20 years of the IN3

Institutional venue of the Open University of Catalonia, Barcelona

Minister,
Director,
Members of the Executive Board,
Researchers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In 1976, *Nature* published an opinion article titled "No university without research". It included a warning to the Open University: that no higher education institution could focus solely on education, because it is the interaction and synergy with research that both characterizes it as an institution and guarantees the quality of its teaching. **In short, research is not the only factor, but, in terms of universities, it is necessary**: "there has been a reassertion of the vital need for research to take its proper place alongside teaching"[1].

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Obviously, this article was not talking about the UOC, rather its British namesake founded in 1969, which, following these warnings, was able to correct its course. We did not need any of these warnings here at the UOC. The very decree founding the University, a quarter of a century ago, explicitly stated that research was essential.

And five years on from the UOC, the founding of the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3) reinforced the University's commitment to research. The IN3 was pioneering in research into the interactions between digital technologies and human activity.

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[1] Gillian Boucher, "No university without research", *Nature*, 264, 18 de novembre de 1976, p. 204, https://www.nature.com/articles/264204a0.pdf.

This focus, which at the time was as original as it was disruptive, was aided by the involvement of our friend, the researcher and now minister, Professor Manuel Castells. He was a founder and later a director of the institute, but above all he was a researcher and an inspiration... **the history of the IN3 is intertwined with his name and his research**.

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In these first twenty years, the IN3 has consolidated its position of leading research not only within but also beyond the UOC, especially in the field of the Network Society. Right now, the IN3's different research groups produce a third of the UOC's articles each year, are awarded half of external research funding, and, in 2020 alone, organized some fifty activities involving 4,500 people from around the world.

Looking beyond the numbers, which you can find in the institute's reports, I would like to highlight its role as a trailblazer, spearheading progress, opening the way and being at the vanguard in order to go further. Through excellence.

The success of the initial approach and the consistent progress since then have acted as both an example and an inspiration for others.

The IN3 studies the interaction between technology and human sciences, and each step forward has been the result of a natural evolution. From that first core focus on the effects of technology on society, different lines have emerged focusing on new areas of research and innovation: the interaction between technology and teaching led to the creation of the eLearn Center; the coming together of technology and health prompted the creation of the eHealth Center; and the links between tech and the arts and creativity led us to recently unveil Hac Te, our art, science and technology hub.

This institutionalized research has also branched out into other groups and individual researchers, who have drawn inspiration from *The Information Age* trilogy to pursue rewarding research of their own.

In short, the institution's, the groups' and the individuals' research all share one common principle: a commitment to research and knowledge. This commitment was true for the UK's Open University in 1976, as I said earlier; it was also true twenty years ago as the IN3 made its first steps, and it is still true for the present and the future. It is

true for the challenges set by the 2030 Agenda, and for the crises brought on by the pandemic.

It is true because, as Mariana Mazzucato, economist and the UOC's next honorary doctorate, said recently, it is not enough to get back to normal, we need to "build back better"[2].

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So, the current digital transformation represents an excellent opportunity given that, as anyone who has tried to turn back the tide knows, the wisest way to get ahead is to ride the waves.

The Catalan university system in general and the UOC in particular have made a clear commitment and, despite the difficulties, we have stayed the course. Evidence of this can be found in the strategic plans rolled out in the last few years, or in our recent performance.

«As a unique institution and a hub in a global system, we want to play an active part in this future of digital transformation»

As a unique institution and a hub in a global system, we want to play an active part in this future of digital transformation: putting ourselves in the shoes of the people studying, training, upskilling, researching and showcasing this research. In short, people creating tomorrow's world.

And this, in good part, is what the IN3 has been doing for the last 20 years... and may they continue to do so for many years to come!

Thank you very much

Josep A. Planell

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[2] Mariana Mazzucato, "Build Back the State", *Project Syndicate*, 15 April 2021, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/biden-lessons-from-us-moonshot-by-mariana-mazzucato-2021-04