How did we manage to move to online over the night - challenges and opportunities of pandemic COVID-19 for Croatian Higher Education?

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Croatia

Population: 4 millions
Area: 56.594 km²
Capital: Zagreb

- 9 public universities
- University of Zagreb is the oldest and the biggest one
- 3 private universities
- Over 165,000 students
E-learning Centre is established at University Computing Centre University of Zagreb in 2007

- Basic objectives:
  - to support higher education teachers, students, e-learning teams and institutions
  - to provide and maintain reliable and generally accessible university platform for e-learning
  - to support the university network of people involved or interested in e-learning
  - to promote and foster implementation of e-learning

University Computing Centre

is main computing centre and the architect of the e-infrastructure of the entire system of science and higher education of the Republic of Croatia

Competence centre for information and communication technologies as well as the centre for education and support in the area of ICT application

University of Zagreb computing and information Centre, responsible for coordinating the development of the University's e-infrastructure

University Computing Centre SRCE

www.srce.hr/enc
Higher education in Croatia till March 2020

• Still dominantly oriented to classical (f2f) teaching and learning
• Digital technologies mostly as addition to enhance the quality of teaching and learning
• Possibility to implement e-learning instead of f2f learning up to 20% in the course without university approval (University of Zagreb)
• Few accredited online studies
• Criteria for evaluation of the online studies (Agency for Science and HE, 2016)
• Strategy of Science, Education and Technology (Ministry of Science and Education, 2014)– Action plan with defined activities - low level of realisation
• Left upon HEI and teachers to decide on implementation of digital technologies and e-learning into their study programs and courses
• Research dominant in relation to teaching, especially in the rules for the advancement
• Teaching efforts not recognized nor awarded
Virtual Learning Environment – Merlin

http://merlin.srce.hr

national e-learning platform where higher education institutions in Croatia can open their e-learning courses and get the support in development and advancement of their e-courses

One Moodle installation

156 institutions on Merlin
Support to teachers

- Technical support in work with e-learning technologies – **moodle**, e-portfolio and webinars (enabled by the Centre)
- Instructional design and support in preparation, development and delivery of e-courses on **moodle platform**
- Teacher training in e-learning technologies and issues related to e-learning:
  - Courses and workshops (online i f2f)
  - Manuals and animations
  - Consultations
  - Helpdesk
  - Work with teachers in e-course development projects
- Organization of lectures and other events on the topic of e-learning and dissemination of information

IMS Europe Summit 2020, November 2020
Teaching and learning after lockdown

• Those teachers who have used e-learning before, easier and faster moved their teaching online.
• Those teachers who did not use any digital tools in their teaching had more difficulties to find out how to organize their teaching in online environment.
• High increase on the systems for webinars in order to organize classroom lectures in online environment (Adobe Connect, Microsoft teams, BBB, Zoom, Jitsi, Google Suite….)
• Move to online environment with courses prepared for the classroom teaching- emergency remote teaching.
• Technical issues - some institutions did not have adequate infrastructure, teachers and students did not have broadband or adequate laptops.
• Lack of teachers' digital skills resulted in low use of possibilities of digital technologies, high workload and stress.
• Lack of students' digital skills resulted in confusion and high stress.
• Online oral and written exams – additional stress for students (did not meet technical requirements, first time experience, lack of enough information and testing how to participate in online exams).
• Goal to ensure the continuation of teaching and learning and finish of academic year.
SRCE E-learning platform Merlin (Moodle with custom addins)

50.000 average unique users per week
840.000 average visits per week

Plus 53.326 archived e-courses in Ac. Year 2020/2021

IMS Europe Summit 2020, November 2020
SRCE Webinar system
(Adobe Connect with 52 Named Host licences)

Webinar usage

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<tr>
<td>Webinars</td>
<td>1421</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>11760</td>
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<td>Usage Increase</td>
<td>1981%</td>
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Webinar participants

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<td>Participants</td>
<td>18559</td>
<td>6164</td>
<td>276712</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>4389%</td>
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IMS Europe Summit 2020, November 2020
How did we survive first wave…

- Developed additional short manuals & guidelines
  - how to use Merlin (Moodle) and develop e-course
  - how to teach online
  - how to prepare exams in Moodle
- Online consultations (via webinars or phone)
- Helpdesk (mail and phone)
- Added number of new features on Merlin
- Being patient and positive
- …
Quality of online teaching in higher education via lectures

**Source:** Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2020

**Student opinion**

- Much worse than before lockdown: 17%
- Worse than before lockdown: 33%
- Same as before lockdown: 23%
- Better than before lockdown: 15%
- Much better than before lockdown: 9%
- I do not know: 2%

**Teacher opinion**

- Much worse than before lockdown: 9%
- Worse than before lockdown: 22%
- Same as before lockdown: 38%
- Better than before lockdown: 18%
- Much better than before lockdown: 11%
- I do not know: 6%

IMS Europe Summit 2020, November 2020
Possibility for interaction with students in virtual environment - student opinion

Source: Agency for Science and Higher Education, 2020
How universities are preparing for new academic year?

- Depending on the management decision
- Surveys to teachers and students on online experience in the period March-June
- Dealing with technical issues- purchase of the system for webinars
- Staying dominantly with classroom teaching and learning
- Few universities decided to start with digital transformation, working hard over the summer to prepare everything for the autumn (i.e. University of Rijeka)

- Recommendations and guidelines for teaching and learning at higher education institutions in the winter semester of the academic year 2020/2021- National Council for Science, Education and Technological Development

  the "classical" way of teaching is the best and that it is the only one that is fully adequate for all programs that are accredited as such study programs (except, of course, in the part where distance learning is possibly planned). In addition to teaching, the "classic" way provides the prerequisites for the complete formation of young people, students, in constant interaction with teachers and fellow students and in life at the higher education institution where they are educated.

- Recommendations from Croatian Institute for Public Health
EDEN spring initiative: education in time of pandemic

- Started on March 30th
- Practical webinars on how to take face-to-face education online
- Focus on the day-to-day challenges teachers and educators face
- 11 webinars
- 35 speakers and moderators
- Over 3500 participants

Recordings available at: http://www.eden-online.org
EDEN initiative: education in time of new normal

• Continuation of the initiative
• 6 webinars
• 26 speakers and moderators
• over 920 participants
• In last webinar the EU presented the Digital Education Action Plan
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“We have an opportunity to plan for the future we want, rather than one we are given.”

Neil Fassina
President of Athabasca University and ICDE
(EDEN Webinar, June 2, 2020)

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