



Lifelong Learning, career services and employability, and alumni activities Strategy at the University of Novi Sad

Novi Sad, december 2011

Project Information

Project Title	Developing and setting up measures for initiating, enhancing and sustaining Higher Education-Society-Cooperation
Project Acronym	INTERFACE
Project Code	511224-Tempus-1-2010-1-Tempus-JPHES
Organization Project Coordinator	Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz – University of Graz, Austria
Project Coordinator University of Novi Sad	Prof. dr Pere Tumbas
Project Activity	WP2. Develop tailor-made "Interface Centre" (IC) strategy papers
Document Title	Lifelong Learning, career services and employability, and alumni activities Strategy at the University of Novi Sad
Document Date	December 2011.
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1. Introductory Remarks

Decision [95/2493/EC](#) of the European Council, from 23 October 1995, proclaiming the year 1996 as the “European Year of Lifelong Learning”, represents an initial act for all further activities in the implementation of the framework of European politics for lifelong learning. The aims of this decision were broadly set, primarily for the European public to be aware of the importance of lifelong learning as to achieve a better cooperation between educational, i.e. training structures and the business community, especially small and medium size enterprises, as to assist in the implementation of the unified European Area of Education and Training (practice) through an academic and professional (expert) recognition of qualifications in the European Union, and emphasize their equal importance and contribution.

Lifelong learning is defined as a purposeful and continuing process of adopting and processing information by the individual with the goal of advancing their knowledge, skill, and capabilities. This process unfolds in various conditions and takes place at all ages. This means that lifelong learning possesses two dimensions: a temporal dimension implying “people learn throughout their lives”; and a spatial dimension, implying that the learning takes place in educational institutions, as well as at the workplace, in the family, through contacts with others, etc.

The following year, the World Conference on Lifelong Learning was organized, and in 1998 the European Council would reach a resolution “Lifelong learning for equity and social cohesion: a new challenge to higher education.” Subsequently, numerous documents had been drafted, and generally, the European Union’s lifelong learning strategy promoted learning as a broader term to education, which implies forms of formal education, non-formal education and informal learning.

Formal education is an education that takes place within the framework of the school system, from primary, secondary education that takes place in primary and secondary schools, to higher education in schools of higher education and universities, based on approved educational programs, that result in acquiring diplomas (certificates), that is, in the social recognition of acquired qualifications, competencies, or levels of education. This form of education is financed from public funds.

Non-formal education is an education that takes place outside of the school system, it is institutionalized and organized with systematized and planned programs, but it does not end with a social verification of acquired knowledge in the sense of national qualifications and levels of education. This form of education takes place at the workplace and through activities of interest groups such as non-governmental organizations, syndicates, various business and other associations. It is not financed from public funds.

Informal learning is an unplanned and often subconscious learning that takes place every day in an individual’s work and social environment, so they frequently do not recognize it as a form of acquiring knowledge and skills. It is realized on an irregular basis, during one’s entire life, and results in the development of the personality, forming of opinions, adopting certain values and virtues. It takes place in the family, at the workplace, in everyday life through contacts of a business and other type of nature.

The briefly described various types of education, i.e. learning, together with their significance for individuals and organizations, in the sense of employment, and adopting to requirements, as well as a form of active citizenry and social inclusion (inclusivity), were specially emphasized on the part of the European Commission on 21 November 2001 in the adopted document "Communication on Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality". In the same document, the interpretation of lifelong learning is expanded, and it reads that it encompasses "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective."

The same socioeconomic approach to interpreting lifelong learning is also dominant in the decision 1720/2006/EC of the European Council from 15 November 2006, that additionally focuses, influenced by the Lisbon Strategy adopted in the meantime, on the exchange of participants, cooperation and mobility between educational systems and training systems (practice) in society.

Although more than 15 years have passed from the proclamation of the European Agenda, and more than 10 years from the adopted Lisbon Strategy from the year 2000, which represented its integral part regarding the ambition of making Europe a world leader in knowledge based economy, the aims were not reached. From the most recent documents of the European Commission "Europe 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", it is entirely clear that the initialized process will continue in the next 10 years and that it particularly relates to the strategy of lifelong learning.

Facts: one quarter of pupils possess modest reading competencies, one out of seven pupils leave education and training (practice) too early, around 50% of pupils achieve an intermediate level qualification with which they do not satisfy the requirements of the labour market, one out of three pupils of 25-34 years of age possess a university degree, only two European universities are on the Shanghai ranking list of universities amongst the leading 20 in the world, these are only a few that speak in favor of the importance of lifelong education. At the same time, if we take into account that up to the end of the period leading to the year 2020 more than 16 million jobs will additionally require higher qualifications, and that the necessity for lower qualifications will be reduced by almost 12 million jobs; as well as that the working life of an individual is extended, this even more significantly magnifies the need for the development of new knowledge and skills throughout life.

Starting from the aforementioned documents which define policy and strategies, and the decisions of the relevant authorities in the European Union, lifelong learning is seen as the correct response to the observed weaknesses.

Universities and other institutions of higher education had, during time, in the last 10 years, in the attempt to satisfy the requirements presented to them, placed lifelong learning in a more prominent position as a form of open and flexible learning and continuing education. University associations had been founded, for example, EADTU (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities), in the attempt to respond to the challenge. From 2003, the aspect of e-learning had been built into the Bologna Process.

Upon the invitation of the European Commission, during 2007, national reports had been drawn up and discussed on the implementation of the national lifelong learning strategy of the member countries of the European Union. It should be stressed that the response followed, individually, as well as from the European Association of Universities (EAU). In the "Lisbon Declaration. Europe's Universities beyond 2020" document, one of the largest associations of universities had its focus on a comprehensive framework of qualifications for the purposes of overcoming the problem of a dual system of qualifications for universities and other institutions of higher education.

In 2008, at the EAU meeting, the drawing, i.e. formulating of the document under the title "European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning" was initiated. This was a very precise document that defined policy, in the sense of encouraging universities to include forms of lifelong learning in their offer as to satisfy the Lisbon Strategy, while it invited the national governments to support its operationalization towards a successful outcome. This document particularly encouraged traditional universities in the introduction of lifelong learning.

Following this, the communique of the meeting of the ministers of education of countries implementing the Bologna Process, held in 2009, in Leuven, confirmed the key role of lifelong learning in the European Area of Institutions of Higher Education. One more document had been produced "The Bologna Process 2020-The European Higher Education Area in the new decade." In this document, the ministers had agreed that the central question of further development of the Bologna processes is as follows: the broadening of participation and forging partnerships between public institutions, institutions of higher education, students, employers, and the employees in the process of coordination of the national qualifications framework.

Finally, one more significant document should be mentioned, as well, "Trend 2010. A Decade of Change in European Higher Education", created by EAU in 2010, which states that although the policy of lifelong learning in Europe is built on solid foundations, it still remains poorly implemented at universities. Within their own business model, the universities are concerned with research and innovation, that is, the implementation of the determined three levels of study, which satisfy the requirements of the education of students from the ages of 18 to 25. In the countries which adopted a national lifelong learning strategy, certain shifts have been observed in the introduction of lifelong learning courses, however, they are outside the business model of the university and do not constitute its core. At the same time, changes appear at larger universities, while the majority of the smaller universities concentrate only on a regional, or, at most, the national level.

2. Defining Lifelong Learning, career services and employability, and alumni activities at the University of Novi Sad

Other than the identified European documents, briefly presented in the Introductory Remarks, the starting point of the Lifelong Learning, career services and employability, and alumni activities Strategy at the University of Novi Sad is also represented by the following strategic documents and laws published in the Republic of Serbia.

- Poverty Reduction Strategy, from 2003,
- National Strategy of Serbia for Accession to the European Union, from 2005,
- Strategy for the Development of Professional Education in the Republic of Serbia from 2006 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 55/2005 and 71/2005-correction, 01/2007)
- Strategy of Adult Education Development in the Republic of Serbia, from 2006 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 55/2005 and 71/2005-correction, 01/2007),
- Law on the Foundations of the Education System ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No. 72/2009),
- Law on Higher Education ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia," No. 76/2005, 100/2007-authentic interpretation, 97/2008 and 44/2010), and
- The Draft of the Law on Adult Education from April 2011.

Defining the lifelong learning strategy of the University simply needs to determine in which direction the organization will move in the following strategic period of five to ten years, in which way it would reach the desired goal, and in which way it would determine if it achieved the set goal or not. The focus of the strategic plan is the entire organization, while the focus of the business plan usually is a certain product, service, or program. Starting off with this statement, it would be relevant to implement a lifelong learning strategy into the university strategy as its constitutive part, as it is always a part of the overall strategy of an organization.

Based on the analysis of the external and internal environment, it is necessary to determine a mission (why an organization exists), values (what values are important to the university), a vision (what the university wants to be or to achieve), strategy (in which way the university will achieve the set aims), a Balanced Scorecard or SWOT analysis (measuring achievement), an implementation plan (what is necessary to do regarding achieving the set goals) and an employee plan (what individuals need to do regarding the implementation).

The Lifelong Learning career services and employability, and alumni activities Strategy at the University of Novi Sad has to be incorporated into the University Strategy. As the University does not possess a determined and adopted University Strategy at the moment, the Lifelong Learning career services and employability, and alumni activities Strategy will be determined separately, and will be discussed and harmonized with the overall strategy. In that way, the goals will be harmonized in their implementation.

2.1 The Main Principles of the Strategy

The main principles of lifelong learning, on which the Lifelong Learning Strategy at the University is based upon, are the following:

Quality - represents the primary principle that implies the offer of high quality services, the organization of engaging and relevant topics and programs of education and training, which need to be accessible to all user categories, and, foremost, to the University graduates.

Flexibility - as a principle it implies the ability of the university to research the requirements and, based on analysis, adequately and promptly react to the demands of the environment for new knowledge and skills, through the development of new and the modifications of existing topics and programs of lifelong learning. The application of this principle, regarding the shifting demands of businesses and interests of organizations, specific groups and individuals, enables the adaptation of such topics and programs of education and training that would contribute to the harmonization of content of education and training with the requirements of the economy and the public sector.

Multidisciplinary - as a principle, due to the primary characteristic of the University, as belonging to the category of general, non-vocational, or perhaps, simply traditional universities, is specially emphasized. It implies introducing topics and programs into education and training that are of a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary character, that is to say, a combination of different scientific fields. This implies an implementation of this type of joint content in which participants come from a number of faculties, departments, and chairs.

Relevance - represents a principle that is achieved by including all relevant partners interested in the content of topics and programs of lifelong learning in the process of their creating and modification, as to answer to their requirements. Topics and programs are relevant if they provide adequate knowledge and skills that correspond to the needs of the individual, employer, the labour market, and a wider social community.

Accessibility - as a principle it implies the promotion and ensuring accessibility of topics and programs of lifelong learning for all user categories, in a manner that is acceptable and adequate for them. The content of lifelong learning has to be accessible to various social groups and categories of citizens, as are the following: employed and unemployed individuals, employers, entrepreneurs, individuals of a mature age that are facing the risk of losing their jobs, highly educated individuals with a requirement of professional and personal specialization, etc.

2.2 Vision and Mission

If a vision is considered to be a statement defining the meaning and purpose of an organization, then the vision of the University in the segment of lifelong learning could be identified in the following manner:

"Providing a continuing education to graduates in their professional lives based on research and analysis of requirements."

The vision of the University defined in this manner could be transformed into mission. As missions are usually identified through their fundamental purpose, key values, and goals, the mission of the University is as follows:

"Lifelong learning - key process in the business model of the University."

"Lifelong learning that includes both formal and non-formal education and informal learning which is created based on the requirements of the environment."

"Lifelong learning that is implemented through the University, national and international network."

Mission is usually defined through a number of elements, however, taking into account that the University Strategy does not exist, a further harmonization and a possible amendment of the visionary goals according to the overall strategy is pending.

2.3 Goals and Tasks of the Strategy

The Lifelong Learning, career services and employability, and alumni activities Strategy of the University implies identifying the goals and tasks, the fulfillment of the mission i.e. vision. The Strategy defines the way an organization wants to reach its set visionary goals. The goals of the Strategy are as follows:

1. Development of strategic conditions for providing lifelong learning services, career services and employability, and alumni activities,
2. Increasing motivation and instigation of lifelong learning content development,
3. Strengthening cooperation and networking on a University, national, and international level,
4. Lifelong learning content development with the goal of reducing unemployment and promoting social development,
5. Application of innovative forms of lifelong learning,
6. High quality of lifelong learning services.

2.3.1. Development of strategic conditions for providing lifelong learning services, career services and employability, and alumni activities

To implement this strategic goal, the University must solve the following tasks:

- Founding a Center for Lifelong Learning of the University that would represent the basis of the organization of the implementation of activities related to lifelong learning at the University. The Center would, at the same time, represent a link with the centers for lifelong learning or other organizational forms that deal in these types of learning on faculties. The primary role of the Center would be to provide the foundations for standardization and documentation of all processes at the University connected to lifelong learning, as well as for the coordination of activities in their implementation. This particularly applies to the introduction of standards for the accreditation and quality control of the implemented programs.
- Provide conditions for the implementation of lifelong learning content at the seat of the University, and faculty locations within its framework (Subotica, Sombor, Zrenjanin), as well as all other locations where a commercially justified requirement for their implementation is expressed.

- Strengthen the Center for Career Development of the University, in the sense of facilitating professional orientation, providing direction, and counseling, through which potential users could be introduced with the possibilities offered by the concept of lifelong learning.
- Develop a certain content of informal learning into the concept of lifelong learning, alongside the programs of formal and non-formal education. New or modified forms of lifelong learning imply organizing courses and training that would enable the diversification of services on offer and, at the same time, provide a response to the changing social requirements.
- Form a network of alumni students, as the most important source of information connected to the identification of the needs of graduates regarding the development of new and the modification of existing content in education and training, in consideration to the demands of professional life.

2.3.2 Increasing motivation and instigating content development in lifelong learning

The primary task of the most important institution of higher education in AP Vojvodina, the University of Novi Sad, is promoting the culture of learning, continuing specialization and education. On this basis it is necessary to increase motivation of the individual in mastering the content in the field of lifelong learning. Quality, flexibility, multidisciplinary, relevance, and accessibility, as the basic principles of development of lifelong learning, should provide a diverse and an accessible content to everyone. These types of courses will encourage potential users to attend or master them, so they would advance in their careers or for personal satisfaction.

It is especially important to emphasize the necessity for the development of lifelong learning contents that are modified in accordance to previously acquired knowledge, skills, and experience of the individual. Furthermore, the contents that are on offer to the younger population must be different to the ones aimed at the more mature population, i.e. even for differing age groups.

To implement this strategic goal, the University must solve the following tasks:

- Increase the awareness of graduates and other potential users of lifelong learning on the forms and content that are on offer at the University and at faculties, through organizing events such as seminars, conferences, round tables, workshops, etc.
- Perform the identification and analysis of the needs of graduates for the content required for their professional development, or for a further development of existent knowledge in the same or in different scientific fields. Develop such specific knowledge and skills, alongside general knowledge, ones that are directly applicable at the workplace. Particularly, enable graduates to advance their skills as are leadership, entrepreneurship, management.
- Identify and register target groups and potential users of lifelong learning content and their needs.
- Develop a system of evaluation and recognition of prior learning.
- Promote the culture of learning through media, publications, promotional and informational material. The founding of the children's university is especially important, as well as organizing festivals of learning, lifelong learning week, and the university of the third age.

2.3.3 Strengthening the cooperation and networking at a University, national and international level

The diversity and the quantity of content that is offered at the University, and individual faculties of the University in the field of professional development and training, postgraduate studies, different courses, etc., indicates the need for a decentralized system to be in some way integrated. The degree

of integration of the system of lifelong learning would depend on the organizers of particular contents and their desire for the same to be visible and recognizable on a faculty or university level. In the case when education and training is implemented through the Center for Lifelong Learning of the University, at the faculties or University, the process of the accreditation of content, implementation of content, and finally, issuing certificates on attendance or the successful mastering of the content, would fall under the jurisdiction of the University. The certificate would be recognized at the University and in the entire university national network. Other than this, the faculty could continue organizing individual content independently in a way that makes it visible and recognizable only at the faculty level.

To implement this strategic goal, the University must solve the following tasks:

- Promote cooperation and strengthen partnership on a University level, especially through organizing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary courses of lifelong learning.
- Promote cooperation with universities at home and abroad, as to implement joint content of lifelong learning. The importance of forming a national network of universities in the implementation of lifelong learning is manifold. The following should be particularly emphasized: promoting the importance of university lifelong learning on a national level; promoting the cooperation between universities; enhancing the reputation and creating the university brand of lifelong learning; initialization of joint projects in this field; creating possibilities for a better international cooperation; establishing dependable and permanent channels of communication; forming interest groups in particular fields of lifelong learning; ensuring a higher level of quality.
- Developing topics and programs of lifelong learning on foreign languages, particularly the English language.
- Developing the cooperation of the University with its surroundings: business organizations, business and other associations, communities, chambers of commerce, the National Employment Service, the Syndicate, municipalities, etc., through formal and informal forms.
- Independently access, or through The Serbian Universities network for lifelong learning, if it is to be established, other networks of international organizations and associations, as are the EUCEN, EULLearn, etc.

2.3.4 Development of lifelong learning content with the goal of reducing unemployment and promoting social development

To implement this strategic goal, the University must solve the following tasks:

- Identify the requirements for lifelong learning in collaboration with the National Employment Service.
- Developing and implementing engaging topics and programs that suit the requirements of various categories of users. Particularly, a further development of programs for the requirements of continuing professional development of teachers, educators, and professional advisors; continuing professional education of medical workers and associates; etc.
- Defining content of programs of professional development for students of differing age groups who are already employed.
- Defining content of the program of lifelong learning with the goal of acquiring entrepreneurial competencies, increasing awareness and the possibility of self-employment.

2.3.5 Application of innovative forms of lifelong learning

Tasks in the implementation of this goal are as follows:

- Application of a flexible teaching method based on information and communication technologies with the goal of acquiring general and field-specific knowledge.
- Implementing distance learning and e-learning with the aid of open source tools, and, thus, creating a platform for virtual learning and the implementation of virtual programs, i.e. virtual mobility in the field of lifelong learning.

2.3.6 High Quality of Lifelong Learning Services

For the purposes of implementation of the mission and vision of the Lifelong Learning Strategy at the University, the high quality of services offered is of a special importance and it can be achieved through the following tasks:

- Developing the educational capabilities of teachers, associates, and other lecturers, as to enhance their competencies in their work with different age groups of students attending courses.
- Defining standards and procedures of accreditation of lifelong learning content and establishing a unified system of evaluation of the existing knowledge of individuals.
- Introducing European and world standards into the educational system through harmonizing the national with the international systems of lifelong learning.
- Initiating improvement of legal solutions in the application of the concept of lifelong learning.

3. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis is a special segment of the Lifelong Learning Strategy of the University, in which advantages, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the implementation of the Strategy are analyzed.

STRENGTHS	1. Employed with research and educational experience and competencies
	2. A wide spectrum of topics and programs
	3. Solid infrastructure
	4. Direct contact with potential users
	5. Opportunity of exchange of information
WEAKNESSES	1. Overall Strategy of the University
	2. Relationship between offer and demand
	3. Relationship between quality and creativity of content
	4. Content evaluation
	5. Finance mechanisms
	6. Alumni network
	7. Partnership with the stakeholders
OPPORTUNITIES	1. Flexibility of offer
	2. Accreditation of prior learning
	3. Recognition and accreditation of content
	4. The Serbian Universities network for lifelong learning
	5. Connecting on an international level
THREATS	1. Legislation
	2. Financing priorities
	3. Competition
	4. Status of lifelong learning content at the University

4. Action Plan

Following the adoption of the overall strategy of the University, the University shall determine the Action Plan for the implementation of the presented Lifelong Learning, career services and employability, and alumni activities Strategy at the University of Novi Sad. Through this plan, roles, responsibilities, implementers of particular tasks, institutional mechanisms that will enable the implementation of the Strategy in a desired way, will be determined. For each task it is necessary to structure in detail its activities, identify the expected outcomes of the same, determine quantitative and qualitative indicators of activity as to follow the activities in their implementation and measure their success. Also, each task with activities will be precisely identified, regarding deadlines, sources of financing, the manner of monitoring the implementation and the manner of evaluations.