

# Daedalos in Re-Education

## EU Policies Trying to Bridge the Data Gap in South East Europe

Need a better way to conquer a gaping distance than flying? Why not build a bridge? These days the proverbial waxen wings are up in the air and safer ways are to be used.

D@dalos abandons avionics and becomes a bridge architect to close the online knowledge gap between Central and South East Europe.

*by Iulia Mitzner and Regina Schrutz*

**W**eblog, Podcast and RSS. Wiki, WIFI, Vlog. Even inveterate internet users are getting out of breath trying to keep up with the pace what with all new features the World Wide Web is constantly creating and offering. For a broader section of these users, the internet has long been an important source of information, a way to communicate and network, a place to perceive media and, not to forget, a place for interactive self-portrayal.

Consequently, countries that were not participating in this phenomenon from the very beginning are now under pressure to make up for the time this technology could not evolve in their region. Due to war, political leadership or other circumstances domineering freedom of speech and information, the problematic nature of this so-called knowledge gap appeared. Therefore, some South East European countries still have not completely made up for this lag up to this day.

Different networks offered various supporting activities: Online/More Colour in the Media (OL/MCM) is an organisation that offered practical media education activities and career orientation through their programme Creative and Practical Media Activities (CREAM). This programme started in October 2003 and ended in September 2005.

The Italian NGO Scope supports projects aimed at promoting real social change and favouring the active participation of the people involved.

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) promotes the creation of high-quality and permanently self-sufficient higher education structures in developing and transitional countries. Their help includes individual support and training of young academic staff, as well as experts and executives (staff development), but also support for the construction of appropriate structures at the partner universities (institution building).

### The Objective of Promotion

“The challenge in helping to keep pace lies not so much in equipping the affected countries with the latest technology, but actually in the training of skills needed for the use of the provided hardware,” says Wolfgang Schumann, professor of political science at the University of Tübingen in Germany and project supervisor at the organisation D@dalos. To gain a critical exposure to the medium and how to exploit it for ones’ own interest is thus an important ability, which needs to be acquired.

D@dalos, which was founded in 1999, is one of the many projects that is, among others, sponsored and supported by the European Union’s Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

One of the focal points of the Stability Pact is to create and support independent media. Furthermore, it is of high interest for the Stability Pact to support the introduction of democracy, human rights and the rebuilding of infrastructure, especially in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and in Kosovo.

But the concerns of the Stability Pact also include economic rebuilding, cooperation and development, as well as addressing security questions.

Without a doubt the promotion of the internet medium is an economic concern, a basic precondition for democracy, as it provides freedom of speech and information, which is an elementary human right. Thus, it is an important tool for transitional countries to use in their process of overhauling the last barriers to become socio-economically equal to countries of the European Union.

Enhancing, what we would like to call Internet Literacy (in dependence on the term Media Literacy) is therefore an undertaking that supports all of the goals of the Stability Pact at some point. From the numerous projects working in this section there is one, held by the above-mentioned organisation D@dalos, which we found to be especially dedicated to this particular problem. It deals with the problem at the roots – in the educational sector.

## All They Need to Know

Schumann, also a civic education expert and author of the D@dalos EU-textbook explains the strategic objectives: “With that course, teachers do not learn how to use a single software application; instead they learn how to fulfil teacher-specific tasks.

FIT@school addresses the problem that nobody really reads the full manual of his or her computer. Training, which is designed to explain one software application, has to meet the expectations of many different users, but something that is interesting for an office assistant might not be important for a teacher.

Teachers do not really need to know how to write a serial letter. It is much more important for them to know how to produce worksheets for their pupils, search the internet for information and literature concerning one of their teaching-units, or communicate with colleagues by e-mail. This is what we are trying to concentrate on.”

The programme runs as a six day IT training course, during which the participants create teaching material on the topic of Human Rights. The first three modules cover the basic functionality of the application Microsoft Word. Modules four, five and six give the trainees an understanding of the internet and its numerous applications like browser basics, online literature research, effective use of directories and search engines, as well as the efficient use of e-mail.

## Train the Trainer

For flawless delivery to as many teachers as possible, FIT@school is handing over the knowledge through professional training by D@dalos experts. It provides training for local trainers in their own mother tongue, in cooperation with different educational centres. Those local trainers then provide further training programmes to local teachers.

Shqipe Abazi, who works for the Kosovo Education Center (KEC) and has participated in one of the trainings provid-

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ed by D@dalos experts, shares her experience: “One of my personal highlights was that the contents of FIT@school were combined with a human rights education. This programme is very well designed and plants two trees with one seed: First of all the trainees learn how to use the computer and how to use the internet for their personal advantage, and secondly they learn about Human Rights, which is very important in our society.”

According to Schumann, FIT@school’s main focus in 2007 will be Romania: “Hopefully, the translation of our CD-ROM for the trainees will be finished by the end of the year. We cannot organise a workshop without having one of our most important tools.” These CD-ROMs include all details of the programme and the data of the online education server for the trainees who do not have internet access.

## Learn to Learn

At the moment, D@dalos is awaiting authorisation on another programme. Learn How to Learn and Teach with PC and Internet should encourage the ability to work effectively within the World Wide Web. Like FIT@school, this programme will depend on multipliers within the local population and again has teachers as its target group. After attending this programme, the trainees will have acquired a standard of Internet Literacy equal to the Central European nations. Efforts are under way to fund this new programme.

## Continuing Education Allegorised

The former avionics master set a good example. He learned the handcraft of bridge building and is now guiding his students from Crete to the mainland. And those who will not cross the bridge should at least be taught how to build their own bridges whenever they want or need to. Organisations like D@dalos already set important cornerstones, for connecting Central Europe and its South East neighbours through an equal online network. Thus EU countries to-be get a fair chance to keep pace with the rest of the Union.