

# The Advent of ePortfolios in Europe

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**Abstract**—A short overview of current ePortfolio-related activities in Europe is given. Potentials of ePortfolios are outlined. The heterogeneous ePortfolio-landscape is illustrated by means of some indicators.

**Index Terms**—ePortfolio

For the first time the Interactive Computer Aided Learning Conference in Villach, Sept. 26 – 28, 2007 had included a dedicated ePortfolio section. This came at a time when knowledge of and interest in ePortfolios is expanding beyond a relatively small number of pioneers into the consciousness of a wider audience of academics and when there is still a great deal unknown about this topic. It seems that the ePortfolio landscape in general is taking a new shape week by week. The ePortfolio section at the ICL2007 has attracted a number of international and national participants and raised a great deal of discussion. This clearly reflects that in the last two years interest in ePortfolios has grown rapidly, particularly within the higher education sector. But for sure, ePortfolio is far from being commonplace.

Too often, discussion about ePortfolio usage is reduced to the ePortfolio's role as a showcase for an individual's accomplishments or as a means of assessing student performance. However, ePortfolios can contribute to a wealth of teaching and learning related activities and beyond. This includes goal-setting, continuous reflection, selective communication, social networking across institutional boundaries, developing social capital, practice with a purpose, supporting learner organisation, valorising non-formal and informal learning experiences, supporting instructor planning and management, shifting control from instructor to student, changing curriculum design up to promoting reform of the traditional education system. Recently, the interest of ePortfolios has extended beyond learning processes into the domain of professional development planning supporting reflection on professional goals and career planning. Particularly, there are increasing implementations within the vocational disciplines specifically such as health professions and teacher education.

Current ePortfolio related work is characterised by focusing on conceptual aspects analysing institutional, pedagogical, technological, and economic surrounding conditions, by exploring its potential benefits for the individual and for the learning society, by investigating frameworks for sound practical applications, and by launching pilot projects exploring the scope of applications, efficiency, sustainability and manageability of ePortfolio usage. Four of the projects running today on public funding in Austria (funded by the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, the Ministry of Science and Research, and the Ministry of Economics and Labour) might serve as examples to illustrate the current

stage of interest in ePortfolio related research. The project “*Educational-political framework for ePortfolio implementations at Higher Education in Austria*” addresses ePortfolio related organisational and technological general conditions, issues of competence-based education, acknowledgement of prior learning, and educational requirements in relation to human resources development. “*Implementation strategies for implemented ePortfolios in Tertiary Education*” focuses on case studies running at six Universities with different purposes like reflective ePortfolios for PhD students, ePortfolio as integrated course elements, career-Portfolios for personal development planning, assessment portfolios, learning and reflection portfolios, and inter-curricular process portfolios. “*Corporate ePortfolios*” analyses the potential of ePortfolios for SMEs and initiates pilot implementations. “*ePortfolio Readiness in SEE countries*” identifies the current status of ePortfolio policies in south east European countries and analyses and compares policies and strategies with advanced approaches.

ePortfolio usage and approaches differ widely among Europe. When comparing the various landscapes and analysing ePortfolio-related activities the following indicators can be applied:

- Policies: at national level and at institutional level; national LLL strategy in place, EUROPASS support
- Stakeholders engaged: agencies, ministries, educational institutions, NGOs, companies
- Network active: at international level and at national level;
- Projects launched: international, national, institutional;
- Publications available: scientific books, journals, proceedings of conferences and/or workshops, magazines;
- Events taking place: conferences, workshops, courses, lectures;
- Implementations running: at universities, high schools, secondary & primary schools, vocational schools; ePortfolio software developments available

Only few European countries have gathered significant experience by using ePortfolios on a larger scale with a fine tradition. Among those one could name The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In The Netherlands ePortfolio projects and initiatives have been set up by most institutions of higher education because of focusing on competence-oriented education at universities of professional education and because of universities' attention to fostering academic maturity. A major community is active, the NL Portfolio, engaging since 2004 in combining, sharing and expanding experiences (<http://www.surf.nl/portfolio>). ePortfolios play a signifi-

cant role in didactic and administrative processes in higher education. An increasing attention in other educational branches and in the field of employment and the public arena can be realized. Similarly, much experience with the implementation of ePortfolios has been acquired in the UK. A national ePortfolio strategy has been developed since 2005 by the Department for Education and Skills. ePortfolios usage in all sectors of education has grown, driven in part by national policy and lifelong and personalised learning initiatives. A number of national policy initiatives is promoting ePortfolio. Renown competence centres are active: the Centre for International ePortfolio Development, Nottingham, JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee, <http://www.jisc.ac.uk>), and the Centre for Recording Achievement (<http://www.recordingachievement.org>). Numerous ePortfolio projects are running today. In addition, Careers Wales (<http://www.careerswales.com>) can be seen as the national brand for the all age careers information, advice and guidance services. It has gained considerable level of awareness by the international community. From the Austrian perspective these activities can be seen as prototypical. In comparison, there is little history of ePortfolio in Austria, it is not commonplace yet. Still, there is a growing level of awareness of ePortfolio

potentials. Several research projects are carried out, the number of implementations is increasing and communities like the E-Portfolio Initiative Austria (<http://www.e-portfolio.at>) are active. Quite a few schools and universities are already working with and on ePortfolios, some are considering it and most have yet to discover its existence. Sophisticated policies and strategies are not available yet.

To sum it up we can see a growing level of ePortfolio awareness in the EU. Expectations are high concerning both, its individual educational potential and its educational-political support for lifelong learning. Today's ePortfolio landscape within the EU turns out to be very heterogeneous with some countries already providing ePortfolios on a larger scale, some which are considering it and others which have yet to discover its possibilities.

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