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GLOBAL UNIVERSITY IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES

As noted in the UNESCO Report on Knowledge Societies (2005) there is a general agreement of the appropriateness of the expression "knowledge societies", the same cannot be said of the content. We have to ask which type of knowledge are we talking about. Are we endorsing the hegemony of the techno-scientific model in defining legitimate and productive knowledge. Also the term "Digital Age" has been questioned as a Western concept and some speakers prefer multicultural world instead. Art is needed as means to learn from another culture. Furthermore, there are grave imbalances and obstacles that mark the access to knowledge both locally and globally.

However we define the 21st century societies there are some trends that seem to have consequences in all spheres of life. Globalization and digitalization have fundamental consequences in educational and learning life, working life and in governance. Not only money and technology are moving but markets and partnerships become global and labour becomes increasingly mobile. The issue of multiculturalism becomes central and people live in media environments of multiple identities. There is also the threat of becoming marginalized and excluded.

We are facing a third major educational invention in technology. The first was the phonetic alphabet, the second printing, and now the third is telematics, which means computers connected to networks. There is a need for a new global strategy for promoting the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in different fields of the working life of the emerging knowledge societies and developing educational and training approaches on how to learn the use of ICT and become digitally literate in the spirit of sustainable development.

Traditional alphabetical competencies include basic operational competencies related to texts, psycho-cognitive competencies related to alphabetic signs, basic reading and writing, basic mathematical and textual comprehension, and socio-communicative competencies. Digital competence include basic operational competencies related to screens and computers, psycho-cognitive competencies related to computer signs, basic computer competence, interactive media and on-line competence, and global socio-communicative competence associated to cyberspace.

Digital literacy is a fundamental element of the knowledge society. In Europe it is now seen as a right for all. Ensuring that everyone has the necessary skills, competences, experiences and attitudes to make effective use of ICT is probably the biggest challenge of all. The illiterates of the 21st century are not those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. Different terms are being used in different countries to refer to media education and media literacy. While the educational approaches are discussed in some countries under the title "media pedagogy" and traditional literacy is extended to include "media literacy", "digital literacy", "technological literacy", "visual literacy", "cultural literacy" etc a more broader approach has been also developed under the title "media competence." A most recent demand comes come e-media and e-learning which covers a wide set of applications and processes such as Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration

It is widely understood that the most important skills of the future would be communication skills. Today everyone is able to access vast amounts of data without a mediator. Critical thinking skills are needed as a productive and positive activity. Critical thinkers see the future as open and malleable, not as closed and fixed. They are aware of the diversity of values, behaviours, social structures, and artistic forms in the world. Critical thinking is a process, not an outcome, and it is emotive as well as rational.

According to the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning higher education institutions worldwide face significant challenges related to providing increased access, while containing or reducing costs. Meeting increasing and increasingly varied demand for quality higher education is an important consideration in policy debate and institutional development in many countries. New developments in higher education – from virtual universities and cross-border education to e-learning, blended learning and open educational resources – all speak to the efforts on the part of the traditional higher education community, as well as new providers, to address the challenges they face in increasing provision. (Unesco International Institute for Educational Planning 2005)

Globalisation is consolidated by the extraordinary invasion of higher education by new technologies, especially the Internet. The development of communication and information technologies makes it possible for distance teaching institutions to strengthen their position in the educational landscape. They also pave the way for lifelong education for all and at the same time are spreading the traditional universities, more and more of which use distance teaching methods in their activities, thereby making the distinction between the two types of institutions virtually meaningless. There are an increasing number of university networks of this kind all over the world, and the use of computers in the learning process, access to the Internet by students as a vehicle for self-directed learning, educational broadcasting and video-conferencing are all being stepped by.

In the information society, knowledge forms the foundation for education and culture and constitutes the single most important production factor. Information and communications technology significantly promotes interaction and exchange of information between individuals, business enterprises, and other organizations, as well as the provision of, and access to, services. The extent to which the information society is implemented in schools and libraries, health care, the promotion of business and industry and other administrative services, as well as enhancing transparent decision-making, largely depends on the decisions made and the measures taken by local authorities.

The vision is a society, which develops and utilizes the opportunities inherent in the information society to improve the quality of life, knowledge, international competitiveness and interaction in an exemplary, versatile and sustainable way. These ideas have been used to develop the Global University System (GUS) within the UNESCO Chair in global e-learning at the University of Tampere.

The Global University System (GUS) is a worldwide initiative to create satellite/wireless telecommunications infrastructure and educational programs for access to educational resources across national and cultural boundaries for global peace. The GUS helps higher educational institutions in remote/rural areas of developing countries to deploy broadband Internet in order for them to close the digital divide and act as the knowledge center of their community for the eradication of poverty and isolation. The GUS has task forces working in the major regions of the globe with partnerships of higher education and healthcare institutions. Learners in these regions

will be able to take their courses, via advanced broadband Internet, from member institutions around the world to receive a GUS degree. These learners and their professors from participating institutions will form a global forum for exchange of ideas and information and for conducting collaborative research and development. The aim is to achieve "education and healthcare for all," anywhere, anytime and at any pace. (Varis – Utsumi – Klemm 2003).

The mission of GUS has three specific thrusts, to:

- Identify, test, and facilitate the deployment of broadband Internet and related technologies that are affordable and accessible for underdeveloped areas of the world,
- Coordinate the delivery of content and rich educational experiences leading to a GUS degree,
- Provide a global infrastructure for collaboration among faculty, students, graduates, and policy makers in universities, healthcare institutions, corporations, and governments.

The highest priority of the GUS is to launch a transcultural, globalwide initiative (using modern techniques of communication) to promote the kinds of global education that will advance peace, justice, understanding, and human wisdom. The GUS has no intention of dictating morality to its participants. It will encourage free and open dialog among those with differing opinions and outlooks. But, in view of the challenges confronting humankind at this critical juncture in its history, it behooves us to demonstrate moral leadership in the various activities we undertake.

In a world now fragmented by hosts of competing special interests, a globe endangered by the tribal rivalries of the nation-states, we affirm our university as a place where teaching and thinking are given free reign to be truly ecological - to address problems and crises global in scope. The GUS will place an emphasis on quality in all its programs and courses of instruction. It will draw its curriculum from known centers of learning around the world and seek to identify new centers of excellence and creative scholarship. The undertakings of the GUS will include the most up-to-date research and methods, the most recent developments and insights in its various fields of study, and will be supported and enhanced by the latest advances in communication technology. To respond to the immediate needs of its students, the GUS will offer culturally relevant educational experiences not readily available in local institutions, perhaps not available through any other means but an electronic university, that is interactive in nature and global in scope.

At the same time, the GUS will remain cognizant of the *collective* needs of the globe. Recognizing that the welter of newly generated information and technologies can itself constitute a significant problem for humankind as a whole, the GUS will seek to temper the fragmentizing effects of contemporary innovation. The GUS will encourage curricula in which the latest facts and newest techniques are grounded and integrated with the wisdom of our *oldest* traditions, holistic and ecological approaches found at the core of every native culture on the globe. Accordingly, the GUS will define a "*quality education*" as one that promotes an integration of the social, economic, political, and spiritual insights of East and West, North and South, masculine and feminine - encompassing the wisdom of the past, the richness of cultural diversity and the transformative potentialities of the present and future.

The GUS partnership of universities, businesses, governmental, nongovernmental, and community organizations will be guided by, and remain fully responsive to, the felt needs and stated aspirations of students, workers and individual citizens around the globe. The GUS will work diligently to help make it possible for researchers in significant fields of study to collaborate across national boundaries, engaging in joint research projects facilitated by computer, telecommunication and

information technologies. A rich new interplay of disciplines and schools of thought is possible through such electronic cooperation and interchange. By bringing many minds together through computer networking and conferencing, our "*collective intelligence*" can be brought to bear in exploring fresh approaches to global issues.

But the global problems to be addressed include widespread human suffering: physical, emotional and spiritual anguish, and distress. This suggests that exchanges between and among researchers, faculty and students must be more than intellectual. An *affective* component seems required. Through intercultural transactions in the arts and humanities, through more intimate interpersonal exchanges, the *heart* must be engaged as well as the mind. If compassion, trust and empathy are to be fostered, if a sense of global solidarity is to be attained, we must be willing to share our feelings as well as our ideas.

The GUS endorses the precept of unrestricted access to all information and educational resources at its disposal. The GUS is committed to the goal of counteracting the depersonalizing effects of mass technology. But rather than limiting itself to the aim of meeting the purely personal needs of its participants, GUS hopes that its educational programs will encourage a sharing of minds and hearts across personal, disciplinary, scientific and cultural barriers. Both in the formal courses of instruction and in the post-graduate networks of colleagues that emerge from a GUS education, we hope to promote awareness of cultural diversity without encouraging either cultural fragmentation or cultural homogenization, as performing a dynamic *synthesis* of unity and diversity, a transcultural *unity-in-difference*.

Sources:

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