Online teaching and learning in higher education: dynamics, obstacles and challenges - the case of the University of Évora

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The University of Évora, UE, is a public institution of higher education whose origins date back to 1559. After being closed in the 18th century, the university reopens in 1979.

At the present time, it is organized in schools, related to specific scientific domains, and by the Institute for Research and Advanced Training.

The UE also comprises other units, namely, scientific-pedagogical units in which the Educational Technologies Centre, CTE, is included. we_move expresses the corporate identity of the CTE.

The main activities of the Educational Technologies Centre are focused on development and implementation of online courses in the context of a Distance Learning program of UE.
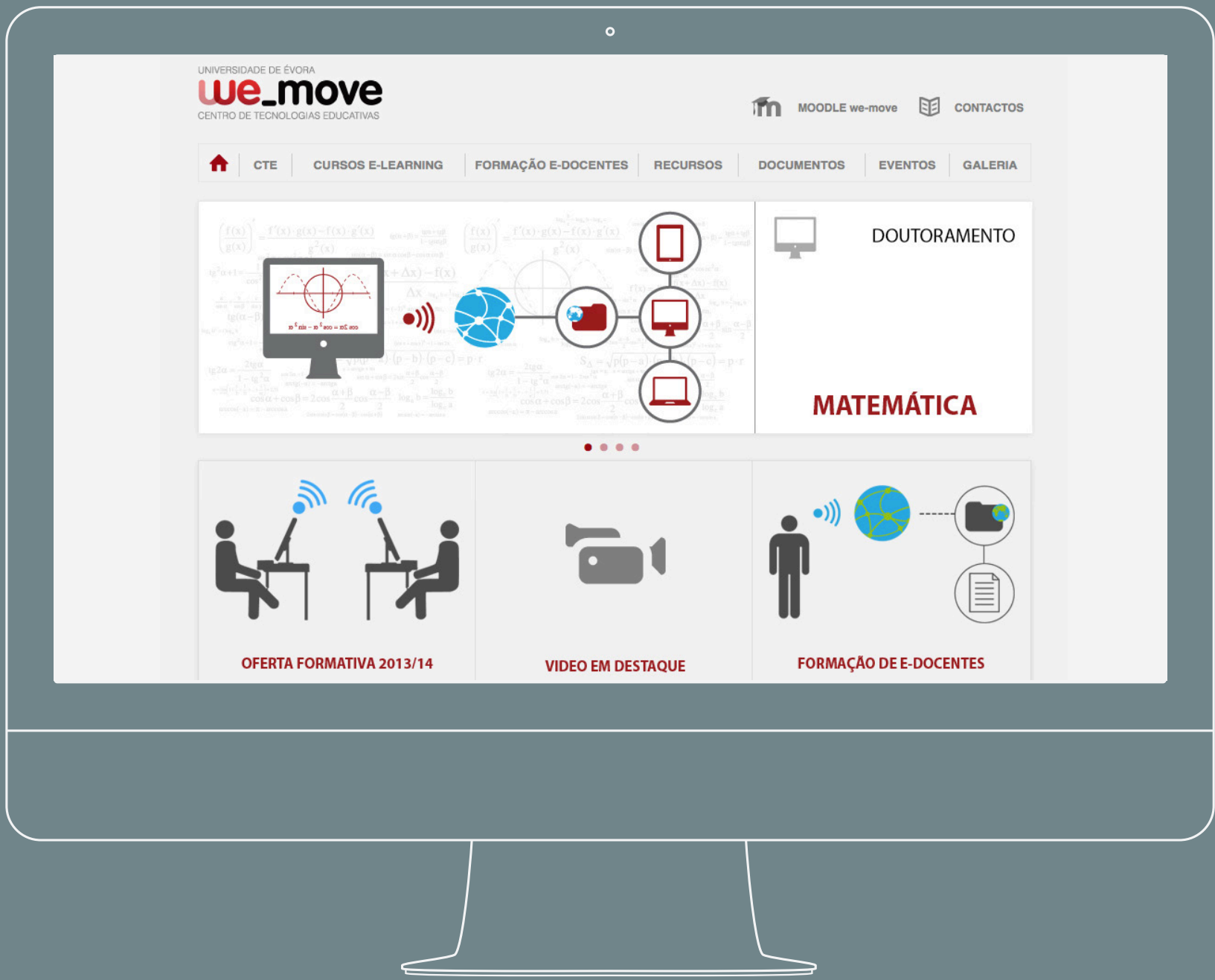
why?

L'homme se promènera dans le volume de l'information comme il se promène dans les forêts et les montagnes, pour explorer le monde physique. Jusqu'ici, le savoir était un lieu d'apprentissage de la déduction, de l'induction, de la mémoire. Il devient aujourd'hui un lieu de promenade. Cela n'est jamais arrivé.

Michel Serres, 2012

– Existence of technological, pedagogical and web design knowledge (present in separated schools)
– Long experience in the use of LMS as complement to traditional courses
– Search for new publics
– Growing interest in pedagogical innovation at the university and an intentional desire to desseminate the same through concrete projects
– Lifelong learning and its sustainability in a digital world
– The importance of producing OERs placing the university in the pedagogical society for the XXI century

what?

Two years of practice in online courses, guided by theory and by collaborative work between teachers, preceded by a long time of preparation

Postgraduate courses
– 1 PhD course (3rd cycle)
  Mathematics
– 1 Master course (2nd cycle)
  Informatics Engineering
– 2 Post graduations courses (2nd cycle)
  Educational Assessment
  Education, Environment and Sustainability
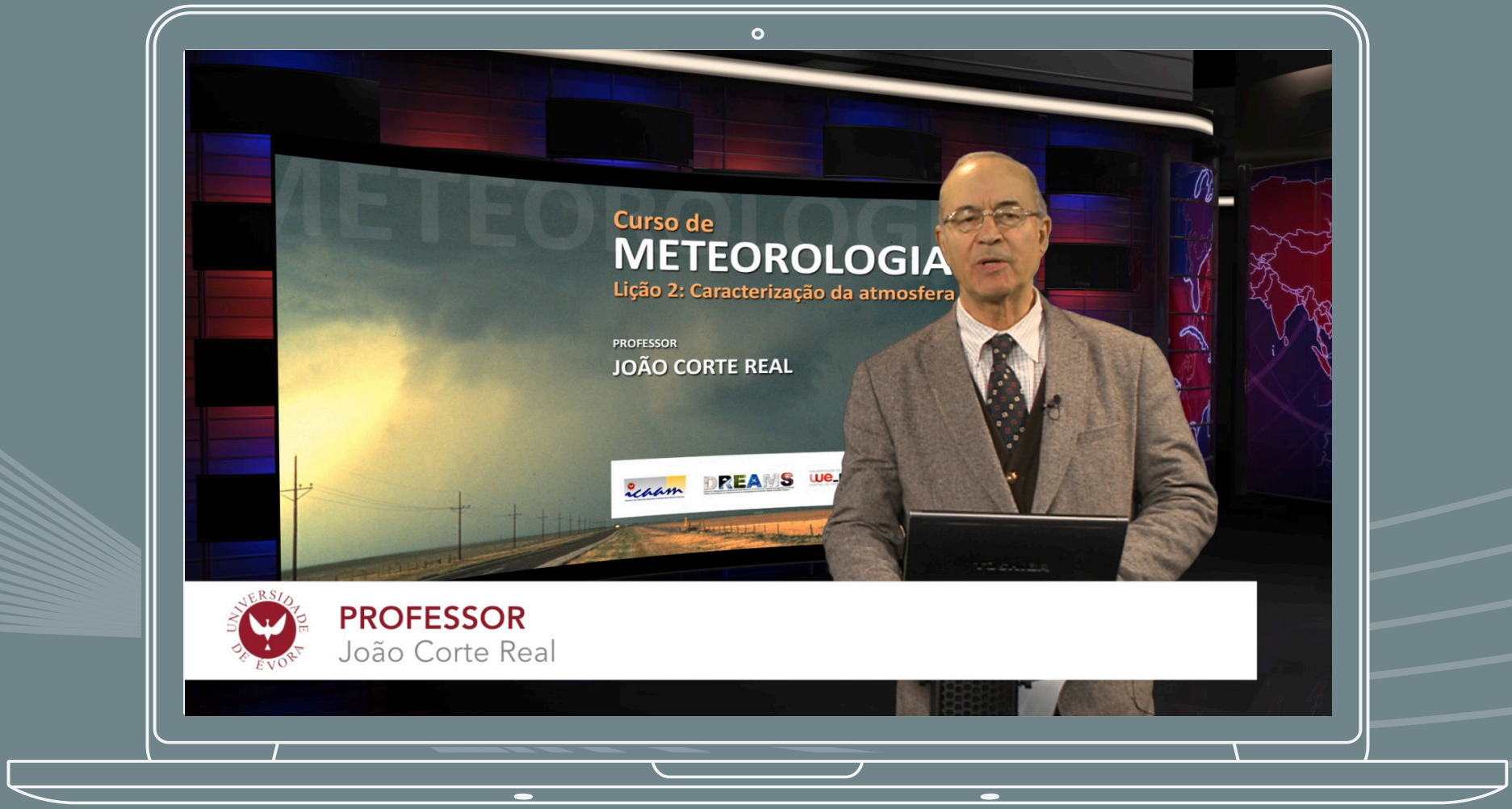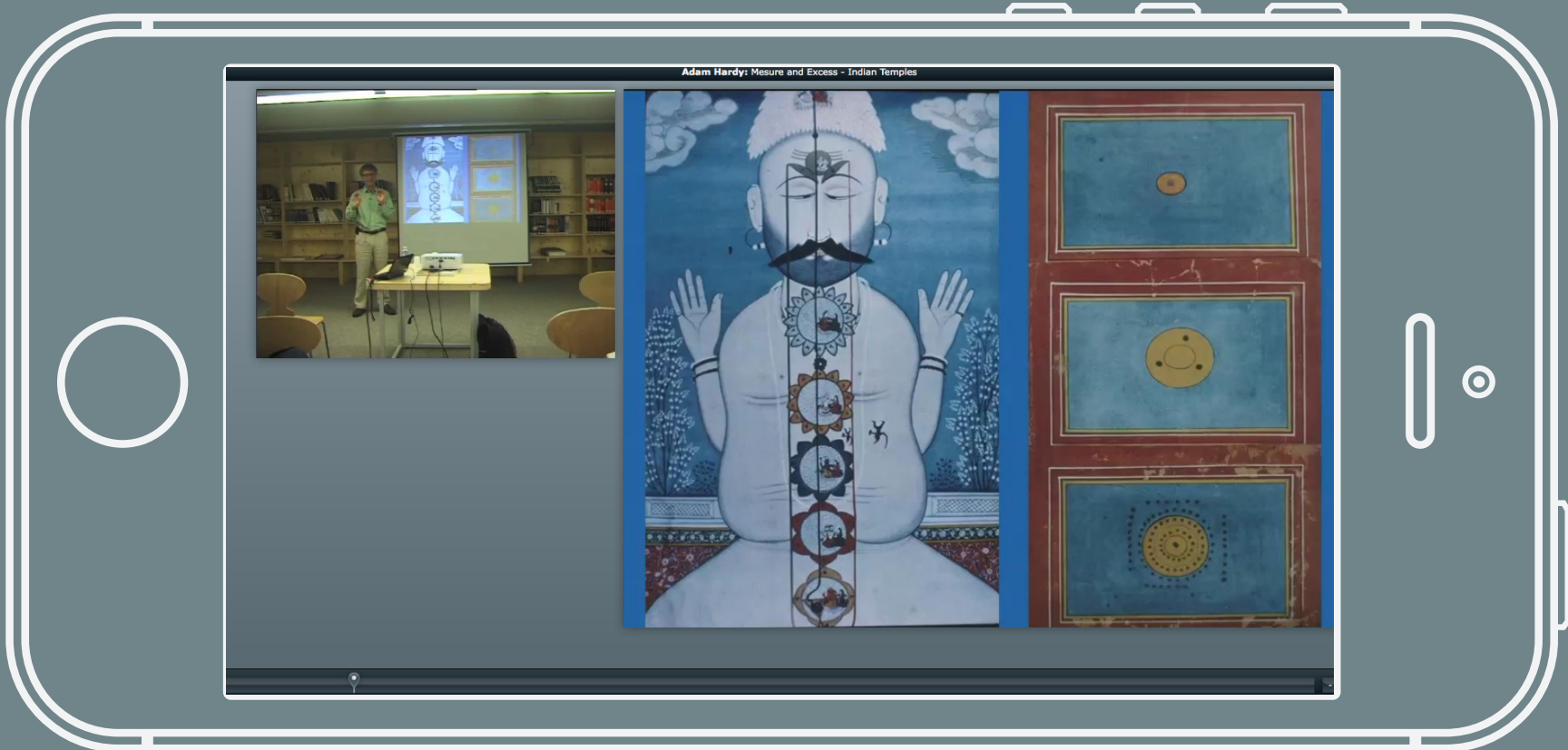
Lifelong learning
Short courses in various subject areas, such as urban landscape, and introduction to eLearning and collaboration tools

Training course for online teaching
– Introduction to online pedagogy
– Organization and design of online curricular units
– Monitoring and evaluation of online teaching

Open educational resources
– Meteorology open courseware
– Conferences and Seminars
– Educational Videos

how?

What we can expect, however, is that online learning – like all forms of quality learning – will be knowledge-, community-, assessment-, and learner-centred. Online learning will enhance the critical function of interaction in education, in multiple formats and styles, among all the participants

Terry Anderson, 2011

– Guided by theories, practices and case-studies in online teaching Transformative Learning, Mezirow, 2003; Theory and Practice of online learning, Anderson, 2011; e-tivities, Salmon 2013, for instance
– Bringing together knowledge existing in different schools
– Converting already existing courses into online courses
– Creating new online courses
– Providing teachers training in the pedagogy of online teaching and learning
– Involving teachers in the construction of a pedagogical model for online teaching, collaborating on some benchmarks of quality
– Creating a support structure for online teaching
– Creating a strategy for the sustainable development of online teaching
– Creating an organizational space in parallel to the already existing institutional culture

obstacles and challenges

According to this approach, the teacher does not rigidly follow his/her teaching plan but acts as a researcher attempting to form models of his/her students' knowledge. Next, the teacher transforms his/her teaching plan and intervenes to create an encouraging environment for the students to improve their knowledge according to their needs. In the online context, this approach could be used by empowering the online teacher to act as a researcher, trying to form models of her/his students' knowledge.

Terry Anderson, 2011

Teachers involved in online teaching are working in two different contexts: online and traditional. This fact has been a positive one as some pedagogical innovation is spreading over traditional courses. But there is also a problem related with time management. Helping teachers to invest their time most effectively, in order to achieve a high level of online performances, is a continuous challenge for a multi-disciplinary team.

In this multiple context of teaching the organizational culture of the institution, even if the UE is a Portuguese model concerning digital integration of all academic dimensions, it is very difficult to integrate some fundamental requests for distance education.

Development of new partnerships with Portuguese and foreign universities

In our first courses, the students we worked with expressed their satisfaction.
With regard to this, a Brazilian student wrote:

"Alegra-me ver este diálogo entre as unidades curriculares".
(I'm very pleased to see this dialogue between curricular units)

The big challenge now is to provide continuity in the development of high quality online teaching at the University of Évora, and guarantee its sustainability.

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