Editorial

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Biographical notes: Piet Kommers is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente at the Department of Media, Communication and Organisation. He Chairs the IADIS Conferences and the E-Society Conference and the IADIS Web-Based Communities' Conference in particular. In his work for UNESCO, he brings forward the blend between the nature and the culture of learning. He distinguishes the 'new' media as catalytic to communication and awareness. In his view, learning gradually embeds in every aspect of life pertaining to the delicate question if learning can be orchestrated essentially. Similarly, he may question if communication can be 'arranged' as he ought to believe at the dawn of the social web.

Eugenia Smyrnova-Trybulska is an Associate Professor at the University of Silesia, Poland, Head of Department of Humanistic Education and Auxiliary Sciences of Pedagogy, Faculty of Ethnology and Sciences of Education in Cieszyn, University of Silesia in Katowice. She is a Coordinator of the Faculty Distance Learning Platform (http://el2.us.edu.pl/weinoe). He Chairs the 'Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Distance Learning' Conference as well as coordinator and researcher a lot of scientific and educational projects. She is the author of more than 100 scientific papers and monographs in the field of e-learning methodology, ICT in education, multimedia, teacher training in ICT, other.

Margriet Simmerling is a Peer Consultant/Senior Manager for R&D projects in the area of e-society and web-based communities. She participated in the advisory board for the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and is active as a reviewer for the European Commission. She designs and moderates e-learning modules and workshops' e-learning modules and workshops in the domain of education technology and psychology at the PhD level.

Future progress in life-long learning has been ICT technologies, media and repositories for open learning material, recently called massive open online courses (MOOCs). The main two more recent trends in higher education during the last two decades have become multicultural dimensions, diversity and the growing momentum of internationalisation. One underlying factor can be seen as the growing mobility and the growing connectivity through mobile devices as well; mobile, virtual and vicarious are the inevitable trends at large.

The IRNet project, which devoted several articles to this special issue, accepts this status and faces the new challenges that will need more and more attention in the coming years as otherwise the ambition for internationalisation will fade away quickly. The problem can be characterised as follows. About 20% to 30% of university students have a natural tendency to study abroad. In this mood, they are quite open to meet a different culture. However, local students do not necessarily have the necessary exotic mind set to assimilate the inbound students in their local study arrangement. In other words, the effort to acculturate foreign students is only one aspect; even more crucial is the question if and how local students want to benefit from the multicultural situation that has arisen at that very moment. The first article attempts to clarify this fundamental deficit in ongoing practice of international student exchange. The crucial enabler in this process will be Web 2.0 infrastructures, such as social media and social networking, both for students and teachers (Kommers, Smyrnova-Trybulska, Morze, Issa and Issa).

The number of 'digital natives' (usually, such young people are called as net generation) is growing and they are in need of continuing education and lifelong learning. If current trends in Europe continue, characterised by an aging population over the next two decades, more than 50% of the population will be older than 50 by 2030, and life expectancy will be increased to 90 years. Children of the 21st century – modern 'digital natives' born in the world of information technology, like their parents, will have to undergo lifelong training in the use of the new technological environment. To meet the educational needs of the population, lifelong learning and continuing education system must be transformed. Also, such an educational activity will require the person to make financial and physical efforts and investments (Smyrnova-Trybulska, 2013; Il'chenko, 2010).

Young people born after 1980 are referred to with various epithets: *digital natives* (Prensky, 2001), *homo virtualis, net generation* (Tapscott, 1998), *the millennial, generation Y* (Howe and Strauss, 2000). Obviously, within today's youth there are a number of differences: age, regional, socio-cultural situation. The main question is: in what way are young people themselves aware of the surrounding reality? One of the possible ways of answering this question is to ask students to formulate their views of the contemporary society and their place in it. Besides, today, with the development of a global world, international studies of students' educational and extracurricular activities are needed. These ideas are closely connected with the content of the European IRNet Project (Noskova, Yakovleva, Pavlova and Smyrnova-Trybulska).

IRNet-International Research Network for study and development of new tools and methods for advanced pedagogical science in the field of ICT instruments, e-learning and intercultural competences (http://www.irnet.us.edu.pl). Project financed by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme, within the Marie Curie Actions, International Research Staff Exchange Scheme. The main objectives of the project are:

1   to exchange expertise and knowledge in the field of the innovative techniques of education between EU and Third Countries and suggest effective strategies of implementing new tools in their profession

2   to analyse and evaluate social, economic, legal conditions, as well as methodologies and e-learning techniques being developed in the European and Third Countries involved.

This special issue targets the recent trends of developing the E-learning and intercultural competences in West, Central and Eastern European countries as well as in Australia. Twenty authors, working in 16 different universities and other learning institutes located in seven countries (Australia, Czech Republic, the Netherland, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine) share with you their experience and future prospects into effective factors in e-learning intercultural competences development in their countries.

Central topic in this special issue is e-learning in different countries (for example, methodology aspects, foreign languages study, extracurricular activities of students, other) as well as an intercultural competences development project in different countries. The authors from Australia, Czech Republic, the Netherland, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine, inform readers about new achievements and outcomes in the area of methodology as well as technology using and implementing e-learning and intercultural competences development in different countries: in order to enhance analyses law, ethical, human, technical, social factors of development ICT, e-learning and intercultural development in different countries, a study of educational and extracurricular activities, analysing case studies of the use of concept maps as tools in the development of eLearning courses or when teaching eLearning courses; using the university e-learning platform for improving students key competencies and information literacy, CLIL instruction in online interactive multimedia – a case study of polish middle school learners of English and others. This special issue includes authors from different universities that presented their best papers during the 6th Annual International Scientific Conference entitled 'Theoretical and practical aspects of distance learning', DLCC2014, which was held on 13th–14th October 2014 at the Faculty of Ethnology and Sciences of Education in Cieszyn, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. The articles in this special issue are revised and expanded versions.

Piet A.M. Kommers, Eugenia Smyrnova-Trybulska, Nataliia Morze, Tomayess Issa and Theodora Issa, international team of researchers from the Netherland, Poland, Ukraine and Australia describe and present in their article 'Conceptual aspects: analyses law, ethical, human, technical, social factors of development ICT, e-learning and intercultural development in different countries setting out the previous new theoretical model and preliminary findings' some study, conducted in frame of the joint scientific project. This paper, prepared by an international team of authors focuses on the conceptual aspects: analyses law, ethical, human, technical, social factors of ICT development, e-learning and intercultural development in different countries, setting out the previous and new theoretical model and preliminary findings of study in the

framework of the international project IRNet (http://www.irnet.us.edu.pl). In particular, the article describes a WP2: analyses of legal, ethical, human, technical and social factors of ICT and e-learning development, and the state of intercultural competences in partner countries. The second part of the paper includes data from preliminary research. During the study and analysis of global (international) and local (national) documents as well as university documents tables were prepared which set forth a comparison of different legal, ethical, human, technical, scientific and social factors of ICT and e-learning development, and the state of intercultural competences in several partner countries, for example, the Netherlands, Poland, Ukraine, and Australia in the context of the IRNet project – International Research Network.

The authors Tatiana Noskova, Olga Yakovleva, Tatiana Pavlova, and Eugenia Smyrnova-Trybulska of the article 'Students in the information environment: a study of educational and extracurricular activities' stressed that the development of the global world makes it necessary to conduct international studies of students' educational and extracurricular activities. This article describes several research directions pursued at Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (HSPU), Saint-Petersburg and University of Silesia (US), Poland as well as research directions and outcomes within the European IRNet Project (http://www.irnet.us.edu.pl). Firstly, a questionnaire as well as other research tools were developed, implemented and analysed in order to ascertain students' new educational strategies and educational needs. Secondly, in order to understand in what way young people are aware of the surrounding reality a number of online discussions were held with the students and the discourses were analysed. Researchers points out that the questionnaire included several research directions: the specifics of students' communication activities in an electronic networked environment; the characteristics of information retrieval activities and the preferences in the choice of particular resources in the network; the attitude towards the information and communication network resources and services used in education, future professional work and self-education.

In the article 'External resources in e-learning – dominant discourse?' by Anna Ślósarz from Poland investigates the online course 'Auditory Transmissions in the School Reception'. External resources have been examined by author: hyperlinks invoked by a teacher, by full-time students and by part-time students. It turned out that the teacher pointed out mainly social, institutional, scientific and educational websites. But the students mentioned mainly commercial websites. It reflects how students use the internet. The dominance of commercial websites is consistent with the habits of students, but contrary to institutional scientific discourse. Tested course was addressed to mature students teaching speciality, strongly connected with traditional Polish literature and culture due to the subject of their studies. Researcher notes that contemporary dominant media discourse form largely commercial entities – also on the internet. It is reflected in the structure of external resources of the examined online course.

The paper 'Use of concept maps in eLearning courses' prepared by Pavel Kapoun and Jana Kapounová from Czech Republic is aimed at analysing case studies of the use of concept maps as tools in the development of eLearning courses or when teaching eLearning courses. Teachers discovered the advantages of concept mapping and learners have come to like it to such an extent that they use it when writing their seminar papers or in their theses. Authors present papers in which learners develop ICT-supported courses – eLearning courses. The authors of such papers usually follow instructional system design (ISD) principles. Usually, they create a map of all stages of the system design life cycle

and go from the low level of distinction to the more detailed levels. Researchers note that mapping can also be used when explaining the curriculum in an eLearning course. Concept maps can be used in different ways by students because each of them has a different learning style. The authors of theses, which have been selected as examples in this paper, are distant learners who used the paper results in business practice.

Irena Pulak and Małgorzata Wieczorek-Tomaszewska from Poland in their article 'Students' competencies to educational activity in digital environment' presents the results of preliminary research aimed at the diagnosis of the level of competency of students beginning their academic education in the fields of social sciences and the humanities, concerning their preparation for activity in the digital learning environment. The present study took into account the skills of being active in the digital environment in terms of the educational process. For the purposes of the present study, the main areas of competency in the field of ICT were specified, in which the respondents rated the level of their skills. The distinguished areas of competency are the basis for proper functioning in the world of the new media and the process of lifelong learning.

'The rapid development of technology and the changing needs of the modern labour market suggest that modern universities have to implement huge changes in the learning-teaching process', notes in their paper 'Designing an e-university environment based on the needs of net-generation students' the authors Nataliia Morze, Eugenia Smyrnova-Trybulska and Mariia Umryk from Ukraine and Poland. Today, the high school prepares students for careers that do not yet exist, for technologies that have not been invented, and directs them to solve problems that are not yet identified as a problem. Students have changed too. Nowadays, students are different from students of previous years. Educators are faced with the challenge of adapting their teaching styles to accommodate a new generation of learners. Usually, such young people are called the Net Generation, Millennials, Generation Y, Digital Natives, Trophy Kids, etc.; and they do not have the same learning expectations, styles, and needs as former students. This article discusses building a model of e-environment of the university, which would take into account the needs of today's students and today's market and would ensure a high level of competitiveness of future specialists in modern conditions of development of the information society as well as support learning opportunities throughout life.

The Polish authors and researchers Ewa Ogrodzka-Mazur and Anna Gajdzica in their manuscript ''New professionalism' of the teacher and education towards interculturalism' applied the undertaken considerations, which explore the issues of preparing teachers for intercultural education, theoretical conceptualisation, referring to Julian Elliot's concept of 'new professionalism'. Its essence consists in a reflective approach and examining teachers' own practice. The conducted analyses and interpretations allowed for outlining real professional preparation of teachers in the context of needs, tasks and demands of intercultural education. In accordance with Elliot's model of teacher's professional practice, four elements were taken into account in the outline: the context, properties of the professional role, and the character of both professional competence and professional knowledge.

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