

# THE ADDED-VALUE OF THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF LBUS BY MEANS OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the present paper is to perform a critical survey of the ongoing transformation, evolution and challenges of higher education as it is shaped by the global information society. There is a paradigm shift from the traditional concept of university to the adaptation of university mission, role and services in keeping with technological progress and the latest advances in the information and communication technologies. The paper also examines an example of best practice at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

## 1. THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ADAPTING TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETITIVE ECONOMY

The concept of sustainable development includes four interdependent components – the pillars of any society - i.e. economic, social, ecological / environmental protection and cultural. According to the Bruntland Report the goal of sustainable development is to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” provided the accomplishment of several simultaneous requirements: interpreting / analysing the present form the vantage point of future trends, continuous compatibility of the natural and man-made environments, as well as the attainment of national development strategies deeply connected with the economic and environmental trends.

Sustainable development is a relatively new concept which though initially emerged from environmental premises and the resource crises, it further extended to the quality of life. Change is a constant characteristic of our contemporary world and it requires an adequate and complex process of adjustment of the individual in order to cope with the unprecedented challenges confronting him. Thus, in this context, the expression coined by Alvin Toffler “future shock” accurately reflects the discrepancy between the fast rhythm of changes currently occurring in the world and, on the other hand, the individual ability to adjust to these new circumstances. The individual or national choice, i.e. between resistance or adaptation to change, will

influence the personal and social response with a subsequent impact on the quality of life.

Lifestyle represents an essential component of the quality of life and it includes the following indicators:

- professional-related activities: their nature and duration
- access to education and professional training
- residence and transportation
- housing and related facilities
- access to health facilities and support
- means of communication and telecommunications
- access to culture and information
- leisure (duration and activities)

Education has become a fundamental means of communication and progress of our contemporary world, as well as a vector for the training of future leaders endowed with the necessary skills, abilities and competencies for the knowledge-based society and a global competitive economy. Higher education institutions hold a key role in society due to their significant contribution to the sustainable development and the socio-economic growth. Thus knowledge is a prerequisite for shaping a dynamic approach to society and economy as well as the innovative process that entails positive and constructive change.

The wide range of disruptive changes – political, cultural, economic, technological – taking place at the end of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21st century have triggered the reform of higher

education institutions. Contemporary tertiary education has to cope with unprecedented changes mainly generated by three factors:

- Information and communication technologies – heralding a new “digital era” as well as the acknowledgment of information and knowledge as fundamental sources of socio-economic development and the further expansion of globalization. Such technologies have a profound impact on academic institutions as well, for instance the emergence of “virtual universities” that are not bound to any temporal or spatial borders. Furthermore, the new revolution brought about by information and communication technologies will entail essential redefinition of traditional managerial patterns in higher education institutions, the organization of university libraries and research centres, as well as the design and implementation of study programs or conducting research. Likewise, it is imperative for researchers and scholars to have access to state-of-the-art equipment and technological facilities in order to become nationally and internationally competitive. Thus, one of the consequences of the information society is a fundamental reshaping of mentalities, institutional and individual interaction, cultural communication and educational methods.

- An unparalleled and extraordinary increase in the individual demand for tertiary education – which has facilitated the transition from elitist to mass education; nowadays, higher education institutions are governed by the principles of a non-industrial organization. However, they are faced with the paradox and challenge to find a working method, rather than a compromise, in order to simultaneously and effectively reconcile the requirements of quality assurance as well as a wider access to higher education. In this respect, universities evince an increased interest in meeting the excellence criteria and standards in both teaching and research processes; fostering qualitative changes accompanied by an adequate training of undergraduates and postgraduates for the future by means of acquiring key competencies of the knowledge-based society (i.e. information literacy, digital literacy). In this context, a major goal of universities will be to add value to all academic processes, i.e. teaching, research, development and innovation – as fundamental components of the knowledge-based society meant to lead to personal and sustainable development.

- The higher education market – characterized by institutional widening in keeping with state or

private funding accompanied by an increasing individual demand for tertiary education thus leading to a fierce competition among universities. Higher education institutions are bound to foster and disseminate knowledge and at the same time they have to find appropriate means to adapt to the requirements and changes in society and community life, supported by responsiveness to the latest trends, innovations and opportunities in the field of Information and Communication Technologies. Hence, universities have a twofold role: accurate responsiveness and thorough accountability by re-thinking its traditional notion.

In keeping with these requirements, LBUS, as an academic organization, has undertaken the mission of:

- promoting teaching and research in keeping with the requirements of a society based on knowledge and continuous learning, integrated in a European and global context;

- contributing to local, regional and national development from a social, economic, cultural and political perspective by means of active participation to the environment and community;

- systematic knowledge and providing original contribution to major fields of science and technology at the dawn of the 21st century, associated with flexible, comprehensive, interactive and continuous learning;

- promoting and supporting, in its capacity as public institution, within the local, regional, national and international community, the development of a culture of proactive and participatory attitude, of personal development and of integration to diversity and globalization;

- openness to the interaction with the economic, social and academic communities at local, national and international levels.

## **2. THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE AT LUCIAN BLAGA UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU – AN EXAMPLE OF BEST PRACTICE IN USING ICT FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES**

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu has evinced a strong emphasis on opening new „academic doors” enabling the entire academic community – both staff and students – to integrate into the larger international academic community, observing the highest professional and scientific standards.

In 2007 LBUS in cooperation with the Beijing Language and Culture University and under the

auspices of Hanban set up the first Confucius Institute in Romania whose goal and mission are to promote the culture, language, history and values of China and intensify intercultural understanding in Romania by offering programs in Chinese language and culture. The Confucius Institute at LBUS will promote its mission through a variety of educational and cultural activities addresses to students and teaching staff, as well as to the local community and business leaders. One of the most recent and successful outcomes of the Romanian-Chinese academic collaboration is the initiation of a new study program, English-Chinese Studies developed at the Faculty of Letters and Arts, as a result of the cooperation of Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu and the Beijing Language and Culture University. Moreover, the information and material displayed on the LBUS site shall be available in four foreign languages (English, German, French, and in the near future, Chinese). As regards the economic dimension of this partnership, the Romanian-Chinese Economic Forum shall take place in Romania this year. The goals of this joint Investment Forum are:

- presentation of investment opportunities in Romania by Chinese businessmen and companies;
- promoting high quality investment projects initiated by Chinese investors;
- identifying Romanian products potentially interesting for Chinese companies;
- supporting Chinese products to enter the market of EU member-states by means of the Romanian state;
- presenting and promoting Romanian culture and sightseeing tours

Therefore, the role of the Confucius Institute at LBUS is to build bridges, encourage the exchange of ideas and strengthen Romanian-Chinese interaction at all levels: economic, cultural and linguistic by means of an active and constant promotion of a nation`s image. Nowadays, in an ever-increasingly global economy and a knowledge-based development, education has become the most important currency. Thus, international exposure to one of the fastest-growing economies in the world – “the Chinese miracle” – is not only relevant but essential for the emergence of a global awareness as well as for preparing graduates to become the future leaders in a competitive world. Furthermore, students and teaching staff alike will have the opportunity to immerse themselves in Chinese

language, culture and society and to gain genuine knowledge about one of the world`s most important competitors.

By now, Hanban – Confucius Institute Headquarters – has inaugurated almost 300 Confucius Institutes all over the world. The Confucius Institute at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu can provide Chinese teaching courses and programs according to local needs and requirements, particularly teaching Chinese by means of various methods, including multimedia courses and online resources. In this respect, the best illustration of integrating information and communication technologies in the educational process is the Great Wall Chinese, a key project developed and operated by Hanban, and it represents a new Chinese teaching and learning system based on extensive network and cutting-edge multimedia technology. It integrates e-learning with e-tutoring and provides a convenient, vivid and cost-effective teaching method to Confucius Institute. The diversified products of Great Wall Chinese can provide quality teaching/learning platform, digital courseware and other resources for the teaching institutions and Chinese language learners at home and abroad.

## Chapter IV Student Use

### 4.1 Course List

#### 4.1.2 Progress Report

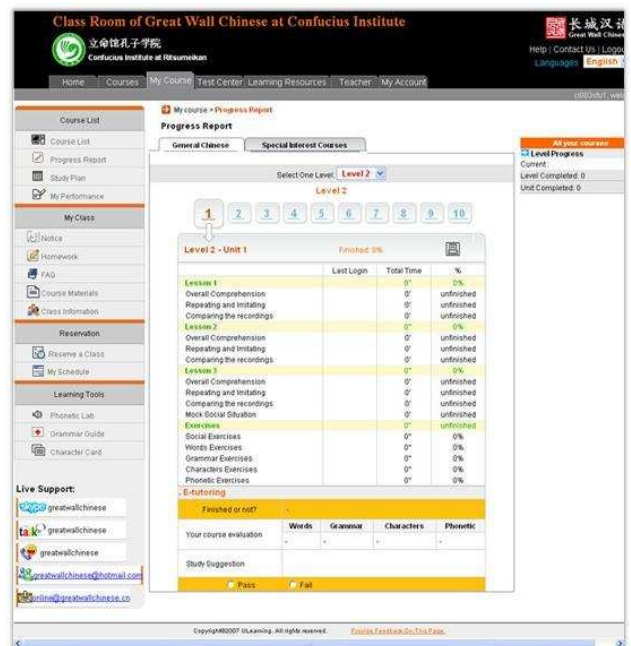
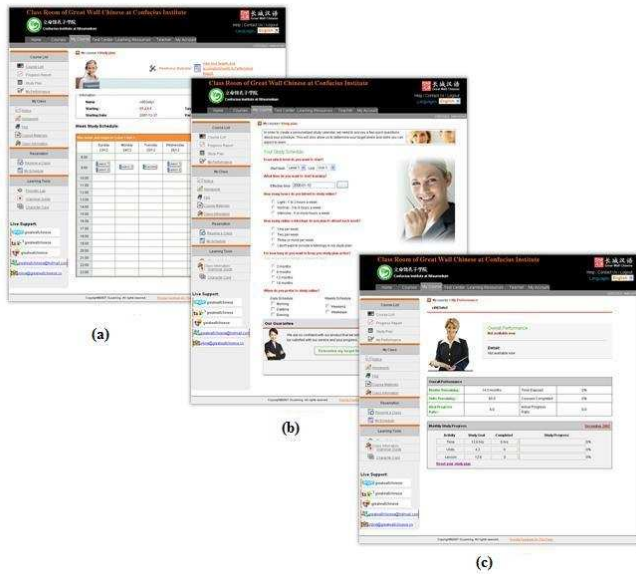


Figure 1. Students` progress of the unit being learned, including last login time, spent study time and the learning status

## Chapter IV Student Use

### 4.1 Course List

#### 4.1.3 Study Plan



**Figure 2.** Students` basic information and weekly study schedule (a); A customized study plan for individual students (b); Assessment of students` performance (c)

### 3. CONCLUDING REMARKS: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES – A PREREQUISITE FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION

There is a growing awareness nowadays of the need for sustainability due to the massive and radical changes accompanied by a wealth of information available, that are impossible to prevent, hard to control but potentially manageable. A comprehensive and equally accurate definition of e-learning can be epitomized in the following statement: „Learning facilitated and supported

through the use of information and communication technologies.” Access to information is both facilitated and mediated by technology which has thus become a social process, no longer a tool; hence the need to master technological devices in order to unlock the gates to knowledge. Therefore, technology may be simultaneously or alternately seen as: improving and widening access to higher education; improving the quality of educational and research processes. Study programs, curriculum design and teaching methods have to be adapted to the changing circumstances in order to preserve competitiveness.

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