Towards a Walloon Virtual Campus

Poumay Marianne, Demily Fabian, Georges François, Jans Véronique, Leclercq Dieudonné
University of Liège, Department of Educational Technology, Belgium
E-mail : m.poumay@ulg.ac.be

Abstract: This “work in progress” paper presents the results of a study conducted in Belgium, proposing the deployment of a virtual campus through a call for tenders selecting SMEs and organizations to be trained and accompanied in the development of their own distributed learning project. From the needs analysis, an important focus on quality all along the process will control the decisions, actions, plans and measures, forcing the regulation and preventing the projects from being too technology centered.

The context

Wallonia, a French speaking region of 3.5 millions inhabitants located south of Belgium, is presently investing in a wide fiber optic infrastructure along the highways with local loops to private organizations and public institutions. Electronic commerce, tele-business and distance learning are then considered as main issues to generate traffic on the new fibers.

Our study

In this context, in 1998-99, the Walloon Region has asked the Department of Educational Technologies of the University of Liège to conduct a study advising the Walloon stakeholders on the choices and steps to make towards a Walloon Virtual Campus.

The study ended in June ‘99, proposing:
- a common platform for distributed learning respecting the emerging international standards;
- a strategic plan to unfold an efficient distributed learning system over the whole region in the next 4 years, to start in 1999.

This study and the strategy proposed for 1999-2003 could inspire other regions or countries wanting to develop distributed learning. Its focus on quality will allow an emergence of “examples of good practice”, transferable to new contexts.

Deployment

Regional information events including many “hands-on” demonstrations will be organized in order to highlight the added-value of distributed learning. The WebCT platform will serve as common tool for a deployment in two phases from 1999 to 2003:

- In phase 1, a call for tenders will be launched to select 20 projects to be closely coached. The selection criteria will guarantee the representation of diverse target publics (age, socio-economic origin), types, status and activity sectors of organizations, types of objectives, sizes, main focus and contents of the foreseen services, etc.
In addition to the variety, those criteria will also largely focus on the quality of the proposed methodology (priority given to activities, problem solving, case studies, dialectics,...), the

---

1 Poumay & al (1999), Vers un Campus Virtuel Wallon, Rapport à Technifutur
“demultiplicative” aspects of the new services, the quality and originality of the contents and the motivation of the candidates.

A training, provided half at a distance, both in Technology and in Pedagogy (programs of 70 hours and 90 hours already available), will be offered to two persons in each selected organization. Depending of their quality (criteria to be refined in September’99), the new distributed learning services will be certified by the Walloon Region of Belgium and information on those services will be linked to the Region’s Web site;

- In phase 2, one hundred projects will be coached from 2000 to 2002. The same training will be proposed (but not anymore completely free of charge) and the same quality control applied. We should end up in 2002 with a wide covering of the Region and a quality increase of the available services.

The budget, piloting structure and coaching of those actions have of course been detailed, but, most important, a series of educational models serve as references to the development plan. Funding will be obtained before the end of ’99.

![Figure 1: Phases of the deployment of distributed learning in Wallonia](image_url)