

From training to partnership

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21 May 2013. Blues music from a speaker, sun through the window, a beer on the table. Location: a bar just outside the centre of Prague; no tourist masses here. The sun shines, a well-groomed golden retriever is obviously at home on the floor of the bar. It raises its head, then lazily puts its nose between its paws again. Even Wi-Fi functions well here – life's good! I have a few hours between the end of a seminar and the bus to the airport. I visited Prague to discuss the results of a comparative study with international partners from both West and East. The phone beeps: email. It is Hanneke's invitation to contribute to this book.

Thoughts fly back to almost 25 years ago, my first time in Prague. The Wall had just come down, the EU had launched Tempus and a group of higher education researchers from the West (the emerging field had just founded its organisation, CHER) and the East met for the first time to start work on a Tempus proposal. The Eastern partners were old grey male professors and young intelligent female assistants. All equally insecure, the former because, with one exception, they spoke better Russian than English, and the latter because they did not know how to behave in a situation balanced between the old hierarchy and the new freedoms. The Tempus proposal became the first European training course for new researchers and future university managers, with modules in Eastern and Western European countries, taught by teams from West and East together.

In the old town square we were the only foreigners. The houses were all grey; grass grew in the gutters. How could this sad city ever become anything?

Fast forward to 2013. The same square is restored, colourful and full of tourists. The students of the CHER training course have become professors and rectors. Prague is in the EU. Tempus is now operating for Georgia and Azerbaijan; no one is surprised if you are sent to Astana or Baku for a seminar. And everyone speaks English.

Fast forward 25 years again. Where will internationalisation go? Will all Chinese speak English? Or all English Chinese and Swahili? Will we travel to worldwide training courses? Or will we be at home, counting CO₂-vouchers to claim electricity for a video conference about setting up an MOOC on higher education management and research?

I take my final sip of beer and pat the dog. Time to go home!