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Online Multi-language Vocational Training Course on Children's Ergonomics for Product Designers - eChild

Final Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

The aim of the eChild project has been to create, implement and set the basis for a pan-European exploitation of a new online VET course in children ergonomics applied to product development addresses to design professionals.

Previous studies carried out by members of the consortium revealed that despite the information sources and tools available companies recognise the need for continuous innovation strategies, in practice, the design teams of European SMEs find difficult to introduce ergonomic innovations beyond safety and fashion because they lack of specific training and skills on how to design ergonomically performing products for children. Most SMEs are limited to each company's know-how and to the individual experience of designers, mainly gained over trial-and-error experiences of previous product releases.

Therefore, the overall aim of this project has been the development of the contents and the implementation of an online course that assures the European designers an education and training in ergonomics applied to children enabling them to match the product innovation needs of the children's products industries.

The targeted groups of the project, besides their focus in children's fashion sector, have been the professionals making part of design teams in companies, self-employed design professionals providing services to children's product industry, professionals providing external design consultancy services to children's product industries, students following product development/design training which are interested or want to direct their career towards the children's product industry and unemployed persons which want to direct their career towards the children's product industry.

The project has been lead by Children's Fashion Europe, CFE, European association that gathers children's fashion and childcare products manufacturers, technological institutes, universities and national/regional associations. The remaining partners are; ASPERI, Spanish Association of Children's Products Manufacturers, NovaChild, which is the representative of French children's fashion companies in the project, BAATPE, the Bulgarian Association of Apparel and Textile Producers and Exporters, The Finnish Association of Designers, Ornamo, IBV, which is a research centre dedicated to scientific research, technological development, technical advice and training activities related to applied biomechanics; The Swedish TelePedagogic Knowledge Centre, STPKC,; IEP as a service provider company in the field of local and regional development. This consortium completes a number of basic requirements for proper development of the project. Geographically covers the complete Eurozone with the four national associations (ORNAMO, ASEPRI, NovaChild, BAATPE) and with the European scope of CFE. These associations both represent the European companies gathering active design professionals and the self-employed designers. IBV facilitates access to background knowledge of the course and has the capability of developing training materials. STPKC has the experience in setting up on-line VET learning courses. The exploitation capabilities of the final course will be integrated in the partners' training portfolio and all partners are experienced in European wide dissemination of results. Academic and industrial levels of recognition will be provided by each of the representatives in the sector and the belonging of IBV, IEP and STPKC to educational networks will help the introduction of e-Child course in formal education.

The methodology that the project has followed is, in first setting, an educational framework and, afterwards, implementing and validating an online course. These main lines have been constantly accompanied by enhancement activities that helped in managing and in disseminating the project results. More information about the project and about the course can be followed by visiting the project's website: www.e-child.euproject.org

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1. Project Objectives

The main objective of the project has been to develop the contents and to implement an online course that assures the European designers an education and training in ergonomics applied to children enabling them to match the product innovation needs of the children's products industries. To reach this purpose, other individual objectives were stated:

First of all gathering the training requirements of the targeted groups; different designers dedicated to the children's fashion industry.

Secondly the definition of the Vocational Education Training curriculum and the qualification recognition system for the course according to the specific improvements in skills and competences detected.

Consequently, according to the learning objectives and to the structure defined by the VET curriculum, the consortium developed the course materials, which is another of the objectives.

The next objective was the implementation of the multi-language e-learning tool and contents and, finally, the consortium conducted a pilot course and validation of the e-learning tool and contents with real end users, which was the latest of the individual objectives to be implemented.

Potential users have been included in the European children's fashion designers, but within this range we may find more specific groups; professionals in companies, self-employed design professionals, professionals providing external design consultancy services, students and unemployed persons with interests in the industry.

The objective of the project has been to reach all this targeted groups by both the Industrial Associations and the Professional Associations in the consortium.

The targeted groups have been involved from the beginning of the project in many of the activities, gathering their needs throughout questionnaires, communicating their concerns directly to the consortium in conducted workshops and they receive information on the progress of the results of the project by dissemination activities.

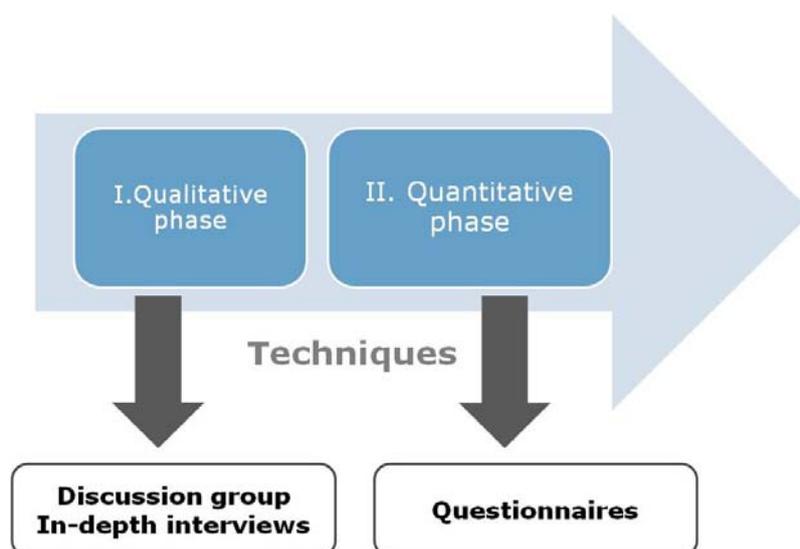
2. Project Approach

The eChild Project activities, target and outcomes have been directly addressed to improve a high quality new product in Lifelong Learning, with a highly innovative dimension in contents and systems. Different approaches have been used to ensure the highest quality content, proper functioning and sustainability of the project during the planned work and after-completion.

Detection of needs

An **integrative approach** was planned to tackle the detection of needs for generating the contents of the course. Potential end-users of the course as well as expert in on-line training were contacted to gather their opinion and expectancies about the future course.

We followed a two-step methodology, as shown in the figure below, to obtain relevant information regarding users’ needs, gaps, expectancies and preferences. This methodology intends to identify and defines the knowledge areas of the course based in a first qualitative analysis and in a second quantitative analysis.



Initially, a group of experts in children products participating in the Design4Children project defined a list of initial topics for the course based on their experience.

Qualitative analysis

We gathered qualitative information from potential users of the course by means of focus groups and interviews. A focus group is a group conversation in a permissive and non-directive atmosphere designed to obtain information about a topic. A small group of persons, generally between six and eight, participate guided by an expert moderator in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. The purpose is to know what participants think, how they feel or what they know about the specific issue. This qualitative technique is particularly appropriate when the study tries to describe the people’s perception about a situation, program, event, or like in this case, a course.

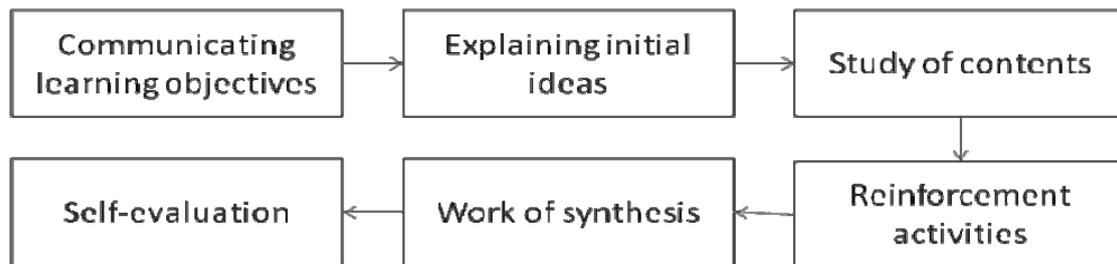
Several individual interviews were developed to complete the information obtained from the focus group. An in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique that allows person-to-person discussion. It can lead to increased insight into people’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior on important issues. This type of interview is often unstructured and therefore permits the interviewer to encourage an informant (respondent) to talk at length about the topic of interest. The in-depth interview uses a flexible interview approach. It aims to ask questions to explain the reasons underlying a problem or practice in a target group. This technique is used to gather ideas, to gather information, and to develop materials.

Quantitative analysis

The survey technique is one of the techniques used in social research to gather information from a representative sample of the population on both objective aspects (sociodemographic data, facts, habits, behavior, personal characteristics, etc.) and subjective aspects (opinions, attitudes, values, etc.). Results obtained from the focus group and the interviews were used to generate a questionnaire including closed questions and all aspects of interest previously detected. Results coming from the descriptive analysis of the questionnaires were used to take decisions about the design of the course.

Generation of the contents and implementation into the e-learning platform

To generate the contents of the course, the first step was the definition of the formative modules, they are the different thematic areas of the course. Each module involves the learning sequence showed in the figure below.



We defined five modules according to the needs detected and the most relevant aspects to be considered for designing comfortable and functional children products.

The course has been generated with the aim of facilitating the comprehension and understanding of the information by the future participants. For doing this, different resources have been used:

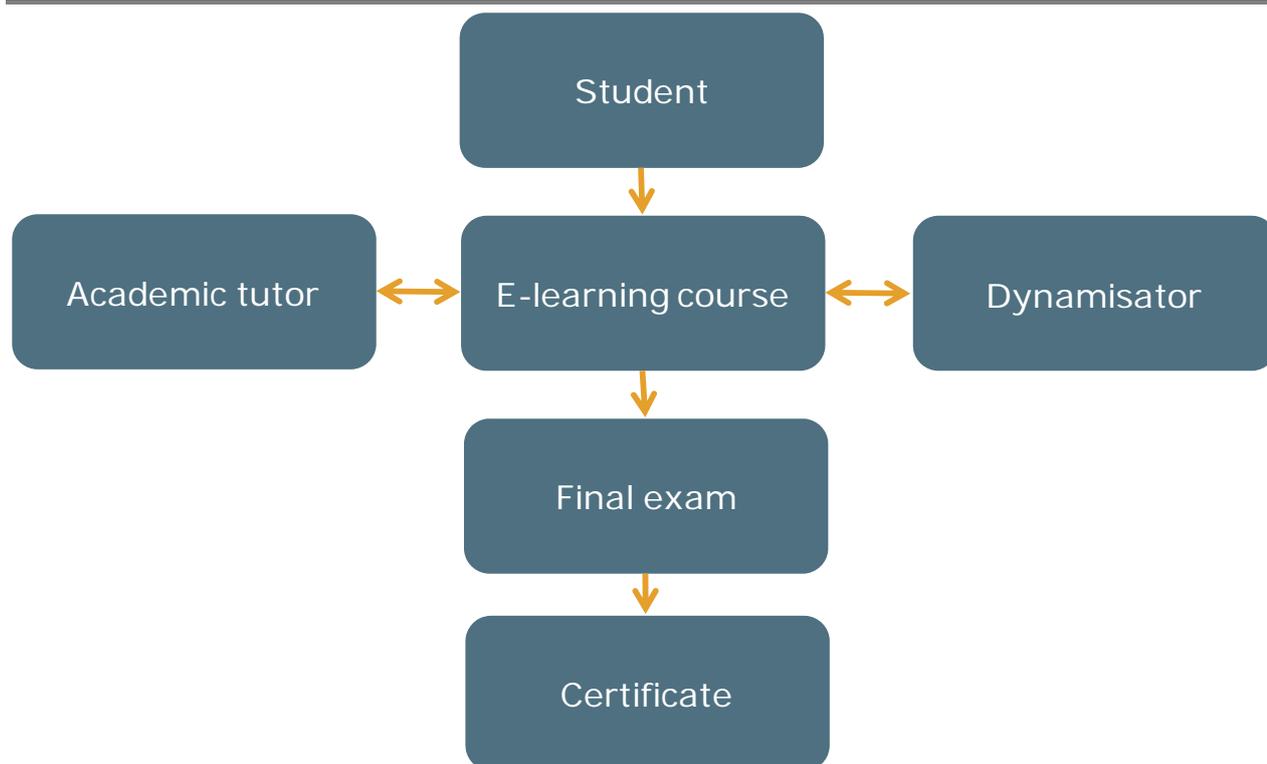
- Visual itemization
- Extension of concepts
- Bibliographic citations
- Examples
- Highlighted ideas

Experts in different areas such as biomechanics, children development and product design participated in the generation of the contents. Each module of the course includes different sessions, each working session involves around 2-3 hours of study to be completed.

Contents of the course were translated into seven different languages to reach a wide market within Europe: English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Finish and Bulgarian. All these contents were uploaded into the e-learning platform, generating seven different courses. Besides, roles for the exploitation of the course were defined:

- **Academic tutor:** an expert in the contents who helps students in understanding the contents, solving doubts, clarifying concepts and correcting activities and evaluations.
- **Facilitator:** a person that monitors the students, managing their enrolment, following the accomplishment of the schedule, encouraging them to participate in the forums, to develop the activities, keeping a constant contact with students during the development of the course.

The process of development of the course was defined according to the figure below. After performing the e-learning course, the student has to pass a final exam in order to obtain the Certificate of Completion of the course.



Validation and improvement

The validation of the course was planned as a real case with professionals in the field of children products development. The validation developed had different objectives:

- To get direct feedback from the sectors the course is addressed about the contents included into the course.
- To detect aspects to be improved, regarding technical contents, graphical design, aesthetic appealing and level of comprehension.
- To get Feedback module by module as well as whole assessment to differentiate the improvements to be made.
- To simulate a real call of the course to check the information channels, protocols established and roles defined for the future exploitation of the course.
- To implement the improvements defined to get a final validated course

47 European professionals in the field of children's product design participated in the validation of the E-Child course and provided feedback. They were representative of the three sectors included into the course: clothing, footwear and childcare products. They received a Certificate, indicating the completion of the course.

The results allowed defining different actions addressed to improve the course. The course obtained good assessment in all countries participating in the validation. Recommendations provided were implemented during the project and contents were improved following these recommendations.

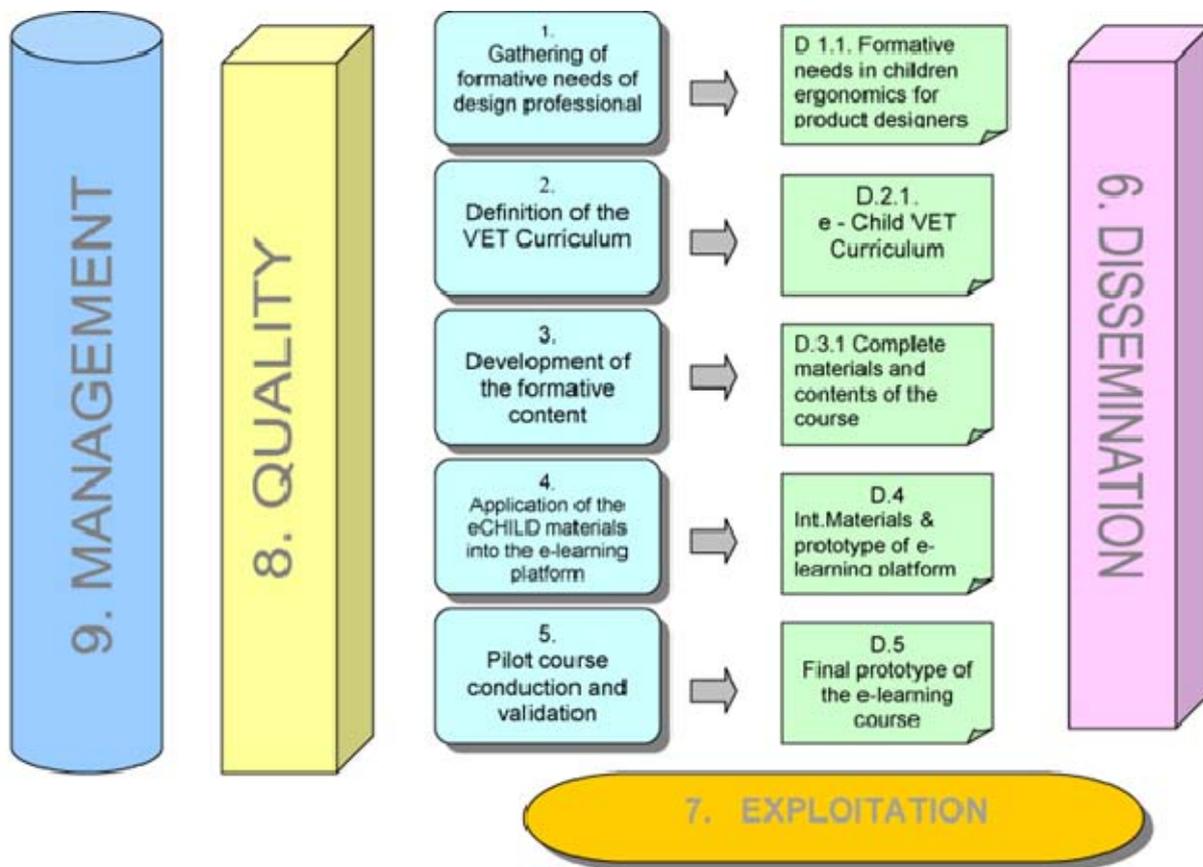
Enhancement activities

The project's strengths were also characterized by the pursuit of excellence in operations carried out in the project. That was provided by a system for **evaluating the quality of work**, accompanied by quality questionnaires which consortium members filled periodically.

For proper **dissemination** and sustainability of the results upon completion of the project there were produced detailed dissemination and exploitation strategies. The dissemination activities include the projects logo and the website, as well as leaflets for direct dissemination in sector events as well as newsletter to inform the interested stakeholders and workshops. These tools were used by the project members among events where they were in contact with the interested stakeholders. The exploitation strategy has been discussed during the whole project and has been agreed between the members of the consortium to assure the sustainability of project results and to reach the stated objective of reaching European fashion designers and help them improve their knowledge.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

During the life of the project, the consortium has been following rigorously the time table and schedule prefixed in the application form of the project. Work Packages and corresponding Deliverables were distributed as follows:



WORK PACKAGE	Months	Leader
WP1. Gathering of vocational training requirements	1-6	IBV
WP2. Definition of the VET curriculum	6-8	STPKC
WP3. Development of the training materials	8-16	IBV
WP4. Set up of the multi-language e-learning platform	13-18	STPKC
WP5. Pilot courses: conduction, assessment and redesign	19-24	CFE
WP6. Dissemination actions	1-24	ORNAM O
WP7. Exploitation activities	13-24	ASEPRI
WP8. Quality plan	1-24	IEP
WP9. Project Management	1-24	CFE

This is the description of the work packages developed during the project and the corresponding outcomes and results:

WP1. Gathering of the formative needs of design professionals

The main objective of the work done during the first six months was the detection of formative needs related to children ergonomics from the target users of the e-Child course, including into this

category European professionals working in children's products industries, namely clothing, textiles, footwear and other children carriage products such as pushchairs, cradles or car seats.

The responsible for this WP was the Spanish partner IBV. Twenty-eight professionals participated in focus groups and in-depth interviews to define and characterize their training needs regarding product design. Ninety-four professionals from eleven different European countries provided information through on-line surveys.

Results:

Results obtained from the development of this work package are included into deliverable *D1.1 Formative needs in children ergonomics for product designers*. Main obtained results are:

- Current available knowledge
- Formative needs
- Aspects of interest and demanded sources of information
- Level of interest in the proposed thematic contents
- Conditions and requirements for the on-line course

WP2. Definition of the VET curriculum

The objective of this work package was defining the VET curriculum of the e-Child course considering the results obtained in the previous work-package, the available knowledge and sources of information and the learning and educational model to be used and implemented for the course.

The Swedish partner STPKC was the leader of this Work Package. After gathering the information, an analysis of the data was done in order to create a VET curriculum that meets the end user's needs, covering the demanded skills and competencies regarding ergonomic criteria applied to the design of children products.

Results:

Results obtained from the development of this work package are included into deliverable *D2.1 VET curriculum*. This document includes:

- (1) A definition of the content and structure of the course, that is the curriculum of the E-child course
- (2) A specification of the core parameters in the learning services to be developed, also called the 'training model' or 'competence development model'

The general program structure has six major blocks combining competences in childcare and child development and child clothing and wares design. The structure is previewed to hold seminars apart from online course teaching.

WP3. Development of the training materials

Considering the results obtained in the two first Work Packages, WP3 developed the materials of the course that meet the formative needs of the European design professionals in the children's products field. This Work Package was led by IBV in cooperation with STPKC, as both are the responsible for the two first workpackages. The contents of the course were generated by IBV, including theoretical and practical information. The structure of the course and the associated learning model was supervised by STPKC to accomplish the designer competencies resulting from the development of work package 2.

Results:

Results obtained from the development of this work package are included into deliverable *D3.1 Complete materials and contents of the course*. The course is structured in the following way:

MODULE 0: SCOPE OF THE COURSE

MODULE 1. Evolutionary development

Session 1. Theoretical approach to evolutionary development

Session 2. Evolutionary development in each age group

MODULE 2. Parents and children needs

Session 1. Introduction to consumption and needs in the children sector

Session 2. Requirements in the childcare sector

Session 3. Requirements in the clothing sector

Session 4. Requirements in the footwear sector

MODULE 3. Anthropometry

Session 1. Introduction to children anthropometry

Session 2. Anthropometric dimensions and databases

MODULE 4. Functional requirements of children products

Session 1. Design criteria for childcare products

Session 2. Design criteria for clothing

Session 3. Design criteria for footwear

MODULE 5. User Centred Design

Session 1. Introduction to the User Centred Design

Session 2. Detection of users needs

Session 3. Analyzing and Designing Solutions

Session 4. Produce, Maintain, Recycle, Prescribe, Communicate and Market

The document also contains the Guides for trainers and trainees regarding the development of the modules and completion of the course.

WP4. Application of the eChild materials into the e-learning platform

The objective was to transform the materials developed in WP3 into a working prototype of the e-learning course in the 7 languages defined (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Finnish and Bulgarian).

The different tasks performed were the configuration of the e-learning platform, the translation to the national languages and to upload of the contents to the e-learning platform and creation of the eChild course

Results:

Results obtained are reflected in the deliverables D4.1 to D4.5 with the translation of the course to all the languages aforementioned. The course materials, in all the languages, was implemented in the platform in a first version to test it.

WP5. Pilot course conduction and validation

The main objective of conducting a pilot course was to test and analyse the performance achieved with the new e-learning course and propose improvements to maximize its adequacy to satisfy the needs detected in the design professionals of children's products.

The course was conducted in five national and one international scenarios, including Spain, in Spanish, France, In French, Bulgaria, in Bulgarian, Finland, in Finnish, and international, in English, Italian and German.

The performance of the work package was divided in three phases, the course preparation, the course development and the result analysis.

Each of the members of the consortium informed about the pilot course by their means, as well as using the normal communication system of the project. We obtained an important response from the stakeholders, which high interest in the contents of the course.

The project members were all involved and served as interlocutors with the participants of the course, solving technical and content issues that might arise.

The participants of the course had to fill in questionnaires which gave us feedback about different aspects of the course which were later compiled and revised, to improve the final version of the course. The participants received a certificate of participation.

Results:

Results obtained from the validation of the course are included into deliverable *D5.1 Pilot test report*. This document includes:

- Opinion and assessment of the course by potential users
- Detection of aspect to be improved, regarding technical contents, graphical design, aesthetic appealing and level of comprehension
- Test of the information channels, protocols established and roles defined for the future exploitation of the course

The implementation of the resulting modifications generated a improved E-Child course, included into deliverable *D5.2 Final prototype of the e-learning course*.

WP6. Dissemination of the eChild course

The objective of the Dissemination Plan was to identify and organize the activities to be performed in order to promote the commercial exploitation of the project's results and the widest dissemination of knowledge from the project.

The Finnish Association Ornamo is the leader of the activities which main purpose is to raise awareness of the project in order to make e-Child a successful and sustainable project. This is being carried out from the beginning of the project by using various communication materials, such as a web site, newsletters and leaflets but also by face to face information at conferences, workshops and events. The information will also meet the general public through media coverage.

All members of the consortium are contributing to the dissemination by participating and giving presentations at conferences, publishing papers and similar activities.

Results:

Several activities have been done preceded by a Dissemination Plan.

- An eChild logo was created and it is being included in the all communications with the Leonardo official logo.
- Creation of the public website with a private access for partners to the internal platform.
- Creation of leaflets of the projects to disseminate.
- Creation of newsletter in order to communicate to interested stakeholders.
- Dissemination and communication activities during fairs, exhibitions and workshops.

Worth mentioning the two workshops conducted so far, one in Cholet (France) organized by Nova Child in which the project was presented to the local press and other interested SMEs and another one in Helsinki (Finland), organized by Ornamo, and in which the members of the consortium could exchange views with designers interested in the project results.

WP7. Exploitation Activities

Exploitation activities help to sustain the project results once it is concluded. Its current importance is the need to ensure the correct implementation of the project results efficiently in the market so it reaches the targeted audience.

ASEPRI is leading this Work Package, which began with a stakeholder register to be used in the dissemination activities and the pilot implementation. The consortium signed an agreement on how to develop the exploitation strategy and to deal with the IPR of the results.

Results:

The main result of this work package was the approval and signature of an IPR agreement. This way the eChild course will assure its commercialization in the market, based in the exploitation strategy.

WP8. Quality plan

The objective was to provide a sound framework to assure the quality and adequacy to objectives set of the project outcomes through both internal and external evaluations as a continuous process along the entire project.

The responsible of this Work Package was IEP, and the tasks done were based on internal and external evaluations to assure the correct development of the project.

One of the tasks is the conduction a periodic internal evaluations with questionnaires to the partners in order to determine their feelings about the progress of the project. The other one is an external peer review done to assure the excellence in the completion of the deliverables.

Results:

Evaluation and monitoring of the project and its main deliverables, by internal and external reviews.

WP9. Project management

The objective of this work package was to assure an adequate deployment of project activities and the achievement of objectives set within the timescale and resources planned.

The responsible of this work package is Children's Fashion Europe, and with the collaboration of IEP has produced deliverables that contribute to the correct functioning of the project; the steering committee regular meetings, the financial reporting and the Mid Report.

The progress of the project results is reflected in the Newsletters and in the project webpage, where everybody interested can contact the project responsible; www.e-child.euproject.org/

Project Outcome:

The main result of the project is the Online course.

The course is developed in on-line mode and consists of 60 hours and includes theoretical and practical content, issuing an accreditation after its conclusion.

The languages in which the course is available are; English, Spanish, French, Bulgarian, Finnish, German and Italian.

The commercial version will be available during 2014.

4. Partnerships

The ensemble of the consortium has resulted of extreme competence and efficiency.

The consortium is equilibrated and complete and formed by the following:

- Children's Fashion Europe, CFE, European association that gathers children's fashion and childcare products manufacturers, technological institutes, universities and national/regional associations. CFE is the coordinator of the project and leads WP9. CFE will assure the adequate deployment of the project.
- ASPERI, Spanish Association of Children's Products Manufacturers, gathers 200 companies who combine their efforts in cooperation in implementing the necessary measures and activities in order to promote the competitiveness of the Spanish sector as a whole; ASEPRI is the representative of Spanish children's products manufacturers and is the Exploitation Manager of the project.
- NovaChild, which is the representative of French children's fashion companies in the project, is a cluster of companies composed by 30 business leaders and sources of innovation in the world of children from 0 to 12 and collaborates with 20 schools and research partners and many qualified people from all sectors related to childhood.
- BAATPE, the Bulgarian Association of Apparel and Textile Producers and Exporters which is a national voluntary association of companies in the field of textiles and clothing , created to defend and represent the interests of Bulgarian manufacturers of clothing and textiles in the country and beyond. BAATPE will be the representative of Bulgarian children wear companies in the project and the main route-to-end-users in Eastern Europe.
- The Finnish Association of Designers, Ornamo, is the national central organization of designers with almost 1.800 members, gathering self-employed designers, agencies, design studios and design consultancy companies. Ornamo is the Dissemination Manager and coordinator of dissemination activities.
- IBV, is a research centre dedicated to scientific research, technological development, technical advice and training activities related to applied biomechanics, sited in Valencia, Spain. IBV is the content developer of the project and leads WP3. IBV has defined and prepared the methodology for the gathering of training needs due to their experience and knowledge in users' needs elicitation.
- The Swedish TelePedagogic Knowledge Centre, STPKC, is a recognized 'knowledge broker' organization in the areas of telematics, multimedia, eLearning and eCommerce fro Sweden. STPKC is the pedagogic expert of the project and has leaded the definition of the VET curriculum of the course. STPKC will also supervise pilot courses' conduction.
- IEP is a service provider company in the field of local and regional development, specialised in the promotion and implementation of innovation as a factor in competitiveness. IEP is the Quality Manager of the project.

All consortium members have helped to add value to the project because of their experience in previous projects and their ongoing relationship with industry players. The consortium is as well enriched by the geographical coverage of the partners; Northern , Southern Western and Eastern Europe which provides which provides high capacity of approach to the potential users and interested stakeholders.

5. Plans for the Future

The great achievement of the project is that the partners have ensured its continuation in time agreeing about its possible exploitation. At all times it was considered a priority that the work performed should be able to reach all those people interested in further developing their knowledge in design for children.

The most important agreements done to be carried out after the project are:

- a. The eChild course will be hosted by IBV, in their servers at the Polytechnic University of Valencia (UPV).
- b. UPV will provide the recognition for the students completing the eChild course.
- c. The associations will provide the tutors for the course.

The course is prepared to be exploited in seven different languages.

6. Contribution to EU policies

As stated in the proposal, eCHILD promotes and gives awareness in the importance of cultural and specially, linguistic diversity within Europe, since the project and the training contents have been developed and validated in 7 different languages (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Finnish and Bulgarian) in order to achieve the maximum impact among target groups. The offer of the course in mother languages will increase user acceptance and maximise students' achievement.

eCHILD course has been implemented on a tele-pedagogic platform which accessibility is rated "AA" by the W3C (specialised organisation in certifying websites' accessibility, www.w3.org). Moreover, the training program and materials have been developed under accessibility criteria for motor, speech and auditory impaired persons. This way, eCHILD project encourages the integration and equal opportunities for persons with special needs.

Addressing Education and Training 2020 Work Programme, a skilled workforce is an essential asset to develop a competitive, sustainable and innovative economy in line with Europe 2020 goals. The anticipation to the skills needed is a fundamental part to raise productivity, competitiveness, economic grow and ultimately employment. eCHILD aims to train design professionals capable of providing European SMEs in children's product sectors with an enhanced capability for innovation and product differentiation based on the improvement of product functions.

eChild project complies perfectly with different European policies. It follows in fact the Lisbon Strategy/Bologna Process according to the following points:

- Improving competitiveness of SME's:

Prague Communiqué (2001): "Lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area. In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life".

(http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Prague_communicuTheta.pdf)

This has been one of the objectives of the project. A better knowledge of how designing more accurate products, the companies can better reach their customers and give benefits increasing the final sales.

- Promoting diversity of language in an Open Learning Environmet:

All the training materials are available in different languages, and all the dissemination and communication materials have been translated into the language of each partner's country. Also, the web course is addressed to people of different range of age and experience and the result will be an instrument easily achievable practically and economically, and affordable for all SMEs, employers and students.

- Improving digital competencies and learning systems:

Bergen Communiqué (2005) states "time is needed to optimise the impact of structural change on curricula and thus to ensure the introduction of the innovative teaching and learning processes that Europe needs."

([http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00 Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00_Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf)).

The tool generated by the project is a modern digital based course, accessible by all with a constant tutorial support in each country.

- Inter-institutional cooperation:

Bologna Declaration (1999) "Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research"

(<http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>).

eChild project would not be possible without the integration, in a balanced way, of companies associations of the sector, training higher Institutions with curricula in the sector and technical developers and consultants. All the members of the consortium, coming from various European countries (Spain, Finland, France, Bulgaria and Sweden) give also to the project an interesting transnational point of view of the industry and the sector.

- Analyze and implement the current requirements of business organizations:

Bologna Declaration (1999) "(...) higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge."

(<http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>).

This is exactly what project partners have been doing in eChild. Detect the increasing demand for proper design into children's products and seek the necessary learning tools. This will result in creating a standardized course which will reflect this knowledge and thus providing companies with the necessary skills to improve their competitiveness.

