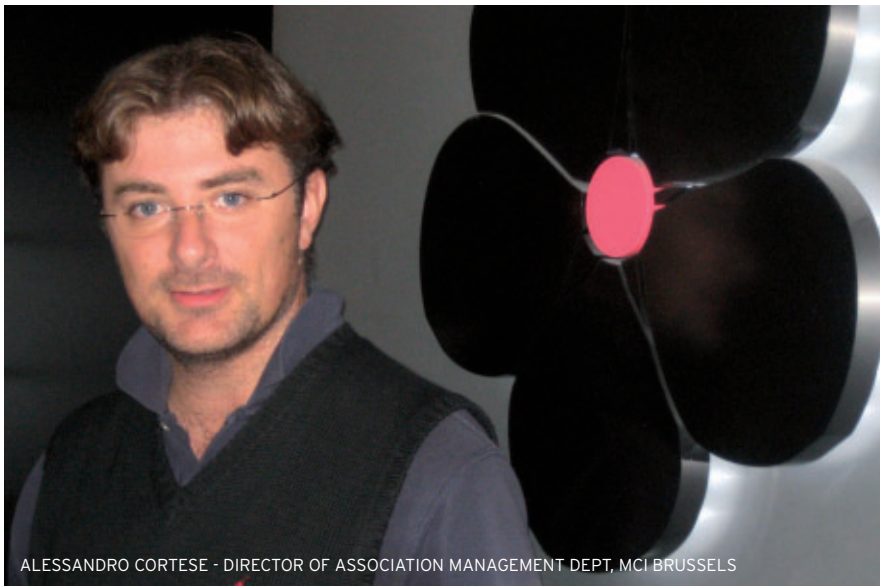


LIFELONG LEARNING: THE OPPORTUNITY FOR EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

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titudinal: one can and should be open to new ideas, decisions, skills or behaviours. Lifelong learning throws the axiom 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks' out the door and offers learning opportunities to professionals of all ages and in numerous contexts: at work, at home, at networking meetings and through leisure activities, not just through formal channels such as school.

Associations can create a virtuous learning cycle by:

- + focusing on learning rather than teaching
- + defining new and varied modalities for learning
- + defining learning tailored to needs of individuals as professionals
- + developing a role for teachers as guides and facilitators
- + defining a methodology for advanced education on technology

At the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, government leaders set the EU a 10-year mission to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Lifelong learning became a core element of this strategy, central not only to competitiveness but also to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development. As a consequence the European Commission defined an articulated framework for its lifelong learning policy.

Associations can benefit from this programme when planning their educational offering as the new Lifelong Learning Programme supports learning opportunities from childhood to old age in every single life situation. The programme has a budget of € 7000 million for 2007-2013.

A Chinese proverb from the 7th century BC says:

*When planning for a year, plant corn.
When planning for a decade, plant trees.
When planning for life, train and educate people*

China has been at the centre of several revolutions over the centuries. Today, we can look to China to understand another, more contemporary, revolution: the importance of knowledge in all economical processes in a globalising world: the Knowledge Revolution.

The rapid pace of innovation fuels growing competition and a rapidly changing labour market needing constantly higher skill sets. The ability to create, access and use knowledge is a fundamental determinant of global competitiveness.

Here's where associations can become key players in the Knowledge Revolution. Associations can focus on articulating their educational offer in order to make it as relevant as possible to their members and stakeholders.

There are five key elements in the Knowledge Revolution:

- + Increased codification of knowledge and development of new technologies
- + Closer links with science base/increased rate of innovation
- + Shorter product life cycles
- + Increased importance of education and lifelong learning
- + Investment in intangibles (R&D, education, software) as compared to fixed capital

Lifelong learning - 'It's never too soon or too late for learning' - is a philosophy that has taken root in a host of organisations. It is at-

Two sub-programmes seem particularly interesting to associations:

- + The **Leonardo da Vinci programme** for apprentices, workers, employees and related institutions/organisations (vocational education and training).
- + The **Grundtvig programme** for adults, teachers and related institutions/organisations active in the field of adult education

The challenge is immediate for European associations. A recent article from *The Economist* (Survey: Higher Education - 8 September 2005) was titled: *Head in the clouds: Europe hopes to become the world's pre-eminent knowledge-based economy. Not likely...* states: 'It is worth visiting the Humboldt University in Berlin. Walk [...] past a slogan by a former student engraved in gold on the wall ('Philosophers have simply interpreted the world; the point is to change it') There were eight Nobel prize winners in 1900-09, six in 1910-19, four in 1920-29, six in 1930-39, one in 1940-49 and four in 1950-56. [...] But after 1956 the Nobel prizes suddenly stop.' At that time, the US offered the most welcome environment supporting knowledge and research - a huge magnet for the best professional talent as America competed to keep industry leaders and academics at the top of their game.

If there's a difference between the American civil society and the European one, it's the aptitude of Americans to adhere to a cause and promote it as a group. American associations have become a source of information, a place for people to meet people, for corporations to 'meet' research, for supply to meet demand - the place where wisdom is accessible.

European associations have the opportunity to develop educational products to meet the increasing demands of a competitive global economy thirsty for knowledge and skills. It is time for European associations to step up and provide the knowledge-sharing infrastructure where wisdom is created, transferred and turned into development processes - challenging the current course dominated by North America.