**Krisztina Palotás (host):**

Diversity and inclusion have been hot topics in the European Union lately, and I believe we must discuss the EU when we're talking about inclusion diversity in the higher education sector. So currently, what are the challenges and enablers in policy and practice across the EU, and its member states that link to the inclusion and diversity topic?

**Ágnes Sarolta Fazekas (guest):**

So, it's again it's wonderful; how you say a wonderful journey if we look at how the European Union and actually it was back in the days, an economic cooperation. So, basically, if you look at the step-by-step journey of the current European Union, of course, in the beginning, it was much more like economic cooperation in the field of employment in the field of economic areas. And later on, step by step in the European Union became a much more political union, as you can remember that the Maastricht treaty was kind of a big step back in the days and then later on the Amsterdam treaty in 1997 highlighted more aspects in terms of non-discrimination in terms of equality and step by step, the European Union has been increased their activities in the field of social inclusion in the field of equality and wide-spread this area to different topics in terms of education in terms of employment in terms of internationalization all kinds of areas.

And I just want to highlight that we are talking now about inclusion and diversity. Inclusion and diversity is an overall topic which has all kinds of aspects in all kinds of different areas. So, it's like why spreading every area. So, it's not only that we are talking about educational affairs. We are talking about social affairs we are combining them. So, whether we are talking about the Erasmus program, we need to consider what are the issues in terms of inclusion and diversity.

So just to give you a quick example. In terms of inclusion in education and training. We must collaborate with different organizational units, even with the European Commission, let's say. So, if we are working a lot together with the DG EAC which is the Education and Culture Directorate General, we also need to collaborate together with the Social affairs & Employment (Directorate General), because there are connecting points, also in terms of legislations, in terms of proposals, in terms of directives that might have like a combination and the collaboration. So, this is something new, but I'm very delighted to bring these discussions further and speak with the relevant stakeholders and address these issues.

So now, a lot of new things are happening in terms of the inclusion and social affairs. So back to your question: so, how I have a vision and the mission for inclusive unity and diversity for me. So, I can tell you very briefly that from the beginning we were thinking with the Alliance, is a very holistic approach so I'm very happy that the Alliance is open for this holistic approach of inclusion and diversity.

And we were also connecting to the values and principles of the European Union. Also, to highlight these elements in our work, and in our culture and in our operational structures of CHARM-EU. And I would say, and I'm quite honest in different conferences and different meetings that I think so that, and it's also kind of an earlier experience working with, with other stakeholders other European stakeholders that still even though the European Union and the different stakeholders have been put an amazing and the huge work into inclusion and diversity in different areas. Still, a little bit the inclusion and diversity is a kind of a buzz word or a very vague concept in the, in the mindset, which is, I mean, which is a you know it's a learning journey so it's okay. But I would like to, to have a vision and a mission that really inclusion and diversity really takes place a more mainstream approach, meaning that it's not only principles and values but also embedded in all kinds of areas of our work, as we are doing in the term you from governance to teaching and learning environment curriculum design mobility communication piloting the whole project management coordination everything. So, it became an integral part of the work. And it became, not only as a concept which is very vague and very far away and difficult to grasp. But it really became a practical approach to tangible things. So, what we are bringing, and this is our actual work and actual little baby steps to make it as a practically implemented aspects in the CHARM-EU that we are supporting or the work packages all the structural, organizational way of charm you to really put in practice, little by little, the inclusive approach, starting from how we communicate, how we create the teaching and learning environment, how we provide tips and tools which are tangible and easy to manage. And now we are we are supporting this.

So, I really hope that by the end of this journey the, for the CHARM-EU will have a much more clearer understanding of diversity and inclusion, we will understand that it's an integral part, it's not a, let's say, a philanthropic approach, but it is much more based on the human rights brief principles and in the alignment of all the conventions and all the or the things that we are have been working towards. And I really hope that after this learning, it will become an integral part of just thinking about inclusion and diversity when we do something that this inclusive mindset and the inclusive approach starts from the beginning of our activities, whether it's policy drafting whether it's a practice, whether it's just interacting with each other and having these things.

And last but not least, I just want to highlight that actually this is, as I was mentioning to you earlier that how higher education has been changed and how we were fixing the environment since new groups entered and things like this. Now we have a chance, and it's a wonderful thing that these alliances are there with us, that now we have the chance to create something where we can design from the zero point as inclusive as possible.

Of course, I am very conscious in terms of existing barriers, so I give you a very concrete idea. So, of course, we won't rebuild our buildings of the term EU member institutions. I mean in terms of accessibility and in terms of the universal approach in in architecture, but whenever we can have the chance to change it to be inclusive, such as our approach in the teaching and learning environment in the online environment in the digital environment, simply just creating the mindset and the knowledge and attitudes and create more awareness among stakeholders, individuals, teachers, students academic support staff etc. then we are we are bringing these, and I'm very delighted that now we have something that we can really work on and try, and of course it's a pilot so I always say that sometimes we make mistakes but we can learn from these mistakes and if we put our hearts to the table and we share that now we are we are learning we are doing this, I think so everyone will be much, much more understanding, in terms of these.

**Krisztina Palotás (host):**

Yeah, I think what you mentioned is not just a buzzword but more, more like an integrated practice. I think what is important for CHARM-EU and all of the other alliances and overall universities is to not add inclusion on to things but in the process of designing new things or just in general, operating as a university, always had the question in the back of your mind is this as inclusive as it can be? How can I make this practice more inclusive? And should that be done, I think we're already at a huge advantage and then of course, lucky we have, and we have the half of professionals such as yourself who can advise us on that. So, we don't need to come up with these practices on our own, but we can get the help from, from amazing people such as yourself so thank you! But, what do you think are the factors that could jeopardize this mission and vision within show me that you just, you've just outlined?

**Ágnes Sarolta Fazekas (guest):**

Yes, the risk, you were asking. So yes, I always say that inclusion is a journey, and it doesn't happen overnight. So, it is a long journey, it's a lot of preparation, it's a lot of brainstorming, it's a lot of dialogues creating dialogues. So, at the moment, I can say that, since it's getting, you know, step by step, getting to the structures and cultures and work packages and the teaching and learning environment. We are bringing in this approach it's quite new to a lot of people, and we know from our earlier organization and experiences that when you bring something new, in which were never the case or it was never the embedded topic that people have some questions, some concerns, some resistance, which is all fine. It's because you bring something new to the table, and you, you would like to be an as integral part of the activities, policies, practices and so on.

So, I think so we need to be patient. We need to be as understanding as possible, and we need to take time. Because, as I was mentioning, it doesn't happen overnight. We cannot rush, you know, these, these procedures and these certain circumstances. What we can do is that we can step by step bring these aspects to the different stakeholders, whether it's the academic staff, whether it's all kinds of units in the CHARM-EU that they are not afraid and you know they don't block. Oh my god, I don't want to do this because it's too much thing, and I'm saying this very transparent because over the last couple of years, when I was participating in conferences. It's a general, and it's a general experience, you know whenever you are creating something, it's a general experience because it was not part of the earlier settings.

So, we need patience, we need people, and we need to keep this in the loop. So, it's constantly in the environment and in the atmosphere in the air, let's say, and we need to be patient. We need to say that okay, this is the minimum, what we can do at this moment, but once we completed this minimum, then we can again dream bigger and bigger and bigger. And actually, I'm very, very thankful to the, to the Alliance to all the people who are working on, on this charm, because they are open.

And I can tell you, and again I'm very happy to share in very much at all kinds of conferences very honestly that this openness is one of the keys. Not to be, you know not to be as a risk or not to have like jeopardize these things. So, and I might say that not everywhere around the world is this openness, and I also experienced some things in the around the world is through my activities and through my work activities that not everywhere is this openness, so I'm very honoured—working with this wonderful team.

And what I can also say in terms of this openness or around this a little bit of let's say, resistance that we need to have conversations we need to have discussions about how we understand inclusion diversity what different people understanding so if we create a safe and open platform for this dialogue this brings us further. And actually, I wrote an article in these in these things about these things in a Conference Conversation Starter **(Agnes corrected it only in the transcript)**([https://www.eaie.org/our-resources/library/publication/Conference/conference-conversation-starter-2018.html)back](https://www.eaie.org/our-resources/library/publication/Conference/conference-conversation-starter-2018.html%29back) in the days with the European Association for international education for the EAIE back in 2018, when actually the EAIE conference was on encompassing all voices **(Agnes corrected it only in the transcript)**(Correction (EAIE 2019: <https://www.eaie.org/blog/helsinki-2019-encompassing-all-voices-city-full-contrasts.html>) and also brought the topic to the conference's overall thematic. So, I really hope that step by step.

And last but not least, I would like to highlight that we need to consider time, resources and, and also this transition for all kinds of activities. So, we need to recognize the work of the individuals of the stakeholders who are working towards a more inclusive environment. And we also need to create an atmosphere where we motivate them to keep continue their work. So, I am always saying that we need to when we are thinking about inclusion and diversity. It's not like something happens, I don't know, in that in that in a way that the immediately bad, you need to put in a fourth you need to put time, you also need to create a time for academics to really, you really take time to understand this.

So, what is the last point, besides all the good things, is that one of the difficulties is that we are in a time frame which is quite tight, and we would like to be very innovative very inclusive. So, sometimes time pressure is also jeopardizing these things, but I really hope that we, we will have a lot of little things that we can do in during this limited time, and I really hope that I don't know what the future brings for CHARM-EU, but I really hope that we can continue these approaches, beyond, beyond that.

**Krisztina Palotás (host):**

Yeah, I think as you mentioned, it is definitely going to be somewhat of a slow process, but the openness that you've touched upon, I've also noticed myself, and it is a great environment to deal with such open-minded individuals, and I think that in and of itself is going to strengthen the practices of inclusive beauty and diversity within CHARM-EU and also going to sort of give it a faster pace than he would go in and not so open environment so I'm excited to see where that goes.

This was our second episode with Fazekas Ágnes Sarolta about inclusivity and diversity in the higher education sector. If you want to find out more, tune back in, and listen to the third episode of this special series in December of 2021! Goodbye!