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NK: Welcome to Högskolepedagogisk Spaning or Higher Education Trainspotting, as we call it, since I...This is a podcast where we discuss questions regarding higher education. So, [TIME 00:18] we have guests who contribute with the trainspotting about what's going on in higher education. This is our first episode and our first one in English. So today's topic deals with internationalization and more specifically, virtual exchanges. I'm Nicolette Karst and I will lead this discussion today. I work as a lecturer in higher education development at Lund University in Sweden. And me, myself, have been on two exchanges, although they were not virtual at the time, once as a student and once as staff. So understandably, this topic interests me lots. Let me go on by presenting today's guests. We have Ana Cristina Biondo Salomão, Assistant Provost for International Affairs, Coordinator of the Brazilian Virtual Exchange Program at the São Paulo State University in Brazil. We also have Phillip Baur, Project Coordinator at the Unit for Global Partnership, Division for Internationalization at Uppsala University, Sweden. And we'll have Francesca Helm, researcher at the Department of Political and Juridical Sciences and International Studies at the University of Padova, Italia. And also, she is a second research officer at the executive board of UNICollaboration from 2018 to 2020. We'll start with the first trainspotting concerning virtual exchange by Anna. Take it away, Anna.

AS: Thank you very much for the invitation. In my trainspotting, I'd like to discuss how VE can be a means for comparing global and local perspectives and also the importance of bringing back those international virtual experiences to contribute with our local context. So instead of [TIME 02:17], this happens in a much more individual way, as the student goes to another country and has the opportunity to live in this different culture. But when they come back, this does not directly affect his or her local community. Now in virtual exchanges, if well-designed, students will have a chance to collaborate on a specific project and come up with a result or a product. So in this sense, the [TIME 2:46] have much more...much bigger local impact as students can be comparing similar problems or even different problems they face locally and try to come up with solutions for these problems. So as an example, in our VE, BraVE-UNESP São Paulo State University program, we have an example from the engineering degree. And so students were partnered with students from a university in Chile and they had to analyze the composition of the energy matrix of transporting Chile and in Brazil. Then they had to make a diagnosis of the environmental impacts caused by the fuels used in the transfer matrix of each country. So they had to discuss the challenges to change the current transport matrices of Chile and Brazil, find out actions that had been taken in each country to comply with STG 7, 12 and 13 and the results obtained by those actions so far. They were also supposed to propose improvement options and actions to increase transport sustainability in both countries. So in this sense, they had to have intents and directions and they had to learn how to work together, especially working online. This is a very important skill to develop nowadays, yes? So this is very interesting in terms of developing employability skills that will be useful for students. And there is an intentional pedagogical planning behind this [TIME 04:19] work. Another example I'd like to share is from

our medical school, so this was before the pandemic. Professors presented students, these future doctors from Brazil and from the UK with the concept of viral diseases and the clinical case. And then students were encouraged to carry out a clinical investigation and if necessary, laboratory evaluation to define the diagnosis and the treatment plan. So while the European group raised the hypothesis of features similar to that of the flu, the Brazilian students considered the differential diagnosis of [TIME 04:55] virus common in the summer months here in our region, reinforcing the need for local epidemiological knowledge. So if you think about the reality we live now, with the pandemic and the need to discuss health issues from a local and global perspective, projects like this are extremely important to engage students in thinking in a combination of those perspectives, local and global, and bringing back these discussions to their own communities. And one last example I'd like to comment on as a [TIME 05:28] that VE brings about the opportunity for interdisciplinarity. So we had a group of students in a course on fermentation processes and their [TIME 05:39] technology and they were paired up with students from the US who were studying animation...yes, animation. And you might think that those are not compatible, yes? But then in the project, the Brazilians presented the fermentation processes to the Americans and the Americans helped them to create an animation that illustrated those processes. So this collaborative work was an opportunity to join different talents, skills, and help students see the [TIME 06:07] that they were studying by the eyes of others which can be very insightful. So just to finish here, in sum, I believe that virtual exchanges have a lot to offer in terms of [TIME 06:18] internationalization, making use of active methodologies and bridging learning and teaching to the interconnectedness of the real world.

- NK: Thank you, Anna. Now let's see if Francesca and Phillip...would you like to comment on what Anna just said?
- FH: Thank you. [TIME 06:41] very interesting to hear about it and these projects sound amazing, really fantastic. How do you get the teachers on board to engage in this kind of work, because I know it is very time intensive and I think after the pandemic, I think we're busier now as teachers than we were before. How do your institutions that you know of motivate teachers to do these kinds of projects?
- AS: Well, the BraVE program came up before the pandemic in 2018. So we had workshops where we invite the teachers to get to know about the concept of VE, which was...well, this is just three years ago but this was very new to the teachers to think about how they could collaborate online or how they would be working with students from other classes, speaking another language. But at the same time, what we offered, we offered courses for them to prepare them. So this was one way to help them on board...you're going to be trained for that. You're going get training, learn about active methodologies and things like this. We also got them to visit...some of them, not all of them...but visit their partners to meet and plan in person. Or after the exchanges, they could participate in a congress to get it to present the results of their experiences. So I think professors saw that there was some recognition to what they were doing, to these different things that they had to bring to their jobs. And also, with the pandemic, what I feel happened is that professors felt that just speaking to the students online was not enough and some of them came to us and said, "Okay, so do you have something different [TIME 8:37] that we can do to have to get the attention of the students?" So that's how the pandemic really increased the interest of the professors in the BraVE program.

NK: Phillip? Would you like to comment?

PB: I think what your examples highlight is, of course, that we live in a highly entangled and globalized world. We know that, of course. And we're looking for ways to include this in education, and so to reach a level of interaction and analysis of the world that is critical and looks at the details of how we live. Of course, how we eat and produce food here in Sweden is directly connected to Brazil, for instance, and the deforestation that has happened there because of soy production. So, I think this is an example where virtual exchange can highlight and also critically assess the way we globally live at the moment and for that, it's a fantastic tool.

NK: Thank you, Phillip. Anna, we got a question here in the chat as well. The question is, "What skills do students need to collaborate this way and how do they develop these skills?"

AS: Well, one of the first things is to think that our students will be speaking a foreign language, in your countries as well [TIME 10:02] be mostly speaking English. But the level of proficiency in English of our students is usually not very high. And so, one of the first skills they will have to work on, they will have to, of course, try to get some...to work on their English skills and also to collaborate with others who have a better proficiency than them to be able to keep things working. Usually I suggest for the professors to use [TIME 10:30] strategy of bearing up students with more proficiency with the ones who are less proficient so that they can all work together...and each one can do one part of the project so we also assign them specific roles so that they will know even if they are not very proficient, they can help with other things and then the most proficient could communicate that. And so, I think these kind of skills because...usually students know how to use applications [TIME 10:59] internet but on their own for individual interests. But then when you have to collaborate, you have to find out, "What can I do? What can I bring to this project that will help my group?" So, I think this is one of the most important skills that VE helps them to develop and especially because they will have to be working online, which is very different from working from face to face, essentially in the same place.

NK: Thank you. Okay, let's go over to our second trainspotting. Phillip, it's your turn.

PB: Yes. I'm not a teacher. I'm a project coordinator, so my look at the whole topic is more of an institutional one. And I think what we can see is that the role of virtual exchange for working institutionally with internationalization will increase a lot over the years to come. Virtual exchanges, of course, about connecting classrooms originally but I think there's a lot of potential to take that methodology and all the experience that was collected in classroom to classroom connection to use that broader for the purpose of internationalization. So, this is a great tool for collaboration within projects. We know that we need to be more conscious and sustainable in way we develop projects, integrating virtual exchange methodologies in projects so that we don't have to meet so much is a way to make the internationalization more sustainable. So in this sense, it's more than a teaching tool. It's also a collaboration tool for developing internationalization. Anna has talked about sort of the skill development that virtual exchange can provide for students. But of course, these skills that we talk about, professional skills, soft skills, intercultural skills, this is also something that we need for staff development. This is not just for students but I think there's a lot of potential to use virtual exchange for staff

development in between universities, within Europe, outside of Europe and so on. So, there's a lot of potential that I think we're still beginning to untap...leadership trainings, think about joint supervision that is becoming more and more common but also requires joint supervision skills for teachers and professors and I think virtual exchange could help with developing that. So basically, virtual exchange is a contribution to a form of internationalization that is more blended but blends physical, traditional ability with virtual exchanges. It's not a replacement, it is really a contribution. So ultimately, I think the big potential is that virtual exchange can make internationalization more sustainable and also more inclusive. And I think that's the two topics that are really important for us at the moment.

NK: Thank you so much for your...Francesca, Anna, do you want to comment on what Phillip just said?

FH: Okay, thanks Phillip. It was really interesting. Yes, I totally agree. I think it's...what you said about it being applicable to various other areas such as projects, development and implementation and also for...[TIME 14:22] staff perfectly and I think this is a growing area of interest. Now we have these European universities where you have eight or however many universities collaborating together. But really, it's often very few people who are actually involved in the collaboration. But I think through virtual exchanges, it really has huge potential in terms of exchanging knowledge and experiences and perhaps improving the quality of mobility when it does happen, you're not going to some random place but you're actually going to work with somebody who you've already engaged with online and you know why you're going to that specific place to engage with those people. So yeah, I totally agree with much of what Phillip said. I think it has huge potential in other areas.

AS: Yes, I agree too. I think it is important to consider virtual exchange. And also paired up with the physical mobility, not just a replacement. It's not a replacement. They're not similar things but they compliment each other. I like this idea of thinking them as blended, how we can blend both perspectives and have them...and improve the quality of internationalization and even give the chance to more people. You talked about the potential of virtual exchange for staff. I also think you could think about the potential of virtual exchange for research. So, joint research. Maybe PhD students conducting joint research through virtual exchange or virtual research or whatever we can call it. So, they're used to make use of that in other areas of university collaboration. And it's very important also to take advantage of synchronous and asynchronous work, that there must be a combination of those to make it work better. But of course, it would depend on local context and professors and objectives.

NK: Thank you for your comments. We also have some questions again. "What skills, tools and prerequisites do teachers and also institutions need?" And I know, Phillip, you mentioned soft skills or generic skills, such as leadership, leadership training or joint supervision skills. Do you see any other skills or prerequisites that might be needed at an institutional level?

PB: Well, if you look for instance at the level of PhD students, as I've mentioned this supervision of PhD students, most of our PhD students [TIME 17:07] come from international backgrounds. It is very international. They of course bring their own experiences and backgrounds into this, into a Swedish higher education system. So, I think there's a little potential to utilize that and bring in that experience. When it comes to other skills, development, I think the idea of making PhD

studies more international, not just concerning research trips and going to another lab, but having opponents from abroad and having the whole development of a three or four year PhD enhanced with virtual exchanges is certainly something that we're looking into.

NK: A follow-up question NK: "How do you think educational developers such as myself may help?"

PB: I think maybe it goes back to you. But what do you think? I think virtual exchange is an aspect that is still very much in motion at the moment which makes it very exciting. And I think what it requires is that within universities, we also start collaborating more with each other. I work internationally, so I'm very used to talk with people all around the world and coming up with ways to work together better. I think we also need to do the same within universities and find ways that someone like me who works in an international relations department works together with teachers, but also with teaching developers like yourself and that kind of...hitting those kind of platforms and connection [TIME 18:58] to develop something where we all have an expertise on the topic but we don't have all the knowledge but pooling that knowledge would be great. So I think this is something where we need to get better as universities, to see this as a cross-unit inter-disciplinary development area.

NK: Thank you. And Francesca has a great idea as well.

FH: I was just saying, I really think...in response to your question perhaps, Nicolette, that...and I know in Sweden, tuition is very different to here in Italy, for example, where we have very few learning designers. And I really think we need to persuade universities to invest in more [TIME 19:43] educational developers and staff and facilitators who can really work with teaching staff to design and implement and support virtual exchanges. I think the risk of being too techno-centric and technological solution-ism and it is so difficult, I'm finding, to persuade universities that we really need to invest in the staff and the human people to support this kind of activity.

NK: Thank you. I really like that comment. Let's go over at Francesca now...it's your turn for your trainspotting, so take the floor.

FH: Okay. So, I'm going to talk about a different [TIME 20:23] talk about virtual exchange in very general terms and there's a risk of really not understanding what it is and distinguishing it from online learning. So I think now there is an underst-...that virtual exchange differs from online learning more generally in terms of the focus on the kind of intercultural dimension and the idea of working across cultural and geographic borders and also in terms of the learning objectives. But there are also, though, many different models of virtual exchange and Anna Christina talked about kinds of exchanges that are co-designed by teachers, right? So there are [TIME 21:02] into institutions who will collaboratively design and develop a virtual exchange to meet the specific needs of their courses and [TIME 21:13] wonderful examples of how complimentary they can be and how they can also inter-disciplinary. When I was working on the Erasmus virtual exchange project, and also before, actually, there's another model of virtual exchange which, if you look at it from an administrative point of view, it could be described as a ready-made virtual exchange in the sense that it has been developed by an organization perhaps external to a university. [TIME 21:45] I give examples from this project. So there is Solia, for example, an international NGO and showing perspectives [TIME 21:53] they have developed virtual exchanges based very much on facilitated dialogue. So they will join and to address

virtual fault lines...so they address groups which are seen to have difficult dynamics. Solia originated in 2003, in the wake of 9/11 [TIME 22:13] was designed to address the relations between the Western world and the predominantly Arab and Muslim world, if you like. And the whole program was built on dialogue between these two broad groups. And with trained facilitators, they are able to involve participants...multiple universities. So at any one time, there may be...in dialogue groups you may have students from eight or ten different country [TIME 22:42] context interacting with one another. At any one semester, there have been up to three hundred or five hundred young people from forty, fifty different universities. But having this NGO that coordinates and follows this program through over multiple years and iterations, we have the capacity for this kind of project which involves many people from diverse backgrounds and focuses on different skills, in this case, it's listening and attitudes towards people from different ethnic and religious groups. And this is the kind of very sensitive topic where you really need to have this kind of expertise. They're also supported by a huge body of volunteers, facilitators because students who have done the program can then do the training and become facilitators and carry on this work of facilitating dialogue. So this is one model of a ready-made, in terms of implementation but if we want to focus on the learning objectives, the focus is on understanding others and engaging [TIME 23:53] from different cultural backgrounds. In terms of models, the Stevens Initiative has developed a typology of virtual exchanges and [TIME 24:02] in terms of administration but also in terms of the types of activities interactants are getting involved in. And we're seeing increasingly challenge based virtual exchanges where students work in inter-disciplinary teams on a specific challenge, for example. Other models we've [TIME 24:21] are Hack-a-thons where students...you know, they kind of work...I don't know...forty-eight hours without sleeping...again, working on a specific challenge but in diverse groups with a tutor or mentor. So these are [TIME 24:38] there are emerging models but I think it's always important to remember the learning objectives and how the model can support the learning objectives. And obviously, different models will have different outcomes depending on [TIME 24:52] they were designed to do.

NK: Thank you, Francesca, for this overview in the typology of different virtual exchanges. Let's see, Phillip and Anna, would you like to comment on what Francesca had told us?

PB: I think what Francesca highlights is of course, that virtual exchange doesn't just happen by putting people into Zoom rooms together. I think that we underestimate, I think...partly because of the pandemic where we have been used...and it was necessary to rely on this so much. As maybe a general feeling that we're all experts in virtual exchange. But I think there's a lot to learn in how to really make this work as a methodology and it requires training, it requires staff resources, it requires a lot of time and that is something we shouldn't underestimate. So, this facilitated dialogue requires resources and that is something where universities need to pay attention to more.

FH: Thank you, Phillip. That's a really good point.

AS: Yes, I agree with Phillip. This...different methods are based on your making efforts to mediate communication with people around the world and universities [TIME 26:17] have to seek that as something that has to be strategically implemented and there must be resources for that...is because teachers have to be prepared. We have this...it's not just saying, "Okay, so here's virtual exchange. Do it." There must someone like Nicolette, for example, to mediate, as the

possibilities that they have in different contexts and help them. I usually do that here in the BraVE program. So, we meet with the teachers, we try to understand both contexts and we try to mediate or...what we could do together, to brainstorm together. So, [TIME 26:56] the class to class examples. But then Francesca presented us with other examples that can foster communication with people from all around the world. And this did not just happen. There are intentional pedagogical plannings behind those. So we need to think about how to plan them to be better and how to include more people to think about the language that students will be using, maybe transform them in more multi-lingual contexts, [TIME 27:25] not just to use English but students feel that there is a plurality of languages to be used. And so, we have to explore all of these possibilities.

- NK: Thank you so much. I'm already having visions about the international office at our university, linking it to a pedagogical course for both teachers and to the student union, for example, to help students as well to undertake a virtual exchange or non-virtual exchange, for that matter. There's another comment here. "I see that facilitation is a buzzword for the future teacher role but how do we help this process?"
- FH: I talked about facilitators...in the dialogue based model of virtual exchange, I talked about facilitators aren't teachers. Facilitators are dialogue facilitators and they tend to be alumni of the program who have followed training in conflict resolution transformation about facilitating on [TIME 28:24]. And that is a very specific role which I think needs a specific kind of training and it also needs to provision...you need to have [TIME 28:53] as mentors in place and you need to have people observing the dialogue and who the facilitators can interact with. And I think it's [TIME 29:03] that teachers aren't that kind of facilitators for their students in that kind of context. Of course, teachers can also be facilitators. Our teachers are facilitators [TIME 29:13] learning process. And so, I think teachers in designing virtual exchanges, they facilitate in a different kind of way. But I just wanted to clarify this distinction in dialogue facilitation in this kind of peace-building programs and teach facilitation of learning and of designing interaction for students. But Ana might have something more to say about that.
- NK: Thank you.
- AS: Yes, I think in the term...I don't usually use the term "facilitator". I prefer the term "mediate" because I think we are mediating between teachers and teachers who are working together [TIME 29:52] collaboration or teachers and their students to make them understand that what this kind of collaboration involves or even students and students when they're working together. So, this mediation is to help them understand how they can make the most of it and why they should [TIME 30:10] taking part in that. Because sometimes I think...not sometimes but...when you bring a kind of project like this to the class, you have to explain the learning objectives of this, the possible learning outcomes, why you are doing that, even though it appears to be obvious what we're trying to [TIME 30:29] communication with other peoples around the world, you need to think about the world together because we all inhabit the same world. We now after the pandemic know that problems in other places affect us locally much more. This is obviously even so, we have to talk about that and to provoke reflection about that because I always think that teaching must be intentional. It must have...it must be intentional but there must be clear objectives and professors have to make it clear for those students and I think mediation should the word because mediation brings about this [TIME 31:07] for dialogue and

reflexivity.

- NK: Thank you. There's another question in chat here. We talked about student-student virtual exchange and faculty-faculty partnerships. But is there also a form that student and faculty can meet somewhere in a virtual exchange? What do you think?
- AS: You mean student and faculty have a virtual exchange where students and faculty would be put together in a different way than they are in regular classrooms?
- NK: For example.
- AS: It could be. Yes, I think it would be a nice way for them to share their experiences and maybe professors could share their experiences with virtual exchanges, their perspectives on what they believe virtual exchange will bring about. And students could bring their perspectives on what they actually saw. We've been doing this...I've been conducting focus groups with our students because we understand virtual exchange mostly from the perspective of instructors, professors, teachers because they are the ones we talk to. And they say, "Okay, this is great. Yes". Like I said here, [TIME 32:34] it's the experiences from the perspective of the professors. But right now, we're conducting focus groups to understand it from the students what they think. And their perspective is similar, of course. They see, [TIME 32:47]. But they will each take a different view according to what was more important for them in the experience or according to the kind of help they needed in terms of speaking to the others or how they discovered new ways to communicate with others, how they prove it to themselves that they were able to communicate. And also, I saw a question here in the chat from [TIME 33:19] "Does learning have to be intentional?" I believe both, yes. Teaching has to be intentional and learning, too, has to be intentional and students have to...that's why reflexivity or reflectivity is important because students must think about what they are learning. So, what to do, I know. What do I want to know? What am I learning from here? So, these questions have to be constantly in their minds for them to make the best out of the experiences that they are having, this formal instruction experiences that they are having.
- NK: Okay, thank you. Let's see, are there any more questions here?
- PB: Just briefly related to this question of student-faculty relationship, sort of...the experience that we saw in a collaboration with South America also that offers students in Europe and South America...what they liked about this project exchange was not only the interaction with other students but having a teacher from another country. So, that was one of the things that made the virtual exchange very attractive. And that is something to consider, of course, as a role for the teacher in a virtual exchange that is more than just moderation. I think the students are also interested in hearing from a teacher from a different perspective.
- NK: Thank you. I totally agree. Do you have any concluding remarks? Would you like to...okay, here's a thing. Maybe you could say in three words what you...how would you promote virtual exchange, you have three words?
- FH: To who? How do we promote it to universities or to students?



NK: To universities, institutional level. Anyone?

FH: That's a very tricky one.

AS: A tricky question. Perhaps stress the access, providing access to more people through internationalization, making internationalization more sustainable, different place. You could think about how we will be [TIME 35:58] Things that we are not really doing to affect our environment [TIME 36:06] Maybe talk about sustainability and also sustainability in terms of working together with our partners and perhaps thinking about the kinds of talents that higher education should focus on nowadays and inter-disciplinary [TIME 35:25] possibility. Yes. These would be the words that I would try to promote it.

NK: Thank you. Francesca or Phillip? Do you want to have a go?

FH: The words I would choose are reciprocity in terms of being a reciprocal exchange so it's not unidirectional. And also mutual learning for its learning from one another. And I don't think they're necessarily values that are always valued by all universities. But also the idea of interdependency. We are interdependent, we need to collaborate and learn from each other. These are the kind of...what I would highlight about virtual exchange.

NK: Thank you. Phillip?

PB: I think there's a bit of a danger that we're preaching to the choir, right? We're all believers in virtual exchange, those that driving it forward at the moment are believers in virtual exchange. So the question's like how can we mainstream this and make this more normal? I think one approach is to look at this from a program level, not making it an initiative from a single teacher who is very excited and has a friend in Brazil and wants to do something. But look at programs and think about in the four year bachelor programs, where does it make sense to have this intercultural collaborative experience for our students? And if we find that door, that opening, I think that will be the way forward to convince faculty. And of course, incentives. I think we need to look at support infrastructures and also funding to make this happen. Time is very valuable, virtual exchange takes a lot of time to be relevant to run. So this is where universities can incentivize it better.

NK: Thank you. And I think with those concluding remarks, we'll just say thank you for your participation in this episode of our podcast and good luck with virtual exchanges.