MOVERS AND SHAKERS: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND MOBILITY BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to introduce an international cooperation project around international mobility to the Turkish Higher Education market and call for participation by Turkish Higher Education Institutions and providers of Student Management Systems.

Keywords: international mobility, Erasmus, interoperability, standards, collaborations, web-services, Bologna Process.

1. Background and rationale

Internationalization has shown to be a factor with growing political and societal importance in higher education policy making. Research shows that the mobility programs have had a leading role in internationalization policies in higher education at national, European and international level.

From the vantage point of the European Commission, the issue of mobility is inextricably linked to the Erasmus Programme. The Erasmus programme has brought mobility to a wide range of countries and students from different backgrounds. The programme has grown from above 3 000 students in 1987 to over 182 000 in 2007/08. Thanks to Erasmus, some 1.86 million students have studied abroad since 1987 and the objective is to achieve a cumulative total of 3 million by 2012.

These figures are impressive, but they only reach some 4% of the graduate population. Erasmus and non-Erasmus mobility combined is expected to reach 10% of the graduates by 2010. An ambitious but achievable objective for the longer term could be the prior mobility experience of 20% of graduates by 2020.

2. Aim and Objectives

The main aim of the project is to facilitate mobility - one of the main objectives of European Higher Education Area (as stated in the London Communiqué 2007, and emphasized in the Leuven Communiqué 2009)

In order to support the directives and meet the goals of the EC, CINECA, an Italian Higher Education Consortia has gathered a partnership of several leading HE systems providers (University consortia and SMS providers) to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Interconnect universities in a international network
- Reduce administrative inefficiencies/problems in handling mobility data and procedures (intra-university)
- Streamline the communication flow among partner institutions (inter-universities )
- Digitize mobility documents (secure, authentic, transparent, tamper-proof)
- Produce reliable and accessible mobility statistics (EC interest)

3. Distinctive Traits

The project has the following distinctive traits:

- The value of the project is directly proportional to the number of active participants - the "network effect".
- Economies of scale could be triggered faster by interconnecting the consortia and established implementers first - connect one, serve many - the "Hub-and-Spoke" approach.
- Adopting "Standards" specifications for an open, accessible and efficient implementation
- Leveraging established Federated Identity Management technologies.

The project has already a prototype implementation between the Italian and Polish consortia.

The idea is to call out for participation to other consortia and/or student systems implementers to join
this project, thereby achieving critical economies of scale, which can result in a substantial impact toward the creation of the European Higher Education Area.

4. Participants

University Consortia
- OODI - Finland - Finland
- SIGMA - Spain
- CINECA - Italy
- Ladok - Sweden
- FS - Norway
- MUCI - Poland
- HIS - Germany
- SURF - Netherlands
- Almalaurea - Italy
- VHS - Sweden

Individual Universities
- University of Stuttgart - Germany
- University of Malaga - Spain
- University of Thessaloniki - Greece
- University of Porto - Portugal
- University Fernando Pessoa - Portugal

Companies
- Digitary - Ireland
- AcademyOne - USA
- KION - Italy
- Unisolution - Germany

This is an OPEN project. Mobility is the "hallmark" of the European Higher Education Area, therefore any organization at stake willing to contribute is welcome to join in - the impact of the project is directly related to the number of active participants. However, due to the very nature of the project, the "preferred" profile is that of a partner with willingness and ability to execute and (some of) the following characteristics:

- installed universities (customer) base (software implementers - CINECA, MUCI...)
- means of promoting and disseminating the project (organizations - EUNIS, EAIE...)
- experience in European Funding Programs (LLP, TEMPUS, CIP...) and proven track record of successful project participation.
- lobbying channels into the European Commission (DG EAC)
- International mobility expertise (IROs)
- involvement in standardization activities (MLO, ELM, SCHAC..)

5. Work Teams

The distribution of the participants the competence and contribution that each partner could bring to the project. The teams are: WSDL (Web Services Definition Language), Identity and Access Management, Security Management, Architecture, Business Processes, Funding, Pilot.

7. Standards

Standardization in data exchange is going to play a relevant role in this project, particularly in terms of its potential of becoming an early-adopter of the work being carried out around the establishment of a common format to describe data being exchanged between the various European Higher Education stakeholders.

In recent years, CEN (European Commission for Standardization) has been putting more and more attention to supporting the creation of a European Higher Education Area, through the activities of two main projects: Metadata for Learning Opportunities (MLO) and European Learner Mobility (ELM).

MLO [MLO] is a standard addressing metadata sufficient for advertising a learning opportunity, a programme of study for example. The goal of MLO is to provide information about a learning opportunity, to enable the learner to make a decision if there is a need for more information about the learning opportunity, and where to find that information. MLO is a lightweight standard that fits well with existing business processes and technologies, and is designed in full compliance with ECTS requirements. The MLO standard facilitates semantic technologies and web architectures to support several mechanisms for exchange of information and aggregation of information by third party service suppliers, while being easy to implement to ensure a rapid uptake by the European countries. The MLO work stemmed from the need to harmonize different regimes around Europe which describe and exchange information about courses, e-learning offerings, and learning opportunities.

ELM is a standard data model for the expression and exchange of European Learner Mobility information, as defined by the European transparency instruments, starting with the Europass portfolio (Diploma Supplement, Certificate Supplement, Curriculum Vitae, Mobility, Language Passport). This standard will support the interoperability of European-wide IT systems that manage and exchange Europass related information. The standard will build on existing learning technology specifications, such as MLO, and take into account related national application profiles. As a multi-part standard project, the initial focus of ELM will be to create the specification to describe the Diploma Supplement document -- starting with an abstract model and all the way to providing XML
schemas, application profiles, and implementation guidelines.

6. Project Plan

- Project (re)kick-off meeting (Nov. 16th @ RS3G workshop)
  - Share prototype
  - Factor in contributions
  - Define Work Teams
  - Set Goals and Deadlines
- Schedule a joint workshop between RS3G and TF-EMC2 (Spring 2010)
- Present the update on the project at EUNIS 2010 in Warsaw (June 2010) - running pilot with at least 5 institutions
- Present the user scenarios at EAIE 2010 in Nantes (September 2010) - project presentation in a "user-oriented" way

7. Conclusions

There have been some earlier approaches concerning electronic exchange of data on student academic achievements.

This approach differs in some respect since the main goal is the support for processes running at IROs of cooperating higher education institutions, strictly connected with the student and staff mobility. The solution is needed here and now, and – what is very important – may be deployed here and now.

Extending the prototype between MUCI (Poland) and KION (Italy), an effect of scale can be obtained relatively easily, as national consortia developing student management systems join the project and integrate needed interface into their products.

MUCI develops USOS which is deployed in 25 higher education institutions in Poland which group about 30% of students in Poland (40% of state owned HEIs).

KION is the leading consortium of Italian Universities, develops ESSE3 which is a student management system in place in over 75% of all Italian Higher Education Institutions.

There are other consortia in European countries which cover high percentage of domestic universities like Ladok in Sweden (almost 100% of the market), HIS in Germany (230 universities), OCU in Spain, and also companies like unisolution which deliver software for many institutions all over Europe (moveon is the standard software used by 260 institutions in 12 European countries to manage their international activities).

Let us imagine that these companies add support for data exchange into their systems. Not so much implementation work, tremendous effect of scale – it would be interesting to count how many students might travel across Europe not accompanied by a flow of papers.

This will not happen without common data format, adopted and agreed on by all partners, compliant with the official standards. This may be the most difficult step to make. The suggested approach is not to wait passively for the final approval of the official standards (European Norm) but to actively start with some preparatory steps and work on the practical implementation. RAD-like approach of our project may help in setting some practical perspective. The idea is to call out for participation to other consortia and/or student systems implementers to join this project, extending it and making it sounder with their requirements, thereby achieving critical economies of scale which can result in a substantial impact toward the creation of a European Higher Education Area.