

European Youth, Its Hopes and Discontents

Hans Adriaansens Student Award winners' webinar welcome speech

Thursday, May 27th, 2021

Hans Adriaansens

1. I am grateful to the Board of ECOLAS, not only for having established an award program in my name (which is the type of honor that is normally only given to people who died some time ago, which I obviously didn't), but I'd like to thank them also for giving me the opportunity to say a few words to the winners of the award.
2. Let me, therefore, congratulate you, the students, on being chosen by the ECOLAS board as award winners. So far as I can see, I believe the jurors in the Board were right. I read your papers and they show a praiseworthy interest in the more serious problems of this day and age.
3. Together you touched on issues like democratization and/or authoritarianism, on climate issues, health issues and the threat of future pandemics. You also wrote about growing inequality, about propaganda and disinformation, and about modern ways of twisting truth and creating fake realities.
4. You rightly emphasized the effects these issues have on the position and perspectives of young people. Many of you complained about how your intellectual power and potential have been neglected, in this age of baby-boomers like myself. Someone wrote "that we the youth are butterflies with broken wings".
5. You didn't stop at self-pity, though; for at the same time you put your cards on education. But, you also said, education, and higher education in particular, should then be better organized than it has been for decades.
6. And this is where ECOLAS comes in. ECOLAS was established to reinvent Higher Education, particularly in the bachelor's stage. From its very start ECOLAS has tried to free our universities from the industrialized, large scale and anonymous set-up that became prominent in the second half of the 20th century. Since then students and teachers lost meaningful contact with each other, teaching and learning were narrowed down to the transfer of monodisciplinary knowledge and almost no attention was given to the academic community which has always been the basis of our knowledge. And these problems were aggravated by the COVID pandemic.
7. You know, I'm a sociologist, not a priest. I don't believe in good intentions alone. Just praying for nice weather doesn't make the sun shine. If 'moral appeals' form the only instrument we have for making a better world, I'm sure it wouldn't help us much. What we need is a social structure that steers us in the right direction.
8. And that is also true for education, and Higher Education in particular. Therefore, ECOLAS has been promoting three elementary organization principles for our universities. The first is that we should focus within the broader university

on the small-scale 'college' idea, where students and teachers have the chance to get to know each other really well, and become 'persons' instead of anonymi. The second is that a converging liberal arts curriculum should replace the monodisciplinary programs so that students may capitalize on their own developing interests and understand more of the multifaceted reality. And the third is what I would call 'a culture of diversity', that is a culture in which students and teachers come from divers international and national backgrounds, which will force them to understand and appreciate a variety of viewpoints.

9. Luckily there are signs that this development is gradually getting momentum in many universities throughout Europe. But we certainly haven't reached what we wished for at the start of ECOLAS. I honestly hope that you will bring us closer to that goal.

And for now, I wish you all a very productive webinar!