WEBLOG FOR SUPPORTING THE MIGRANTS INTEGRATION
GRUNDTVIG PARTNERSHIP

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1. THE WEBLOG PROJECT

Weblog for supporting the migrants' integration is a project funded by the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) in the frame of the Lifelong Learning Programme (Grundtvig Partnership[1]).

The Grundtvig Partnership project is a framework for practical co-operation activities between organisations working in the field of adult education in the broadest sense. Compared with the Grundtvig Multilateral Projects, which are more 'product' or outcome-oriented, the partnerships focus more on process, and are intended for smaller organisations, providing for smaller scale co-operation. The emphasis is on the process of establishing collaborations between partners in different countries which may lead to bigger projects/networks as seen in the Grundtvig Multilateral Projects and the Grundtvig Thematic Networks

In general terms, the main objective of Weblog for Supporting the Migrants Integration is to contribute in overcoming the socio-economic disadvantages as well as supporting the integration of migrants in the hosting countries, such as Italy and Spain, providing the following ACTIVITIES:

- To provide the migrants with basic information about the hosting countries and practical recommendation related to cultural issues and habits in order to facilitate their integration.

- To assist people from vulnerable social groups and in marginal social contexts, in particular older people and those who left education without basic qualification, by enabling alternative opportunities to access adult education. This shall be done by analysing their needs; offering an educational package known as "survival kit" and creating a flexible communication platform.

- To facilitate the development of innovative practices in adult education and their transfer implemented not only by the survival kit but also through the intercultural exchanges during each transnational meetings.

- To support the development of ICT based content, services, pedagogies and practice for LLL by designing an operational multi-lingual Weblog based on communication theory and didactics used in learning virtual platforms.

ICT has both a key role in the project since the Weblog is the heart of the project and also a facilitating role within the project, smoothing communication flows and making processes transparent and shared.

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[1] For more information: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/overview/grundtvig_overview.htm

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The Weblog for Supporting the Migrants Integration partnership is comprised of three partners from three European countries:

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The main project's outputs according to the mentioned objectives and activities will comprise:

- a self-sustaining Weblog area for Romanian migrants with an increasing number of reports about experiences of living abroad and examples of overcoming motivational, social and cultural barriers in their integration.
- A "survival kit" which is a package comprising 3 initiating language lessons (Italian and Spanish) and 2 initiating lessons in using PC and internet.
- a community/network between migrants and migrants and their families using the space developed within the platform.

2. SCOPE AND PURPOSES OF THIS DOCUMENT

This paper is intended to present the background and describe a proposed approach towards developing the Conceptual Framework and Methodology for Weblog.

It does intend to provide a framework to:

- o Identify and analyse existing related learning environments (such as the story area used other projects) and to use good practices and a related user-needs analysis;
- o Develop the overall concept and introduce a first set of recommendations for the technical development;
- o Propose a reasonable structure of the platform (specific categories, events…etc) revision of the prototype of the web-environment and collaboration with the Technical Development in aspects such as the administration of the web, modules, tags, etc.
- o Introduce a general planning of categorisation activities and content-related as well as technical interrelations between weblog area and the content analysis.
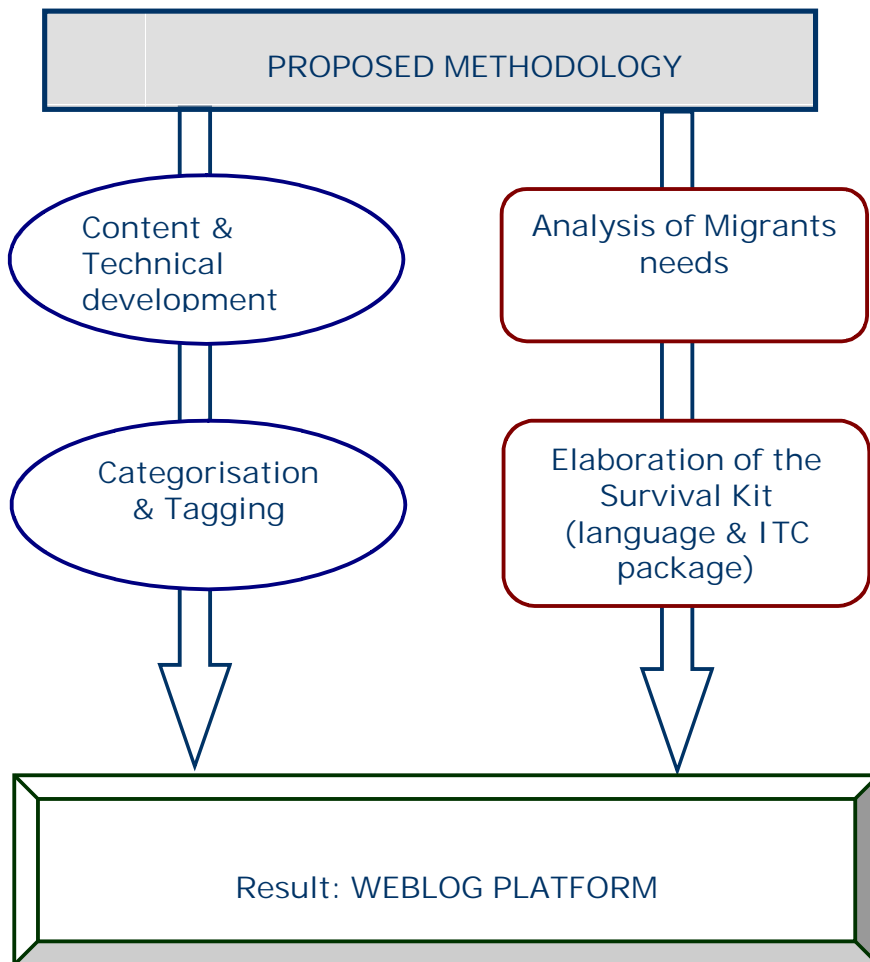
3. THE ROLE OF THE METHODOLOGY

The framework and methodology need to support the four main objectives of the project as a whole.

They are, as already mentioned directed:

- To provide a web-based, bottom-up but well-structured and multi-lingual service at European level for peer-to-peer exchange of experiences of individual migrants containing all not-organisational aspects of integration like motivation, social, communication and cultural issue
- To develop a structured and comprehensive survival kit for the target topic.
- To encourage a network between the migrants as well as migrants and their families in both hosting countries by replacing existing conventional services integrating existing virtual campuses.
- To test the innovative e-learning concept of an approach to combine (and link) the relatively unstructured concept of blogging with the structuring offer of an online guide for learning purposes.

Figure 1: Relationship between activities and key workpackages

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                    ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
                    │      PROPOSED METHODOLOGY        │
                    └──────────────────────────────────┘
                         │                    │
              ╭──────────────────╮   ┌──────────────────┐
              │   Content &      │   │ Analysis of Migrants │
              │   Technical      │   │      needs        │
              │   development    │   └──────────────────┘
              ╰──────────────────╯            │
                         │         ┌──────────────────────┐
              ╭──────────────────╮ │  Elaboration of the  │
              │  Categorisation  │ │    Survival Kit      │
              │   & Tagging      │ │  (language & ITC     │
              ╰──────────────────╯ │     package)         │
                         │         └──────────────────────┘
                         ▼                    ▼
              ┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
              │        Result: WEBLOG PLATFORM           │
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4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 OVERVIEW

The conceptual framework, and the underlying Weblog methodology, will need to be informed by exploring a number of theoretical, conceptual, research and practice positions and debates, already experienced in other projects developed by Scienter España such as TALE or HISTORY, that include:

- Storytelling (exchange of experiences) and Learning
- Weblogs as Platforms for Storytelling and Learning
- Demands on Storytelling or Learning Platforms using weblogs

These are briefly summarized below.

4.2 STORYTELLING AND LEARNING

The experience within the projects developed by Scienter España and other partners such as TALE and MOBIBLOG project, where the storytelling approach is to be transferred to a learning context, leads back to the question how people are learning. Since both projects claim to be pedagogically innovative, we have to ask how innovative learning has to look like and which aspects belong to an innovative learning approach.

Carl R. Rogers (1969) suggested a definition of 'significant learning' which is closely approaching the idea of pedagogical innovation we tried to experiment in our projects. This learning idea has several aspects:

- It includes personal engagement: the migrants are involved in the learning process, both with cognitive and emotional aspects of the personality.
- It is self-initiated: even when the impulse and impetus comes from the outside, the sensation of discovery, apprehension and comprehension comes from inside the person, in the case of Weblog, the migrants.
- It is penetrating the whole person: learning in this way is changing the behaviour, the attitudes and sometimes even the personality of the learner.
- It is assessed by the learner his-/herself: the students targeted know if this kind of learning is meeting his/her needs, if he/she is learning something he/she wanted to know. The locus of assessment lies inside the learning person.
- It makes sense: when this kind of learning takes place, it is a part of the experience of the learner, that learning has a meaning.

All of these aspects can be found in learning by storytelling. Story telling is a very old method that was used in the bible in which people are learning from stories. It is still strong in some European cultures which are more narrative than written. For example in the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia) for a long time, it was one of the most important learning methods.

Storytelling is becoming a new trend in the last 10-15 years. Research has showed that it is very successful for learning processes in enterprises. These experiences should be integrated also in other contexts such as school, university, vocational and further training, adult education, lifelong learning and other settings of formal, informal and non-formal learning.

Telling (or listening) persons is involved in the learning process, the learning process is self-initiated which means the learner is highly motivated to learn. The learning process is not just a cognitive one, but involves the whole person with needs, emotions and attitudes. Furthermore the learner him/herself is assessing the learning process, the focus of learning lies inside the learning person. And – which is one of the most relevant aspects – the learning has a meaning and is not just "instruction" or "teaching".

Storytelling is a very interesting learning method even in fields which do not look that are very suitable for storytelling like teaching mathematics. In fact, there are some successful projects financed by NSF in US[2].

Storytelling fulfils important criteria of innovative pedagogical and didactical approaches: It is learner, oriented, motivating, creative and free. Moreover, storytelling can be a very adequate means for transporting and sharing information, even on a European level and with several cultures and languages. The information transferred is not just data which the learner can save in his/her mind, but it includes also emotional and social information which is very beneficial for a successful and holistic information transfer.

The feedback of the learners from the TALE project shows that the telling of "learning stories" is very useful for the reader. He/she is supported to internalise the content of the story and can transport it to own learning processes, which before may be difficult or obstructed.

Summarising all these aspects, it can be said that storytelling is a means of experimenting innovative pedagogy.

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[2] http://www2.bc.edu/~caseyb/oview.html

4.3 WEBLOGS AS PLATFORMS FOR STORYTELLING AND LEARNING

Distinct to other technical options to communicate and share experiences on the World Wide Web, like personal websites, newsgroups, e-mail, wiki, instant messaging, etc., the technique of weblogs is especially suited to publish individual stories and articles that develop step by step and in a chronological way.

The original weblog idea derived from the wish to publish personal diaries on the Internet: Before blogging became popular, digital communities took many forms, including Usenet, commercial online services such as GEnie, BiX and the early CompuServe, e-mail lists and Bulletin Board Systems (BBS). In the 1990s, Internet forum software, such as WebEx, created running conversations with "threads". Threads are topical connections between messages on a metaphorical "corkboard".

Only some years after their establishment on the web they are used for many different purposes and increasingly not only by single persons but also by organisations such as journals and newspapers. Technorati[3] is now tracking over 70 million weblogs, about 120,000 new weblogs being created worldwide each day as of April 2007. That's about 1.4 blogs created every second of every day. And numbers are growing.

Innovation on the technical side was followed by the use of weblogs for special areas of application. In their short history weblogs were first used mainly as an unstructured tool for self-presentation (e.g. diaries) of private persons on the net. After the explosion of weblog usage in the last years there is a clear trend of organisations (e.g. newspapers) using the technique for special needs and topics.

Through out projects we have tried to integrate these two approaches by embedding the free and unstructured elements (single articles by users) in a structured and organized web environment (category system or summarizing report with multilinks).

As learning is not a singular event, but a process that takes weeks, months or years, weblogs are the medium of choice to share learning experiences as they enable not only to report about single crucial events right after they happened, but also to form an individual collection of experiences over a wider range of time.

An additional advantage of weblogs is the possibility to follow longer processes of learning and to observe certain steps of a learning period at different points of time within a longer process. The collaborative element of learning is represented by the possibility for users and readers to write comments related to certain articles and give feedback by comments. But one of the main advantages of the use of weblogs for learning projects is the possibility to embed free and unstructured articles by users in a structured and organized web environment (e.g. an online-guide or course).

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[3] Technorati, http://technorati.com/, is known widely for its quarterly State of the Blogosphere reports, http://www.sifry.com/stateoftheliveweb/ , analyzing the trends around blogs and blogging.

Weblogs can not only be used as an information database, but also as a medium for communication and reflection and are hence a very interesting technique in the field of education and training.

Among the different possibilities for interaction, weblogs usually offer a commentary function for feedback of readers and the opportunity for different authors to interrelate to each other's contributions by hyperlinks, called trackbacks. Learners in a course can use a personal weblog to document their own work or texts chronologically and publish their methods or results to their classmates or ask them for feedback and thereby gain new impulse or perspectives for the continuing learning process. Additionally the continuous documentation of learning or working process stimulates metacognitive processes and reflection.

A further, maybe even more important field of application for weblog is informal learning. In personal learning processes at home or in companies at the workplace weblogs can be an important information database. Learning communities for special topics of interest can develop and deliver "just-in-time" content for individual learning processes.

From Wikipedia we can read that Weblog software (also called blog software or blogware) is a category of software which consists of a specialized form of Content Management Systems specifically designed for creating and maintaining weblogs. Many weblog applications are available for users to download and install on their own systems. A wide variety of licenses are used by user hosted weblog software. Some of these are free and open-source that can be used, modified, and redistributed freely under free-software and open-source licenses. Others are proprietary software that may be licensed for a fee or have versions available free of charge.

The main features of a weblog are:
- Title, the main title, or headline, of the post.
- Body, main content of the post.
- Permalink, the URL of the full, individual article.
- Post Date, date and time the post was published.

A blog entry optionally includes the following:
- Comments - Main article: Feedback comment system

Comments are a way to provide discussion on blog entries. Readers can leave a comment on a post, which can correct errors or contain their opinion on the post or the post's subject.
- Categories (or tags) - subjects that the entry discusses
- Trackback and or pingback - links to other sites that refer to the entry

Even though the list of Weblog software is quite long (see: Free and open source software from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog_software), based on other experiences as well as on the ease of use software, WORDPRESS is highly recommendable http://wordpress.org/).
Please note that Scienter España will support the administrator (ODL) in designing but not in developing the platform from the technical point of view.

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WordPress is a blog publishing system written in PHP[4]. The latest release of WordPress is version 2.6, released on 15 July 2008. It is distributed under the GNU General Public License version 2. Its main features are:

- Templating system
- Integrated link management
- Search engine-friendly permalink structure
- Support for plugins
- Support for widgets
- Nested categories and multiple categories for articles
- Trackback and Pingback
- Typographic filters for proper formatting and styling of text
- Static pages
- Multiple authors
- Can store a list of users who visit your blog
- Can block site visitors by IP address
- Tag support

As I have mentioned in my last email, it is necessary to decide upon the project site and later start with the selection of templates from the Wordpress catalogue and contents.

4.4 DEMANDS ON STORYTELLING OR LEARNING PLATFORMS USING WEBLOGS

After the experience gained in other platforms, we have learnt that we need to find a place between the opportunities given by current Weblog software and the demands of an 'ideal' storytelling or experiences exchange platform on the web.

Here we will propose some theoretical requirements, result of a process of theorizing, testing and discussion after the initial implementation of the Wordpress Weblog site. This will be the result of consistent debate which will be carried out during the second project meeting in Italy and through email by the project consortium. These dimensions will need to be revisited after the results of the user needs and analysis.

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4 PHP is a computer scripting language, originally designed for producing dynamic web pages.

Hence, the DIMENSIONS can represent the following:

1) Open source: The two main advantages of open source software are of course, the costs, and the possibility to work on the source code of the programme to perform adjustments to our needs.

2) Number of weblogs: Some of the weblogs found on the internet propose the participants to start their own blogs. Initially, Weblog aims at collecting and summarising information and experiences for which we consider that one weblog for all users is sufficient.

3) Categories, subcategories and tags: Weblog should develop a Categorisation & Tagging system. The initial proposal includes the following categories for the general part: Geography, Society, Culture, Communication and other practical information, etc. Subcategories are beneficial to enable a multidimensional assignment of categories. They are necessary if categories are needed to be assigned on different levels of complexity (e.g. Category: "Culture", Subcategory 1: "traditions", Subcategory 2: "Do´s and dont"s…etc).

4) User registration: As storytelling using Weblogs has its main advantage in easiness and freedom, an open user registration can be favoured in contrast to "manual" registration by an administrator. Eventual problems here are off-topic usage of the platform (e.g. "spam", "flames", "commercial use").
As a consequence in any case minimum control by an administrator is necessary (e.g. by setting flags or disabling of users).

5) Language system: A multilingual user interface is initially proposed. This is one of the values added for a platform like Weblog. However, at the testing phase, we have decided to promote the use of English ad see how it works and the see how we can shift to a multilingual interface maybe including countries and languages as categories

6) How to use the platform internally, etc.

Secondly, some initial criteria for a successful implementation of weblogs in learning environments can be set:

Criteria	What to do
CONTEXT: Weblogs have to be used in a specific context. It has to be clear for users for what purpose the weblog is used. It is not useful just to provide the technical option.	It has been decided to include: Information on the project and general information on the host country (IT, ES) Plus specific questions for users to understand what the weblog addresses and what they will find inside survival kit
ORGANISATION: There should not be too detailed time- or content-related templates	No templates for the exchange of experiences are being requested.
PURPOSE: Blogs are not useful if they are used as a pure communication medium. Discussion forums a synchronous media like chat rooms are more useful for this purpose. Communication facilities in weblogs are rather a supporting accessory.	Communication channels could be included, especially for the communication between the migrants and their families Youtube for the audiovisuals (courses, pronunciation, etc) Links to other activities
TOOLS: It is recommended to use approved and effective tools like Wordpress, Dotclear or Movable Type. Additionally RSS-feeds should be used for regular practice	Wordpress. RSS feeds included.
GUIDELINES TO USE THE WEBLOG: It is very important to give a technical introduction about the technical use of the weblog to participants. Although weblogs are mostly very easy to handle, users for instance have to know how to use trackbacks to work in the most effective way	We need to draft simple and easy to understand Guidelines on how to use the weblog and how wordpress works and include it right below the REGISTER button.
PRIVACY and COPYRIGHT: Amongst the most important issues we find privacy and copyright issues.	Registration? Users need to register to upload stories, comments, suggestions, etc. The administrator will give rights to those requesting to register. The idea is to publish all the entries for them to become public. As to Copyright, we are including a disclaimer and we have to decide if we will inform the users about copyright issues.

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5.   IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THE NEXT ACTIVITIES

The background material presented above suggests a possible initial structure for the methodological approach and some pointers as to how the methodological framework might look. An initial starting point for the main output of work between the last meeting in Rumania and the next in Italy, therefore proposes the following elements:

- User needs analysis

- Participating country backgrounds (ES, IT, RO,) and activities selected by the participating partners for the migrants

The work of the next months within the framework of Weblog will therefore focus on developing the activities/mobility that will include:

- Planning the structure of the Weblog area

- Planning the Weblog content related to migrants

- Planning the communication tools

- Planning the promotion of Weblog

All these activities include permanent harmonization between didactic, technical, cultural and communication issues between the partners.

The proposed schedule from now until the next meeting in Italy is:

	WHAT	WHO	WHEN
ACTIVITY/MOBILITY	Planning the structure	All partners	12. 2008
	Planning the Weblog content	All partners	01. 2009
	Planning the communication tools & promotion of the Blog	All partners	02-03. 2009
	Ending the planning, domain purchase and creating the Weblog	ODL with the support of Scienter	April 2009

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The Art of Storytelling: http://members.optusnet.com.au/~dbelling/artnsccd.html

Theories about storytelling: http://www.stevedenning.com/learn.htm

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wordpress

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The POSILLIPO project: http://zope.reu.pub.ro/posillipo/

The Masei centre project: http://www.learningwiki.com/theory

Dan Pink`s website: http://www.danpink.com/

Round the Rug Math: Adventures in Problem Solving: http://www2.bc.edu/~caseyb/oview.html