Network promoting
e-learning for rural development

e-ruralnet

LLP Transversal Programme
Key Activity 3 ICT – Networks

WP7 – National Stakeholder Networks & Advisory Forum

NATIONAL WORKSHOP
Germany

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For more information on E-ruralnet visit the website www.e-ruralnet.eu

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eLearning in Rural Areas: Chances and Perspectives

Rostock, Germany
May 25th 2011

1. Abstract

Lifelong learning and the promotion of qualifications and competences are decisive framework conditions for the economic development and sustained competitive strength of enterprises. Globalisation, the increasing development of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), and technological and economic restructuring make new demands on the imparting of knowledge. To meet the demand for further training and education from various occupational groups and sections of the population, mainly in rural areas, an efficient educational offer must be ensured. Consequently, special importance is attached to e-learning, a new type of learning in the educational sector based on new ICTs. Because it individualises the learning process and is independent of time and place of learning, e-learning offers the opportunity to surmount spatial disparities, not only between countries, but also between urban and rural regions within each country.

The aim of the workshop was to identify opportunities for the successful use of e-learning, to discuss in this context the particular challenges for rural areas and to highlight the perspectives of e-learning. Supportive and obstructive factors, as well as specific potentials for e-learning in rural areas should be presented. At the same time, prospects for the future development and use of e-learning should be derived. The experience, information exchange and networking were other focuses of the workshop.

2. Agenda

13:00-13:10

Welcome by the responsible manager of the e-ruralnet project
Prof. Dr. Hans Kögl, University of Rostock

13:10-13:30

Presentation of the e-ruralnet project by Emel Abu Mugheisib, University of Rostock

13:30-14:00

Conditions and prospects of education in rural areas, Dr. Patrick Küpper - Institute of Rural Studies of the Johann Heinrich von Thünen Institute (vTI), Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries, Braunschweig

14:00-14:30

Growth opportunities in rural areas through the use of mobile Internet, Prof. Dr. Reza Asghari - Institute for e-Business GmbH Ostfalia at the University of Applied Sciences, Wolfenbüttel

14:30-15:00   Coffee-break

15:00-15:30

Virtual learning in rural areas, Dr. Christian Fiebig - vhs.Böblingen-Sindelfingen e.V. Böblingen

15:30-15:50

"Technology has to fit the culture" - rural areas and the concept of viral learning, Christian Lippmann - Structura, Berlin

15:50-16:10

„Die Landakademie" - in-service training for the agri-business, Jana Görbing – Deutscher Bauernverlag GmbH, Berlin

16:10-16:30

Digital content and e-learning offers in public libraries, Raik Writschan - Rostock City Library

16:30-16:50

Innovative e-learning in rural areas, Dr. Lutz Laschewski - Alcedo Social Research, Evaluation and Regional Development, Neustrelitz

16:50-17:00

Summary and outlook

3. Report

The national workshop was titled "eLearning in Rural Areas: Chances and Perspectives" and was organised by the University of Rostock. The workshop was held with four other workshops as a Pre-Conference Workshop within the scope of the eLearning Baltics 2011. This was a good opportunity to disseminate the e-ruralnet project and its outcomes to a broader public. The eLearning Baltics was organised by the Network E-LEARNING@MV, operating under the umbrella organisation IT-Initiative Mecklenburg- West Pomerania. 20 participants attended the national workshop, which took place on May 25th 2011. Altogether about 210 participants from 6 different countries participated at the eLBa conference, organized from 25th to 27th May 2011 in the Radisson Blu Hotel in Rostock.

Project Nr: 143418-LLP-12008-1-GR-KA3-KA3NW
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Key Activity 3, ICT of the European Union   Seite 4

The aim of the workshop was to identify opportunities for the successful use of e-learning, to discuss the particular challenges for rural areas and to highlight in this context the perspectives of e-learning. For the discussion of the opportunities and prospects of e-learning in rural areas, speakers were invited who approached the subject from different starting points and perspectives. First, from the scientific perspective, in which among others underlying and relevant facts were identified and presented to describe the initial situation and conditions in Germany. Additionally, results of a study were presented, indicating a win-win situation concerning the use of mobile applications in rural areas. But also, social and cultural aspects were discussed, which play an important role for the actual use of e-learning. As part of a more practical approach to the subject, the importance of virtual learning was emphasized and possibilities of virtual learning shown. Two further practical examples of e-learning providers also introduced their business concept. Besides the aim of exchange of experience and information, the networking was another focus of the workshop, which should be facilitated through the presentation of the e-ruralnet project and the first results of the project both at national and EU level.

The workshop opened with a welcome speech from the manager of the e-ruralnet project Prof. Dr. Hans Kögl of the University of Rostock who was later held for moderation.

The workshop continued with an introduction of the e-ruralnet project, particularly about the aims and objectives as well as project outcomes, by Emel Abu Mugheisib, researcher at the University of Rostock. Results of the survey of e-learning providers were presented, focusing on the profile of the organization and courses as well as the views of respondents and problems with access to e-learning in rural areas. The results of the survey were very interesting for the workshop participants.

The subsequent presentation by Dr. Patrick Küpper of the Johann Heinrich von Thünen Institute dealt with the conditions and prospects of education in rural areas. The focus here was on the discussion of problems with regard to demographic change, the existing economic conditions in different regions of Germany and especially the educational infrastructure including the issue of broadband infrastructure. As a result, the following challenges for e-learning were discussed and are summarized below:

- Demand for education by older people,

- Decrease of the labour force potential,

- Deficits of the educational infrastructure,

- Difficulties in overcoming space,

- Problem of the financial situation of public budgets,

- People as social beings.

The following presentation by Prof. Dr. Reza Asghari of the University of Applied Sciences Ostfalia was concerned with the growth opportunities in rural areas through the use of mobile internet. The results presented are based on a project study, which is based on a concept of strengthening the role of rural regions through integration of innovative broadband-based applications. In particular, four clusters m-Business, m-Government, m-farming and m-health were examined under special consideration of rural areas and have been discussed in the workshop. The results of the study showed among other things that:

- A simple integration of applications into the value added chain of the company is important,
- SMEs need support to identify and apply the potential contemporary,
- High opportunity cost of mobile applications when not in use in everyday business transactions, in particular in the handicraft by cost pressure.

After a coffee break, the second session of the workshop began with an online presentation in the virtual space via Adobe Connect meeting by Dr. Christian Fiebig, Director of the Adult Education Center Böblingen-Sindelfingen e.V. in Southern Germany with the topic of virtual learning in rural areas. Depending on the current situation, the potential impact of virtual learning environments for the development of rural areas were discussed. The current trends in the e-learning market were shown and hypotheses were raised for the future development of the education market. Virtual learning is viewed as an integral part of the culture of education that needs to gain in importance, particularly in rural areas.

The subsequent presentation by Mr. Christian Lippmannn, Director of Structura in Berlin focused on learning considering different cultures, economic and social conditions, and in this context the concept of "viral learning" was presented. "Viral" means, in connection with e-learning, an easy provision and dissemination without complex and complicated infrastructures, but it also means that e-learning should be

- Low priced & affordable
- Technically robust
- Easily handled
- Prepared and adapted in cooperation with the user
- In a modular design (the modules should be short: ≤10 minutes)
- Information on actual use and covering the actual needs of the participants.

Project Nr: 143418-LLP-12008-1-GR-KA3-KA3NW
With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme,
Key Activity 3, ICT of the European Union   Seite 6

The following presentation of Mrs. Jana Görbing from the German Bauernverlag in Berlin contained information about the business concept of the Landakademie, which offers specific educational services in the field of the agri-business and targets rural areas. The technologies of the Landakademie cover a broad spectrum of e-learning activities, providing e-learning, blended learning and mobile learning courses.

The presentation by Mr. Raik Writschan included the presentation of the city library in Rostock and its range of e-learning and digital content. In collaboration with the company Bitmedia (Graz), 100 online courses in the areas of languages, business administration, economics, IT and Microsoft Office applications have been offered by using the learning management system of SITOS. An extension of their courses on the platform is easily possible (SCORM formatted). Initial experiences after 12 weeks showed a high number of participants in e-learning courses and a great interest in using e-learning. In particular, language courses and IT courses (Microsoft Office applications) have been used. Important requirements for successful e-learning, so that e-learning is actually used, are its inclusion in the environment of the city library (including hotline facility), an intensive training of staff and good marketing. In conclusion, the future of the city library as an e-learning service provider has begun.

The final presentation by Dr. Lutz Laschewski from ALCEDO Social Research, Evaluation and Regional Development, included some findings of the e-ruralnet report "Innovative E-Learning in Rural Areas: A Review," which considered the European perspective with a focus on rural small businesses in rural areas. In this connection, e-learning was shown from a diffusion of innovation perspective, with following results that were discussed or commented on in the workshop:

Criteria	e-learning providers	ICT and Rural Policy
Access	Solutions for SMEs without access, non-users Targeting e-exclusion	Internet Access and i-literacy as policy objectives of rural development projects Diverse priorities in different rural areas
Learner Orientation	Needs assessment of target communities, tailoring e-learning to specifics needs of the professional communities, simplicity of tools, learner support, qualified trainers	In depth needs assessment, personal development strategy for trainers etc. as possible requirement of project funding.
Interactivity/Community	Tools to encourage interactivity and community development of user groups	Integration of e-learning component into rural development network projects (e.g. LEADER)
Micro-learning	Developing of micro-content suitable for work-place learning	Support of exemplary content development

Project Nr: 143418-LLP-12008-1-GR-KA3-KA3NW
With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme,
Key Activity 3, ICT of the European Union   Seite 7

Interoperability	Feasibility of technical solutions with ICT used in SMEs	Defining standards
Efficiency	Full cost modelling for providers AND users	Development and promotion of full cost calculation frameworks
Institutionalisation	Linking e-learning to existing communities of practice, integration/combination of e-learning Communities are also the entry points for newcomers/learners as change agents Strategies differ according to institutional context	Establishing of demonstration projects to exploit "networks effects" for the diffusion of knowledge about e-learning, Identification of possible change agents
Quality Management and Evaluation	Establishment of QM Systems and Evaluation	QMS as standard requirements of project funding

At the end of the workshop, a final discussion took place with a short summary of the results by project manager Prof. Dr. Hans Kögl. The opportunities and prospects of e-learning in rural areas are promising, but the requirements for the use of e-learning have to be fulfilled and optimized. An e-learning concept must be adapted to the learning environment and learning needs of the participants.

Presentations can be downloaded on the eLearning Baltics homepage under following link http://www.e-learning-baltics.de/382/.

Project Nr: 143418-LLP-12008-1-GR-KA3-KA3NW
With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme,
Key Activity 3, ICT of the European Union

Seite 8