Chapter 9

Glocality, Diversity and Ethics of Distributed Knowledge in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Global networks through distributed systems technology granted a new meaning to knowledge creation, storage and distribution within higher education context. This global dimension imposes a considerable amount of ethical and social impacts concerning distributed knowledge because it is expressed within local contexts. Nonetheless, main stream literature highlights equity and cultural sensitivity as leading issues, and disregards the existent social dilemmas concerning organizational innovation in higher education. Therefore, this chapter aims to promote a philosophical and empirical argument within contextual determinants, in order to explore the ethical and social key dilemmas of distributed knowledge between global and local diversity in higher education. For that, under scrutiny will be a specific layer regarding first co-author e-University strategic implementation framework which interacts with ethics and culture, in order to, understand e-learning current practices in higher education, as well as, to nominate potential future guidelines concerning these trends.

INTRODUCTION

To debate XXI century high education is essential to investigate the key features that characterize informational society: communication, interaction, automation, post-industrial, specialist, service, immaterial needs, postmodern, or learning society (Webster, 2006; Castells, 2000). As a result, it is comprehensible that governments or organizations (namely universities), do not intend to mislay this opportunity related to information society (Lallana, 2004), because as Richards (2004) suggests:
e-learning is globally accepted as a prerequisite for future social and economic development, providing a new essential style, as a base level for accessible education. This claim is justified by the e-learning concept itself: acquisition and use of knowledge distributed and facilitated primarily by electronic means, which incorporates synchronous or asynchronous access and may be distributed geographically with varied limits of time (Hall & Snider, 2000).

Therefore, the emergence of a global education marketplace can be understood as a consequence of informational society and globalization (Friedman, 2005). Despite this global awareness, education is inevitably expressed within local dimensions (Altbach, 2004), or at least focusing a certain global region (the European Bologna Process is an example), in which is feasible to distinguish different local perspectives regarding the process itself, as well as concerning the main issues that illustrate education in that region: cultural diversity, ethics and values, mobility, intercultural communication, organizational cooperation, economical value, and government’s education policy. Thus, following Meyrowitz (2005) “glocality” (global dimension with multiple local dimensions) engages a whole new range of ethical and social issues in education. This line of reasoning is consistent with the work of Audrestch, Lehmann & Warning (2005): “local regions” exhibit an increasing importance in the era of globalization. In addition, diversity plays a progressively role in shaping the relationship between local and global (Gaspay, Legorreta & Dardan, 2009).

Furthermore, beyond the characteristic dialog concerning global and local dimensions in higher education, main stream literature focus as primary analysis the subsequent differentiated ethical issues: learner’s diversity in various educational settings (Berge, 2001); highly sophisticated educational settings in distributed interactive versus learning experiences (Vrasidas & Glass, 2002); learner’s versus ethical norms (Stahl, 2002); the relationship between ethics, technologies and pedagogy (Jefferies & Stahl, 2005), and in different local contexts (see for example: Heyneman, Anderson & Nuraliyev, 2008); or, how virtual universities may impact on cherished values, such as liberty, justice, privacy and sociality (Brey, 2004); equity issues (Patrick & Gaële, 2007); or even cultural sensitivity (Uzuner, 2009). However, it is interesting that e-learning literature seems to pay little regard to the current ethical and social key trends regarding distributed knowledge (creation, sharing and distribution), and diversity within globalized higher educational contexts.

Against this backdrop, the chapter structure considers: the contemporary scenario concerning higher education; knowledge in education (concept and systems evolution); globalization versus glocality (globalization, glocality and emergent trends); globalization versus glocality in higher education (overview, ethical issues, social dilemmas, and eureka); empirical evidences (overview, a cross-cultural diagnosis, lecturing experiences, and others testimonials); discussion; and finally, future trends. As a final remark, the authors point out that to understand the ethical and cultural issues trade-off between global and local in distributed knowledge, this contribution focuses upon the knowledge/content management layer regarding e-University strategic implementation conceptual framework (Silva, 2007).

**HIGHER EDUCATION STATUS QUO**

Higher education mission can be referred as teaching and research in order to promote societal development. Although 21st century manifestations enhance some of these fundamental roles of creating, preserving, integrating, transmitting and applying knowledge, which leads to a plausible conclusion: contemporary universities are “knowledge servers” (Duderstadt, 2001). Nonetheless, the key focus of this chapter impels an approach to the idea and purpose of a university.