WHAT DO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE ICTE CONFERENCE IN ROŽNOV WISH FOR?

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In September 2014, the 15th annual international conference "Information and Communication Technologies in Education" held by the Department of Information and Communication Technologies of the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Ostrava took place. Academics and PhD students from Czech, Slovak and Polish universities met in the picturesque town of Rožnov (Czech Republic) to discuss the trends of use of ICT in education and to make acquaintances during both formal and informal occasions. On the occasion of the anniversary of the conference the organizers can ponder whether the established trend (with small innovations) is sufficient, or whether the time for a radical change has come.

Colleagues from Polish and Slovak universities regularly participate in the ICTE Conference and its PhD section – the field of information and communication technologies in education (specialization in pedagogy). The 15th annual conference was dedicated, among others, to B. F. Skinner. The international conference was supported by an international organization, the Visegrad Fund.

In order to learn the participants' views and opinions, the organizers asked them to fill out a questionnaire, which was designed to learn their opinions on general issues, the focus and program of the conference, contributions (papers) and the journal, marketing communication, technical background, and the non-formal part of the conference. The respondents were asked to describe what the conference could look like in 15 years and to try to draw a picture with the conference being an animal with its characteristic features. The questionnaire was filled out by 31 respondents, whom we want to thank once more. The research results are presented in this paper.

As far as the countries from which the participants of the conference come are concerned, nearly two-thirds come from the Czech Republic, one-third come from Slovakia, and the rest come from Poland. Guest lectures by renowned experts not only from the Czech Republic, but also from the United Kingdom, the U.S.A., Austria, or Spain are an integral part of the conference. The fact that nearly half of the respondents stated that it was their first time participating in the conference (and for nearly one-third of them it was the second or third time) proves that the conference is much more than a reunion of the same group of people who participate each and every year. The organizers believe that the new participants will participate in the conference regularly in the future.

The reasons why people come to the conference are diverse and the individual respondents mentioned several of them. Six of the respondents participated in the conference within the scope of the compulsory PhD seminar while four of them participated within the scope of the Visegrad project meeting, which was a part of the conference. Less than half of the respondents stated that they participate in the conference because of the quality of presentations and to expand their knowledge. 17 of 31 respondents appreciated the possibility of being able to personally meet with colleagues from the same field of research, a friendly atmosphere and environment. It is somewhat surprising that only three of the respondents stated the possibility to publish their papers in a journal that has previously been indexed in the Web of Science database is the reason for their participation in the conference.

With a few exceptions, all participants are content with the conference being held in September from Tuesday to Thursday. Half of the participants are content with the focus of the conference, three of them would appreciate more presentations on mobile technologies and two of them would appreciate greater emphasis on didactics of informatics. Nearly two-thirds of the participants are content with the structure of the conference. Some of them would appreciate more presentations, more workshops, and especially more posters. There were reservations about the main and PhD sections taking place at the same time. As a result, the main section has a low number of attendants while PhD students are not able to hear the presentations of renowned experts.

Another question was whether the conference should become a more international event with a greater number of participants coming from outside of Europe, or whether it should stay a regional (Central European) meeting of experts who deal with similar problems in a similar manner. 11 out of 31 respondents spoke for the greater openness toward the world. Some of them suggested that all the presentations should be presented in English while others suggested they should be interpreted from English. 15 out of 31 respondents stated that the nature of the conference should remain regional. Some of them warned that trying to make the conference a worldwide event may result in the loss of its spirit and friendly atmosphere. However, even these respondents wished for the participation of experts not only from Europe but from all over the world. Considering that the majority of respondents wished for the conference to sustain its regional character and stated that the main reason of their participation in the conference is the possibility of being able to personally meet with colleagues from the same field of research and its friendly atmosphere, the organizers opted not to change the conference format and instead decided to enrich it with guest lectures and workshops led by renowned experts not only from Europe but from all over the world.

In another group of questions the respondents evaluated the quality level of guest lectures and presentations in the main section and at the same time could suggest their own ideas for improvements in this area. Nearly half of the respondents think that the level of presentations is increasing. Among celebrities that the participants wanted to see and hear also appeared the name of Steve Jobs. This, sadly, is a wish that can no longer be fulfilled. Four of the respondents would appreciate more didactics and an interdisciplinary dialog of didacticians and IT experts at the conference. Furthermore, the respondents would like to hear from someone from the field who is more familiar with the teacher community, or a representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The respondents were also interested in the

actual effectiveness and possible disadvantages of ICT-supported education. As far as the main section presentations are concerned, the respondents evaluated them as good or average. There were complaints about the violation of the time allocated for presentations. One of the respondents suggested that a stopwatch (counting down the time) be attached to a lectern. The organizers promise they will make sure such cases do not occur at future conferences.

Approximately half of the respondents answered the question concerning the editorial system for posting of papers. Ten of them are content with the editorial system. However, there were complaints about irrelevant, late or entirely absent feedback. One of the participants suggested that the conference switch to the widespread conference management system, EasyChair. The majority of respondents evaluated opponent reviews as apt, useful, and professionally satisfactory. Some of the complaints mentioned that in some cases the level of opponent reviews varies; that there are cases when there are two contradictory reviews for one paper; and that reviews should provide constructive criticism and not only a two-sentence summary of the paper.

The organizers were pleased to learn that 22 out of 31 respondents stated that they continue to use the journal after the conference, i.e. they quote from it and recommend it to their colleagues and (mainly PhD) students. As far as the CD version of the journal is concerned, the conference participants would like it to include presentations and additional documents from guest lectures (including audio recordings), photographs and videos from the conference, the list of reviewers, index, and the possibility to search in the papers. Three respondents would prefer a USB flash drive version of the journal since their laptops do not have a CD-ROM drive. All of the respondents agreed that the journal should be available on the Internet (a request the organizers can promise to fulfill).

In order to improve promotion and communication, the respondents suggested a more intense call for papers – include more workplaces and address specific people. Those who participated in previous conferences (including PhD students) should be addressed primarily. As far the target groups the members of which should be addressed are concerned, the respondents most frequently chose teachers (not only informatics), didactics experts, pedagogical associations, representatives of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and coordinators of international projects aimed at the implementation of information and communication technologies in education. There were also suggestions concerning inviting sponsors, representatives of the commercial sector, and software developers who would provide information about trends and upcoming innovations in the field of educational software. There was a suggestion about addressing foreign PhD students who could introduce the results of their research at the conference. As a result, our PhD students could compare their own work with the work of foreign students.
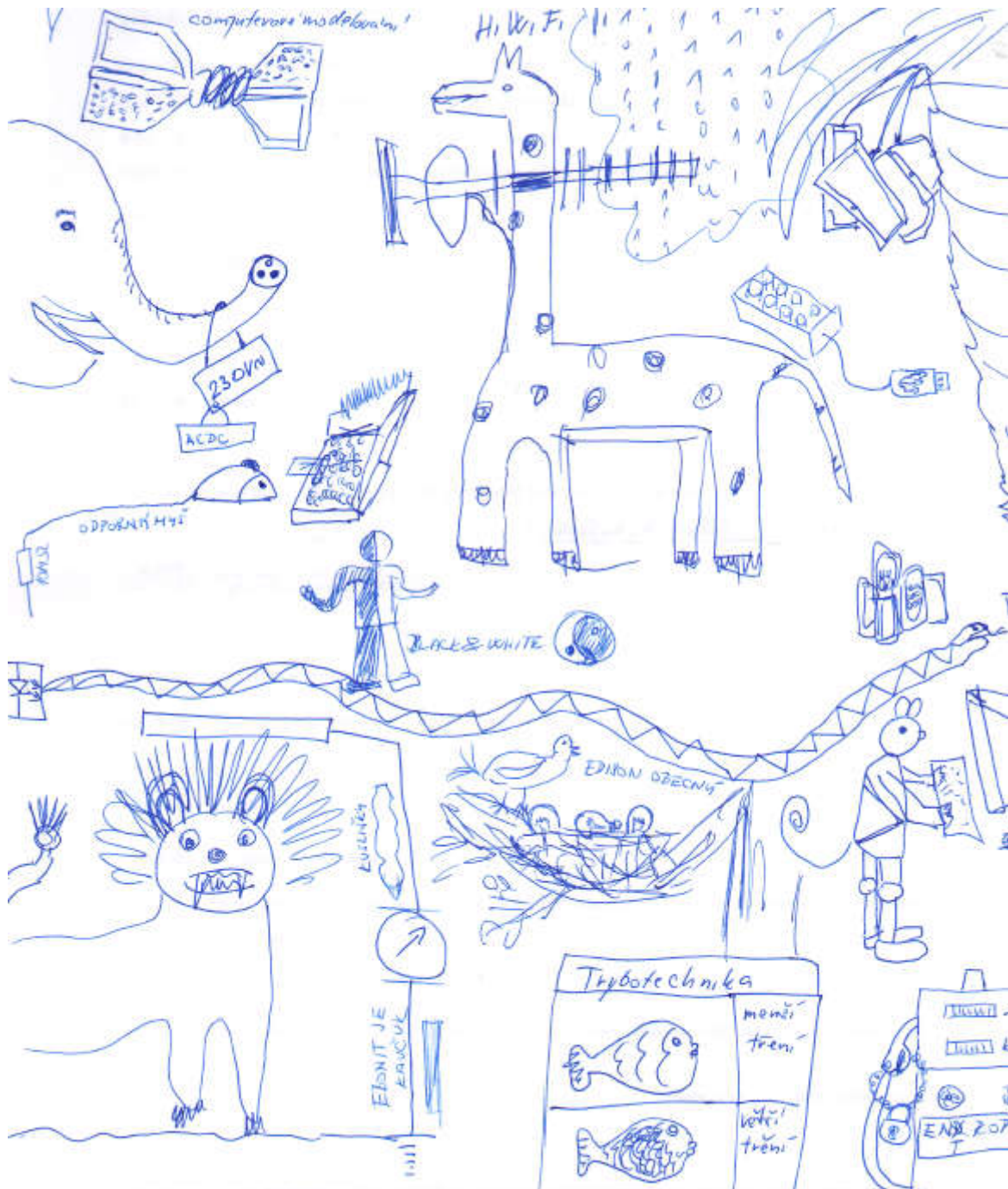
As far as the technical background of the conference is concerned, there were no crucial remarks. The respondents would appreciate a larger screen so that the text written in a smaller font size would be easy to read, a high-quality data projector with better color resolution, and a presentation remote control with a laser pointer.

The participants were content with the social and non-formal parts of the conference, i.e. backstage debates, field trips, and a social evening. They stated that this part helps with

integration, cooperation and solving collective problems. Some of the respondents even stated that the non-formal part is the most important part of the entire conference. As far as destinations of future field trips are concerned, the participants suggested places around Rožnov, the Wallachian Open Air Museum, or more remote places such as Štramberk or Kopřivnice. The organizers will take these suggestions into account when planning future field trips.

The questionnaire also had a "non-serious" part. The respondents were asked to become sci-fi authors for a moment and write what they think the conference will look like in 15 years. The vast majority of them see the future of the conference in the virtual space, i.e. they will not have to travel anywhere as they should be able to participate in the conference from their own living rooms. These, however, contradict what they appreciate the most about the conference – personal meetings, backstage debates, social and non-formal parts of the conference. Therefore, the organizers decided that in the age of virtual reality they would choose the old-fashioned way of face-to-face meetings in a friendly environment.

The respondents were also asked to draw the conference as an animal with its characteristic features. The majority of respondents draw minimalistic pictures. However, there was one complex composition the meaning of which the organizers were not able to decipher. Maybe some of you will be able to tell what the person was trying to say about the Rožnov conference.

Finally, we want to thank all the respondents who filled out the extensive questionnaire. The organizers can promise that they will take the complaints, objections and remarks into account when trying to improve the quality standard of the already traditional conference on information and communication technologies in education