Transparent Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this project is to create sets of media-based imagery that illustrate the internal workings of public institutions to the common citizen. This is an important need in countries that are seeking to open up their public and private institutions and bring them closer to their users.

Method: There is a clear need to carry out proposals that tackle organizational lack of transparency; to this end, through an interdisciplinary approach, we propose the creation of a free-access Web-based portal that shows the interior of the institutions at hand, learning institutions to start with, this scope will be broadened later to institutions of health and public safety. The project chooses and shows a core selection of features capable of becoming international models for each kind of institutions, elementary schools in this phase. These features are shown in short videos, depicting every core element found: installations, governing bodies, documentation, samples of learning and teaching methodologies in use, etc.

Results: the propossed project succeeds in getting institutions closer to their users. It has been developed in Spain, and translated to other Latin-American countries and the United States.

Key words: WEB 2.0, multimedia web-platform, applied ICT's, accessible ICT's.

1. INTRODUCTION

This project originates in the School of Education at Universidad of Oviedo, Spain, and relies on the work of a team of researchers in various universities (Univ. Camilo Jose Cela, Madrid; the University at Albany, New York; Univ. Nacional Autonoma de Mexico; Univ. Pedagogica Nacional de Mexico; and Univ. Playa Ancha, Chile). The project seeks to impart

Internet communicative capacities with a social purpose by making of it an open door and window to the institutions's interiors, fostering transparency and bringing them closer to the public.

The project places on the Internet a *visual* WEB platform (**www.orgtransparent.uniovi.es**) or (**orgtransparente.org**), with a direct, easy structure, and adapted to different countries. It is a window to free and direct access for the entire community: students, families, scholars, school administrators, etc. The project shows, in its first stage, educational institutions's use of techniques and narrative strategies characteristic of advanced multi-media know-how. Such use is **novel** inasmuch as it takes on content that was traditional the domain of writing, and it is **innovative** as a new application, generalized to all users and with a social purpose, is found. Opening up freely, directly, easily and using a universal imagery endows it with a particular **relevance**.

There was a need to bestow a social purpose upon Internet materials by appropriating their advanced communicative strategies in multi-media. In this sense, the experience is **original** since there is no other similar case online that would show the interior workings of institutions without a commercial or marketing approach, using the information at hand to foster the sales of goods or services offered by the institution.

The present article is the retelling in writing of a visual experience that parallels the social echo of *Youtube*.

2. SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT OF THE EXPERIENCE

In a context of perceived crisis, such as the current one, societies find themselves forced to maximize the resources and funding of their institutions. New Information and Communication Technologies merge as contemporary knowledge transmission tools with a central role in social changes. The realm of the image in our culture moves to the new digital audiovisual environments through Internet and

portable digital devices (mp3, iPhone, PDA's, etc.). We are living in a society with a novel framework of knowledge management, a society in the midst of a dynamic that redresses educative and formative activity by redirecting both its methodology and its contents (European Counsel, 2000). According to Gernard and Klinger [1] this is a shifting scenario where individuals interact, relate to each other and to the environment's elements on a grid whose core material is real-time data integration with a strong preeminence of iconic information. We see a steady relinquishing of activities characteristic of traditional education systems, i.e. reading, traditional phone conversation, old television models [2]. The society of knowledge affects teaching methodologies at all levels, their contents, and even their own goals [3]. Educational systems, in line with these trends, gather technology ideas and include them in their methodologies and contents [4], but it is not rare to reverse the process to the extent that the pedagogical initiative designs and specifically generates innovative models in knowledge management.

Cabero [5] differentiates two technological models: American and European. Both approaches are used as reference in our research (by implementing a Spanish platform and a second version in English with evaluators in the United States).

Particularly in Europe, there is a new framework of mobility for the individual, who faces changes in the social boundaries and points of reference that were formerly physically set in recognizable places. An ongoing international exchange of people, workers and students, such as this, implies for the institutions approved designs, and transparency in their facilities with an attractive offer for a community that requires exact knowledge of every organization's workings. University systems must provide an answer to these new social demands, and their centers, following organizational reference approaches, must be able to ofer sharp cultural models in line with such an environment and dynamic society [6]. This is particularly the case when the education systems are required to compete and adopt models of "quality" management [7], mastery of the markets and attraction of a limited clientele, the search for students to whom to *offer* new products and new learning strategies. It becomes necessary to create a forum that serves as reference to management models, and thus show university environments capable of offering technology-based helping tools that draw near learning institutions and the citizenry.

The guidelines set up to make systems converge in the European Higher Education Area indicate that we need to renew the methodological tenets of education, directing its activities towards the education of a student body able to interact independently in the knowledge society we live in. In this manner education practices reshape their priorities to stress the value of non presencials activities. A society based on knowledge, and with a high component of ICT's in its workings, will encompass virtual communities and networks that allow for the exchange of information and knowledge, will follow audiovisual narrative techniques [8], and will make it possible the active participation and cooperation by its citizenry in all issues that impact them.

The research background for this project follows the guidelines proposed in works by Rodriguez [9], Blasco and Perez [10], Corominas [11], Echeverria [12] and Romero [13], on a Spanish context; and, more centred on the definition and development of

strategies in new technologies, and the core of our specific interest in this analysis, Anthony [14], Bloom and Walz [15] and Caleb [16], among others at an international level. In the field of web-design, for Web usability the project relies on works by Nielsen [17], Rosenfeld and Morville [18], and Norman [19]; and for the design of more functional generic applets Burdman [20], Niederst [21], Dinucci [22], and Druin [23], are established world-wide references.

On the field of audiovisual technology, the work of J. Cabero, M. Gisbert, and Mª. C. Llorente (2007) are a reference for new education technologies in technological environments and teacher-training; P. Marques's work on technological activities in Internet. Also a reference is the research published by Sevillano M. L. [24]. within their work on I+D (2009).

3. FIRST APPROACH AND PROJECT GOALS

At the School of Education of the University of Oviedo, Spain we found the need to satisfy the demand for training students doing their annual internships in elementary schools. This project was intended as a free- and open-access Internet-based education support platform for learning the Spanish educational system; but this idea turned out to be of interest for families, for other institutions and other countries.

Through the project we found that the institutions and their workings could be shown using WEB 2.0 audiovisual techniques and strategies: namely through the showing of narrative-effective short videos. Also, the project draws on participants' experiences and their daily use of computer and information technologies, as well as access to successful social networks like Facebook and Flickr. Thus the project benefits from the citizenry's familiarity with new effective technologies, as well as from the practical abilities and specific background of participants in the use of graphic WEB sites.

For these reasons, the project's proposed goals are the design, setup and assessment of an open WEB platform, with organization, technique and strategies akin to that of the audiovisual narrative of social communication media that will work as a helping tool for showcasing the distinct elements that make up an institution (educational in this first stage), and that would work simultaneously as an international window and frame of reference for the interior of such organizations.

The proposed goals are:

1. To select the main contrasting and meaningful features, keys for the organization and development of a reference educative institution at the Spanish Elementary Education level.
2. To carry out video tapings of the selected features' visual aspects. Posting those clips using effective narrative techniques in audiovisual communication media.
3. To design, assess and publish a WEB-based platform in which to post the pilot institution's video clips of its features, in English and Spanish.
4. Using techniques and strategies of audiovisual knowledge society extend the initiative towards the broadcasting of organizational features of other institutions, to draw closer to the citizenry, the educational institutions, their physical aspects, their practices.

5. To publish the research results at national and international academic, professional and technological publications.

This is an **original** project in the sense that currently there are no multimedia websites in Internet that showcase educational institutions. Also, by showing a model for implementing multimedia ICT effectively, as do communication media and users of virtual knowledge foray, it seeks to be **relevant** to the research community. To this end, we research the tenets, the techniques and strategies of ICT's, documenting distinctive elements of an educational center (for Elementary Education in Spain's pilot center) on short videos, edited with graphic inserts: Installations, governance bodies, charter documentation, etc.

We find this project's publication to be relevant because it addresses:

- The interest to promote a technological culture based on techniques and strategies of social communication media and virtual knowledge forums geared towards improving educational tools and applications.
- The citizenry's need to know the potential of virtual communication tools and their best applications in a knowledge society.
- The opportunity to showcase institutions and transparent models to a common and converging European Education Area. Since it is a research on tangible features (capable of being on video), we opt towards assessing the practice and exercise of non-tangible features: reflection, conceptualization and cognitive exercise characteristic of educational environments.

It benefits to society since:

- The usefulness of the forecast results will be tangible in the societal impact of the Web-platform, its level of content enhancement, and the degree of user interaction.
- Its approach to free- and open-access audiovisual content will foster the overcoming of barriers that, because of age, background, geography or social status, various social groups face, thus avoiding the appearance of marginal pockets --digital gaps-- in the information society.
- The project seeks to offer **solutions to concerns and problems, and will benefit society** through broadcasting and knowledge of the real management and educational methodology of *transparent* institutions. All aspects of the Web platform design, application and assessment aims at it to be useful and guiding for other activities supported by similar virtual tools.

4. METHODOLOGY AND WORKPLAN

External assessment of the project: The project starts with the research and selection of meaningful features that make up an educational institution, in the pilot case an elementary School in Asturias, Spain. The selected features for this case and for each institution will be evaluated by researchers in different countries to check for their applicability in their areas. The project seeks to be a contrasting experience for different viewpoints, in several universities, and an open and communicative experience of the understandings and educational models of reference for other academic fields, administrative bodies, and society itself.

Phases:

1st Design: Sampling selection, review and contrasting analysis of typology, significant characteristics and tangible iconic features of Elementary Educational institutions.

On the initial research population: Sample and institutions chosen to select the features to showcase are representative of the whole population. These contents describe a generic institution and must be a representative sample of a set of educational centers. To this end, the project relies on researchers from diverse regions and countries: Asturias, Catalonia, Andalucia, Aragon, Murcia, Madrid and Galicia, in Spain, Mexico, Chile, Venezuela and the United States in the Americas.

We use several data gathering and analysis techniques according to the stated goals, from quantitative and qualitative approaches: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and fieldwork notes.

Finally, following the Delphi method for treatment and analysis of the features, we perform a qualitative treatment through successive analyses of content in the workplan index.

2nd Phase: production of video recordings. The selected features will be taped in video clips and edited, these will gather all important elements found in educational centers: Installations, organizational bodies, documents, methodologies, etc.

3rd Phase: Web-platform programming suitable for the project requirements that will host the streaming video documents. Web-based content will have the same formal and narrative characteristics of other successful social networking media: the videos will be of easy and convenient access, direct, short and rich in graphical information. This phase includes the try-outs, assessments and improvements of the Web-platform that will be open to Internet users, and geared in particular to the educational community itself, to researchers in different disciplines, and to any individual interested in the main features of a given educational institution.

The Web platform poses itself to be extensible to other educational levels, and other institutions. Always under the framework of a theme-based network, informative for society, and innovative and rigorous for the international scientific community.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The setup of this platform support non-presential and autonomous educational processes. This implies an intervening approach to offer the agents in charge of designing and implementing such educational processes --schools, administrative bodies, educational centers, etc.-- a window into the events occurring in educational institutions, thus showcasing a model, contributing to knowledge of reality, consensus building, and to the standardizing of pedagogical practices.

On the other hand, the project is particularly **relevant** in satisfying the universal need to bring closer institutions and their users, under a framework of international collaboration through diverse universities. This approach of assessment and

adaptation to distinct social realities affords the project with external validity, **scientific weight**, and exactness in its results. The **impact** the project currently has relies on the simplicity and universality of its strategies: the use of audiovisual communication to show the internal workings of institutions to the citizen.

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