

Catania 3 Conference

Working Group: **New Technologies and Distance Teaching**

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Introduction

The creation of a European space for higher education, which originates from the collaboration between Distance Universities and traditional Universities and Institutions of the different European and Mediterranean countries, is a fundamental topic from a strategic, cultural, politic and economic point of view.

Today, the new communication technologies allow to create Distance Universities without distances, television and Internet have revolutionized the way in which knowledge is produced and communicated. The new media allow all the citizens to have access to knowledge without any limit of space, time and place. The quantity of educational contents inserted on the *Internet* makes knowledge and competences learning more significant also out of the traditional educational structures. Everyone has the possibility of learning from people who feed the information networks. This process, enlarged by the telematic technologies, tends to constitute a global pedagogic society within the information society. The ascertainment of this reality highlights the worth and the importance of activating the collaboration among academic institutions of different countries, in our specific case of Europe and of the Mediterranean area, in order to produce the educational contents to be included on the Internet virtual spaces and to create together the systems and structures of the Distance Universities' new models. A distance University which originates from a multicultural partnership not only creates for the people who attends it the necessary skills to live in a globalised world but also facilitates the production of multimedia educational contents in different languages and at the same time allows to concretely realise the “Lisbon 2010” objectives linked to the development of a Knowledge-based Economy. In this context, the experience we lived among 31 Universities and training institutions of 11 Euromediterranean countries for the realisation of the Med Net'U Project - Mediterranean Network of Universities (funded by the European Commission in the framework of the Eumedis Programme and coordinated by NETTUNO - Network Università Ovunque), is really significant. In three years of activity, we actually realised not only a technological Network which, thanks to the satellite technologies and therefore to the learning environment on the Internet via satellite and to the TV channel RAI NETTUNO SAT 1, gives the possibility to all partners to produce, broadcast and receive the educational contents, but we also created a network of people, of intelligences who can link and share their knowledge. Professors from different cultural realities collaborate together with the unique aim of developing new knowledge and disseminating it to their students; every partner University was and is the protagonist of the new educational process. I believe that Med Net'U truly developed a new enthusiasm in the communities of professors who are working on this project, enthusiasm that has been also transferred to the political institutions of the involved

countries. Today in fact, the development of Med Net'U from project to system is supported by the Governments of the partner countries. Catania 3 represents a moment of verification of the actions realised but also a concrete ascertainment of the Governments' commitment and therefore the Education and Research Ministries have demonstrated supporting this process. A special thank-you should be addressed to Minister Moratti, who wanted to give concrete form to the ideas that emerged from the conferences of Catania 1 and Catania 2, both for the memorandum already signed with the Ministers of Education, University and Research of some Mediterranean countries and because, committing herself to establish the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, she enabled the birth of the structure through which it will be possible to give a continuity to the Med Net'U project and which will be able to constitute the basis for the creation of a distance Euromediterranean University.

Report: What has been proposed to the Catania 1 and Catania 2 conferences? And what has been realised?

Today's meeting requires a brief reflection on these two points. Let rapidly analyse the proposals.

Catania 1 (2003)

Proposals

In the Conference of the Informal Meeting of the Higher Education Ministers which took place in November 2003, among the four action lines proposed to develop a Euromediterranean Space of Higher Education, there was the one related to the working group for the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Distance University. The working group suggested to:

- Create a Euromediterranean Distance University starting from the Med Net'U Project results and from the partnership agreements among traditional Universities of the European and Mediterranean countries, still existing Distance Universities, Continuing Vocational Training Institutions and technological enterprises;
- Develop the actions directed towards supporting the cooperation among partners in order to create common psychopedagogic curricula, contents and models, targeted to the creation of distance degrees and training and requalification vocational courses to prepare the skills required by the global job market;
- Create a distance teaching network to train teachers at different levels;
- Realise a network structure equipped with technological infrastructures and common technical standards based on satellite technologies which allow the dissemination of contents both via television and via Internet satellite;
- Realise on the Internet via satellite a common multilingual didactical platform and a TV channel entirely devoted to academic lessons;
- Realise the recognition of the combined titles according to the adoption of the ECTS system of credits.

Catania 2 (2005)

Proposals

The Working Group Catania 2, in which all the academic representations of the Med Net'U partner countries participated, jointly decided to transform the Med Net'U experience in a real system of a distance Euro-Mediterranean University in order to capitalize and enlarge the results obtained by the Med Net'U Project and the political/institutional consent it generated. In particular, it proposed to:

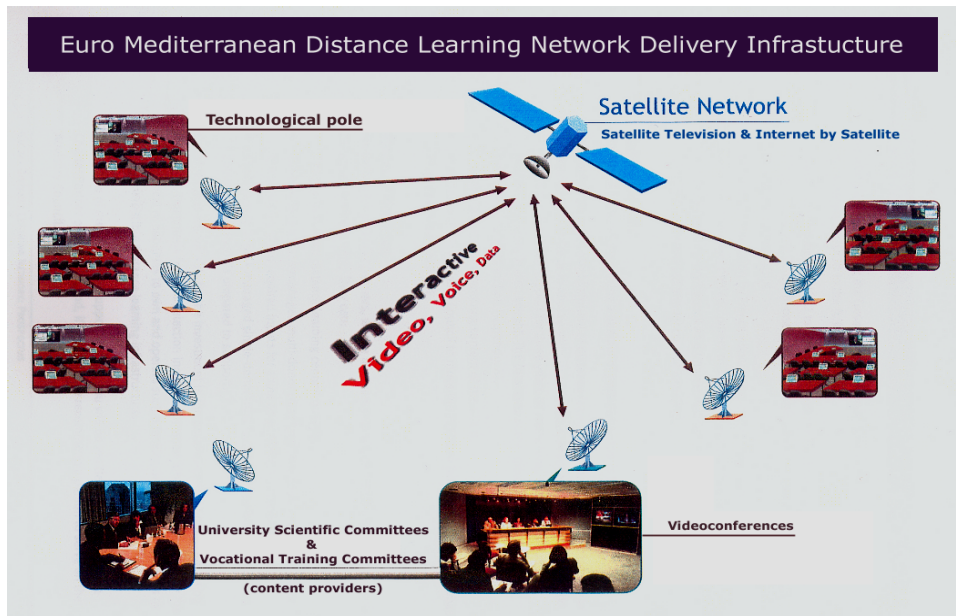
- Find out the modalities to determine the students' enrolment to the distance degree in Information Engineering carried out with the Med Net'U Project;
- Realise new degrees in the fields of economics, tourism, management, international law, cultural assets, Arabic and Italian languages and cultures, medicine, management of health-care services, territorial management, engineering;
- Realise Master courses to create specific skills in the fields much more required on the international job market;
- Realise short vocational training and retraining courses, both to train teachers at various levels and to prepare the skills necessary and linked to the educational needs of the job market in the involved countries.

Results achieved by the proposals of Catania 1 and Catania 2

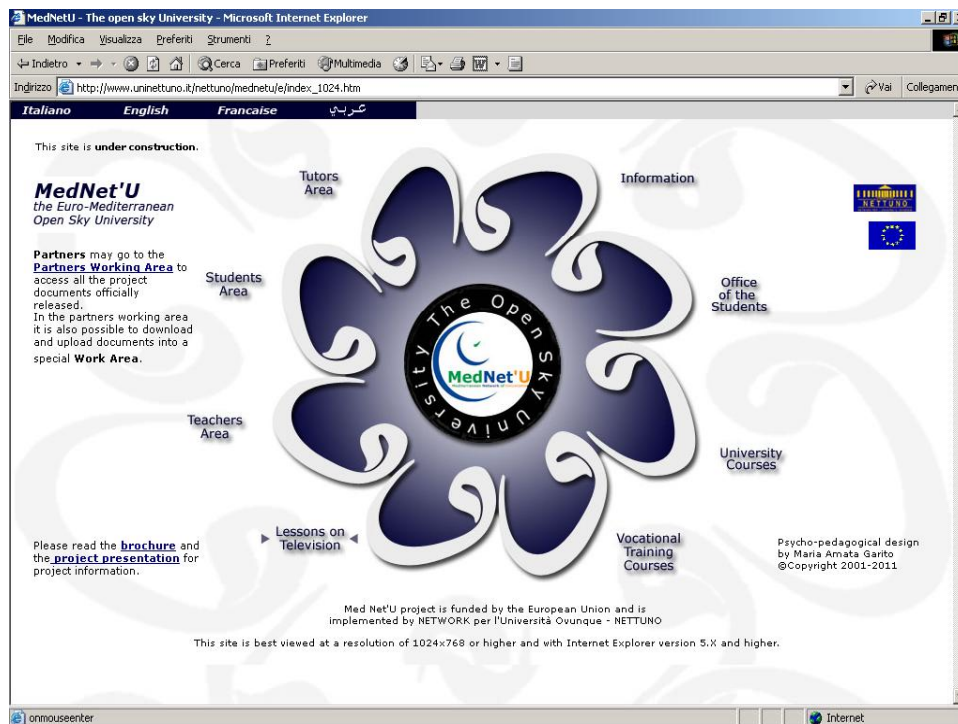
The activities carried out by several teachers and experts, and above all by the Med Net'U partners who participated in the Catania 1 and 2 conferences, enable us today to present the concrete results of our work. Together, in 3 years, we were able to realise:

1. The creation of two common curricula in the field of Engineering according to the guidelines of the Bologna and the Sorbonne process (3 years of basic studies plus 2 years of specialisation);
2. The production, in four languages (Arabic, English, French and Italian), of the modules of the first and second years of the distance degree in Information and Communication Engineering and Mechanical Engineering;
3. The training of professors, tutors and technical staff linked to the skills necessary to implement distance teaching;
4. The production of the didactical materials in multilingual version for the creation of 18 courses of high distance vocational training that deal with different topics: Java programmers, Project Management, Business and ICT, Innovation Technologies, Management of Cultural Assets, Intellectual Property, Environment and Territory Planning, Computer Literacy, Tourism Marketing and Training of Distance Trainers;
5. The realisation of a network structure based on transmitting and receiving bi-directional satellite technologies that were installed at the 11 Production Centres and 31 Technological Poles at the Partners' sites, the unique Euromediterranean bi-directional technological network for distance teaching existing as of today;

- The development on the Internet via satellite of a common didactical platform, the Med Net'U teaching environment in Arabic, Italian, English and French and the availability on the TV satellite channel RAI NETTUNO SAT 1 of spaces entirely devoted to the broadcasting in Arabic, Italian, English and French of academic lessons carried out by professors of the Arab and European Universities.



Euro-Mediterranean Structure for distance training



Home page of the Med Net'U didactical portal

Furthermore, some Med Net'U partners decided that the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO, established by the Decree of 15th April 2005 of the Minister of Education, University and Research Letizia Moratti, which issues recognised academic titles – should be the natural prosecution of the activities realised with the Med Net'U Project and the basis for the creation of a real Distance Euro-Mediterranean University.

Starting from the 2005/2006 academic year, students belonging to diverse countries and diverse cultures will be able to choose to follow distance courses of the new International Telematic University UNINETTUNO in the language they prefer, and will be followed in a telematic way by professors and tutors from the diverse Med Net'U partner universities. The courses will be broadcasted on the TV channel RAI NETTUNO SAT 1 and it will also be possible to follow them through the appropriate learning environment on the Internet (www.uninettunouniversity.net), where have been inserted diverse didactical supports and have been created virtual classrooms to activate processes of interaction and collaborative learning between students and professors.

In 2005, the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO signed academic agreements with Rectors of some of the most prestigious universities of the Arab world and Middle East, which are also Med Net'U partners, belonging to countries such as Egypt (Cairo and Helwan Universities), Jordan (Yarmouk University and Jordan University of Science and Technology), and Tunisia (Virtual University of Tunis), as well as with the under-secretary of the Ministry of Education, Teaching and Training of Morocco, in order to develop together undergraduate distance courses. These academic agreements were inserted in the Memorandum of Understanding that the Italian Minister of Education, University and Research signed with the corresponding Ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco.

The Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research maintained its commitments taken with the signature of the Memorandum. It approved the project for the production in Arabic, English and French of the didactical materials of the undergraduate distance course in Economy and Management of Businesses, and for the production of the International distance Master in Management and Development of Tourism Services and of Marketing of Tourism.

Proposals Catania 3

The Working Group Catania 3 of the sector “New Technologies and Distance Teaching”, will discuss the following topics and will formulate at the end of the discussion concrete proposals. Of course, each member of the group will be able to insert, if he wishes to, new points to discuss.

Points to be discussed:

- Using the multilingual platform on the Internet and the interactive technological network of Med Net’U, with which were realised 11 Production Centres and 31 Technological Poles within the universities and institutions partners of Med Net’U, in order to create delocalised seats of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO and obtain from their governments the acknowledgement of joint diplomas;
- To create a working group that defines the common guidelines for a developing process of the Euromediterranean University. The group will individuate: common methodologies, academic fees, the recognition of credits, the technologies; the training methods of teachers and tutors and strategies to develop management courses for private companies and public administration managers in partnership with the “Education and vocational training” working group. The EADTU, European Association of Distance Teaching Universities, will participate to the working group to identify the common methodologies.
- To create a group that identifies and develops common marketing strategies for distance universities while taking into account cultural differences existing between countries.
- To develop common research programs about didactical methodologies so as to create the theoretical bases on which to build a model of multicultural e-learning.
- Creating together new curricula linked to the areas of economy, law and cultural assets, of engineering and other areas of common interests;
- Producing together the materials of the undergraduate distance courses mentioned above in multilingual version;
- Planning and producing Master courses for the development of skills useful for the global labour market;
- Instituting the Mediterranean Virtual Academy of Civilisations, a research and teaching centre, composed of masters and students that together, by using diverse languages, create a Mediterranean network of knowledge. The chosen themes to undertake new research and communicate the results through teaching are: religions, power, law, institutions, art, fashion, gestuality, organisation of

the cities, space and time, cultures, travellers and travels, food and table, trade and cooperation, languages, peace and war;

- Planning and rendering concrete the shift from the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO to the Euromediterranean Distance University.

The last measure to realise among the proposals is the creation of the Euromediterranean Distance University. A distance University that emerges from the collaboration between diverse countries, of which we are all in some way protagonists of its development, that can help countries of Europe and of the Mediterranean to put in relation their antic cultures so as to propose to the world the immense cultural heritage of which they dispose: from art to painting, from history to literature, from scientific to technological knowledge. These contents are a world heritage of Europe and the Mediterranean from which we can make emerge new wealth. Europe and countries of the Mediterranean, thanks to the new technologies and Internet, can become strong actors in the creation of contents to be inserted on the Internet so as to develop e-learning at the global level but also to develop a knowledge industry and become protagonists on the new knowledge markets.

Let's try, initially, to make this way together with the new International Telematic University UNINETTUNO. Our aim is to develop an international academic distance system, a great university in which the most prestigious professors of the European and Mediterranean universities teach in the varied faculties that go from Engineering to Philosophy, from Art to History, from Law to Economy.

This University emerges from the collaboration between European and Arab professors that are realising together a unique international knowledge pole and create multimedia contents in diverse languages. From Italy to Europe to the Mediterranean, a unique great university. Thanks to the new technologies, distances are no longer an obstacle, students of the Arab world may study and learn about our culture and students from Europe may learn from the best teachings of the Arab academic culture, all being free from reciprocal prejudices but having as a sole goal to deepen and enlarge their own knowledge, create together new knowledge and go beyond the frontiers constituting an obstacle to cooperation between people.

A dream that today has become reality.