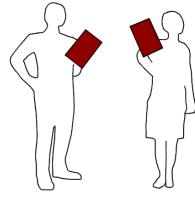# blinc

blended learning institutions' cooperative

In October 2005 blinc, the blended learning institutions' cooperative was founded in Goettingen, Germany, with an objective to offer a platform for sharing know-how and experiences as well as for the dissemination and valorisation of European educational projects, services and products.

On 10.10.2005 blinc, the blended learning institutions' cooperative was founded in Goettingen, Germany and officially inaugurated on November 19th 2005 during a transnational conference in Marseille with participants from 12 European nations.

blinc is a cooperative of experienced stakeholders and institutions from:

- Formal and non-formal education,
- Training institutes, grass-root projects (NGOs),
- Hospitals, social and cultural organizations (3rd sector),
- Universities and pedagogical science

Project eL3

The cooperative has been developed in a project named "eL3" funded in the framework of the eLearning-Initiative of the European Commission by 9 partner organisations from 4 European countries (DE, FR, IT, UK).

eL3 is the acronym for "eLearning Project Cluster for Third System Organisations in Europe" and stands for a networking project combining different organisations that work in the European Healthcare, Social and Education Sector.

By means of the main project activities (Evaluation, Networking and Dissemination) eL3 contributes to improve the quality of education, to support stakeholders of learning processes and to promote innovative ways of learning.

In the 2-year project the pedagogical research has worked very closely together with different stakeholders from grass-root projects and institutions "in the field", thus developing approaches and instruments for didactic planning and evaluation to overcome the gap between science and professional practice.

The second target of the project was to develop an approach to found a European network (blinc) for stakeholders working in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments, namely developers, experts and users of Blended Learning products and services.

blinc and its objectives

blinc is an exchange instrument for educationalists, producers and users of blended learning offering a platform for sharing know-how and experiences as well as for the dissemination and valorisation of European educational projects, services and products.

During the first blinc conference in November in Marseille the main focus was put on the development of a mutual and sustainable dissemination and valorisation strategy for the European learning network.

In the following we would like to give you an overview about our activities and experiences in the framework of the European clustering project and explain the perspectives of blinc:

**Combining Science and Practice:**

- From 2004 onwards a specially assigned workgroup produced patterns for partner profiles, projects and products leading as final products to a powerful web-based showroom concept enabling members to present their institution and activities as well as concrete products in various languages inserting all kind of web-based multimedia materials.
- Inventories (Question-pools) for stakeholders in different learning environments, namely learners, authors and decision makers were developed and pre-tested.
- A so called blended learning matrix and a catalogue of didactic models concerning eLearning-settings have been developed, being a guidance to blended learning authors and facilitators as well as a didactic planning tool.
- An auto-evaluation instrument for authors was designed together with an online tool for the measurement of learning styles for learners basing on the model of learning style by KOLB. On the basis of inventories and blended learning matrix acting recommendations and guidelines considering didactic planning for Blended Learning arrangements were developed.
- An internal project evaluation system is available online and on paper which has already been transferred and proved feasible in other transnational projects.

All results are available in an evaluation report with attached compendium. The digital materials can be downloaded under www.blinc-eu.org.

**Networking:** The main outcome of the 2-year networking process is the registered cooperative "blinc", inaugurated by 40 partners from 12 countries in November in Marseille during a first "European Dissemination and Valorisation-Conference". The statutes and membership conditions are available in DE and EN on the website.

**Dissemination:** The blinc website is a dynamic, multilingual web portal with various web-services either in the public area as well as in the restricted member area.

75 articles and 2 newsletters were posted in the internal article system and more than 1.500 multilingual brochures/leaflets for different target groups were produced and distributed during local, national and transnational seminars and meetings. We also used new dissemination pathways like radio broadcasting and podcasting. We

included stakeholders from various backgrounds, contacted and collaborated with the Commission's Dissemination and Valorisation department twice to incorporate the EC-valorisation strategy into the blinc-development concept and to introduce it to our members and associated partners. By now blinc and eL3 have been presented in the course of six conferences in four countries.

**Experiences and Perspectives:** The multi stakeholder partnership of the clustering project el3 was at the same time source of opportunities and threats. The different backgrounds, needs and claims of the partners led to extended development processes but, at the same time, to good results concerning adaptability and transferability also in respect to new partners and nations.

The different experiences and educational traditions from each partner country gave constant additional inputs into the "learning network" blinc. The partners also learnt from each other due to different cultural, social and healthcare backgrounds. These new inputs led to several new projects and project proposals in the field of formal and non-formal education and blended learning on local and European levels.

Following a clear bottom-up approach, blinc also gives a European stage for concrete projects "from the field" and activities conducted by small local initiatives and NGOs working with disadvantaged beneficiary groups.

We experienced that combining both, transnational and local projects, is a powerful valorisation strategy which proved successful in recent workshops and conferences in Marseille and Goettingen. Due to the transnational audience it is much easier to activate the local press for events and to disseminate the local projects in the region.

Vice versa there is a high added value in valorising local initiatives on a transnational level. As consequence, new local partners are actively integrated by the blinc community in new transnational project proposals.

Additional to the originally envisaged dissemination approach new activities have been carried out and will be followed in future:

- Combination of local and transnational projects
- Mobility activities (exchange of personnel) within the network (for instance a travelling fellowship funded in the framework of the British Winston Churchill Memorial Trust)
- New projects developed by sub-teams of blinc-members including new local partners and new fields of activities (e.g. 2 successful Socrates follow-up-projects and 7 successful SOCRATES and 2 LdV-pre-proposals)
- Introduction of new dissemination media (radio and podcast) to reach new target groups (e.g. youngsters, self-help groups, disadvantaged and marginalized groups)
- Enlargement of the target groups by integrating the youth-segment in the cooperative thus creating interfaces between formal, non-formal and informal education for different learning groups
- Inviting learners to become active participants in blinc (e.g. in a German course for content managers and a European project for eLearning-designers)

The blinc cooperative was founded to become a European educational cooperative (SCE) from 2007 onwards.