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OIKODOMOS

a virtual campus to promote the study of dwelling in contemporary Europe

WORKPACKAGE **PR EA 2**
Experience from Pilot Studio Grenoble-Bratislava
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This document summarises the experience of the Pilot Studio carried out between the universities of Grenoble and Bratislava.

It provides an overview of the pilot studio and of its objectives, and reports on the evaluation of specific items of the studio, namely: Dates, Participants, Target groups, Contents, Actions-aims, Integration in the existing curricula, and Learning outcomes

1) Introduction

1.1) Concept of Virtual Design Studio VDS

The aim of the Virtual Campus OIKODOMOS Project is to allow partner universities, teachers and students, to participate in educational activities, integrated in a learning itinerary programme for architects and urban planners. Amongst these different activities composing a future join learning curriculum, the Design Studio proposes a teamwork based approach, which completes the personalised individual learning process. Studio activity is centred on the teamwork project, developed in cooperation with extra-academic and professional partners and supported by local authorities. The Virtual Design Studio propose to conceive the design of distant project elaborated simultaneously by students' teams and partners from other target audience groups located in different European participating regions. This organisation enhances the quality of collaborative group-work and makes synchronous interventions possible on the common digital workspace due to integrated ICT tools.

Virtual Design Studio could be incorporated in the existing learning programmes of partner universities, despite their heterogeneity. VDS Studio may integrate different types of groups, (OIKODOMOS project target users) because its adaptability to their different constraints of use.

1.2) Aims of Pilot Virtual Design Studio

In order to check the feasibility conditions and transposition of the Virtual Design Studio (VDS) into OIKODOMOS partners' learning programmes, University of Grenoble and University of Bratislava, who didn't participate in the previous programme HOUSING@21.EU, organised a test itinerary for the VDS. The activity of this pilot studio, which involved students from both universities (IUG and FA-STU) with French and Slovak practitioners, allowed the evaluation of requested compatibility with existing learning programme and test the ICT tool's asynchronous/synchronous communication protocols. The studio experienced the participation of extra-academic target groups on the supervision and students' project tutoring. Links with local authorities interested in this process have been established. A website dedicated to the collaborative group work permitted to test some specifications for adequate organisation and tools used by the future common Virtual Campus.

1.3) Activities of the Pilot Studio

Activities of the Pilot Studio have been organised as a „virtual" distant collaborative group work (February-April 2008), followed by a „real" on-site project workshop (May 2008). Two groups of French and Slovak students worked together on 3 selected sites confronted to the problematic of housing in urban development strategies in Bratislava metropolitan region and in cross-border development urban zone between Slovakia, Austria and Hungary.

The studio have been integrated in existing learning curricula in Grenoble (1st year of Master studies) and Bratislava (3rd year of Bachelor studies).

The choice of sites for studio projects and the definition of pertinent issues to be solved have been selected in coordination with Bratislava local authorities. A first videoconference between Grenoble and Bratislava in February 2008 presented each selected site and main orientations for project works.

During two months of studio work, students have been tutored by home university academics and discussed via regular videoconferences with teachers from partner's university. Two practitioners, architects and planners integrated the studio as external tutors.

Students collected information and data related to the selected case studies via Internet and file sharing, elaborated diagnosis and developed draft projects for each site. They uploaded information on a specific collaborative website created and located in Grenoble University Multimedia Platform server (http://webtek-02.upmf-grenoble.fr).

This site was conceived for storing complex technical data of the studied sites (maps, plans, photos, statistics, legal regulations, etc), as well as for the diverse annex documentations, thematic readings and references, accessible for students and tutors. The website integrated a virtual common workspace for file sharing, saving project components, group works and temporary results and project presentations. A series of videoconferences permitted to exchange information directly between groups in Grenoble and Bratislava.

In May 2008, students and teachers from IUG Grenoble organised a 10 days field trip to Bratislava in order to finalise virtual projects elaborated during two months on distant mode and confront them to site reality. They presented drafts of projects to Bratislava Municipality representatives, FA STU teachers and students. During one week students have been working together with their local colleagues to complete the project design and to make a final presentation by PowerPoint slideshows and poster exhibition. Later students exposed the same OIKODOMOS projects exhibition at IUG in Grenoble.

1.4) Links with other Workpackages

Pilot Virtual Design Studio activities and results has been constantly the source of information valuated and transmitted to other OIKODOMOS partners in the framework of the workpackage PROM. For example, students' projects on Housing in Urban development strategies for Bratislava have been presented in Slovakia and France, as well as on OIKODOMOS website and at different symposia and academic congresses.

A part of the pedagogic activity developed during Pilot Virtual Design Studio is integrated into "Joint Learning Curricula" (PREP 5) and "Implementation of Housing Design Studios" (PREA2) workpackages.

Experiences of the collaborative workspace website created for the Design studio, in addition with videoconferencing tests and evaluations of digital project data transfers will complete investigations in workpackage DISS 1 (ICT Communication Space).

2) Pilot virtual design studio evaluated items

Evaluated items:

1. Dates
2. Participants
3. Target groups
4. Contents
5. Actions-aims
6. Integration in the existing curricula
7. Learning outcomes

2.1) Dates
OIKODOMOS Pilot VDS was organised between January 2008 – May 2008: First part of the activity: „virtual" distant collaborative group work (February-April), followed by a „real" on-site project workshop (May).

Evaluation

Academic agendas coordination
The activity has to be more integrated into the teaching agenda of each participating university. The total duration of the exercise is limited by the legal semester. So, the overlapping schedule makes difficult the coordination of distant teamwork. For example Grenoble starts the spring semester in February and set the examination period in June. Bratislava's semester starts as well in February, but students begin with their records and exams earlier, in May. They had no time available enough to participate at the final presentations. Without a better coordination between European universities' academic agenda, the real collaborative work has to be compressed into shorter period, which will suit all partners participating at virtual campus. This can consequently shorten the time for complex distant project development. The examination period has to integrate a more flexible planning for common presentation sessions.

Continuity of OIKODOMOS workshops during academic year

The Bologna reform of higher education splits academic years into two distinct semesters. Students from IUG and FASTU, participating at the first common workshop (Ghent, 29.9.- 3.10.2008) programmed during the first semester will not continue this work at the second semester and second common workshop (Grenoble, 03/2009). They will have other subjects and pass exams, which will not harmonize with the OIKODOMOS virtual campus learning topics. For this reason, the idea of „project continuity" based on a workshop series „pre-design/ development / final stage" of the same project or topic has to be adapted to possible changes of studio designs, and different student's groups.
Common problem as well is the timing of the introductory workshop in the beginning of the academic year. This makes difficult to select students for the workshop, acknowledge them with its topic and assignment. The solution can be the postponing of the initial workshops a minimum two weeks after the beginning of the academic year of each participating partner, or starting the preparatory works with students at the end of previous semester.

2.2) Participants

Students:

38 students from IUG Grenoble, 1st year of Master Study, Course of Urban Planning & International Cooperation,
15 students from FA STU Bratislava, 3rd year of Bachelor Study, Course of Architecture and Urban Design

Professors:

IUG: Jan Tucny, Jacques Lacoste, Stéphane Sadoux,

FA STU: Ľubica Vítková, Viera Joklová, Igor Košco

Associated professional tutors:

JJ Faure, Architect, President of French Society of Town Planners SFU-Rhône-Alpes
Ph. Caparros, Charge de mission, New Town Isle d'Abeau
Two representatives from the Mayor Office Bratislava, during the on-site workshop.

Evaluation:

Students

It is difficult to draw different training levels together (Master 1st year for Grenoble, 3rd year Bachelor in Bratislava) since the teaching and assessment levels are not the same. For example, in Grenoble the studio work was central to the second semester's curricula, whereas in Bratislava it had to be included (due to FASTU subject structure) into second, "small' studio design, with less importance and design time as normal "big" studio design. Student availability and engagement that is required to work through cultural, language and training barriers was sometimes affected by this. Preliminary preparation carried out by teachers and tutors can allow a mixing of levels to be beneficial, but the condition to achieve it consists in developing complementarities, both for teaching/assessment and competences (architects / planners, locals / distant actors involved, master/bachelor).

A certain critical size should however not be gone over. For presence work, groups should not exceed 5 groups of 6 persons. The combination of teaching modules should be defined beforehand (see FASTU definitions of simulation studio, concept competition, concept application etc.) The Grenoble-Bratislava pilot workshop was a hybrid between concept competition and virtual class. A better definition of the type of exercise would have improved the management of the workshop and the coordination of different teams.

When operating in distance mode, it is possible to manage a greater number of participants, but the status of exercises, tasks and supervision of assignments is vital. The absence of a timeline tool in the workshop website was a handicap.

Teaching staff, professionals

The studio brought together academics and non academics. We suffered from the absence of a database which would include data or existing teaching reference, easily accessible in asynchronous mode. Academics had to supply additional content (reference and method related guidance, mini-seminars or thematic lectures) in a synchronous mode, directly during the workshop or at a distance, via videoconferencing. At the beginning, we suffered from the different engagement capacities by academics in the field of ICT for education and those in charge of teaching and tutoring students. In Bratislava, the involvement of ICT staff appears to have happened earlier than that of teachers. In Grenoble, the opposite is true. This problem will need to be taken into account in the future; it also explains the problems of adaptation of tools to teaching functionalities rather than a misconception of ICT teaching supports.

The association of non-academic participants has only really happened through live tutoring during workshops. The monitoring of student work, the provision of guidance and online assessment could not be implemented because of the lack of an adequate tool (timeline). Partners (professionals and local authorities) are still eager to take part in the project, demand remains high and will be relatively easy to fulfil in the future.

2.3) Target groups

Despite the short running time, the workshop was able to draw in professional and local authority representatives, in France and Slovakia.

Evaluation:

Groups of non-academic partners were able to be associated to the project, but their involvement remains incomplete. The interest in the project which was expressed during the meetings organised to promote OIKODOMOS and the Pilot project (see PROM) was possible to satisfy only through partial integration. Professional tutoring was used only during live workshops; elected members were present only during project presentation sessions (poster exhibitions, PowerPoint slideshows, radio interviews etc.) Distant online access functionalities and methods of asynchronous consultation still need to be developed. Videoconferences with professionals and elected members were not carried out due to inadequate tools.

2.4) Contents

With the collaboration of FA STU Bratislava and City Council of Bratislava three topics have been selected including three localities in Bratislava and nearby surroundings:

1. Inner City
    Localization - Pribinova, Mlynské Nivy, Bajkalská, Kosická, Zimny Prístav
    Development strategies at the former industrial sites of the city, nowadays in the enormous development stress of transformation to the new city perimeter. This sole assignment has been coherent on both sides – solved by French and Slovak students as well.
2. City Satellites
    Localization - Lamačská Brána – Devínska Nová Ves – Záhorská Bystrica
    New suburb development at the west outskirts of the Bratislava city.
3. Cross border Development
    Localization - Bratislava Petržalka – Kitsee
    Bratislava has a very specific location close to the borders of two other countries: Austria and Hungary. Since Slovakia joined the Schengen area, there are no more barriers to develop this strategic site between Bratislava and its Austrian and Hungarian borderlands.

Evaluation:

The selected sites were in line with university demand, since it offered both a strategic site that could be worked on at a distance using a cross disciplinary approach of housing (architecture and planning) and an opening on new European trends. A similar theme offered to students in Bratislava using the French context was not able to be implemented, due to time and availability constraints of students. This severely handicapped the collaboration between different groups. The approach based on complementarities between architects and planners was effective, but the reciprocal dimension of the way the site was approached diverged. Students in Bratislava have been in a way "middle persons" who helped with the site information, nevertheless were not stimulated by the project to actively and regularly take part in the distant work. It appears; that the balance of reciprocity should be better respected in future activities.

2.5) Activities / objectives

Students developed their projects for the distant sites selected in Bratislava by experimenting the following activities and skills:

- Interpreting requirements: housing issues in the development strategies of the three sites selected by Bratislava local council and FASTU.
- Using technical tools to collect and use complex data related to a distant site (Google Earth, Google Maps, databases etc.)
- Carrying out surveys, intervention strategies and concept and functional diagrams
- Suggesting the main visions of a project, taking the spatial, social, economic, environmental, architectural and urban dimensions of the site into account,

- Developing an ability to determine the main geographic constraints (site), the operational constraints (stakeholders and politicians) and regulation constraints (master plan, planning regulations) etc.
- Enriching basic concepts by referring to additional documents, references and similar projects
- Locating the housing requirements in the development programmes devised for the selected sites
- Formalising suggestions, and make them accessible for the targeted audience
- Experimenting communication tools at a distance, asynchronous and synchronous tools (videoconferencing, skype, EVO, web, other collaborative tools…), exchange with teachers and students from the partner team
- Practicing foreign languages and facing an intercultural and multiprofessional challenge
- Organising project group work, splitting and allocating tasks, managing time and resources

The field trip to Bratislava and the workshop on site allowed confrontation of the projects that have been developed at a distance, with the local context and following some amendments, to present them to local academics and professionals.

Activities have been translated into tasks and planned in the workshop programme. Subsequent assignments are defined and displayed on the workshop support website (http://webtek-02.upmf-grenoble.fr.).

Evaluation:

Activities and utilization of ICT tools

"Institutional videoconferences" worked fine and fulfilled their roles, namely fixing objectives and presenting partial results. However, we suffered from certain rigidities (constraints related to booking videoconferencing rooms, availability of technical staff, compatibility issues between systems etc.). Autonomous, interpersonal and small group communication using a personal webcam worked better, but the use of certain types of software were a problem (Skype is officially banned from French universities for security reasons). We are currently looking for alternative solutions to the products. IUG and FASTU are currently researching with regards to this question.

The specific website that supported the workshop was significantly "parasited" by the use of other ICT tools that students were more familiar with. Part of the exchanges between groups thus went through GoogleDocs rather than OIKODOMOS, through Gmail rather than through the OIKODOMOS forum. Students also exchanged data using USB keys rather than uploading their work on the OIKODOMOS site.

We were not really able to use the Housing 21 database in other way than for a demonstration and for use under supervision, due to access problems (site changed location) and to the fact that students were not able to use teacher logins. An unlocked version should be provided for people who participate in OIKODOMOS activities.

Group integration

Practicing foreign languages has been one of the main learning outcomes of this experience. English became an exchange language, which is an exception in the French academic context. This part of the pedagogic objectives of the Masters in housing, planning and international cooperation diploma delivered by IUG however appeared to have handicapped the integration of other target groups in the project. The exclusive use of English is a breach of French law (Toubon Law). Furthermore, it makes the implication of professionals, elected members, citizens and of some academics difficult. Multilanguage solutions should be provided if we see OIKODOMOS as a long term tool. This issue has not been visible on the Bratislava part, even if wider inclusion of public and elected members will certainly meet with difficulties in communication language.

With regards to the organisation, the differences in academic calendars between Grenoble and Bratislava have been a handicap for group integration: during exam periods, FASTU students weren't

able to take part in workshop sessions and presentations enough. This was one of the frustrations that students in Grenoble highlighted.

2.6) Integration in existing curricula

Evaluation IUG Grenoble:

Pilot Study workshop has been a part of the activities planned in the first year of the Master programme, which includes an international workshop. The second OIKODOMOS workshop (Grenoble, 03/2009) represents an enriched variation compared with the standard version of the workshop. The fact that it is programmed for the second semester (spring semester) means that it can be replicated in an improved version. Programming another common workshop (Bratislava 10/2009) in 1st semester would require integrating it in the master 2nd year programme. IUG will be unable to allow participation in OIKODOMOS in the first and second year of the master's degree without making major changes to the approved programme. An alternation system should be set up, or we should consider running one workshop as an option only for selected students.

Additional lectures and seminars, imported or exported into future workshops are currently being identified and negotiated with potential teachers. They can take the form of synchronous interventions (present or by videoconference), or auto training modules, recorded and made available for asynchronous use. The Housing 21 database, which is progressively transformed and enriched, can form the part of these training modules.

2.7) Learning outcomes

- Students and teachers work in multicultural environment
- Assignments have close connections with the requirements of practice
- Students have to present their works in foreign language (English) and to defend their opinions before mixed public (students, professors, representatives of the Mayors Office)
- Participants of Pilot Study have been obliged to exploit the tools of ICT to more extent than in usual design studio
- By including the foreign students and professors the Pilot studio has contributed to the wider European view of the solved issues as well as the different approaches, which has been the contribution to all participants
- Students experiment project management and workshop coordination skills