



NETWORK OF STAFF AND TEACHERS IN CHILDCARE SERVICES

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Abstract

In this paper we present the results of the project “*Network of Staff and Teachers in Childcare Services*”, which is being realized within the framework of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme. The state of the art in staff development in Early Childhood Education and Care is related to the fragmented situation of systems and provisions across the EU: a common vision for childcare services is currently lacking in Europe, just as levels of investment differ greatly between Member States. Also, the picture in relation to childcare workforce varies significantly. Given the varied backgrounds of the EU Member States, there are no common recommendations/curricula, and practitioners as well as institutions at the national/regional level have little possibilities of sharing them. For this reason, the project has established a network in ECEC staff development: it contributes to overcome local visions, by creating links between institutions/practitioners/professionals, and by collecting learning resources in ECEC and making them available to a larger audience.

Key Words: Early childhood education and care, learning resources, network, childcare workforce.

INTRODUCTION

Starting from fact that there are great difference between Member States (“Key Data on Early Education and Care in Europe”, 2014) in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), the NEST (Network of Staff and Teachers in Childcare Service) project has established a network in ECEC staff development. The aims of the NEST project were as follows:

- to establish working groups in ECEC topics and issues, especially curriculum development
- to set up an online-based pool of learning resources, information and sharing for ECEC workforce and institutions at all levels in EU
- to build community, promote peer learning and support among ECEC staff
- to support and enlarge the community, through dissemination and exploitation of results
- to establish an effective system for monitoring and evaluate the network

The impact is envisaged at 3 levels: ECEC workforce, engaged in EU community of practice, with opportunities of exchange, peer learning, access to learning resources; Researchers in the field of curriculum development, to define a potential EU-ECEC curriculum; Policy makers, to raise awareness and point out the need to work toward a common vision and provision for ECEC.

THE NEST PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT

To realize above described aims of the project the web based platform was conceptualized, developed and tested. In the conceptualization of platform we tried to fulfil the user needs as much as possible. From technical point of view we decided to use Wordpress based platform. The developed platform is multilingual in following languages: English, German, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Finnish, Hungarian and Slovenian, so that users from participating countries can use the services offering by NEST platforms in native language.

The design and navigation on platform is simple and it is easy for user to find topics, in which they are interested in.

If the user wants to participate actively in groups and not only to read materials it has to register. The registration process is simple and easy to realize.

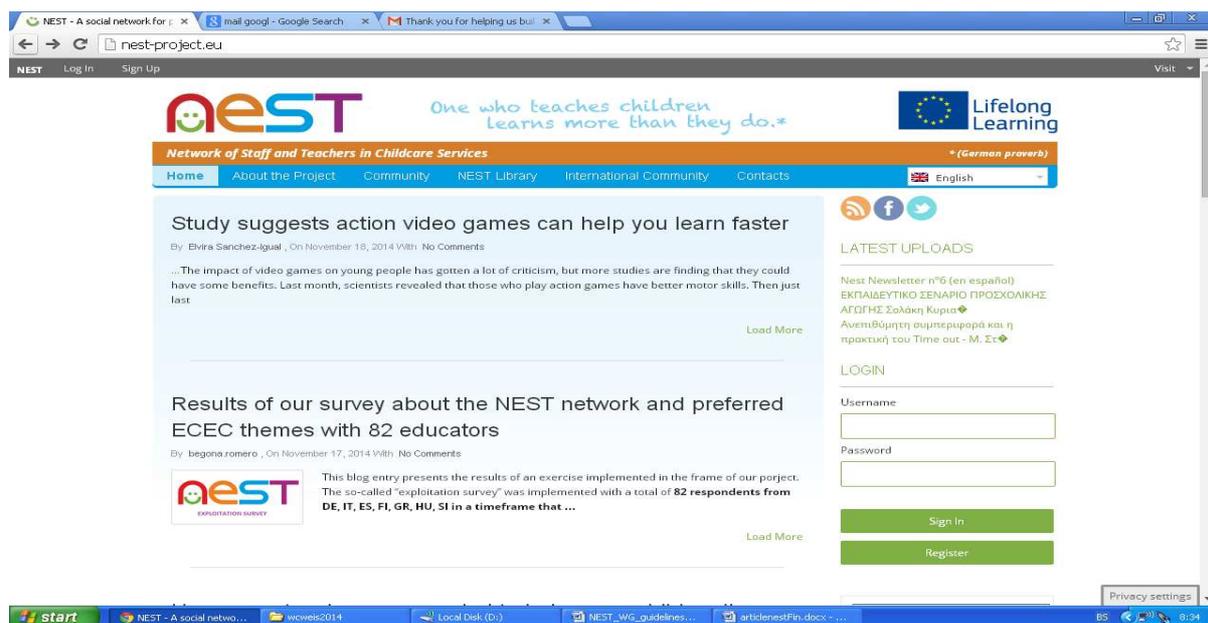


Fig. 1: NEST project

The platform is offering as could be seen from Fig. 1 the following services:

- Basic information about project
- Community which consists from groups, members, forums Fig 2
- NEST library offering: searching in library, good practices, ECEC library and NEST publications
- International communities opportunity for members to exchange in English language.

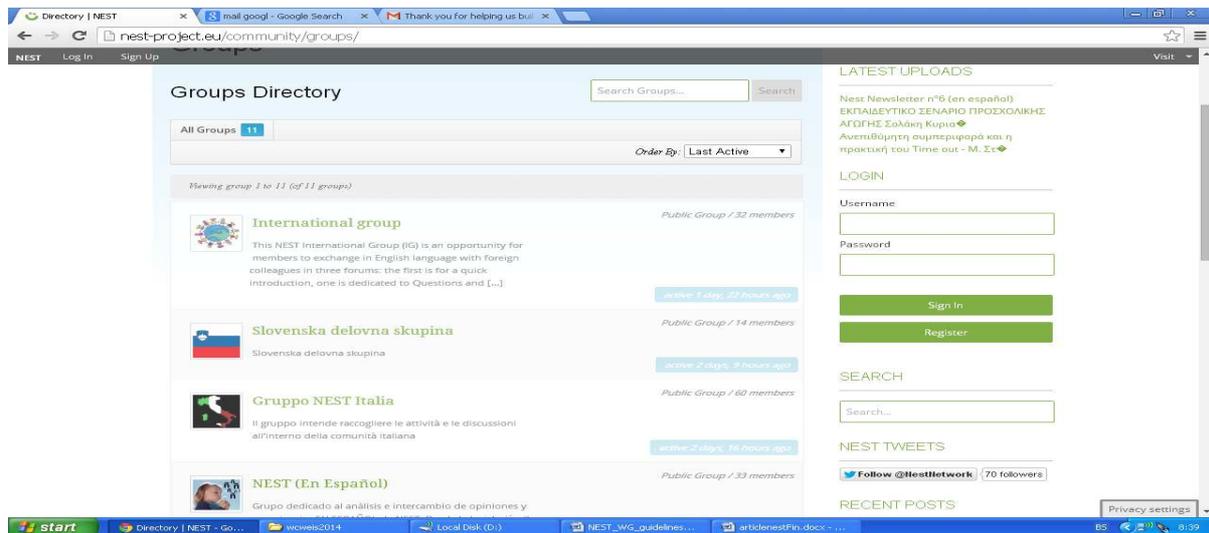


Fig. 2: NEST groups

During the project life the NEST platform has been carefully tested and used by several users from participating countries.

RESULTS

The intensive use of platform started in 2nd year of the project. Till now 11 groups has been established with 264 members. There are 99 forums open Fig 3 in which several topics have been discussed.

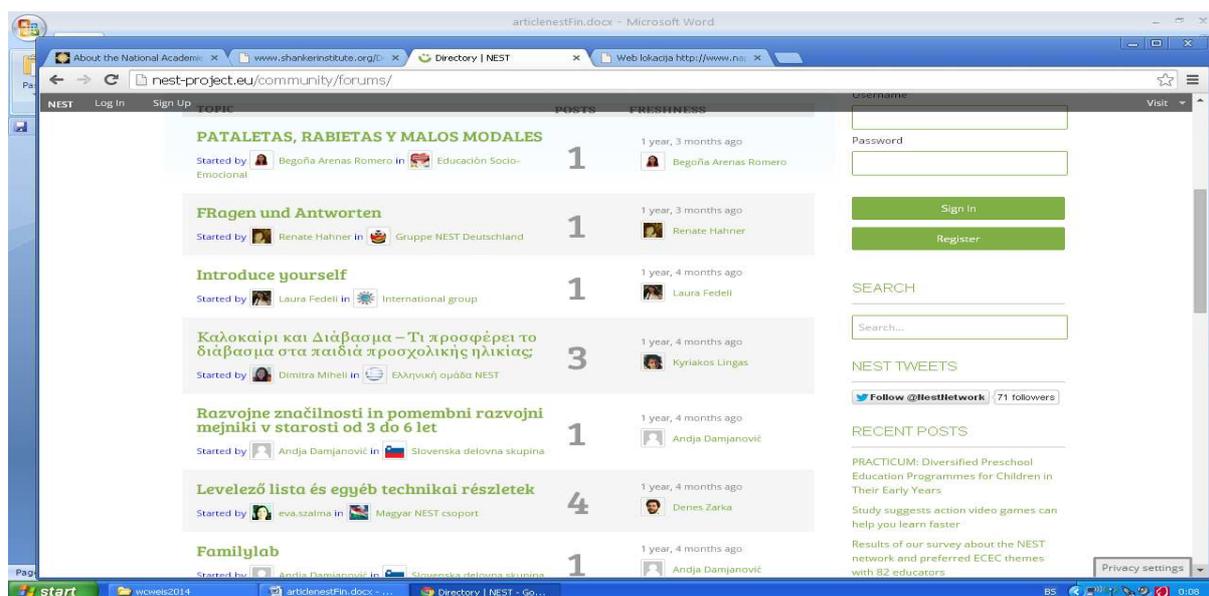


Fig. 3: NEST forums



There is an international community on platform, which provides communication in English so that participants from different countries can participate and exchange the experience and best practices.

One of most useful service on platform is NEST library offering articles about good practices, NEST publications, ECEC publication and searching for documents, which were collected during the project by different users of NEST platform. There is 479 documents covering different ECEC topics, which were collected so far.

A specific questionnaire was designed to ask ECEC stakeholders about the NEST platform and about themes related to ECEC.

91% of the total respondents replied yes to the question *Do you think that the NEST platform and network is a good way to support the professionals that work in ECEC around Europe?*

When asking the respondents about *Organisations within their territory that would be interested in the work carried out by NEST*, mainly regional and local organisations were mentioned followed by Universities and NGOs. Worth mentioning that many of the respondents of the ES survey were from Latin America and showed the interest of the organisations in their countries (Honduras, Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Dominican Republic...)

When asked to *Go to the NEST Forum <http://nest-project.eu/community/forums/>, take a look to the TOPICS (in your language) and EXPLAIN TO US IF YOU FIND THEM INTERESTING or less*, most of the participants found the topics dealt in the NEST community quite interesting

As to the topics, the highest ratings correspond to skills related emotional and social skills (early development) followed by “resources and practice examples” and areas of development (early development). The table 1 presents the highest ratings, out of 5, *highly interesting*:

Table 1: Topics with highest rating

Topic	Rating
EARLY DEVELOPMENT Emotional skills	4,6
EARLY DEVELOPMENT Social skills	4,6
TEACHER TRAINING/ MATERIAL Resources and Best practice examples	4,4
EARLY DEVELOPMENT areas of development	4,3
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY/PLAY Psycho-motor skills	4,2
QUALITY ECEC profile and requirements	4,15
QUALITY Services	4,14
LEARNING: ICT/ Digital natives	4,1
HEALTH Nutrition	4,0
TEACHER TRAINING/ MATERIAL Dealing with emotional and behavioral disorder	4,0
TEACHER TRAINING/ MATERIAL Integration of children with disabilities	4,0
PARENTS AND FAMILY: Use of Social networks	3,84

There are a lot of visitors coming to NEST website. The traffic on site for year 2014 is shown on Fig 4.

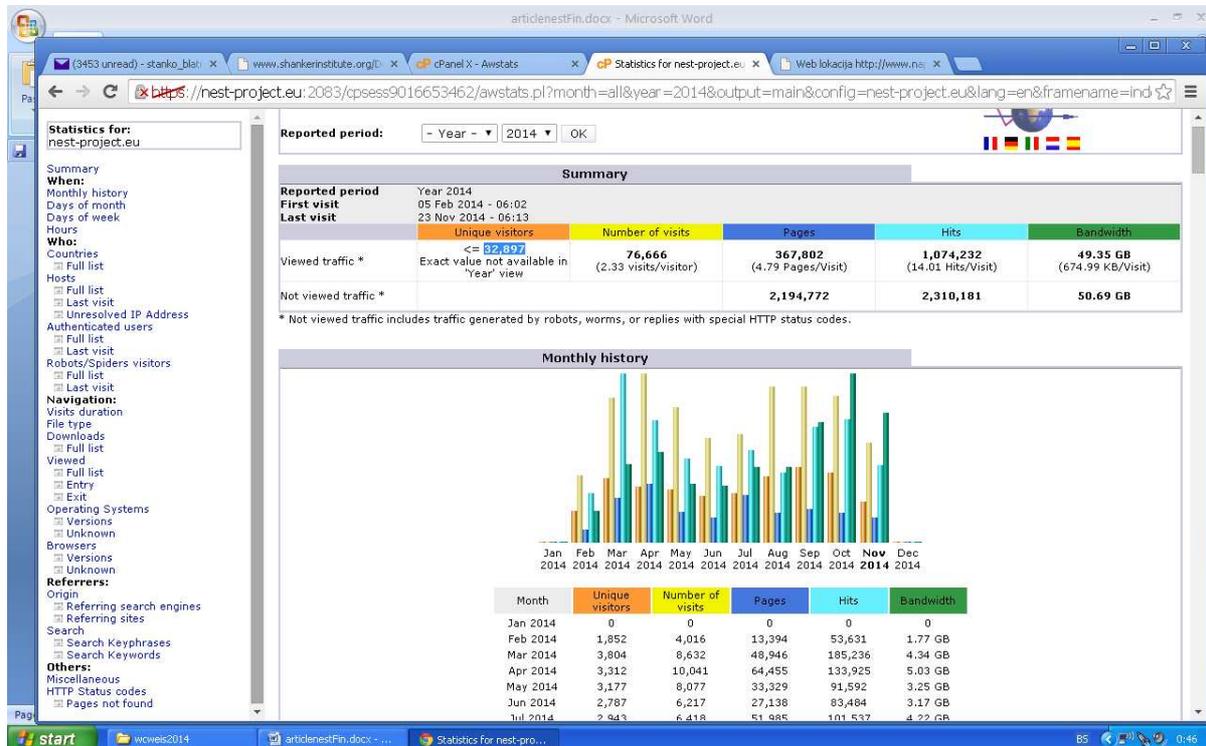


Fig .4: NEST traffic for 2014

There were almost 33.000 unique visits, more than 1.000.000 hits and almost 50 GB of bandwidth. Most interesting document for the users GUIDA AGLI ESERCIZI DI LOGOPEDIA PER BAMBINI: ELENCO COMPLETO DEGLI ESERCIZI DI LOGOPEDIA E RELATIVI ESEMPI has been downloaded 15.000 times.

These data show that platform is very useful and that user from participating and other countries are using it.

CONCLUSION

The Early Education and Care is one of most important part of education and human development (Fleer, 2010). The young children's development and learning has recently taken on new importance (Snow,2008). In the NEST project the web based platform has been developed with the aim to support of ECEC staff development. This multilingual web platform has been accepted by many users in countries participating in project. The necessary conditions for sustainability have been provided so it is expected that it will grow and will be used in other countries too.

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