

## THE MEANING OF INTERNET SERVICE EXCHANGE PLATFORMS FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE ON A GLOBAL SCALE

Aleksandra Wróblewska  
Maria Curie Skłodowska University, Poland  
awroblewska94@gmail.com

Bartłomiej Twarowski  
Maria Curie Skłodowska University, Poland  
b.twarowski@poczta.umcs.lublin.pl

### **Abstract:**

The systematic improvement of the quality of life is one of the key objectives of the EU's cohesion policy for 2014-2020. The condition for the policy implementation is to improve the competence potential of human resources. This process can be smoother with the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). One of the modern tools, which enables the quick transfer and development of the individual competences of members of the global community, are "Internet service exchange platforms". Their users "meet" on a virtual market offering specific services performed within their competences and expecting in exchange equivalent services from other users. An undisputed advantage of this mechanism is a significant reduction of time needed to find an adequate service provider compared to traditional exchange models. This article is devoted to the use of "Internet service exchange platforms" in service exchange processes which occur on a global scale among Internet users. Such processes require involvement of individual competences of service providers, and frequently also their transfer, whereby they contribute to strengthening the competence potential of service recipients. Taking account of the global dimension of these processes, which is practically unbounded by any territorial divisions, we can claim that they may play an important role in building a global knowledge-based economy, whilst knowledge, which is one of the sources of competences, contributes to the quality of life.

*Keywords: learning, quality of life, information technology, globalization*

## 1. THE ESSENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In the contemporary world we can observe the pursuit to ensure the comprehensive, and at the same time, sustainable development at the level of an individual, a group or a society. The essence of the multi-faceted and sustainable development is the permanent improvement of the quality of life of contemporary and future generations, which is achieved by creating the right proportions in managing the three types of capital, namely the economic, social and natural capital. The quality of life and sustainable development are closely related categories, because a high quality of life is the top priority of the concept of sustainable development. According to R. Kolman, the quality of life is the most important among known types of quality and may be treated as a stimulant for the development of a society. The quality of life can be understood as:

- the level of satisfaction people derive from various spheres of life,
- a set of needs which, if satisfied, make people happy,
- a superior category of quality which integrates all other types of quality.

The significance of the quality of life has been stressed in the EU's cohesion policy. One of its top priorities is to ensure a high quality of life and wellbeing for all EU citizens.<sup>1</sup> This aim should be achieved by aspiring for a cohesive and just society, where all individuals and groups provide the optimum value and contribution and where incentives and support measures are focused on combating poverty and social exclusion, as well as on building a sustainable economy.<sup>2</sup>

The quality of life is an aggregated category. It is composed of a number of components, including but not limited to:

- the state of the natural environment,
- wealth perceived in financial (value of assets owned) and non-financial (easy access to education and culture) terms,
- health and safety,
- the feeling of being rooted in the local environment, the quality of interpersonal relations, involvement in the life of a given community and the possibility to influence the decisions regarding its functioning.

Each of the above-mentioned elements is influenced by human action. It is humans that are responsible for the state of the natural environment; by working, they contribute to creating wealth both in financial and non-financial terms. Due to their activity, humans are able to ensure health and safety for themselves and for others. They also have a chance to play significant roles in the life of their community. A knowledge-based economy needs professionals who can use their knowledge effectively, while co-operating with experts in other fields. Thus, it is the action taken by humans and the quality of work they provide that determines the quality of their lives, as well as the lives of the members of the society who take advantage of the results of their activities.

### 1.2. Competences as the condition for the quality of life

Processes taking place in the contemporary world are more and more complex and dynamic in character. This constitutes a serious challenge for the humans who, both in their private and professional lives, should achieve the desired effects in the shortest time possible. This becomes possible thanks to competences understood as a compilation of individual abilities, acquired knowledge, practical skills, the level of moral development, motivation, physical and mental predispositions and attitudes displayed. Competences should be perceived as a tool to solve frequently structured problems, which occur both in the private and professional lives of individuals. They are not a permanent resource. They lose value with time. To counteract this phenomenon, it is necessary to take action aimed at improving such competences.

It is the duty of each man to develop acquired competences. By doing this, they make a significant contribution to the common good. A higher level of competences determines a higher level of

---

<sup>1</sup> Consolidated version of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union; European Information and Documentation Centre, [www.oide.sejm.gov.pl](http://www.oide.sejm.gov.pl).

<sup>2</sup> Przyszłość Strategii Lizbońskiej po 2010 r. (Future of the Lisbon Strategy after 2010); 82. Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions, 3-4.12.2009, <https://bvstoad.cor.europa.eu>.

operational efficiency in every sphere of life, including a higher quality of work performed. C. Moller said that "a person who works well, feels good"<sup>3</sup>, and, in addition, has a considerable impact on the quality of their own life and the life of their community.

We can use various methods to improve competences, among which the most popular are:

- instruction (e.g. in lectures or training sessions),
- case-study solving,
- role-playing,
- learning by doing through gaining new experiences,
- mentoring,
- reading literature, articles, etc.

Due to the increasing expectations regarding the effectiveness of the methods used, these methods, which enable achieving the desired results in the shortest time and with the minimum effort, seem to be especially interesting. Learning via an Internet service exchange platforms plays an important role among such methods.

## 2. SPECIFICITY OF INTERNET SERVICE EXCHANGE PLATFORMS

The quick development of information and communication technologies (ICT) has a significant impact on our everyday life. They make various processes smoother and quicker. According to surveys made by Microsoft, every society, irrespective of their nationality, has experienced significant changes caused by the popularisation of ICT. According to the respondents, such changes have taken place in numerous fields of life, with the most frequently mentioned being business, education, transport, social bonds, art and culture. Negative consequences of the use of information technologies have also been observed, such as: loss of privacy, weaker security and anonymity, and also significant deterioration of reading and writing skills. However, none of the above-mentioned disadvantages is significant enough to discourage people from using ICT in everyday life.

Being the basic ICT tool, the Internet is the most frequently used in interpersonal communication and acquiring information. It also determines the functioning of the so-called Internet service exchange platforms which gather users who want to exchange services and have specific expectations regarding the subject matter of such an exchange. These are cashless service transfers. Their price is another service in exchange. The advantages of such platforms include:

- time-saving - through search engines users find relevant advertisements without the need to leave home,
- convenient times for using services,
- business and pleasure combined - users improve what they like doing and at the same time help others - they acquire new skills being service recipients,
- improved self-assessment - thanks to the cashless nature of the exchange users get the feeling of doing something gratuitously, which did not require any contribution in cash or much effort - their only contribution was using their own skills,
- opinion about the user - when looking for a service provider, we frequently do not know if they are reliable; such platforms enable expressing opinions about the user and also give access to the opinions expressed by other users,
- easy contact - platforms gather users from all over the world which makes them boundless; this enables establishing contacts with people of various nationalities and exchanging experiences with such people, and service transfer is global.

These advantages have contributed to a quick increase in the number of users of such platforms which, among others, are used to learn foreign languages. LiveMocha.com, the second website for learning foreign languages in terms of size, had only 350 thousand users in 2009. One year later the number of users increased to reach 6 million, and currently it is more than 16 million registered users from all over the world.

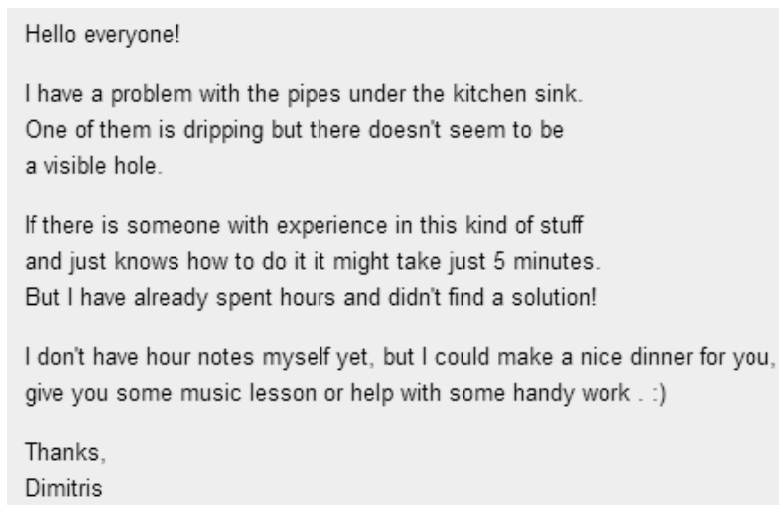
---

<sup>3</sup> C. Moller: *Quality thought people*, Proceedings of 34<sup>th</sup> Annual EOQ Conference, Dublin 1990.

### 3. MAIN FEATURES OF SELECTED INTERNET SERVICE EXCHANGE PLATFORMS

Internet service exchange platforms can be divided according to two criteria. One is the community they gather, and the other one is the type of services exchanged. The first criterion allows for determining platforms which operate on a local, national and global scale, and the other one is websites which support bartering (service for service) and websites which offer assistance in learning languages or studying various subjects. An excellent example of websites which support service exchange are so-called time banks. This is where local users register and offer their services. Two users can arrange for a barter service exchange or they can be awarded credits for providing a service. Such credits can later be used by using the services offered by any user.

**Figure 1:** Example of an advertisement published on a service exchange platform



Hello everyone!

I have a problem with the pipes under the kitchen sink. One of them is dripping but there doesn't seem to be a visible hole.

If there is someone with experience in this kind of stuff and just knows how to do it it might take just 5 minutes. But I have already spent hours and didn't find a solution!

I don't have hour notes myself yet, but I could make a nice dinner for you, give you some music lesson or help with some handy work . :)

Thanks,  
Dimitris

Source: <http://e-flux.com/timebank/categories/handy-works?page=2>.

Using virtual currency known as "time dollars", you can value your work and then, with mutual consent, collect a required amount from the account of the service recipient. An account statement provides information on the activity of a given user. If the balance is negative, it is clear that a user only uses services of others without being engaged themselves. On the other hand, if the account balance is positive, it means that a user is active and provides good quality services.

Currently, we can observe that the role of Internet service exchange websites in learning languages is systematically increasing. This is due to the usefulness of the services offered there, and also their high effectiveness. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world".<sup>4</sup> By learning foreign languages, members of the society improve their competences, and also broaden their minds. There are a number of websites supporting language learning. Their common feature is gathering users who want to learn and devote their time to monitor the progress in the work of others. The only difference is the content of the tasks offered and the form of interaction among users. Usually, such websites offer instructional materials in various languages and of varying difficulty. At registration, each user indicates a language which they want to learn and also their mother tongue. Apart from instructional materials, such websites also provide other learning tools. These are chat rooms and the possibility to upload a written assignment to be checked by other users. The concept of the functioning of such type of websites is based on mutual help of the users who do tasks in the language they are learning, but also check the work of other users who are learning their mother tongue. For example, a Chinese checks the assignment of a user from Slovenia learning Chinese. The advantage of learning languages through service exchange platforms is the possibility to choose the time for learning, or the number of tasks to be done or checked.

<sup>4</sup> L. Wittgenstein: *Some Remarks on Logical Form*; Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Suppl. Vol. 9 (1929), pp. 162-171.

Figure 2: Example of an essay corrected by with platform lang-8.com

**Lang-8**

All my guests, included me, are vegetarians so are you able to prepare various dishes made with no meat?  
 All my guests, myself included, are vegetarians, therefore, would you be able to accommodate us by preparing various dishes made with no meat?  
| Quote |

And finally could you please let me know can you hire a music band for the party?  
 And Finally could you please let me know if you could hire a musical band for the party?  
| Quote |

I think that the best style of music would be a pop music and the head of the band also should entertain all guests.  
 I believe that the best style of music would be pop and the head of the band also should be expected to entertain all guests.  
| Quote |

I would be grateful if you could contact me with a convenient time and date when we could meet.  
This sentence is perfect! No correction needed!  
| Quote |

Source: <http://lang-8.com/788006/journals/293986730109221022318110510761412957577>.

An example of a website showing the functionalities mentioned above is lang-8.com (see Figure 2.). It offers a useful and at the same time precise tool which divides the text into sentences and allows for correcting each individual sentence in a way that is legible and clear for the author. When correcting is finished, the author can evaluate the work of the checking person. Other users can also comment on the corrections made and make their own corrections. Each comment added to the correction gets points, and the number of points provides information on the activity of the users. The website also enables sending private messages among users, adding friends to your profile and creating groups of users learning the same language, being native speakers or wishing to learn more about a given country or a language.

The most popular language learning platform is Busuu.com. Just like with the previous site, you can add friends, create groups of users and chat with other users. With Busuu you can learn 12 languages (compared to more than 30 languages offered by livemocha.com) and the platform gathers more than 30 million registered users. At registration, users choose their mother tongue and the language they want to learn. They are given various tasks in writing, vocabulary, reading comprehension, speaking and pronunciation.

**Figure 3:** Examples of tasks in writing and spelling

Which kinds of vegetable can you see in these photographs?



In the first photo I can see the cauliflower, in the second photo I can see the broccoli and in the last photo I can see the cucumbers

★★★★★

Zgłoś nadużycie

Source: <http://www.busuu.com/p/8719164>

For each completed task, users get "blackberries". These are points which define their activity and inform them about their progress in learning a language. You can use such points in the shop to buy various accessories or exchange them for a discount when buying a premium account. In addition, the website offers live lessons. It is an extra-paid video chat with your teacher.

**Table 1:** Comprehension of selected language learning platforms

Feature	Site		
	Livemocha.com	Lang-8.com	Busuu.com
Number of users	16 milion	750, 000	30 milion
Number of languages	35	90	12
Type of exercises	Reading and speaking, grammar practise, writing	Only writing and correcting essays	Writing, vocabulary, reading comprehension, speaking and pronunciation.
Points	Points and beans	L-points	Blackberries
Upload an essay	No	Yes	No
Chat rooms	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adding friends	No	Yes	Yes
Creating groups	No	Yes	Yes
Live lessons	No	No	Yes

## 4. SUMMARY

Internet service exchange platforms create communities whose members help each other in acquiring or developing various competences. Users of such platforms make an effort and devote their time to help others improve their competence potential and in exchange get help in improving their own potential. A higher level of competences of users being members of various communities makes it possible for them to take higher quality action both in their private and professional lives. The resulting benefits constitute a significant contribution to implementing the concept of sustainable development. Taking account of the global scale of such service exchange platforms, it seems justified to believe that they contribute to building a global knowledge-based economy and to ensuring sustainable development on a global scale. By that, the operation of the service exchange platforms exerts a positive impact on improving the level of the most important quality category, i.e. the quality of life. It seems that a multi-dimensional analysis and evaluation of the meaning of Internet service exchange

platforms for improving the quality of life may be an interesting and at the same time important scientific challenge.

## REFERENCE LIST

1. Armstrong M.: *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi*, Wolters Kluwer Polska, Warszawa 2011.
2. Bratnicki M.: *Kompetencje przedsiębiorstwa. Od określenia kompetencji do zbudowania strategii*, Placet, Warszawa 2000.
3. Chmielecka E.: *Informacja, wiedza, mądrość. Co społeczeństwo wiedzy cenić powinno*; „Nauka i Szkolnictwo Wyższe” 2004, nr 1.
4. Fazlagić A.: *Osobowość na sprzedaż, czyli jak funkcjonuje profesjonalista w gospodarce wiedzy*; „Personel” 2002, nr 12.
5. Kolman R.: *Ewolucja uwarunkowań jakości życia*, [w:] *Wpływ jakości życia na zarządzanie organizacjami*, Ministerstwo Gospodarki RP, KIG w Warszawie, WSM w Gdyni, Warszawa 2000.
6. Kolman R.: *Jakość życia na co dzień*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Ośrodka Postępu Organizacyjnego, Bydgoszcz 2002.
7. Król H.: *Podstawy koncepcji zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi* [w:] H. Król, A. Ludwicyński (red.): *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006.
8. Kusterka-Jefmańska M.: *Wysoka jakość życia, jako cel nadrzędny lokalnych strategii zrównoważonego rozwoju*; „Zarządzanie publiczne” 2010, nr 4(12).
9. Liaw M.: *Review of Livemocha*; „Language Learning&Technology” 2011, Vol. 15, Nr 1.
10. Liu B.C.: *Metropolitan Quality of Life Indicators in the U.S.*; Paper prepared for the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the ISI, Poland 1975.
11. Maciuszek J.: *Metody oceny jakości życia*, [w:] T. Wawak (red.): *Spoleczna, ekonomiczna i konsumencka ocena jakości*; Wyd. EJB, Kraków 1997.
12. Moller C.: *Quality thought people*, Proceedings of 34<sup>th</sup> Annual EOQ Conference, Dublin 1990.
13. Penn M.: *How Personal Technology is Changing Our Lives*; „View From Around the Globe”, Microsoft 2014.
14. Piontek F.: *Integracja Polski z Unią Europejską a wdrażanie konstytucyjnej zasady zrównoważonego rozwoju*, [w:] M. Burchard-Dziubińska (red.): *Integracja Polski z Unią Europejską w dziedzinie ochrony środowiska – problemy, korzyści, zagrożenia*; Wydawnictwo Biblioteka, Łódź 2000.
15. Sienkiewicz Ł. (red.): *Polityka zarządzania kompetencjami pracowników*; Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, Warszawa 2013.
16. Skrzypek E.: *Determinanty jakości życia w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, [w:] E. Skrzypek (red.): *Uwarunkowania jakości życia w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Zakład Ekonomiki Jakości i Zarządzania Wiedzą, Wydział Ekonomiczny UMCS, Lublin 2007.
17. Twarowski B.: *SYNERGIA – przesłanki, specyfika i efekty realizacji projektu*, [w:] A. Sitko-Lutek, Z. Pastuszek (red.): *Synergia nauki i biznesu. Interesariusze – kompetencje – innowacje*; Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2014.
18. Whiddett S., Hollyforde S. 2003. *Modele kompetencyjne w zarządzaniu zasobami ludzkimi*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2003.
19. Wittgenstein L.: *Some Remarks on Logical Form*; Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Suppl. Vol. 9 (1929).
20. *Wersja skonsolidowana Traktatu o funkcjonowaniu Unii Europejskiej*; Ośrodek Informacji i Dokumentacji Europejskiej, [www.oide.sejm.gov.pl](http://www.oide.sejm.gov.pl).
21. *Przyszłość Strategii Lizbońskiej po 2010 r.*; 82. Sesja Plenarna Komitetu Regionów Unii Europejskiej, 3-4.12.2009, <https://bvstoad.cor.europa.eu>.
22. <http://e-flux.com/timebank/categories/handy-works?page=2>
23. <http://lang-8.com/788006/journals/293986730109221022318110510761412957577>
24. <http://www.busuu.com/p/8719164>