

# Using the TIPS platform to train Greek cultural mediators

Konstantina Polymeropoulou and Achilles Kameas

**Abstract**— In this paper, we shall discuss the role of Cultural Mediators and their qualifications and training needs, and then we shall present the a distant training course that we developed as part of the LdV TIPS project. The course employed the T-learning methodology and involved three technological platforms, namely Internet, mobile phones and IPTV, in order to ensure continuous availability and timely deployment of the course content. Finally, we shall present an assessment of the course based on the personal testimonies and the evaluation results of the TIPS Greek Class.

**Index Terms** – Cultural mediators, Lifelong learning, T-learning methodology, E-learning, Internet, M-learning, IPTV

## I. INTRODUCTION

More and more European countries are becoming multicultural due to several socio - economical factors as their non homogeneous population is growing through the immigration phenomenon and the globalization. In the frame of the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue" (year 2008), the cultural mediators are indicated as the most important players in the integration of the immigrants. *"Cultural mediators are involved in all welcoming services for immigrants, refugees and human traffic victims. Social workers require valuable, updated training especially applicable in everyday work-related activities [1]."*

A professional cultural mediator acts as a facilitator aiming to enhance the communication and to establish a common understanding between the immigrants / refugees and the public bodies of the hosting country. Cultural mediators have a significant position and can be helpful in many important fields such as health, education, employment, legal rights etc [2]. They support foreign citizens and their families, providing them with information and professional consultancy in order to adapt better and even become integrated in the hosting country. *The main skills and competences of cultural mediators are communication, empathy, active listening and knowledge either of the native country or the host country (culture, laws, traditions...)* [3].

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The need to develop a non - traditional approach to enhancing cultural mediators' education has risen because of the requirement to constantly provide information and support to the immigrants, overcoming constrains of time and space.

In this context, the TIPS project (T-learning to Improve Professional Skills for intercultural dialogue), co-financed by the EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme, developed a blended T-learning methodology by integrating a triple technology platform consisting of e-learning (Internet), M-learning (PDA & Smartphones) and TV-learning (IPTV) [4]. These three tools have been used in order to maximize the effectiveness and the efficiency of the cultural mediators' education. Five countries participated in the project (Italy, Greece, France, Austria and Poland, which ran for twenty four months, between 01/11/2007 and 31/10/2009).

The main aim of the TIPS project was to develop and test an online training course using the T-learning methodology, addressing social workers and potential cultural mediators and aiming to advance their skills and capabilities required for cooperating with immigrants.

*In spite the fact that the Greek social sciences have a strong knowledge base to practice the cultural mediation, the profession of cultural mediation appeared to be not so much developed and recognizable not only to a wide public but also to the public immigration institutions [2].* The terminology "cultural mediator" became more familiar in Greece through the participation of Greek organizations in several European projects (such as Community Initiative EQUAL) about cultural mediation [2, 5].

In this paper, we shall firstly present the TIPS project, the TIPS course content, and the T-learning methodology. Then, we shall focus on the progress of the Greek students and present the results of the evaluation study we conducted at the conclusion of the TIPS course.

## II. THE T-LEARNING METHODOLOGY

The TIPS system combines three different educational platforms, in order to maximize the benefits of distance learning tools: the e-learning platform, the M-learning platform and the IPTV-learning platform (see fig. 1).

Through the e-learning platform the participant is able to view multimedia training content and also to attend virtual classrooms, participate in a discussion forum and interact with other students and/or the tutors. Also, it is feasible to download the didactic material and exchange information and knowledge. The above educational procedure is realized by accessing the Internet via a personal computer.

The M-learning platform provides access to the training course contents anytime anywhere through a mobile phone or PDA. This platform supports a “learning-by-doing” approach integrated with “learning in the workplace”. The educational material that is being developed for the IPTV-learning platform is presented via television in high quality images, audio and movies that can be controlled using a simple remote control [6].

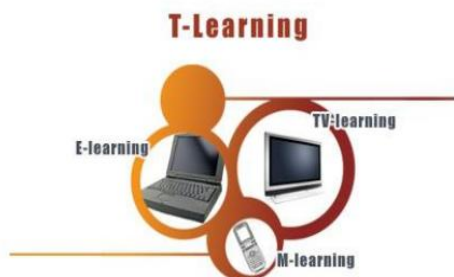


Fig. 1. T-learning methodology, a triple methodology which integrates e-Learning, M-Learning and IPTV Learning

### III. TIPS COURSE

The TIPS online distant training Course titled “*Practicing and Enhancing Cultural Mediation in a Pluralistic Europe*” officially started on March 2009, with the delivery of the first module and ended on August 2009. Different course contents structured as “Learning Objects” were designed and developed for each platform based on their technical capabilities.

The TIPS training Course appealed not only to the people who were already working as professional cultural mediators and require up-to-date training, but also to those prospective cultural mediators, who needed to enhance their knowledge and skills. It was realized as a pilot course in the field of Cultural Mediation that made use of novel training methods supported through the three different platforms, E-learning platform, M-learning platform and IPTV-learning platform.

The TIPS e-learning platform is hosted in a restricted area in the TIPS website at [www.forcom.it/tipsproject](http://www.forcom.it/tipsproject). It presents to the learner with a menu listing the services available, which include communication tools, the training agenda, announcements, documents, links and access to the e-course contents (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2. E-Learning platform home page of the TIPS Course

The mobile learning platform offers different didactic material and communication tools, such as the TIPS phrasebook, which

contains the most important phrases and expressions related to cultural mediation translated in fourteen languages, and the TIPS glossary, which provides specific professional terminology. In addition, there are mobile learning pills (short videos that can be viewed in a mobile phone or PDA) and multimedia objects composed of images, audio and text. There is a chat area and a telephone directory which contains a list with all course participants’ phone numbers (see fig. 3). Moreover, the M-learning platform offers an e-book that provides information about several migrant countries, cultures and traditions. The M-learning platform is accessible at <http://77.238.3.46/claroing/mobile/>.



Fig. 3. The M-learning platform home page

The third platform is the TV-learning platform on IPTV. To access the IPTV-learning platform, a TV set has to be connected to the Internet via a set top box (see fig. 4). By using the remote control, different course module videos can be selected, featuring case studies and interviews concerning cultural mediation. The e-book is also available on this platform.



Fig. 4. IPTV-learning platform using the AmiNET 125 Set Top Box, <http://www.aminocom.com/products/ipstb/aminte125.html>

Five training modules were developed in the framework of the TIPS Course (see fig. 5):

#### Module I:

##### Introduction to the TIPS course

The first module gives practical information on how to use the three platforms.

The Learning objects for module I include: three (3) mobile learning pills, three (3) audio lessons, three (3) lectures notes and documents and links.

#### Module II:

##### Cultural Mediation: A Professional Profile

The second module includes: three (3) mobile learning pills, one (1) IPTV video, four (4) audio lessons and four (4) quizzes, two (2) lecture notes and documents and links.

## Module III:

**The Psychology of Cultural Mediation**

The third module, “The Psychology of Cultural Mediation”, provides an in-depth look into the psychology and theories behind interpersonal communication and intercultural mediation [7]. The Learning Objects for this module include: one (1) mobile learning pill, two (2) IPTV videos, eight (8) audio lessons and seven (7) quizzes, eight (8) lecture notes and documents and links.

## Module IV:

**National and European Legislation**

The fourth module, “National and European Legislation”, presents a general overview of European and national legislation in France, Italy, Poland, Greece and Austria, focusing on specific legal aspects and procedures essential to cultural mediation such as: registration procedures, work permits and social security [7]. The Learning Objects for this module include: one (1) mobile learning pill seven (7) audio lessons and six (6) quizzes and nine (9) lecture notes.

## Module V:

**Cultural Mediation: Fields of Application**

The fifth module, “Cultural Mediation: Fields of Application”, explores the world of legal and illegal migrants encompassing their human rights, welfare, access to social housing, education, healthcare and employment. The module demonstrates the role of cultural mediation in these different fields of application in order to facilitate the integration of migrants into their host country [7]. The Learning Objects for this module include: six (6) mobile learning pills, two (2) IPTV videos, two (2) audio lessons and two (2) quizzes, two (2) lecture notes and documents and links.

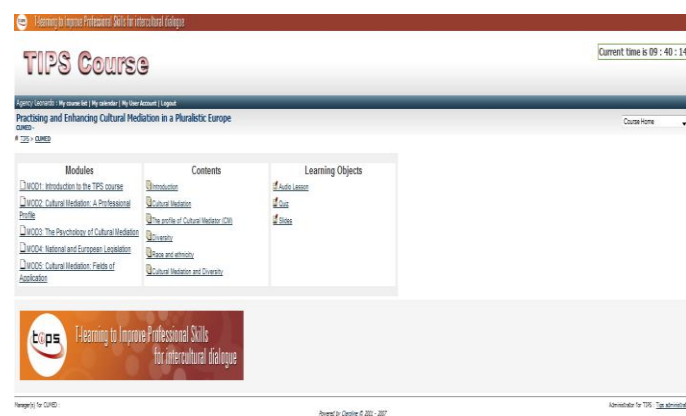


Fig. 5. A snapshot of the TIPS Course on the e-learning platform which presents all the modules, their contents and the learning objects

All partners collaborated in the development and evaluation of the Learning Objects, under the coordination of the Hellenic Open University group [8]. As an example, we are going to analyze the structure and the content of the second module.

The aim of this particular module was describe the profile of cultural mediator, the main characteristics and six main principles of cultural mediation. Furthermore, the second module explained the meaning of intercultural dialogue and

presented the way stereotypes and prejudices usually effect on modern societies. The contents of the module were developed by Dr. George Mavrommatis (see fig. 6).

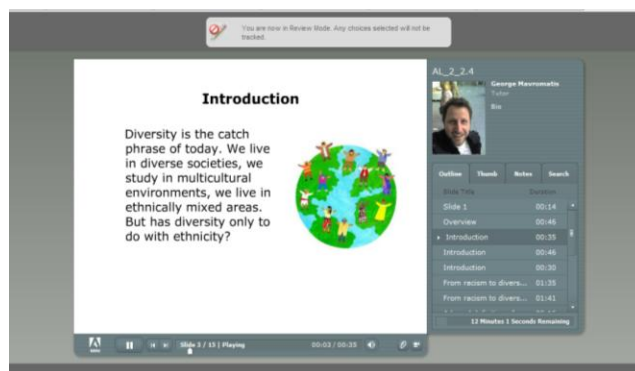


Fig. 6. Review mode of an audio lesson of the Module “Cultural Mediation: A Professional Profile”, delivered via the e-learning platform

The second course module was divided into five lessons and each lesson had specific learning objects. As a result, the trainee could navigate, read and download the preferable didactic material. The following list details the contents of the second module, and presents the options a trainee has, regarding the Learning Objects and the available platform through which the trainee can access the Learning Objects:

**Cultural Mediation, A professional profile****Lesson 2.1: Introduction to TIPS Course**

- Audio Lesson (PC)
- Slides (PC)
- Quiz (questions) (PC)
- Learning Pills (Mobile)

**Lesson 2.2: What is Cultural? What is Mediation?**

- Audio Lesson (PC)
- Lecture Notes (PC)
- Slides (PC)
- Quiz (questions) (PC)

**Lesson 2.3: The profile of Cultural Mediation (CM)**

- Audio Lesson (PC)
- Slides (PC)
- Quiz (questions) (PC)
- Learning Pills (Mobile): Who can be a Cultural Mediator

**Lesson 2.4: Diversity**

- Audio Lesson (PC)
- Slides (PC)
- Quiz (questions) (PC)

**Lesson 2.5: Race and ethnicity**

- Lecture Notes (PC)
- Learning Pills (Mobile)

In addition, a video case study entitled as "Why Does a Cultural Mediator has to be neutral and impartial" was created. It was a seven minute interview with a cultural mediator who analyzes the profile of cultural mediator from her point of view. The trainee should answer to four questions based on the previous interview through the TV platform.

#### IV. TIPS TRAINING

A specific selection process of the participants in the pilot phase of the TIPS course was realized in every participating country. In the end, the training course was offered to one hundred participants from all the partner countries (see Fig. 7). In Greece, more than fifty people were interested in participating in the TIPS course and submitted their CVs and pre-enrolment forms; finally twenty five of them were selected and enrolled. It is important to note that applications came from all over the country, as well as from countries other than Greece, including Germany, Italy and Finland.

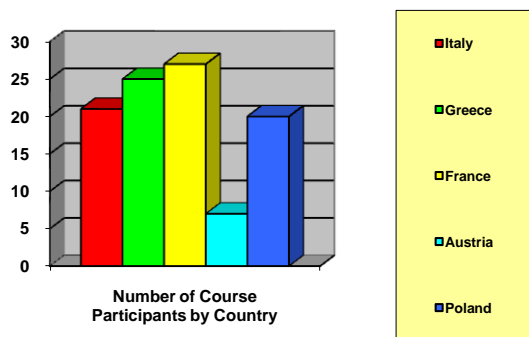


Fig. 7. Distribution of the participants in the TIPS pilot training course per country

Apart from the weighted criteria specified by the consortium, other selection criteria included: professional experience, background /degree, current occupation and working environment [9].

The selected course participants were given a training schedule describing the sequence of study of the five course modules. Within each module, they could design their own schedule of accessing its Learning Objects. At the end of each module, they had to attend from a distance one Virtual Classroom using the TIPS e-learning platform. During the VC, the trainees had the opportunity to virtually meet the national tutor, who was responsible for compiling and delivering the module, and discuss with him and the other students on topics related to the module contents.

Course students could log on the e-learning platform or IPTV-learning platform from their own premises, or from one of the TIPS Centres that each partner had set up. Each TIPS Centre was equipped with an IPTV, a mobile phone for the m-learning platform and PCs with ADSL Internet connection.

##### A. The Greek group

In Greece, we set up three TIPS Centres dispersed in three cities in the country, namely Patras, Athens and Rethimno, so as to facilitate access of all TIPS trainees. The Greek class included twenty one people from all around Greece, one from Albania, one from Romania and two from Lebanon (see Fig. 8) [9].

The concept of the TIPS course attracted people with different background and experience. More specifically, nineteen (19) working professionals were motivated to take part to this educational course, from which seventeen (17) were female and two (2) male (average age thirtyseven). Also, six (6) students who were studying social work, education, adult

education, Greek and Arabic literature, theology, attended the course from which five (5) of them were female and one (1) male (average age twenty nine) (see Fig. 9).

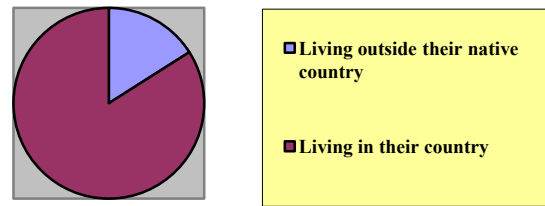


Fig. 8. Distribution of the nationality of the TIPS Greek team participants

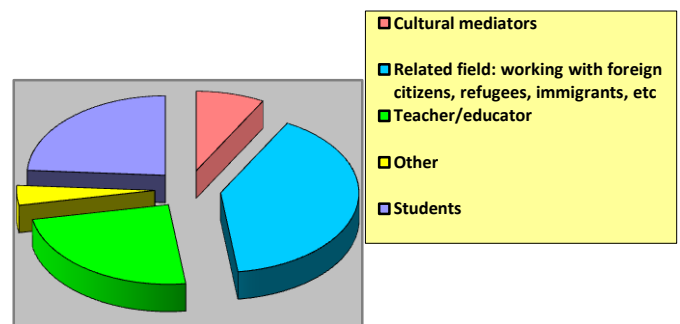


Fig. 9. Distribution of the experience of the TIPS Greek team participants

It is a fact that more and more people nowadays become familiarized with the Internet due to its daily usage. But does this apply to the other two technologies that TIPS project supports? A question that emerged was whether the Greek trainees - who were not experts in the field of technology - would welcome the educational use of the other two tools (mobile phone and IPTV). In the end, the system recorded three (3) inactive participants and twenty two (22) active trainees out of twenty five. In other words, a percentage of 88% of the Greek Class (as of June 30, 2009) chose to access firstly the e-learning platform, then the mobile platform and last the IPTV platform (see Fig. 10). The Greek Class also attended five VCs using the e-learning platform.

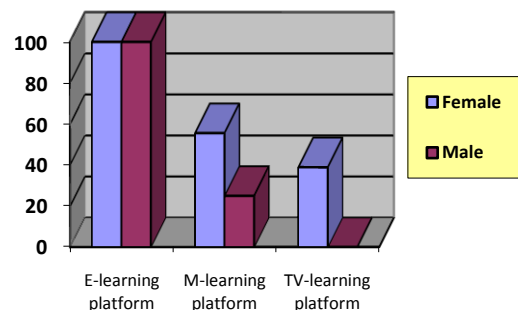


Fig. 10. Distribution of platform usage among the TIPS Greek team participants

##### B. Evaluation Results

The methodology that was used in order to accumulate all the valuable personal testimonies - the negative and positive

aspects - of the course participants included evaluation questionnaires, interviews and roundtable discussions. As far as the roundtables are concerned, three meetings with the TIPS course trainees were organized during July and August 2009, in Patras, Athens and Rethimno, in order to discuss the students' experience with the TIPS course. The following summarize the opinions, ideas and proposals about future activities that Greek trainees shared with the Greek project team at the Hellenic Open University.

Generally, the content of the course was considered to be interesting and important enough for the trainees, who up to that point, were working as Cultural Mediators based mainly on their personal experience with immigration. The course, discussing in detail the characteristics and needs of the Cultural Mediator, gave them a different perspective on how the Cultural Mediator can deal with various cases that have a strong multicultural dimension. All trainees considered that their participation to the TIPS course gave them significant professional advantage, because Cultural Mediation is steadily emerging as a brand new field in Greece. The parallel usage of three technological platforms constituted a very useful and effective tool for Cultural Mediators. Trainees found the modules on communication and legislation to be both interesting and informative. In general, the TIPS course helped them acquire theoretical information on European legislation and immigration, enhance their communication skills and improve a positive collaboration with immigrants. The trainees now believe that they can function as multipliers of this special knowledge in their work and social environment thanks to the TIPS course material. Trainees faced some difficulties in using the technology, especially the IPTV and mobile phone platforms. The cost of a 3G mobile connection was high and did not justify the benefits received from the content delivered by the M-platform. Moreover, some of them had problems in studying and understanding the educational content, because all the material and the virtual classes were in English. The time allocated for studying the modules was short, given the busy schedule of the trainees (almost all of them were professionals) and the large volume of the educational material especially that contained in module 3.

Concerning the IPTV videos, some of the trainees found the quality of the picture and the sound low. They also suggested that more videos should be included in each module, as they were considered to be helpful in memorizing and understanding the theory and the relevant content. Despite the technical problems, the trainees were active and enthusiastic about taking the course. During our meetings, they came up with various suggestions:

*"The content of the fourth educational module should be continuously updated and complemented, so as to present the legislation more accurately and concisely."*

*"Module 5 should be expanded to include culture (art, activities, sports, exploitation of free time, workshops of creative employment etc)."*

*"The TIPS web site should also be preserved and updated after the official end of the course, so as to function as a forum/point of contact of people who have an interest in Cultural Mediation."*

*"The TIPS training approach could also be applied to other target groups, apart from cultural mediators, because cultural*

*mediation is a process of resolution of conflict in the modern multicultural societies."*

*"The IPTV platform should be enriched with more material and also be accessible from the Internet."* [10]

After the realization of the course, Hellenic Open University issued seventeen (17) certificates of attendance to the Greek class who completed at least a minimum of 30% of the Learning Objects. The 68% of the Greek Class managed to use the triple platform in a satisfactory level. Most of them have never used the mobile telephone and television for educational purposes. It was reported that the three dimensional educational activity was very interesting and worth trying.

## V. CONCLUSION

Through a fruitful and constructive collaboration among the TIPS partnership, a significant project has been realized which has delivered interesting outcomes. The efforts of the trainees have greatly attributed to a successful experimentation and provided valuable results for the TIPS project.

The T-learning methodology that was applied in the TIPS project has enhanced the combination of theory and practice, synchronous and asynchronous, autonomous and collaborative learning. It realized a pilot training Course at a European level, combining three novel and powerful technologies: Internet, mobile phones and IPTV. It is important to mention that the Greek class showed active participation and attendance.

Cultural Mediators will always need to improve their capabilities and competences. The TIPS project demonstrated the capabilities that technology can offer and is susceptible to future improvements not only for Cultural mediation but also for other social, scientific, or cultural domains.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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