A Virtual University Platform for University of Bucharest, Romania

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Abstract

Where do we come from? The starting point was the "PHARE Multi-country Programme for Distance Education", 1994-1999. The objective was to create 40 Distance Education Study Centres, acronym DESC, in 11 countries (Central and Eastern European Countries). In Romania, 7 DESCs were established, one within University of Bucharest. All the seven RO Centres were recognized by the Ministry of National Education (Decision OMEN No.3289/19.02.1998). The DESC from University of Bucharest has provided the authors the opportunity to grow in parallel with distance education in Romania.

Where we would like to go? The authors are thinking to the future! This paper is aiming to presents their pilot tests focusing on eLearning and online courses. This seems to be in line with European Commission initiatives.

As it concerns the new type eLearning resources, the authors were already involved (2003-2011), in producing the Romanian ECDL training courses. Early, in 2013, the authors started a pilot test of the Udutu platform; the first Udutu trial is presented in this paper.

As it concerns the online courses, the authors are focusing their activity on the Course Builder Google Platform which seems to be "a giant leap into 21st-Century Online Learning"! Early, in 2013, the authors started a pilot test based on this platform. The first training course implemented on the Google Course Builder platform is presented in this paper.

The digital technologies tested and presented in this paper can be considered as parts of the virtual university platform for University of Bucharest, Romania.

1. Where do we come from?

Our adventure in the domain of distance learning started with was the "PHARE Multi-country Programme for Distance Education", 1994-1999, [1]. The main project objective was to create 40 Distance Education Study Centres, acronym DESC, in 11 countries (Central and Eastern European Countries). In Romania, 7 DESCs were established, one within University of Bucharest. All the seven RO Centres were recognized by the Ministry of National Education (Decision OMEN No.3289/19.02.1998). The Director of the DESC from University of Bucharest was professor Bogdan Logofatu. The DESCs were affiliated to ETF Torino. The DESC from University of Bucharest has provided the authors the opportunity to grow in parallel with distance education in Romania. In 1999, the DESC was transformed in Department for Distance Learning (DDLUB). After that, the center/department was further developed based on other projects: REDEC TEMPUS JEP (with financial support from EC), EDUCO (with financial support from World Bank and RO Government). The achievements of the last 14 years (1999-2013) are reported during the workshop "Best practices and case studies of Distance Learning", organized within "The 9th eLearning and Software for Education Conference, eLSE 2013, April 25th - 26th, Bucharest, Romania [2]. The implementation of the distance learning system of education in Romania can be considered an example of best practice. Nowadays, there are almost 100 universities in Romania, 50% of them (including DDLUB) have included in their educational offer distance learning study programs in parallel with traditional face-to-face, on-campus courses.

We can report a best practice in the area of LLL system: DDLUB has successfully implemented the CISCO NetAcademy Program [3]. "Every year, the Cisco Networking Academy program teaches hundreds of thousands of students worldwide the skills needed to build, design, and maintain, networks—improving their career prospects while filling the global demand for networking professionals. With 10,000 academies in 165 countries, Networking Academy helps individuals prepare for industry-recognized certifications and entry-level information and communication technology (ICT) careers in virtually every type of industry. Students develop foundational skills in ICT while acquiring vital 21st-century career skills in problem solving, collaboration, and critical thinking".

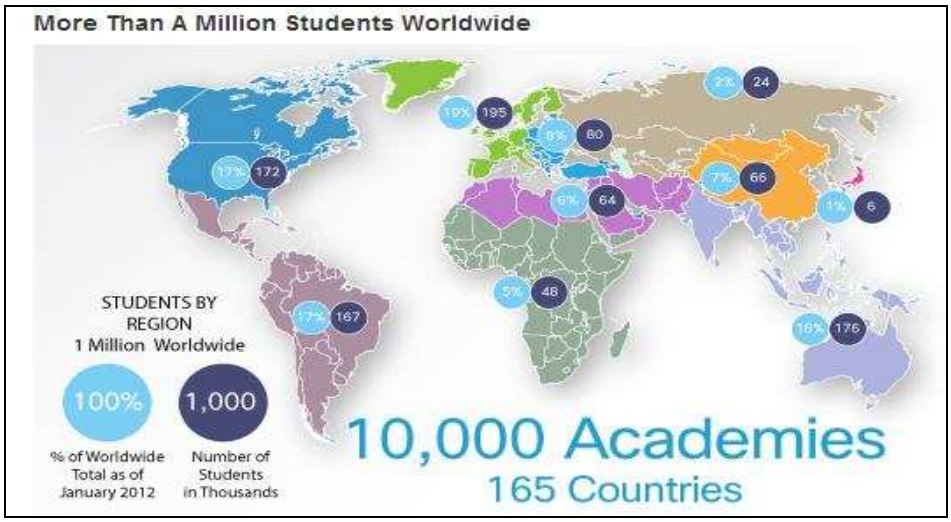

Figure 1. CISCO NetACad Program World Wide.

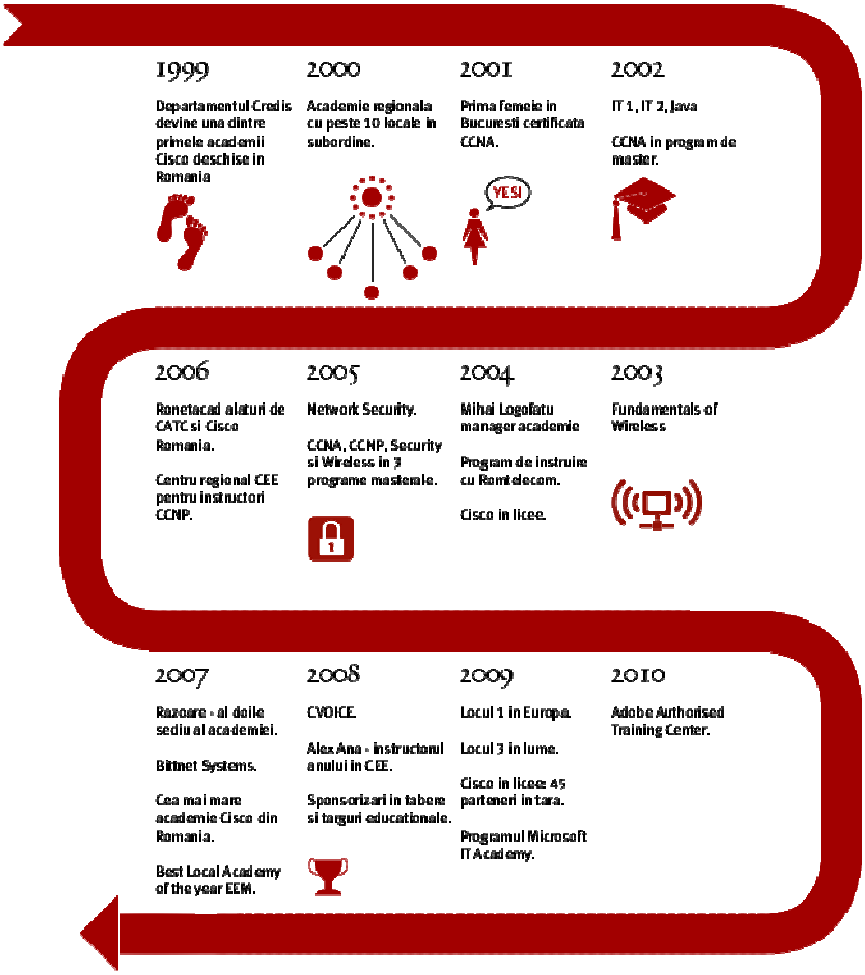

Figure 2. CISCO CREDIS Academy in Romania [4]

We consider the CISCO model to be a wonderful MOOC model, already tested. Their blended learning model uses several innovative technologies, including [3]: (i) “Cisco Packet Tracer, a powerful visualization and simulation tool that allows students to design, build, and troubleshoot virtual networks in a safe environment. Students and instructors use Packet Tracer to create their own virtual "network worlds" to explore complex technical concepts and networking system designs; (ii) Cisco Passport21 to Entrepreneurship, a series of case studies and simulation activities that expose students to critical business and financial skills; (iii) Cisco Aspire, an educational game that provides realistic business and networking scenarios in an engaging virtual environment where students make business and technical decisions to complete projects for clients; (iv) Online assessments that provide immediate, interactive, personal feedback to students; (v) Social media tools, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and the proprietary Academy NetSpace and Club NetAcad sites, that connect students and instructors around the world to one another so they can collaborate and continue learning outside the classroom”.

The authors are the main “authors” of the program implementation in DDLUB [4], Fig.2. We would like to highlight that, Credis Academy won the prize "Best Local Academy of the Year 2007" in Europe & Emerging Markets region-region including 130 countries and over 4,000 academies across Europe, Middle East, Africa, Russia and former CIS countries and Latin America. For us, this award was recognition of the efforts and work of the whole team and has increased the desire to constantly improve the quality of courses. Other prizes/awards [5]: (i) 2008 - Best Instructor in CEE- the CREDIS trainer, Ana Alexander won the instructors’ race in Central and Eastern Europe region; (ii) 2009 – 10 successful years - Excellence Award for CREDIS lifetime achievement [6]; 2010 - Award of Excellence from ROCS 2010, organized by IDG Romania, other to be viewed on the web page [5].

Final comment for this chapter: the authors are proud of the fact that, through this LLL program, during the last 14 years, they were positively influencing thousands of students career.

2 Where we would like to go?

All the time, the authors were thinking to the future! This paper is equal opportunity to present past and future initiatives. In the past, modern digital technologies were promoted within DDLUB: virtual campus (2003), [7]; eLearning resources(2003, 2011), [8]. In the same line of action, there are new initiates and the authors would like to report, during the FOE 2013 Conference, in Florence.

We have to go in the same direction with EU! This is the right moment to remind two of the main initiatives of the European Commission: (i) “Rethinking Education”, [9]; (ii) “Digital Agenda for Europe 2020”, [10]. We really believe that our past initiatives are in line with these CE initiatives!

Now, we would like to present further details on the authors’ initiatives of early 2013: (i) to test the eLearning platform UDUTU; (ii) to test CISCO Course Builder platform. From UDUTU site [11]: “...Udutu offers easy to use online learning solutions designed to help small and large organizations build and distribute online training courses. Our user friendly software and support network will help you to create highly interactive online courses quickly, easily and affordably’; “...thousands of organizations are already using Udutu to author and distribute online courses. Our award winning online course authoring tool is free to use and you don’t need to be a technology expert’. Our pilot test can be followed through the link [12]. The innovation is: (i) we used UDUTU to produce eLearning resources; (ii) we used Google Drive to host(!) and distribute this pilot test eLearning course.

We are excited by the Coursera project. We wrote them in order to ask permission for University of Bucharest to join their project. Unfortunately, no reply!

That is why, the authors moved their attention to Google Course Builder Platform (CB). From their site[13]: “...Course Builder contains software and instructions for presenting your course material, which can include lessons, student activities, and assessments. It also contains instructions for using other Google products to create a course community and to evaluate the effectiveness of your course. To use Course Builder, you should have some technical skills at the level of a web master. In particular, you should have some familiarity with HTML and JavaScript”. The authors of this paper are experienced in traditional distance learning courses; one of the key issue in this type of education is to provide students learning resources written based on DL methodologies. Our previous experience can be successfully moved on the CB platform. That is why, the authors started a pilot test which can be viewed on web site [14]. In this stage the focus was on the implementation, not on the content; that is why we used the content and the objects already developed for the 2003-2007 version of the ECDL eLearning resources [8]. If somebody like to test this implementation, he has to register with his Gmail

account, Fig.3. This implementation is available for online education, to anyone, anywhere, anytime, any pace. We have included the Fig.4 to demonstrate that this course is interactive. You are invited!

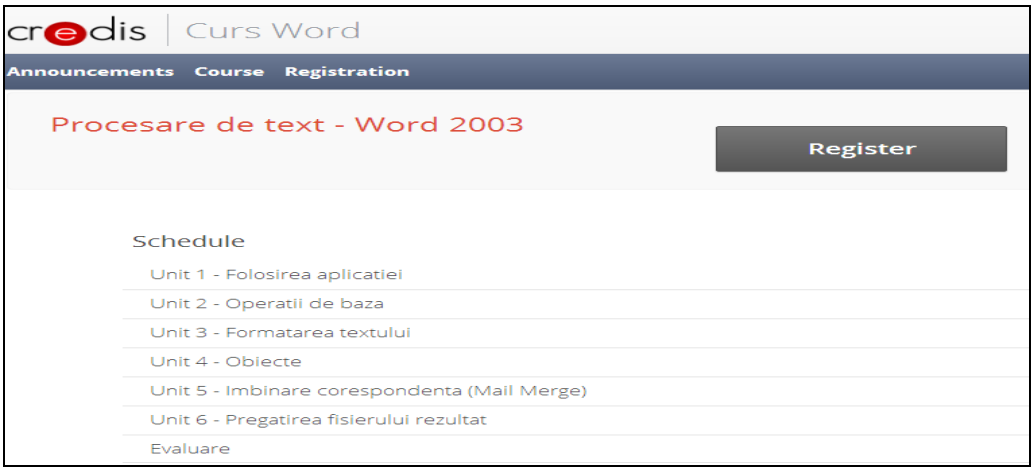

Figure 3. DDLUB pilot test on Google Course Builder Platform

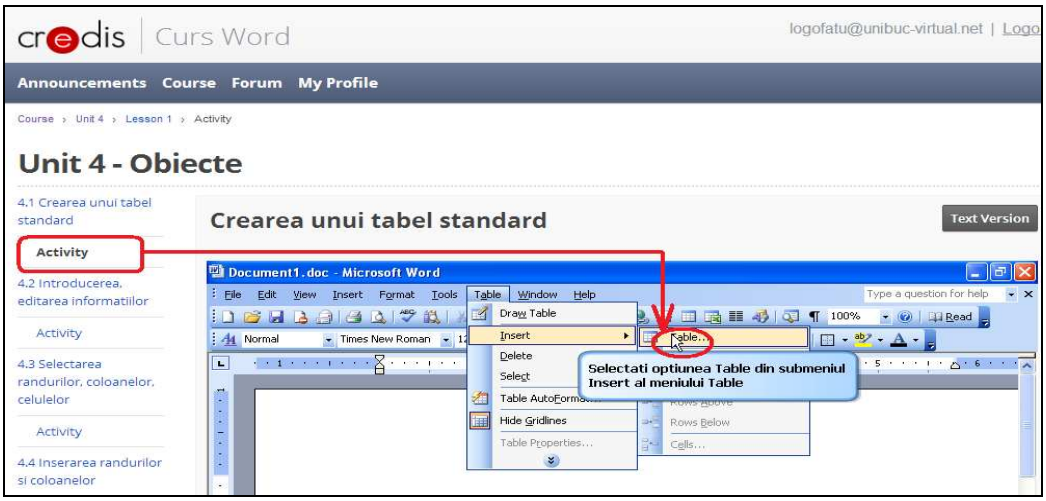

Figure 4. “Activity” is an interactive learning resources.

3. Conclusions

The digital technologies tested and presented in this paper can be considered as parts of the virtual university platform for University of Bucharest, Romania. The authors are looking forward!

References

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