

European Liberal Education: its varieties, convergences, and significance



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Hodnocení kvality vysokých škol konference
16 května 2019

MUNI



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Národní akreditační úřad
pro vysoké školství

>RVŠ<
Rada vysokých škol

Core argument

- “Liberal (arts) education” in Europe (ELE):
 - no common essence, no shared understanding, no direct collaboration, no single leader;
 - a range of creative applications looking to solve a range of cognitive and social problems;
 - convergent intentions of the eight pioneers;
 - a shared direction/vision for European liberal education.



**European liberal (arts) education...
What do you even mean?**

80+ degree programs,
mostly public

15.000+ alumni,
3000+ new enrolments
18-19

database and methodology:
www.liberal-arts.eu

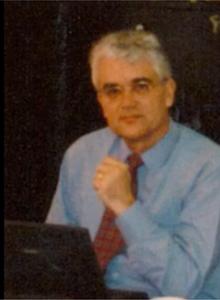


ELE as a contested practice

name	liberal arts, liberal arts and sciences, liberal education, modern liberal arts, interdisciplinary individual education, value studies, <i>artes liberales</i> , university college, Свободные искусства и науки...
institutional model	private independent university; private American university public university college; public liberal arts degree program non-degree granting innovative program, ...
functions	innovative knowledge economy — resisting market pressure superior academic preparation — open, democratic society Continuous questioning — moving up the social ladder...
features	institution: selective or not; core curriculum or open curriculum; humanities or also sciences; residential or not; immersion in tradition or critical thinking; no, regular, or premium tuition... individual: academic or also ethical training? learning or problem solving? future professor or civic leader? unique talents or basic skills of citizenship? critical thinking or employability premium?...

perhaps then ELE is just a misnomer?

The 'snapshot' study looking for a common vision

	Nigel Tubbs 2010-	UK MLA
	Hans Adriaansens 1997-2012	NL UCU/UCR
	Thomas Norgaard 2002-	DE ECLA (BCB)
	Leif Borgert 2003-2008	SE Gotland

	Samuel Abraham 1996-	SK VSS/BISLA
	Jerzy Axer 1993-	PL MISH/KAL
	Anatoly Mikhailov 1992-	BY EHU
	Nikolai Kuposov 1997-2010	RU Smolny



**The big picture:
what did they want from ELE**

OPEN AGREEMENTS

- what I (and others) do is ELE;
- ELE is truly European;
- ELE is different and better than the *status quo*.

OPEN DISAGREEMENTS

- how to specifically call it;
- does the concept of LE matter;
- should ELE be in English;
- Whom to target (interested, motivated, work ethic, or also talented students);

Hidden agreements

- ‘liberal arts’: useful, despite the confusion;
- higher expectations (often more student agency);
- closer connection, horizontal learning (often more egalitarian study culture);
- ELE as an incremental reform, not wholesale educational revolution.

Hidden disagreements

- APPROACH: multi-, inter-, or anti-disciplinary;
- LEADERS SELF-IMAGE: teacher, dean, educationalist, social visionary;
- EMPLOYABILITY: enhanced, tangential, opposed;
- VISION / PARADIGM:
 - teaching - also research - or both plus outreach,
 - coherent, partial, or disintegrated,
 - intuitive, inspired, and informed contribution.

3 Themes of ELE: making sense of it



ontological complexity



transformative pedagogy



organisational alternative

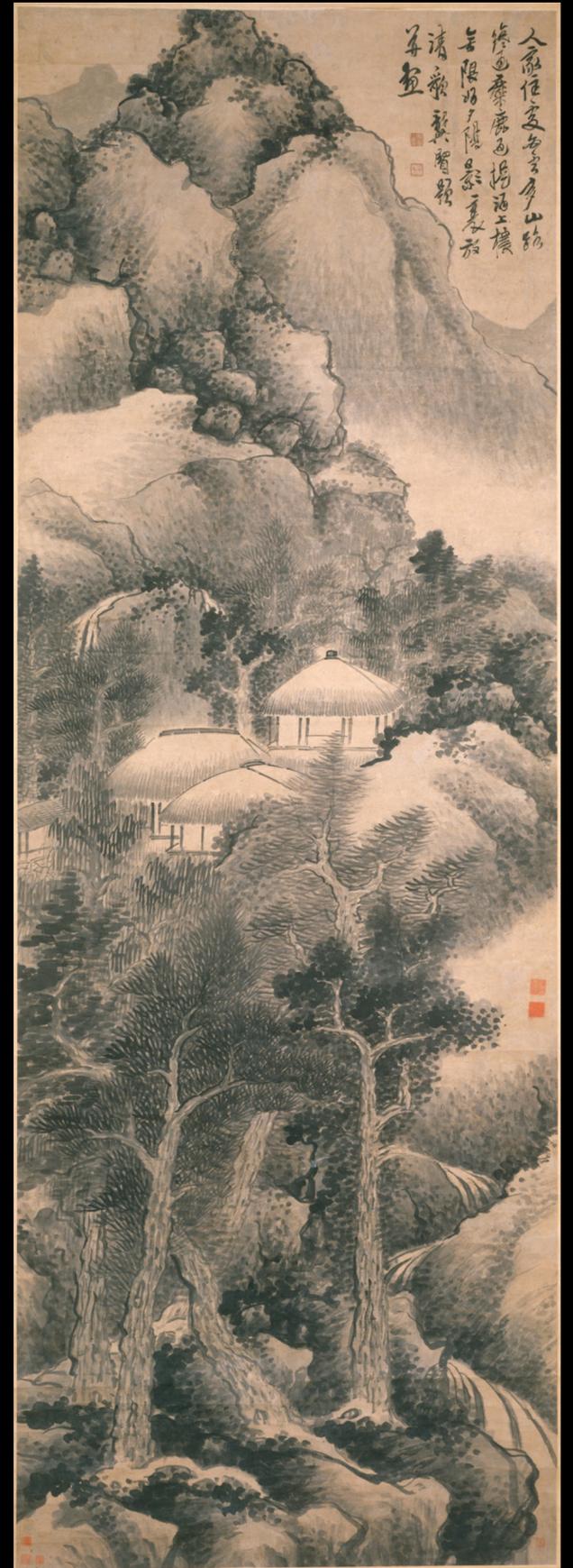
Ontological complexity

- Cognitive dimension: from partial disciplinary insights to the promise of comprehensive understanding;
- Social dimension: knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to solve wicked problems;
- European Humanities University (Belarus/Lithuania): understand the full human being through the Western tradition in the humanities;
- Modern Liberal Arts (Winchester, UK): reclaiming the study of first principles in the conditions of modernity.



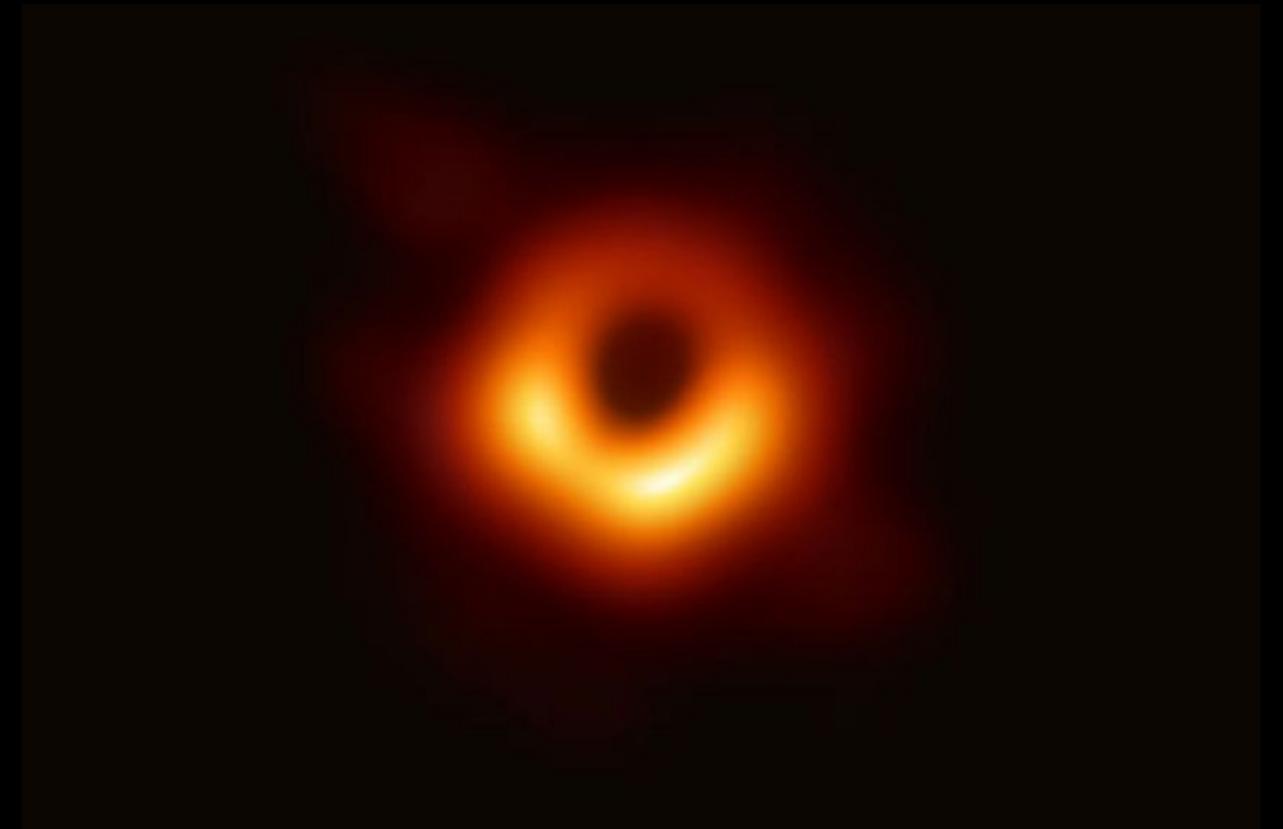
Transformative pedagogy

- Cognitive dimension: brain development, shifting goals, building identity of the students;
- Social dimension: mindfulness and collaboration, civil dialogue and speaking out against immorality and error;
- Smolny College (Petersburg, Russia): activating students to challenge ideology of narrow professionalism and finding out their own real interests;
- European College of Liberal Arts (Berlin, Germany): the drama of education, a pluralist value studies curriculum, and an egalitarian high-minded community /now Bard College Berlin/.



Organisational alternative

- Cognitive dimension: agency and integration; non-departmental paradigm;
- Social dimension: experiment, catalyst, transformation;
- MISH College (Warsaw+, Poland): individually tailored curricula, courses across the university, tutor supervision, highly selective; / new: Kolegium Artes Liberales;
- University College (Utrecht+, the Netherlands): Dutch mix of US liberal arts curriculum, Oxbridge size and prestige, and Bildung pedagogy; international honors.





**Meaning:
I can explain**

How (I think) ELE works

- VISION: a positive-negative identity; context co-constructs the vision;
- THEMES: abstract, not enough to use as a blueprint; inspiring but not prescriptive;
- PHENOMENON: confluence of unity and diversity in European liberal education: range of variants, survival and adaptation, no shared essence;
 - Is European liberal education a countermovement?
- limitations of a snapshot study: time, practice, interpretation.

What to make of ELE

- Not a US import;
- A contested concept;
- An attractive concept;
- Plasticity and adaptability;
- Imaginative differentiation in solving problems.



IZV -> FHS UK

liberal education, Czech style



PRAHA VÝSTAVIŠTĚ LETŇANY
HYPERMARKET PRO LEPŠÍ ŽIVOT
OTEVÍRÁME V SOBOTU 31. KVĚTNA V 10.00
PRVNÍ DEN PŘEKVAPENÍ PRO KAŽDĚHO!

Looking forward



- June 2019;
- keynote by Teun Dekker, Professor of Liberal Arts and Sciences Education, Maastricht University;
- Roundtable featuring a presentation on the role of the Bologna Process in dissemination of liberal arts education.
- est. 2017 by Daniel Kontowski (Winchester) and Tim Hoff (Hamburg); www.liberal-arts.eu
- database and map of LA institutions in Europe; self-description, institutional confirmation, updated, growing;
- recommended literature for studying LA in Europe;
- blog (reflections and summary of new developments).



Thank you for your attention!

and let the conversation continue

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www.liberal-arts.eu