

HUMAN PLUS 2004

First Conference of the Archipelago of Humanistic Thematic Networks "The role of the humanistic arts and sciences in European society, education and research"

Name: Elena Lamberti, University of Bologna

Work group: 4 – “Mapping the missing or emerging islands in the humanistic archipelago and encouraging their formation”

Thematic Network: ACUME- Cultural Memory in European Countries: An Interdisciplinary Approach”

The task of this work-group is certainly challenging, though not an easy one. I hope that the following considerations can help to encourage additional speculations in order not only to assess the current situation, but also to offer suggestions leading to useful guidelines well rooted in our actuality.

First of all, I would encourage a very positive and affirmative attitude, deriving from a deep consciousness that humanities can and must play a fundamental role in the development of new research and educational paths; I would encourage to think of humanities not as a subsidiary area, but instead as a fundamental and pivotal set of expertise offering a deeper and an articulated understanding of the current complex issues pervading society in its whole. All sustainable development is no longer possible without the factual contribution of the humanistic arts and sciences.

A preliminary task, before even start to map the missing or emerging islands in the humanistic archipelago, is perhaps to try and define what are ‘the humanistic arts and sciences’ today. Situations are different in the various European realities and, therefore, it could be difficult to work out a map that perfectly fits all needs and local situations. As a matter of fact, all together the ETNPs approved so far offer a broad range of definitions, including social sciences, health and social welfare, as well as occupational therapy, citizenship education, humanitarian development, laws, political sciences, in addition to history, literature, visual arts, music, theatre, geography, architecture, language, etc. There are also some very new areas of expertise which seems to originate directly from new societal situations and complex cultural phenomena, such as globalisation, Europeanisation, intercultural communication. Therefore, the definition and the understanding of what we mean, in our own Countries and in Europe, by ‘Humanities’ is still a crucial issue, if not a ‘work in progress’.

What above is linked also to the typology of ETNPs in the humanistic arts and sciences that are currently active in Europe. In turn, the typology strictly relates to the methodology of investigation, teaching and research. There are, in fact, ETNPs which clearly focus on a well defined discipline and which aim at consolidating it through specific actions: networking, links with professional association, European diplomas and schools, etc. Other ETNPs, instead, are based on an interdisciplinary approach bringing together various humanistic arts and sciences, operating through sub-networks along subject or thematic lines. Needless to say, both methodologies are relevant, but each of them implicitly contributes to define or redefine humanities themselves. In particular, a close analysis of the former can help to map the missing islands (which are the humanistic arts and sciences that are not yet, or no longer represented? And why is it?), whereas a close analysis of the latter can help to map the emerging ones (can networking, subject or thematic projects, and interdisciplinary methodologies be a way to rethink humanities, to rescue ‘weaker’ or neglected/disappearing disciplines and to promote new approaches to both learning and education? And can interdisciplinary networking in the humanities be organised, explored and assessed in order to promote new educational curricula at all level, from BA to master courses, to Ph.D programs?).

Concerning the missing or the emerging islands of the humanistic archipelago, it is worth to consider also the results and effects of the Bologna process, that have redesigned higher education in its whole. Is there a difference in the humanistic arts and sciences between the first and the second level of higher education? Are some disciplines dropped or retrieved depending on the level of specialisation? If this is the case, why is it?

The major goal of this workgroup will be to suggest sustainable strategies to encourage the formation of new islands in the humanistic archipelago. This could, for instance, lead to the investigation of new strategies aiming at developing ‘affirmative programs’ for the humanistic arts and sciences; a possibility which starts from a clear understanding of the fundamental role that the humanistic archipelago can play in the making of a better educational system strongly focused on the ‘human factor’. In addition, humanistic arts and sciences can be organised in a way leading to new professional figures required by our own actuality (i.e. ‘cultural mediators’ or ‘experts in intercultural communication’, and many more); also they can offer new educational curricula capable of completing or integrating all training in the sciences, applied sciences, engineering or related areas.

