

**Lisa Griggio**

University of Padova, Italy

## **LINKING VIRTUAL AND PHYSICAL MOBILITY: A SUCCESS STORY OF A MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL EXCHANGE**

---

---

**Summary.** The article presents a scientific analysis of a practical application of multilingual and multicultural education at higher education, more specifically, the description of the eTandem project developed and launched by the Language Center of the University of Padua, which won the European Language Label (ELL) in December 2016. The project was selected and nominated since it provides a methodological approach and study strategies which favour multilingualism, mobility for young people and inclusiveness. The project is based on an online exchange between Italian students enrolled at the University of Padua and international students who will be coming to the University. It differs from many other telecollaboration projects in that it involves different languages, levels of language competence as well as various ways of interaction. Indeed, it implies three different ways of communication among participants: (1) one-to-one partnership in the students' target language; (2) many-to-many interaction in Italian and/or English/French/Spanish as *linguae francae* on a Moodle platform and/or in a social Facebook area; (3) one-to-many multilingual interaction carried out by e-tutors in Facebook. They provide students with useful links regarding cultural events and things to do in Padua and its surroundings, as well as recent news and interesting linguistic and cultural issues related to different countries. Mobility, informality, autonomy, reciprocity, friendship, fun and multilingual community are the key words of this initiative whose objectives are aimed at developing linguistic, cultural, personal, social and digital skills in different languages, even in the less used and less taught ones.

**Keywords:** European Language Label (ELL); etandem; multilingual; multicultural; virtual mobility; physical mobility; community.

### **Introduction**

The European Commission's 2020<sup>22</sup> strategy recommends developing a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth where being smart means improving the European Union's performance in education, research and innovation, as well as in the digital society (Europe 2020). In the last decade, open borders have characterized developments in Europe. "As a consequence of these

---

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, Communication from the Commission "Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" COM (2010) 2020 final, Brussels, 3.3.2010.

developments, individual citizens need to possess competences and intercultural communication to a much higher degree than we have seen before" (Lauridsen, 2013).

Since migration into and across the European continent is changing its linguistic landscape (European Commission, 2007) European countries and their educational systems should prepare their citizens in an adequate way for living and working in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural society.

Individual multilingualism and intercultural communication skills are necessary components for mobility and employability of graduates everywhere in Europe 2020. Unfortunately, according to Lauridsen (2013), we still have not solved the issues related to multilingualism yet:

20 years after the policy of mother tongue plus two languages was introduced, there is still a long way to go before that goal has been reached for the majority of Europeans. Migration and mobility has resulted in a much more complex linguistic landscape<sup>23</sup>. In the same span, English has obtained a special role of the generally accepted lingua franca in many spheres of life, a development that has led many people to believe that English is enough, and that they therefore do not need to learn more languages (p. 15).

A little further on her interesting paper Lauridsen adds, "we all form part of global society and to interact on the global arena, we need languages. In this context English is necessary, but English is not enough" (p. 16).

While implementing the eTandem project, as recommended by the European Commission, the Language Center strongly believed in multilingualism as a powerful instrument for Europe. This initiative gives students the opportunity to be internationally, culturally and linguistically competent and further improves the value of the culture of multilingualism and mobility in the younger generations.

In this paper it will be shown that the project could be considered to be smart, sustainable and inclusive, as well as innovative, creative, and transferable. It also provides a European dimension. Especially, the motivations that led to the implementation of this initiative at the

---

<sup>23</sup> "linguistic landscape": Lauridsen (2013) uses this expression as a synonym of 'sociolinguistic situation'; however, it refers to the visibility of language in a territory.

University of Padua will be presented. Moreover, a brief description and some outcomes of it will be addressed. Finally, the reasons why this project was awarded the ELL<sup>24</sup> prize will be shown and some conclusions will be drawn.

### Why eTandem?

The idea for the eTandem project at the University of Padua arose for different motivations.

The first reason is related to the fact that at the University Language Centre there is a higher number of Italian students seeking a face-to-face tandem partner than international students seeking an Italian-speaking partner. The idea to set such a project originated in order to meet the needs of those Italian students who are willing to participate in the already existing Tandem learning Face to Face (Formentin, Griggio, & Whigham, 2004) but that cannot be paired up with international students. ETandem, thus, enables all Italian students to increase their linguistic and cultural expertise in various languages through peer-to-peer informal learning.

---

<sup>24</sup> EUROPEAN LABEL FOR INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING – EUROPEAN CRITERIA

All projects awarded the European Label, in all participating countries, must meet the following criteria:

- Initiatives should be **comprehensive**. All elements involved – learners, teachers, methods and materials – should contribute to ensuring that the needs of the learners are identified and met. Creative use should be made of the resources available to stimulate language learning. These might include, for example, the presence of native speakers, language practice organised with twinned towns or institutions, or cooperation with local business.
- Initiatives should provide **added value**, in their national context. They should lead to a quantitative and qualitative improvement in the teaching and learning of languages. In quantitative terms, this might mean involving several languages, and particularly those which are less widely used. In qualitative terms, it might mean the use of a better methodology than before.
- Initiatives should provide **motivation**, for learners and teachers.
- Initiatives should be **original and creative**. They should explore previously unknown approaches, appropriate to the learners concerned.
- Initiatives should have a **European dimension**. They should be based upon the reality of the European Union and its linguistic diversity and use the potential which that offers (for example, contacts across national borders, language learning between the neighbouring countries, etc.) to improve understanding of other cultures by means of language learning.
- Initiatives should include innovation which is **transferable**. They should be a potential source of inspiration for others in different countries and contexts. They might, for example, be adaptable to the learning of other languages or to learning by different age groups than those originally involved. (source – title, year, pages).

The second reason arises as a corollary of the first one: to boost the integration of international students with host country students. Owing to this online exchange, international students have the opportunity, prior to their arrival, to acquaint themselves with the environment they are about to face. They are introduced with students who are familiar with the Italian university system and culture and benefit from some language practice before their departure. It is also intended to increase their interest in Italy. Italian learners thus become their first cultural and linguistic contact and will facilitate and encourage the international students' integration in their culture, country and university (actually, students are also matched according to their study area).

Thirdly, this initiative aims to deepen the participants' linguistic and cultural knowledge as well as their digital competence in a real context. It gradually fosters cultural and intercultural awareness and stimulates students' capacity to comment, collaborate and share respectfully. It helps to learn to "*savoir faire*" and "*savoir être*" online (Griggio, 2012), participating in an e-community and safeguarding their web reputation. Participants learn not to overexpose themselves online and how digital tattooing<sup>25</sup> may spoil their digital identity and hinder some future employment opportunities.

Last but not least, the project also aims to boost the internationalization process at the University of Padua and student' mobility. As Op de Beek and Van Petegem (2013) assert,

"Internationalization has become one of the key issues in present day European Higher Education. The term refers to the integration of an international dimension into the research, teaching and services function of higher education and has as one of its main objectives - the development of intercultural competences or sensitivity. Among the most beneficial tools to reach this goal are student mobility and interuniversity exchange programmes. For those students not able to benefit from the existing face-to-face programmes, the concept of virtual mobility can be introduced" (p. 151).

Defined as "a set of ICT supported activities that realize or facilitate international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching and/or

---

<sup>25</sup> A tattoo is permanent, much like the information we post online. The photos we share, the comments we write, the videos we 'like'. Even if we delete them, they may still be out there – saved and shared by others, or even kept by the site or app itself.

learning” (Op de Beeck & Van Petegem, 2013), virtual mobility has great potential to contribute to the internationalization of higher education. Also, as reported in the document released on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2009 in Brussels by the Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, “Mobility is important for personal development and employability, it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of European Higher Education Area and it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions.”<sup>26</sup> It has been estimated that in 2020 at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education area should have had a study or training period abroad. But what about the other 80%? Should we think of virtual mobility as an alternative to physical mobility?

In the Green paper document (European Commission, 2009), instead, it is claimed that virtual mobility often encourages physical mobility, it serves as “a catalyst” for physical mobility. It is admitted though that virtual mobility cannot replace a physical one, but it can help students to prepare for their future physical mobility “by facilitating friendships, contacts and social networking.” For the students who cannot leave for other countries or do not want to do that it “can also provide an international dimension”, i.e. experience in communicating in virtual reality with people from different countries, gaining intercultural experience, improving their language competences, creating networks, etc.<sup>27</sup>

In this project virtual mobility is seen both as a useful first step on the way to developing physical mobility exchanges between institutions, and a way to prepare students psychologically, interculturally and linguistically for their experience abroad. Indeed, the group of Italian students is composed both by those who have already won a scholarship abroad and by those who want to experience an international dimension at home. One of the aims of this project is to encourage virtual mobility students to emulate their epartner and other participants and eventually apply for a period of study abroad.

---

<sup>26</sup> Brussels, 29 April 2009. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28–29 April 2009 ([http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-09-675\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-09-675_en.htm)).

<sup>27</sup> Commission of the European Communities: Green paper: promoting the learning mobility of young people.

## Description of the project

eTandem is a form of peer-to-peer learning at a distance, that is, an online exchange where students can increase their linguistic and cultural expertise using technological tools such as WhatsApp, Skype, e-mail, Facebook, etc. This eTandem is intended as a pre-mobility project. It involves Italian students at the University of Padua and international students who intend to come to Padua for the following Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer semesters.

The project goals are:

- linguistic: students learn and practice the target language with their eTandem partner and the *linguae francae* (Italian and/or English/French/Spanish) in the eTandem community;
- cultural: gradually foster their cultural and intercultural awareness;
- social: students gain capacity to comment, collaborate and share respectfully and all this facilitates the integration of international students into their target country/university/culture;
- technological: help to learn to *savoir faire* and *savoir être online*, participating in an e-community.

During the ten weeks of the project several weekly e-tivities are launched and moderated by the tutors (who are members of the University Language Center staff and one of them is the author of this paper). Besides providing safe themes to discuss, e-moderators match pairs of students, remind them to meet up regularly and divide the time equally between both languages. Participants are also invited to keep a record of what they cover during each meeting (diaries of language and culture) to reflect on the study skills employed as well as evaluate their own process of learning.

Students are not awarded credits for participation as they enrol in the project on a voluntary basis, so to attract them a certificate and a 'virtual badge'<sup>28</sup> are issued when students meet the following requirements:

- writing at least 4 (out of 6) language and culture diaries;

---

<sup>28</sup> Open Badges communicate skills and achievements by providing visual symbols of accomplishments packed with verifiable data and evidence that can be shared across the web. Open Badges empower individuals to take their learning with them, wherever they go, building a rich picture of their lifelong learning journey. Thousands of organizations across the world already issue Open Badges, from non-profits to major employers to educational institutions at all levels. For further info: <https://wiki.mozilla.org/Badges>.

- contributing to at least 4 eTandem community discussions;
- writing a short essay in the language of study;
- completing a questionnaire at the end of the project.

After the first week of social and technological familiarization, the topics discussed in the e-community guide learners through their growth in personal, social, intercultural and linguistic terms.

### Analysis of the outcomes

This multilingual and multicultural exchange has been run three times so far. In each of the three editions (carried out since the first semester of academic year 2015–2016), the participants came from a variety of countries.

**Table 1** indicates the number as well as the nationalities of the international students who took part in each edition of the project.

*Table 1.*

**Number of participants in 3 editions of the project and countries they come from**

Edition	1st 77 international ss	2nd 46 international ss	3rd 56 international ss
Countries	20 Germany 11 Spain 9 France 8 England 7 Czech Republic 5 Hungary 5 Croatia 4 Poland 2 Finland 1 Slovakia, Bulgaria 1 Netherlands and Portugal	8 Morocco 6 Brasil 6 USA 4 Libya 3 Russia 2 Egypt 2 Canada 2 Colombia 1 India, Algeria, Bhutan, China, Vietnam 1 Togo, Austria, Peru, Haiti, 1 Germany, Spain and France	19 Germany 19 Spain 9 France 4 Greece 3 Czech Republic 3 Switzerland 2 Denmark 1 Croatia, Russia, 1 Algeria and China

**Table 2** shows the number of Italian and international students, the languages spoken as *linguae francae* in the e-community as well as the total number of diaries written and certificates/virtual badges earned.

Unlike the first edition, in the second and third, participants came from non-EU countries as well due to the support of the University International Relation Office which helped the Language Centre to promote the project outside of Europe. As a consequence, the number of languages spoken

increased from 2 to 4. These differences demonstrate that our initiative is still undergoing changes, since it is continuously improved and adjusted according to the nature of the student population and their feedback.

*Table 2.*

**The number of Italian and international students, their *linguae francae*, number of diaries completed and certificates or badges awarded**

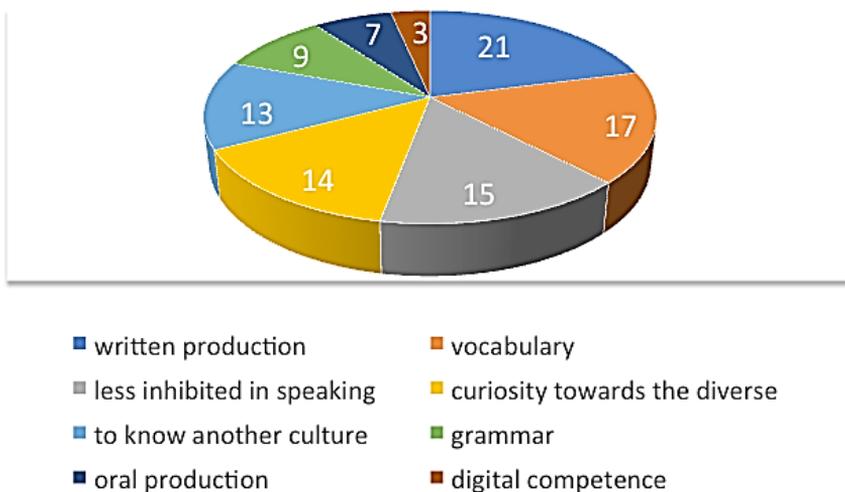
<b>Edition</b>	<b>Italian ss</b>	<b>Inter. ss</b>	<b>Total ss</b>	<b>Dyads / Triads</b>	<b>Lingua franca</b>	<b>Diaries</b>	<b>Cert. and badge</b>
1st From 12/2015 till 03/2016	41	77*	118	68	Italian English	54	12
2nd from 07/2016 till 10/2016	39	46***	85	48	Italian English French Spanish	30	5
3rd From 12/2016 till 03/2017	66	56***	112	69	Italian English French Spanish	53	7
*EU countries **non-EU countries							

This analysis is based on two sources: (1) feedback questionnaire and (2) the observation of the participants' activity in Facebook and in Moodle.

At the end of the project the students were asked to fill in a 28-item feedback questionnaire in order to reflect on their linguistic, digital and social learning outcomes. Out of 315 participants, only 37 responded. The questionnaire aimed at exploring how students managed their one-to-one interaction, whether they corrected each other's language mistakes or imperfections and their opinion about the project. Moreover, the students were asked if they got on well with their partner(s), if they found it useful to write diaries, if they thought their own and their partner's language competence had improved and whether the project had been useful for the development of specific areas of language.

Interestingly, as for the latter question, where more than one option could be selected, **Figure 1** shows that the greatest improvements that the students reported regarded their written production (21% of the

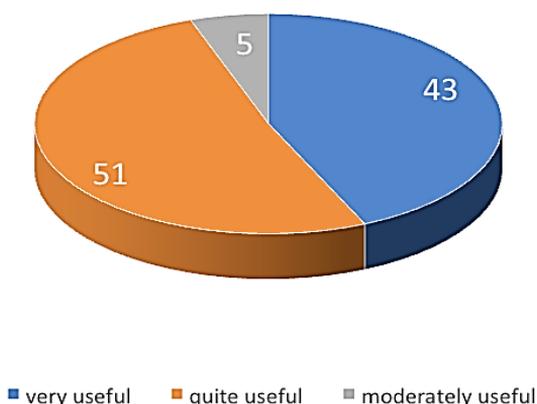
respondents) and vocabulary (17%), while grammar and oral production were selected respectively by only 9% and 7% of the students.



**Fig. 1. Area of improvement in language competences after participating in virtual mobility project**

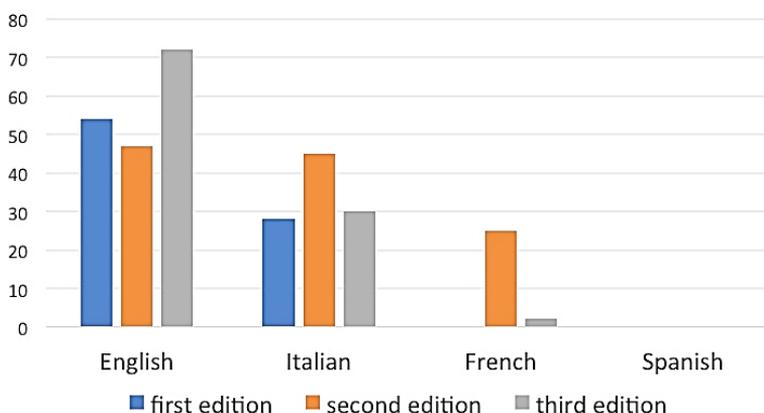
When asked which language/s was or were most used in their individual interaction, 12 students reported that they mostly used English, 6 communicated in Italian and English and 19 used Italian and other languages (different from English).

The students were also asked for a global assessment of their exchange experience. The majority (94%) found the project very or quite useful (see **Fig. 2**) and declared their willingness to keep in touch with their partners once in Padova. Moreover, after their participation in the virtual mobility project, most of them (84%) felt more confident about going abroad.



*Fig. 2. Global assessment of the exchange experience*

As for students' activity in the e-community, the **Fig. 3** provides information about the use of the *linguae francae*. According to the research findings, English is the most used *lingua franca* in each edition. Italian comes in the second place but for the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition where its use was fairly equal to English. With regard to French, it was mostly used in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition while Spanish was never used.



*Fig. 3. Use of languages as lingua francae in the project*

In summary, Fig. 3 clearly shows that English is by far the most used *lingua franca*. The low use of other *linguae francae* languages might depend on many

factors: the participants' nationalities, their motivation (learners participate on a voluntary basis), the topics addressed, etc. This issue will be dealt with in more detail at the end of "Conclusions". The results of this project are currently being taken into consideration for future implementations. More research topics concerning eTandem organization and accreditation will be brought about. In particular, the following hypothesis will be tested in future editions of the virtual exchange: 1) will the participants be more participative if there is a solid cooperation network with teachers or tutors coming from various European and non-European universities involved? 2) Will the participants' motivation and appreciation of the exchange experience be better if the project is credited?

### **What made the eTandem project successful?**

The reasons that made our project gain the ELL lay on the fact that it meets all of the European criteria as well as all the European and national priorities. In this section we will demonstrate how the initiative is innovative, effective and replicable and satisfies all the European criteria.

### **Our eTandem is comprehensive**

The initiative is comprehensive, in that all elements involved – learners, teachers, methods and materials – contribute to ensuring that the needs of the learners are identified and met. Creative use has been made of the resources available (social network) to stimulate language learning.

### **It provides added value**

It provides added value in the national context, as it leads to a quantitative and qualitative improvement in the teaching and learning of languages. It involves several languages, and particularly those which are less widely used. In qualitative terms, it uses a better methodology than the one used in other projects. By engaging in authentic communication via social networks such as Facebook, language learning does become task-based and learner-centred.

The students continue belonging to a multicultural e-community even when the project is over.

As mentioned in the previous section, this multilingual exchange has been run three times. Participants came from different countries covering eighteen different languages. Among them there are less widely used and less commonly taught, so-called LWULT languages, characterized by low demand at market conditions and by scarce availability in terms of resources so far as the use of the 21st century technology. In the eTandem project the latter have the same value and dignity as do the languages having a strong socio-political and economic weight, and, consequently, a high market demand. Besides English, Italian, French and Spanish spoken as *linguae francae*, German, Czech, Hungarian, Croatian, Polish, Finnish, Slovak, Bulgarian, Dutch, Greek, Arabic, Russian, Chinese and Portuguese were the languages contemplated in the project. As the number of Italian students outnumbers that of the international students who want to learn Italian, not only dyads but also some triads were formed for peer-to-peer partnerships (see table 2 pag. 95).

The choice to run the e-community in four different languages is justified as follows:

- the European language policy calls for 1+2, students should master two other languages in addition to their mother tongue<sup>29</sup>;
- French and Spanish are somewhat similar to Italian and with some effort students speaking one of these languages can understand each other. Also, after English which is by far the most studied, French is the most taught language in Italian schools<sup>30</sup>.
- the focus is on the content and not on the linguistic form (fluency vs accuracy);
- the aim is to support spontaneity of the students. Languageing is fostered so that students can choose the language they prefer to feel at their ease in a more relaxed atmosphere.

---

<sup>29</sup> In an EU founded on the motto 'United in diversity', the ability to communicate in several languages is an important asset for individuals, organisations and companies. Languages not only play a key role in the everyday life of the European Union, but they are also fundamental in order to respect cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU. Retrieved from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/fiches\\_techniques/2013/051306/04A\\_FT\(2013\)051306\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/fiches_techniques/2013/051306/04A_FT(2013)051306_EN.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> As reported at pag. 73 in Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe, French is the second most studied foreign language in at least one education level in Italy.

### **It provides motivation**

The online project described in this paper fostered the participants' motivation through the use of the social networks in collaborative learning. This social area implied an exchange on a wider basis and constituted the setting for many-to-many, one-to-many and one-to-one interactions. It served to put the participants in touch with other students and cultures involved in an enriching multilingual and multicultural context.

Motivation is a key issue to learning. Recent findings by Zoltán Dörnyei and his research fellows have shown that it is possible to trigger goal-oriented intense and long-term motivational energy streams called by them Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) (Dörnyei, Henry & Muir, 2016). A DMC is "a prolonged process of engagement in a series of tasks which are rewarding primarily because they transport the individual towards a highly valued end" (Dörnyei, Ibrahim & Muir, 2015). The distinguishing features of DMCs are directedness, i.e. goal-orientedness, and enduringness. In institutional educational contexts one of the best ways to generate DMCs is through the engagement with a goal-oriented and action-based project which supports students and sustains their involvement. The eTandem framework can offer an effective instructional mechanism to develop and promote this type of motivational process. Its practical potential can be powerful because if we are able to set the direction of a DMC towards L2 learning goals, we may facilitate a far-reaching pathway in long-term motivated activities both at an individual or group level.

### **It is original and creative**

The initiative can be considered original and creative as it explores previously unknown approaches, appropriate to the learners' concerned.

Establishing a multicultural and multilingual community is a key element of originality. Italian and international students being present in the same virtual place help achieve the goal of integration and social inclusion, and also contribute to students remaining loyal to the project.

Web 2.0 tools can create spaces for sharing, cooperating and building knowledge, so using them for informal learning becomes active and collaborative and responds to modern trends and theories (see e.g. gamification and edutaining).

A further element of innovation is the unlimited duration of membership to the virtual community. The social network Facebook was chosen as a "home space" for the e-community because it is the most used by our students. The fact that the eTandem community creates a "bridge" between virtual and physical mobility is also original (this point will be developed in the "Languages for virtual mobility and physical mobility" section).

### **A European dimension**

Since a high percentage of the international students come from the EU countries, our initiative has a strong European dimension based on linguistic diversity as seen in Section 4.

The project aims to promote the furthering of knowledge of different cultures and intercultural dialogue in several European languages, and aims to strengthen social cohesion in a multilingual and multicultural context. The topics discussed in the e-community guide learners through an important path in personal, social, intercultural and linguistic terms. Becoming aware of their own and others' culture ("everyone has their own culture, everyone is different"), students are gradually stimulated to cultivate curiosity about diversity, to appreciate it and to develop an active and empathetic attitude by breaking down the barriers of preconception and prejudice.

### **It includes innovation which is transferable**

Projects such as the one described in this paper can be replicated in different countries and contexts. They can be adapted to the learning of other languages or to learning by different age groups than those originally involved. The innovative aspects of the project are flexibility, adaptability and modernity. The structure of the project can also serve as a model for introducing topics that are best suited to meet the students' needs and interests. To the most virtuous students, who fulfill all requirements of the course, besides

a certificate of participation, a virtual badge is awarded. The Mozilla open badges may be shared in students' personal Facebook profiles as well as on Twitter or LinkedIn. The use of badges belongs to the recent initiatives of gamification used to promote learning and the acknowledgement of the acquired skills. They can be useful at an educational level to motivate and attract learners' attention.

This initiative is surely replicable in platforms other than Facebook (such as Twitter or Google+) as long as the chosen instruments are part of everyday life for digital native learners.

## **European and national priorities**

### **European priorities**

As noted before, besides fulfilling the above requirements, the project meets the priority needs outlined by the European Commission every year since 2003<sup>31</sup>. The European Priorities for the 2016–2017 Language Labels are aligned to the objectives stated by the Education ministers in the Paris Declaration<sup>32</sup>.

The European priorities for the 2016–2017 Label Campaigns were<sup>33</sup>:

1. Multilingual Schools and Classrooms: Embracing Diversity in Schools
2. Language-friendly society – informal language learning.

---

<sup>31</sup> See selection criteria in the following document: European Language Label (ELL) For Innovative Initiatives in Language Teaching and Learning. Guidelines for Implementation. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/guidelines-for-implementation-ell\\_en.doc](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/guidelines-for-implementation-ell_en.doc).

<sup>32</sup> On 17 March 2015 EU Education Ministers met in Paris to discuss how education and training can best meet the challenges of social inclusion, radicalisation and citizenship. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/0316-paris-education\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/0316-paris-education_en.htm).

<sup>33</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/label-priorities-2016-2017\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/label-priorities-2016-2017_en.pdf).

## ***Multilingual Schools and Classrooms: Embracing Diversity in Schools***

An eTandem project such as the one described in this research can strengthen the role of education in the promotion of citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. Social cohesion and an inclusive society are promoted, in particular valuing diversity and intercultural dialogue, encouraging multilingualism and using linguistic diversity as a resource for language learning.

Students are provided with information about the implementation of an intercultural approach. According to the Common European Framework<sup>34</sup> of Reference for Languages adopting an intercultural approach means: understanding the distinctive differences between where you come from and the place you are visiting; establishing a relationship between one's own culture and others; being open to new experiences and being able to relativise your own value system.

Information about various cultures and different languages is likewise provided to cultivate curiosity towards the diverse and develop empathy for others. Learners are also invited to intervene in the intercultural discussions using the lingua franca they prefer (or feel at their ease with). The social networking area functions as a "safe" environment of a closed group where members trust one another, listen to one another and respect one another. To foster linguistic diversity further, our Moodle platform hosts different blocks including useful links for practising English, Italian, French, Spanish and German. Learners can find several tools as a support for their learning: links to online dictionaries, grammar exercises, online resources for language learning and some evaluation questionnaires help them to understand their goals and what they want to get from their e-Tandem experience. Some tips on how to behave in an online environment, with reference to netiquette, are also supplied.

---

<sup>34</sup> Council of Europe (2011). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.

### ***Language-friendly society – informal language learning***

As reported in the European Priorities for the 2016–2017 Language Labels document<sup>35</sup>, (1) "‘Language-friendly society’ means a social environment where language learning and intercultural understanding are encouraged, and multilingualism is promoted and seen positively." (2) "The needs of speakers of all languages are fully respected, and linguistic diversity is presented as an asset for an inclusive society and for economic development." (3) "Every community in Europe can become more language-friendly by making better use of opportunities to hear and see other languages, respecting all languages present in the community, thus helping to improve language learning and intercultural awareness."<sup>36</sup> A little further on, it says that projects should be (4) "designed to identify and encourage practices and measures for the promotion of informal language learning and a society for languages, for example, by proposing innovative ways of learning the language in an informal manner to the benefit of all participants age, or making use of the structures and informal resources available, new media, online resources, the community of speakers etc., or even enhancing learning in the family and in the community or the intergenerational."

eTandem can be a way to achieve the above goals for two reasons: because it is an online student exchange and because it uses new technologies and online resources to foster a language-friendly society and informal learning. Informal learning is the most important part of all the learning that all of us experience everyday. Language learning can happen everywhere. Indeed, both the way of interaction with speakers of other languages, and the myriad of online resources (WhatsApps, Facebook, Messenger, Instagram etc.) make the informal language learning happen in all places.

By definition, eTandem promotes informal learning as participants are autonomous (each person plans their own linguistic objectives, and negotiates with their partner the strategies and methods to be used) so they are responsible for their own learning; since this initiative is not officially

---

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, European Language Label Priorities: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/label-priorities-2016-2017\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/label-priorities-2016-2017_en.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Idem.

assessed (yet), students do peer correction and focus on the processes of communication, rather than on accuracy of language; learners are encouraged to incorporate their personal experiences into their language learning environment and concentrate on their learning experience (writing weekly language and culture diaries), in addition to the learning of the target language.

### **National priorities**

According to the selection criteria, each participating country determines the number of Labels it awards in any given year, taking duly into account the need to keep this number within reasonable limits in order to maintain the prestige of the award and the character of excellence distinguishing both projects and individuals awarded. Italy also envisages additional criteria or specific priorities for the selection procedure.

These are: 1) languages for inclusion and integration; 2) languages for virtual mobility and physical mobility.

### ***Languages for inclusion and integration***

As affirmed before, multilingualism is promoted and positively evaluated, the needs of speakers of all languages are fully respected and linguistic diversity is presented as a factor of enrichment for an inclusive society and for the development of economy. Linguistic diversity is enshrined in Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>37</sup> ("The Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity"), and in Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union<sup>38</sup> ("It shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.").

There are numerous eTandem projects that include learning of widely used and widely taught languages, while there are fewer which involve LWULT (less widely used and less widely taught languages). This project – involving LWULT – represents a real proposal of language-friendly society.

---

<sup>37</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/charter/index\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/charter/index_en).

<sup>38</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12008M003>.

### ***Languages for virtual mobility and physical mobility***

In this eTandem project virtual mobility is not seen as a substitute of physical mobility but rather as a complement of it. As suggested before, the initiative aims to create a bridge that links virtual mobility to physical mobility. The international students who interact online with their epartner can carry on their exchange in person once they arrive in Italy. Also, they can continue their online mobility again when they return home. Thus, the most virtuous participants can participate in an enriching language learning experience before, during and after their physical mobility.

As highlighted by the European project IEREST<sup>39</sup> (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers), the period before the exchange requires careful preparation, not only in linguistic and intercultural terms but also psychologically speaking; drawing attention to this aspect is essential both for the success of any mobility project and for further motivation of students to participate in mobility endeavors. The majority of our Italian eparticipants, in fact, were not students who won a scholarship to study abroad, but at the end of the project the majority of them stated they were willing to apply for it.

This virtual pre-mobility project appears to address the linguistic and cultural obstacles for future physical mobility while promoting and motivating young students to mobility. During the exchange it has been referred to several times that this international experience entails considerable advantages both in terms of personal and professional growth as it makes students more attractive to companies eager to hire graduates who are flexible, multilingual, and comfortable in multicultural settings.

However, it must be said that so far the percentage of students who have participated in a constant and active way is quite modest compared to the total number of participants. Recognition and validation could be improved which may lead to greater participation.

---

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.ierest-project.eu>.

## Conclusions

The initiative promoted by the Language Center of the University of Padua was awarded the European Language Label for its originality, innovation, possibility of integration, added value, promotion of learners motivation, methodological creativity, its European dimension, dissemination potential and the possibility to transfer the outcomes to other languages and/or countries.

This scheme can be adapted to other languages, various age groups of learners and different virtual platforms. The structure of the project can also serve as a model for introducing topics that best meet the students' needs and interests.

It differs from other eTandem projects because it is not a bilateral exchange in which two classes from two different countries learn and interact in their respective languages. Rather, it is a more complex model that implies three different ways of interaction: one-to-one interaction, many-to-many and one-to-many. E-tutors launch e-tivities in the e-community addressing significant intercultural topics related to current events to ensure a strong connection with the Italian situation and setting. Moreover, by providing useful links regarding linguistic and cultural news as well as events or things to do in Padua and its surroundings, etutors improve students' loyalty to the project, favour students' virtual integration in the host territory and last but not least, they reduce the risk of abandoning the project.

As reported in a previous article, the project brings various benefits to all participants (Griggio, 2016). Technologically speaking, students learn how to use Moodle and Facebook, how to search and retrieve information from the web, how to use the net and social networks in a more responsible way defending their web reputation. Linguistically, as shown in the "Analysis of the outcomes" section", above all they develop informal lexicon, grammar and written and oral skills both in English/Italian/French used as *linguae francae* and in their target language. Participants become more competent in social skills such as commenting, sharing and interacting online. Also, they develop active listening, understanding diversity and intercultural awareness.

The multicultural and multilingual community helps to achieve the goal of integration, social inclusion and cohesion. Not only, once in Italy, have the participants the opportunity to carry on their exchange face to face, but they

can also continue visiting their virtual space, before, during and after their physical mobility. Whenever they want, they can get in contact with other participants and carry out a further virtual exchange following the rules they have already learnt and using materials, prompts and links published by the etutors so then.

The unlimited duration of membership to the virtual community aids to create a bridge between virtual and physical mobility both in temporal and linguistic terms. From the data collected, it emerges that students consider the project to be very or quite useful. Indeed, the students who have won a scholarship feel more confident to go abroad, while those who, for different reasons, are not able or willing to study in a foreign country, have the opportunity to experience an enriching international dimension at home. Almost the totality of the Italian participants, indeed, are eager to keep in touch with their epartner in person once in Padua.

Despite the fact that the analysis of the collected data and the low percentage of respondents to our questionnaire might indicate a low level of participation, we believe that the potential positive impact on mobility, multilingualism and inclusiveness make this initiative worth being spread and disseminated as well as re-proposed. Of course, some adjustments need to be done in order to enhance participants' contribution. According to Helm (2014), there are various factors affecting learners' involvement: time and recognition for participants' efforts are the main ones. Participating in online projects is quite demanding in terms of time and energy thus "institutions should recognize the value of online intercultural exchanges as internationalization activities" (p. 48) and offer students university credits for their participation in these exchanges even if they are optional.

There is another relevant aspect that can be considered to boost learner's motivation: the role of teaching/tutoring presence. So far the research has demonstrated (Anderson et al., 2001) that virtual exchanges need instructors/etutors or teachers working on both sides (or on many sides as it would be in our case if other universities could be involved) to be successful. The data has indicated that Italian participants were more motivated than the international ones.

This project encourages international students' integration in the host university only. A parallel network of international university teachers or tutors

supporting such an exchange might increase integration of our outgoing students at their host universities, but also encourage foreign learners to be more participative and productive in developing their multicultural and multilingual competences and strengthening their international communication capacities.

### **References**

- Anderson, T., Rourke, L., Garrison, D. L., & Archer, W. (2001). Assessing teaching presence in a computer conferencing context. *Journal of asynchronous Learning Networks*, 5(2), 1–17.
- Brussels, 29 April 2009. *Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education*, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28–29 April 2009. Retrieved from [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-09-675\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-09-675_en.htm).
- Council of Europe (2011). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*.
- Dörnyei, Z., Henry, A. & Muir, C. (2016). *Motivational Currents in Language Learning: Frameworks for Focused Interventions*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z., Ibrahim, Z., & Muir, C. (2015). Directed Motivational Currents: Regulating complex dynamic systems through motivational surges. In Z. Dörnyei, P. D. MacIntyre, & A. Henry (Eds.), *Motivational dynamics in language learning* (pp. 95–105). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- European Commission (2007). *Final Report. High Level Group on Multilingualism*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Retrieved from <https://publications.europa.eu/it/publication-detail/-/publication/b0a1339f-f181-4de5-abd3-130180f177c7>.
- European Commission Green paper: Promoting the learning mobility of young people. Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0329:FIN:EN:PDF> (2009).
- European Commission (2017). *Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union 2012/C, 326/02*. Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>.

- European Commission (2017). *Communication from the commission "Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" COM (2010) 2020 final, Brussels, 3-3-2010*. Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52010DC2020>.
- European Commission (2017). *European Language Label (ELL) for Innovative Initiatives in Language Teaching and Learning Guidelines for implementation*. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/guidelines-for-implementation-ell\\_en.doc](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/guidelines-for-implementation-ell_en.doc).
- European Commission (2017). *European Language Label Priorities*. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/label-priorities-2016-2017\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/label-priorities-2016-2017_en.pdf).
- European Commission (2017). *Treaty on European Union*. Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12008M003>.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2017). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe – 2017 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from [http://Key-Data-on-Teaching-Languages-2017-Full-report\\_EN.pdf](http://Key-Data-on-Teaching-Languages-2017-Full-report_EN.pdf)
- European Council (2002). *Presidency conclusions*. Barcelona European Council 15 and 16 March 2002, Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download\\_en/barcelona\\_european\\_council.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/barcelona_european_council.pdf).
- Formentin R., Griggio D., Whigham C. (2004). Face-To-Face Tandem Learning. In C. Taylor Torsello, A. Pasinato & N. Whitteridge (Eds.), *L'apprendimento Linguistico al CLA: Experience Innovative e Riflessioni per il Futuro*, (pp. 43–56), Padova: CLEUP.
- Friesenhahn, G. J., Schild, H., Wicke, H. G., Balogh, J., & Plantz, C. (2013). *Learning mobility and non-formal learning in European contexts. Policies, approaches and examples*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Retrieved from [https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-3435/240312\\_Learning-mobility\\_1sts.pdf](https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/downloads/4-20-3435/240312_Learning-mobility_1sts.pdf).

- Furstenberg, G., Levet, S., English, K., & Maillet, K. (2001). Giving a voice to the silent culture of language: The CULTURA project. *Language Learning & Technology*, 5(1), 55–102.
- Griggio, L. (2012). Parle avec Moi: Training in digital and linguistic competence in a French course hosted in a wiki platform. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 34, 73–78. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.02.016>
- Griggio, L., & Rózsavölgyi, E. (2016). A pre-mobility eTandem project for incoming international students at the University of Padua. In S. Papadima-Sophocleous, L. Bradley, S. Thouësny (Eds), *CALL communities and culture – short papers from EUROCALL 2016* (pp. 167–171). Research-publishing.net. doi: <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.eurocall2016.556>.
- Hardman, J. (2016). Opening-up classroom discourse to promote and enhance active, collaborative and cognitively-engaging student learning experiences. In C. Gorla, O. Speicher, & S. Stollhans (eds), *Innovative language teaching and learning at university: enhancing participation and collaboration* (pp. 5–16). Dublin: Research-publishing.net. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.000400>.
- Helm, F. (2013). A Dialogic Model for Telecollaboration. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 6(2), 28–48.
- Helm, F. (2014). Developing digital literacies through virtual exchange. *Elearning Papers*, 38, 1–10.
- Kinginger, C. (2016). Telecollaboration and student mobility for language learning. In S. Jager, M. Kurek & B. O'Rourke (eds), *New directions in telecollaborative research and practice: selected papers from the second conference on telecollaboration in higher education* (pp. 19–29). Research-publishing.net, doi: <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.telecollab2016.487>.
- Lauridsen, K. M. (2013). Multilingualism—a necessary, absent component in Europe 2020? *Darnioji daugiakalbystė*, 3/2013, 12–18. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7220/2335-2027.3.2>.
- Mullen, T., Appel, C., Shanklin, T. (2009). Skype-based Tandem Language Learning and Web 2.0. In M. Thomas (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on*

- Web 2.0 and Second Language Learning* (pp. 101–118). Hershey-New York: Information Science Reference.
- Op de Beeck, I., & Van Petegem, W. (2013, January). Virtual mobility: An alternative or complement to physical mobility? In *ERACON, 2011 & 2012 Dual Year Proceedings* (pp. 151–160).
- Van Maele, J., Vassilicos, B., Baten, L., Atabong, A., Bavieri, L., Beaven, A., & Golubeva, I. (2015). IEREST. *Intercultural education resources for Erasmus students and their teachers*. Annales University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.ierest-project.eu/>.
- Vassallo, M. L. & Telles, J. A. (2006). Foreign language learning in-tandem: Theoretical principles and research perspective. *The ESPecialist*, 25(1), 1–37.

### **Lisa Griggio**

Padovos universitetas, Italija; [lisa.griggio@unipd.it](mailto:lisa.griggio@unipd.it)

## **VIRTUALAUS IR FIZINIO MOBILUMO SUSIJUNGIMAS: DAUGIAKALBIŲ IR DAUGIAKULTŪRINIŲ MAINŲ SĖKMĖS ISTORIJA**

**Santrauka.** Padujos universiteto Kalbų centro sukurtas ir vykdytas „eTandemo“ projektas 2016 m. gruodžio mėnesį laimėjo Europos kalbų ženkle (ELL) apdovanojimą. Projektas buvo išrinktas ir nominuotas dėl pateikiamo metodologinio požiūrio ir mokymosi strategijų, kurios skatina daugiakalbystę, jaunų žmonių įsitraukimą ir mobilumą. Projekto pagrindas – virtualūs mainai tarp italų studentų, studijuojančių Padujos universitete, ir tarptautinių studentų, kurie atvyks studijuoti į šį universitetą. Šis projektas skiriasi nuo daugelio kitų telekomunikacijų bendradarbiavimo projektų dėl vartojamų skirtingų kalbų, skirtingų kalbų kompetencijos lygių ir įvairių bendravimo būdų. Projekte naudojami trys skirtingi komunikacijos tarp dalyvių tipai: 1) vienas-su-vienu bendravimas studentų tiksline kalba; 2) keli-su-keliais bendravimas italų ir / arba anglų / prancūzų / ispanų kaip lingua franca kalbomis Moodle sistemoje ir / arba socialinėje Facebook erdvėje; 3) vienas-su-keliais daugiakalbis bendravimas naudojant elektroninio mokymo programas Facebook erdvėje. Studentai gali rasti naudingas nuorodas apie kultūrinius renginius ir veiklas Paduja ir jos apylinkėse, taip pat informaciją apie naujausias žinias ir įdomius lingvistinius ir kultūrinius iššūkius, susijusius su skirtingomis šalimis. Mobilumas, neformalumas, autonomija, abipusiškumas, draugystė, linksma ir daugiakalbė visuomenė yra raktiniai šios iniciatyvos žodžiai. Iniciatyvos tikslai yra vystyti lingvistinius, kultūrinius, asmeninius, socialinius ir skaitmeninius įgūdžius įvairiomis kalbomis, net ir mažiau paplitusiomis.

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** Europos kalbų ženklas (ELL); etandemas; daugiakalbystė; daugiakultūriškumas; virtualus mobilumas; fizinis mobilumas; visuomenė.