Presentation

Introducing EUCIP

Renny Bakke Amundsen, Neil Farren, and Paolo Schgör (with contributions by Niko Schlamberger)

When Geoff McMullen and Llorenç Pagés-Casas asked us to support the editorial team of Upgrade and Novática for the composition of this special issue on EUCIP, our first enthusiastic reaction was quickly followed by concern about the big challenge ahead: it’s not easy to choose and summarize the most important facts and experiences earned in various years of EUCIP projects in various countries.

The Guest Editors and Special Contributor

Renny Bakke Amundsen is CEO of EUCIP Norway, fully owned by The Norwegian Computer Society (DND). He graduated in Master of Science in Economics at The Norwegian School of Management (BI), Norway. Renny is a creative, enthusiastic, self motivated CEO with extensive experience in networking. He specialises in driving Informatics Competence in Europe and in technology driven business development combined with Knowledge Management. In addition he is an adjunct lecturer at BI for Master and Bachelor programs in Knowledge Management, eBusiness and other subjects related to technology, business and the society. He also participates actively in DND’s CIO Forum, some other workgroups and has been part of various boards in that organization. His profile is at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/rennyba>. <Renny.Bakke.Amundsen@eucip.no>.

Neil Farren is Programme Development Executive for ECDL Foundation, the global governing body and licensing authority for certifications including ECDL, the global standard in end-user computer skills, and EUCIP. He is closely involved in the development of ECDL Foundation programmes, including EUCIP. Prior to joining ECDL Foundation, he worked for the Irish government Department of Communications and was involved in the development of the Irish Digital Terrestrial Television platform. He holds a B.B.S. in Information Technology from Letterkenny Institute of Technology and an M.B.S. in Electronic Commerce from NUI Galway. <neil.farren@ecdlo.org>.

Paolo Schgör, born in 1963, lives in Milan with his wife and their 4 children. After graduating with summa in Electronic Engineering, he worked for 5 years as a software designer at TXT e-solutions S.p.A. From 1992 to 2003 he worked for several consulting companies, including KPMG Consulting, as a manager in charge of enterprise applications (ERP, e-business,…) and as project manager for several international clients, mostly industrial groups. In this period, he got several personal certifications, among which Apics Cpm. More recently, Paolo started working as an independent consultant, collaborated with Politecnico di Milano for various teaching activities, and started a collaboration with AICA, the Italian Association for Informatics, where he is currently in charge of managing the ECDL & EUCIP certification programmes. <p.schgor@acicnet.it>.

Niko Schlamberger holds a university degree in mechanical engineering of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. After having worked shortly in manufacturing industry, his professional experience is in the field of information technology in programming, application development, consulting, project management, and general management in IT industry, in business, and in government. His career experience includes various positions: head of software development in the major Slovenian bank, IT consultant, assistant to general manager of the former Yugoslavian federal clearing agency, and head of a Slovenian government information technology office. His present formal position is Secretary at the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, in charge of special projects. He is president of the national computer society— Slovenian Society INFORMATIKA (SSI), a member of Language Chapter of SSI, a member of Board of Editors of the Society’s professional journal Uporabna informatika (Applied Informatics) and of journal Information Technology and Control published by Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In 2003 he was elected Vice-President of International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) for a three year term where he is also chair of Member Societies Relations Committee and a member of various standing committees. The office has been extended for another three years in 2006. In 2004 he was elected Secretary Honorary of Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS) and appointed a member of the board of European Network Information Security Agency (ENISA). In 2006 he was elected President Elect of CEPIS, to start his two-year presidential mandate in November 2007. He is now president of CEPIS. He was a visiting lecturer at the High School of Administration at the University of Ljubljana and has written a text book on computer programming fundamentals. He is member of programme committees of national and international computing and informatics conferences, and has contributed papers for national and international conferences. His bibliographical record shows over fifty papers, reports and reviews.

We knew from the beginning that, in spite of the ample availability of pages, only a few selected projects could be presented, others simply mentioned, and many more excluded. On the other hand, this monograph is not intended to recollect everything about EUCIP (which would be simply impossible); the main goal is to give a comprehensive view on all aspects of the EUCIP model.
We acknowledge that a high number of people from around a dozen European countries have contributed to the development of EUCIP from the beginnings up to its current stage: our sincere apologies for not mentioning each of them individually. We’re confident that the growing success of EUCIP initiatives can nurture some justified pride, especially in those who contributed voluntarily, when the EUCIP model was just an interesting idea for possible future applications.

The first two articles of this issue of UPGRaDE will explain about the history of EUCIP development and its current status as a certification programme for ICT professionals.

EUCIP literally stands for the "European Certification of Informatics Professionals", but the plain explanation of the acronym is not sufficient. To create this programme, the dedicated CEPIs taskforce had to find a shared position on complex issues, such as professionalism, competences and ICT certification: these three are all hot themes, on which a lively debate is currently taking place.

To mention a few examples, IFIP has recently launched a taskforce on ICT Professionalism, CEN/ISSS has undertaken a complex project for the European Commission to define ICT professional competences, and in the USA (the homeland of all largest ICT multinationals) some experts are reflecting on issues that stem from a "vendor" approach to certification.

To explore these issues in greater depth, please refer to the articles written in the last twelve months by Emmett Dulaney on Redmondmag.com and by Warren Wyrostek on InformIT. Both of these authors are advocating a new certification system that really focuses on the skills required to work as an ICT practitioner, not on those "pushed" by companies interested in selling their products (and the respective latest versions, regardless of real market demand).

It appears that the independent researchers on both sides of the Atlantic ocean – the Americans mentioned above, and the Europeans who worked in the Harmonise project (see Table 1 on the next page) – come to very similar conclusions: the market, and especially the organizations using IT to support their business, can no longer understand where the value is, due to the real jungle caused by an overwhelming variety on the supply side. There are currently thousands of different ICT certifications available, and even for experts it is hard work to compare one with another.

To answer the initial question, EUCIP is certainly about ICT certification, but is not limited to just ICT certification. We prefer to say that EUCIP is a model, proposing a viable approach to the definition and measurement of ICT professional competences. In fact, all other articles in this edition describe applications of the EUCIP model; in a sense, every single application (ranging from a country approach to local implementation, up to offering a full set of services around ICT competences) requires the involvement of several partners. EUCIP is therefore a unique example of a multiple multi-stakeholder partnership, having different forms in different countries. This example has recently been endorsed by the inclusion of EUCIP in a benchmarking study on policies on multi-stakeholder partnerships for e-skills in Europe.

The various articles from Ireland, Estonia, Spain, Poland, Romania, Croatia, plus the article on Cisco/EUCIP co-operation, and the final article on e-learning tools and projects show how the involvement of different institutions is a key success factor for the introduction of the more usual types of EUCIP certifications (Core and IT Administrator).

The remaining articles from Italy and Norway report on how broad the discussion may become when talking of the professional profiles and of all services to organizations that can be built around the management of human resources and of their respective competences.

Conclusions

The EUCIP programme has probably reached its main turning point. It can either continue as a traditional certification offering (and face fierce competition in a narrow market, where customers are disoriented by an excess of proposals) or achieve a unique position as a shared model around which a number of stakeholders are building original solutions to the complex issues of professionalism and effective management of ICT competences.

The second option has an evident higher value, but its achievement does not depend on CEPIs only: it depends on an open attitude from other stakeholders, who can either exploit the value of this thorough model, or continue to conceive new projects from scratch to cope with the arduous task of defining and measuring ICT professional competences.

Note on the Cover Page Design: The shape of the main image on the Cover Page is intended to reproduce the shape of the Atomium, evoking the fact that CEPIs headquarters are located in Brussels. In the central sphere you can see the Greek mythological figure of Europa, abducted by Zeus in the form of a bull. According to mythology, Zeus was in love with Europa and changed himself into a bull in order to get access to her… <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europa_%28mythology%29>
The Harmonise project (aiming at the harmonisation of e-skills certification market) was approved in 2004 for European Commission funding through the Leonardo da Vinci programme (DG Education and Culture). CEPIS led a project consortium involving other 8 partners from Austria, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, and UK.

The final report (over 360 pages) was delivered at the end of 2007, and its official approval by the EC was formalized in July 2008.

Harmonise reviews existing qualification and certification schemes in the context of learning provision that leads to certification, and clarifies the underlying profiles, terminology and curricula. The project’s aims involve clarifying existing arrangements to support greater transparency, and influencing the harmonisation of vocational learning and qualification schemes for ICT professionals at the European Union level.

Having assembled a comprehensive knowledge base in this area that can help stakeholders, employers and individuals better understand what is available, Harmonise defines options for achieving greater transparency within the EU and proposes ways of clarifying the feasibility of a widely acceptable European approach to qualification and certification for ICT professionals which can draw and build on the successful experience of the ECDL <http://www.ecdl.org/publisher/index.jsp>.

The following are just few little clippings taken from the final report:

“... Our survey revealed 62 certification suppliers, delivering 617 types of certification for a total volume of more than 5 million in the last 6 years...”

“... This turns the certification landscape into a 'jungle' (Tittel, 2006), (Povalej and Weiss, 2007b) and makes it difficult for individuals and employers to get a good overview of it...”

“... EUCIP, as one of the most recent 'Vendor Independent' models, promotes an open, collaborative model, using an 'inclusive' concept which aims at valuing the role of the numerous subjects (vendors first of all) operating autonomously in the field of training and education, and in the definition of ICT certifications. As well as collaboration with commercial companies and organisations, the EUCIP model also tends to involve editors, universities, schools and public and private training centres...”

“Figure 7-62: Umbrella Approach to Harmonisation”

Table 1: Overview of the Harmonise Project.