

More than Music of the Future?

Budapest, August 2005 – *(by Margit Kanter)* As the head of the eLearning Department at MAT SZTAKI, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – Research Institute for Computer and Automatization, an author of various eLearning books, as well as an organizational member of the Hungarian eLearning Forum, **Dr. Otto Hutter** has deep insight into the development of eLearning in Hungary. He has been kind enough to explain trends and his visions of the future for **CHECKpoint eLearning**.

How do you assess the future of eLearning in Hungary?

Dr. Otto Hutter: Unfortunately in Hungary eLearning is as yet more focused on the future than the present. Still we find only a few big eLearning projects in business education. Although there are many plans, they mostly result in pilot projects. Indeed the government supports big projects for content development but because of a complicated process of grant and substantial administrative costs, few companies are able to take them up. The smaller companies can access those project orders only as a sub-supplier in a very limited, special area at dumping prices.

Which trends and perspectives do you perceive?

Dr. Otto Hutter: As a matter of fact eLearning will primarily spread in the form of distance learning in the governmental sector and adult education. Within one or two years, we may possibly find a basic infrastructure with standardized learning platforms or - in specific special areas - even with a central education management system in those sectors.

The focus, however, is shifting more and more towards content development. At the present time, that's already the case in the vocational sector because the development of the infrastructure is concentrated on a few multinational suppliers of learning platforms.

For the majority of the national suppliers of eLearning, the introduction in the business sector can mean a limited business field, but the content development is a bigger business. This may also lead to cooperation between international and national suppliers. At the present time, all participants in the scene are just waiting for the already implemented learning platforms to be filled with content.

What is making your work more difficult? Which obstacles do you have to overcome?

Dr. Otto Hutter: ELearning concerns various disciplines where specialists in web- and multimedia applications, pedagogues, specialists in distance learning, and those from the content areas have to cooperate. Therefore eLearning projects are complex, but many clients do not realize this and often set deadlines that are impossible to meet.

Also the sales cycles are extended because in the companies the training department, HR, and the computer department have to be involved in the decisions. In governmental projects, you can sometimes hear remarks about "irrational regulations", and also the extremely extended decision-making phases are problematic for the suppliers.

Do Open Source Learning Platforms have a future in Hungary?

Dr. Otto Hutter: In the private sector until now a special demand for OS learning platforms cannot be recognized because ERP systems (ERP - enterprise resource planning, SAP, Oracle and so forth) are used once companies reaches a certain size.

But especially this segment can generate demand in the eLearning market; therefore I expect that besides the HR module of the ERP system, sooner or later the education modules of this manufacturer will be introduced as well. In these circles the price is not decisive; it's the functionality and the quality of service and support that count. And when we have a look at the size of the projects, the offer of cost-free platforms in reality doesn't weigh very much because they represent only a minimal savings. Compared to that, the integration into the ERP system is much more important.

Which importance does the standardization of eLearning in Hungary have?

Dr. Otto Hutter: In Hungary, standardized content development is emphasized quite strongly. So specialized forums as well as practice-oriented projects especially focus their attention on the SCORM compatibility. Apart from some Hungarian learning platforms, the biggest part of the learning platforms used in Hungary is SCORM compatible. Thus we can also expect that the part of SCORM compatible content will grow likewise.

In the commission of the Ministry for Information and Communication, a professional recommendation for the use of eLearning standards has been elaborated, and after the relevant democratic processes have been exercised, we expect a governmental guideline to evolve.

For the university sector there is already a central content pool where the universities and colleges can collect their own SCORM compatible contents within an NIIF (National Information Infrastructure) Development Project.

Do you perceive interest in EU-wide or transnational cooperation?

Dr. Otto Hutter: Yes, there have been several successful eLearning projects with Hungarian cooperation, especially the Leonardo Program. Also within the EU FP6 IST R&D Research Program, some projects with Hungarian participation have started recently. Furthermore some consortia under Hungarian guidance have been built for the second call of the European eLearning program.

In general we can say that the Hungarian universities and research institutes are very actively participating in EU tenders and projects. Also there is a relatively small group of private manufacturers who are working successfully in this area.