

In this Newsletter

- p. 1 Project news
- p. 4 Announcements
- p. 4 Bits and Pieces
- p. 4 Reminders

Welcome to our sixth newsletter of 2009 – which we are sending to an extended circle of researchers, academics and others interested in Virtual Campuses.

To subscribe to this monthly newsletter, please contact nikki.cortoos@atit.be.

Project news

Finalising the Lessons Learned

Project Partner, Ilse Op de Beeck from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven AVNet in Belgium is leading in this work and provides this summary for the June Newsletter.



Ilse Op de Beeck

Throughout May and June the Re.ViCa team has been busy formulating lessons learned from the research work done during the course of the project. The following article presents some of the key lessons and is based on the reports on Higher Education and Virtual Campus initiatives that were produced earlier. Twenty-one countries in Europe as well as eight non-European countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia and South Africa) were reviewed in the process.

A list of draft “lessons learned” was presented to the participants of the [International Advisory Committee](#) Meeting, June 2009 for their input. An adapted version based on their feedback will be included as a separate chapter in the forthcoming project handbook.

Key lessons learned:

- There is no common understanding about the term ‘Virtual Campus’ or even ‘Virtual University’ and no single accepted definition of the term exists. Different names are given to similar activities in different countries and in some countries it has even fallen out of use altogether or has never been really used.
- The line between what constitutes a ‘Virtual Campus’ and more traditional campus activities is becoming increasingly blurred as more and more universities offer varying degrees of blended learning opportunities for on and off campus students.
- Language is a key issue in the development of virtual campus initiatives within a country as it is, for example, important both in terms of being able to give access to a public outside the boundaries of a country and in relation to the number of possibilities for cooperation with other institutions and initiatives.
- HEIs operating on multi-campus basis and which are often (but not solely) to be found in large countries are more likely to adopt Virtual Campus/University type strategies than those located in a single location.
- While in developing countries one could say that virtual initiatives

have been a response to the rapidly rising number of students and the demand for more university places, in the developed world the declining number of students is also having an impact on the level of ‘Virtual Campus’ type activities.

- There has been an increase in the amount of collaboration being undertaken by universities in the area of digital provision of courses forming new alliances allowing for increased economies of scale.
- At the beginning of the century, several European governments provided generous state funding to set up large national programmes and initiatives. However, the long-term impact and sustainability of national programmes and initiatives is now questionable.
- It is not enough to have a consistent eLearning offer and be advanced and experienced; it is necessary to check beyond the borders for strategic adaptation.
- HEIs in the developed world are more focused on developing content and service provision which contributes to enhancing collaboration and the overall quality in teaching, rather than on designing new technological facilities and platforms
- Internationalisation is a driving force for change and innovation.
- It is only recently that attention is being paid to setting up Quality Assurance systems expressly looking at virtual initiatives. Before, Quality Assurance systems within HEIs were mainly focused on traditional learning and in charge of traditional Universities Quality Assurance bodies, and the ICT component was often forgotten.
- For-Profit Virtual Campus initiatives tend to opt for content areas where there is a ready-market for online courses.

Defining the term ‘Virtual Campus’

Like many others, the Re.ViCa team has faced several challenges when it came to finding an acceptable definition of the term ‘Virtual Campus’. It became clear that to really understand the term, one needed to trace its history and use, look at what other terms and definitions are being used in several countries. Project Partner Theo Bastiaens from



FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany is leading our work in this area and recently prepared a chapter on the topic for inclusion in the forthcoming Re.ViCa handbook in which a boundary approach is put forward.



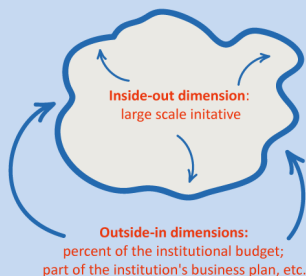
Prof. Theo Bastiaens

Here is a short extract:

Defining “Virtual Campus” – A Boundary Approach

There are a lot of variables involved defining the concept of the virtual campus; depending on the context, the target group, the different goals and the technology involved a definition of ‘virtual campus’ can be formulated. The partners in the project group of the Re.ViCa project do not want to give one single definition of the concept of the virtual campus.

Since there will never be one right answer on the question what a virtual campus is, we suggest to use a conceptual representation aid as is shown in Figure 1 (right) to discuss the concept of the virtual campus. Figure 1 shows the concept of a virtual campus as an amoeba-like form.



The amoeba represents the virtual campus as a limited and demarcated concept, which is expressed by drawing its boundary. The boundary is being shaped by two opposing forces, being visualized as arrows (based on the work of Stooft, Martens, Van Merriënboer & Bastiaens, 2002, p 352). From inside the figure, forces expand the boundary. This process is labeled as the ‘inside-out approach’ of the concept of the virtual campus. These are dimensions that define and construct the concept of the virtual campus. In Re.ViCa we aim to take virtual campus as synonymous with large-scale e-learning initiative. This ‘large-scale e-learning initiative’ is the inside-out dimension.

On the other hand, the forces from outside the figure reduce the boundary. This outside-in approach focuses on the selection of terms that best express the intended meaning of the virtual campus (so it clarifies the relationships). In Re.ViCa we avoid the issue of giving distance e-learning a privileged position over campus-based e-learning but this begs the question of what is large-scale. Here we suggest some indicators, these are all outside in dimensions, which suggest large-scale - note that not all of them need to be satisfied. An e-learning initiative in a university - or consortium of universities - is major if it has many (but not necessarily all) of the following characteristics:

- It requires at least one per cent of the institutional budget (this is a rule of thumb taken from Activity Based Costing theory that it is pointless to track from the top any initiatives below that level of expenditure).
- The person responsible (as the majority proportion of his/her

job) for leading that initiative has a rank and salary at least equivalent to that of a university full professor at Head of Department level, or equivalent rank of administrative or technical staff (usually an Assistant Director) - and ideally that of Dean or full Director.

- There is a specific department to manage and deliver the initiative with a degree of autonomy from mainstream IT, library, pedagogic or quality structures.
- Progress of the initiative is overseen by a Steering Group chaired by one of the most senior managers in the institution (in UK terms, a Pro-Vice Chancellor).
- The initiative is part of the institution's business plan and is not totally dependent on any particular externally funded project
- There are strategy, planning and operational documents defining the initiative and regularly updated
- The head of the institution (Vice-Chancellor, Rector, President, etc) will from time to time in senior meetings be notified of progress and problems with the initiative
- The head of the institution is able to discuss the initiative in general terms with equivalent heads of other institutions - in the way that he/she would be able to discuss a new library, laboratory or similar large-scale development

As said before as a project group we do not want to take the arrogant view to present one final definition of the virtual campus, time will catch up on us when we do that and our work will become obsolete. For the time being we present a working definition that involves large scale initiatives (an inside-out dimension) which are recognizable on the list of characteristics above. The boundary approach makes it easier to change the definition in the future and discuss new opinions.

Report on IAC Meeting in Maastricht

The Re.ViCa team recently organised a very successful meeting of the International Advisory Committee, invited guests and project partners alongside the M-2009 conference organised by ICDE/EADTU in Maastricht. Project partner, Sally Reynolds from ATiT in Belgium provides this short summary of the meeting.



Sally Reynolds

26 people from 13 countries (8 European and 5 non-European) took part in the Re.ViCa meeting in Maastricht on 8th June. This was the last in a series of key meetings organised by the project team as a way to validate the research work undertaken by the consortium amongst experts in the field.



The main item on the agenda was to open up the discussion as to whether there is a difference between the way in which Virtual Campuses have been set up and run in European countries as compared with those in Non-European countries. During the meeting, the partners organised a knowledge café and invited those attending to discuss a series of provocative statements like “Europe is tired of national initiatives” and “EU initiatives leave no lasting trace so countries acting on their own get better value”. It was clear from the off-set that no-one was willing to argue for a clear distinction between European and non-European Virtual Campuses, but the discussion raised many interesting issues and discussion points and allowed the project team to draw out the experiences and opinions of those taking part. Much of what was discussed will be included in the Re.ViCa Handbook which will be published in October.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss the draft set of “Lessons Learned” developed by the project team. These are a set of significant conclusions that the team has been able to draw up based on their country and programme analysis work and is intended as a way to summarise key findings and recommendations arising from the Re.ViCa project. For now these are summarised in 13 statements which are described elsewhere in this newsletter by Ilse Op de Beeck and during the meeting, participants commented on each and provided valuable input to be used in the final realisation of the ‘Lessons Learned’ in the project handbook.

Finally the meeting provided an opportunity to present the main outcomes of the project and the wiki in particular, to talk about future plans and to provide ideas on how those taking part can continue to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the topic of Virtual Campuses gathered and published by the Re.ViCa consortium.

We are grateful to all those who took part for contributing their valuable time and insights!

New People in the Re.ViCa Network

The more people get to know about Re.ViCa and contribute to the work the team is doing, and the Virtual Campus wiki in particular, the more the network grows. We are delighted to introduce you to 3 new experts who took part in the Maastricht meeting and who are experts in their own right on the topic of Virtual Campus.

Expert for Brazil: Fred Litto, ABED

Fred Litto retired recently after thirty-six years as professor of communications at the University of São Paulo, where he founded and directed, from 1989 to 2006, the “School of the Future”, a self-sustaining laboratory consisting of some 70 researchers/producers of digital learning materials, clustering principally in the areas of school-based virtual learning communities; digital open-content multimedia repositories of humanistic material for learners in Portuguese, and learning objects in science education used annually by over two million young and adult learners. He is currently in a fourth term as president of the Brazilian Association for Distance Education, a learned society of 2,600 professionals, and a member of the Executive Committee of the ICDE-International Council for Open and Distance Learning. His research interests at present center on Open Educational Resources. Fred also serves on the editorial boards of Open Learn, the American Journal of Distance Education, IRRODL and RIED-Revista Interamericana de Educación a Distancia (Spain).



Prof. Fred Litto

Expert for Canada: Terry Anderson, Athabasca University

Terry Anderson is Professor and Canada Research Chair in Distance Education at Athabasca University - Canada’s Open University. He has published widely in the area of distance education and educational technology and has co-authored or edited six books and numerous papers. Terry is active in provincial, national, and international distance education associations and a regular presenter at professional conferences. He teaches educational technology courses in Athabasca University Masters and Doctorate of Distance Education programs. Terry is the director of CIDER - the Canadian Institute for Distance Education Research (cider.athabascau.ca) and the editor of the International Review of Research on Distance and Open Learning (IRRODL www.irrodl.org). His blog the “Virtual Canuck” is accessible at terrya.edublogs.org



Prof. Terry Anderson

Expert for Tanzania: Uswege M. Minga, ACDE, Open University of Tanzania

A citizen of Tanzania, Uswege M. Minga graduated from Nairobi University, Kenya with a BVM degree, the University of Illinois with a MSc and earned his PhD at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. First a lecturer and then Professor at Sokoine University of Agriculture teaching Microbiology 1978 - 2002 where he became Head of Department and Associate Dean. Between 2002 – 2007 he was Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the Open University of Tanzania and has been a member of the academic staff there from 2002 to date. Currently he is also



Prof. Uswege M. Minga

the Director of the ACDE Technical Committee on Collaboration for Africa. Uswege has published over 60 scientific papers and has worked as a consultant on several occasions for various agencies including the FAO and the IAEA of the UN.

Announcements

Public Launch of Re.ViCa wiki

The project team has officially launched the Re.ViCa wiki on Virtual Campuses which is now open to the public. With more than 1,200 content pages, this wiki is probably one of the largest open resources on the topic of Virtual Campus available today. Developed by the Re.ViCa project team, this wiki contains information about programmes, initiatives and leading institutions as well as a rapidly growing series of country reports describing Virtual Campuses around the world. Visitors are welcome, if you would like to add to or augment the wiki, then all you have to do is register.

Re.ViCa Handbook

The project team is working on the Re.ViCa handbook which will be published in October 2009. This handbook will contain chapters on the following: Definition of Virtual Campus, Historical Overview, Categorisation, World Tour, Thematic view, Critical success factors and further reading.

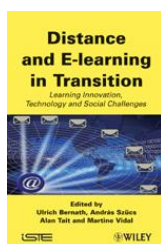
Bits and Pieces

UNESCO Conference on Higher Education in Paris

UNESCO is organising a World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in Paris, 5-8 July. This conference is intended as a way to foster a forward-looking debate on one of the most rapidly changing fields within the global learning landscape. It will take stock of transformations in higher education since the 1998 WCHE and address the new dynamics likely to shape the strategic agenda for the development of higher education policies and institutions. The conference will reaffirm the importance of higher education and research in meeting global challenges, as well as in building more inclusive, equitable and sustainable knowledge economies. Project partner Bieke Schreurs has received an invitation to this conference: www.unesco.org/en/wche2009/

New E-Learning Book Published

"Distance and E-learning in Transition - Learning Innovation, Technology and Social Challenges" was recently published jointly by ISTE and Wiley. The book is a selection of the best EDEN conference papers from the past years, revisiting research, innovation and professional practice in distance and e-learning. The table of contents is available here: <http://www.eden-online.org/papers/publications/toc->



[book.pdf](#) and an order form is available from EDEN here: <http://www.eden-online.org/papers/publications/of-book.pdf>

Sad News of the Death of Prof Robin Mason

The Re.ViCa project regrets to inform readers of the Newsletter that Professor Robin Mason of the UK Open University died on Monday 15 June 2009 after a period of illness. She will be greatly missed by her son and daughter, her wider family, her friends, her UKOU colleagues, her students past and present, and the e-learning community around the world. Robin's analytic work on virtual campuses for UNESCO and national agencies formed a key part of the intellectual underpinning of the Re.ViCa project. More recently, via her evaluation and project work for a number of major initiatives she was a wonderful source of informal advice to members of the team. There is a memorial page for colleagues and co-workers at <http://iet-public-wiki.open.ac.uk/index.php/Robin>. The project team and International Advisory Committee members would like to join others in expressing their condolences to her family and to her colleagues at the UK Open University.



Launch of UNIQUE Quality label

The UNIQUE Quality Label for the innovative and creative use of ICT in higher education was officially launched on Friday, June 12th, during the EDEN Conference, in Gdansk. To find out more about this new quality label, visit the UNIQUE site. <http://unique.qualityfoundation.org>



Paul Bacsich to Keynote at Spanish Professional Development Conference

Project partner Paul Bacsich will be the keynote speaker at the forthcoming IX ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR PROMOTERS OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS in Spain: <http://www.elearningcyl.com/fichatecnica.htm>



ICDE/EADTU Lessons Learned Published

The M-2009 event, where the third Re.ViCa IAC Meeting was held, has published its lessons learned. You can read them at: <http://www.ou.nl/eCache/DEF/2/11/255.html>

Reminders

We look forward to receiving input from you for our next newsletter which will be published in July. This input can be news items, new RSS feeds, relevant papers or publications by you or others.

Editorial team Nikki Cortoos: nikki.cortoos@atit.be
Sally Reynolds: sally.reynolds@atit.be