

E-MOVE project – a case of successful cooperation of European academic libraries of distance teaching universities

By Anna Zuniga Ruiz, Gill Needham, Sirje Virkus og Karen Harbo

The Library and Learning Support Working Group (LLSWG) is a European network of library and information professionals and educators within the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). EADTU is the representative organization of both the European open and distance learning universities and of the national consortia of higher education institutions active in the field of distance education and e-learning.

Anna Zuniga Ruiz
UOC. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
azuniga@uoc.edu

Gill Needham
Open University UK
G.Needham@open.ac.uk

Sirje Virkus
University of Tallinn
sirvir@tlu.ee

Karen Harbo
ASB library, Aarhus University
har@asb.dk

An academic network of European libraries

LLSWG is one of several academic networks of the EADTU. In addition to LLSWG the following academic networks are in existence: E-learning and Teaching Academic Network (ELTAN), Educational Research & Technology (ER&T), Humanities, Health & Social Care, Science & Technology (S&T), Languages, European Law, and Business Administration.

The academic networks of EADTU are supposed to inspire and generate new ideas regarding distance education which as of today also comprises the concept of the virtual learning environment and learning management platforms. At each year's annual conference of the EADTU the library and learning support academic network contributes to the content of the conference by presenting issues of current library development within an academic learning environment.

This library and learning support academic network is not only an inspiration to the distance teaching universities of EADTU, but also a focus for knowledge sharing among the European academic library community with a major emphasis on library and information research and development as a main driver for modern library institutions. We are strongly convinced that academic libraries are meaningful and valuable partners of universities in the case of teaching and research.

In June 2008 the LLSWG celebrated its 10th anniversary. A mission statement and objectives of the LLSWG were agreed at the inaugural meeting in London on 12 June 1998.

The Group committed to the development of library and learning support services as an essential element in innovative and cost-effective approaches to learning. The Group decided to provide a forum and a focus for those responsible for library and learning support services within EADTU member institutions. It aimed to address strategic issues as well as seek to identify, disseminate and encourage good practice in supporting both on campus and distance learners. By these means the Group aimed to promote equal access to library and learning support for citizens throughout Europe.

During EADTU conferences best practices and experiences were shared and research results presented. The mutual site visits gave the members of the group a very useful opportunity to see how library and learner support operates in practice.

E-MOVE project: a case of cooperation of EADTU LLSWG members

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national research projects which do not focus exclusively on library issues.

In 2005 the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) presented to the European Commission a project proposal about Virtual Mobility called E-MOVE. The project included, among others, a work package concerning Library and Learning Support in the context of virtual mobility. This work package was developed by the LLSWG of EADTU.

The mix of library professionals and academics in the field of library and information science has been a very enriching factor both during the submission/writing of the work package and the development of the project itself. The E-MOVE project proposal was successful and the project started in January 2006 and ended in November 2007. The results of the project were presented at the EADTU Annual conference in Lisbon in November 2007

www.eadtu.nl/conference-2007/files/EADTU%20conference%202007%20proceedings.pdf

The members who took part in the work package (WP) on Library and Information Support were:

The Danish Association of Open Universities (DAOU), FernUniversität in Hagen, The Open University (UK), Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Parma University (representing NETTUNO).

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The partners of the project

The Danish Association of Open Universities (DAOU), www.au.dk/index.jsp
Estonian Information Technology Foundation (EITSA), www.eitsa.ee
European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), www.eadtu.nl
FernUni in Hagen (D) www.fernuni.de
Johannes Kepler Universitaet (AUT), www.jku.at
National Council for Distance Education (APERTUS), www.apertus.hu
Network per l'Universita Ovunque (NETTUNO), www.uninettunouniversity.net
Open Learning Foundation (OLF), www.olf.ac.uk
Open Universiteit Nederland (OUNL), www.ou.nl
The Open University (OUUK), www.open.ac.uk
Polish Virtual University (PL), www.puw.pl/english
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), www.uned.es
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), www.uoc.edu
Coordinated by European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), www.eadtu.nl

The WP was coordinated by the Tallinn University (representing Estonian Information Technology Foundation and Estonian e-University).

The main objectives of the E-MOVE project were to explore on new learning and mobility schemes for non-mobile students, on campus as well as off campus and to develop an operational model for the implementation of virtual mobility schemes. As a result of the project there was a web based Guide and handbook on Virtual Mobility, and a European Portal for information on support services. The LLSWG had significant contributions to both outcomes.

Role of Library and Information Support in a context of virtual mobility

Each of these three models pose a different challenge to the university libraries involved. Besides a context of virtual mobility, academic libraries already play an important role supporting the research, teaching, administration and learning at universities. Academic libraries keeping up with modern technology are already a part of the virtual learning space of universities and offer online library service and support as well as access to considerable amounts of online information resources.

In the scenario of virtual mobility, the academic libraries of the universities being involved in the actual virtual mobility exchange complement

Concept of Virtual Mobility

Virtual Mobility is defined as an activity based on a co-operation of at least two Higher Education institutions. Virtual Mobility takes place when two or more institutions agree to offer their students the opportunity to acquire a number of ECTS-points at one of the foreign partner universities or through a joint activity of the partners. The ECTS-points of this international experience will then be counted to the student's degree at his/her home university.

each other. It is important, to the students and to the libraries involved that the library institutions exchange knowledge on this issue.

In the Virtual Stay Abroad (VSA) students are enrolled at their host university and therefore have to use the library of that particular university¹. If the VSA-course is not offered in the national language, it is important to check if the library web site is monolingual or if it exists also in the language the VSA is offered. Concerning the electronic resources, it is important to check if they are available from outside the campus network, for example from the student's home Internet connection, if there are any restrictions on the licenses for this type of students, if there is any need for login and a password for authentication. It is also helpful to explore any possible alternatives to on campus services like for example loans and the information desk. Developing a guide explaining how information resources are organized, what library services exist, as well as rules and practical information and sending it to the participating students will let them know what to expect from the Library Services. From a management point of view, informing the library staff about the VSA and the courses offered in it, or providing a support librarian for those students, will help to offer a better service.

In the Virtual Seminar (VS) no external access to library resources and materials from partner institutions is needed². Each student uses his host university library. For this reason it is important to check whether the resources and bibliography mentioned in the study materials form part of the collection of the university library. In this sense, informing students enrolled in the Virtual Seminar about library services and information resources available at each university can be of help. This information could consist of a link to the different

Models of Virtual Mobility in the e-move project

The e-move project defined 3 models of virtual mobility*. The Virtual Stay Abroad, the Virtual Seminar and the Virtual Campus.

The core objective of the Virtual Stay Abroad (VSA) is to offer non-mobile students an international study experience similar to the Erasmus-stay abroad. The focus is on the international exchange of distance teaching course modules in the framework of a study-programme. Students can study one (or several) modules at a different European university, which is then counted towards their degree at home.

The Virtual Seminar (VS) is a joint course that promotes an international, multidisciplinary dialogue between students on authentic and current issues, using modern ICT and the Internet to overcome the constraints of place and time. The students participate in heterogeneous groups, in terms of nationality, discipline, institution and gender.

In the Virtual Campus (VC) students from the partnering institutions are invited to round off a specific course in their curriculum with a virtual international experience. They complete one or several assignments in a virtual workspace, through collaborating in an international community of students. This model can be informally described as 'Virtual Mobility-light', meaning that it meets relatively few institutional barriers because almost no institutional agreement is required. Generally, the international experience will consist of 10% of the total ECTS-points of the original course.

* Guide to Virtual Mobility. Eadtu 2007, p. 6

¹ http://145.20.178.4/TeachersInstitutionsHome/The-GuidetoVirtualMobility/TheVirtualStayAbroad/tabid/118/Default.aspx#_Toc183635567

² http://145.20.178.4/TeachersInstitutionsHome/The-GuidetoVirtualMobility/TheVirtualSeminar/tabid/119/Default.aspx#_Toc183635584

home university's library web site or a more complete explanation posted on the e-learning platform notice board of the Virtual Seminar.

In the Virtual Campus (VC) the students depend on the literature resources available at the library of their home university and sources they can access via the web³. Still, as in the previous model, it is important to check whether the information resources mentioned on the assignments are available at the library. Also, including library information at the information board of the e-learning platform can be useful for students.

Detailed information about the library role in each virtual mobility model can be found in the Virtual Mobility Guide.

During the project it was very enriching to discuss with each library taking part in the WP how should the library provide support to the different virtual mobility schemes; it was both an exercise of imagination as well as a revision of all the procedures already established when "not standard" students use the library services.

Library for Virtual Mobility

As mentioned earlier in this article a web based Guide and Handbook on Virtual Mobility, and a European Portal for Library and Information Support together formed one of the results of the project. In order to construct a library for virtual mobility each member of the work package collected and evaluated a number of free accessible e-resources that could support and be of inspiration to the virtual student when studying as well as to the faculty in designing virtual mobility. These resources originated from countries or regions of Europe. In several cases the e-resources chosen, of which there were also a number of web based tutorials, had been created within national organizations or on the basis of externally funded projects and in a cooperation between libraries and educational settings, e.g. DEFF (Denmark's Electronic Research Library) or JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee). Other cases reflected results of library and information research or practice. In this way they also represented a kind of state of the art on this matter in countries and regions of Europe.

The e-resources were annotated and categorized. The broader categories of the library for virtual mobility were represented in a way in which libraries can support the individual student and/or an academic course that is set up within the framework of virtual mobility. Each category was subdivided into subject categories and most of the resources were supplied with keywords. The negotiation between the partner institutions on this categorization was an interesting example of organizational inter cultural co-operation. Even if the points of views did not represent radically different attitudes concerning libraries' role in an

³http://145.20.178.4/TeachersInstitutionsHome/TheGuidetoVirtualMobility/TheVirtualCampus/tabid/120/Default.aspx#_Toc183635601

Categories

TEACHER

Case studies: Here you can find case studies which describe innovative educational practice, virtual learning, e-learning and collaborative learning within different professional subject settings

STUDENT AND TEACHER

How can I become information literate?

Students who are information literate know how to make the best use of information from libraries and the web to support their studies. They know how to search for and find relevant information, assess its quality and then present it clearly in their work

academic setting they never the less reflected the different library thinking and culture in Europe. The discussions were very beneficial and eye opening – and not least finally resulted in a range of categories of the library for virtual mobility. The categories on one side reflected the supportive role of the academic library on the other side the needs of the student/teacher. Some additional categories were primarily addressed at teachers.

The selection of resources was an attempt to collect a variety of free accessible electronic resources that could support the virtual students as well as the faculty designing virtual mobility. At the same time, as it is reflected in the guide, this selection of resources was a complement to the electronic resources subscribed by the academic libraries involved in a virtual mobility scheme.

Conclusions

The conclusions we present refer, first, to the role of library and information support in the learning process, and secondly, to the importance of taking part in international projects.

The role of library and information support in virtual mobility context, besides the models developed in the context of the e-move project, is a key issue in the development of the different virtual exchange courses. This is not only due to the technological challenges the libraries are facing to integrate their contents in the e-learning platforms and classrooms, but also because of the need for considerably stronger links between European university libraries and the development of information literacy programmes. The library for virtual mobility presented in the e-move project is supplementary to the academic libraries of the universities involved in the project and it only intends to be an inspiration for the students, teachers and administrators of the Virtual stay abroad, the Virtual seminar and the Virtual campus.

As it is written in the Guide for Virtual Mobility, the key for success of academic libraries lies not on the virtual mobility context chosen, but on the constant contact and communication with

academia as well as with the management staff. Only working together with academic colleagues can the academic libraries provide the needed resources and services to the students and professors in a context of life long learning and the European Space for Higher Education.

Taking part in international projects is a very enriching activity for libraries. In the case of the European project presented, besides the project itself, all the university libraries and professionals who took part in the project had the opportunity to learn how to work in the context of an international project where members were operating in the margins of their time and lived in different countries. The work took place in different forms, meetings, document exchange by e-mail, chats and audio-conferences. Meetings had an important role to get to know each other, fix objectives and deadlines, and helped to create a bond between members. At the same time, in this project we have seen that it is possible, and very productive, to work on an international project without the need of many regular meetings.

Being an academic library, a key issue to present successful European projects is to work in cooperation with other libraries. Being members of a broader association facilitates the establishment of links between similar libraries. In the cases of EADTU the LLSWG congregates distance teaching universities libraries. Although not all universities share the same distance teaching model, the fact of being members of the LLSWG and having worked together in other European projects makes it easier to work on new proposals.

If you are interested in knowing more about LLSWG from EADTU we suggest you to consult the newly launched blog ELLSI European Librarians and Learning support Sharing Ideas <http://ellswordpress.com/>

At this moment the participants of LLSWG are:

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Anna Zuniga Ruiz;
Open University UK, Gill Needham;
University of Tallinn, Sirje Virkus;
Kaunas University of Technology, Antanas Štreimikis;
ASB library, Aarhus University, Karen Harbo (chair);
George Ubachs (george.ubachs@eadtu.nl) is the contact person at the EADTU.

LINKS

e-move project www.eadtu.nl/virtualmobility

e-move guide to virtual mobility http://145.20.178.4/Portals/0/documents/The_Guide_to_Virtual_Mobility.pdf

European Association of Distance Teaching Universities EADTU www.eadtu.nl/default.asp

LLSWG www.eadtu.nl/default.asp?hId=6&mmId=26