

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"

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Work group: "Reaching out" and collaborating with broad disciplinary areas or Archipelago/s.

Thematic Network: CLIOHNET

My understanding of this issue is influenced by the following factors:

- the academic situation of nowadays Portugal. History is part of the curricula of courses like Architecture, Law and Business Administration. Nevertheless, History is almost non-existent in courses like Engineering, Medicine and Agronomy. In addition to that, the teaching and the research of topics like history of Medicine, history of science or history of techniques is usually undertaken by physicians, engineers, etc. In other words, such a work is carried out by non-professional historians.
- In a near future the presence of History in the study plans of Law and Economics/Business Administration will suffer a dramatic reduction. Not to mention that in all the above mentioned courses History is generally regarded as a minor subject and as a knowledge that has little importance for the fundamental training in areas like Medicine, Law or even Architecture. As the outcome of that, the students usually look down on the subjects that involve history knowledge, regarding them as almost useless.
- Personal experience: teaching in the graduate course of Territorial and Environmental Engineering; teaching in the post-graduate course in Patrimony and Architecture.

The issues that I consider most important are the following:

- it is of fundamental importance to maintain the presence of History courses in the study plans of areas like Architecture, Law, Economics, Pedagogy, Medicine, International Relations, etc.
- it is also of fundamental importance to strengthen the presence of History in areas like Engineering, Agronomy, Patrimony, Urban Planning, Journalism, etc.
- it is also necessary to widen the scope of topics under examination: for instance, Environmental History.
- there is a need to implement the notion that a deep knowledge of the national and the European history is of special importance for the human being condition. Not only does the diachronic outlook provide a deeper understanding of today's world, it also shows that a particular situation only becomes relevant when historians call attention to them.
- It is also of fundamental importance to demonstrate that the knowledge about the past is indeed important for certain professional activities. No less important is to impose the notion that the manipulation of historical information requires a proper professional training. That is the reason why it is indispensable that historians make part of all the teams of researchers or teachers that deal – in a direct or indirect way – with data about past societies.
- We obviously have the notion that these proposals involve certain difficulties:
 - o How far will the historians be able to teach subjects like history of Medicine, History of Physics or History of Mathematics without the technical knowledge about these fields of studies?
 - o How far is the historian able to meet the expectations of certain professional activities? For instance, to what extent is the knowledge of a historian useful to an architect involved in the process of rebuilding an historical site? Instead of a narrative account of the history of that site, the architect would need knowledge about building techniques of the medieval or the early modern period.

We would thus make the following proposals:

- taking into account the diversity of the academic traditions within the European Union, it would be of fundamental importance to identify the several existent situations, based on the following criteria:

- in which curricula, apart from the humane sciences, is History lectured?

- which are the issues lectured?

- Economic History – School of Business Administration?

- History of Institutions, Legal History, History of the Political Ideas, Constitutional History – Law School?

- History of Architecture – Faculty of Architecture?

- History of Education – Faculty of Pedagogy

- History of Science, History of Mathematics – Faculty of Sciences?

- are these courses obligatory or optional?

- is the teaching of history limited to the graduation level, or is it also part of the post-graduate courses?

- is this teaching undertaken by historians or by specialists in other fields of study?

- Regarding the research, are the research groups multidisciplinary? Do they include historians?

- Finally, it seems to me that we should make an effort to re-orient our knowledge of History, in order to make it more useful for professionals from other areas. The question is: are we ready to experience such a deep change?