

BOLDIC Perspectives Online

**Evaluation report
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1. Background

In 2005 the project "Flexible Learning Network - Nordic perspectives online" was approved as a NordPlus Voxen development project. The project was unofficially called "NordFlex". Its main idea was to strengthen the cooperation around flexible education between the Nordic sister organisations in the distance education field - SADE, NADE, FADE and the Danish FLUID - and a partner from Iceland – Iceland Telecom. The aim was also to develop the cooperation which the four first mentioned organisations since 2001 had from the MINERVA project "BOLDIC Network" with Baltic organisations in the field. The experiences that the network had with virtual conferences were to be followed up and widened. The NordFlex activities contained a number of virtual conferences, critical observations about learning resources and objects, period summaries as evaluation tools etc. Finally a Nordic conference about Learning in the Workplace, with conference strands that were clearly co-planned for the conclusion of the project, was presented. Especially the virtual conferences were very much appreciated and it was obvious that there was a need for further development work to match the potential of the tools with the educational/cooperational needs.

2. BOLDIC Perspectives Online

2.1 General purpose

The general purpose of the project BOLDIC Perspectives Online has been to deepen and bring further the cooperation between the Nordic sister organisations dealing with distance education and eLearning by opening the community for partners from the Baltic countries. It also aimed at disseminate experiences from the NordPlus Voxen project "Flexible Learning Network - Nordic Perspectives Online" that was completed in 2007. By bringing in new players from the Baltic countries and from other educational and working life sectors the aim was to deepen and develop the results of the earlier project.

The new development project, called "Boldic Perspectives Online", was intended to:

- Develop the forms for BOLDIC Award –criteria adjustment to match the situation concerning today's technology enhanced learning and find better ways for dissemination of information about the nomination throughout the region as examples of good development work within the area of flexible learning
- Standardise the design of online conferences and create a model with free access to conference rooms for educational players in the area in order to create sustainable, environment friendly, cooperation forms
- Create a new annual conference with the theme creativity and growth in the Nordic/Baltic region, prepared by virtual conferences. The aim of the conference is

to disseminate project experiences in the use of new net based learning tools. The target groups for these conferences will be organisations and companies within the educational and working life sectors including trade union organisations.

. Allocate efforts to find sponsors for further BOLDIC conferences.

2.2 Partners

Swedish Association for Distance Education, SADE, project coordinator
<http://www.sverd.se>,

Danish Association for Distance Education, FLUID <http://www.fluid.dk>

Estonian Information Technology Foundation. [EITSA](http://www.eitsa.ee)

Finnish Association for Distance Education, FADE

Norwegian Association for Distance Education and Flexible Learning, NFF <http://www.nade-nff.no>

Velvakandi, Iceland <http://www.velvakandi.is>

Vilnius college Lithuania <http://www.viko.lt/en>

2.3 Duration of the project

Start date : 2008-08-15 **End date** : 2010-08-14 (according to the application)

The project was prolonged twice and was completed 2011-12-31.

2.4 About the evaluation

As evaluator I have followed the project from the start by attending the conferences arranged by the project, (except for the kick off in Copenhagen) taken part in a number of meetings held by the project group, studied printed and online documents and interviewed members of the project group.

3. Aims and results

3.1. Aim 1 - Develop the forms for BOLDIC Award.

One of the results of the SOKRATES Minerva project was that a yearly Nordic/Baltic award for best eLearning activity –called BOLDIC Award - was introduced. The first award was presented in 2005 and since then the award has been presented every year.

The price winners during the period 2005 – 2011 are:

2005 [Network Upper secondary school](#) , Jämtland, Sweden

2006 [NKI](#), Norway

2007 [Vitus Bearing](#), Denmark

2008 [MKFC](#) Stockholm college, Sweden

2009 [Bergen University](#) Norway

2010 [Aarhus University](#), Denmark

2011 [NKI](#), Berghs (Sweden) and Danish School of Media

Improving the forms for BOLDIC Award

During the nomination processes in 2006 and 2007 it was obvious that the nomination framework needed to be “refreshed” and elaborated to be consistent with the situation concerning today’s

technology enhanced learning. It also became clear that there was a need for vast marketing efforts. To further build up and deepen the cooperation between the Nordic distance education organisations and the Baltic countries it was considered to consolidate the BOLDIC Award and market it intensively to make it become better known.

It was noted that the award process was very dependent on the individual input from the different partners in the BOLDIC project and that the project was managing a somewhat fragile practice. Therefore efforts were made on focusing on making the award as robust as possible. The work on that started in the autumn of 2008 , mainly with changing the nomination process. The project found a good solution in making the nomination electronically. The management of the nominations became easier and the nominations could be standardized. The criteria for the award were already quite good, but became more apparent in the electronic nomination form.

However, around the middle of 2009 it was noted that the feedback along the way could have been better within the project group; there was a certain lack of feedback and response along the way. Further it was noted that the time schedule should have been more clearly communicated and the different deadlines respected. All this to prevent the nominators from running out of time in the end and make it possible for an unbiased jury to do a good job. The BOLDIC project group decided on the following elaborations of the award procedure:

- The marketing process

It was established that good marketing is essential for making the award robust and sustainable. The BOLDIC Award group decided on having a clear plan for marketing, both time wise and regarding different responsibilities within the group. In addition the marketing work has to be started early, if the award ceremony is to be held in the autumn.

In practice this means starting the marketing effort during the winter and early spring the same year. This showed to be time consuming work, but it also showed how important it is to use the established networks in each country and approach people in different organizations personally to achieve the best effect. Simply posting information on different web sites proved not to be sufficient.

The project has used different media routes as webinars, social networks and new organisations to cooperate with for dissemination of information about the nomination procedure in order to stimulate good practise and development work within the area of flexible learning to be considered for a nomination for the award. The online form could still be enhanced and developed further.

- The nomination process

The nomination period was decided to run from winter to the end of June . This would give the BOLDIC Award group the time to assess the different applications/nominations during August and September and make it possible to approach the winner in good time. Unbiased juries should be in place before the summer, with a clear picture of what is required of them and the process associated with the jury work.

. The award ceremony

The award ceremony that takes place at a conference during the autumn, should be decided upon at the latest before the summer the same year.

. The sustainability

This is perhaps the most crucial issue - how to keep the BOLDIC Award going after the end of the project period. Today the prize sum is €500. The question is how the prize will be funded and who will be in charge of the award in the future. The project group has discussed and concluded that the easiest way would probably be to get the BOLDIC partnership organizations to take ownership. However, in that case it must be emphasized that there must always be one person within each organization who is associated with the award and that the people in each of the countries are in good contact with each other.

3.2 Production of a handbook for online meetings, conferences and seminars

The results of "NordFlex" showed an emerging use of online conferencing, eMeetings and eSeminars and a great need for good quality implementation. Thus the project wanted to give advice on models for standardising the design of online conferences and create a service with free access to conference rooms for educational players in the area in order to create sustainable, not environmental challenging, cooperation forms.

The intention was to produce a guide book with general orientation about good use of virtual conferences connected to eLearning. The task was taken on by the Icelandic partner, who at the annual conference in Stockholm 2009 demonstrated a power point presentation that showed work in progress of a "cook book" for online meetings. However, after that the Icelandic partner no longer took an active part in the project. The Norwegian partner, who had good experience in the field took over the task.

The Norwegians have over ten years of experiences in trying out various sites for holding online meetings and seminars for different collaborative projects in the Nordic region.

They have developed a synchronous format that is being used quite frequently, the webinar (combination of web and seminar). Based on the experience gained over the years work had started on producing a publication which should set out advice and suggestions on how webinars can be established and implemented. The publication was thus developed in conjunction with the Nordic project SKJAR (Nordplus Voksen) and the Nordic/Baltic project BOLDIC Perspectives Online. The following topics are discussed in the publication which has the title "**Web + seminar. How to arrange a webinar**":

What is a webinar?

Preparation for a webinar

Advertising /marketing

Implementation

Common start-up problems

List of meeting and conference platforms

3.3 . Aim three – create a new annual conference

The aim was to establish an annual conference on the theme creativity and growth in the Nordic/Baltic region prepared by virtual conferences. The purpose of the conference should be to disseminate project experiences of the use of new net based learning tools. The target groups for the conference should be organisations and companies within the educational and working life sector including trade union organisations. During the project period three annual conferences were arranged:

Boldic Annual conference in Stockholm Stockholm, October 8, 2009

Boldic Annual conference in Kaunas, April 12 – 13, 2010

The conference was arranged in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University and Lithuanian Distance and eLearning (LieDM) Association

Boldic Annual conference in Oulu, June 28-30, 2011

Programs from the conferences can be found at the website of the project, www.boldic.org.

In addition to the annual conferences there was arranged a Boldic "Kick off"-meeting in Copenhagen on November 21-22, 2008, and a "Kick-out"-meeting in Stockholm on October 20, 2011.

During the project period one seminar and an amount of webinars have taken place:

August 19, 2009 *Identification of the BOLDIC pedagogical tradition*, Joergen Bang, Aarhus University (seminar)

March 11, 2010 *Flexible education in practice*, Anita Mattsson University of Skövde

April 22, 2010 *Online learning a matter of circumstance*, Jimmy Jaldemark, Midsweden University.

June 8, 2010 *Digital competence for teachers*, Ola Lindberg Midsweden University,

4. Concluding observations and reflections

The project has delivered what was promised in the project application, i.e. production of annual conferences, jury work and development of the forms for the BOLDIC Award and production of a manual that is free of charge and available to everyone. The manual can be used to improve the quality of online meetings between and within different countries.

The project was intended to be run by seven partners. Due to different circumstances Iceland did not take an active part in the project after the autumn of 2009. The same applied to Estonia after the summer of 2010. Finland took a more or less passive role until spring 2011. The cooperation between the other four countries – Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Lithuania – has been intense and active during the whole period.

The most successful part in the BOLDIC project is the delivery of the BOLDIC Awards which has become an established annual activity since 2005. In this actual project there has been work done to improve the statutes of the award. The real challenge is now to find someone who can continue and fund this positive tradition. The project has carried out important dissemination of good practice through the award ceremonies in different conferences and through publication in printed media and on the web.

However it can be noted that during the years the interest to nominate projects for BOLDIC Award has not been equal in all the participating countries and the BOLDIC Award winners have all come from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. If it will be possible for the award to continue to exist it will be important to stimulate the interest in the other Nordic and Baltic countries.

The second aim of the project was to standardise the design of online conferences and create a model with free access to conference rooms for educational players in the area in order to create sustainable, environment friendly, cooperation forms. This task was at first taken on by the

Icelandic partner and problems emerged when Iceland from the beginning of 2010 no longer took an active part in the project. Due to the good work in Norway the project succeeded in producing a useful handbook.

The third aim was to establish an annual conference on the theme creativity and growth in the eLearning field in the Nordic/Baltic region, prepared by virtual conferences. The project has been successful in this. Three annual conferences have been arranged. Interviews with the project members have shown that they have found the conferences useful and interesting and that the conferences have given inspiration and knowledge for future work and collaboration in the field.

Regarding the virtual conferences – the webinars - the project has been in fierce competition with NVL network initiatives, which have held virtual conferences up to 10 times a year during the period of the BOLDIC project. This might have affected the number of participants in some of the BOLDIC webinars.

The project had to face a real problem when the initial project leader, who had a lot of experience from earlier BOLDIC projects and had played a very active part in preparing the application, suddenly left the project in the autumn of 2009. It took some time before a new project leader was in place and updated and due to that there were during a time some difficulties in making a joint dialogue and take joint decisions. This was partly because there were some uncertainty about what had been done by agreements in connection with the preparation of the application, and this created some uncertainty about the objectives. However, as a result of intense work during the spring of 2010 the project group succeeded in arranging - in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University and Lithuanian Distance and eLearning (LieDM) Association – the annual conference in Kaunas. The conference turned out to be a success with distinguished speakers and a great amount of participants.

There has been some weaknesses in the administration of the project. This project has further stressed the experience from the earlier BOLDIC projects: development work with many different partners requires a lot more time than foreseen.

The project has also confirmed that it is very important to get the right partners in place before the project starts. In this project the partners in Denmark, Norway and Lithuania, together with Sweden, have been the most participatory and active.

It is possible that the economic crisis has had a major negative influence on the efforts of the Baltic participants. But also in the Nordic countries educational institutions are much under pressure at the moment. As bringing the Baltic participants to better interact with the Nordic participants was one of the focus areas of the project, it is not possible to be completely satisfied with the outcome, even if the cooperation with Lithuania was very developmental and promising for future projects. On the other hand, especially concerning the annual conferences, the project has done more than what was promised in the application. The different partners have expressed that taking part in the conferences has been very stimulating and useful. They have also said that it has been stimulating and interesting to participate in the nominations and jury work concerning projects for the BOLDIC award.

As an answer to the question if the project has promoted the cooperation between the Nordic/Baltic countries, the participants of the project group replied “a bit, but not enough”. However, the partner from Lithuania said that it definitely has done so, especially due to the fact

that the different meetings and conferences were organized in different countries, at different institutions and that a variety of people took part. The partners from Sweden, Denmark and Norway stated that they have established contacts in Lithuania that can be useful in the future.

The project BOLDIC perspectives on-line – like the previous projects – has shown that there is a good potential for development of cooperation between the Nordic and the Baltic countries in the field of open and distance learning. The project has allocated efforts to find sponsors for more annual conferences, but after three years the BOLDIC project has not been able to find the necessary fundings. There is no doubt that the time and especially the economic crisis has discouraged interest in transnational activities during the project period. However, it would be a waste not to build further on the knowledge that has emerged and the good contacts that has been established between the countries.