
E-PORTFOLIOS FOR ARTISTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARTS BERLIN

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Abstract: The pilot project has the title “Kompetenzplattform for Artists” and aims at providing artists who work as freelancers or are self-employed with an interactive, multilingual internet platform for e-portfolios, information and further education. The platform is an up-to-date, problem-oriented and manageable tool for information and education, which supports to acquire the necessary skills to work and present oneself. The CTC analyses formal and non-formal competences of its students and alumni to provide further assistance for their employability as well as setting itself up as a mediator between the individual artist and the local economy/cultural sector. The competence tool (e-portfolio) includes: (1) providing guidance services, (2) identifying gaps in provision of training and professional development (3) advocacy and representation (4) secure involvement of practitioners and education providers for the purposes of developing, piloting and evaluating materials (5) promote the competence tool. The e-portfolios for the artists does encourage the students to develop their skills and to build their own personal portfolio as a life-long learning tool.

Keywords: self-directed learning, artists, careercenter, competencies, self-management

Background Information

The Universität der Künste in Berlin¹⁾ was the first university of the arts in Germany to tackle this problem by opening a Career & Transfer Service Center (CTC) in 2001. The CTC provides services related to planning a curriculum or a career, such as workshops and training complementing the artistic university education, information and coaching for start-ups, self-employed artists and freelancers, and a job portal. The CTC management decided to launch a project with the overall objective of widening the scope of the CTC’s services and to develop an E-portfolio for its users, embedded in a ‘Competence Platform for Artists’.

Development and Management

The entire Competence Platform has been developed in a two-year project by an interdisciplinary partnership. The development procedures in this project were innovative in that they differed from traditional software development projects as the users were repeatedly involved in the development and testing. The typical steps of a software development project – requirements, specification, software architecture, code development, testing – were not as ‘isolated’ and sequential in this project as they often are. More feedback loops and iterations were done in this project in order to link the users’ needs with the technically feasible. It was therefore crucial for the success of the project to have team members that were able to translate between the languages of art and technology.

The CTC is responsible for the overall project implementation and management. We have the necessary expertise and the organisational experience. The idea of Career Centers in Germany in general is new and innovative. Until one or two years ago, this service was totally neglected by German universities.

The pilot project is a regional partnership comprised of cultural sector practitioners/employers, training providers in Higher Education, and cultural sector support agencies. The pilot project will develop a digital web portal of multidisciplinary material.

For the City of Berlin, the activation and promotion of the potentials in the art and culture sector especially of their artist target groups, and the stabilisation of small businesses is of central interest. With an high unemployment rate on the one hand but with a very lively and growing number of

¹ Berlin University of the Arts

students at art schools and artists, the city and the region has decided to focus on the potential of the cultural sector.

Since 2001 the Career & Transfer Service Center at the University of Arts (CTC) analyses formal and non-formal competences of its students and alumni to provide further support and assistance for their employability as well as setting itself up as a mediator between the individual artist and the local economy and the cultural sector.

The purpose is to enhance opportunities for training and ongoing professional development by accepting and taking into account that:

- the nature of learning changes,
- the needs of the learners are changing,
- the needs and dynamics of a knowledge economy are permanently changing.

The e-portfolio as an instrument to compete and to present

The e-portfolio is named the ‘Competence Portfolio’; the online- tool is designed to support artists to document, to analyse and to present the competencies that he or she has developed during formal education and in working experiences. It builds on the traditional showcase tool of artists, the Portfolio, which is a collection of artefacts demonstrating the achievements and abilities of its owner. An e-portfolio is the digital representation of a Portfolio, offering a variety of modes to publish its contents such as a personal website, DVD, in print etc. The ‘Competence Portfolio’ goes beyond this: it was also designed for the user and owner to analyse and reflect his or her skills and competencies, thus providing the basis for planning further educational steps or career decisions. An e-portfolio is the digital representation of a Portfolio and contains electronic artefacts such as texts, sound files, images, certificates, reviews etc., each of them representing a work completed, the results of a project, an educational step or other achievements. The Competence Portfolio tool developed in this project offers the (infra)structure to collect and to present competencies and work completed to prospective employers, sponsors, agencies etc. There are various modes to do so such as a personal website, a CD-ROM or DVD etc.; the structure of the portfolio follows the Europass guideline² and is therefore internationally compatible. Equally important, the Competence Portfolio was also designed as a tool for the user and owner to analyse and reflect his or her skills and competencies, thus providing the basis for planning further educational steps or career decisions.

The use of new media and digital learning tools and the development of online-services was an opportunity to seek and based on the general development in education the observation, that the nature of learning as well as the needs of the learners are changing. In the ‘knowledge economy’ a person’s ability to systematically develop and demonstrate his or her knowledge and competencies is crucial to improve employment opportunities – an ability that needs training and support beyond the traditional university education. This observation triggered the idea to develop the new “Competence Portfolio” tool. The Competence-Portfolio developed in this project is the first e-portfolio developed and implemented at a university of the arts and specifically tailored to the needs of artist and art students in Germany and probably even in Europe.

The competence tool is:

- providing guidance services,
- identifying gaps in provision of training and professional development and working with partners to address the gaps,
- advocacy and representation: bringing the needs of the cultural sector and the target group to the attention of key stakeholders,
- secure involvement of practitioners and education providers for the purposes of developing, piloting and evaluating materials,
- promote and or make e-learning materials available on our website and through our website (the competence tool).

² <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

The intended task of the implementation of e-portfolios for the target group is to encourage the students and the participants to develop their skills and to continue building their own personal portfolio as a life-long learning tool.

In a knowledge economy, the most valuable resource is obviously knowledge. A person's ability to express his/her knowledge effectively (through artefacts, examples of work, progression of growth, and instructor comments) improves opportunities for employment and access to education. A portfolio permits the learner to display competence, outside of a static transcript.

Learning is now a process of living. Formal education is only a stage of learning. Learning continues in virtually all aspects of life. Schools assign grades to demonstrate competency. Learning through life experiences creates artefacts instead. The ability to include these is an important motivation for E-Portfolio development.

The E-Portfolios of the participants of the Career & Transfer Service Center includes elements of:

- Personal knowledge management,
- History of development and growth,
- Planning/goal setting tool,
- Assist programs for making connections between learning experiences (formal and informal learning),
- meta-elements and information needed to support participants in planning career paths by identifying best practice examples,
- shared content areas,
- Preparing learners for life-long learning.

Users

The main participants of the E-Portfolio development process are: students, alumni, instructors, and institutions. The end-users of E-Portfolios are: prospective employers, instructors (for assessment), and award granting agencies, sponsors etc.

Implementation and usage

Implementing an institutional approach for E-Portfolios can be a difficult task. To be effective, the concept needs to be embedded into the process of instruction and assessment.

The implementation in an educational institution in the field of arts the E- portfolios possess the following characteristics:

- The portfolio is viewed as a personal, learner-in-control tool,
- It is treated as assessment process,
- The artists are introduced to the concept, and instructed on how to use the system (both from a technical and from a "how will this help you" perspective),
- The portfolio is used for assessment of learning objectives. feed-back can be integrated back into the portfolio and treated as an artefact,
- An E-Portfolio culture exists: companies and the cultural sector will both use it,
- Dialogue, debate, discussion, and examples of E-Portfolio use are common,
- Technical details are well managed, resulting in a simple, positive end user experience.

Portfolios have long been the showcase tools of artists – expressions of competencies and work completed. E-Portfolios and webfolios are digital enactments of portfolios. The cultural sector and its artists are always faced with many challenges resulting from the reform of labour market policy and changes in the structure of the employment market, to offer for a larger and in certain respects newly defined target group more and even better quality employment and integration opportunities. Existing structures are not adequate to achieve this extended mission and existing general regulations and support structures will also lose in part their validity. The task of this pilot project is to together with the companies in the cultural sector and their partners to build and architect new structures, to develop

model solutions for their sustainable development and to win new cooperation partners for a newly defined regional mission.

The institutions like Career Centers are required to support the target group in adjusting and coping with the changed demands of a self organising and self regulating employment market behaviour. Current solutions often miss the real chances of this group and they are pushed out of the competition.

The cultural sector will be taking on a new role in the newly structured regional labour market politics. Their target group will increase, the general regulations under which they operate will change and they will have to accommodate a greater flexibility. They will receive new cooperation and contracting partners and they must examine their existing services and elicit new areas for employment. They need support in adjusting to these new structures and to changing processes. Artists have few resources to communicate their mission and innovation not only outbound but also within the culture sector itself. This is however indispensable if they are to build new cooperation with and to strengthen their ties with other economic branches, to create and maintain jobs and to strengthen their market position.

The extensive use of the tool at the CTC is a sign of the short term and mid-term success of its implementation. In terms of employability, qualifications, internationalisation and the increase of self-employment it has already shown its capabilities on the individual level.

The short- term perspective on an individual and institutional level is the learning area. The short-term perspective did show already an increase between university and a growing partner of enterprises, the network itself did increase and the cultural sector is an intensive user.

The mid-term and long-term perspective still has to be shown and depending on ongoing input on technical and content level.

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