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*Evaluation and guidance services
for transnational projects in education*



**Initial External Evaluation Report of the
POOLS-T
Producing Open Learning System Tools
Project**

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Introduction

A. Purpose of the report:

Evaluation and monitoring of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme's project "POOLS-T" (Producing Open Learning System Tools)

B. The main areas to be evaluated will be:

- The progress made towards the contractual outcomes and respect of the contractual workplan
- The manner in which the partnership performs as a transnational collaboration (cross-cultural understanding, sharing of activities, effectiveness of communication, meeting deadlines, etc.,)
- The quality of the outcomes and products
- The extent of the inclusion of the target group (teachers at secondary schools and less directly, teachers in other subject areas) in project planning and activities
- The effectiveness and impact of dissemination activities and the extent to which the project has employed models of best practice from related projects
- The quality of the ODL and ICT elements of the project activities
- The extent to which a strategy for sustaining the project activities beyond the programme funding has been applied within the project
- Advice and guidance on the financial and administrative progress of the project

The project external evaluator will participate in a minimum of two project meetings scheduled in the project.

C. Evaluation outcomes:

- i) ***Initial evaluation report – 3 months after project start*** (this document).
- ii) Interim evaluation report – due 1 month before the contractual Progress Report
- iii) Final evaluation report – due 2 months before project's close
- iv) Quarterly reviews of project progress in line with tabular evaluation plan (see contractual evaluation strategy)

1. Project synopsis

POOLS-T Objectives:

- Objective 1: To promote the implementation of computer assisted language learning for CLIL and to reduce the costs of software and the time spent by teachers on tailoring authentic materials for students, by producing software tools that automate the process of converting web pages and texts to html pages linked word by word to on-line dictionaries.
- Objective 2: To help CLIL teachers and students in working with technical texts, especially in the LWUTL, by providing an user-friendly web-based tool that enable CLIL teachers to easily create supported on-line materials and enable students working individually to convert text documents through instant dictionary access and thus easier comprehension of the content.
- Objective 3: To increase public awareness and enhance the use of CLIL by writing a methodology unit on to apply the software in CLIL and by providing free-access to all project outputs on website www.languages.dk, with materials suitable for CLIL teaching in 5 languages (Danish, Dutch, Greek, English, Gaelic) and by disseminating the results.

Planned outputs / products / results as contracted in the Original application:

- 1) A CopyLeft software tool which can convert texts into html documents where all words are hyperlinked to free on-line dictionaries covering many combinations of European languages. The application will have support for audio, video and graphics to enrich / support the text content.
 - Interface and support guides in Danish, Dutch, Greek, and English.
 - The tool produces standardized html scripts that do not require any plug-ins or software installations for the end-users.
 - The tool will enable CLIL teachers to easily create supported on-line materials where all words have instant access to on-line dictionaries. The resulting outputs will be suitable for individual tutoring of students working with technical texts, the web pages created may in a task based context be used as “pre tasks” and “post tasks” ensuring language learning through CLIL.
 - The software developers will also seek to make a version with functionality like “Babelfish” <http://babelfish.altavista.com>; the resulting web page would word by word be linked to on-line dictionaries (i.e. not just translated).
- 2) Documented and commented open source scripts that show the algorithm behind the produced software and enables portability and further development.
- 3) Online instruction videos and training materials with subtitles in Danish, Dutch, Greek, and English. The DVD produced in the POOLS project will be updated with videos demonstrating the new tool.

- 4) A methodology guide in Danish, Dutch, Greek, and English to show pedagogical considerations for CLIL application of the software and its outputs.
- 5) Exemplary CLIL materials in the project languages produced with the tool
- 6) A project website to disseminate the outputs, keep in touch with end users, and archive projects documents. The site will tailor/extend the existing website www.languages.dk which can document 40.000+ IP-address visitors per year
- 7) A suite of dissemination materials; brochures, quarterly newsletters, handouts for conferences, etc.

Partners:

- P1: Odense Tekniske Skole Denmark Odense Tekniske Skole (OTS)
- P2: EfVET Belgium European Forum for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- P3: Horizon College Netherlands Horizon College
- P4: Athena Greece Vocational Training Center of Thrace “ATHENA”
- P5: SMO United Kingdom Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

2. Sources of information and Tools used for Evaluation

The qualitative assessment of the achievement of objectives and outcomes is based on the available sources of information and on the tools/instruments and indicators developed by the partnership:

- PM plan and monitoring procedures, POOLS-T Calendar, Internal evaluation procedures;
- Communication: E-mails from coordinator and copy of most relevant e-mails from the other members;
- POOLS-T meetings' evaluation form and reports, Internal evaluation reports by each partner.
- Coordinator's synthesis and Progress Report 1, available at 08_01_2009.
- Period Covered by this Review: 1 Oct. 2008 to 1 March. 2009;
- Products developed: website <http://www.languages.dk/index.html> , Newsletter1 from 19 Dec 2008 and Newsletter 2 from 23 Feb. 2009;

Tools/instruments used for external qualitative and quantitative evaluation

- Original application, objectives, activities, outputs;
- PM plan, QA procedures, internal evaluation by project partners, and Progress report 1
- Work-plan, changes, quarterly reports

3. POOLS-T Evaluation

a) Phase A - Project Management and Quality Management: (WP 1 & WP 2)

The PM and QM can be assessed from three points of view: ensuring the achievements as planned, the collaboration among the partners, and communication and reporting.

Quality evaluation of the achievements of Phase 1 - PM & QA

The rigorous and transparent project management and communication procedures and the personal involvement and management skills of the DK coordinator (OTS) and the good collaboration between the partners were key factors that ensured the achievement of all the planned activities and outcomes of the project during the first five months, from October 1st 2008 to March 1st 2009.

All the outcomes and achievements are in line with the original work plan, for each of the five main phases, for which examples of specific results and QA are presented below in more detail. **This is also reinforced by the internal evaluation of the five partners**, covering the period October – December 2008

The internal evaluation reports show that the management is perceived as:

“strict quality and project management” EfVet

“most than sufficient, relevant and effective” (partner VTC of Thrace “Athena”)

“Very comprehensive listing of all tasks” (partners HORIZON COLLEGE and SMO).

The average score for PM and QA, based on the notes given by five partners, is 4.8 from a maximum of 5.

What is also important to note is that the project has not merely followed a work plan but has done so in a dynamic way that is sometimes unusual in the first months of a transnational co-operation project. It had a very effective start. Although the project was waiting for contractualisation to be complete, **several activities were begun in advance of the kick-off meeting**, taking advantage of the experience of the consortium and the management skills of the co-ordinator who adopted a very proactive, friendly and “peer encouraging” approach that should ensure the project establishes and maintains a high profile in language learning in Europe. This particularly was evident in the field of dissemination, **where initial awareness-**

raising activity in this project was excellent and more of which will be described in the section below.

With regard to internal evaluation and monitoring procedures, again a clear and effective start has taken place with key documents such as the “Web Page Text Blender Development Feedback Form” being discussed in draft form by the partners and finalised through collective discussion. In addition to this, various forms are already being implemented, including a meeting evaluation form and a quarterly progress form. These have been completed to-date and are very positive – the partners feel very much empowered to exercise their skills and competences in the project.

The management of the first project meeting appears to have been effective. The minutes circulated from the first meeting are clear, if a little brief. There is a clear contribution from all partners present (particularly in terms of contributing to ideas for dissemination). It does not appear that the BE partner EfVET was present at the meeting and with dissemination being discussed in detail, perhaps the minutes should have included reference to why EfVET was not represented. The minutes are available from the document archive for the project <http://www.languages.dk/archive.html> which is already very well “populated” with informative project-related documents and reports. The archive is excellent and promises to be a very valuable resource for language learning in the EU. One suggestion for the internal evaluation document (quarterly report) is that partners are encouraged addressing the issue of “European Added Value”, if not for each report than occasionally. This would give them the opportunity of documenting an area often under-explored and yet important. In particular, it may provide an additional element to dissemination, impact, etc by allowing comment on the personal and professional development of those taking part. The first stages of the project indicate a consortium working together very well in a transnational environment, some record of their views and how they are benefiting could serve as a useful model for other projects.

b) Quality evaluation of the Phases relating to Development

Phase B Development: (WP 6, 7, 8 and 9)

Phase C Development, Dissemination and Exploitation of Website (WP3)

Phase D Exploitation and impact of results (WP4)

The project achieved as planned the delivery of the main outcomes, for each of the other Phases and the corresponding Work Packages. The activities and the schedules were in-line with the planning, there were no reported or observed delays and negative variations from the work plan. The milestones were respected. The ongoing progress towards objectives appears to be going very well based on the thorough project management and administration outlined elsewhere in this report. In addition, there is clear evidence already that the consortium is the correct one to deliver effectively the outcomes, with members identifying new materials and site and early examples of simultaneous video and text being presented at e.g. <http://www.languages.dk/tools/fred.htm> whilst the text blender itself (see at <http://www.languages.dk/tools/index.htm> has already been adapted and refined which again is a very positive indicator for the first months of the project.

Evidence from the project

2008: Evidence from reports and newsletters

- October 15th: Project website and blog merged and launched as joint pools and pools-t platforms
- October 15th: Conference brochures in English
- October 22nd to 25th: Dissemination event at EfVET annual conference: two round-table presentations and brochures (120 were handed out), posters were produced and used.
- November 15th: documentation of scripts and algorithm available on-line to be used for the development of the tools.
- December 1st: Conference brochures in DK, EN, EL, GD, and NL available from the website
- December 2nd: Project Newsletter 1 summarizing events, achievements and user feedback, work in progress, and examples of everyday project life from the partnership.

- December 31st: Internal evaluation reports

2009:

- January 08 : Synthesis of internal reports by the coordinator;
- February 15th: Delivery of summary of needed improvements and recommendations for the software tools (the alpha versions) based on piloting and evaluating the tools with teachers and students .
- February 25th: Project newsletter summarizing events, achievements and user feedback.. The project newsletters presents partners' contributions, work in progress, events, and photos, examples of project's life, from the partnership, interesting links and up-coming events/conferences, main outcomes for users to comment on and suggest improvements.

Evidence of project's results, procedures, activities

We had access to the all necessary information continuously, through the e-mails or phone calls from Kent Andersen, the project co-ordinator, for each major event, product, or meeting and through the project's website.

We would like to highlight here as a valuable PM strategy, the decision to make available on the POOLS-T website all the activities, processes and outcomes of the project and to offer transparent access to all persons interested to the internal documents, including the original application, budget & financial agreements.

Example of outcomes and Quality Assessment:

www.languages.dk

The merger of the previous project's website and the new POOLS-T website content was successfully finalised in the first month of activity. The website presents a very good quality. The criteria taken in account for the evaluation:

- transparency and free easy access to the information
- design, presentation, navigation, including the blog
- languages for the tools developed previously and for POOLS-T
- content and relevance of the information for ICT & languages
- monitoring the website access and number of visitors.

Through the POOLS-T's blog <http://www.weblogs.uhi.ac.uk/pools/>, access is given to the different events and developments taking place during the project, and also to the previous project POOLS. The archives of the projects, available also on-line on the blog, are well structured and offer information updated monthly.

In conclusion, the project's website allow to follow the development of tools, the problems and solutions found, the involvement of each partner, encourage participation to the activities and software development and testing, the feedback from the end-users.

Tools:

T1- a desktop application that converts texts and web pages to html pages where all words are hyperlinked to on-line dictionaries covering many combinations of European languages.

T2 - An on-line tool with functionality like “Babelfish”, where the resulting web page will, word-by-word, be linked to on-line dictionaries.

We note a very good collaborative effort towards the development of the two NTIC tools by OTS (DK) and SMO (UK). We found evidence about the continuous involvement of the other two partners (GR, NL) in the testing and the evaluation of tools. The BE partner was little involved in these activities but this is in-line with the planned tasks and responsibilities. The development is also based on active involvement of end-users in testing and feedback on the developed tools.

Collaboration of partners to tools development and testing

Example of quantitative indicators about the cooperation within the partnership:

P1 (OTS) has been in contact with all partners by phone calls and by e-mails throughout usually several times per week. He received +600 e-mails regarding the project and probably sent more than that out in the first three months.

Other **qualitative evidence of the partners' collaboration** was gathered by the external evaluators from the e-mails sent by Kent Andersen, exchanges with the SMO partner, copies of exchanges of most important e-mails between all the partners, e-mails exchanges with others developers, information available from project's website and Newsletter 2.

Newsletter 2 excerpt: “At the workshop in Hoorn, the project teams from Denmark, Greece, Netherlands, and Scotland met f2f for the first time. The workshop key points were presentation of the two types of tools to be produced and how to apply these in a CLIL (Content and Language Integrate Learning) context. **The Greek team had, as an ice breaker, prepared a lesson for learning numbers in Greek.**

... We experimented with Greek fonts and had a first success with exporting web pages from the desk top tool with presentation of Greek letters, at least when we used ISO fonts. **Based on recommendations after the workshop we have included support for embedding YouTube videos in the web pages** produced by the desktop tool.”. There is clear evidence presented of informal but very effective transnational co-operation from all.

These software developments of the UK and DK developers were tested by the external evaluators as well. We would like to highlight as good practice that potentially **every person interested in using the tools has free access to the website to real-time development versions**. Following the e-mail updates sent by the project's coordinator, the evaluators were able to test the version of the web page software at the beginning of January 2009 (see e-mail from Kent Andersen on Jan.12th).

Angelica Bucur-Marinescu, one of the external evaluator team, installed the Neuron plug-in to launch the Text Blender and tested the work on progress of the EU based dictionary covering 276 language pairs combinations, on which it will based POOLS-T tool, i.e. the web page text blender. The version used for testing is available at: http://www.languages.dk/materials/step7/unit2/unit2_rony.htm

We were able to translate several words from the lesson Unit 2 PLC Step 7, using the English to Romanian dictionary. At that moment, after less than 4 months from the beginning of the project, the dictionary content is limited, but the software is working very well. The other

dictionary combination English to Danish is available at:
http://www.languages.dk/materials/step7/unit2/unit2_ny.htm.

We also tested a previous POOLS product, a “Do It Yourself” version of the six HP applications that enable a teacher to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises for CLIL lessons.

The involvement of end-users (teachers and students) for testing and providing feedback on the developed tools.

Again, we note very good strategies and activities reinforced by **the evidence of end-user involvement** (electricians' students) from the start of the project and the feedback integration in development of tools, excerpt from the POOLS-T Newsletter 2:

“We have also made a simple student version with only a window for pasting text, a selection of dictionaries and a convert to webpage button. This version has been successfully tested in Odense with a class of electricians' apprentices working with complicated technical texts. The students told they would continue using the tool after the language lessons, a small victory in itself. Main debate among the students was which dictionary to prefer, several preferred the IATE dictionary found at <http://iate.europa.eu> . New versions of the tools will include support for the many combinations of languages that is possible with the IATE site“.

c) Dissemination, valorisation and exploitation

Phase E: Dissemination (WP5)

Dissemination and valorisation were areas of particular importance for this initial evaluation as it was one of the areas assessed as not being as strong as others in the feedback on the original proposal (achieving a score of 3.5). The comments of the independent assessor re the relatively low number of days for EfVET to fulfil its discrete role for dissemination are noted and re-emphasised here, particularly in the context of the organisation apparently not being

represented at the first meeting where dissemination ideas were a significant part of the discussion. **However, that being said, progress has been very positive in terms of dissemination and valorisation.** Contacts made by the promoter with various organisations and projects in Europe at the very start of the project are very positive. The evaluation team has had access to several email exchanges where **very promising reciprocal information-sharing and project promotion activities have been set up**, such as with the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning Consortium in Finland) and their CCN activities. Their CLIL Cascade Network seems a good networking tool that can be exploited. <http://ccn.infoweb.as.tietotalo.fi/English.iw3>

Another result of early proactive dissemination materials is the offer from one language learning teacher contact to share **300 x 5 minutes recordings of spoken text** in Luxembourgish.

The language used in the early project brochures is very effective and welcoming to project “outsiders”. This may seem a simple point, but it is an important one. Whilst the content is high level and impressive, the (EN) language used is informal and welcoming (e.g. “Let’s cluster our projects”, “hop on board” etc) and it is **very positive to see dissemination materials using this style and approach** rather than being dry “cut and pastes” from project applications and other formal documents.

We note as good practice this very good dissemination strategy and, from the very beginning of the project, activities for in particular, initial awareness-raising of the project's aims and results. **A valuable aspect is the contribution of all partners to the dissemination activities.**

In addition, we consider as very good the following results:

- the dissemination outcomes, for the quality and relevance of the content and pro-active communication
- very clear activities in each country (details in the project's first internal evaluation reports of the 5 partners)

- the deployment of activities/events at national and European level, including participation confirmed to CALL European conference in September-Oct. 2009 (Brussels), with a live demonstration of the tools and other dissemination methods.
- the diversity of means and dissemination channels such as the EfVET Conference - European Forum for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, workshops, production of brochures in 5 languages DK, EN, EL, UK, and NL available from the website, two newsletters offering a good content & quality of information.

Exploitation

There has been clearly good early planning of exploitation activities. Two new EU project applications under “Transfer of Innovation” designed to exploit the results from BP-BLTM and POOLS-T in new geographical areas were submitted in February 2009.

Example of quantitative indicators:

- The Newsletters from Dec. 2008 and Feb. 2009 were sent to +500 registered users. The Newsletters present POOLS-T events, achievements and user feedback, work in progress, and situations and photos of everyday project life from the partnership.
- At the EfVET annual conference, 2 round-table presentations were organised and 120 brochures were distributed.
- The coordinator sent electronic Christmas cards to +200 known users from the target group.

d) Overall recommendations

i) Project Management: EFMQ

The use of the European Framework Quality Management is reduced to the monitoring and improvement activities of project performance. The EFMQ indicators are therefore limited to the set-up of clear milestones and achievements for each main phase and related activities: “Deliveries and achievements will be checked against the work plan milestones”. As a result, the Quality Management is resumed to tight monitoring of work-progress by observing the

milestones and achievements as defined. However, at this stage of the project, this approach proved to be sufficient.

EFQM Key measures for main outputs (tools and the guide for the CLIL method) remain to be defined.

The following indicators could be developed by the partnership, in order to facilitate and enhance the monitoring and internal evaluation processes:

- criteria to assess the users' feedback, pilots' results
- criteria to evaluate the relevance of the future methodology guide,
- criteria to assess the relevance of the tools
- questionnaires for peer-review results, teachers' Questionnaires
- questionnaires for website survey
- end-users questionnaires.

ii) Dissemination

A good opportunity for dissemination might be the 12th International Conference on Minority Languages (ICML XII) at the University of Tartu, Estonia "Language revitalization and new technologies". This conference will provide an academic opportunity to discuss which barriers need to be overcome, myths to be broken, processes to be followed and changes to be undertaken.

iii) Meeting Minutes

Enhance the minutes presented after a meeting and try to include more indications of diverse transnational input, especially indications of partners influencing agenda content related to their area of leadership / competence.

iv) European Added Value

This project has made an excellent start and there appears to be a very positive working atmosphere among the participants. This project could be one that is well-placed to document the personal and professional benefits of working in such a transnational cooperation project for the participants themselves as well as the other target groups (just one example being the activity where experienced linguists could empathise with new language learners as a result of

the informal method of learning numbers in Greek that took place at the first meeting and which was presented in a newsletter), and this could be seen as an additional element to traditional measures of European Added Value.

v) Addressing the comments of the assessor of the application

Some final comments here re the comments of the assessor in the context of the criteria that were considered as *relatively* weak (achieved a score of 3.5). The comments on dissemination and valorisation have already been addressed elsewhere in this report

- **Quality of the Consortium.** The project's early activities have to an extent answered any concerns which really were about the extent to which the consortium was a "multi-actor" one. The consortium so far appears to have shown that it is ideally placed to deliver the project's outcomes due not just to the organisations involved but also very much due to the individuals representing them. Essentially, the recommendation is to continue to do what the project has already begun – continue to develop links with other projects, consortia, networks; promote its links with new "silent" partners (like in Switzerland) and to support EfVET in its networking activities. This will help to emphasise that the partnerships networks are indeed multi-actor and will help in sustaining the project and maximising its impact.
- **Cost-benefit ratio.** Most of the comments made were connected with adjustments to the budget that would have been made at the contractualisation stage. However, the project should continue to promote and emphasise its "open access" policy and the growth of its networks to prove its cost-effectiveness.
- **Impact.** This is not easy to comment on as little critical comment (aside from mention of a relative lack of detail) was made in the assessment. However, impact is clearly connected to the dissemination and exploitation activities, and to the open access element of the main products. Therefore, the recommendation is again, to continue to work in the same way.

Signed

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