

## An integrated solution to virtual mobility barriers

- ☞ *VM framework*
- ☞ *Virtual mobility added value for students and teachers?*
- ☞ *Sociocultural aspects*
- ☞ *Meeting in Lithuania*

## WM framework

*The UbiCamp* project emerged as an attempt to respond to the usual obstacles to carry out Virtual Mobility (hereinafter VM - Virtual Mobility) experiences in higher education institutions inside the European Union. UbiCamp is an acronym from "Ubiquitous Campus", and tries to become a VM model that allows an easy integration of new institutions, through encouraging a decentralized model in which each institution will only have to meet the quality requirements raised, and where the technology integration could become as a simple process. The UbiCamp project is based on a set of frameworks that allows the virtual exchange within the institutions enrolled. These frameworks can be briefly described as follows:

- **Academic Framework:** It defines all the standards related to academic content and quality, and the basic requirements or methods that allow the assessment in curricular exchange. It is used to define how to make the curricular recognition of students and teachers.
- **Cultural Framework:** Defines the cultural content that the project tries to provide to students and teachers involved. This framework defines the cultural contents and other information related to the curriculum assessment and recognition of mobility, supported by the acquisition of cultural knowledge to differentiate from traditional international e-learning.
- **Technological Framework:** This framework defines any aspect related to technology that will be used in UbiCamp, describes the minimum technological and sharable resources for each participating institution. This framework also describes other features, such as information exchange standards, etc.
- **Training Framework:** This framework defines the available resources for the participants in the mobility experience. These resources will ensure an adequate learning acquisition (technology, pedagogy, etc.) through the whole virtual mobility process.
- **Management Framework:** Finally, this framework summarizes the different administrative processes required to perform a virtual mobility experience. From institutional arrangements to participate in the Virtual Campus UbiCamp, to teachers and students agreements to participate in a virtual mobility experience, even the definition of roles for each institution participating.

## Virtual mobility added value for students and teachers?

*Taking part in Virtual* mobility gives plenty of benefits for students:

- Widening choice of modules and enriching your curriculum
- Possibility to study in desired university
- Enrich curriculum
- Cost-effective for the student
- Possibility to gain new professional and intercultural skills
- Possibility to gain skills in up-to-the minute information/communication technology
- Timetable flexibility
- Find new possibilities for further virtual exchanges
- Making new friends and contacts
- Experiencing the life and culture of a university abroad without having to travel
- Finding out about other options for virtual study in the future

Taking part in Virtual mobility gives plenty of benefits for teachers:

- Working with a greater number of students through e-learning environments
- Producing a more personalized learning with a higher training variety
- Possibility to gain new professional and intercultural skills
- Possibility to be more adaptable in European educational system.
- Possibility to higher the qualification and will become more competitive and attractive teachers for students
- Finding new contacts
- Finding out about other options for virtual training in the future

# Sociocultural Aspects in the UBICamp Virtual Mobility Project

*Most of the Virtual* Mobility projects have taken into account that sociocultural aspects are very important in general for every mobility experiences, and more specifically for virtual mobility experiences.

In most of them, sociocultural aspects depend on the initiative of the students. Usually, the system offers a social network and other technological means use that are expected to be used by the students off their own accord, but the reality is that the students are more concerned about t academic results and they forget about the sociocultural experience.

In such circumstances, students avoids spending much time in interpersonal and intercultural relations and the final result is that the experience is very poor in general on these aspects.

We must not forget that virtual mobility has to offer students the possibility of acquiring a sociocultural experience in order to such experience can be compared to physical mobility.

UBICamp has identified that question as a barrier in the processes of virtual mobility and has offered a possible solution by means of a sociocultural itinerary that students must complete during the mobility. This way, students will have, at the end of the experience, a minimum of sociocultural knowledge of the foreign institution and its environment.

This itinerary will be structured in order to ease the students' learning process and it will require an effort equivalent to 2 ECTS. This way, students will know at the beginning of the experience how much time and effort these sociocultural aspects will take demand.

At the end of the experience, the sociocultural aspects will have to be evaluated. This is necessary in order to properly distinguish between a virtual mobility and a simple international e-learning process. This evaluation will not be as strict as the academic evaluations are, but it must convince the tutor from the receiving institution that the student has made a minimum effort in such aspects. Because of this, the evaluation will not have a numeric mark but rather a simple "suitable" or "unsuitable" assessment.

Academic and sociocultural efforts must have their own recognition, in such way, the student will have their academic ECTS recognized if the assessment has a good mark and virtual mobility recognition if the sociocultural evaluation is suitable.

Finally, we all have to think about the experience of students that travels to other institution and other country. When they returns and talk to their family and friends, surely the experiences they talks about are related to the differences and the similitudes of the way of live in the country they had visited with respect to their domestic way of life.

Perhaps, after a while, they will speak about the teachers, and other academic experiences. Will UBICamp be able to cause such a reaction in students? Perhaps not, but this must be our objective.

## Second meeting in Druskininkai, Lithuania



*On 18th and* 19th of September 2013, the Vytautas Magnus University successfully organized the second meeting of the UbiCamp project. Positive feedback was received from all the participants involved. The meeting provided a great opportunity for the partners to agree regarding the virtual mobility framework, discussing of OERS creation according to UbiCamp standards and the organizing of training for teachers.