

## **Cooperation Model between the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO and the Helwan University in Cairo**

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### **Background: the challenges to the University in the knowledge society**

All what is happening around us make us realise that we live in truly globalised, interconnected world that affects our way of being as well as our economic, political world, our stability, our beliefs that are no longer related to a single country, a single nation. We witnessed the first cases of devolution in the world that had as their main tool the Web, the Social Networks, the televisions and mobile phones and tags such as Facebook Revolution”, “Twitter Revolution” and “Al-Jazeera” are the battlefields of the young people of the countries of the Arab World and not only them; let’s think about the “indignados” in the Western World. The power of these tools was unsuspected: suddenly, political systems, that never before showed their fragility, fell down. I believe that, in the present historical era, before any intervention or cooperation model among different countries, we have to take into account the fact that the globalised society is a concrete fact. In the virtual space of the Internet people of different cultures, religions and political settings constantly interact and this is an unprecedented fact. Intellectual technologies do not play a simple role in the current anthropological change, but they are their focus. In principle, everybody has to recognise that, thanks to the new technologies, anybody from anywhere, if he has the required equipment and materials can build his own space to carry on his own education and self-learning path.

In principle, everybody recognises that knowledge, know-how and skills of every man are the sources of all richness. In the so-called “knowledge society”, in principle, everybody believes that the development of a country, its reforming and change processes can be put into practice only if there are people capable of realizing and managing these reform and change processes; otherwise, these facts are reduced to mere abstract rules. As a consequence, education, the acquisition of competences is at basis of any change, of any model of cooperation. Education is also a tool by which citizens participate in a constructive way to change. The enhancement of cooperation in the field of university and research, dialogue among intellectuals and representatives of the academic world of both shores of the Mediterranean Basin and the harmonisation of higher education and scientific research programmes aimed at making the students’ and teachers’ mobility effective, represent now the fundamental path to make intercultural dialogue become part of the daily life of all of us.

Together a new model of social ethics, it is necessary to establish new systems, new systems and public policies facilitating the development of new organisation models for schools, training centres and universities at local, national and international level integrating presence with distance and able to meet the complex educational needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century man.

and also new organisational models for universities at local, national and international levels. These can integrate presence with distance; if this is not achieved, I believe that we risk a progressive decay of traditional educational structures. We will witness an uncontrolled process that will lead us towards a more and more de-schooled society; it will be up to the agencies separated from the educational institutions and software designers to create for tomorrow’s citizens the new competences that society requires.

The curricula should develop the learning of knowledge of the various countries of the world and of various languages, they should supply the tools to make man capable of respecting of the cultural, religions and political differences, to be able to use new technologies and new

languages, to be able to merge professional skills with a sound cultural background in order to be able to experience complexity. This situation affects the entire world: all universities of the various countries have to find their own identity and a new role in the knowledge society.

These considerations are at the basis of my personal engagement and of that of the group of people who, in these years, has been working with me to realise, jointly with the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, a Euro-Mediterranean Area for Education and Research resulting from the cooperation among distance universities and traditional universities and educational institutions of various European and Mediterranean countries to produce training contents to be included into the virtual spaces of the Internet and jointly create systems and structures of new models of distance universities and quality e-learning. .

### **The International Telematic University UNINETTUNO and its role in the Mediterranean Area**

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 worked together and created a true technological network based on receiving and transmitting digital satellite technologies. Today, all partners can produce, broadcast and receive educational contents, via Internet, via satellite 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 the jointly developed a virtual area for higher education and for the circulation of knowledge in the Euro-Mediterranean and capable of giving rise to the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO. The development of Med Net'U from project to

system, with the birth of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, 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 the International Telematic University 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 including engineering, philosophy, conservation of cultural heritage, law, economics, psychology and communication sciences. Thanks to the cooperation of the professors of different universities did we succeed in creating in the Internet ([www.uninettunouniversity.net](http://www.uninettunouniversity.net)), the first portal of the world where teaching and learning are carried out in 6 languages: Italian, French English, Arabic, Greek and Polish and very soon even in Russian. The students of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO come from 40 different countries of the world; they, with no more space and time limits, can attend the university and they can choose whether to studying the language they prefer on television and in the Internet.

Indeed, the Euro-Mediterranean challenge on the front of higher education was launched precisely in Egypt. In fact, on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2006, at the Helwan University Campus, in Cairo, the first Technological Pole of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO was inaugurated that gave origin to the first Euro-Mediterranean Distance University. For the first time, Italian and Egyptian Professors designed common study programmes allowing for the delivery of university study titles acknowledged in Italy, in Egypt and in Europe.

In order to establish a joint study programme we carried on important work of harmonisation between the curriculum implemented at the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, based on the model of the Bologna Process and on that one of the Helwan University, based on the Egyptian university regulations. A Committee including professors

of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO and of Helwan teachers studied the study programmes and contents of the courses of both Universities, defining, at last, unified curriculum including mutually recognised exams. This curriculum allows the students to get an Italian study course in 3 years. Taking some additional exams, specific of the Egyptian curriculum, the students can get also an Egyptian degree upon completion of an overall five-year study path. The analysis and integration of the study programmes allow for the realisation of study path able to supply the competences required by the new global labour markets. The great value of this process of integration of the study programmes and creation of competences at global level is that the outcome of this integration meets the actual needs of the society in which we live. On the contrary, if Universities are cut off from the outside world, the answers they give to the needs of the current society will be inadequate. At present, Universities still deliver customised and localised curricula: this means that in each country they teach “their own philosophy”, “their own history”, contradicting all what is going on in the world now: on one side 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. The networked world often make people interact with individuals coming from countries having completely different political, religious and cultural settings; not all academic institutions are able to supply tools to facilitate communication, understanding, dialogue and cooperation.

If the universities would start to network and integrate their own training paths, they could start to supply tools able to meet the needs and demands that the knowledge society requires. Today, this has been achieved with the Helwan University. Actually, the Technological Poles of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO at Helwan University campus and in the premises of the Istituto Don Bosco in Cairo are equipped with all the all the

technologies allowing the student to attend the courses without moving from their own country.

The Egyptian students currently enrolled are 200 and among them 14% are women. In the last year there were 53 graduates and among them 75% have already got a job in European companies based in Cairo and in Egyptian companies working in the field of technological innovation, 9% decided to continue their studies in the United States, 13% are currently doing their military service.

These students had the opportunity had the opportunity to carry on a training period at some ICT Italian companies and to continue collaboration relations even after they came back to Egypt. This training period gave the Egyptian students the opportunity of achieving specific applied research projects and to familiarise themselves with the professional dynamics of some important Italian companies working in the field of technological innovation and computer and software development.

### **The psycho-pedagogic didactic model of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO**

The psycho-pedagogic tool of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO designed during over twenty years of research work by me and by my team of researchers and assistants and developed by the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO is the Internet-based learning environment [www.uninettunouniversity.net](http://www.uninettunouniversity.net), the first portal of the world where teaching and learning are carried out in six languages enabling to concretise the shift from teacher's central role to the student's central role; from knowledge transfer to knowledge creation; from a passive and competitive learning to active and collaborative learning.

In the learning environments of the Didactic Cyberspace the students have their disposal a model of knowledge structuring that makes them active protagonists of their own teaching and learning processes. In the Didactic Cyberspace it is possible to access the different learning environments: get digitised videolessons linked in a multimedia and hypertextual way to books, texts, selected bibliographical references, lists of websites and virtual laboratories. In the virtual classroom the professors and tutors of each subject interact with the students and support their learning processes. Through forums and chats intelligences get interconnected and knowledge is exchanged.

In the “Virtual Laboratory” learning environment the students have at their disposal virtual tools allowing them to put into practice the theoretical knowledge learnt through the study of the training materials described above.

During his learning process the student is not left alone; he is continuously supported by the teacher and by the tutor. Finally, the student’s whole learning process is constantly monitored by professors and tutors through the tracing system of the UNINETTUNO portal.

The tracing system of the UNINETTUNO portal supplies reports and statistical data on the individual study activities of each single student. The tracing report is integrated by qualitative evaluations made by the professors/tutors. The results of these mid-term assessments determine his admission to the exam that is made on the face-to-face mode or by videoconferencing.

### **The internationalisation of the University**

The model of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO can put together the partner countries’ cultural contexts, create shared knowledge between Universities and training centres, develop together real and virtual spaces, build up common networks of knowledge. Thanks to the mutual knowledge of their cultural, religious and political

specificities, belonging to the history and cultures of the different Countries, it is possible to interconnect intelligences and create, through the cooperation with other universities, a new training model, based on ethical values able to qualify, in terms of moral and social terms, the coherence of the study programmes, that are enriched by the cultural specificities supplied by each university and teacher involved.

Today we work together and operate within a Euro-Mediterranean Common Area to launch a process of harmonisation of the Euro-Mediterranean educational and training systems by sharing psycho-pedagogic models and human and technological resources. Our working group is aware of the fact that this cooperation enables to create a new model of distance university within which one can move without boundaries and where, thanks to the new technologies, beside the physical moving of professors and students, the mobility of ideas is easier and easier.

The experience made with the Helwan University in the Mediterranean Area confirms that it is possible to share study programmes and to create new educational models.

So doing we really succeeded in starting new fruitful alliances that allow providing the new generations with knowledge and tool required to meet the challenges of the labour market of a globalised society and to dialogue with the various cultures of the world.

## **Conclusions**

Democratising the access to knowledge helps reducing ignorance, feeding the minds of all men and women, and to allow everybody to start from the same starting point and thus eradicating the slavery of ignorance.

Today, knowledge networks can generate new wealth, they can offer the teachings of scientists and of the best intellectuals of the world. Distance university allows interaction between



teachers and students from different universities and actually gives a prompt answer to demands for internationalisation of the training system, it can help transforming the university in an open system, capable of integrating all available knowledge and fostering its exchange at global level. The cooperation model between the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO and the Helwan University is undoubtedly a success model that makes us hope and that offers to young Arabs the opportunity to acquire the skills allowing them to access a market of labour, which hopefully will not see any longer a desperate migration, but a flow of human resources that will contribute to the socio-economic development of the Arab world and European countries. Together we are creating our future capital, the immaterial capital of knowledge.

Only if we implement powerful policies aimed at democratising the access to knowledge, will we be able to lay the foundations on which to make skilled men and women act and to jointly create the values of solidarity and respect of differences, thanks to which the world will more easily share those universal values that, in principle, are accepted by everybody: justice and peace.