

Conference: Serbia online 2012 (Srbija na vezi)



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When? Sunday, 14th October, 2012

Where? Formal conference hall of the Rectorate of Belgrade University (Studentski Trg 1, Beograd)

What? Online education, online business, online marketing innovations

It is well known that Serbia has been burdened by a drastic brain drain and lack of experts for over 20 years, while the level of unemployment is continuously reaching new peaks. This is especially symptomatic within the category of young people who are in search of their first job opportunities on the labor market. The conference "Serbia on the Line 2012" aims to promote innovative business and education practices in Serbia, that is, to offer students and young professionals alternative solutions to the problems they face, the common thread of all these solutions being – the Internet. Instead of a tool that is exclusively used for entertainment and free time, we will present the Internet in a new light – as an accessible resource crucial for attaining current and competitive skills, entrepreneurship, business promotion, and as a field of infinite commercial opportunities.

NGO and portal iSerbia.rs, in cooperation with the Economic Press Association of Serbia are organizing "Serbia on the Line 2012", a conference dedicated to online education, online business and online marketing. The conference will last for one day and is to be held on Sunday, 14th October, 2012 in the formal conference hall of the Rectorate of Belgrade University. The conference is sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, Information and the Information Society (Digital Agenda), SBB Company and the Municipality of Zemun.

Lecturers:

dr Piero Torola – Oxford University – Online education in the form of activism and entrepreneurship

Predrag Sojičić M.D - Harvard Kennedy School of Government – Online social mobilisation

Istok Pavlović – Most influential Serbian blogger 2011 – Online marketing

Vladimir Prelovac – Founder of Prelovac Media and Manage WordPress – Making an idea reality

Sonja Ilić – Belgrade young entrepreneur of the year – Entrepreneurship and new technologies

Stefan Salom – R&D Manager, Infostud – example of good practice

Gordana Igrić – Regional Director, BIRN Balkan Investigative Reporting Network – example of good practices

Andrea Sušić – PR Manager, eKapija.com – example of good practices

Nina Fićović – Co-founder, WAN-NABE magazine – example of good practices

More details about the conference and lecturers can be found on www.Serbia.rs!



Bringing knowledge

iSerbia.rs, in partnership with the Association of Economic Press Association of Serbia and South-East European Society of Oxford, has put in motion the first on-line mentoring program between Serbia and the diaspora.



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"Serbia on the Line" (Srbija na vezi) began as a program of online mentorship and knowledge exchange with the Diaspora. The aim was to link Serbian experts from abroad, in the role of mentors, to the most promising young professionals from Serbia. Even though the project

has now expanded to include the upcoming conference on online innovations as well as plans for a Language Exchange Program and an Internet Academy, the mentorship program still represents the foundation all other activities develop on.

"The principal goal of the project is to encourage young people in Serbia to think of the internet as a creative

and useful business and education tool as well as to make the first step towards developing a channel of continuous exchange and constructive cooperation between Serbia and its diaspora. Instead of focusing on the return of Serbian experts from abroad, we are trying to find alternative solutions by placing an emphasis on knowledge as the most valuable donation Serbia can

receive", says Ana Ranitovic, one of the founders of iSerbia, who came up with the online mentoring idea after graduating at Oxford University and returning to Belgrade.

The mentorship program is currently underway, linking 15 mentors from all across the world – experts in fields spanning from cardiovascular medicine and political sociology to public health

back to Serbia

management and diplomacy, with 30 mentees from Serbia. The mentoring is conducted via online audio and video conferences and e-mail, at least 2 times per month for half a year.

Adrijana Milosavljević, a graduate of economics and freelance journalist living in Kruševac, is currently a mentee of Mirjana Milošević, media development expert and senior consultant at the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers. As Adrijana tells us, living in Kruševac can pose as an obstacle to career development, which was the principal reason she applied to participate in the mentorship program: "So far, I am more than pleased with working with Mirjana's approach and her interest in my work. She has been advising me

regarding putting together a project application for the Youth Association of Krusevac, as well as in writing an academic article so that I may enrol in doctoral studies next year." In an entirely different field of work are Dr Draško Vidović, chemistry professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and former postdoctoral fellow at Oxford University, and his

mentee, Bojan Gligorijević, PhD candidate and engineer at Goša Institute. Bojan's experience so far has been an excellent one: "The mentor has demonstrated a great readiness and interest to help me out. At the moment, we are in the midst of learning about the synthesis of Si-based non-oxide ceramics, which is the first specific goal of our collaboration".

Motivated by such great results, iSerbia has begun developing an Internet Academy which would provide online mentoring services and online courses to young people in Serbia in a whole range of subjects: "We are especially excited about the Language Exchange Program we plan to initiate at the beginning of next year – we

want to make use of the fact that, on one hand, there are many Serbs living abroad, as well as foreigners living in Serbia, who wish to practice their Serbian, and young people in Serbia who want to practice foreign languages with a native speaker. The solution – linking them in an online language exchange program!" Preparations are currently underway, and as we are told, the call for applications for both the Online Mentoring Program and Language Exchange Program is ongoing.

If you would like to participate in either of these two programs, either as a mentor or a pupil, send a line to office@iserbia.rs.

Interview:

dr Piero Tortola, Oxford University

We spoke with Dr Piero Tortola, political scientist, lecturer at Oxford University and one of the editors and partners in the Italian NGO Quattrogatti. What started as a private initiative of three friends at the London School of Economics has grown into a movement that gathers young academics, researchers, journalists, animators, movie directors and PR specialists, all with one goal – to dissect complex social, economic and political issues and present them to the public in a straightforward and accessible manner. With clever use of videos, infographics and most importantly, the internet, Quattrogatti has experienced enormous growth in the last year. Dr Tortola will tell us how the Quattrogatti idea came to life and what are the innovations in the world of online education on the 14th of October at the conference "Serbia on the Line" (Srbija na vezi). In the meantime, we offer a sneak peek!

What is the role of academics and higher education in this new context and how do you try to fulfil it?
Academics, and more generally intellectuals, have a crucial role in this context for they have the power and responsibility to mediate between the quick and simple information obtainable from the web on one side, and on the other side the sort of deeper knowledge which is built over years of study and should be at the heart of quality information. Needless to say, this mediation is all the more important the more complex, and hence obscure, government becomes. Take the example of fiscal policy: in principle it should be a simple thing to determine, say, whether a government has raised or lowered taxes. In practice it is not, given the wide array of types and levels of taxation a modern government can act on, the combination of which determines the true weight of taxation on citizens. As a result, the layperson is often unable to determine whether our prime minister or president is telling the truth when she claims that her government has lowered taxes without the help of someone who has the resources and ability to read a state budget and keep the bigger picture in mind. In this sense the web as a communication tool and human capital as the source of content are complementary to one another. Clearly, this is not to say that all academics are always right or disinterested. But judging from what I can see I would say that all in all the internet has done more to increase the role and relevance of honest and well-intentioned intellectuals than it has given an audience to fraudulent ones. This mediation between different types of information and knowledge is exactly what Quattrogatti.info aims to achieve. I think we are particularly well placed to fulfil this function not just because of the sort of instruments we use—videos, presentations, infographics—which allow us to take very complex information and turn it into very simple language, but also because we are filling a very visible gap in the Italian information landscape.

In your opinion, what are the consequences of the internet for governments today?

From a purely conceptual point of view I would be tempted to say that, as any new technology, the internet is a neutral means which can produce good or bad results as far as the relationship between governments and citizens is concerned. From simple observation, however, it seems to me that on balance the web so far has had a positive effect on the quality of government. For one thing, by speeding up communications the web can and does make public administration more efficient and user friendly. (Of course, the flip side of the coin here is that governments are now more than ever able to store and access huge amounts of data and information, which raises issues of privacy). For another, the internet has multiplied the ways, speed and sources of democratic control on government and, more generally, production of information. Again, one should not underestimate the negative effects that this multiplication of voices can have on society, in the first place because the web gives 'good' and 'bad' information the same sort of access and ability to capture an audience. But it is quite evident that the more mature the internet becomes the more able it is to develop 'antibodies' and mechanisms to separate quality information



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What was the driving power, the principle motive to establish Quattrogatti?

Generally speaking, it was the desire to provide clear, concise and accessible information on certain issues that are important for the social, economic and political life of Italy but on which little reliable information was available in the traditional outlets like newspapers and the TV. More specifically, Quattrogatti.info was founded in 2008 by three postgraduate economics students with the aim to evaluate/clarify the economic and financial situation of the country and the platforms of the two rival political coalitions on the occasion of the 2008 parliamentary elections. From there the project has gradually expanded in its team (Quattrogatti.info has now six editors, two video-makers and a large number of authors and other collaborators), types of products, and topics: we now work on political and social issues in addition to economic ones.

Often intellectuals believe "the more complicated the better" and thus remain outside the public sphere, incomprehensible and ineffective. Quattrogatti is trying to change that. How did Italians react when you first started with work?

We have always had a very good response from our audience. And the bigger both our project and audience become, the more positive this response is! We take feedback very seriously: we read each and every email we receive and respond to all the clarification requests and comments. Of course, we

do get the occasional critical message. But even these are more often than not constructive. I believe that this response is all the more remarkable in the Italian context, where quality factual information is rather scarce (especially on politically sensitive topics) and public discourse tends to be structured along factions, each with its own official truth. The enthusiasm generated by our project is very encouraging for the future of information in the country. Another important feature of Quattrogatti.info is that we always encourage our reader to get involved and collaborate with us. Over the years we have built quite a large network of people who help parliamentary elections. From there the project has gradually expanded in its team (Quattrogatti.info has now six editors, two video-makers and a large number of authors and other collaborators), types of products, and topics: we now work on political and social issues in addition to economic ones.

The line between activism and business is very thin nowadays. Did you strive for Quattrogatti to develop into an internet business or is it something that caught you off guard?

We have always had a general idea of transitioning to a more professional way of working at some point. In a way, this is physiological when one starts making ever better and more sophisticated products, which require certain professional figures, abilities, and greater time and energies which make pure voluntarism unsustainable after a while. What was, and is, less clear, however, are the terms of this transition: the external ones (how we want to in-

teract with the outside world) and the internal ones (whether and how we should restructure our organisation). Being a completely new type of project, we are breaking new ground and learning by doing every day in these respects, but thus far we have managed all our transformations quite smoothly, and I predict we will continue to do so in the future.

What is it about infographics and animated videos that facilitate the transfer of knowledge to a greater number of people?

I would say it is three things: a) these instruments are just nicer to look at, and hence more attractive; b) they allow transmitting a great amount of information very simply and in little space/time—an image is often worth a thousand words; c) they require less effort on the part of who watches/reads. Now, the downside of this mode of communication is to diminish the incentive to look for more complex information. To some extent, one can say this is our objective—to 'digest' concepts and ideas and make them simple and accessible to everybody. But it is important to stress that in no way do we intend to encourage intellectual laziness: on the contrary, we always try encourage our audience to dig deeper into the topics we cover, whether through bibliographies, notes and links, or with richer follow-up posts on our website. This latter aspect, in particular, will be expanded in our new website, which will be up this autumn.

Time	Length	Activity/Lecturer	Topic
11:00 – 12:00	60 min	Registration	
E-education			
12:00 – 12:10	10 min	Ana Ranitović – iSerbia, Oxford University	Online mentoring
12:10 – 12:45	35 min	Predrag Stojičić – NGO Srbija u pokretu, Harvard University	Internet as a tool of social change
12:45 – 12:50	10 min	Miloš Jovanović, iSerbia	Student rankings results – what skills are we lacking?
12:50 – 13:25	35 min	Dr Piero Torola, Quattrogatti.info, Oxford University	Online education as entrepreneurship and activism
13:25 – 13:50	25 min	Intermission	
E-business			
13:50 – 14:10	20 min	Sonja Ilić – Best young entrepreneur of Belgrade, director Match&Art	Entrepreneurship and New Technologies
14:10 – 14:30	20 min	Nina Fićović – Co-founder, Wannabe magazine	Internet Business: What to Expect in the First Year
14:30 – 14:50	20 min	Vladimir Prelovac, founder Prelovac Media and Manage WordPress	Step by Step from an Idea to Global Success
14:50 – 15:10	20 min	Gordana Igrić – director of BIRN	Sustainability of NGOs: Is Internet Business a Must?
15:10 – 15:30	20 min	Intermission	
15:30 – 15:50	20 min	Andrea Sušić – PR Manager, eKapija	Ingredients for Permanent Success
15:50 – 16:10	20 min	Stefan Salom – Co-founder, Infostud	The Perspectives of On-line Business in Serbia
16:10 – 17:00	50 min	"Internet Business and 75,000!" Competition	Presentations and interviews with the finalists
17:00 – 17:20	20 min	Intermission	
E-marketing			
17:20 – 18:00	40 min	Istok Pavlović – most influential blogger of 2011	The Most Effective Online Marketing for SMEs
18:00-18:30	30 min	"Internet Marketing and 75,000!" Competition	Presentations and interviews with the finalists
18:30 – 18:50	20 min	Intermission	
18:50 – 19:00	10 min	Formal announcement of competition winners and presenting of awards	