

***HERODOT* Thematic Network and the Tuning of Geography Education in Europe**

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Abstract

This article will outline the aims and role of the *HERODOT* Thematic Network for Geography in higher education. It will focus in particular on one of the project's research pillars (Thematic Pillar 1), which is looking at Europeanisation in Geography and the curriculum. The Tuning of academic subjects, through subject specific Thematic Networks, addresses several of the recommendations of the Bologna Declaration. This pillar is currently undertaking a survey of academics, students and employers in order to identify the importance placed on both subject specific and generic competences. The outcome of this research is the self-tuning of Geography in Europe leading ultimately to curriculum changes based upon an increased awareness of the needs of employers.

Introduction

The *HERODOT* Thematic Network

HERODOT is the European Geography Network of higher education institutions. At its outset in October 2002 it had just 42 partner organisations. This number has continued to expand and at the end of its first year reached over 100 higher education geography and environmental studies departments and geographical associations, with representation in every European country (EU, EEA and candidate countries). The members of *HERODOT* have begun to establish links and multipliers by working directly and indirectly with national, European and multinational organisations and associations in the field of Geography and in geographical education. The purpose of the *HERODOT* Thematic Network is to establish a trans-national forum for the study, analysis and development of geography in higher education and to promote the training of geography teachers and lecturers. *HERODOT* thus plans to enhance co-operation, encourage mobility between countries and to share information and expertise between higher education institutions. *HERODOT* functions as a focus of activity in matters concerning geographical education in Europe.

The aims of *HERODOT* are to:

- Develop strategies and methods to strengthen forms of cooperation between education institutions and organisations
- Contribute to descriptions, analyses and comparisons of Geography and geographical education programmes and policies
- Strengthen the links between research, professional training and geographical education

Through the *HERODOT* Project three issues of common interest (Thematic Pillars) have been established and further developed. These are Europeanisation, Professional Development and Exciting Geography. In this way aspects of the training of Geography

academics, suited to changes in a wider Europe, are being promoted and enhanced. Through the comparative analysis of differing participating countries curriculum development and teaching innovation can be encouraged and disseminated.

This article will focus on Thematic Pillar 1 (TP1), which is looking at Europeanisation of Geography and the curriculum. As part of its remit TP1 has undertaken to complete an analysis of competences in Geography higher education courses in Europe, based on the TUNING approach (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2003).

Tuning of Educational Structures in Europe

Originally the Tuning of Educational Structures in Europe Project (Tuning Project, 2002a) surveyed the subject areas of Business Administration, Education Sciences, Geology, History, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. In 2002 the European Commission recommended that similar Tuning should now take place throughout the various educational disciplines (EUROPA, 2002) and that this activity was best undertaken through the subject specific Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks of which *HERODOT* is one.

Tuning of academic subjects addresses several of the recommendations of the Bologna Declaration (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2003). These include the adoption of a system of comparable and easily readable degrees, the creation of a system based on two cycles (bachelors, masters), quality assurance and establishment of a system of credits. The initial focus of Tuning is to identify points of reference for both generic and subject specific competences and skills (EUROPA, 2002) and to undertake comparisons of the opinions and expectations of academics, graduates and employers.

The competences are developed and defined for testing by the academic subject team. They describe discrete learning outcomes, i.e. what a student knows or is able to demonstrate upon the completion of a learning process (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2003). This relates to the establishment of both subject specific competences (Figure 1) and generic competences (Figure 2). These competences can then be used as points of reference possibly for curriculum evaluation and design. They should allow flexibility and autonomy in curriculum construction whilst at the same time providing a common language in describing curriculum aims (Tuning Project 2002b).

Survey of academics, students and employers

Initial discussions related to the Tuning survey took place at the *HERODOT* launch conference at the RGS-IBG in March 2003. A member of the original Tuning Project led a workshop, which addressed the principles and approaches that had been adopted. Following this, a working group of geographers from six countries met to decide on the details of the Tuning pilot study that would be undertaken in 2003-4 and to identify the generic and subject specific competencies necessary to undertake the Geography Tuning survey.

The Pilot survey started in October 2003 and the following 9 universities are involved at this stage:

Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain
Constantine the Philosopher University of Nitra, Slovakia

Liverpool Hope University College, United Kingdom
Nicholas Copernicus University in Torun, Poland
University Bordeaux 3, France
University of Iceland
University of Karlsruhe, Germany
University of Malta
University of Tartu, Estonia

The Europeanisation Thematic Pillar will collate the results of the pilot survey and these findings will be discussed at length in the next meeting of the group in Tartu, Estonia during June 2004. At this time the full Tuning methodology will be determined so that the survey can be undertaken throughout Europe.

Conclusion

The Tuning of academic subjects provides an opportunity to compare and contrast the opinions on and outcomes of undergraduate study across Europe, as the Bologna Process encourages systems to become standardised (European Commission, 2003a). It is hoped that the results of this survey will enable European Geography departments to become more aware of the needs of their graduates in the workplace and the relevance of key skills to employers (Van Ernst *et al.*, 2001) resulting in the preparation of relevant curriculum change in an enlarging Europe.

In 2004, a number of *HERODOT* members intend to apply for funds to develop a distance learning European module, based on the outcomes of this survey, and the perceived needs of employers which will seek to address the specific learning objectives of students and the relationship between academia, learners and businesses (Van Ernst *et al.*, 2001).

Results of the thematic network activities are available on the *HERODOT* Web site (<http://www.herodot.net>). The *HERODOT* Thematic Network is funded under the Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks action (European Commission, 2003b). The grants awarded support conference attendance, meetings and research activities of the network members.

Endnote

Any institution interested in joining *HERODOT* or in taking part in this Tuning Survey should contact:

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FIGURES 1 AND 2

Comprehend the reciprocal relationships between physical and human environments
Comprehend the significance of spatial relationships at various scales
Understand and explain the diversity and interdependence of regions, places and locations
Draw knowledge, understanding and diversity of approaches from other disciplines and apply them in a geographical context
Apply an understanding of geographical concepts
Interpret landscapes
Collect, compare, analyse and present geographical information
Appropriately use geographical terminology
Communicate geographical ideas, principles and theories effectively and fluently by written, oral and visual means
Use diverse, specialised techniques and approaches in Geography
Comprehend the nature of change
Appreciate representations of geographical space and different geographical representations

Figure 1 Subject Specific Competences

Capacity for analysis and synthesis
Capacity for applying knowledge in practice
Planning and time management
General knowledge in the field of study
Knowledge of the profession in practice
Oral and written communication in the national language(s)
Knowledge of other languages
Use of information and communications technology
Research skills
Information management skills (ability to retrieve and analyse information from different sources)
Critical and self-critical abilities
Capacity to adapt to new situations
Capacity for generating new ideas (creativity)
Problem solving
Decision-making
Teamwork
Interpersonal skills
Leadership
Ability to work in an interdisciplinary team
Ability to communicate effectively with non-experts (in the field)
Appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism
Ability to work in an international context
Ability to work on their own
Ability to work on own initiative
Project design and management
Concern for quality
Responsibility
An entrepreneurial spirit
Commitment to work related ethics
A systematic approach to accuracy and precision
Dealing with uncertainty

Figure 2 Generic Competences

Membership to *HERODOT* is FREE
and open to all higher education Geography departments
and geographical associations within Europe

Funding is available for eligible partners wishing to
participate in Conferences and Workshops