

A Pivotal Moment for the Future of the World Dignity University **Mara Alagic**

Contribution to the Pre-Planned Dignilogue #4:
Plotting the Future of the World Dignity University Initiative
Digni-Host — David Yamada
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(<https://humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/annualmeeting/36.php>)

I feel the COVID-19 pandemic has stranded us on our 'islands' but also provided opportunities to connect in different new ways, letting some lights for our work be brighter. The nature of communication and connections has significantly changed (caution - for many but not for all). Also, research indicates increased interest in informal and self-regulated learning. If we just reflect on our day yesterday, the fact that we have 155 registered participants from more than 30 countries that can carry out our messages to the world – that is **a new way of learning**.

On Context: We are all learners

As we all, I look at the world from my own context and experiences. Two of my passions are education and you, my dignity family. In education, I teach teachers, and research learning and learning environments. I also learn from my students, so I like emphasizing, **we are all learners**. So, that is my primary context when thinking about World Dignity University and I love to be able now to thank Evelin, Linda, and Uli for all their work in developing and nurturing this idea framed in the context of dignity global leadership.

On how things are rapidly changing:

Two weeks ago Austria started a lockdown due to a significant increase in COVID-19 virus cases. A week ago I listened to the news about flights from South Africa that made it to Amsterdam but were grounded for a while on the tarmac leaving passengers to wonder... During the 12 hours of flight time, information came out about a new variance of the COVID 19 - Omicron (B.1.1.529): SARS-CoV-2 spreading out of South Africa. A reporter Stephanie Nolen tweeted and wrote from one of those stranded planes, **“Europe apparently panicked while I was somewhere over the Sahara; by the time we landed, we were told we would not be permitted off the plane.”** So as

authorities were trying to figure out whether passengers should quarantine ... I was thinking about my travels with trepidation. Is this the future we need to prepare for?

Needless to say anything else about climate change, our deeply divided societies, or other global challenges. The way this pandemic is resurfacing and spreading demonstrates the ongoing/urgent need for focused global community collaboration, the need for dignity in solidarity as we attempt to understand and at the same time solve threatening adaptive problems. Could this quick caption of my reality moment be a droplet in recognizing a glaring need for reconstructing education to be global and adaptive from the perspective of dignity and solidarity, unity in diversity, and not humiliation?

On LEARNING FOCUS and a global perspective

In the framing WDU document, Evelin and Linda emphasized that “liberal arts education must be strengthened to foster responsible citizenship” (Evelin and Linda). I would like to add something to that from my corner of transdisciplinary STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) research and education. This emphasis on liberal arts is also essential for those that by most of our educational systems stay isolated in the STEM context. Some progress has been made by integrating arts so it is now STEAM, but that is not enough. Nurturing learners’ curiosity, creativity, problem solving competencies, and collaboration abilities has been assigned to transdisciplinary STEAM education. So, for the real change, (a) STEM education has to be immersed or strengthened by liberal arts education, and (b) STEM literacy needs to be more accessible to the general public.

A narrative that also points to what we can do in this context needs to include a recognition of novel **technological capacities and collaboration/communication practices** for learning in global contexts that have been developing under the pressure of the pandemic. This seems to me to be a pivotal moment for furthering World Dignity University's reach by strengthening its infrastructure, fostering global partnerships, and creative formats for dialogic collaboration, mutuality, and nurturing as its primary facets.

Before I end, I ask you to take a deep breath and take a few seconds to think about what stood out for you in yesterday’s and today’s activities and reflections. What are you taking with you?

For these reasons and many other reasons that we listened about yesterday and today, I would like to summarize my thinking in three points:

- (i) Recognition of current complexities **we leave in** requires new ways of learning and thinking;
- (ii) This time might be pivotal for furthering the WDU initiative in the spirit of dignity in solidarity and unity in diversity, to use the terms Evelin defined so well for us; and
- (iii) I bring to that what we in education call 4C's - Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity as one of the frames for our global leadership through the WDU.

Thank you for your attention.