



The Internet: A New Renaissance for the University

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Innovative impact

The paper proposes a model using new technologies and knowledge alliances as an approach for innovating higher education at global level. This impacts in the short term products, technologies, organizational models and facilities. At long term, ICT-enabled knowledge alliances will act as a tool for academic and scientific diplomacy, developing cross-cultural academic programs, and supporting citizens and institutions promoting mutual knowledge and understanding addressing cultural, religious and political differences.

Keywords: eLearning, Internet, Distance University, Academic Alliances, Covid-19.

Introduction

The drama caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has forced the world to become aware that technology, if well used, can rewrite new rules that allow for the creation of new models of University. Universities without boundaries that bring knowledge to everybody's homes with no more space and time limits.

The subjects that will be treated in this paper will be:

- The Internet: A New Renaissance for the University
- Research for a new model of University
- Academic Alliances: A Global Strategy for Building the Future

The Internet: A New Renaissance for the University

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced all teachers to rely on the Web for teaching and communicating with their students. Almost all the universities in the world are currently knocking down their Ivory Towers using the Internet to carry out all teaching activities including remote exams.

In order to build an infrastructure for the XXI Century higher education, we ought to add a technological infrastructure to the universities' physical one. This will foster a new model of knowledge production and delivery.

A network of Knowledge Alliances will be possible by establishing consortia involving both universities and businesses from different parts of the world. Those Consortia promote the development of networks, meeting the

educational needs of a globalized and interconnected society.[1]

The Universities in those Consortia, based on a robust organizational and pedagogic model, will cooperate in the joint production of contents for the online learning environments, bringing to life a new model of distance university. A distance university, integrated within the traditional universities, allows those to regain a crucial role in the innovation of products, processes and structures: products flexibility and adaptability, promotion of students' autonomy, changes to the teachers' role and the universities' structures.

The creation of a higher education global network, in which teachers and students from different places of the world participate in the collaborative knowledge construction, is not a utopia. Our International Telematic University UNINETTUNO was born from a Consortium of 41 Italian and 31 foreign Universities: which is Consorzio NETTUNO – Network per l'Università Ovunque.

A new pedagogical model was born thanks to UNINETTUNO University.

Teachers had to learn a new knowledge communication model for teaching through television and the Internet. University lecture halls became open structures where technologies allow a flexible training process and foster self and collaborative learning, both face-to-face and at distance. Today, thanks to UNINETTUNO, we built a technological network - as well as, a network of people, able to connect and share their knowledge being aware of cultural, political, religious and economic differences. Jointly, we developed and keep on developing common spaces, real and virtual, of

knowledge, shared academic curricula and shared psycho-pedagogic models that help harmonizing educational systems on a global scale.

Research for a New Model of University

The All this was achieved and developed thanks to the distance teaching model included into the Didactic Cyberspace of UNINETTUNO's platform: this is based on over 25 years of research and experimentation focused on technologies applied to teaching-learning processes. The UNINETTUNO University itself is a true research laboratory in which are analyzed hypotheses on teaching methodologies and languages, and students performances in their learning processes. These results are continuously assessed by scientists from various fields.

The design of the Didactic Cyberspace is based on a systemic approach. All courses from the various degree programs include digitized video lessons, indexed and connected by multimedia and hypertextual links to: texts, exercises and virtual laboratories - in order to promote the transfer knowledge through different modalities:

- From simple to complex (as in video lessons and intelligent library);
- From theory to practical application (like, learning by doing in the virtual laboratory);
- From guided exercises to content research on the World Wide Web;
- From individual study to an interactive dialogue between professors and students (as in collaborative learning through communication and sharing tools)[2]

The interaction between students and teachers coming from different countries is at the core of the entire educational process: jointly they develop collaborative and constructive learning by using interactive classrooms and virtual classrooms in immersive 3D environments. UNINETTUNO psycho-pedagogic model promotes the development of new Web ethics, reconsidering the teacher's role as crucial, as opposed to the usual tendency on the Web to disregard it. Therefore, a new telematic Professor/tutor's profile is defined: as Socrates did, with the Maieutic Art, the Professor/tutor guides the students along their learning path, also in distance education, teaching them not only how to do things, but also how to be.

The richness of cultural exchanges in the educational virtual spaces, among individuals belonging to different backgrounds, even few years ago was unpredictable, whereas, today UNINETTUNO's students come from 167 different countries.

Academic Alliances: A Global Strategy for Building the Future

In the present historical time more than ever, I think it is essential to enhance the cooperation in the fields of university and research. The dialogue among representatives of the academic world, the harmonization of higher education and research programs, the students and teachers' mobility – all of those, represent the unavoidable path to be followed to make intercultural dialogue become part of everyday life. We should all be aware that developing online educational contents, jointly with worldwide universities, is strategically important: it allows to develop the knowledge that helps all citizens to consider cultural, religious and political differences as a richness for humankind and not as tools of conflict and war. We cannot simply ignore conflicts taking place around the world because, due to the effects of globalization, they could have a more and more disruptive impact on our freedom.

Past experience confirms that it is possible to share with the universities belonging to different political and cultural backgrounds, common paths of reflection and thinking[3].

The interconnected intelligences of teachers and students from all parts of the world build new knowledge and develop a network not based on the imposition of the cultural models of one or the other, but based on the dialogue among different cultures and educational models.

Together we developed a true laboratory enabling younger generations to become drivers of change.

Conclusion

We should all be aware that this cooperation allows us to build a new balance between unity and diversity: unity of values and traditions that past memory conveys and diversity of cultures and languages. The XXI Century requires a new model of university: a virtual university under open skies, with no boundaries, a university where we build competences for development and lay the foundations for building the future together.

References

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