

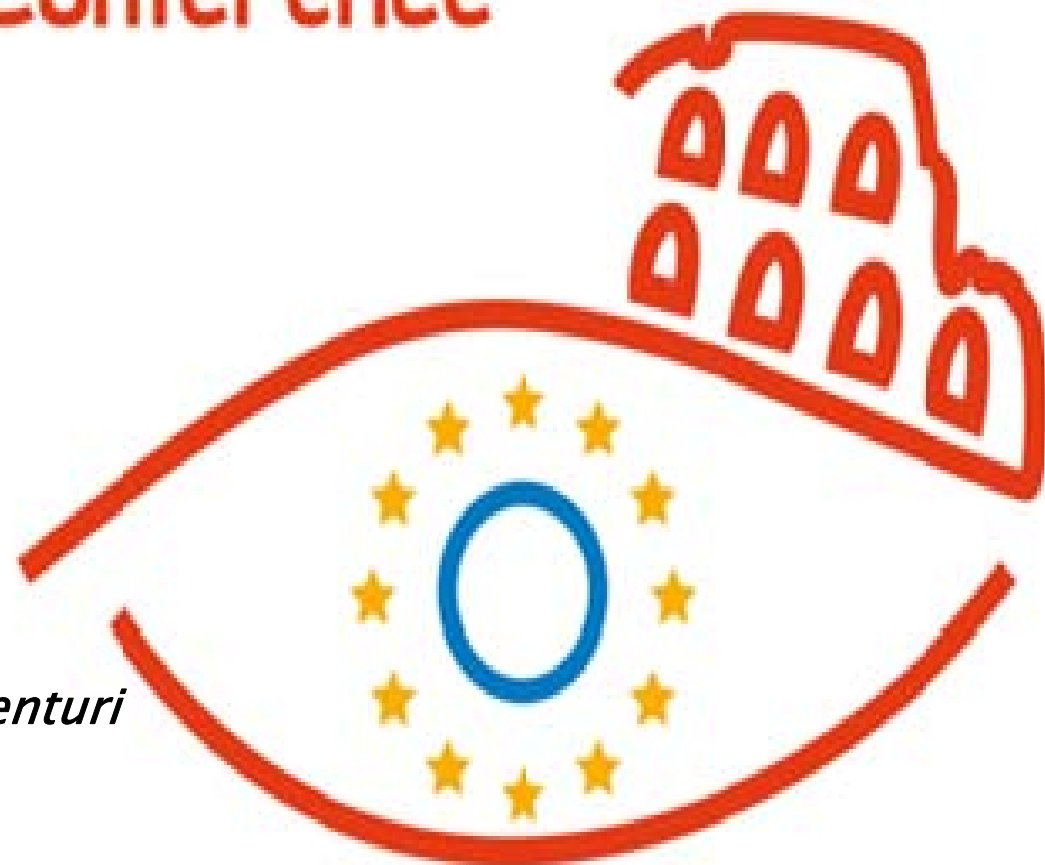
# Unica Student Conference

22-25 september 2010

*Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the  
university in the  
contemporary society?*

*University of Rome "ROMA TRE"  
Donatella Ortenzi and Valerio Venturi*



Europe Through Student Eyes

## Topic N.3

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

As the XIX century theologian John H. Newman stated:

*“If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society. [...] University training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind”*

John H. Newman *“The Idea of a University”* Dublin, 1852

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Newman's statement is universally valid, without any time or space limitation, both in the economically advanced countries, as well as in the so-called developing countries

## *Topic N.3*

### *What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Within the Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the most politically and socially stable states is Senegal where, differently from other ones, a system of education and academic institutions has been created since the XIX century

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ From the historical point of view, University has always had a dynamic role in contributing to the improvement of society by means of a dialogue of reciprocal enrichment

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Within such an osmotic process, university has always played a sentinel role by forming intellectuals capable of analyzing the changes of society and formulating proposals for its evolution

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ The contemporary society has equally dynamic needs, mainly linked to both the scientific research progress and the technological development

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ The response which university is currently providing is increasingly focused on training qualified technicians and skilled experts in specific fields

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ If university satisfies such needs of the society by exerting a didactic role solely based on the transmission of knowledge, it provides a valid but “static” answer

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Such an answer has to be considered “static” when university limits itself to satisfying the needs required by the society at a given point in time

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Due to the university reaction timing, if compared to the society speed of change, a “static” answer becomes factually inadequate

## Topic N.3

### *What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

It is highly desirable that university provides a “dynamic” answer by taking equally into account:

- ▶ the need of specific training, finalized to transmitting to students the knowledge required by the labor market
- ▶ the need of ensuring intellectual self-awareness of students, which is fundamental to enable them to become citizens fully conscious and capable of contributing to improvement of the society

## *Topic N.3*

### *What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

By exerting again the proposing function typical of the academic world, it would be possible to achieve the manifold result of a university capable of being simultaneously:

- a catalyst of scientific and technological progress
- an intellectual gymnasium where to shape the civil consciousness needed for improving society
- a forge of ideas and proposals able to anticipate and stimulate the evolution, the progress and the social growth

## *Topic N.3*

### *What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

In practical terms, these objectives could be achieved by:

- reforming the curricula for all disciplines by including history and sociology exams
- adopting a “long life learning” model to ensure a dynamic mental approach to face the future challenges of our ever-changing society

## *Topic N.3*

### *What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Today's world economic globalization process is by definition creating an extremely homogeneous environment in which each individual is considered as having the same needs as everyone else
- ▶ The consequence is that the society inevitably tends to become increasingly impersonal

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Within such a scenario, the university seems to be one of the few, if not the only, environment in which people can still interact and compare their ideas as single individuals

## *Topic N.3*

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Such an University would become fully capable of transforming students into active and conscious citizens for the benefit of the entire society

## *Topic N.3*

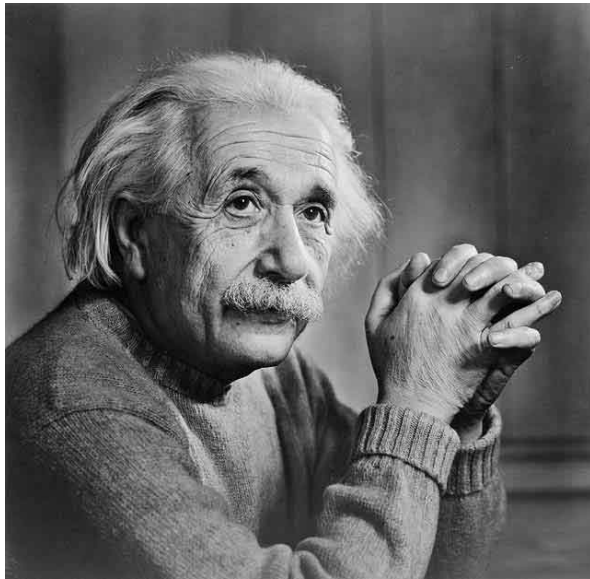
*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

- ▶ Imagine University as a social laboratory in which students express themselves and cooperate together in order to play an active role in shaping the contemporary and future society

## Topic N.3

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

As Albert Einstein once said:



*“Imagination  
is more important  
than knowledge”*

## Topic N.3

*What is the role of the university in the contemporary society?*

Unica Student Conference

22-25 september 2010



Europe Through Student Eyes

**THANKS FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION!**

*University of Rome “ROMA TRE”*

*Donatella Ortenzi and Valerio Venturi*