



Leonardo Da Vinci Transfer of Innovation Project

I TUBE

Innovation Transfer in continuous education of an integrated model Based on personalization and digital portfolio.

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EX ANTE VALIDATION REPORT

 Learning Community

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Foreword

The present document intends to report, summarize and analyse the results of the focus group held in each Partner Country in order to collect feedbacks on the proposed integrated model of digital portfolio and learning personalization approach.

Focus group sessions are indeed part of an ex-ante validation plan aimed at:

- involve target group in the transferring process from the very beginning of the project;
- highlight weakness and strength points of the provided integrated design, both before and after the experimentation;
- to prepare and introduce the further experimental phase;
- to perfect the integrated design and the adaptation of the model.

During the focus group the ITUBE approach has been presented and the integrated design has been introduced to a mixed group of trainers and experts. Meanings and designed method for the matching of the technological instance of the digital portfolio and the methodological issue of personalization has been presented and discussed according to the designed focus group guide. At the end of the focus group, partners distributed a questionnaire or organized a plenary debate session in order to discuss the done work, the weakness and the strength points of the methodology and proposed practice. Reports of the focus group sessions have been reported by each partner, collected, then have been analysed and compared. Focus group reports have been examined through a comparative analysis, highlighting common and divergent aspects.

Guidelines for transferring originate also from the results of focus groups and of the ex-ante validation report's results.

Following the results of this analysis are shown.

Abstract

The document presents the:

- recurring common observations raised up from the different Countries and contexts;

- divergent aspects surfaced from each focus group sessions;
- conclusions that summarizes the core issues and results of the ex-ante validation report, that will be used in order to perfect the integrated design before the transferring phase.

The focus group reports provided by each partner are attached to the document (Annex 1).

Common feedbacks by focus group

The comparison of the focus group reports, realised in the Partners Countries, highlights different cultural backgrounds and different levels of confidence about the adoption of digital portfolio and learning personalization approach. This condition makes more relevant the envisaged common elements emerging from the comparison of the focus group reports.

The following elements recur:

- agreement with the definition of personalization proposed by ITUBE: *“an approach aiming to guarantee each student to reach an excellent learning level, by developing his potentialities and his faculties, each one achieving his own objectives. Personalization is intended as the valorization of the potential that each person can express. The valorization process is the result of a full sharing, collaborative and not competitive interaction, of an empathic participation to all the development processes. It requires the acquisition of strategic competences such as self-evaluation, self-orientation, managing of negative emotions, collaborative attitude, and the whole competences that express a full self-awareness and self-responsibility. This definition allows to clarify the specificity of the personalization concept and to overcome the linguistic ambiguity that tends to identify, in the pedagogic reflection, this term as a synonym of individualization. Personalization is the whole group of strategies that allow valorizing the biography, the intelligences, the sensibilities and competences (also emotional ones) that characterizes each person as a person, in order to reach a form of cognitive excellence, developing capabilities and talents. The outcomes of the learning process, even if finalized to the acquisition of professional competences, will be different for each person, and they cannot be foreseen from the beginning of the learning process. Not the kind of competences will influence the outcomes, but the different degree of ability in the use of competences themselves. To personalize learning experience means to co-set the learning challenges with the learner; to co-design with the learner the learning pathway to afford the settled learning challenges; co-evaluates the learning process with the learner.*

- willingness to apply the proposed integrated design (matching the personalization approach defined in the @ model of self evaluation for the building of the digital portfolio) in the work experiences;
- recognition of the digital portfolio as an innovative tool that allow showing all the competences acquired in formal, not formal and informal contexts possessed by each person, in a better way in respect to a traditional CV.

These are the positive observations detected by the focus group reports that highlight the innovation proposed by the I-TUBE Project.

But also some useful recurrent and common criticisms must be remarked:

- the definitions, adopted in the ITUBE integrated design and approach, appear too long and too technical to be understood for someone who has not a strong background on Educational sciences;
- the use of technological tools could be a barrier for the adult learners that, generally, are not confident with the ICT;
- the @ process of self evaluation, proposed as a learning personalization pathway, is a lengthy and time expensive process.

Specific characteristics by focus group

In this paragraph the specific characteristics of each focus group are presented, in order to highlight the different backgrounds of the Partners' Countries and to show how these different starting points had produced different observations with reference to the opinions about:

- the model and the Project;
- the proposed methodology and practice.

APRICOT – (EN)

Individuals were interested in the I Tube project and the two underlying earlier projects (TIPEIL and PAEPEDA). In general terms members felt that there was 'nothing particularly new' about the concepts of digital portfolios, self awareness or personalised learning. Self assessment, self evaluation and appraisal processes were seen to be well embedded in the UK. In a similar way the @ process had some similarities to approaches that had been seen in Canada over a decade ago. On the positive side it was considered that '*self evaluation is not something that we do well*' and that the primary target client group were a particularly difficult client group. It was also felt that the 'peer group' aspects of the @ process may add value to the more individual aspects of self-awareness and reflection which were part of the UK NVQ approach. There was a commonly held view that the description of the I Tube project in the documentation could be improved. In addition the @ process was difficult to understand from the document and it was felt that a video of this working in practice might help. It was also difficult for members to see from the documentation how the elements of the project were connected. The importance of in-formal and non-formal learning was recognised as was the need to capture the wider skills that individuals possessed: '*These sorts of competences and attributes are what employers are looking for*'. In the UK it was considered that the Public Sector was particularly keen to capture the value of in-formal learning. The @ process was discussed as a vehicle for self-awareness and valorising in-formal and non-formal learning. The approach was judged to be somewhat time-consuming and academic in character. The potential added value of the @ process was therefore seen to

be in 'leveraging the power of the group' to inform individual awareness and to validate individual opinions. There was potential for this to be a useful peer mentoring approach and part of normal continuing professional development.

SOLCO – (IT)

In general it can be noted that participants were familiar with the tool of the Digital Portfolio. But they didn't know the personalization model. They showed a lot of interest when the Digital Portfolios was shown. Most of them did not know the @ process and had many questions about how they could apply this process with the target of disadvantaged people with whom they normally work. The interesting thing was that they wanted to try to apply this process and wanted to see each other again to talk of this model and exchange views and opinions. The participants agree with the definition of personalization given in ITUBE document. Some participants also gave their own definition of personalization and they want to test this model on themselves and on the groups they work with. Some participants think that the term personalization means a path that is different from person to person and it is made on the particularities and needs of each person, paying attention to previous experiences and history of each person. They think that the role of the innovative professionalism of personalizer results form a mix of several figures: coach, orientator and counselor. Participants think that self-evaluation is a complex process but can give some very interesting results especially if you work in very large groups. The autonomy that leaves this model is appreciated because it allows everyone to create a path in a conscious way. The digital portfolio is defined as an innovative tool that can highlight personal skills (non-formal and informal) of the disadvantaged people but also of students and workers. Through the use of computers, videos, records and certifications it is possible to show your skills and competencies better than a simple CV. The participants agree that the Digital Portfolio is a tool that can be used for any target group. Thanks to the Digital Portfolio people are not judged only by appearance and by degrees but are evaluated on the best way. Participants think that the Digital Portfolio should be used in school and not just for the disadvantaged. To apply the Digital Portfolio is often difficult because adult trainers are not confident with the use of computer and in

general of digital ICT. To ensure that the target group can use the digital portfolio it is important that it is made simple and understandable for everyone, even for people who is not familiar with the computer.

ILE (DE)

ILE did not use the results acquired during the first meeting in May 2011. At this time, ILE and local partners did not find a consistent group of five people – due to the fact that unemployed or teachers in VET in a precarious situation were not found within ILE environment. In particular, in the county of Berlin teachers at VET schools (Berufs- und Fachoberschulen) do not generally suffer from insecurity of employment. In order to gather the pilot group and organize the following meetings we proposed a cooperation with counsellors of the local representation (Jobcenter Schöneberg-Tempelhof) of the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) which for the moment is in the state of progress. Our public relations activity is spread out to different counsellors and we wait for answer. ILE therefore carried out a second meeting with trainers and coaches from grassroots networks. Those trainers prepare people for education towards a profession. All participants agreed with the definition from a pedagogical viewpoint. The term personalization is largely defined and that aspect should be stressed more clearly. Participants are interested in the aspect of diversity. They believe that the definition of personalization ought to be more accentuated to the question of discrimination and how to overcome it. All trainers wondered if the approach of personalization is not already used in their work without having this label. However, they believed that this approach can largely bring some new insights in those existing discussion. Participants wondered how to use the proposed approach. They all saw problems getting people to acquire self-awareness through an educational guidance as proposed. The process of self evaluation has many advantages, as well as some disadvantages that should be overcome in order to optimise that process. The disadvantages are listed below:

- it is a lengthy process;
- intercultural conflicts can even lengthen the process;
- focus often on minor issues in order not to create tension;

- lack of comparative data;
- lack of more objective external assessor.

All forms presented in e-portfolio are seen by the participants as useful means in order to stress additional information of the personal qualities and skills of each user. The individualization approach and the self-evaluation is perceived most probably beyond the common information in CVs collecting only formally learned skills which are referring to outdated evaluation models. So, the e-portfolio contributes in the development of user's self-consciousness. Most of the participants did not see any possibility to use the approach within the nearer future for their target group. They believe that the interactive communication part of the approach could be very useful for younger people who already use new communication technologies and interactive platforms. The distinction of non-formal and informal learning and the importance to mention its value was supported by all participants. But they also mentioned that this is not such a new thing to them.

NAVREME BOHEME – (CZ)

We distributed I-TUBE presentations to the selected target group to let them prepare for the focus group in advance as requested, but we received almost immediate negative feedbacks from most of the participants. But - they did not argue against participation itself, they simply argue that described methods of integrated design are not usable for them. Afterwards, we decided to participate at the Conference SCO 2011 held in Brno (CZ) from 22nd till 23rd June 2011. The main topic of the conference was actually "ePortfolio". We therefore prepared the poster, introduced the project during poster session and invited participants (5) to take part of the focus group on the spot. This scenario gave less time to the participants to read through the presentation but we were able to target wider range of different people. Participants fully understand and agree with the definition and – at the practical level – linked this term basically with the facultative (optionally selected) courses and training; but they pointed out that "personalization is the whole group of strategies" (as it is mentioned in the definition/text) and it *can* be based on both self-navigation or self-assessment and externally directed and pre-structured process. Participants tried to use this approach as a method/tool,

means tried to find how to apply and use it with the target group. They identified one aspect as both kind of strength and weakness: necessity to use it on a long-term basis. It cannot be used for a short period of time only; if you do not have sufficient time to apply this approach, you can only introduce it to the target group and let them decide if, how and what for they will use it. Proposed self-evaluation process was seen as a “complex” – complicated, succession of steps and its logic hard to remember, but also not easy to find inconsistency and challenge this model. Participants mentioned simple group-based methods how to activate and work with participants and asked “*what and how big is the added value of such a long process?*”. They prefer shorter and simpler methods but on the other hand they agree that it could probably be worth trying. Participants as a group slightly stuck at the definition of digital portfolio. There are several (also open source) platforms that are labelled “digital portfolios” – they know about them, tried some demo or install it and try. No one actually experienced such an interface/platform – neither for longer time nor under the supervision/couching. But most of them know the Czech “pilot” digital portfolio project “Digitální portfolio jako princip vytváření sítí a pracovních týmů v oblasti výzkumu a vývoje” [Digital portfolio as a principal for creation of networks and working groups in the field of research and development]. On the other hand, some of them are convinced that (so called) “online social networks” as Facebook, LinkedIn and discussion forums can be recognized as a digital portfolios. There could be the problem with the level of information literacy, competencies and maybe also access to the internet in some cases. Digital portfolio can be a useful tool to show non-formal and informal learning – but it needs to be presented as a something more than “online CV”. And when we use broad definition of digital portfolio (covering also online social networks), community aspect can be in this case extremely useful.

SPI – (PT)

The main interest of the participants concerned the “@” process, especially how they could use it on their experiences. They all complained that the document was too long and too specific for someone who hasn’t a strong background on educational sciences, and that the description “@” process was too complex to be well understood. Two of the trainers suggested that the process should give more time to individual work at home as they think that’s the best way to increase the self-awareness of each learner. The “@” process is used in more technical contexts – for example at a university class – it’s essential that every student must have the same starting point, i.e. the same knowledge about a specific subject. There was also a very good response to the difference between personalization and individualization of learning.

When asked about the viability of the project and its usability on the Portuguese market, they raised some doubts, as they think that:

- It’s a time-consuming process requiring a lot of time to the learners;
- The target group (trainers 45+) is very conservative, and used to do things the way they learnt;
- The majority of people in Portugal (even teachers and trainers) is very suspicious about educational theories.

Conclusions

The reported results of Focus group sessions, realised in each partner Country, allow remarking some key issues in order to perfect and adapt the integrated design and the model to be transferred. The guidelines for transferring take into account the results of this ex-ante validation.

Different start-points, cultural backgrounds and culture rise up from the different reports about the knowledge and the application of learning personalization strategies and of digital portfolio.

These differences strengthen the results of focus group, since it is possible to highlight common elements even if the reference scenarios are divergent.

By the analysis of the report of focus group, delivered by each partner, indeed are surfaced many interesting and useful ideas for the perfection and effective enacting of the I TUBE solution.

Interest and appreciation for the Project idea and for the proposed approach appear in each report. Strength points can be summarized as follows:

- Proposed approach encourages and supports the reflection and the practice of self-assessment. The general feeling is that this practice is known but not so diffusely applied or well done;
- Collective dimension, 'leveraging the power of the group', represents an interesting element of the proposed approach;
- The proposed approach offers a concrete solution in order to valorise and show competences acquired in non formal and informal contexts, to capture learning outcomes;
- Participants realise that they in some way apply learning personalization strategies, even if they adopted different definitions, but they had not before the opportunity to reflect on it, distinguishing it also from the learning individualization.

The main critic that the participants of the focus group have done is the complexity and the length of the process. Nevertheless the remarks about the proposed approach, that is recurrently defined too academic and time expensive, everybody demonstrate interest and will to apply the digital portfolio following the @ process.

The alighted weakness, individuated by participants, include important indications that will permit the improvement of the model in order to make more applicable the model: guidelines must be in a not technical language, must present examples, practical advice, to visualize the steps and merging process of groups and try to simplify or reduce the steps planned in the @ process.

It appears necessary to make clear:

- which is the best way to involve participants in the process;
- how external inputs and knowledge can benefit the learners decisions and learning (elements of reality, real market information, misconception, contents, etc.);
- what the learners will gain from entering in the process;
- how to verify the real impact of the ITUBE approach;
- how to simplify the proposed personalized pathway (through the application of the @ pathway);
- how to reduce the duration of the @ pathway making it effective also for small groups.

Another important observation of participants refers to the confidence of adult trainers and workers with the use of the ICT. They indeed maintain that the construction of digital portfolio requires a medium technological competence and it could be a barrier for the adult learner that usually haven't a friendly use of the ICT and they are resistant to the new knowledge.

This observation actually remarks the target's needs already envisaged in the project design.

This second observation suggests to accurately plan the technical implementation of the digital portfolio and to foresee a methodological support to its building.

On the other side the raised doubts and reflections show that the self-evaluation practice and its application through methodological and technological tools it is not so still diffused and consolidated.

Some resistance to change and puzzled reactions in someway reveal that ITUBE is really proposing something new, particularly for the envisaged target group.

The remarks also highlight the opportunity to better merge the two previous starting models, perfecting the integrated model:

- over crossing the definitions given in PEAPEDA and TIPEIL;
- adopting new definitions of ITUBE;
- making better evident the new unified and coherent process leading to the building of the digital portfolio through the original, collective and personalized pathway of suggested @ process.

Finally the remark about the “time expensive” observation deserves a reflection. Of course the process will be adapted and simplified to the aim of the experimental phase. Nevertheless the engaging proposed approach, as the investment and the effort required to target group involved in the experimentation, are justified by the specific aim and needs envisaged by the project. Of course an executive and didactic approach should have been more rapid, but not really effective or fit with the real aim of ITUBE: the Project indeed is born with the aim to support the empowerment of trainers competences, through the application of personalization strategies in the vocational and continuous training courses addressed to the adult workers at risk of exclusion from the Labor Market. The ITUBE integrated model, based on the digital portfolio and a personalization approach, is placed in this direction because it allows the raising up of competences owned by the adult workers, also in a self-entrepreneurship and outplacement view. The ITUBE Project indeed goes in the direction for the definition of a good practice, at European level, on the theme of occupability and re-occupability of adult citizen, starting from the trainers' category.