Virtual exchange (VE) has received the attention of educators for several years (Helm, 2018; O’Dowd, 2018). Often resulting from grassroots initiatives by which teachers from different institutions connect their classes to work on collaborative projects, VE has led to the creation of networks on a global scale, which for a long time have not received institutional recognition or have not been included in internationalization policies.

VE networks provide unique opportunities for exchanging good practices and professional development, usually through training activities and conferences. Precisely, it was within the second conference of a VE network, the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project (TAPP), that the idea of this Special Issue (SI) ‘Global Perspectives on Virtual Exchange for University Internationalisation’ emerged. TAPP has connected educators in the U.S. and Europe for over two decades, mainly through bilateral and multilateral projects that involve writing and translation, and more recently expanding to other continents and involving different disciplines. Combining practice reports derived from teaching activities and research studies, this SI offers different perspectives on VE and university internationalization from around the globe. This SI offers a variety of insights into how VE can contribute to making university internationalization more diverse and digitalized. The articles in
this SI share a coherent theme as they present the results of well-established partnerships through a variety of VE exchanges and thematic fields addressed (e.g., translation, technical writing, specialized communication, sustainable development goals (SDGs) and digital literacy).

This SI looks into VE in a changing, complex university landscape, connecting students and educators in different geographical locations to help develop different types of linguistic, intercultural and transversal skills (e.g., Arnó-Macià et al., 2021). Based on the lessons learned through multiple VE initiatives, many of which come from the long-standing TAPP network (Mousten et al., 2018), the five articles in this special issue examine numerous aspects that cover the use of different languages (e.g., English, Portuguese, Spanish), the reappraisal of the use of technology, and the varied learning outcomes of VE. Additionally, the varied results presented in the studies in this SI reach beyond individual learners or courses to create an impact on institutional policies, impinging on the internationalization of institutions, of the curriculum and of students’ experiences.

In the first paper of this volume, Finardi and Aşık focus on VE in the Global South by describing a collaboration between a Brazilian and a Turkish university. Their study analyzes institutional, teacher and student perspectives on the role of VE in Internationalization at Home (IaH). From the portrait depicted in this article, the authors describe the challenges and necessary improvements that VE still has to face in its institutional implementation.

A practice report coming from a TAPP project is presented by Castel-Branco. She describes a VE practice that linked a U.S. creative writing class and a Portuguese literary translation class. In her paper, Castel-Branco shows how VE can help students improve their academic and professional literary translation skills while gaining deeper insights into their own beliefs and practices.

From the perspective of sustainability, Reynolds describes a VE programme between France (participants’ location) and different institutions in Italy, Syria, Palestine, Algeria and Egypt. Using an ethnographic approach, Reynolds examines the impact of VE regarding students’ linguistic skills and their awareness towards climate change issues.

López-Arroyo, Pizarro-Sánchez and Moreno-Pérez describe a TAPP project between a group of U.S. law students and a class of Spanish legal translation students. Their paper shows that peer collaboration contributed to the students' increased knowledge of legal language and their translation performance. Specifically, they improved in terms of textual cohesion through the use of general language, synonyms and hypernyms.
Petts and Lázaro-Gutiérrez present two successful TAPP exchanges between the U.S. and Spain, involving undergraduate students of technical writing and graduate students enrolled in a stylistics and editing course. Through a content analysis of the participants’ pre- and post-programme reports, the authors evaluate and discuss the different benefits of the programme and potential challenges for future VE.

In sum, taking global and multidisciplinary perspectives on VE and focusing both on research and teaching practices, this SI brings together VE research and practice in language learning, translation, law, and sustainability. It collects teachers’, institutional officers’ and especially students’ perspectives on VE as an internationalization practice, and it provides an overall reflection on how interactions in this ‘third space’ can help teachers and students design, create and communicate in multiple and imaginative ways, while they develop a variety of intercultural, professional, linguistic and disciplinary competences (Wimpenny et al., 2022). Additionally, such varied grassroots perspectives can inform policymakers towards providing the necessary means to nurture VE practitioner and researcher networks for the solid implementation of VE as a valuable IaH practice in higher education.

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