UNINETTUNO University for Refugees: a Model of Network for an Education without Boundaries

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The Universities have always been true instruments of peace and respect for differences, melting pot of international identities and creators of the most creative chapters in history. And today they do are more than ever, in the turmoil of the contemporary world, characterized also by a huge migration phenomenon. Just in 2015, year in which UNINETTUNO launched University for Refugees initiative, about 155 thousands migrants disembarked on Italian shores, and 84thousands of them sought for asylum. In this context, putting the whole society facing the need of learning a new culture of civil coexistence, Universities can still play a fundamental role in providing to XXI Century citizenships the cultural instruments needed to live in a more globalized and interconnected society.

Regardless of race, religion, or social position, all people of the world share common values, as that to live in peace and safety, to have an education and get a decent job, to build a family, take care of their communities, traditions, values and religions.

These are the hopes and ambitions of all mankind, whose common house is our planet Earth.

Recognizing our common belonging as humans is just the beginning of our duty: becoming global citizens through adequate educational policies, should be our commitment, expecially in this globally interconnected world.

The Web is in fact the greatest public space humanity has had available so far. No matter of nationality, ethnicity, skin color or gender, the Internet technologies potentially can grant all citizens worldwide the access to knowledge.

In this context Universities must be able to find their new identity, which could enrich mankind with verified knowledge.
The new spaces of access to knowledge can be anywhere: using personal computers, smartphones or tablets, everyone can access knowledge with no limits of space and time.

Starting from this, the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO was born, replacing the physical buildings of the Universities with digital infrastructural. Internet allowed the development of a new pedagogical methodology, as well as of a new knowledge production and delivery model. Today, on www.uninettunouniversity.net, more than 23000 students coming from 168 different countries are accessing to an educational offer ranging among 30 BA, MA and PhD programs and more than 20 Post-Graduate programs. In

Uninettuno Didactic Cyberspace students can access to about 90thousands hours of academic videolessons, linked to courses topics, designed and recorded by Professors coming from several universities in the world, in various languages (Italian, Arabic, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Greek, Moldavian, Georgian).

For each topic of the video lessons, the same professors created texts, multimedia materials, exercises, virtual laboratories, counting more than 5 million digital teaching materials.

Interactive classes and 3D virtual environments enhance the teaching and learning experience and trigger a truly interactive educational and training environment where, in addition to the teacher, students are active co-creators
of new knowledge. This new University model is really democratizing access to knowledge.

Dialogue among cultures is not a utopia but it is actually possible: UNINETTUNO has really managed to create new alliances between universities and educational institutions to develop together real and virtual spaces, to build common networks of knowledge.
Together, teachers and students from the North and South shores of the World create new knowledge and develop a learning network, integrating different cultures and educational models beyond the traditional "cultural colonialism" approach.

Together we created a true laboratory for intercultural and inter-linguistic cooperation, helping young generations becoming the center of the new, changing world, acquiring new competences, and building together the future.

Several elements inspired Uninettuno designing and launching University for Refugees initiative; among them: the history and vision of Uninettuno itself, its international mission and vocation, the dimensions of the migration phenomenon, and institutions inefficiencies and ineffectiveness in facing this issue.
University for Refugees allows refugees and immigrants to access the University for free from any place across the world; they can enroll and attend to degree, vocational training and language programs, and acquire title recognized in Italy, in Europe and in some Arab World countries.

The University for refugees – Education without Boundaries, provides services for:
- Free-of-charge enrolment to UNINETTUNO's degree, professional masters, vocational training courses;
- The recognition of refugees and migrants study titles achieved in their countries of origin, allowing them to access the University system;
- The recognition of professional skills;
- Language teaching, with Italian, Arabic, English, German, Spanish, French, Greek and Portuguese courses;
- The access to online healthcare services;
- Training on mutual rights and duties in their welcoming country.

The impact of University for Refugees exceeded our expectations. Today almost 13thousands migrants and refugees downloaded our free mobile app for Italian language learning. 480 refugees registered to the University for Refugees portal to use the services provided.

As to the registered students, the majority is male (93%) between 18 and 34 years old (68%), coming from 28 different countries, (Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Byelorussia, Burundi, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Eritrea, Gabon, Gambia, Jordan, Guinea, Honduras, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic Of Congo, Russia , Senegal, Syria, Somalia, Togo, Turkey, Ukraine, Uganda). Students currently enrolled in our University for refugee programs are hosted in reception centers from Saudi Arabia, Benin, Cameroon, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Lebanon, Rwanda, Turkey.

Prospects UNINETTUNO's refugees students found information about this new opportunity on the internet, the ones accepted as regular students are now studiyng on the UNINETTUNO portal trough digitalized videolessons, many of those realized by professors from their original countries and universities, as the case of: Prof. Fadel Sukkar (professor of Computer Science at the University of Aleppo), Prof. Mohamed Kheir Ahmed (professor of Mathematical Methods for Engineering at the University of Aleppo), Ayman Hamadeh (professor of Databases at the University of Aleppo), Ousamah Douedari (professor of Electro-techniques at the University of Aleppo), Muhammad Gh. Aljalali (professor of Economics for Engineering at the University of Damscus), Fawwaz Mufdi (professor of Electronic Measurements at the University of Damascus).

Uninettuno, thanks to its digital model, was able to store on the Internet lectures and teaching materials realized by these professors who had to leave their universities because of the war and violence, making their scientific expertise available to their own students who do not have any more the possibility of meeting them in their own Universities. Giving refugees and migrants these opportunities means giving them back their dignity and a new hopes.

University for Refugees was awarded by several international awards:
- UNESCO, through its IAU – International Association of University, in 2017 included Uninettuno among the universities active for the achievement of the 17 SDGs of the UN 2030 agenda.
- IELA – International E-learning Association awarded University for Refugees with honorable mention in 2017 during the annual ceremony at Columbia University;
- E-Learning Inside web magazine listed University for Refugees as one of the 5 2017 top stories in worldwide higher education elearning

In 2018 UNINETTUNO continued working on this topic, building up international partnerships able to upscale the University for Refugees initiative to wider audiences, with more innovative services, and with greater involvement of all stakeholders: social services, public administrations, policy makers, research centers, technology institutes, universities, NGOs.

From these collaborations the REBUILD project was designed, a project awarded and funded by the European Commission within the Horizon 2020 framework program, and coordinated by Uninettuno.

The research project aims to create an artificial intelligence system able to analyze global Big Data about immigrants and refugees needs in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public administrations and political decision-making at the global level.

In this way, the REBUILD project will have a direct impact on the goal of SDG 16 "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", and in particular on target 16.6 "Develop transparent, accountable and efficient institutions at all levels" and target 16.7 "Ensure fast, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels".

As a conclusion, we would like to share with you words coming directly from the first student applying to University for Refugee initiatve: Harout, from Syria, enrolled at the Three-year Degree in Information and Communication Technologies Engineering:
"I am 30 years old and I was born in the city of Aleppo, in Syria. I was a student at the University of Aleppo and UNINETTUNO's portal I found the video lessons of some of my professors at the University of Aleppo and now I do not know in which place of the World are. At present, I have the status of political refugee in Lebanon and, hoping that peace comes back again in my country, thanks to UNINETTUNO's University for Refugees, I will be able to realize my dream: complete the study path I began in Syria and earn a study title recognized in Italy and in Europe. I thank this University which gave me the possibility of resuming my studies to have a better life and leave the past behind."

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