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Connecting the Digital Knowledge Economy and Libraries in Croatia: Preliminary Findings of the IPEDU Erasmus+ International Research Project

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Introduction and Problem Statement

This poster will report on the preliminary findings of an ongoing international research project IPEDU - *Introducing Intellectual Property Education for Lifelong Learning and the Knowledge Economy* attempting to connect public and private sectors of European national economies. The project aims to utilize the potential of libraries and information institutions to stimulate the development of intellectual property (IP) education by making expert interventions in current study and training programs for librarians, information professionals and staff at technical universities in Europe. The IPEDU project is co-funded by the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union and led by the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (Ireland) in cooperation with the project consortium consisting of seven European universities and one SME (MBThinkThank) from Romania. The Croatian scientific community is represented by the University of Zagreb. More about the project can be found on the project website (see IPEDU, 2021).

As libraries develop, new opportunities to expand their services and roles in society are identified. It has been voiced by different stakeholders that IP knowledge is crucial to ensure active, productive, and democratic participation of citizens in the European digital knowledge economy (e.g. White, 2012; Schlipp, 2019). This project wishes to place libraries in the middle of attaining these goals as they can serve as empowering actors that build IP capacity of European citizenry to competently act on the competitive markets of ideas and goods. The poster reports on the first steps taken in Croatia to address these problems, namely the identification of the state of IP education and the employer's perception of the value of IP knowledge and educational opportunities.

Methodology & Research Results

The state of IP education and the skills needed in the labor market were explored by a combination of descriptive methods. Below is a list of these methods organized as they pertain to particular Intellectual Outputs of the IPEDU project:

Intellectual Output 1 (IO1):

- Survey S1: State of IP education offerings in Croatia
- Content analysis (CA): Websites and study programs
- Case studies (CSs): In-depth analyses of IP education offerings in Croatia

Intellectual Output 2 (IO2):

- Survey S2: IP skills and competencies needed in the Croatian labor market

The sample analyzed in S1, CA and CSs outputs includes, after excluding private HEIs delivering study programs in the field of technical sciences, 46 institutions i.e. 27 faculties, 7 polytechnics, 2 colleges, 9 universities, and 1 university department for professional studies. In the IO2 survey (S2) 307 companies were approached, however only 18 filled out the online questionnaire.

The S1 survey shows insufficient presence of IP education in the Croatian HEA. Results of CA and CSs show that IP related content is covered only sporadically in the curricula of technical universities, no courses specifically dedicated to IP are offered in the studied context and any existing relevant content appears in limited formats, usually as one of the topics of thematically related courses. Acknowledging low response rates, results of the S2 survey mapping IP skills and competencies might be considered as indication of the real attitudes and needs of employers regarding IP-related competences. Taken thus, results show that employers value IP-related competencies of their employees and acknowledge their positive impact, but they don't seem to perceive them as decisive for the success of their company. When it comes to actual skills and knowledge, the competences valued are 1. knowledge of what IP is, 2. how to utilize it in work environments and 3. knowledge on IP infringement. The study showed an uncertainty among the employers about the need and successfulness of education and training in their companies.

Discussion & Conclusion

The state of IP education in Croatia points to an implied importance of IP within study programs and will not guarantee the development of necessary knowledge and skills on IP and related concepts. However, employers themselves are unsure whether IP training would promote the success of their companies although they do stimulate their workers to acquire it by employing outside specialists. The project team will shape responses to these challenges in accordance with projects goals i.e. by developing a Train-the-trainers Toolkit consisting of education materials and content on theory of IP (IO3). This content will be integrated into a curriculum for IP education at technical universities (IO4) and freely offered on a specialized and innovative web platform (IO5). These materials will be complemented with content curated for non-law students and practitioners (IO6) while all results will be summarized in a final report on the impact of implemented solutions.

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