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Unique learning Badges to recognise non-formal learning

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> "Learning today happens everywhere. But it's often difficult to get recognition for skills and achievements that happen online or out of school. mozilla open Badges help solve that problem, making it easy for any organization to issue, manage and display digital badges across the web."

Mozilla Foundation

Digital badges for life-long learning

Badges are not a new idea. Scouts have been using badges to recognize various skills and achievements of their members for years. Players of video games unlock various trophies by completing game missions.Web developers use badges to encourage wanted behaviours of Internet

users.

Similar ideas lie behind the use of digital badges for life-long learning. They should help to recognize knowledge, skills, attitudes and achievements of learners in various learning contexts. They should bring game features into the learning process and encourage wanted behaviours. Digital badges are visual representations of learning outcomes and achievements.

Putting badges inpractice

Any educational organization can design their unique system of badges online and issue them as part of their educational activities. Mozilla Foundation offers free software1 and an open technical standard2 that any organization can use to create, issue and verify digital badges.

Doug Belshaw works for Mozilla and has a couple of videos3 on how to make badges work for your organization. In his blog post4 he suggests a plan to follow when starting with badges for your non-formal learning activities:

1. Decide on the behaviours, skills or attitudes you want to promote.
2. Think of some criteria for a badge that would begin to promote those behaviours, skills or attitudes.
3. Consider if the criteria for the badge you've come up with can be broken down in more granular ways.
4. If (as is likely) you end up with multiple badges, think about multiple (potentially interest-based) pathways through your badge ecosystem. Ask yourself, which badges depend upon other badges? What are the relationships between these badges?
5. Get someone to design an awesome- looking graphical badge for you or use the Open Badge Designer tool5 online to do it yourself and use a badge-issuing platform such as badg.us, ForAllBadges, WPBadger or BadgeOS to issue badges.

early bird example from the field We are taking the first steps in developing badge-based recognition systems for non- formal learning in the European youth work context. At the beginning of 2013, in cooperation with the Finnish National Agency, we launched the pilot project "Turn the Youth Exchanges On(line)" that used badges to support non-formal learning in European youth exchanges.

The whole concept of this project was based on the methodology of blended learning: a residential non-formal learning activity, complemented and supported by the online learning environment10 and tools before and after the activity. The participants were youth workers, accompanied by young people (15-18 years old). The residential activity brought together 38 participants from 10 European countries.

The participants welcomed the general idea of using badges for recognition of non-formal learning. Given that the project is in its early development stage, the experience of working with badges brought many valuable insights to the organisers of this project. The following online conversation may be interesting to reflect upon when starting to play with the idea of badges:

Participant: *Already made a presentation about it in my school! Great stuff!*
Facilitator: *And what were the reactions during or after the presentation?*
Participant: *A lot of questions, but the most common was, why do we need to prove our achievements in a digital way, if we can do it in normal one...you know, it was hard to explain, that we need a recognition of non-formal learning, outside schools and universities!* Facilitator: *Both are true: for people who are getting formal recognition of their achievements in schools, everything else seems*

unnecessary, but for those (and there are more and more of them!) who do not follow formal education curricula, badges can be both attractive to complete formal education and benefit from recognising their informally or non-formally gained competences. Perhaps your school pupil should check how employers currently look for candidates - many of them take social networking into consideration as a source of information. Here, badges could be a means to help candidates stand out from the crowd. Participant: *Totally agree with you. The best explanation for badges is that they can make the person more special in some way, while at the same time proving his competences and ability to stand out, using badges as a tool. But the truth is that there are enough employers who are satisfied with the formal education of their candidates and enough workers who don't want to have extra-recognition of their competences until they become job-seekers and are trying to get new qualifications to improve their chances on the labour market.....*

The full report can be downloaded online.

Future developments

The Association of Non-formal Education in Lithuania together with the partner organisations of the European UNIQUE Network received a grant from the European Commission to develop UNIQUE Learning Badges for Recognition of Non- formal Learning in European Youth Work. UNIQUE Learning Badges is a new development in the European pathways towards better recognition of non-formal learning within and beyond the European youth work field.

New developments seek to develop a web- based accreditation platform and build capacities for using it. The platform should enable those involved in youth work to design unique recognition systems and implement them in their non-formal learning practice with young people.

This initiative takes into account the most recent developments[12] in the recognition of non-formal learning at European level. The project has the specific objective to transfer the best practice of the Youthpass recognition system by disseminating and using the project results beyond the current programme in non-formal education contexts on national, regional and local levels.

The methodology of Learning Badges is grounded and complementary to the best practice of the Youthpass recognition tool used within the European Youth in Action Programme. Learning Badges will make it possible to better support young people in their learning process, to encourage reflection in a playful way and make the process of self-assessment easier and more exciting. Digital solutions make it possible to choose any competence framework such as the 8 Key competences for Life Long Learning or any other.We expect that UNIQUE Learning Badges will be a great tool to make Youthpass certificates richer, well thought of and credible.

Specifically, Learning Badges will:

- Support personal reflection on non-formal learning through online guidance
- Offer new online feedback and self- assessment opportunities for the dialogue process
- Introduce game-like solutions to make the recognition process more interactive and dynamic
- Open possibilities to add evidence in any digital format to better describe learning outcomes
- Visualize the learning progress and learning outcomes to monitor achievements more easily
- Introduce online tools for learning facilitators to strengthen the recognition dimension
- Develop solutions for learners to share their achievements with the outside world

Moreover, Learning Badges will take the best practices of Youthpass beyond the European Youth in Action Programme. Learning Badges will be piloted within the national youth programmes and youth worker qualification programmes.

The project activities include: an international training course for 24 youth workers in June 2013 in Lithuania; innovation transfer workshops for 144 youth workers in 6 project partner countries; piloting badges in 25 youth programmes and 9 youth worker qualification programmes; research and promotion activities.

You can follow project developments online at http://www.learningbadges.eu [3]

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