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Abstract

The rapid development of educational technologies, combined with the Internet boom at a worldwide level, gives rise to favorable conditions for the establishment of a new model of university training. The first part of this work will give a description of the major components of the new virtual university. The second part will attempt a critical approach of the sense of virtual university from a social and a philosophical point of view. Focal point of this work will be the danger of having a sweeping uniformity among university departments all over the world, together with the necessity to prevent university institutes from becoming units of providing distance learning material in package form.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of the new information and communications technologies [1], in conjunction with the massive use of computers and the Internet boom [2], create new data at an international level. The transfer of capitals in the new technological environment, released a huge power on the part of international capital market.

The very rapid and secure flow of vast amounts of funds towards every direction created the conditions for the consolidation of the phenomenon of globalized economy [3]. The educational systems are called upon to serve the new dogma, the new reality. This is the dogma of the free, according to many [4] or wild, according to others [5], market.

Conventional educational systems are unable to keep pace with the demands of a world where the universal spiritual values show signs of weariness compared to the respective material ones [6]. The conventional educational environment [7] or, in other words, the first category of teaching activities [8], served quite successfully the social and financial needs of an era, which seems to fade away with time. The new technologies of communications and information make possible the development of a totally different educational environment, by means of the “educational technologies”, as they are called [9].

One of the characteristics of the new technological age in the area of education will be the transition from a student-centered education to the concept of independent studies [10].

2. The Virtual University — A Critical Approach

The development and establishment of a supranational homogenized teaching and administrative environment in the area of higher education creates the conditions for the formation of a new individualized virtual learning model at a planetary level [11]. There’s no doubt that the University should be in direct and constant interaction with the area of businesses and the labor market. At the same time, however, it should remain firm and unalterable in relation to the philosophy that ought to govern a university institute and distinguish it from a training center. This is not so easy in our times, since reality itself often becomes oppressive enough to enforce violent changes and put forward the idea of adjustability as the only weapon towards survival and competitiveness.

At this point, a crucial question comes into sight: will the virtual universities of the future be able to maintain the basic philosophy behind university education or are they going to drift into providing modern knowledge in the form of information packages to their distant students?

What is the dividing line between information and knowledge in these days of informational cataclysm?

In an age when everything changes at an incredibly high speed, perhaps we cannot afford the luxury of going deeper into the sea of knowledge. Thus, our interest is probably concentrated on how to teach students to manage in the best possible way the vast volume of information they can now access.

Actually, the following dilemma is brought up from several directions: will the new model of virtual university give priority to the necessity of the times or is it going to remain adhered to the dogma of an era which seems to go out of sight as the time goes by?

As part of this work, it would be expedient to reword the question as follows: in what way will the virtual university manage to combine the overwhelming pressure for modern and uniform learning with the
cultural and pedagogic need for pluralism and deeper knowledge?

According to the model of virtual university we have described, the student will be free to choose his professor regardless of the geographic distance that might exist between them.

Studying in a virtual university like that enables the student to acquaint himself with different educational and learning systems. This way, he improves his adjustability to different levels of culture and philosophy in the area of the university, which is now virtual.

This will help him a lot in being receptive to the continuous changes that will take place throughout his professional life.

Therefore, the maintenance of the philosophy, viewpoint and culture in general, which is peculiar to each university department, is a crucial factor in the training of students in a constantly changing environment. Thus, the virtual university does not impose absolute uniformity and the leveling of everything – quite the contrary.

The model of virtual university that we described guarantees diversity and pluralism, together with the students’ access to different levels of culture and philosophic systems.

But how is the issue of deeper knowledge going to be guaranteed? This question, in the context of the virtual model of university training, becomes much more difficult to answer.

The difficulty lies in the fact that the virtual university professors will have a greater degree of independence than they would have in the traditional model.

As a matter of fact, the curricula and the professors who will undertake to teach the courses will be the mirror of a department in this new virtual university.

However, a very important role in the evaluation of each professor in the virtual university plays the level and the number of students that will select him. So in order to prevent the student from getting caught, in making his choice, in the vortex of modern but superficial knowledge, it is necessary to take preventive measures at three levels.

On the first level, a complete system of orienting students in relation to the university’s role and character in modern times should be developed.

This endeavor aims at building people who are aware and who are able to choose curricula and courses that promote a combination of modern and also scientifically structured and deeper knowledge.

On the second level, this combinational rationale should pervade not only the curriculum but also the content of the courses and, most importantly, the way they are taught. This way, the students will be encouraged to choose from a great variety of courses, which will be based on the combinational rationale of modern and at the same time deeper knowledge.

On the third level, there should be a consolidation of the rationale that the new form of virtual university will also accompany the student after he graduates, throughout his professional life.

The development of reliable systems of lifetime learning as part of the virtual university, in cooperation with people of recognized merit and experience who are in the labor market, is one of the most important priorities in the new era of education.

3. Conclusions

The new form of virtual university incorporates in a workable way all the modern educational technologies, and especially the unlimited possibilities offered by open and distance learning via the Internet. The danger of a sweeping uniformity can be avoided, if we accept that the diversity provided by the virtual university helps its students adjust themselves faster to a world which is constantly changing. The precise organization of flexible curricula, teaching methodologies and systems of orientation and lifetime learning are some of the components of the new virtual model of university education. If these requirements are met, virtual universities will be able to combine in the best possible way the provision of modern and at the same time scientifically substantiated knowledge.

4. References