



E-RURALNET
Network promoting e-learning for rural development
National workshop, Győr
7th September 2009
REPORT

On 7th September 2009 HAS held the national workshop according to the E-ruralnet workplan. The workshop, the first of a series of workshops in 11 European countries was titled *New learning methods for sustainable rural areas*. The workshop was organized and moderated by the *Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre for Regional Studies West Hungarian Research Institute* (HAS CRS WHRI) and has held in Győr (Hungary) at Hotel Fonte. The Hungarian organizer invited individuals and organisations of each three groups of stakeholders. The participants outnumbered the expectations, 35 Hungarian representatives took part in the workshop, a good number for a productive discussion on the theme.

The aim of the workshop was to promote networking, awareness raising and interaction among key stakeholders, such as training providers offering e-learning services; social partners representing SMEs and the workforce in rural areas; policy makers who have responsibilities for lifelong learning, ICT infrastructure and rural development; managers and animators of rural development; rural businesses; adults wishing to use e-learning for skills development or personal development.

The workshop consisted of 2 sessions for the theoretical and practical issues of the theme. The morning section started with greetings from the director of HAS CRS WHRI and the introduction of E-ruralnet project by the Hungarian project manager. Following the project introduction three representatives of stakeholders' group presented their experiences related to the topic. During the afternoon session the participants were divided into 3 workgroups according to three different topics.

László Kárpáti who represented the Institution for Training and Rural Development Consultancy of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development gave a presentation the impact of increasing IT on rural areas and agricultural sector in head of policy makers with title of *The role of knowledge transfer in agricultural and rural policy*. He highlighted the necessity of knowledge and its update as a key factor of these impacts. In horizontal tasks the training, education and advisory services and development of IT infrastructure in rural areas have great importance. He noted that in Hungary besides the traditional educational methods, increasing attention is paid to ICT-supported education and training, various combined trainings and several non formal training methods. In his opinion the services of community access points, the telecottages and e-Magyarország points could be the model points of IT infrastructure development in the future.

Gábor László Papócsi representative of the Agricultural Centre Non profit Ltd. Gave the *second presentation* about an ongoing project called Netrekész by a group of training



providers. It is a training program developed for farmers and consultants with an aim to direct farmers towards fully electronic based applications (applied for funds for develop agriculture and rural areas). At this moment the program affects already nearly 200 thousands individuals, although the application forms are very complicated even for the advisors of Hungarian Rural Office. So there is a contradiction between demands from government and skills, so the Netrekész project has been established to solve this “digital conflict.” And make processes easier. During the program a 4 day training is organized for the target groups who are the about 55 years old people living mainly in rural areas, economic disadvantaged regions and the 30–55 years old economic active and medium qualified class working in rural areas.

The *third presentation* hold by Piroska Szalai, Director of Lifelong Learning Hungary Foundation introduced a survey conducted in 2009 by the Lifelong Learning Hungary Foundation among women employee in rural areas. Its results confirmed the conclusions of Observatory project that the low motivation is one of the most important constraints not allowing the rural workforce to take advantage of ICT-enabled learning. According to the conducted questionnaires the majority of unemployed rural women didnt want to improve themselves in training, and put all their efforts in the unemployment agencies to find employment. There very few people that takes the next step and tries to improve their situation by learning new languages or takes part in ICT trainings in order to find a (better, well-paid) job.

During the afternoon the Hungarian participants and project partners discussed the topic further in three workgroups. Representatives of organisations of each of the three target groups were put in each group. The first *group* led by László Kárpáti agreed that to find the most appropriate delivery tools and methods of e-learning it is needed to segment the target rural inhabitants into three groups: old but active retired; 50s years old people and housewives. The discussants exchanged their idea on user-friendly tools which could keep somehow the feeling of personal contact (web camera, chat etc) as according to Hungarian experiences the rural people are a bit distrustful with e-administration; and prefer face to face contacts. The most important features of an e-learning curriculum are practicality, ease of use and ease of access. In Hungary organisations responsible for ICT issues are not clearly identified so there are many parallel but often opposite steps. Therefore the first step should be to determine the target groups, then to improve the accessibility of ICT and to develop special e-learning material and then to reach the potential targeted rural inhabitants. It is more and more necessary to involve the professions and civil sector in training and education.

The *second workgroup* led by Gábor László Papócsi identified typical immobility issues for rural people and how these can be improved with the development of e-learning in rural areas. A first needed step is to teach people how to learn by themselves without any external personal control and to ensure an appropriate learning environment, infrastructure, funding system of e-learning which could motivate rural people. Then the professional pre-test of knowledge is extremely important in order to best suit the training course and



programme. As the first workgroup agreed the low confidence against e-learning is a great problem which could be mitigated by high-level quality insurance system.

Piroska Szalai led the *third group* who tried to define the actual target groups of e-learning. The group determined the e-learners and focused to those who want but are not able to learn because of various (financial, infrastructural, emotional etc) reasons. The discussion was focused on demand for new alternative solutions which enforces the innovative e-learning products, methodologies and pedagogies. The idea of marketing of learning is one of the tools to motivate people who are not interested in e-learning. In Hungary the territorial integrated training centers (TISZK) should undertake more tasks to develop e-learning material. An e-learning curriculum needs to be prepared by training providers focusing on subjects increasing practicality than theoretical knowledge. The group highlighted the importance of personal meetings too.

At the end of the workshop the Hungarian coordinator Irén Szörényiné Kukorelli summarized the main findings and experiences of the first e-ruralnet national workshop. All participants agreed that such workshops should be organized more often.

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