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VertebrALCUE

Project Meeting 5 – Deliverable D1.56

Minutes

Santiago 4-5 of April 2011

The 5th VertebrALCUE Plenary Meeting was held in Santiago, Chile, during the days of April 4th and 5th, 2011, hosted by The Universidad Central de Chile (UCCH) and Universidad Austral de Chile (UACH), in very spacious and comfortable setting at the outskirts of the city¹.

Twenty nine Partner Institutions, out of 32, participated in the meeting, most of them represented by an expert and administrative personnel (see annex #2 for list of participants).

1. OPENING AND INTRODUCTION

The opening session was introduced by Giorgio Alberti, general director of the Project who introduced Mr. Luis Merino, academic Vice-Rector of UCCH and Ms. Charlotte Lowengreen, Director of International Relations at UACH, who greeted and welcomed all the participants in the meeting, also on behalf of its University and its Rector, Victor Cubillo, who, regretfully, was unable to be present.

Mr. Merino took the floor underlying the importance of the VertebrALCUE Project for the contribution it attempts to make to the process of educational integration in Latin America and between this region and the EU, overcoming the problems of asymmetry and establishing a relationship of mutual respect and equal standing among the different academic institutions representing the two Regions.

He concluded by recognizing the leadership role played by the general director in keeping together the partner institutions participating in a highly complex and difficult project and by wishing a full success of the meeting, particularly in its effort to pave the way for a more constructive relationship between University and society for building more just and inclusive communities.

The opening session continued with a speech by Giorgio Alberti “Trends and challenges of the VertebrALCUE Project”, where he presented what has been accomplished so far, recalling the difficulties which had to be overcome during the second year of the project and at the same time thanking the partner members for their commitment and work carried out during 2010. The speaker emphasized that the

¹ For further details about the final agenda, see annex #1.

project entered its third and final year and that it is a crucial time to carry out the actions still due.

He underlined that the major themes of the project are the ALCUE UNITS, the Thematic Networks and the Integration Structure at local, national, regional and bi- regional levels.

The project has to undertake four main tasks during this year:

1: To complete the vertebrating structure of the ALCUE Units, launching the four still pending ones, and also promoting the creation of AUs of additional Associated Partners.

2. To consolidate the constitution of Thematic Networks which integrate sub groups of the Consortium and are a concrete example of academic cooperation between institutions belonging to LAC and EU, thus beginning to fill the common space of the ALCUE area. Four Action Plans for the sustainability of Thematic Networks will have to be delivered to the Commission.

3. To develop the integration framework whose pillars are represented by The ALCUE Units.

4. To Identify good practices of academic cooperation as a basis to elaborate blueprints for further cooperation. Within this last point, the project has to identify and analyze five already existing experiences of bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The speaker concluded his speech by emphasizing the idea and practice of integration, which is at the core of the activities of academic institutions at all levels, including the integration between the university and its external environment, which is the object of several thematic networks.

2. Dissemination, Visibility and Communication (WP10)² **Cristina Brecciaroli (Scienter)**

The speaker reminded partner institutions to follow the visibility and communication plan, especially for the design of the ALCUE Units' websites.

While indicating that the official visibility handbook, issued by the European Commission, is available in the sharepoint, she pointed out the following:

- the importance of using both the VertebrALCUE and Alfa logo for any presentations; when used on the website, these two logos should be linked to

² The presentation is available in annex # 3

the corresponding websites of the VertebraALCUE project and of the ALFA III Programme,

- make sure that the ALCUE Unit's web page is visible immediately from the institutional main page of the hosting website,
- the website should contain a brief description of the content of the project and redirect to the project website for more details; reserved information, of relevance only for the project partners, should not be made available on the website,
- make the website attractive to stakeholders,
- refer to good practices in terms of ALCUE UNITS blog/web sites, such as those of CEBEM and UdelaR,
- Whenever in doubt or in need for consultation, refer to Scierter which has the leading responsibility for dissemination,
- make use of the online ALCUE Unit lab to re-launch activities: keep in mind the 9 meta functions of the ALCUE Unit, remind also to upload information related new initiatives, consult the lab for suggestions, share problems and solutions and so on,
- use the web page to publish all events that refer to subjects of relevance for the Project in order to make the ALCUE Unit website more alive, visible and attractive,
- present the Project in any events where a member of the Unit participates, and make sure to report on it by using the appropriate tools, which are available in annex 8 of the Communication and Visibility Plan,
- be prepared to drive a substantial number of respondents to answer the next consultations on line planned by the project.

3. Presentation of the ALCUE Units (WP4 and WP5) and First Integration Seminar (WP9)

Carlos Alvarez (UNA) introduced to the presentation of the ALCUE Units established by the partner institutions, emphasizing the internal and external functions of these structures. A general reflection on the level of integration among all the Units, and the local and national levels, is reported in the "First Integration Seminar Minutes" Deliverable

Universidad Central de Chile - Chile: the UCCH ALCUE Unit has mainly worked in 4 dimensions:

- a. The institutional consolidation of its international relations department, by integrating it into the plan of institutional development and articulation with its external environment in order to guarantee its sustainability within the university. The AU is located within the office of the director of national and international relations which together with the office of the vice director has supported its international relations, especially in the area of curriculum internationalization, credit transfers and participation in international networks. This has implied moving from one internal fragmented system of unrelated activities to a more integrated one, around the AU, both inside and outside the university, optimizing the individual efforts of each faculty and/or program.
- b. Technical assistance to our internal stake-holders in improving their competence in order to insert themselves in processes of internationalization.
- c. The analysis of good practices of our partners, as a contribution to our own performance, observing experiences such as the cases of UTPL, with their newsletter, and the cycle of talks by UDELAR.
- d. The promotion of a virtual space, like our web site, in order to gain information on the needs of our external stake-holders, particularly those connected with the area of local development.

Finally, our most persistent effort has been aimed at obtaining the legitimacy of the AU inside the university by organizing workshops, visits, expositions and the diffusion of documents to our colleagues.

UUA AU - Paraguay, together with CEDEP AU, has mainly worked in collaboration with officers of the Ministry of Education in the effort to contribute to the new law of higher education. In this sense, this AU has participated in meetings in order to articulate the national unit with external stake holders, producing a great impact. This AU has also been particularly active in other ALFA III Projects, like REAIPE and TUNING and many other ones at the international level.

CEBEM AU - Bolivia has specialized itself in the management of learning, connecting itself to a network of researchers gathered around a university project of development.

ASCUN - Colombia has developed a **national coordination AU** which has tried to promote the visibility of the project, producing a web page, leaflets of national circulation, with the aim of constituting a space for the convergence of agencies of university cooperation in order to overcome their fragmentation and increase their integration, particularly within the ALFA III program.

FLACSO-A AU - Argentina has filled an important space within this institution, since there was no central office of international cooperation. The VertebralCue project offered the opportunity to create a structure, established in April 2010, which has 3

main objectives: constitution of networks, academic mobility and scholarships for international projects. Their participation in an ALFA project has also been useful in gaining legitimacy within the institution by providing support to participate in different projects.

UCA AU - Nicaragua is located at the top of the institution and has been institutionalized in the strategic plan of the university, which meant its incorporation in the University annual operative plan, with its own budget. The AU has developed a virtual office, with its own physical space, with the basic aim of strengthening UCA international actions, like being a member of the Council of National University and other networks, such as the AUSAL network, which has members in North America and Europe. The next challenge is to produce a periodic publication in order to integrate and diffuse information more efficiently.

FUEIB AU - Spain has been particularly active in three dimensions: a. the consideration of thematic networks, which has led to the production of a series of documents as the basis for their definition and articulation, in collaboration with Universidad Politecnica de Valencia, b. the production of a web page to improve the future activities and communications to different stake-holders in order to gain legitimacy both internally and externally, c, participation in an ALFA Project promoting the development of ALCUENET. The next challenge is the definition of the guidelines of the action plans of the 4 thematic networks which have to be delivered to the Commission.

Universidad de Granada AU - Spain has great potential but has had to face some problems of internal articulation, because it is difficult to know what the various faculties, departments and centers of the University are doing, due to its total fragmentation. The AU is trying to create procedures and mechanisms of integration, including the clause which obliges the different actors within the University to inform about actions which are being developed with Latin-America. This AU is also planning to participate in various thematic networks, also as a way to strengthen the different units of the university which will participate in the common space.

IEP and Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru - Peru have decided, given their complementary specialization, respectively research and teaching, to establish informal AU at the local level and coordinate their activities within a **nationally coordinated ALCUE Unit**, concentrating their efforts on problems such as, inequality, poverty, local development, fragmentation and institutional weakness. At the same time, the Unit is facing the problems of fragmentation and massification of higher education with the corresponding decay in quality. The Unit also organizes a series of meetings with stakeholders facing the central question of how to articulate research programs with other institutions in Latin America and how to compare political experiences which will permit the region to leave behind mediocrity and improve higher education.

Universidad de Loyola - Bolivia established its AU with the main focus of contributing to the internationalization of its institution and of supporting programs with the possibility of articulating themselves with other networks within the ALFA III Program (e.g. RIAPE and CEDSAR Projects), sharing experiences and working together with CEBEM, in order to give visibility to their actions and to identify, as a first step, which stakeholders would be more interested in their activities. Connections have been started with small and medium enterprises, with public universities (being Loyola a private one) in order to create the conditions for forging a National Coordination ALCUE Unit able to integrate different types of universities.

CEDEP AU - Paraguay is concentrating on developing its Web page in order to disseminate its actions through the diffusion and development of seminars, conferences, professionalization courses and post graduate studies in the area of their expertise. The Unit also aims to increase academic cooperation and participation in international seminars, in collaboration with UAA in the effort to constitute a national unit with the aim of combining the strength of each institution in order to gain visibility at the national level in order to participate as a group in the national agenda of “2030 Competiveness”, together with the group of professionals of different groups trying to produce greater integration of their efforts. The next challenge is to develop a research centre with its own space in order to attract professors and students and improve their articulation with other members of VertebrALCUE.

FLACSO-E AU - Ecuador is working on three dimensions: a. Institutional strengthening of the area of international relations, trying to overcome its fragmentation, particularly in the area of research, where there has been a consolidation of a common space of information on research activities and international articulation; b. the strengthening of institutional relationships with the group of higher education stakeholders, facing one of the main educational problems in the Country, namely the weakness of human capital: the AU proposed to a national network of Ecuatorian Universities to work in this area, by organizing workshops and seminars to overcome weaknesses in technical terms and to develop institutional capacities in international relations, an area of great demand to in Ecuador; c. the Unit is developing a common national space where many actors intervene in the process of educational reform. The idea is to establish a round table for debate and discussion of opinion leaders facing the legal and institutional changes of higher educational at the national level.

Universidad de Quilmes AU - Argentina is located in the general office of the Directorate of International Relations, with a small budget of its own. It has achieved a good internal recognition at the institutional level. The Unit has achieved that professors and students, when developing activities related to internationalization, articulate themselves with the Unit's space Internationalization activities are thus interrelated and the ALCUE Unit has become the most reliable source of information about them. Before there was a high level of fragmentation; that is, each professor signed agreements or invited outside speakers to his group or find financing for its particular projects. The Unit also presented its program of international cooperation both inside the University and to

some external stake-holders. One of the members of the ALCUE Unit belongs to most networks of regional internationalization. During the last year, some members of the AU have been engaged in different projects of the Alfa III Program. The Unit also supports the presentation of professors who apply for international scholarships.

Universidad Antonio Nariño AU – Colombia is located within the office of the vice rector and is centralizing activities that deal with international relations. It has launched a Web site which was well received by the local community with the registration of many interested people and disseminated information with strong impact. The Unit is also producing a periodical leaflet and participating in various Alfa III proposals, developing contacts with other Colombian and Panamanian Universities. An Austrian expert has been hired.

Pontificia Catolica del Perú – Peru has launched a survey among Peruvian Universities to determine the level of academic cooperation between them, with other Latin American Universities and European counterparts. They selected a sample of 25 universities and so far have collected data about 16.

IIFE AU - Brazil is collecting information on cooperation and integration experiences with different institutions about mobility and University- Enterprise relationships. It has also organized a round table with 30 faculties on the theme of education and social inclusion. It is now working on its Web side.

ANUEIS - Mexico participated since the beginning in the constitution of the Mexican national coordination unit. They are establishing a Web side in order to inform about experiences on good practices on students exchanges, joint research and extensions of collaborative relations with other national institutions.

UTPL ALCUE Unit - Ecuador is part of the project OUI Campus, is very committed with the objectives of the project, disseminates information about activities leading to a common space producing a monthly bulletin of good quality and proposes curricular harmonization in order to create a common space of higher education in the country.

Universidad Politécnica de Valencia AU - Spain, as part of its centre for lifelong learning, is highly specialized in terms of continuous learning, both in person and e-learning, participating in various networks with Europe, Latin America and also Asia. The Unit has carried out the survey among members of VertebralCUE to find out each institution's interests in participating in specific thematic networks. The Unit has a high expertise in ETC technology.

UdelaR AU - Uruguay is located in the office of the Director of international relations. It is supported by a follow up committee which is integrated by representatives of different national organisms; it meets periodically in order to define the functions of the ALCUE Unit. So far, nine of these meetings have been held. An internal evaluation of its experience has been carried in terms of identifying strengths and weaknesses. The results of this exercise have been presented in the Unit Web page.

UNIBO-BA AU - Argentina, still in its informal stage, has worked on a document for the establishment of thematic networks, has participated in regional evaluation seminars organized by some partner's institutions and has worked on the presentation of three thematic networks. The first one, together with IEP, CEBEM and EDELSTEIN CENTRE, has developed a conceptual framework for a thematic network that deals with the nature of the State, politics and its relationships with policies dealing with situations of poverty, inequality and social exclusion. A second thematic network has to do with local development and the extension to Latin America and EU of an Observatory on small and medium enterprises, which has been functioning for over 10 years in Argentina, supported by the Foundation of the SME, which is integrated by UNIBO-BA (which holds its scientific direction), the UIA (the Country's most representative Business Organization) and *Techint* (one of the world leading producers of seamless steel tubes). The UNIT has also presented the VertebrALCUE Project in many meetings and conferences. Yet, more works needs to be done to increase visibility of what the Unit is doing. Meetings have been held with the representatives of the other three academic institutions from Argentina which are partners of the Project, FLACSO AR, UNQ, UNTREF, to discuss the plan for the constitution of the National Coordination ALCUE Unit.

UNA AU - Costa Rica coordinated the cooperation activities, which include mobility projects with the EU, promotion of meetings and contacts among academic institutions at the national level and dissemination of information about the project among internal and external stakeholders. A particular effort has been dedicated to the building of an observatory on HEI in Central America which has led to the creation of REDCOSUCA which brings together a good number of HEI form Central America. Its main objective is the institutional consolidation in areas such as academic mobility for professionalization of professors, international projects and the likes.

4. Thematic Networks and Action Plan (WP7)

Patricio Montesinos (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia)

The speaker presented the results of the survey on preferences of topic for Thematic Networks (TTNN).

The most voted were:

- Regional Integration between LAC and EU
- Educational Quality
- Mobility
- Joint Research

- Reform and Modernization of educational systems
- Gender, population and Human Rights

Seven Thematic Networks were finally selected³:

1. University-Enterprise
2. Management and Academic Government
3. Local Development
4. ICT's Application
5. Employability
6. Student Mobility
7. Democratic Governance

Patricio reminded the audience that the Project is committed to deliver four TTNN Action Plans, but suggested to keep working on all the selected TTNN.

Luis Tudela (FUEIB) took the floor to complete the presentation of TTNN. He suggested that all TTNN should follow similar guidelines for their organizations:

- A Public Objective
- A clear Identification of the Problem
- General and Specific Objectives of each TTNN
- Type of service which the TTNN will offer
- Each TTNN must have at least two leaders, one from LAC, the other from EU. Each Partner Institution must participate in at least one TTNN. Participation can be determined either by expertise or by learning about a specific subject.

Ivanna Travaini (UNIBO-BA) intervened by underlying the importance that a bottom up process was followed, by which each partner could either suggests a topic and/or joins one of preference. Information related to such a bottom-up process is available in the Project sharepoint.

³ For further details about TTNN procedures, see annex #4

Parallel session

Administrative and Financial Issues

Santiago 4-5 of April 2011

The administrative presentations held during the VertebrALCUE Santiago Project 5th Meeting had the two following specific objectives⁴:

1. to inform the Project Directors and project Administrative Referents on the main issues and problems emerged during the auditing process and how they were faced and solved (the final results);
2. to agree on the corrective actions to be put in place in order to avoid the same problems in the future (in the second and third financial and auditing reports).

As to the first objective, a plenary presentation with both Project Directors and Administrative Referents was held on Monday 4th April (see the Annex *Administrative Presentation for Project Directors: "General considerations on the auditing process and the financial situation"*). Most of the partners had asked for a brief summary on the main issues which emerged in the financial reporting process of the first year and the consequent expenditure verification report process, and the following points were developed in the presentation:

_the amounts of each partner financial report do not reflect effective work done by the project teams; this is mainly due to an incorrect interpretation of the meaning of some budget items;

_the auditing process was too long, due to the different interpretation (by each partner) of the supporting documentation list necessary for the auditors to clearly identify and proof project costs; also, the use of internal file formats by the auditor was not helpful in order to clearly state the eligibility of each cost items according to the ALFAIII reporting framework;

_during the expenditure verification report's process, 3 main issues were central:

1. "contratos de locacion de servicios" were interpreted by the auditor as external consultancies due to lack of documentation on the contracts explaining the participation of the staff involved in the project as fully integrated in the institution and project rules and means;

⁴ For general information given at plenary session see annex #5, for *Project Financial Aspects in ALFA III Programmes, Partner's Budget Example*, see annex #6, for Administrative Final Agenda, see annex #7, and for Participants List Signature for the Administrative Session, see annex #8

2. there was a general lack of proof of payment, as bank transfers, because most of the partners (also European) had considered as proof of payment institution's documentation stating the payment of invoices, salaries,..;
3. some inconsistencies between supporting documents and declared costs, due to an incorrect interpretation on how to report costs (i.e.: on how to calculate staff costs) specifically by some Latin-American partners.

As to the second specific objective, the following main corrective actions were proposed and agreed with the Project Directors of the Consortium, in order to put them in place during the following 2 days Administrative meeting and the following months:

1. to inform and train the Administrative Referents on Grant Contract Annexes details and the Financial Toolkit in order to clarify and solve partners issues, during plenary administrative training session planned for Tuesday 5th April;
2. to analyze each partner's first year financial and verification reports, during bilateral sessions planned for Tuesday 5th April and Wednesday 6th April, in order to clearly agree on the adjustment documentation to be provided for the first year financial report adjustments and to be included in the second year interim report, as agreed with the financial officer;
3. to agree with each partner on the formats, contents and timings of the second year interim report, that were proposed and agreed as follows:

_May 2011: supporting documents and Financial Interims have to be sent to Project Coordinator (Unibo) by all Consortium members

_end of July 2011; deadline for submitting Expenditure Verification report (EVR) and Second year Interim report to EC, including adjustments to year 1 financial report and financial report for year2.

The two following days, 5th and 6th April, were dedicated to put in place the corrective actions described above (1, 2 and 3), according to an administrative and financial agenda organized as follows (see Annex Administrative Sessions Agenda and Participants - Participants Signatures' List):

_Tuesday 5th April - morning (plenary administrative session; see Annex 4 Administrative Session Presentation for Administrative Referents: "VertebrALCUE Project Financial Aspects in ALFAIII program")

9:00: 9:45 Financial issues – Overview of VertebrALCUE Project main aspects

9:45 – 10:30 First Year Interim Report Feedback – Lessons learned

10:30 – 10:45 Coffee break

10:45 – 11:30 Financial Issues – Reporting Rules and Forms in ALFAIII

11:30 – 13:00 Second Year Interim Report - Practical Examples and common issue

_Tuesday 5th April – afternoon, and Wednesday 6th April, morning and afternoon:

45 minutes of bilateral working session between (B. Vetturini and Maria Rosa Alfieri) on one side, and each Latin-American partner on the other side (with the exception of the Argentinean ones, that were met the following week in Buenos Aires).

During the Administrative plenary session, a collaborative and participated discussion took place between the administrative referents, concerning every issue dealt with B. Vetturini in the presentation. In particular, the issues that were discussed can be classified as follows:

- relation between budget, own contribution and EU contribution; impact of the own/Eu contribution on the project team' and project resources' organization;
- relation between budget's timings and grant payments' timings; impact of the financial payments in the project team' and project resources' organization;
- reporting rules in the framework of the ALFAIII Program; relation among eligibility and supporting documents;
- how to calculate staff costs and how to document them;
- staff contracts in Latin America; how to be compliant with staff budget in the project;
- supporting documents: documents required for reporting different types of cost (salaries, per-diems, international travel, conferences/seminars/meeting organization;)
- meaning and alternatives for proofs of payments;
- auditor's timings: how to present supporting documents to speed up the auditing process;
- reporting forms in the framework of the ALFAIII Program; example related to the second year interim report
- activity plan until July 2011.

For each theme, examples both by the partners and the speaker were discussed in order to clearly understand each specific case.

During the bilateral meetings, Unibo delivered to each partner copy of the supporting documents related to the first year interim report, which were ordered and presented as the auditors had required. All budget items' documents were analyzed and in particular

the necessary additional supporting documents were identified and agreed, in order to obtain the eligibility of declared and real costs that were not fully justified by the documentation presented during the previous auditing period.

ANNEX

Annex #1	Final Agenda
Annex #2	List of Participants for the 5th Project Meeting
Annex #3	Dissemination issues (by Scierter)
Annex #4	Survey Results Networks Action Plans for Thematic Networks
Annex #5	VertebrALCUE Directors Plenary Session
Annex #6	Project Financial Aspects in ALFA III Program, Partner's Budget Example
Annex #7	Administrative Sessions Final Agenda
Annex #8	Participants Signatures' List at Administrative Sessions