Adult Education In 21th Century

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Abstract

Future of education lies within modern social and educational networks highly dependent on ICT. With promotion of ICT usage in education (distant learning) we provide basis for future generations. We cannot stop progress therefore the best solution is to try and adapt to it.

Promoters of distant learning education and all of its benefits (and obstacles, of course) could only be those that really need them: small countries, areas with scarce population, low income areas, drop-outs, and unemployed. Why?

Although EU states it's direction towards "virtual education" and motivates organizations for application of ICT-based projects that deal with it, in reality we still lack the availability of modern, user-oriented educational systems that would allow soft transit of paleontological educational methods, methodologies and didactic approaches into 21th Century: necessity of lifelong learning as priority for social cohesion, importance of EU support for non-formal education (therefore it should be ICT-based, flexible and, in the first place and most importantly – free for everybody. Therefore we are dealing with situation non plus ultra – only adaptation of used learning methods and standardization of e-learning as equal to classical methods of education in EU can bring us towards future, but the today' reality still seems to be holding a hard grasp on its widely rooted and very firm base of didactical, methodological and successful structures of education.

Objectives in near future as answer to numbered problems: support of networks for distant learning, motivated teachers with in-service training abilities for application of virtual classrooms and methodologies of e-learning, upgrade of didactical methods from ex-catedra towards off-catedra, sophisticated methods of communication with participants in lifelong learning.

Direction towards modern ideas of education as objectives for distant future:

- ***Modern didactics with ICT support** – exactly from this point we can disseminate qSchool-idea; [1]* 1

- ***Necessity of lifelong learning** – wide range of non-formal educational programs with methods of evaluation and validation;*

- ***Open-source Availability**– strict distinction between formal and non-formal education with stressed advantage of free non-formal education.*

Because it's based on distant learning, virtual classrooms and is, hence, totally participant oriented, it must be our duty to promote activities of "virtual education" and importance of them for modern European Citizen. She or he will namely be internet-educated, ICT user-friendly and constantly without time or money for formal education.

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1 *qSchool – ICT support for quality School*: dissemination of good practice example (Study Visit 2009, CEDEFOP Catalogue Group Number 225, organizer Public University of Ptuj – Educational Centre for Adults).

1. Background

Despite all attempts to promote the modernization of existing educational systems, we can see today that this was done mainly at formal level - Bologna Process was set as future guidance, but it completely ignores the importance of non-formal and lifelong learning. We are talking about raising of competences, of transition of different professional fields, of the totality of human as labor market value - while forgetting the simple fact that rise of quality of mentioned categories lies deeply on continuity, knowledge obtained after finishing formal educational systems, and, most important, obtained individually through lifelong learning processes.

Commission tries to overcome lost time with Programmes of multilateral/transversal cooperation, joint under LLP that support the idea of lifelong learning [2] and the necessity of its recognition in everyday life. Realization that caught up the EU somewhere around year 2000 is that average tax payer is formally quite educated, but when it comes to practical skills which form the grounds for professional competences he is completely incapable of quick and soft transition. There we must only look at the categories of ICT literacy and foreign languages. In Slovenia, for example, we are trying to challenge that gap with offers of free, ICT supported learning on e-Points with the participation of mentor.

Idea proved itself worthy of implementation, but only on bigger scale, especially when we take the view of Commission regarding importance of non-formal education for average citizen in account. If we want to develop modern, mobile participant that will not only be the tool in the hands of formal educational systems, we must provide him with opportunities for freedom of choice. At the same time we must realize that such learning cannot be possible without the selection from which he can choose and without wide range of non-formal educational contents from which he can upgrade current skills and competences. And – significantly – he can do everything listed in sophisticated, modern and flexible way, taking into account trends of 21st Century that count the most: time, usefulness, and costs.

If we want to meet those futuristic demands, we must ourselves think out of boundaries. We should realize that there are and there will be thousands of unemployed, formally educated citizens, fresh out of colleges, waiting for non-existing jobs. We can't paleolithicaly think we can offer them computer lectures or refreshing courses for foreign languages – we must provide them with highly sophisticated, modernized web-based services and support for every aspect of their professional life. That means we can't let employers decide what and when his employees will learn, and we can achieve that only if we provide basis for cost-free lifelong learning, supported with modern ICT didactics and new models of validation of non-formal knowledge. Only then we can talk about fulfilled citizen – he will have a choice and possibility for participation in LLP and this participation will "pay" of in the sense of formal validation and acknowledgement of obtained knowledge.

Since 2008, a Centre for lifelong learning (CLL) [4] is a vital part of Public University of Ptuj. As part of it we've started establishing web application service called e-SPI - an electronic system for communication between participants and the instructors, supporting access to learning materials, checking the level of knowledge, relevant learning obligations and access to virtual classrooms.

2. Main idea – web platform EU-RATIO©

UNESCO commission on education for the 21st century [5] deals with the global situation and development trends and predicts that the information revolution of the 20th century will be followed by the "revolution of the mind" which will raise education to the top social priorities. It also notes that the traditional school itself might play the role of the greatest hinderer of this phenomenon.

What we need, obviously, is exactly promotion of this revolution of the mind - but on all levels. This change will affect everybody, not only those temporarily participating in formal education.

Therefore, we wish to develop the education platform (EU-RATIO) that will promote this revolution of the mind and offer a new perspective on e-learning. It will offer a web portal with web applications that will cover all areas of e-learning thus developing high-quality tool for the comprehensive work. It should provide accessible, user-friendly and quality learning contents, combining different levels of ICT technologies.
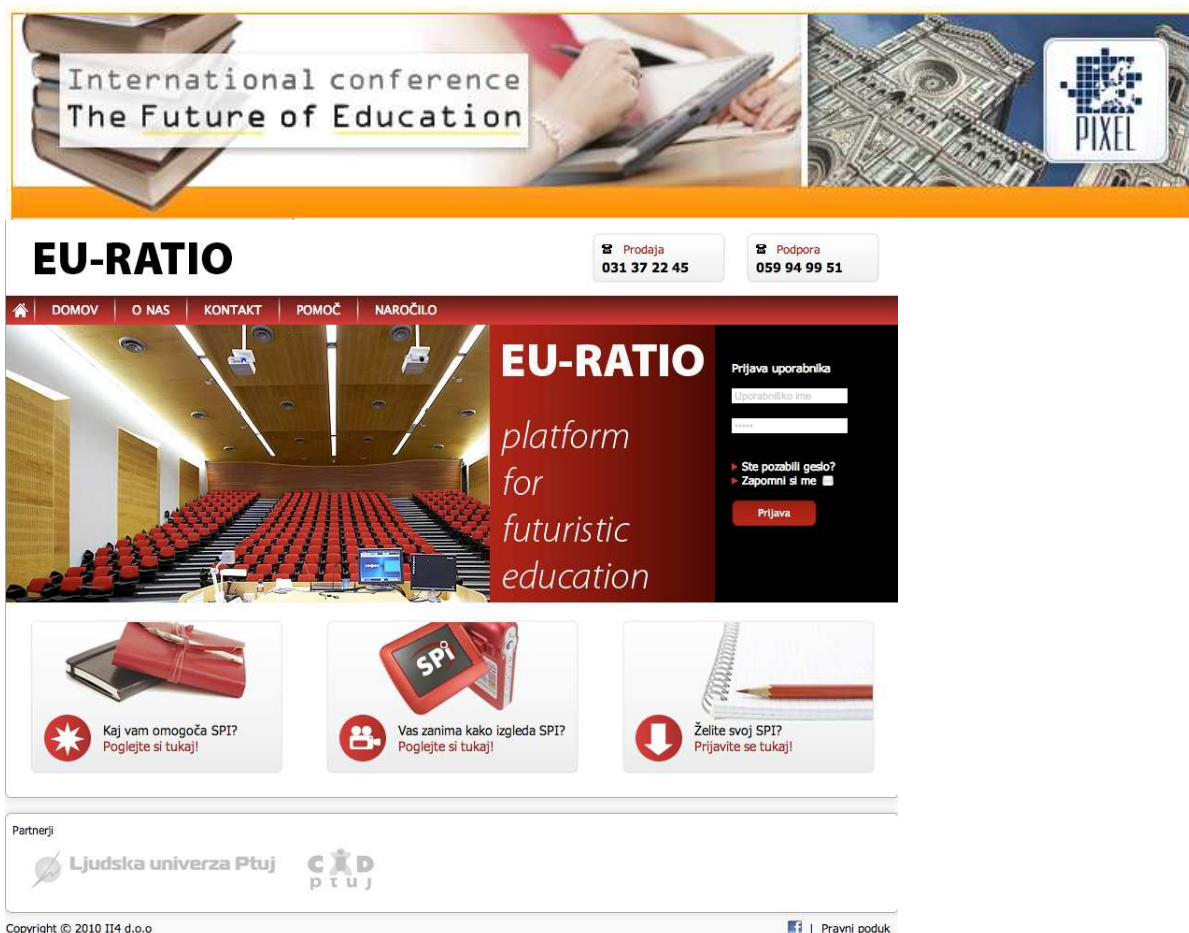
Figure 1.Entry Point of EU-RATIO platform

Importance of such a learning platform basically derives from coverage of three areas:

1. Lectures with virtual classrooms,
2. Exercises, quizzes or non-formal testing of knowledge and
3. Formal system of validation of obtained knowledge implemented by the certified institutions.
4. Following requirements should be met:

1.) *Keep it simple!* - platform must remain sufficiently transparent and simple.

2.) *What you see is what you need!* - At any given time, platform must be able to provide users with everything they need.

3.) *Stop the setup!* - Since platform users are not all ICT experts, it is necessary to minimize the need for ICT skills for the use and management of the system.

4.) *User-friendly!* - Application must be based on simplicity and quality of obtained knowledge.

5.) *Free for all!* - The usage needs to be free of charge.

2.1 Advantages of the EU-RATIO:

- 24 hour support for non-formal education with on-line classrooms, contents and methodologies that will enable better and more enjoyable learning, but also immediate feedback on reached knowledge,
- Possibility of formal verification and recognition of non-formal learning,
- Development of educational social networks,
- Participants sharing knowledge, experiences, questions and answers, they "virtually" socialize and thus upgrade their knowledge of ICT together with the knowledge they wish to obtain;
- Participants building and developing human contacts - the added value of this social networking is cooperation between people in European countries - participant could potentially be involved in any non-formal educational program in each EU-RATIO partner country.

3. Teacher of the Future – SilentMentor©

Advantages for the modern teachers are clear. When offered transparent application with possibilities of usage during entire professional period, we are offering completely new methods of educational thinking: not only is participation in educational platform beneficiary for him, it is beneficiary for potential participants and actual employers too. Think about possibilities if each of our teachers would have the opportunity to register as non-formal educator. Bridging professional methods with new didactical approaches in non-formal education would be most effective if those two would actually be complementary – if teachers of the future would have the ability and understanding of importance of supplementary ways of education (distant learning).

1. Constant in-service training and upgrading of competence.
2. International mobility and transfers of good practice.
3. Possibility of European networking.
4. Working over distance: study visit/assistantship at specific organization in duration of six months with volunteer work possibilities.
5. Working at stationary place: dissemination of good practice from the hosting organization and implementation into local educational networks.
6. Working in non-formal lifelong learning: quick implementation of already existing contents for the purposes of adult education.
7. SilentMentor© – after the mobility we get over-standard teacher, ICT trained, with prepared virtual classrooms and sophisticated didactical, on EU level comparable working methods – not only over distance (virtual classrooms, educational platform), but also in the classroom (interactive tables and videoconferencing).

»*Change we must believe in*,« to quote President Obama's slogan:

1. Teachers must turn towards participants, not towards theoretical knowledge.
2. Spin of direction – new methodical and didactical approach.
3. Participants learn for themselves - teachers obtain levels of specialization as mentors.
4. Raising self-esteem of both parties: participants advance much faster and with better feeling about gathered knowledge while teachers effectively combine praxis and theory and also raise their competences with participation at in-service training mobility.

4. Summary for 2020 - conclusion

Experts recently discussed EU Adult Learning Action Plan in Budapest. As Mr. Maria Joao Rodrigues, Special Advisor to the EU Presidencies and to the EU Commission said: "Adult learning is a central task for the 21st Century – vital to enabling people to make the most of their lives and jobs and therefore an essential element in the Union's EU2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth." [6]

The general purpose is simple: to unify the ICT system of non-formal education offer all across Europe - because talking about lifelong learning seems not very serious when the analysis show that this idea still didn't sprang to life in European minds, although is in Article 1.Decision No. 1720/2006/EC [7] emphasized as a priority.

Our platform enables the exchanging of innovative good practice from the cooperating countries through professional networking. We hope to set an example of developing innovative ICT contents: it enables new access to work with participants in non-formal types of learning; it raises the level of ICT literacy, encourages the participants to an active collaboration at the same time it enables to acquire competences.
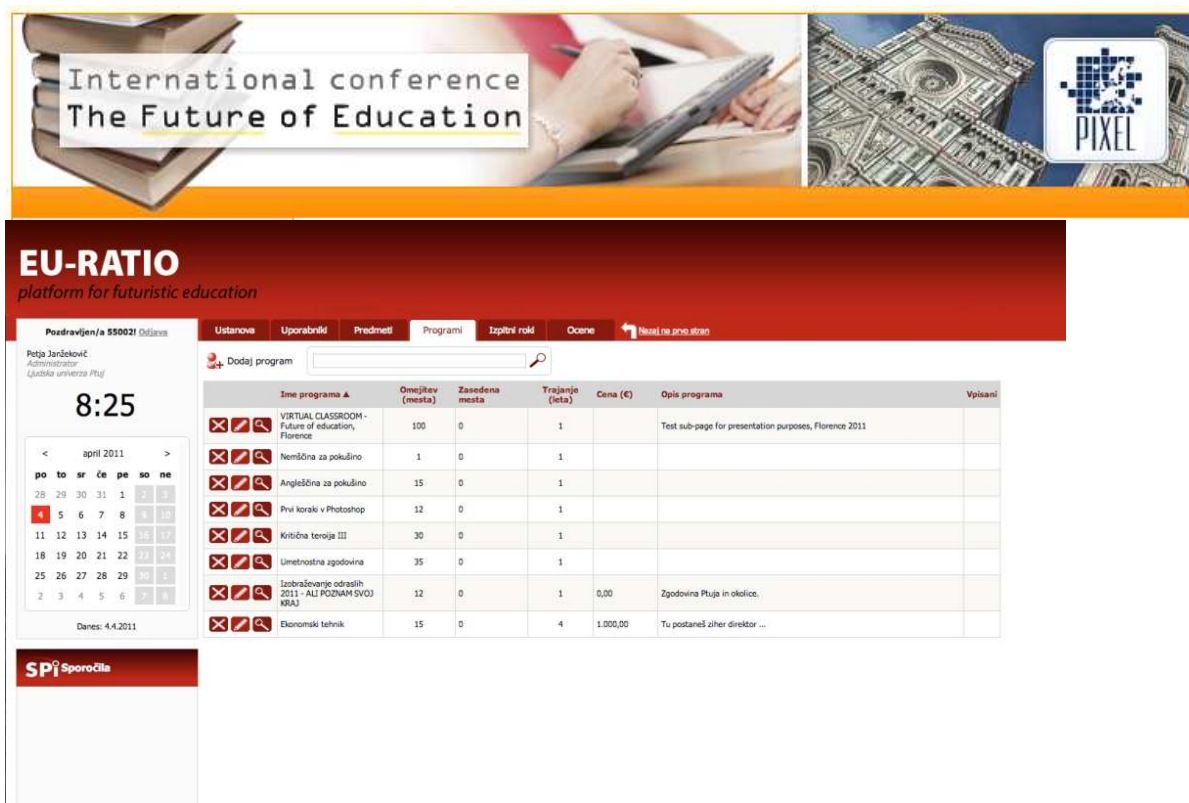
Figure 2.Screenshot of web-platform EU-RATIO

For us it is very important to introduce a realistic evaluating of non-formally acquired knowledge. Formally acquired knowledge is not enough at present and will be even less enough in the future, so EU should really put high efforts in solving this, although mainly technical, obstacle.

Web platforms that allow users participation in virtual classrooms over distance, at some level exist even today. But their common and therefore basic problem is that for the user they are completely unusable. Those few exceptions only confirm the rule. So it doesn't come as a surprise that those attempts represent more measures we must avoid than the steps we must take in the future, if we want to attract masses of participants. If average ICT user can find his ways around Google, Facebook and Gmail, those platforms should be our models.

When planning and organizing education over distance, this is typical, we completely forget about listed facts.

Essence of development of adult education therefore lies in development and implementation of non-formal educational programs, supporting development and rise of competences and knowledge of individual citizens for successful appearance on labor market and active citizenship.

- Implementation of non-formal educational programs for learning over distance with possibility of validation of acquired knowledge.
- Development and implementation of sustainable development programs to raise the general competence of the EU population:

  - education on topics of EU Development Goals,
  - innovation/creativity,
  - raising environmental awareness,
  - mobility.

- Implementation of programs that would allow acquisition of personal/professional competences (art, philosophy, religion).
- Educational platform as a social educational network for raising social skills, language skills, cultural awareness and encourage mobility.

Creating recommendations and discuss theoretical systems which would transform modern adult education, which is still in the shadow of traditional education and in many EU countries still not systematically placed as part of the national educational system (including Slovenia), seems like easier part of the task. But translated into practice it turns out to be extremely difficult, because it meets three problems, where the future of adult education fractures:

- Time flexibility: access anywhere, anytime (when and where I need it),
- Usability - the concrete results: validation of knowledge (exactly what I need),
- Free educational offer: common EU platform as an entry base for non-formal educational programs (LLP) - the expansion and implementation of new programs).

Daily practice confirms that adults definitely want to learn. Lifelong learning Centers in Slovenia have shown that the interest in adult learning (following the completion of formal education) depends almost exclusively on the above factors. Summoning all three – lifelong learning must be free of charge.

Maybe this is an ideal model for raising the general level of literacy of EU citizens, even more suitable than formal schools:

- rapid adaptation of educational services can respond to market needs much faster;
- knowledge of the local environment is giving them access to the needs of this environment;
- educational plans of the future will most certainly be based on the work within online classrooms and multimedia didactic tools, which is the essence of adult education in the 21st century;
- experience of drawing funds from various EU calls for continuous offer of free educational programs.

Those are guidelines for the future – no only for us, but for the EU as well.

7. Reference

[1] qSchool – ICT support for quality School: dissemination of good practice example, Study Visit 2009, CEDEFOP Catalogue Group Number 225, organizer Public University of Ptuj – Educational Centre for Adults.

[2] Considering the European Agenda about adult education and especially activities in lifelong learning process, we were attentive on these European concepts:

- *Compendiums 2007, 2008 and 2009 approved under Grundtvig Programme and database and all LLP Guides, provided on ec.europa.eu/llp –*

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/results_projects/documents/c09grun_en.pdf

- *Education and training in Europe: different systems, common goals for 2010 –*

http://www.esib.org/documents/external_documents/0206_DG-CULT_diverse-systems-shared-goals.pdf

- *Article 1. Decision no. 1720/2006/EC –*

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:327:0045:0068:en:PDF

- *Memorandum about Life-long learning –*

http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/MemorandumEng.pdf

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc58_en.htm

[4] www.cvzu-podravje.si

[5] http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/publications/uiestud28.shtml

[6] http://www.eaea.org/news.php?aid=17929&k=2088&d&utm_source=emailcampaign25&utm_medium=phpList&utm_content=HTMLemail&utm_campaign=EAEA+News

[7] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:327:0045:0068:en:PDF