Virtual USATIC: Collaborating and Sharing Experiences on Ubiquitous and Social Learning Training

José Luis Alejandre Marco, Ana Isabel Allueva Pinilla,
María Teresa Lozano Albalate, Raquel Trillo-Lado

Abstract: This paper presents Virtual USATIC (Ubicuo y Social: Aprendizaje con TIC), an initiative with totally virtual conference format, whose main goal is to provide a virtual environment where people involved in high education (students, professors, etc.) can share their experiences about the use of ICT in learning processes. At the same time, all participants can learn on the issues related with the virtual conference through virtual training workshops.

Key words: Virtual Conferences, ICT, Virtual Learning Environments, Sharing Experiences, Social Media ELearning, New Didactical Models.

1.-INTRODUCTION

During the last decades, new business models and changes in society are arising due to the constant evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Thus, for example, traditional post mail has been almost substituted by e-mails. Learning processes and systems have to be changed in order to be more efficient, take advantage of ICT and be adapted to this new context, usually called *Information Society*.

Under these conditions, in 2013, a group of teachers of the University of Zaragoza decided to organize a conference named *Virtual USATIC (Ubicuo y Social: Aprendizaje con TIC*; Ubiquitous and Social Learning with ICT) [1]. This conference was born with the main purpose of providing a work environment to share information, ideas, knowledge, research results and teaching experiences among the community involved and interested in learning processes supported by ICT. In particular, we wanted to reach teachers and all professionals in the field of High Education whose instructional language was Spanish, and to promote experiences to improve the quality of teaching. In addition, the conference has enabled the training of teachers in areas of interest through the organization of virtual workshops on ICT tools.

Moreover, we decided to beg for a completely virtual event in order to increase the participation and to reduce participant's costs. The participation in the conference is open access and free, if certification is not desired. It is fully developed in the virtual platform *CourseSites*. So, it allows exchange, while it offers the possibility of training in strategic topics of professional development, as we currently understand learning: ubiquitous and social.

The rest of the paper is organized in the following way. In Section 2, some information about the organizer, the Red EuLES, is depicted. In Section 3, the structure of Virtual USATIC is described in detail. Then, in Section 4, analytics about the participants in the different editions of the conference are shown. Participants' opinions, extracted from surveys, are presented in Section 5. Finally, conclusions and future work are presented in Section 6.

2.-ABOUT RED EULES

Virtual USATIC is organized by Red EuLES [2], an interdisciplinary educational research network in uLearning environments in higher education. The Red EuLES objectives are the interaction, cooperation and transfer of knowledge and technology and the exchange of experiences and resources among its members and the rest of the educational community, in relation to uLearning environments in a higher education level. We understand this model in its extensive and opened meaning, and unifying the different evolutions of the learning process combined with the latest technology trends, ranging from bLearning models (Blended Learning) through eLearning, mLearning (Mobile

Learning) and Web 2.0, until arising the concept of ubiquity that allows us to take the teaching-learning process at any time, place and situation.

The Red EuLES purpose is to contribute to the development of training activities, exchange, mobility and scientific interaction, at the same time as to increase the visibility of the participant institutions and thus also contributing to collaboratively create and share knowledge to improve the teaching quality.

This network is promoted and financed by *Cátedra Banco Santander* of the University of Zaragoza (Spain). It also sponsors the Virtual USATIC event, and has been recognized as an Interdisciplinary Network (*Red Interdisciplinar*) of the University of Zaragoza, within its incentive programme of educational innovation (*Programa de Incentivación de la Innovación Docente*) since 2010.

3.-STRUCTURE OF THE CONFERENCE

The duration of the conference was 4-days in all editions celebrated so far. In particular, the conferences lasted from Monday to Thursday and each day was dedicated to a particular topic related to Ubiquitous and Social Learning. Concretely, these topics have been:

1. Learning platforms and environments
2. Materials and Resources
3. Tools 2.0
4. Social networks and uLearning

A plenary session where a guest speaker gives a keynote moderated by two members of the organization was the first event every day. As an example, the four keynotes of last edition were [3]:

1. About MOOC and Quality Criteria. Miguel Gea, Director of Virtual Learning Centre at the University of Granada on behalf of CRUE ICT (Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities, Sector ICT).
2. Discovering Open Educational Resources (OER) for Planning Class. Marcela Morales, Community Relations Manager & Education Specialist Open in the Open Education Consortium.
3. Flipped Classroom and Apps like Whiteboards. Rosa Liarte Alcaine, Teacher of Geography and History in the Secondary School Cartima (Spain). I SIMO Education Award 2014 for Best Educational Resource Blog.
4. On Educational Video Games in the Hospital Environment. Carina González González, Professor, Department of Computer Science and Systems at the University of La Laguna and Director of the Department of Interactive Digital Culture Vice President for University-Society Relations ULL.

After that, participants were available to discuss about several works in forums. Those works, submissions and/or posters, had been selected in a revision process before the event. Moreover, experts in the subject energized the forums, in order to leverage the interaction and discussion among participants.

At the same time, on the same platform, training workshops with limited places (by order of registration) were developed. The workshops were eminently practical and it is estimated that their realization requires an average commitment of 10 hours per workshop, which each participant may perform over the duration of the workshops. As an example, the training workshops of last edition were [4]:

1. Build your Educational Website with *Google Sites*
2. Intellectual Property and Licensing of Contents
3. Web 2.0 Productivity: Managing Tasks and Events
4. Designing Forms and Online Surveys with *Google*
5. Forms Answers Management and Administration and Online Surveys with *Google*
6. QR Code: How to Use them in Teaching

7. How to Easily Create Educational Video Tutorials with *ScreenCast-o-Matic*

8. How to Use *YouTube* to Post and Manage your Educational Videos

After each edition of the conference, the proceedings have been published in digital format with an ISBN, including every communication and poster presented. This publication is free access for all the speakers.

For last edition, in addition, selected papers were invited to write a book chapter. The *Cátedra Banco Santander* of the University of Zaragoza, with the publisher *Prensas Universitarias de la Universidad de Zaragoza*, will publish the complete book in a special issue in paper.

4.-PARTICIPATION IN THE DIFFERENT EDITIONS

In the first edition of the conference celebrated in June 2013, there were 340 people attending. 55 of them presented their works to be discussed in the forums. In the following edition, in June 2014, more than 550 people attended and could debate and discuss the content of more than 160 accepted papers and posters. In the last edition celebrated so far (in June 2015), 708 attendants participated in the conference and 290 of them presented a communication or poster. It is a great participation that grew edition by edition. We would like to highlight that there has been a large number of authors who have participated in several editions of the conference, as we think it represents the idea that participants find that the conference results interesting for them. In addition, we would like to say that only around 50% of the authors pay a small fee to receive a certificate.

Figures 1 and 2 graphically show that the number of participants and works presented have been continuously increasing since the first edition of the conference. In Figure 3, the quantity of communications and posters are represented. Finally, in Figure 4 the amount of contributions by topics are shown.
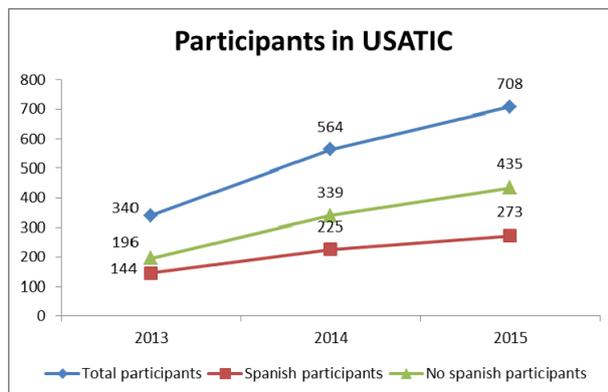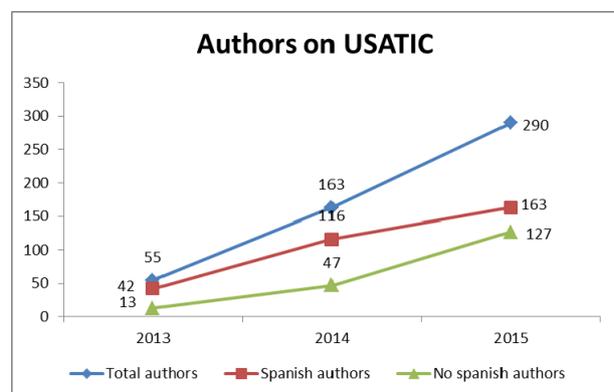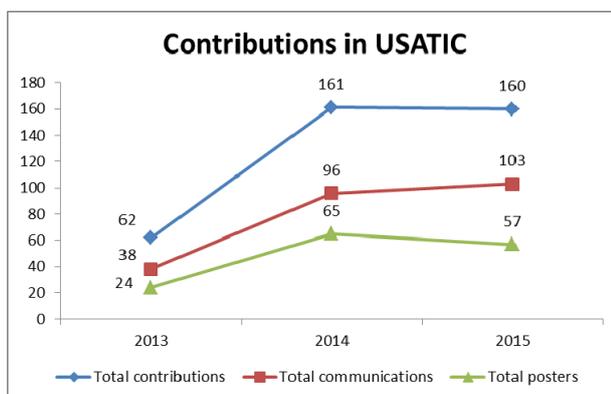

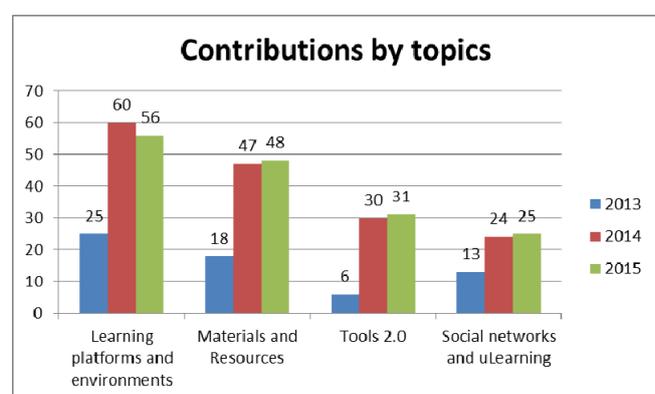Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

The number of countries where attendants come from is also representative. In 2013, 17 countries were represented; in 2014, participants came from 24 different countries; and

in 2015, 21 was the amount of countries participating in the event. The 27 countries represented so far in the conference were: Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, España, Guatemala, Italia, México, The Netherlands, Panamá, Paraguay, Perú, Portugal, Puerto Rico, United Kingdom, República Dominicana, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, Uruguay y Venezuela.

5.-PARTICIPANTS' SATISFACTION SURVEY

In each one of the three previous editions of the conference, participants were asked to fill in a final satisfaction survey. 283 of them did it. Results provided were similar in all performances. Here we present results on the key issues, which correspond to the last edition. We also focus on results provided by those participants attending the last two editions (both) and we will name them as "repeat participants".

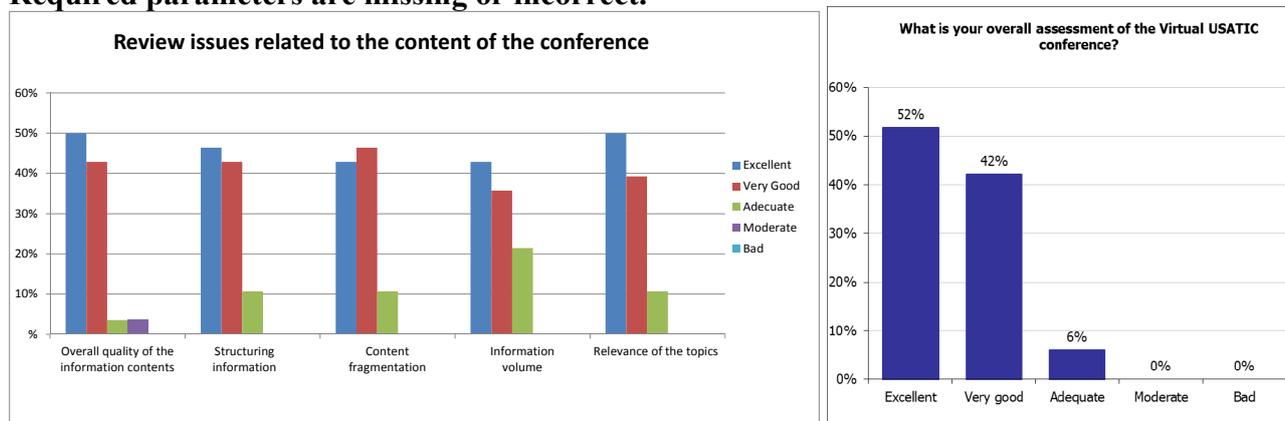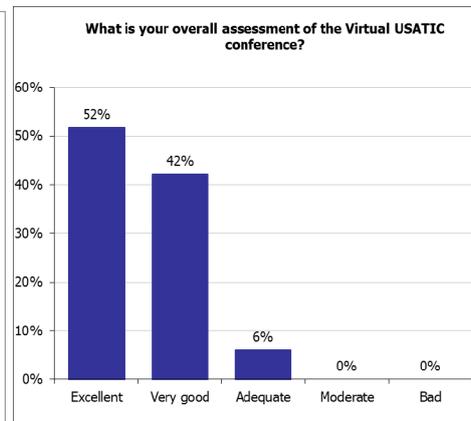**Required parameters are missing or incorrect.**

| Figure 5 | Figure 6 |

Figure 5 shows that 94% of participants answer that the overall assessment of the conference is *excellent* or *very good*. The percentage increases to 96% in repeat participants. In Figure 6, results on review issues related to the content of the conference are presented. Particularly, they were asked about: quality of the information contents, structuring information, content fragmentation, information volume and relevance of conference topics. Results in this case are also mainly *excellent* or *very good*.

In relation to the question: *Was useful the conference (very much - less - nothing)?*, 91% answered *very much* and no one answered *nothing*. In addition, nearly 100% of repeat participants answer *very much* to this question. For these participants also, the degree of satisfaction with the degree of learning obtained at the conference is 100% *very satisfied* or *fairly satisfied*, around 50% each one of these options. These rates are also very similar to the ones obtained from all other participants.

In relation to the eLearning platform used, *Coursesites*, there was an overall satisfaction and 60% of participants said that they intended to use it again. Moreover, although we do not know the reasons, especially as it seems clear that the experience, in relation to eLearning aspects was highly satisfactory, only 6% of participants said that they would not use it in the future (Figure 7).

When participants were asked about how likely were them to recommend Virtual USATIC to a colleague or a friend, all of them answered *YES, I recommend the conference* (100%). Finally, all participants (100%) said *YES I would like to participate in a new edition of Virtual USATIC conference*.

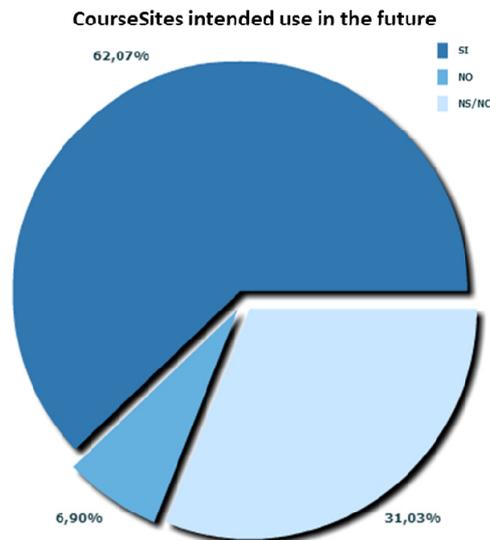**CourseSites intended use in the future**

Figure 7

Regarding the results obtained on the satisfaction of participating in training workshops, we present a brief set of results of the participants' satisfaction survey (Figure 8). Concretely, we present results on assessment of the overall quality of the workshops and assessment of quality of contents. We asked participants to rate these issues on a scale from 1 to 10.

Results express the high degree of satisfaction with the training received in workshops (workshops information is available in Section 3). The score was excellent (9 or 10 points) in 80% of cases and there was no score lower than 8.
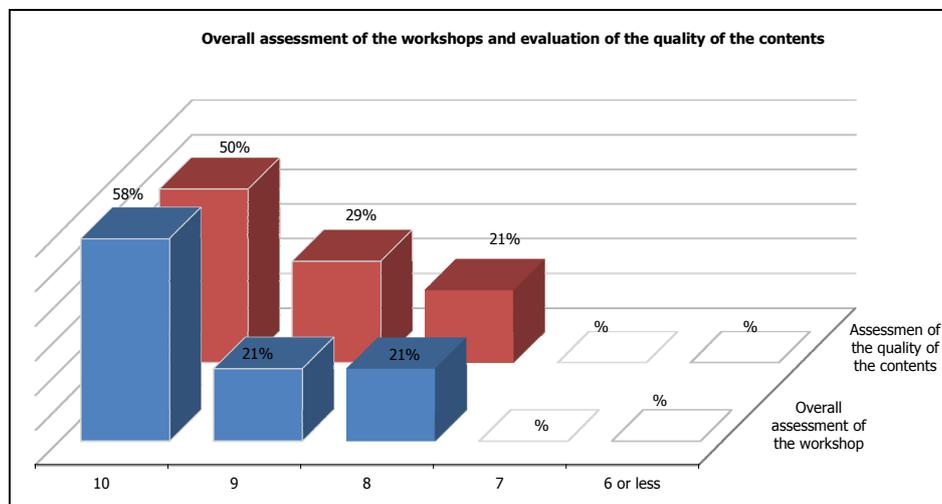

Figure 8

A final consideration that may be relevant in the analysis (apart from those relating to satisfaction) is how respondents said that they obtained information on the conference for the first time (can be several): by email (49%), informed by their institution (19%), a colleague or friend informed them (23%), through social networks and website 18% (Site http://virtualusatic.org, Facebook https://www.facebook.com/VirtualUSATIC, Twitter @VirtualUSATIC, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/user/VirtualUSATIC, Google+ http://tinyurl.com/VirtualUSATIC-Google).

6.-CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Many people already know and have participated in several ways in the conference. In the last edition celebrated so far (in June 2015), as an example, 708 attendants participated in the conference and 290 of them presented a communication or poster. Also, many countries were represented on it: 27 in total.

In relation to participants' satisfaction, 283 of them filled in a survey. Results provided were similar in all editions. So, as an example we focus on the last edition (in June 2015). There, 94% of participants answered that the overall assessment of the conference was *excellent* or *very good*. 91% answered that the conference was *very useful.* All of them (100%) said that they were going to recommend Virtual USATIC and also all of them (100%) said that they would like to participate in a new edition of Virtual USATIC. Satisfaction with the training received at the workshops has also been very high.

So, in conclusion, it was a good experience with good results that we plan to continue with.

Our main goals for next years are consolidating this community exchange, increasing the number of participants and submissions, and increasing also the educational opportunities in workshops, as well as improving as much as possible every point related to Virtual USATIC.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Associate Professor José Luis Alejandre, PhD, Department of Applied Mathematics, University of Zaragoza, Phone: +34 976 762 894, E-mail: jlalejan@unizar.es.

Associate Professor Ana Allueva, PhD, Department of Applied Mathematics, University of Zaragoza, Phone: +34 976 761 655, E-mail: allueva@unizar.es.

Associate Professor María Teresa Lozano Albalate, PhD, Centro Universitario de la Defensa (CUD), University of Zaragoza, Phone: +34 976 739 860, E-mail: Mayte.Lozano@unizar.es.

Associate Professor Raquel Trillo-Lado, PhD, Department of Computer Science and Systems Engineering (DIIS), University of Zaragoza, Phone: +34 876 555 539, E-mail: raqueltl@unizar.es.

The paper has been reviewed.