

Opening Speech, U.Porto Congress 2016
Sebastião Fejo de Azevedo, on 26 October 2016

Dear Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, professor Amélia Ferreira

Dear Keynote Speakers,

Dear members of the U.Porto Community

Dear Guests

Allow me to be short with the protocol

Welcome to the University of Porto, we are in the Faculty of Medicine, one of the 15 visiting rooms of our University. It is a great pleasure and a honor, and be sure that these are not words of occasion, to receive you in this University of Porto Congress 2016

When I applied for this position, which I have held since 27 July 2014, I made a commitment to bring the future of the University into our internal debate, with the participation of invited third parties. This Conference represents part of the fulfilment of that commitment.

The purpose of this initiative is to hold a debate on the very necessary search for the best academic policies and practices to adopt in our public mission. In a fast-paced and increasingly globalised world of unsteady growth and pressing social and economic uncertainties, creating both unprecedented challenges and opportunities for science, technology and higher education, the University carries an enormous responsibility.

After all, and as dealt with by professor Stefan Collini in his book published in 2012, we should keep putting and trying to answer this simple question with so complex answer – “what are universities for?”.

Let me leave you with a few reflections concerning this question.

I see universities as Centres of Knowledge, Culture and Research. Universities are institutions with the mission of producing, developing, promoting and transferring knowledge and culture.

28 years ago, on the 18th September 1988, 388 university rectors of all over Europe and beyond, joined in Bologna by occasion of the 900th anniversary of the oldest university in Europe and have agreed on a document that states four fundamental underlying principles of the university mission:

- Autonomy and diversity – universities are autonomous institutions at the heart of societies differently organized; research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.

- Teaching and Research should be seen and carried out as inseparable activities
- Freedom – should be an unnegotiable value in Research and Training; Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and both governments and university governance models must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement
- Universities are the trustees of European humanist tradition... it transcends geographical and political frontiers, and affirms the vital need for different cultures to know and influence each other

These are principles that are today recognized by more than 600 universities of 77 countries around the World.

These principles were reasserted last week in S. Paulo, Brazil, by more than 130 rectors and other university representatives, by occasion of the commemorations of the 28th anniversary of the Magna Charta, yet with the clear vision of the need to adapt and reinterpret them at the light of the evolution, as universities always did.

I believe that it is worth to remind ourselves of some aspects of today's life

- World Declaration on Education for All, Jomtien, Thailand 5-9 March, 1990, proclaimed by UNESCO
- The felt need for Mass Education, Continuing Education – requiring a strong effort of diversity of offer
- University 5.0 is already with us
 - University without boundaries and without walls is here – opportunities and threats
 - Pedagogical issues, Faculty training
- Education&Research in large scale – massive budgets
- Growing pressure for accountability to Society, not only to governments

And, what about life tomorrow, say in 2038 for occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Magna Charta?

- University 10.0... in a form that maybe we are not able to entirely foresee today
- Targets for mass education – Education for All
 - 95% with at least short courses of higher education training (~ 2 year training)
 - 40% with at least first cycle training (~3 year training...)
 - 25% with at least second cycle train (~2 further years on top of first cycles)

- 5% with Ph.D. training...
- Diversity of offer in order to meet the motivation and competencies of young people
- Diversity of offer of continuing education, again to meet the needs of individuals and society – we shall live longer, we shall have to work longer, we shall have to study longer

The need to adapt

We should keep in mind this idea that comes somehow from Darwin's vision, that

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, but rather, that which is most adaptable to change.”

Indeed, I believe that we need to keep revisiting principles and interpret them at the light of evolution:

- Enlarging the dimension of the mission means growing budgets and related growing pressure for accountability
 - The third mission of universities is now a pillar of our mission, meaning mainly
 - the enlarging of the boundaries of knowledge production to go beyond research for curiosity and embracing the need for knowledge valorisation
 - With a wider vision of the World, there is this perceived need to significant enlarging our responsibilities in the social dimension
 - Science and culture must be promoted
- Independence of political and of economic power... requires capacity for significant levels of self-financing
 - Global competitiveness
 - More flexible forms of governance, getting as much as possible free from bureaucracy

In All

- The fundamental values of the Magna Charta remain as the pillars for the existence of universities - autonomy, education & research, freedom, rationalist, humanist values
- Yet, we have to reinterpret scope, breath and depth, as indeed has been done throughout the Centuries
- There is an urge and need to revisit the meaning of ‘serving the humanity’, of serving the society
- There is a need for sensible, rational equilibrium in finding and implementing new governance models, requiring views that as much as possible anticipate the future -

promoting pedagogical evolution, developing holistic views of society, capturing new sources of financing, coming closer to people

Ladies and Gentlemen

This Conference welcomes 11 prominent scholars from prestigious international universities and scientific institutions, 23 faculty participants, one student representative and one non-teaching staff representative. I am very pleased to say that we have more than 300 registered colleagues. I Just hope that the debate meets the expectations of us all. With the so high quality of the keynote speakers to whom I so much thank their availability, I would say that it has all the ingredients to be useful, which means to be successful.

Given the natural impossibility of covering all issues relevant to the daily life and future of universities, we will focus on four themes that we believe to be fundamental to our development, which will be discussed in seven plenary sessions, consisting of 10 talks given by guest speakers. Theme 1 will take a holistic approach to defining the role of universities in the 21st century; Theme 2 will invite reflection on the core elements of Education and Research in a Changing World; Theme 3 will discuss the Third Mission of Universities, not only regarding knowledge transfer, but also the creation of a vision for advancing Culture and Science for all; finally, Theme 4 will address the challenges of university governance.

In the closing session, which will immediately follow the last Plenary Session, we will also be joined by the Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education, who will provide an important contextual report on the current challenges and opportunities for science, technology and higher education.

It is my sincere hope that this event, and the conclusions drawn from the ensuing debates, will serve as an important contribution to the “adaptation to the times” the University of Porto must undertake in order to continue its mission of public service. This mission acts not only in favour of national progress, but also of advancing the fundamental knowledge, art and culture across all borders that will benefit the future of all humanity.

I shall conclude by offering my wholehearted acknowledgement and thanks, first and foremost, to my colleagues - the rectorial team - and main supporters of this event’s organisation. I would equally like to thank the Directors of the Faculties, who promptly made their facilities available upon request, facilitated an extensive team of cultural, events and communications experts and made the faculties’ services available, which were paramount to the logistics and organisation of the upcoming event.

Last, but not least I acknowledge gladly the relevant sponsorship of EFACEC and MONTEPIO, two companies/institutions that we all so well know in Portugal and that so

swiftly answered my request of support. Of course, a most useful support, considering that there were no registration fees in this event.

I thank you all very much for your participation. May these sessions about “Thinking the Future” prove to be very fruitful.

26 October 2016

Auditorium of the Centre for Medical Research, Faculty of Medicine

Sebastião Feyo de Azevedo, Rector