

TSST ПЛАТФОРМА ЗА ЕЛЕКТРОННО ОБУЧЕНИЕ И СПОДЕЛЯНЕ НА ЗНАНИЯ И МАТЕРИАЛИ В ЕЛЕКТРОНЕН ФОРМАТ

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TSST PLATFORM FOR E-LEARNING AND SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE AND MATERIALS IN ELECTRONIC FORMAT

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***Abstract:** Today, the profound analysis and correct understanding of the informational content and the adequate putting into practice of the acquired knowledge and skills are basic premises for finding optimal solutions concerning the personal realization and lifestyle as well as for the stable development and management of entire societies and global economics. The current paper presents a lifelong learning platform promoting a new culture of learning based on personalized and self-controlled acquisition of key skills, knowledge and professional competences with respect to the safety and security in tourism services. The e-platform development is co-financed by the EU in the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci, Transfer of Innovation multilateral project "Training Safety and Security in Tourism". The project aims, objectives and the partnership are briefly described in this paper. The main architectural modules of the platform as well as the services and functionality are presented too.*

***Key words:** Lifelong Learning, e-Learning, On-the-Job Training, e-Platform.*

Introduction

Tourism and travelling is the largest industry in the world. The development of tourism is connected to positive economical and social influence, gives additional profit to the state and in this way is very important development supporting factor. Well managed tourism object can facilitate resurrection of traditions, renovation of objects and monuments. To make and consolidate the identity of a state you need to preserve its cultural and historical heritage which becomes a decisively important tool to create a positive international view of the state. Europe as the final destination of travelling has leading positions in the entire world, but nowadays new forms of danger and insecurity appear for both the humankind and tourism as the leading branch of national economy. It puts the existence of tourism enterprises themselves into danger and forms combination of circumstances and factors that disturb the development. International terrorism, inner and outer conflicts, new diseases and epidemics, unpredictable disasters,

change of the climate all become risks of tourism business. Risks of security in tourism take new, unknown, unusual and unpredictable forms of appearance, and the industry itself has to be able to respond this kind of challenge adequately. Nowadays, demand for culture, nature, and active tourism grows the most rapidly among travellers. Some research and reports of tourism service providers show that there is rapidly growing demand for secure tourism products, and the criterion of security is one of the most important while choosing this or that product [1-4].

On the growth of demand after international tourism and in order to preserve the place in the business environment, tourism operators not in Europe only but also worldwide should think about unified quality tourism product which would meet the security standards.

TSSST project addresses the sector of tourism which is known as a dynamic and growing industry, being mainly dominated by SMEs. SMEs in tourism sector, especially hotels, restaurants and indoor places for entertainment are in a process of permanent competition, which is not being possible without continuously qualified personnel which are an important competitive factor. This is clear for the SMEs management and the opportunities offered by VET education for lifelong learning are used for improving the knowledge and skills in different aspects of tourist service of the SMEs personnel in tourist sector. Project partners are institutions and organizations from Latvia, Romania and Czech Republic. Some specific aims of the project are:

- To produce national studies on current situation in tourism with regard to safety and security from the view point of service providers.
- To elaborate comparative analysis on skills and knowledge of managers and staff and make a review of the current status in the partner's countries;
- Improvement of occupational skills and anticipated benefits of vocational training by means of: determination of skill needs and improvement of analysis;
- Production and publishing of the results/products obtained by the work in order to promote the created innovations and stimulate trans-national cooperation in VET system.
- Promotion of effective dissemination of networks' outputs/results using relevant channels and stakeholders in order to achieve a sustainable effect and post project life cycle of the project.

Theoretical and Methodological Fundaments

It is proved, by practice, that the blended solutions are most applicable when the training requires trainees to be aware of, understand, apply, evaluate and synthesize information in different situations. Bearing in mind the specific of our target group (adult learners, highly skilled people, professionals), as fundaments in the methodology development were taken into account both the "Andragogy" theory [5,6] and the "Homo Zappiens" theory [8] which we tried to blend appropriately with SEL theory [<http://www.casel.org/basics/index.php>].

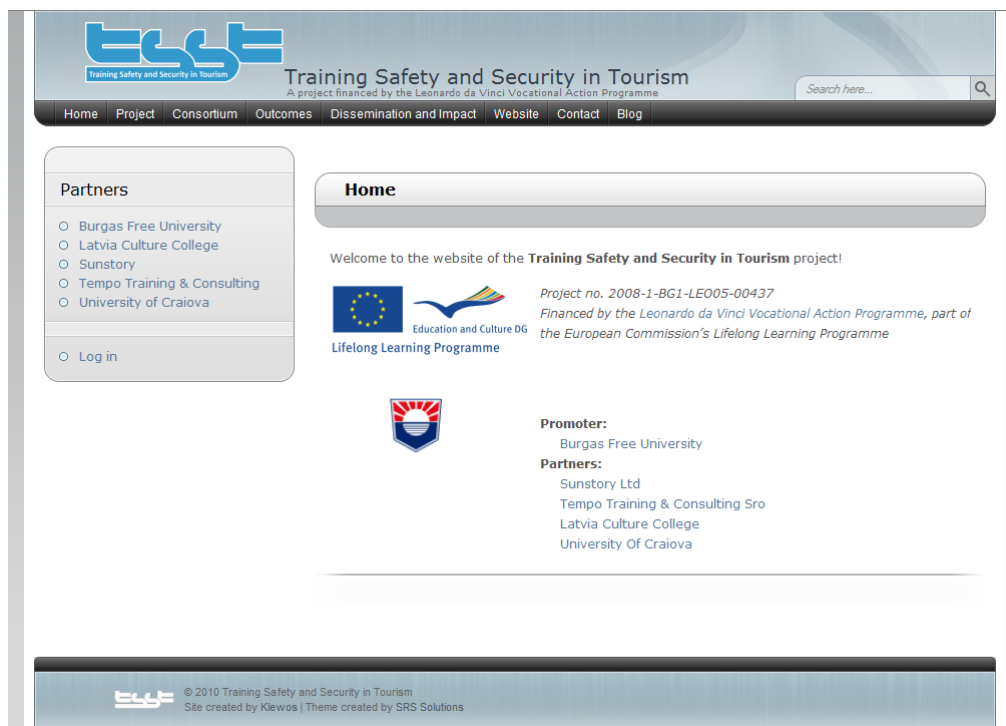


Figure 1. TSST Project (<http://tsst.bfu.bg>)

e-Platform TSST – integration of e-learning, e-practicing and e-tutoring

TSST has been considered as an e-platform facilitating and supporting the safety and security in tourism courses providers as well as the end users (tourism sector workforce) in their activities. The main requirements concerning the platform were: it to be friendly, easy to use, with clear guidelines, and last but not least, the learning how to use the platform has to be easy and intuitive.

The reasonable behind the TSST platform is represented by the limited resources in terms of teachers (coaches), spaces, but above all by the distant users' available time, the latter being far from the places of teaching, of student-workers and, particularly, of those customers that want or need to improve their knowledge and/or update their professional skills.

The platform establishment is based on adoption of open source software in accordance with EU policy for using open source platforms as a key priority in the context of interoperability, security, expenses reducing, transparency, and standardization. The TSST e-platform environment is structured in training area and communication area. The communication area consists of a set of instruments promoting collaborations and cooperation activities – forum, news section, web-conferencing facilities, virtual lab, and announcements section. Users have also been supported by problem reporting system collecting requests on technical doubts/problems, etc. The training area provides link to the local e-learning system established in the corresponding partner organization. The access to the learning content represented in the e-learning system is regulated in accordance with the organization's common rules and policy.

TSST Platform Architecture and Functionality

The main aim of the TSST Platform is to facilitate and support all TSST project participants by providing appropriate services [8].

The functionality is considered so that the holistic approach to be mirrored in the frame of the SEL systematics, where the qualification fields are communication, application of ICT, working together, problem solving and improvement of own learning and performance through improvement and extension of the digital competences. Digital competences involve the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology for work, leisure and communication. TSST Platform is focused on the use of computer networks to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, emotional support and a sense of belonging to and participating in open educational networks.

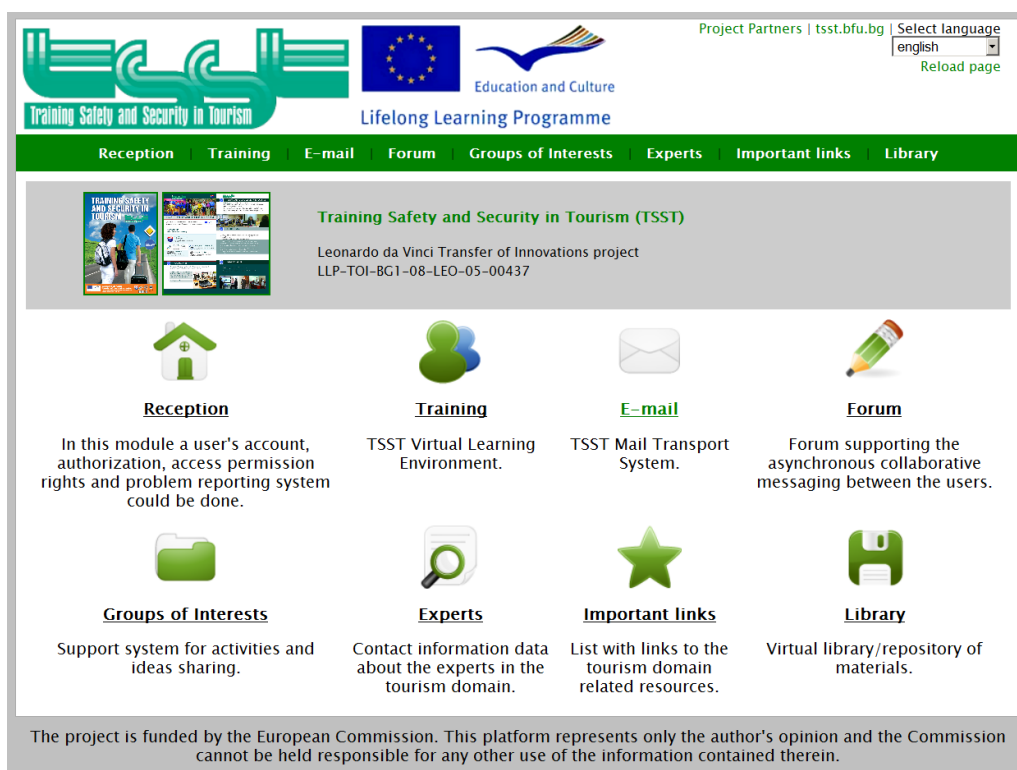


Figure 2. Virtual TSST welcome area TSST Platform (<http://www.tsstproject.eu>)

- **Welcome area.** This module presents, in short, the available services for potential new users. This front page also has language selection option, supporting available languages: English, Bulgarian, Romanian, Czech and Latvian.
- **Reception.** This architectural module allows the identity of all users to be established and each of them to be appropriately authorized ensuring support of access permission and rights policies against resources and data consuming. Another important part of this module is the problem reporting system. Each user accesses the platform through a personal Username and Password.

- **Training.** TSST virtual learning environment. Here the customers will be able to make use of all available online courses in tourism domain.
- **E-mail.** TSST mail transport system. Free e-mail and e-mail management facilities.
- **Forum.** Forum supporting the asynchronous collaborative messaging between the users.
- **Groups of interests.** Support system for activities and idea sharing. It comprises web tools which support virtual communities of practice (groups of interests) focused on idea sharing and shared activities.
- **Experts.** Contact information data about the experts in the tourism domain. This module comprises database with information about experts in different subject domains and corresponding contact information on them. Important part of the module is the searching engine, which allows the participants to find contact information about those experts who could help them to solve given problem through virtual and/or real consultation.
- **Important Links.** List with links to the tourism domain related resources. This module comprises entertainment area where games and music link lists, jokes rubric, interesting facts rubric, etc. are presented.
- **Library.** Virtual library/repository for multimedia materials. Including: articles, links, demos, lessons, learning modules or courses. The library is separated in two parts: common part (for reading and download) and private part, where users having appropriate authorization can upload materials.

Software

All the software tools taken into consideration are:

- Open Source under the terms of the GPL license. In accordance with the EU policy the use of Open Source Platforms is a key priority in the context of interoperability, security, expenses reducing, transparency, and standardization. Adoption of open source software has clear social and political support in Europe. European Commission funds research programs such as IST and IDABC /Interoperable Delivery of European e-Government Services to public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens/[6].
- Based on PHP language and MySQL database.

Below the list of additional selected software tools is presented briefly:

- **E-Learning Platform** – Moodle 2.0 dev - Moodle is a Course Management System (CMS), also known as a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). It is a free web application that educators can use to create effective online learning sites.
- **E-Mail Web Client** – RoundCube 0.2 beta - Vanilla is an open-source, standards-compliant, multi-lingual, fully extensible discussion forum for the web. Anyone who has web-space that meets the requirements can download and use Vanilla for free.
- **Forum Software** - Simple Machines Forum 1.1.6 - SMF in short — is a free, professional grade software package that allows users to set up their own online communities within minutes. Its powerful custom made template engine provides for full control of the layout of the message board and with unique SSI /Server Side Includes/ function users can let their forum and website interact with each other. SMF is designed to provide users with all the features they need from a bulletin board while having an absolute minimal impact on the resources of the server.
- **File Browsing** – FileBrowser 1.3.4 is a PHP application that allows thumb nailing images and viewing them in a web browser.

Conclusions

To provide preparation of highly educated professionals for tourism labour market, it is important to get access to modern theory materials and scientific works for both students and faculties of the higher education institutions. That is why research of security factors and skills of crisis management become important and actual themes among tourism professionals [1].

Conducted interviews with Bulgarian experts in safety and security in tourism and the results from the inquiry with the representatives of tourism industry professional organisations categorically prove that there is much yet to be done in order to increase tourist safety in our country, mainly in terms of training and key competence building of tourist personnel; introduction of certifying systems for safety of foods and tourist products in general; utilisation of the opportunities offered by the insurance market; achieving a better synchronisation between the work of the government structures and the tourist enterprises; improved opportunities for medical care, especially during the high season and so on.

We share the opinion that the problem of tourism safety has not been adequately reflected in tourism training. A review of the curricula and study programmes in Bulgarian educational institutions that offer training in tourist services reveals that tourism safety is not included as an independent study course.

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