The Networked Universities: UNINETTUNO International Telematic University Model

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The International Telematic University UNINETTUNO

The International Telematic University UNINETTUNO was established further to the success of the Med Net'U – Mediterranean Network of Universities project, which saw the participation of 31 partners belonging to 11 Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, France, Jordan, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey). All partners created a technological network based on receiving and transmitting digital satellite technologies, and today they can produce, broadcast and receive educational contents, via Internet and on satellite television. A technological network that is supported by a network of people, of intelligences that can interconnect and share their knowledge and jointly developed a virtual area for higher education and for the circulation of knowledge in the Euro-Mediterranean, capable of giving rise to UNINETTUNO University. The development of Med Net'U from project to system, with the birth of UNINETTUNO University, was supported by the Governments of the partner countries and was made effective by the conclusion of academic agreements with several universities of the Arab World. We jointly succeeded in developing UNINETTUNO and make it rapidly become one great university in which prestigious lecturers of important European and Mediterranean Universities deliver their courses in several languages in various faculties. Jointly we succeed in creating the first e-learning portal (www.uninettunouniversity.net) of the world where teaching and learning are carried out in 5 languages: Italian, French, English, Arabic and Greek. UNINETTUNO students come from 104 different countries of the world; with no more space and time limits, they can attend the university and can choose to study in the language they prefer. In the different learning environments of the Didactic Cyberspace, students can get digitised video-lectures linked in a multimedia and hypertextual way to books, texts, selected bibliographical and website references and virtual laboratories. In the virtual classroom the professors of each subject interact with the students being constantly supported in their learning progress. Through forums and chats intelligences get interconnected and knowledge is exchanged.

Realising shared curricula based on UNINETTUNO internationalisation model

In these years UNINETTUNO has been designing and realising common curricula that are recognised in Europe and in some countries of the Arab World. In the process of definition of the study programmes UNINETTUNO made reference to the guidelines provided for by the Bologna/Sorbonne process and by ECTS, European Credit Transfer System complying with the European Qualification Standards.

As it regards, instead, the partner Universities based on a country that did not join the Sorbonne/Bologna process, UNINETTUNO developed a model for shared curricula design that has been already successfully tested. A concrete example is represented by the double title developed jointly with Helwan University, Cairo; after a first phase of analysis of the contents of the respective study programmes and of the contents treated within each discipline, we decided that, for the first three years, the students of Helwan University, beside completing the study programme of UNINETTUNO degree course in Computer Engineering, had to add, for each year, the disciplines characterising the study programme of their own University. As a result, cultural differences were respected and the students were able to obtain a title acknowledged in Italy, in Europe and in Egypt. This model of shared curricula was applied also to other Universities of other countries of the world.

The analysis and integration of the study programmes allow the realisation of study paths suited to supply the competences required by the new labour markets. Cooperating in realizing networked study programmes has a great value in political and cultural terms.

The networked world of the Web let people interact with individuals coming from countries having completely different political, religious and cultural backgrounds; not all academic institutions are able to supply tools to facilitate communication, understanding, dialogue and cooperation. At present, most of the Universities worldwide still deliver customised and localised curricula. In each country they teach "their own philosophy", "their own history", contradicting all what is going on in our society at present. From one side there are training institutions providing localised training paths, on the other side people connecting with the whole world in real time and socially and professionally interacting with a globalised setting. If the universities would start to network and integrate their own training paths, they could supply tools capable to meet the needs and demands that the knowledge society requires.

The internationalization of the Universities

UNINETTUNO model created and is still creating new alliances between the Universities of various countries of the world and allows to jointly develop new real and virtual spaces to build new shared knowledge and realize a new model of distance University moving with not boundaries.

Working together, sharing knowledge of the different Universities allowed to develop new knowledge as well as to consider cultural, religious and political differences as a wealth for humankind.

In my opinion, the respect for differences will never be achieved if educational and training systems are still unable to provide appropriate tools enabling to better understand the cultures of other people, yet in many cases they make differences even sharper.

Today we should use Internet's global web to bring knowledge and expertise to all the citizens of the world with no more space and time limits. Democratizing the access to knowledge allows to feed the minds of all men and women, to assure all the same starting-point and eradicate the slavery of ignorance. Building and transferring knowledge over the Internet borders disappear; frontiers are places of continuity and not of conflicts. Therefore, today UNINETTUNO, thanks to its psycho-pedagogic and organizational model, can assure its users on the quality of the supplied contents, transforming university into an open system able of updating itself and integrating all knowledge available on the Web and concretizing the exchange of knowledge worldwide thanks to the model of a Distance University without distances.