

Program ALFAIII – Lot 2: Structural Projects

Contract n°: DCI-ALA/19.09.01/08/19189/161-449/ALFA III-107

Project Title: VERTEBRALCUE

Deliverable D1.51 – Kick Off Meeting Minutes

Date of deliverable: 9th of March 2009

Version: Final Version

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VERTEBRALCUE KICK OFF MEETING

Buenos Aires, 9th -10th- 11th February, 2009

Meeting Minutes

The Kick Off meeting started on the afternoon of the 9th of February, with registration, a general assembly in which all participants presented themselves and their institutions, followed by a welcome cocktail. This first direct contact on a personal bases among the representatives of all members institutions, had important implications for the future of the Project since personal interaction succeeded in creating an atmosphere of participation, involvement and commitment on the part of all participants.

The general impression, derived from members' participation in the various sessions of the meeting and also from informal personal communications with a good number of them, is that the objective of creating a working group out of the individual institutions has been largely achieved.

The general atmosphere of involvement and participatory interest shown by all members represents a good and essential starting point for a Project that will certainly require interdependence, coherence of action and clear understanding of the Project's:

- premises,
- main aims
- workflow,
- working packages,
- main aims,
- expected results.

After this brief premise, this report will follow the points indicated in the agenda's meeting (please see Annex 1).

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

10th of February 2009 – Morning Plenary Session

In the *Introductory Remarks on the Vertebralcue Project*, a first point was to clearly state and inform participants about the **management structure and the joint coordination set-up** of the Project. In this respect, the Unibo management group was presented, as well as the institutions that will perform joint coordination activities: UNA for Latin America and Scierter for technical aspects. As far as UNA's joint-coordinating functions and activities, it was agreed that they will be mainly carried out by taking up the role of leadership in the following aspects or points: 1. Active participation in the construction of the Common Area of Latin America HE promoted by Unesco; 2 promotion of Vertebralcue in different latino-american network meetings as ENLACES; 3 development of a strategy to keep informed all the latino-american members of the latest news; 4 promoting the building of an ALCUE Unit in its institution and then giving feedbacks to the latino-american members, together with Unibo Buenos Aires, on the different organizational and strategic elements of ALCUE Units construction, as well as following program actions, so as to serve as an *example* for the other institutions to follow, adapt and/or innovate. A more precise definition of UNA's activities, as a joint-coordinator institution, will be decided within the Project Management Group (PCG) and will be later presented and discussed at the Costa Rica meeting.

A second point was made on the specific historical context within which the idea of creating a common space of higher education between Latin America and Europe initially emerged. This was then tied to the overall objectives and changes that occurred within the Alfa Program. It was emphasized, as a specific contribution of our Project, that the overall goal of achieving the above mentioned aim would require a bottom-up strategy that would involve academic institutions, national academic communities, regional and bi-regional institutions, a clear identification of the beneficiaries of the action and whole array of stakeholders. Within this perspective, special emphasis was assigned to the idea of Local Development which by its very nature is participatory, horizontal, bottom-up and involving all major institutions of a given territory including local universities. At the same time, mention was made to consider also top-down initiatives and their inter-locking relationships with bottom-up activities

A third point which was particularly emphasized was the relationship between **university and society in Latin America**, both from the point of view of the potential contribution of higher education to key problems like **social cohesion** and also as a way of achieving sustainability by way of involving significant local and national stakeholders.

A final point was made about the premises and findings of a previous Project, **VALUE** (in which many Vertebralcue partners participated) which achieved significant results through a questionnaire instrument aimed at finding out empirically such issues as academic institutions perception, involvement and visibility of the ALCUE process. The conclusion was reached that

while existing structures may well provide a good starting point, some significant problems of articulation, overlapping and heterogeneity of aims are still present and should be addressed.

In the following discussion, some Latino-American Partners rightly stressed the importance of concentrating on the ***intra-regional cooperation*** and hopefully integration activities among Higher education institutions at a regional level, as a first essential step in the process of building a common ALCUE Area. The best strategy agreed by participants was one that would develop from a bottom-up approach, from individual institutions to national, subregional and regional contexts. Some participants added that working from a bottom up” perspective would also serve the purpose of respecting the identity and heterogeneity of academic institutions in Latin America, without forcing them into a standard model, but rather building on their diversity in order to achieve cooperation and integration through the specific contributions that different academic institutions can provide. On the same subject, some European Partners mentioned the Bologna Process, pointing out some difficulties that emerged in its implementation, suggesting at the same time that this process could provide an interesting example, but in no way would constitute a blueprint to be replicated in Latin America.

All participants agreed to adopt –for the success of the Project- an inclusive approach that would establish an ***Advisory Board (AB)*** composed by different strategic actors who could give its contributions/comments on the main themes and challenges of the Project. It was also decided to define in the following months who should be included in the AB in order to invite them to the upcoming International Workshop to be held in Buenos Aires.

It was also considered to open the network to additional institutions that would be interested in establishing ALCUE UNITS in their structures.

This inclusion would be first discussed by partners representatives and then proposed to the Commission, under the following conditions:

1. the incorporation would occur when the framework and the structure of ALCUE Units is well in place in the partners’ institutions;
2. it would not imply additional cost for the Vertebralcue network;
3. the would be-incorporated institutions would acquire the status of Associated Partner.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT STRUCTURE AND AIMS

10th of February 2009 – Morning Plenary Session

In the concluding session of the first morning on ***Overview of Project structure and aims***, the main objectives were emphasized, namely a contribution to modernization and cooperation of Higher Education Systems in Latin America and promotion of actions towards the building of a common ALCUE area. At the same time, the overall structure of the Project was considered by pointing out the necessary articulation of the various working packages and their convergence towards the achievement of the Project aims. From this perspective, particular attention was devoted to the central role of ALCUE Units, to be established in each participating Institution, as the real active engine and knot in the *Vertebrating* structure of the Project.

Please see **Annex 2** for first preliminary information/indications on the ALCUE UNITS' internal and external functions, and **Annex 3** for Specific objectives and expected results of the Project.

WORKPLAN, WORKPACKAGES AND DELIVERABLES

10th of February 2009 – Afternoon Plenary Session

In the following session, ***Workplan, WorkPackages and Deliverables*** were presented. The Project workplan was subdivided into three different phases. It was emphasized and particular attention was devoted to the workplan of the first phase. This phase has to be carried out during the first year of the Project action, pointing out the initial relevance of ALCUE UNITS that should be activated and start acting right from the beginning as embryonic structures to be fully developed - from an organizational point of view- during the second phase of the Project. In the general discussion, the interdependence and converging contributions of working packages was agreed, while, at the same time, some participants showed concern about tasks/actions required and time allotted in achieving the expected results from the implementation of the working packages. The Logical Framework was delivered to the partners, pointing out that this framework would be the main bases for evaluating the ongoing activities of the Project.

Please see **Annex 4 and 5** for the full Workplan and WorkPackages presentation and the Logical Framework.

ADMINISTRATIVE SESSIONS

11th of February 2009 – Morning Plenary Session and Specific Session for Administrative Personnel

It was decided to change the agenda's activities in order to allow for a Plenary Session on **Administrative and Financial matters** at the beginning of the second day of the meeting. The purpose of this Plenary Session was to give some basic information to all participants, while more specific Administrative and Financial Issues were then presented and discussed in parallel sessions. As to the plenary session, participants appreciated the clarity of the guidelines presented, but at the same time showed concern about the complexity of the budget structure and about the Financial Reporting requirement and procedures. Please see Annex 6 for the Administrative Presentations.

WP2 – REVIEW OF COOPERATION MODELS AND INFRASTRUCTURES

11th of February 2009 – Morning Plenary Session

The meeting then followed agenda by discussing **Workpackage 2**, emphasizing on the specific activities to be carried out during the next months, in order to produce a Report on the State of the Art of the Academic Cooperation among LA HEI and between LA and EU HEI.

In the general discussion, a first point underlined by many participants was to clearly specify the differences between the Report we planned to carry out and the many studies on the many topics already existing. In delineating the differences, it was pointed out that the major objective of our report is to evaluate the extent to which existing structures and networks converge and contribute to creating a functional cooperative structure of Higher Education Institutions in Latin America and Europe. In doing so, we will have to point out strengths and weaknesses of existing cooperation models, particularly from the point of view of five identified criteria to be reviewed and discussed : Visibility, Sustainability, Replicability/Transferability, Impact, Participation. It is of course clear that the above 5 mentioned criteria refer to single experiences of Academic cooperation and cannot be referred to systemic interaction among different models, networks, associations, structures of academic cooperation. In addition to single experiences of models and structures of cooperation, it was agreed that it would be necessary to raise the level of analysis in order to include additional strategies of action and systemic analysis:

- Systemic approach that emphasizes the dimension of inter-network relationships

- Policies defined at the governmental and inter-governmental levels, both at subregional and regional dimensions, in LA and EU, and at bi-regional level among LA and EU (example: Alcue process)

A **more comprehensive framework** will be developed by Unibo and Granada, responsible for WP2, to guide the activities of Partner Institutions.

WP3 – PRIORITIES, ACTION PLAN, METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

11th of February 2009 – Morning Plenary Session

As far as **Workpackage 3**, it was agreed that each Partners' institution will organize a local meeting by the end of April in order to present the Project to significant stakeholders. Some Partners requested that the Project Management Group (Unibo, Scierter, UNA) would send by the end of March a letter stating each Partners' participation in Vertebralucue and the Project presentation to stakeholders..

WP4– ALCUE UNITS

11th of February – Afternoon Plenary Session

In facing **Workpackage 4**, ALCUE Units, the assembly subdivided itself into three groups in order to discuss a first proposal of how an ALCUE Units should start developing and proceed in the future with particular attention to its main organizational elements, possible structures and functions

These were the main activities initially proposed and considered by working groups in their open discussion:

- Looking inside
- Looking outside
- Involve Stakeholders
- Cooperate al National level
- Work for Sustainability
- Support all actors involved

- Promote the ALCUE cooperation philosophy
- Be active in the network- Result/impact evaluation

It was also discussed how the organizational development of the ALCUE Unit would fit within the structure of each Partners' institution.

In addition to the operational functions agreed, **a task related to the organizational development of the ALCUE Unit was also identified:** it was agreed that all members institutions would draw an individual workplan for the establishment of their own ALCUE UNIT to be presented at the next meeting in Costa Rica

WP4– ALCUE UNITS

11th of February – Afternoon Working Groups

The conclusion of the 3 working groups were the following:

Group One – Coordinated by ASCUN

Participants : The Group was composed by the representatives of the following Institutions:

Unibo, Universidade de Coimbra (Portugal), Universidad Politecnica de Valencia (Spain), Universidad Tres de Febrero (Argentina), Fundacao de la Universidade de Sao Paulo (Brasil), Universidad Antonio Nariño (Colombai), Flacso Ecuador, Universidad Autonoma de Asunción (Paraguay), Universidad de La Republica (Uruguay), ASCUN (Colombia).

The Alcue Units will be able to perceive, with relative easiness, the demands of cooperation of stakeholders; there is however a difficulty to overcome, namely the capacity to relate their requirements to what can be offered. This challenge implies high level of complexity and will require full commitment of the Alcue Units.

Another challenge identified by the Group is to differentiate the ALCUE Units from the multiple agencies of cooperation already existing and those that in the future will be organized in different countries both in Latin America and Caribe, as well as in European Union, some of them with a regional dimension. Which are the differentiating elements that will be recognized as an added value with respect to the multiplicity of agencies ? Are we being too ambitious in trying to deal with other aspects that go beyond the academic dimension ?

In order to better focus the work of each Alcue unit to be organized by each partner of the project, and also in order to lower the risks of the dispersion of working areas which may cause it to be ineffective, and finally, in order to avoid the doubling of efforts with other Alcue Units, it was proposed that each Institution will carry out a strategic study which will specify its content, taking as

a starting point the information provided by WP2. With this information and taking into consideration its interests, resources and possibilities, it is desirable for each Alcue Unit to develop an action plan, the implementation of which can be followed and evaluated. At the same time, this strategic study and the action plan will contribute to the definition of the universe of stakeholders and to better focus its efforts. It is also recommended that the working plan be defined before contacting the stakeholders.

Questions that must be solved by each Institution: where is to be placed the Alcue unit ? A new office/agency/institute/location will be created or will it be located in some already existing structure ? About this question it was agreed that there is no unique answer and each Institution will make the decision following its characteristics and its patterns of decision making.

A clear political compromise is required at the highest level of each Institution for its legitimation and sustainability, assuring at the same time the quality and independence of the Alcue units.

All partners are requested to share information in order that other Alcue units will be able to take advantage of it and establish a true network of cooperation for development.

Group 2 – Coordinated by UCA

Participants : The Group was composed by the representatives of the following Institutions:

Universidad Centro Americana (Nicaragua), Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, Universidad de Granada (Spain), Karl-Franzens University of Graz (Austria), Universidad Tecnica Particular de Loja (Ecuador), Universidad Loyola (Bolivia), FLACSO Argentina, Instituto Internacional e Planejamento Educacional (Brasil), Universidad Austral de Chile, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Asociacion Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educacion Superior (Mexico), Unibo.

1 – Conditions for sustainability of Alcue units in the Partners' Institution: institution political willingness at the highest level and its official institutionalization; establishment and development of mechanisms that will assure the quality of services that will be provided.

2 - Alcue units will articulate, socialize, infuse dynamism and offer opportunities to other significant actors (private enterprises, other universities, SME) and at the same time they should take advantage of the different initiatives carried out by other participating members of the project.

3 – No unique model of Alcue unit can be defined. Each Institution will adapt it to its institutional and national reality; what is important is not to duplicate efforts within each Institution. However it is evident that some minimum common aspects will have to be defined for all Institutions, which will permit later on to carry out an evaluation on structures that can be compared.

4 – Each Institution will decide where to locate the Alcue unit. The ideal will be that it will be connected with some Foundation, Observatory or Institution.

5 – Alcue units can carry out research, post graduate courses and develop mechanism that promote and give incentives to labour mobility.

6 – A value added following the establishment of the Alcue units is that it will oblige us to reflect on how we stand with regard to the theme of international collaboration.

Group 3 – Coordinated by UAM

Participants : The Group was composed by the representatives of the following Institutions:

Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana Azcapotzalco (Mexico), Scierter (Italy), Fundacio Universitat-Empresa de les Iles Balears (Spain), Universidad Nacional de Quilmes (Argentina), Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinarios (Bolivia), Flacso Mexico, Corporacion Universidad Central de Chile, Centro de Estudios de Derecho, Economia y Politica (Paraguay).

Taking into consideration the list of aspects to work on in the construction of Alcue units, it was considered the possibility to incorporate a new aspect of reflection which refers to the evaluation of its impact on stakeholders.

Different examples of Alcue units were considered, like those that could operate in Argentina, considering the particular strength of each of the Institutions that would participate in the project, thus relating Alcue units to each other as a network.

Some questions were raised about the achievement of the project in terms of two dimensions: the level of academic cooperation in Europe and the level of cooperation within each participating country with respect to civil society and governmental agencies. The necessity was discussed to consider these two dimensions of the project in order to understand their relationship in terms of two aspects of cooperation, one internal and the other external to each country, considering at the same time both academic cooperation and its articulation with stakeholders.

It was also discussed the importance of recognizing the existence of working groups defined following the list of matters to approach, at different levels: at the first level, the University considered inward, a second level, the University in its environment, and the third level considering the larger space of Europe-Latin America cooperation. The possible diversity of strategies to approach these different levels is a task which implies a certain degree of autonomy in each Institution.

The importance of recognizing experiences of general models or patterns of cooperation was underlined, considering the heterogeneity of possible Alcue units and also the heterogeneity of different stakeholders, like for example the University as a Community of the Universities, that is to say Students and Faculties. With the recognition of this heterogeneity, the first mapping of the present situation will permit to identify the relevant stakeholders. What is necessary then, is to collect immediate information which will allow us to identify stakeholders and their needs.

It was proposed to share information and a similar format in order to include them in the institutional pages of each Institution, as a reference to the VERTEBRALCUE Project.

The group 3 agreed to propose a chronogram until the june meeting: during the month of march, the first point of the listing (look inside) should be be approached, during april-may; the identification of stakeholders (look outside) should take place, and in the month of june the presentation project report in the meeting in Costa Rica.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

In the concluding Plenary session some of the major points agreed in the kick off meeting were reviewed and the premises were established in order to develop a chronogram for future activities which can be presented as follows. Please note that PCG stand for Project Coordinating Group, composed by UNIBO, Scierter and UNA.

WP	What	Who	Expected delivery (2009)
WP1	Kick off Meeting Minutes. Documents delivered during the meeting. Partners' Data Base.	UNIBO	Within one month from Kick Off Meeting
	Quality Project Plan and Evaluation Plan	PCG	By end of April
	Definition and Choice of Communication Instruments and workflows in the network	PCG	By middle of April
	To organize the 2nd Project meeting in Heredia, Costa Rica.	UNA	In the following months up to the 22 nd and 23 nd
	To participate in the 2nd Project meeting in Heredia, Costa Rica.	All partners	22 nd and 23 rd of June
WP2	Guidelines for State of Art Report	UNIBO-UGR	By 16 th of March
	Preparation and delivery of members contribution of State of The Art Report	All Partners	By 18 th of May
WP3	Project presentation to stakeholders	PCG	By end of March
	Meeting with stakeholders	All partners	By end of April
WP4	Action plan for Alcue Unit's development in each institution.	All Partners	By 22 nd of June
WP10	Logo Vertebralcue	Scierter	By end of March
	Website of the Project (first version)		By end of April
	Website Backoffice for Partners (first version)		By end of May

Annexes to the Project Meeting Minutes

Annex 1 - Kick Off Meeting Agenda

Annex 2 – ALCUE Units

Annex 3 – Specific Objectives and Expected Results

Annex 4 – WorkPlan and WorkPlackages Presentation

Annex 5 – Logical Framework

Annex 6 – Administrative Sessions Presentations

Annex 7 – List of Present Institutions and signatures