



Emdel: a Model for Valorization of eLearning in a Knowledge Society

Edited by Ellen Gard



www.emdel.org

Final Report

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The activation of actions for exchanging and valorising learning materials leads to the result of enlarging the market of single products and consequently cutting marginal costs. At the same time, structuring and favouring of product exchange fosters the circulation of subjects drawn up in minor languages.

Beyond these remarks, we should consider the problem deriving from the lack of a European competence system and of methods for the recognition of credits and certifications. The certification of competences acquired through e-learning training courses and their recognition at European level will favour exchange of products.

Virtual mobility

Through virtual mobility we have wanted to test different ways to guarantee individuals' access to web based learning suppliers from different countries. This work hypothesis has the aim of:

- enlarging the number of users of single learning materials in the original version and language;
- answering vocational training needs - in the mother-tongue - of immigrants and of all those who want to train before moving to another country
- realising conditions of cooperation among web based learning suppliers in arranging accompanying services to help entering on line vocational training (information, registration, managing of blended learning, certification...)

The following writings give an account of the outcomes realized in pursuing these four tasks and provide real information and instruments to favour the development of trans-national cooperation in e-learning. The outcome achieved has been possible thanks to the steady support of Alice Copette and Elisabetta Degiampietro.

The concept of valorization

By Giovanni Bonaiuti

Nowadays the concept of valorization is widely shared by people working in the field of vocational training within the European Community. According to the European accepted meaning the concept of valorization can be described as the process of implementation and building on the achievements of the projects through their experimentation and exploitation in order to increase their value and impact. The dissemination and use of project outcomes make available their added value, optimize and strengthen their impact and integration both in their original systems and contexts and in others.

The valorization and dissemination process needs to start from the outcomes and not from the project general evaluation. The analysis of the outcomes achieved and the identification of the outcomes to be valorized is on a different level with regard to the assessment of the project considered as a complete and coherent number of resources directed to specific aims. In other words, the valorization process does not coincide with the evaluation process. As a matter of fact a product answering the project aims shows good quality from the evaluation point of view; nevertheless it can prove not to satisfy the requirements to be aimed at by the valorization strategy or not to possess the transferability characteristics which it requires. Outcomes, representing the object of valorization, comprise the project final and/or intermediate outputs. They can be both tangible - such as structured didactic material, analysis, research and studies, etc. - and intangible – as, for instance, in case of process innovations or methodologies – provided they are “suitable” for being transferred to other contexts thus maximising their intrinsic value. To be effective the valorization process requires the identification of project outcomes which, on the basis of defined criteria, present:

- *transferability* characteristics multiplying the intrinsic value
- *dissemination* possibilities through actions allowing experimentation and exploitation in new contexts, different from their original context
- capacity of *activating* improvement and implementation processes for the putting into effect of intervention policies

The valorization process can be realized both at *micro* level (promotion, experimentation, exploration and adaptation of outcomes to different contexts) and at *macro* level (that is at level of lifelong learning integrated education systems). The target is to accomplish complete and sustainable integration in local, regional, national and European systems and in education and training practices, also through conventional certification of qualifications.

The valorization proposal arises from the will to answer the education and training operators' growing demand for more innovative products and action models. The European Commission and Regions have been recently supporting innovation projects (under the Leonardo programme, ESF and other financial channels) which have produced interesting but underutilized outcomes¹. The valorization policy of best products and experiences begins with the ability to identify such products/ experiences as concrete operational instruments to optimize time and resources. Valorization intends therefore to realize mechanisms, services and procedures capable of favouring integration among European training operators as well as exchange of products and experiences both at local and international level. In this sense the valorization experience will help the new countries entering the European

¹ Cfr.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/leonardo/new/valorisation/doc_en.html

Union to acquire an effective methodology to share the current discussion on training and work systems. Valorization is part of the process leading to the creation of a knowledge society which could arouse development perspectives.

The idea of valorization within e-learning

Competition in the market of the globalization age is largely determined by knowledge management. Productive organisations ask their personnel for ability to face actively and efficaciously the continuous transformations dictated by innovation and international competition. Success lies in the prompt capacity of selection, transformation and use of crucial information within the operational and social context. Education and vocational training of “human capital” are, accordingly, the main resources on which it is opportune to act as to guarantee economic and social development (European Commission, 1996, p. 17). Information and communication technologies (ICT) represent on the other hand the most flexible and effective tool to accept this challenge. E-learning, which fully exploits ICT potentials by applying them to vocational training, represents the solution able to guarantee people’s full access to the knowledge-based economy. E-learning is one of the instruments which can be used to meet in an efficient and effective way the requirements of society (flexibility, competitiveness) and of individuals (competences, but also valorization, self-fulfilment, life quality). According to this perspective there are the conditions necessary to promote the idea of valorization hereby illustrated. Furthermore, telecom networks foster relations among people and systems allow visibility and diffusion of products and services and, through e-learning, promote the development of human capital.

Emdel project, getting into line with the Lisbon European Council of March 2000, considers e-learning a strategic objective for the development of a knowledge-based economy and, in the meantime, intends to exploit ICT benefits to favour greater integration among European Education and Training Systems. European bodies and enterprises working in the training field seem to suffer from the difficulties due to a market which is still uneven and characterized by language differences and cultural specificities. Technologies can offer in this sense tools to valorize, disseminate and make synergistic the results achieved. Emdel sets specific aims within e-learning. It moves from the need to share the experiences carried out by partners for the development of training multimedia online modules through the realization of actions of experience diffusion and exchange. Within the project actions, for example, interesting modalities have been tested for the development of an exchange policy. In the “**internal festival**”, after having examined mutual experiences and productions, each partner has selected the most interesting products and has then reached an agreement for their post-production and localization in his own language. Differences (also linguistic) among subjects have become, even though in an experimental way, a strong point for the development of

synergies capable of disseminating best practices. The exchange of products among partners has permitted to test the difficulties inherent in the process, beginning from selection, translation and technological adaptations, to conclude with legal issues linked to the intellectual property.

Emdel has tried to spread, in the logic of valorization, these outcomes even outside, proposing a model which exploits some potential of the present technologies. Within e-learning important answers to the problem of integration of systems have been drawn up and in particular important technological solutions for the inter-exchange of products have been developed. However, subjects engaged in network learning often do not have at their disposal either the informative channels necessary to know the respective experiences, or instruments for the identification of available products and solutions, so that they often have to re-device them even though they already exist. And this cannot obviously be accepted in the framework of production of training contents for e-learning.

A consolidated praxis in e-learning is to analytically organize knowledge to be proposed in training pathways. This practice allows to produce modules which are potentially arranged to be integrated and used more than once and in different contexts. Such logic fosters and encourages cooperation among subjects operating in the field of content production with the aim of networking and exchanging best practices. In general, among e-learning greater costs – moreover repetitive costs – are those due to the realization of original didactic material (multimedia, interactive, or only textual). The necessity of optimising the cost of interventions is at the basis of the international initiatives engaged in the development of on-line training standard. The main objective of these initiatives is to provide a system for the analytic description of learning materials – through “metadata” – aimed at their finding, re-use and exchange. The aims of projects like IMS, ADL and IEEE² are connected with the possibility of building a “market” for vocational training products (not exclusively on-line) able to guarantee their widest circulation and use. From the theorization of a market for learning materials (LO) – understood as elementary learning components (autonomous, independent, reusable and aggregated)³, we have typically moved to a courseware economy, wider content elements that, on the other side, enable their aggregation in complex training courses and their transferability in different contexts as well. A vocational training economy based on the circulation of those products assures the optimisation of resources and the valorization of best practices. The saving comes mainly from the possibility of reusing the same educational materials in different contexts and training courses, so as to allow the abatement of production and purchasing costs. All those features are of great importance for e-learning.

² <http://imsprojects.org>, <http://www.adlnet.org>, <http://ltsc.ieee.org>

³ IEEE fully defines LO: “any entity, digital or non-digital, that may be used for learning, education or training” (IEEE, 2003)

The exchange of vocational training products allows also the reciprocal enriching through the sharing of knowledge and practices and consequently the possibility for development of new products. This aspect leads to the raising of the quality level of contents and development methods, reducing costs and opening the possibility for the enjoyment of a larger and larger number of users.

The action promoted by Emdel project of an “on line open catalogue”- considered both as repository and as knowledge and fair place to exchange products - takes the step from here. Emdel catalogue develops the products proposed by partners through the logic of presentation and valorization of reciprocal experiences. As a consequence of the opening of the catalogue to the valorization and promotion needs of trans-national and European vocational training experiences, further products added. Therefore the Catalogue has the aim of collecting and organizing information data related to the courseware’s by any European subject interested in making visible, available and accessible his products. This aspect contributes to promote the development of a network for the circulation of ideas and best practices. Many are the subjects interested in accessing the Catalogue. People can look it up, as with a search engine, to find training courses they are interested in and, where possible, they can enter and attend courses. Sector operators, such as bodies, vocational training agencies and content producers, may use the Catalogue to release their products and, at the same time, to find partners to start up specific cooperation and synergies. As a matter of fact, one of the main goals of Emdel project is to promote the exchange of materials – in the form of trade as well – among producers. This process enables valorization as direct diffusion of best practices, but also as promotion and development of partnership and cooperation among those bodies disposed to make use of their reciprocal experience.

Another chance offered by Emdel is the post-production and localization of products in different languages, realized through trade agreements among producers. In this case, the players of the process for transferring innovation are: the export body of the product to be transferred – that puts the courseware at beneficiaries’ disposal – and the beneficiary of the transfer that will combine it with his own vocational training actions. Emdel project realizes in this way the intermediation between supply and demand of vocational training, to realize the transfer of the product at European level. Finally, among all those interested in using the Catalogue, there are territorial public bodies, government agencies and stakeholders in general, that can use the Catalogue as an instrument for monitoring the development of the relationship network and for consequently promoting actions aimed at further valorising the best practices and models of e-learning, within different European countries.

How to perform valorization

Following EU indications for the fulfilment of procedures and instruments for promoting and guaranteeing transfer and circulation on large scale of best practices, Emdel project has organized its action starting from the reconnaissance, inside its partnership, of single activities. Since the beginning, the project has been directed to activate a European Tele-training Network for the development of synergies aiming at the valorization of reciprocal experiences. In this way Emdel answers the needs expressed by EU programmatic lines, through the identification of best practices and the creation of networks and means for the valorization and transfer of the best vocational training methods into new contexts. The EU specifies some actions to realize the process of valorization; among these:

- the choice and the analysis of contents and their transferability;
- the adaptation and localization of experiences and products to potential users' culture, context and needs;
- the application of experiences and materials produced to different sectors and fields;
- the integration of vocational training practices at regional, national and European and/or sectorial level.

The project during these years has been trying to answer difficulties that in most cases prevented the potential vocational training demand from turning into active users through the creation of a European network that could set the necessary synergies and scale economies. One of the core problems outlined is that of the high production and implementation costs of products to support vocational training experiences. The problem of costs is frequently at the basis of the lag of activation of many systems, especially as regards small realities. The European Tele-training System proposed by Emdel promotes the starting up of a process of cooperation at production and organization level for distance learning services aiming at cost reduction, harmonization of local systems and fast growth of training supply. With regard to the latter, a specific attention of the project is represented by the possibility of promoting systems that use an integrated and harmonized model for the qualitative evaluation of training experiences. In fact the Catalogue provides, for each experience in, a homogeneous system of indicators for the evaluation of the training system and of the methodologies of circulation of didactic materials. This system is built through the attribution of a value judgment on structured schemes by different subjects involved in the process of selection and use of products. The production and sharing of the software for the assessment of customer satisfaction and of the quality of Catalogue products make the transfer of new products into different socio-cultural contexts easier. On the basis of this element also, Emdel network wishes to promote the process of dissemination of best practices and the development of models of cooperation within production and organization of distance learning services.

Emdel project answers these needs promoting through its internet web site (<http://www.emdel.org>), of which the Catalogue is an integral part, the research of products and of the most innovative and exemplary experiences, as well as their circulation in national and international contexts. The web site allows communication, exchange of information and diffusion of results gradually achieved in the processes for transferring projects in different contexts.

Therefore Emdel proposes to realize minutely the Community valorization purposes through the transfer from and to different structures (public and private VET centres, enterprises, schools and universities) of innovative contents and products. Valorization actions realized by Emdel will enable distance learning systems to interact with different targets. Besides, amongst EU purposes there is the development of scale economies for the definition of tele-training products and services, because of the increase of e-learning users. Those who will mainly benefit are apprentices, dropping out people, young and grown-up people attending post-secondary vocational training, and elderly people. These users, usually considered marginal, could take the greater advantage from e-learning for the development of knowledge and for the solution of problems of everyday life.

Partners and partnership

By Edi Fanti and Mara Del Sette

Who were the partners

During the planning phase the attention was focussed on e-learning at European level, taking into account the present (at that time - 2001) and future Europe. According to this purpose the network of partners for the Emdel project was created looking at countries already part of the EU and others, from Eastern Europe, close to become members of it in a short time (May 2004).

The interesting element is the co-operative action, realised through the project, which was anticipatory of the integration process for the Eastern countries and has been concluded with their access in the UE.

The Emdel Consortium had foreseen ten Institutions/Organisations, belonging to nine different nations:

- Tuscany Region - Project Promoter, Italy
- Gdansk University of Technology - Distance Education Centre, Poland
- Kaunas University of Technology - Kaunas Regional Distance Education Study Centre, Lithuania