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Summary

This report summarizes the results from the researchers/teachers segmentation interviews carried out by NETIS partners in Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and the UK between May and October 2007. This report based on the individual country reports, which are available at NETIS project website.

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NETIS Summary of Interview Results

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING INFORMATION SOCIETY TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN NETIS COUNTRIES

By NETIS partners

edited by Robert Pinter

Budapest, December 2008

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Table of contents

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Introduction

The Network for Teaching Information Society (NETIS) project is funded by the European Commission under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme. The project started on the 1st of November, 2006 and after a prolongation in summer 2008 it lasts for 26 months until the 31st of December, 2008. Seven prominent, Europe wide recognised organisations (universities and research institutions) participate in the project from six countries. Information Society Research Institute at Budapest University of Technology and Economics is the coordinator of the project.

NETIS aims to improve the skills and competences of students, teachers, researchers, experts and wider public by developing widely accessible, relevant, innovative and sustainable e-learning course on information society. Through a constructivist approach we use a modular course-design and take advantage of international synergies to produce adaptable, reliable content. By these means NETIS expects to increase the participants' awareness and reflections on the impact of information society on everyday life.

In order to reach its aims and gathering feedback the project carried out interviews in every participating country in 2007 with respective teachers and researchers.[1] The involved experts were information society experts, leaders or participants of academic research groups, directors of NGOs or think tanks in information society related research or teachers who already prepared a book or having a class in this topic for a longer period.[2]

Between May and October 2007 altogether 38 interviews were carried out in NETIS project:

- 5 interviews in Estonia
- 6 interviews in Greece
- 7 interviews in Hungary
- 8 interviews in Italy
- 6 interviews in Slovakia
- 6 interviews in the UK

All interviews based on the following structure:

1. Can you introduce yourself? (In academic sense: name, position, and interests)
2. What is your relation to information society research/education? Why did you start to research/teach this topic? Personal milestones in information society research/teaching.
3. What do you think, which questions are the most important within the information society? Please put in order of importance the topics of our Course Book (in general as academic topics; within your country, and within your personal interest)! What do you think, which topic is missing/not covered within the Course Book?

[1] The project first carried out a research with students (in 2006-2007). See results at the project website: http://www.ittk.hu/netis/doc/NETIS_students_survey_report_final.pdf

[2] For a detailed list of experts from each country see Annex.

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4. What do you think of teaching/researching information society in the given country? Teaching: how should it integrate into the national higher education/research system?
5. Questions parallel with student survey:[3] basic info on respondent, needs of information, format (online or printed), would pay etc.. Do you agree with the statements from the student's survey? (The interviewed experts received in advance a one page summary of survey report with the intro of NETIS project.)
6. What would be interesting area/topics in comparative information country reports?
7. Please help us in dissemination in the given country. How should NETIS disseminate its results in your country? Who could help us in this work, whom should we contact to?

In this report we summarize the results of our interviews in short chapters, covering the following topics:

- Information society research and teaching
- Reflections on Course Book
- Suggestions regarding country reports
- Practical advices (in the conclusion)

[3] Except in Italy, because there were no such survey (we did not plan teaching activity in this country).

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Information society research and teaching

Information society research and teaching in ***Estonia*** is very limited, occasional and fragmented between different universities and departments. It is mainly taught within social sciences faculties. ICT education provided by technical faculties has a very limited space for introducing societal issues. A general feeling was that information society topics, considering their important role, should be given more prominent place in curricula.

The e-learning in ***Greece***, where face to face teaching/learning is mainly the case, started from corporate learning within organisations, such as banks and insurance organisations. However, the progress is very slow. The blended learning methodology seems to be the methodology that is most popular preference among the experts. Nobody of the experts affirmed for a pure e-learning environment. The human aspect, the contact between the student and the teacher, was considered important in order to allow the teacher to adapt the material and emphasise different issues according to the field and the interest of the students. Traditional lectures, printed books and the e-learning platform is considered to provide the students flexibility to choose learning material depending on preferences, pace, space and time issues.

In ***Hungary***, the national network of Information Society Education and Research Groups (ISERGs), which is also a unique network on an international level, serves as the basis for teaching information society. Some of the interviewees have expressed their wish that this network take on a greater role. The Hungarian interviewees emphasized that teaching and researching information society should have tangible benefits. Instead of staying on a theoretical level, the discipline of information society should help in an understanding of the overall coherence of our everyday lives. While some of the interviewees are in favour of establishing information society as a separate branch of study, others think that it would be better to link it with an already existing discipline.

About researching and teaching in the information society in ***Italy***, all the experts agree that a lot has been made in these years but also that still a lot have to be done to bring Italy to a satisfactory and homogeneous level on the national territory. Many experiences and activities being carried out with success now have to be "systemised" at national level. ICT plays a key role in transforming Universities. It is also true that today most of European universities are integrating technology in their daily work. Nevertheless, looking at the Italian current situation, there has been a progressive diffusion of ICT based learning (and eLearning) but it is still a rather new phenomenon and despite excellence cases, the situation emerges that is characterised by a level of coverage that only partially meets the needs of the whole university system.

Respondents in the ***UK*** agree that since computer literacy is widespread and growing amongst school age children and adolescents the provision of content explaining and interpreting the information society is a service that education should provide not only at higher level but also earlier in the process. It is important to provide students with study material which can enhance their personal understanding of the information society and its possible consequences for them and their families.

The general conclusion regarding the information society research and teaching in ***Slovakia*** is that it is fragmented between different universities and departments (this is also supported by the results of the student questionnaire). It is mainly taught as an individual subject within social science and public administration ori-

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ented faculties. Recently, a new commission was established by Slovak Ministry of Education for elaboration a new material: Curricular Transformation of Education in Slovakia. In this document considerable attention will be given to ICT as it is the driving force of economic and social developments today.

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Reflections on Course Book

The opinion that there is a clear need for additional teaching materials was clearly expressed in ***Estonia***. Although books regarding information society from eminent authors (e.g. Webster, Castells) are available in the country, more accessible additional materials might be useful. Also, the availability of materials in Estonian is very limited. The themes going to be covered by the Course Book were generally welcomed by experts interviewed. They specifically liked the idea of covering the key fields related to socio-economic development.

The majority of the interviewees ***in Greece*** has Information Systems background and considers that the theory part of the book seems to be too much emphasised. Depending on the target group for a course book in the information society, there seems to be two directions, namely one social, targeting social and economical departments, and one more technical emphasising applications, targeting e.g. Information Technology (IT) departments. The social impacts would be the most interesting issue for the students; to reflect on own experiences and to exchange experiences with each other. After finished the course the students' awareness of technology advances and their impacts on the society should be raised. In particular, the aims of the course should emphasise the importance of *social* technology advances, not only technology advances.

The interviewees liked the holistic approach of the Course Book in ***Hungary***. Since the interviewees are practicing professors and researchers, they all have their own particular approach, which of course sometimes differs from the approach of the Course Book. The fact that each interviewee found a different focus or topic (the most) important, is typical of the discipline of researching information society. The issue of whether the authenticity of certain definitions and topics remains valid for a longer period raises an important problem and several interviewees expressed their concerns in regard to it; the terminology and focus of the European Union change quite frequently, as does the controversial topic of teaching information society.

The Course Book has been considered very positively by the experts group in ***Italy***. It seems that in Italy don't exist a wide range of courses about information society and the NETIS Course Book that is very comprehensive, could fulfil the different needs of different categories of beneficiaries. As regards the educational environment (schools and universities) Italian experts highlighted different topics that NETIS course should cover (e.g. changes in individual "cognitive sets", new ways of access to knowledge, new learning processes, digital divides, "eEverything": eGoverment, eHealth, eCommerce, eInclusion..., information overload). It is also said that it would be important to divide the Course Book into thematic areas that can be usable individually. The different areas could be addressed to diversified targets.

The interviewees in the ***UK*** applauded the main purpose of the Course Book as a supplement integrating the specialised areas to which the students will be pointed. They approved the European aspect of the knowledge base of the project which is absent from virtually all English language publications and hence will do much to enlarge the students' awareness of a future dimension of their social reality as they join the adult world of work. It was mentioned that it may be a counterweight to predictable American influence internationally. However, the English experts also expressed their interest in further topics such as policy developments, economy and legislation, e-learning, mobile technology, labour market and cultural change.

In ***Slovakia*** there is also a great need for teaching materials in information society, because textbooks and Course Books regarding information society from Slovak authors are up till now no published. Student use

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NETIS

information sources on Internet and papers in different conference proceeding books or temporary not reviewed texts. The themes going to be covered by the Course Book were generally welcomed by experts interviewed, but some additional topics popped up as well, e.g.: information security, informatization of education, distributed information systems, virtual reality, eHealth...

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Suggestions regarding Country Reports

In ***Estonia*** it was expressed that societies and economies are different, so are information societies. Analysis of how some countries are doing better in ICT economy, others in eGovernment, etc. would provide an interesting analysis. Although there are many benchmarking reports are available (e.g. Global Information Technology Report 2006-2007, Economist Intelligence Unit, UN Global E-government Readiness Report) these remain rather general (and even simplistic). A closer look at the respective countries might be interesting. Structure of country reports sounded reasonable as it might give a good overview regarding developments in respective countries. However, they should not remain just descriptive, but be analytical as well.

The country reports are seen as case studies in the different countries from ***Greek*** experts' point of view. Issues missing in both the course book and the country reports seem to be the following (ordered by importance according to interviewees): e-business / e-commerce; employment issues (tele-working / tele (virtual)community / outsourcing); e-health (considered to be important for Greece).

In ***Hungary*** we asked the interviewees to name the aspects that they would like to see as part of an international comparison. They interpreted the question in different ways, but in many cases mentioned the need for basic data regarding development and preparedness, which are important because *"much can be concluded from these data. Not everything can be explained with them, but along these lines the countries can be compared with each other."* It is also highlighted that introducing the evolutionary progress of the individual countries might be of importance, since "*there is no identical information society*". It is also important to understand, what kind of prohibitive circumstances render development difficult, and which development trend certain countries use as a method of prevention. Many interviewees have mentioned best practices, in other words, examples that can really be applied.

All the ***Italian*** experts think that the country reports are very useful and important tools. They mentioned the following interesting areas-topics to be included in comparative information country reports: understand in which way eLearning is used in the different NETIS countries; which are the factors that slower information society and in which way the cultural dimension and the practices capitalization weights on the take-off of the information society in the different countries; analyse the report results using the parameters that allow to identify the information society impact in the different countries.

The experts in the ***UK*** had mainly practical suggestions regarding the Country Reports on analytical level, namely which aspects, variables should be examined. Technologically oriented professionals nominated technical comparisons – for example speed of spread of broadband, access to PC's or cost of access to internet services. Other experts indicated topics such as eGovernment, social policy, economic interests, demographic differences or mobile phone use and access.

In ***Slovakia*** there are many available benchmarking reports and projects[4] regarding information society. But a deeper comparative analysis of the NETIS countries and description of actual situation would be helpful and welcomed by the interviewed experts.

[4] For examples see the Slovakian interview report ont he web:
http://www.ittk.hu/netis/doc/NETIS_Slovakia_segmentation_interviews_report_FINAL.pdf

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Practical advices

During the interviews we have received some practical advices regarding the project activity which were mainly not covered by the above chapters. The two most important suggestions were language barrier and blended learning as teaching method.

1. Language

As information society topics are taught on undergraduate level and many of the students might not be fluent in English in non-English speaking countries, translation of the materials into native languages might be highly relevant (e.g. Country Reports). Also, this is important for lifelong learning. Language question was very important in preparation of materials and experts have justified our concept that the materials must be prepared in more languages, not only in English.

2. Blended learning and use of Moodle

In many countries blended learning was suggested as the main teaching method, but piloting of teaching with recorded lectures might be worth of trying as well. Moodle as e-learning environment is very popular in many NETIS countries among teachers as well as students.

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Conclusion

1. A need for standardized introductory information society course

Concluding the interviews one can highlight the importance of standardized, general introductory course of information society based on this information given by the country experts. In practice this course should use the combination of traditional and new forms-tools (e-learning) of teaching the topic.

2. Course Book: wish list vs. the limited length

Summing up the comments there were controversial needs and expectations regarding the Course Book driven by the specific background of the given interviewee. It was not possible to fulfil all of these needs in our Course Book however the comments on target groups and inclusion of several topics (e.g. history, technology, digital divide, e-learning, legal issues etc.) were very practical and helpful, and were used in preparation of the book. But we had to reject some of the topics as independent chapters, because the length of the book was limited.

3. Country Reports: both descriptive and analytical, comparative and flexible

Concluding the feedback from the interviewed experts the idea of country reports was highly welcomed, but the planned structure of the reports seemed to be too strict and somewhat limited. Hence we have improved the concept of Country Reports and some important topics included in independent papers within the Textbook (e.g. healthcare in Greece). All partners had the right to add extra chapters to his own Country Report to cover the most important missing area in his country. This process resulted in more accurate reports but kept the advances of the same structure (comparability) of the reports.

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Annex – list of experts interviewed

1. Estonia

Prof. Dr. Rainer Kattel, Tallinn University of Technology, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences

Dr. Arvo Ott, eGovernance Academy

Dr. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, University of Tartu

Ivar Tallo, eGovernance Academy

Marek Tiits, Institute of Baltic Studies

2. Greece

Panagiotis Anastasiadis – assistant professor, University of Crete, Pedagogical Department

Georgos Aygeris – teacher in different Private Colleges in Thessaloniki, preparing students for University exams in National Governance

Dimitrios Gouskos – lecturer, University of Athens, Dept of Communication and Media Studies

Vassilis Kostogolou – assistant professor, ATEI of Thessaloniki, Department of Informatics

Gregoris Mentzas – professor, National Technical University of Athens, Information Management School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Director of Information Management Unit (NTUA)

Georgia Zafeiriou – part time lecturer, Aristotle University & ATEI Thessaloniki

3. Hungary

Klára Benda – Digital Secondary School (http://www.digitaliskozepiskola.hu/dk/index_en.html)

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Dániel Füleki – assistant teacher, E-Business Research Centre, Corvinus University of Budapest (http://web.uni-corvinus.hu/ebk/en/index.html#)

Anna Galácz – researcher, Research Centre of Information Society and Network (ITHAKA) (http://www.ithaka.hu/) , assistant teacher, Information Society Education and Research Group at Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences

Gergely Kis – research director, GKIeNET (http://www.gkienet.hu/); assistant teacher E-business Research Centre, Corvinus University of Budapest (http://web.uni-corvinus.hu/ebk/en/index.html#)

Bertalan Komenczi – professor, Information Society Education and Research Group at Eszterházy Károly College

Bence Ságvári researcher, Research Centre of Information Society and Network (ITHAKA) (http://www.ithaka.hu/) , assistant teacher, Information Society Education and Research Group at Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences

István Szakadát – mathematician-sociologist, professor, Media Research Center at the Department of Sociology and Communications of Budapest University of Technology and Economics (http://mokk.bme.hu/)

4. Italy

Councillor Paolo ReBaudengo, Responsible for Education and Training within Bologna Province.

Dr. Agostina Betta, Manager of Emilia Romagna Region at the General Direction of Telematic and Informative systems organization. Within the Competence Centre for e-government and the information society Dr Agostina Betta is responsible for eLearning and eGoverment training in relation with local agencies.

Dr. Claudio Del Rio, Tutor of SPF (online continuos training system) - ISFOL (Istituto per lo Sviluppo e la Formazione dei Lavoratori, Rome), Researcher within the Observatory Unit of Scienter.

Dr. Gemma Fiocchetta, official representative within the Italian Ministry of Education.

Prof. Lucia Giovannini, Full Professor, Alma mater Studiorum – Bologna University, Profes-sor of "Learning and competence evaluation" and "Design of training projects/programmes".

Prof. Roberto Maragliano, Full Professor ROMATre University, Professor of "Educational and learning technologies".

Dr. Tania Salandin, Member of the Communication, Documentation and Training area within the Emilia-Romagna Regional Healthcare Agency.

Dr. Pier Giacomo Sola, President of Amitiè (Amitié was created in 1991 as part of a Uni-versity-Enterprise Training Partnership in the framework of the COMETT Programme, spon-sored by the European Commis-

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sion, with the aim to promote training activities in the Infor-mation and Communication Technology sector. Amitié then created a private organization).

5. Slovakia

Prof. Dr. Ing. Imrich Okenka, CSc., Agroinštitút, Nitra

Prof. Ing. Ján Stoffa, DrSc., Palacky University, Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Technology and Information Technologies in Olomouc (Czeh Republic)

Ing. Vojtech Hoschek, CSc., Faculty of Wood Science and Technology of the Technical University in Zvolen

Zoltán Balogh, Ing., PhD. Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra

Veronika Stoffa, Prof., Ing., CSc. (PhD) - Department of Informatics of the J. Selye University in Komárno

Tóth Krisztina, Mgr. - Department of Informatics of the J. Selye University in Komárno

6. UK

Dr. K. Anagnostopoulou, Head of E-Learning, Middlesex University, London

J. Long, Emeritus Professor of Cognitive Ergonomics, University College London

Dr. David Porteous, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Middlesex University, London

A. J. Richardson, University Lecturer (Retd.), Middlesex University, London

A. Ryder, e-Learning Research and Innovation Advisor, Middlesex University, London

Dr. M. Tribe, Senior Lecturer Emeritus, University of Sussex, England

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