European mobility and social networks

Proceedings of 7 October 2010

2nd national meeting of the Euroguidance France network

Why this topic?

Whether in academic education or vocational training, youth mobility has become one of the major priorities for the development of a European job market. The "Europe 2020" strategy introduced by the European Commission to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth relies heavily on youth mobility and the acquisition of key skills.

Social networks, which emerged a few years ago, are now part of young people's everyday practices and have become essential vehicles of information.

The Euroguidance France network (see p.4), which is heavily involved in questions of student guidance, was keen to explore these networks and the impact of the relational dimension that they introduce into communication between people on the move and between professionals.

The objectives of the day of study on 7 October 2010 were:

- To situate the mobility of young people in Europe both within a life plan and within the framework of the "Europe 2020" strategy ;
- To understand and take advantage of the multiple opportunities provided by social networks ;
- To provide initial feedback on the experiments conducted by a number of establishments, through the creation and operation of virtual communities of young people studying and working away from home..

Mobility can open doors to employment and Europe, with its linguistic and cultural diversity, now constitutes a mobility space that is within easy reach.

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Contribution by the Europe-Education-Formation France Agency

Online social networks, which first emerged just a few years ago, have grown at a tremendous rate. We have only to look at Facebook, which has more than 500 million users around the world and, along with Twitter, LinkedIn, Viadeo, YouTube, MySpace, and innumerable other personal blogs, has revolutionised communication.

These tools offer immense potential for supporting international youth mobility. They are ideal channels for establishing advance relationships, and then maintaining them during and after mobility, or finding practical information in preparation for all aspects of a foreign trip: educational, cultural and social.

That is why, slowly but surely, institutions too are beginning to use these new methods of communication. For them, it is a radical step, because it requires a shift from the traditional top-down approach to a transverse approach. They have to revise both the form and content of the messages they convey.

At a time when 'virtual mobility' is a developing concept, embodied in tools like "eTwinning", social networks are also a way of fostering cross-border encounters with the Other.

However, there is one long-standing barrier that does not seem likely to fall, and could even become stronger, the barrier of language. Whereas body language (gestures, postures) are generally an effective way of communicating in face-to-face encounters, this does not necessarily work when communication takes place through and on screens, even when linked with webcams.

Social networks and youth mobility: they seem to offer a promising link, and will no doubt bring a multitude of changes in the coming years, as the platform operators develop new, creative ideas.

Antoine Godbert
Director of the Europe-Education-Formation France Agency

What do we mean by social networks?

Social networks stretch across 3 generations: the baby-boomers, generation X, i.e. people born between 1960 and 1975, and generation Y or digital natives, those born after 1975.

However, the concept of the social network predates the digital age. Stanley Milgram's **six degrees of separation theory** or the "small world effect" are evidence that digital social networks are simply an extension of societal phenomena that have been widely identified and theorised. The unprecedentedly large numbers of users of current networks (500 million people on Facebook) are perfect illustration of Metcalfe's Law: the more users a network has, the more useful they find it.

However, the explosion of the big social networks hits the buffers with what is called "**Dunbar's number**", which sets a maximum figure of 148 for the number of people with whom one can have a stable social relationship at a given moment of one's life. This figure seems to be confirmed on Facebook, where the average number of "friends" stands at around 120.

Social media, in which content is produced by the users then shared or discussed online, predated social networks. The next step was media profiling (the process of defining and characterising a profile). By naming and centralising their media, users accelerated the use of social networks as a way of sharing both personal and professional information.

This possibility of stating a view, signing one's content, sharing it publicly or privately, triggered the **problem of digital identity**. Asking the question: "Should I or shouldn't I sign up to a social network?" shows the strength of today's pressure on digital identity, and the obligation to say yes. If the question is "frightening", it is because of a lack of information or training about the media and the overlap they create between personal and professional life.

Finally, it should be noted that there is another barrier to the use of certain social networks, which is a knowledge of English, widely used online but poorly grasped by most French people.

European mobility

Carlo Scatoli, representing the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture) noted that, in this sphere, the landscape has changed a great deal in recent years. Just twenty years ago, there was little student mobility, and it was largely motivated by linguistic goals. Today, it is much more widespread, as evidenced by the statistics about students on the Erasmus courses. Systems have been set up to help university students with mobility, but also students at college and high school level, or on vocational training courses (Comenius and Leonardo da Vinci programmes). Europe is keen to promote such mobility for both education and work. This commitment is once again fully embraced in the new Youth on the Move programme.

Discussion and practical workshops

Workshop 1

Social networks and recruitment

What impact do social networks have on finding a job? Can they facilitate mobility in employment and recruitment? Under what conditions are these tools effective? Two examples of practices that illustrate the specific use of social networks for recruitment were described by Mr Stephen Demange, Head of the Web BtoB Services at the French association for the employment of executives and managers (APEC) and Mr Éric Barthélémy, EURES Adviser at the Lorraine Employment Centre (Pôle emploi).

Mr Barthélémy explained that the Pôle emploi has not yet really got moved into social networks into the jobseeking process, and hence not into mobility either. The only existing processes are based on **individual initiatives** by EURES advisers, who have created two Facebook pages. Nevertheless, the Pôle emploi is indirectly involved with the topic of e-reputation within the framework of the **training sessions** it organises to help jobseekers. At these sessions, the advisers emphasise the risks involved in the use of social networks and the widely accessible traces they leave on the web.

Mr Demange, on the other hand, described how by entering into a **partnership with a professional social network** (LinkedIn then Viadeo), APEC had demonstrated its readiness to embrace innovation in helping people find work. This type of partnership is helpful in finding information – for job applicants, information about a potential employer, interviewers and employees, and for recruiters, information on applicants and the network or networks they use.

However, even though both recruiters and job applicants now use social networks to find information and/or create profiles on the web, the main instrument continues to be **spontaneous applications and more traditional methods**.

Although reservations have been expressed, in particular about the time-consuming nature of social networks and the fact that the different networks each address specific audiences, the discussions revealed that social networks can **help people find work or set up a business**, by widening the range and scope of the search and creating new opportunities (discovery of a hidden market, new customers, etc.). They can also reach a wider public by providing real-time information to individuals, institutions, companies and recruitment agencies, and by helping people to organise their own structured networks of contacts or to improve their own professional tracking systems.

Nonetheless, it is very important:

- to learn to **manage one's e-reputation** by leaving "positive" traces on the web and not providing too much personal data,
- to begin by **building up a network** on a professional site, e.g. Viadeo, before moving on to a personal network,
- to find the "right" keywords to get good "referencing" on the web,
- and to think about establishing an identity within peer communities.

Two crucial pieces of advice: Firstly, it is better **to be the "agent" of one's e-reputation**, i.e. to begin using these tools before even looking for a job and to establish a solid network of relations, made up of friends and relatives. And secondly, so far nothing has replaced non-virtual networks, so it is essential to maintain these networks and maintain relationships with people.

Workshop 2

Use of social networks as mobility-support tools

The "real" question is whether social networks are or can be "used" as a tool of mobility.

In fact, there are few examples, but the four that follow show social networks can support mobility, but also that the goals and conditions of use can take different forms, such as:

Discussion and practical workshops

- blogs: University of Paris Descartes' Carnets 2-MundiVox (http://carnets.parisdescartes.fr) presented by Sophie Mahéo of the TICE Department, and the Rhône-Alpes Regional Council's Explora'blogs (http://www.explorablogs.rhonealpes.fr);
- Facebook pages: EPITECH International Relations and the Annecy IUT's Computing Department page, presented respectively by Julie Pidell and Christine Rieu.

From these examples, it emerges that people on the move use these networks because they **need information**. This information is not just institutional, but also includes opinions which help people to make choices, prepare and even reassure themselves. Others publish information because they want to **share** and **get** involved, especially as producing Facebook content is easy (short, relatively unstructured and responsive) and having a blog is status enhancing (e.g. the blogs published on the Carnets 2-MundiVox portal have an institutional address, a mark of quality).

As regards disadvantages, there is the subjectivity of the information, the problems of image rights and the occasional blurring of the distinction between the professional and private spheres (some EPICTECH students resolve this by having 2 blogs).

For the institutions, the use of these networks requires **varying levels of investment** in human resources (greater for Facebook) in order to:

- update and manage institutional pages;
- encourage students to "get involved" in postings. Some institutions provide incentives in the form of ECTS credits (blogs), others make sure they respond to all comments by new contributors or develop recommendation functions;
- controlling postings. The role of the "community manager" is important from the perspective of updates and Administration, but also for risk management (abusive or negative messages, etc.), though these are actually very rare.

As regards the advantages for institutions, these include **reputational factors** (giving the establishment a positive and dynamic image), **economic factors** (raising the public profile) and the possibility of identifying students' needs and expectations more effectively.

During this workshop, a number of questions emerged: community size; structuring of information on Facebook (by country of destination, programmes, events, etc.); volume of information (does too much information kill information? How to make good use of it all?); choice of medium (usually Facebook, others?); managing the community (a volunteer-only basis is often inadequate); reciprocity (how to link incoming and outgoing mobility?).

Workshop 3
Institutions and social networks

How do institutions responsible for providing guidance use the different social media to disseminate information that matches the real needs of users: websites, Twitter, Facebook, online FAQ, etc.

Nature, target and timing of messages? Managing the institution's image? What perspectives on the European dimension?

Comparative views

Institutions/individual, the new challenges
Jean-Philippe Simonnet, webmaster at the Centre Inffo

With social networks, the target audience has become the general public.

The "**porousness" between private and working life** on these networks has forced the institution to think both about self-presentation and self-protection, about its ethical position and hence about staff training.

The shift from an interactive extranet to social networks can result in loss of control for the institution. It is a **new way of approaching relations between** the institution and its employees and between employees.

What position should the institution adopt?
Alain Taupin, Deputy Director of l'Onisep

These media cannot be ignored when one is responsible for providing information to young people. They constitute a **different way of reaching audiences** but do not change the imperatives. We need to be vigilant about the risks they can entail: manipulation of various kinds, predominance of the emotional over the cognitive, etc.

In the light of these factors, **establishment of a digital committee** as well as a "cross media" department. The challenge is to find the "right focus" to track the complementarity between "emotion and reason" when establishing the editorial line.

What editorial approach? *Arielle Girot, Editorial Manager at Onisep*

It offers **new communication media** (videos on Dailymotion, RSS feeds, chats, 2Wire Twitter).

Social networks give everyone the opportunity to express themselves directly. This way of collecting opinions is useful, it elicits rigour and responsiveness. It is not always easy for professionals to deal with this constant and disruptive attention.

The multiplicity of interfaces with the public raises the question of the human resources, having enough trained people capable of providing factual communication.

Key ideas

- **Necessity of training for the professionals** and education for the target audiences ;
- Awareness of the overlap between the private and professional spheres ;
- Time dimension: real-time/delayed ;
- Information overload – multiplicity of networks ;
- Management: focusing on the message, not neglecting the ethical dimension.

Responses or questions

- Risk of information degradation; enclosing oneself in a single network, in a "tribe"?
- Getting involved, but why? Do people know that we are involved in the networks?
- Can institutions be evaluated on the basis of opinions and reactions?

Workshop 4
European mobility and personal use of social networks

Nowadays, social networks are inescapable. They are used by individuals and companies, both personally and professionally. They are particularly useful to people on the move. They have generated **new behaviours** and created **new professions**. They are linked with constant technological progress that requires adaptations from both users and providers. They are both time-saving (on communication, linkage, information…) and time-consuming, in the effort to achieve maximum effectiveness and avoid traps. Three accounts illustrated this aspect.

Benjamin Shifres, former Erasmus student, a credit analyst for Exxon Mobil in Prague. As a student abroad, he felt the need to **maintain contact** with his family and friends, and created a blog. Since he has been working abroad, he has mainly used social media in a private capacity. The creation of Facebook, which he only uses for the private sphere, has made it easier to maintain links. On the professional side, he uses the LinkedIn network to contact former students, develop his network, **find information**… but he has never used it to look for a job. Social networks are important, perhaps indispensable, but he recognises that it is not always easy to "control" them. You have to be able to decide what people can see, who sees it, how, whom to accept or refuse as a "friend", **the boundaries between private and professional**, etc.

Albéric Guigou, (co-founder and head of marketing at "Reputation Squad") is a reputation manager for businesses and individuals on the net. **These days, a net presence is essential**. However, it isn't something that can be done any old how. You have to **control the information and image** you want to put across. Private life

is a thing of the past, but we need to protect our intimacy. So individuals need to define the scope of intimacy, to create their own content, to keep abreast of technological changes, etc. If the net is used for harmful or defamatory purposes, it is possible to take legal action against ill-intentioned people, to have content withdrawn…

Fabienne Buisson, a teacher for the vocational baccalaureate exam at the R. Garros vocational lycée in Toulouse, is involved in an academic experiment with students and a business partner on the creation and use of social networks. From a practical job recruitment situation (based on profiles created on the internet), the pupils learn about the difference between the "target profile" and what is "shown". They learn how to manage professionally the image they convey. This experiment can be followed on the Toulouse education department website.

Social networks still trigger **a response of fear and distrus**t: users are also their own authority, responsible for what they "create". It is difficult to differentiate between private and intimate, so there is a problem of self-protection. For young people, the attraction is spontaneous. They often think "that you can say what you like and no one will know", an illusion of omnipotence and impunity. Education on using social media is therefore essential. It could be incorporated into the teaching of a skill that cuts across all disciplines – "Acquiring information" – which would be helpful in any integration process requiring the search for information. At a personal level, it would also teach people to avoid risks, decide what to do with information, who to talk to, how, why, etc.

The Euroguidance network

Informs and advices on careers guidance and mobility in Europe.

Formed by the National Resource Centres (NRC), it exists in 31 countries.

Its aim is to promote mobility and provide information on education, training and qualification system in Europe while at the same time fostering the European dimension within careers guidance.

Managed in France by the Agence Europe Education Formation, it draws on two networks:

- The employment network, the Centre INFFO (Centre for the development of information on lifelong learning) and the CARIF-OREF Auvergne (Centre for training coordination, resources and information).
- The Education network, the ONISEP (French National Office for Education and Career Information), the Lille, Lyon, Marseille and Strasbourg CIOs (Information and careers guidance centres) and the CIO-relais Europe (reference centres in Europe).

The French network is accordingly under the aegis of the French Minister for Education and the Minister for the Economy, Industry and Employment.

To find out more about education and training opportunities in Europe, please go to the Ploteus portal http://ec.europa. eu/ploteus.

Networking sites:
www.euroguidance-france.org
www.onisep.fr
www.onisep.fr/Espace-pedagoqique (Europe)
www.centre-inffo.fr (en Europe)
www.mobiloutil.eu
www.formationauvergne.com (mobilité)

Glossary

This is not a comprehensive glossary. It simply aims to provide a few definitions to make this document understandable.

- The term "**social media**" covers different activities that combine technology, social interaction and content creation. They can be defined as "a group of online applications based on Web 2.0 philosophy and technology used in the creation and exchange of user-generated content". The social media use group intelligence in a spirit of online collaboration. Through these methods of social communication, individuals or groups of individuals work together to create web content, organise, index, modify or comment on content, and mix it with personal creative content.

- The expression "**Web 2.0**" refers to certain World Wide Web technologies and practices that followed the initial form of the web, in particular interfaces that allow internet users with few technical skills to use the new web functions. This means that internet users can easily interact (share, discuss, etc.), both with the content and structure of pages, but also with each other, together generating the social web.

- An **RSS feed** is a file whose content is automatically produced from updates on a website. RSS feeds are often used by news sites or blogs to present online news headlines. The term RSS means that the file is electronically coded using the RSS standard, which is itself based on XML computer language.

- A **mashup** is a website or application whose content arises from the combination of several information sources.

- A **blog** is a website made up of a sequence of entries collected over time, and often classified in reverse chronological order (the most recent entries first). Like a ship's log or private diary, each blog entry is an addition to the blog. The content provided by the blogger (the person running the blog) is often textual, but is combined with hyperlinks and multimedia elements, on which the readers can generally post comments.

- A **virtual community** is a group of people who communicate by e-mail, the internet, letters, and telephone, for professional, social, educational or other reasons. The word virtual is used to indicate that the communication is not face-to-face.

- **Podcasting** is a way of distributing files (audio, video or other) on the web, called podcasts.

- **Social bookmarking** is a way for internet users to store, classify, find and share their favourite links.

- **Community Manager** is a new profession. Community managers work for a company or brand, leading and pooling exchanges between users of web services such as social networks and ensuring compliance with the community code of conduct.

Source: Wikipedia

- **E-reputation** is what internet users think about a brand or a person. This digital reputation is the basis of digital identity. Where applicable, this image needs to reflect a strategy, an effort to monitor, analyse and manage e-reputation. E-reputation management is a way of establishing credibility and preventing rumours developing.

Editing