

Closing conference: „The EEA Scholarships Programme – A Plus in Education“

**Open Café, 23.03.2017, Bucharest
Conclusions**

THEME 1 - DOs and DON'Ts in finding partners in the Donor Countries for scholarship & related projects

DO:

Network with a clear focus

- have the initiative: participate in contact and dissemination seminars/events/conferences.
- travel and visit institutions. Contact NA/PO

Find the partner

- work with previous partners from ERASMUS or other projects. . Strengthen the partnerships by working with the same partner in different projects;
- evaluate the academic program. Visit the university location, the campus with students' accommodation. Organise more preparatory visits.
- organize workshops on the Roma target in the project – try to involve the universities

Find the person

- make use of personal contacts (professors/ex-students) or use recommendations. Build relationships. Write emails and create a special relation with these personal contacts. Find a reliable person at the partner institutions;

Design the project

- find the common interest (topic);
- "offer something they don't have"
- define clear responsibilities, objectives, roles between partners.

DO NOT:

[Network]

- unbalance between donor countries (DC) and beneficiary States;
- break programme rules established by the donor countries;

[Partner]

- unbalance timing of the grants with the academic year;
- lack communication between partners;
- have an inflexible curriculum;
- ask to be part in the project with short notice (before the deadline - this is not working);
- progress a "general" partnership;
- share (excessively) the partners in the DS;

[Person]

- limit personal contacts (for secondary school teachers);

[Project]

- have a too short period for the project;

THEME 2 - the „+“ of bilateral projects: dynamics, specificities, challenges

Added value

Education:

- sharing good practices on curriculum/common educational projects;
- know-how transfer between partners;
- interdisciplinary approach in teaching (integrated methods);
- STEM, STEAM and STREAM approach;
- development of student skills with social applicability and implementation;
- cultivating common passions and professional interest;
- intellectual outputs: publications, public policies recommendations;
- increased networking & shared experience;
- new solutions to similar problems;
- exchange of ideas & new perspectives;
- developing and enhancing the contact network through organized events (this conference);

Mobilities:

- stepping stones for future collaboration and research;
- students continue their studies based on their mobility experience;

Research:

- the extension of the research network;
- comforting ideas, visions and perceptions on research topics (eg. migration);
- raising awareness through the research community (there's a gap between donor and beneficiary countries).
- EEA Grants: opportunity for future development of research networks;
- internationalization of researchers (Mathematics Dept.);

Diversity:

- developing a cross cultural understanding, by working in and adapting to a different environment;
- sharing knowledge and culture; getting in touch with an extremely diverse environment, mobility; facing diversity;
- working in a multicultural environment;

Employment:

- work and deliver for foreign companies; work with public administration --- Bilateral
- accessing new technologies and transfer of knowledge.

Challenges

- challenging administrative implementation, development and reporting process;
- difficulties in implementing mobilities in only one academic year (vocation/studies);
- pressure on beneficiary countries (ideas, writing proposals, disseminating results,) and not on the EEA partner; unbalanced responsibilities between partners.
- bureaucracy;
- co-financing is difficult for some universities;
- difficulties in finding partners from DS;
- lack of support from home institutions;
- lack of recognition from home institutions for getting involved in bilateral projects;
- lack of interest from NO students to participate in mobilities for studies or attending bilateral programmes;
- ECTS recognition has no or small correspondence between courses;

THEME 3 - Lessons learned about communication and promotion of the EEA educational projects

Lesson learned according to different cultures:

Estonia:

- dissemination calendars, links, photos, good reminder for all participants but also useful outside the project;
- textbook for pupils, containing project elements;
- drawing students' attention and direct communication was more useful data;

Poland:

- communicating on a local community level; personal communication as key factor;
- face to face recruitment/promotion, publications and FB pages for students and teachers;

Romania:

- dissemination in national universities; lead direct communication the projects; include important feedback from teaching staff and students;
- partners dissemination - professional workshop with EEA partners;
- More promotional activity needed from PPs, more visibility/transparency; more feedback after the evaluation of the applications;

Hungary:

- for internal - personal communication is more efficient; for external communication - the website didn't work as expected, but FB provided better feedback;
- events - exhibitions, annual events; printed material proved its efficiency and is really easy to use (will be used more within future projects); the network of the advisory board by means of personal relations;
- motivating staff is very important;
- combining research, mobility and cooperation is very important;
- from a student's point of view, promotion, suggestion and stories work better; visual communication with former participants; personal experience;
- Erasmus+ communication training for students could be applied;

General lesson learned:

- public events to promote and encourage participation;
- bureaucracy should be reduced;
- in terms of cooperation, Erasmus projects require at least 3 countries, whereas in EEA small cooperation projects is possible between 2 countries (positive aspect). Future EEA calls should be open to more countries.

Mobilities:

- word of mouth works perfectly in terms of student mobility. By sharing their experience with as many students as possible, the programme becomes more and more attractive for future participants;
- for EEA promoting purposes, it would be beneficial to highlight that in comparison with Erasmus, EEA may cover majority of expenses (in terms of student mobility);
- one year gap creates obstacle in terms of promoting mobility.

Communication between partners:

- sharing common interest;
- reluctance derived from different cultural background, overcame by gaining trust => first approach is more difficult.

Communication between Partners & National Agencies/POs:

- formalities overcame by personal approaches
- understanding the difficulties caused by the paperwork – working on a common ground.

Promotion:

- key aspect: prioritizing through the duration of the project;
- media, feedbacks;
- books distributed to main libraries;
- oral presentation on the results in different context => future collaboration.

THEME 4 - Challenges in administrative and financial national frameworks of implementation

Management:

- professional capacity of the project promoter and project manager;
- need for a good team + experienced project manager. Experience in projects makes a better experience in next ones;

Financial matters:

- unit costs
- better adjustment of salaries according to the expertise
- SI - for mobilities not so strict budget
- grants for research projects in Nordic countries are low and cost of living in Nordic countries (student housing, etc.) are high;
- currency exchange rate moving fast (Iceland);
- many installments;
- disparity between in/out grants;
- lower grants for NO students to come in some countries (SK, CZ);
- additional costs covered by institutions;
- small grant financing line => very limited amount of money;
- results are correlated with financial resources ;
- salaries are very low for academics from abroad;
- it is useful to have financial resources for publishing books/studies;
- the budget should be more flexible (no strict percentages for certain expenses);
- prefinancing - if institutions cannot support project expenses;
- bank transfers take too long;

Administrative matters:

- incompatible/inflexible national administrative + institutional; lack of flexibility + too much paper work;
- CZ - lot of bureaucracy: conflicting flat rates for staff rates + subsistence with internal rules with EEA rules (especially for travel); LV - bureaucracy;
- difficulties in establishing partnerships;
- lack of understanding of institutional practice in terms of delegation in donor countries;
- timing - lack of time for preparing the mobility;
- academic systems difference => calendar issue - late nomination => maybe adapt the call for projects.
- existing partnerships between Latvia + Estonia => 51 preparation visits have taken place;
- good experience for students;
- collecting documents is too detailed;
- taking into account the benefits and results of the Programme we would apply again. We are grateful for the support of the NA in all matters;

Donor States

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- DS not used to paperwork;
- not favorable perception of Nordic students (myth of language barrier). Promotion of the BS to Nordic students in competition with Western countries (USA, Australia, etc.);
- not many teachers from NO want to travel to BS. Promote the facilities of BS institutions to teachers that might travel in those countries;
- participants from donor countries consider there is too much administrative work;

Recommendations:

- enable allocation of money for dissemination after the end of the project;
- lump sums are welcomed. Increase the cost limit for travel and accommodation;
- have special rules for the under-aged (secondary schools);
- the legal department should be involved;
- implement longer mobilities;
- early planning is a must for future projects;
- part of the budget should be dedicated to administrative staff. Flexibility on budget chapters - transfers if not all expenses were made;
- balance between research and administrative staff;
- to reduce the level of documents needed to cover expenditures.

THEME 5 - On results in EEA projects: synergies, exploitation, transfer. Were the disparities reduced during the implementation?

Exploitation:

- develop a common, coherent communication strategy; use external evaluation for ensuring projects' quality and promote the results;

Synergies:

- the diversity with more in-depth focused analysis;
- partnerships lead to other research projects;
- personal experience through cultural changes;
- best practices from the financial point of view – flexibility;
- positive experiences – we would like to continue with these kinds of projects;
- the trip to Norway has changed future life plans (student);
- going abroad broadens minds;
- inclusion of disabled people (“Play with me”, being hosted for 10 years now) reduced social disparities;
- improving language skills;
- more reactive;
- developing research skills for students and academics; citizenship and democracy (1 and 2 years) mobility and internship projects; creating new study programs and international cooperation (academics and students); migration issues (political science) and research components; organizing conferences (international); improving skills of secondary school teachers (environment, local companies, web based teaching materials); local experience and European influence; cultural literature and society; transversal skills;
- it was a challenge working with transversal skills in Romania; different reflections on Education; facing material problems in less cultivated fields (literature); developing internationalization; cooperation with foreign partners in IT programs; possibility to extend cooperation with other institutions; synergy – eagerness to go beyond the already developed project; cultural awareness; personal enrichment; better understanding; joint work; difference in approach: from theoretical issues to practice.

Transfer:

- enhanced distance learning from a BS (Poland) to a DS (NO); different work styles; surveys on direct beneficiaries on how they would like to be treated (to further develop new projects based on these surveys); teaching methodologies based on competences rather than knowledge; different approaches on teaching and learning activities; focused on competences and practical application; based on the experience of a joint project, professors applied for and participated in a mobility project;
- was not yet done in the teacher training because of national policy and mono-disciplinary teaching; it exists on a micro level, not on global level; quantified research, business weeks, articles, but these take up a lot of time; cooperation is built in time and has different forms (bachelor studies, mobilities, previous joint activities); useful in evaluating previous good practices of the applications;
- inviting professors to lecture and discover organizations, ex. of good practice is benefic (transfer of knowledge);
- cooperating with a Norwegian University led to contacting and collaborating with new partners; overcoming (positive) challenges is possible through cooperation and peer to peer learning (from each other);
- cooperating universities will switch to Erasmus+ funding;

- personal experiences;
- studies from host universities transferred in NO;
- E-learning methods & teaching methods skills;
- practical skills to be taught from foreign partners; knowledge transfer from academic stage to policy making stage;

Disparity Reduction:

- no instruments for measuring it; it's a lengthy process thus cannot be quantified early; satisfaction and acquired competences can be measured ; imbalanced mobilities; small number of universities in DS versus high numbers of universities in BS;
- depend on the project's applicability; selection of participants is not restricted; helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds in applying for mobilities;
- the schedule of all partners should be correlated (different semester starting dates); more staff mobilities, few incoming students; the ECTS system is as an issue because the study plan differs between partners;
- at the beginning of the project, there was a big difference between the partners (scientific, management, best practices), but in the end disparities were reduced (thanks to transfer of knowledge, cultural experiences etc.).
- in financing & administration; smoother rules for enhancing the application process should be instated;
- the need to face slight cultural disparities and overcome communication issues have been substantially diminished the end of the project;

Recommendations:

- experts/researchers for evaluating results, based on gathered scientific data;
- define objective, clear outcomes for incoming students, teachers and academic staff;
- increasing the number of Roma population enrolled in universities;
- DS partners to be more involved in writing applications.

THEME 6 - Impact on beneficiary institutions and participants (students, staff). What was the motivation to implement EEA projects?

Impact on institutions

- joint module- ECTS credits;
- curricula development (2) (do not impose restrictions: more room to be given to real curricula decided by schools);
- new teaching methods;
- e-learning modules;
- knowledge (2) & best practices (2) transfer;
- new quality;
- better cooperation with local authorities;
- to developing new relations with countries from EEA area;
- new academic culture - model for other universities, creating new didactical skills in Philology;
- internationalization (2); developing the internationalization strategies of institutions;
- establishing new directions of cooperation;
- comparing legislation – very important factor in the future development of Educational strategies;
- grounds have been set for future research;
- experience with different methods and technologies
- learning and developing skills
- students and teachers exchange
- research (2) and publishing opportunities;
- networking
- preparing bigger projects
- students involvement in projects
- placement mobilities
- professional development
- bachelor developments
- "Green" life projects
- cultural programs
- differences in academicians
- subjects/project integrated into curricula, transferring the results to similar institutions => impact on the field;
- teaching and evaluation methods for professors (flexible teaching plan, strict evaluation methods, including method's implementation);
- harmonized calendar;

Wider impact:

- sustainability, research initiated and steps towards internationalisation; gradual development in future projects, mutual problem solving & mutual learning between donor & beneficiary states.

Impact on participants

- a major impact on the academic area, contributing to curricula development, widening the spectrum of educational offers, and also contribution to the collaboration between partners, universities and the consolidation of the partnership with the private sectors (including the research and innovation area);
- great impact, at both personal and professional level; research participants hope to continue the cooperating with teachers, creating new teaching materials;
- new contacts; exchange experience; know-how transfer (teaching, learning); cooperation with other institutions;
- new fields of study could be considered as a step forward in ones career;

- new skills;
- learning and applying new things;
- improve language competences;
- teacher training on integrating foreign students: the message is possible. Self confidence for the teachers sending a message to these students is possible, but teachers need self confidence in doing so;
- international networking;
- participants became more practical and flexible;
- working/studying in a foreign country is a major opportunity;
- students became very close to each other;
- participants have developed skills in different fields, thus becoming more independent and self confident;
- students: becoming promoters of international mobility;
- development of Alumni networks;
- win-win situation: opportunities for outgoing/incoming; responses according to the needs;
- maximization of individual potential, openness, safety, own decisions, responsibility

Students: confidence, self-esteem, friendships, openness, cultural awareness, motivation for further studies;

Staff: networks, joint research, new teaching/learning methods, shared activities, ICT Tools, exchange of knowledge, broadening horizons (also for future strategic/political changes)

Motivations

- changing the structure;
- changing of internationalization elements;
- funding;
- increasing the institutional capacity;
- financial motivation;
- access to new laboratories, facilities;
- increasing the trust between partners;
- building networks between partners;
- personal motivation/external motivation;
- learning from the partner experience (they are focused on the process of education, not only on the goals);
- better understanding of others;
- making people see "the big picture";
- improving the culture of learning;
- possibility to continue the work already established; new courses: master on migration, Cider production (Poland, Slovenia);
- unforgettable and priceless experience for students;
- innovation center;
- study – “History of Scandinavia”;
- Another System- of Norway;
- ENT Reports (Latvia Agency);
- new technologies learnt in EEA countries;
- benefits of programmes;
- motivation is high in Latvia and Romania;
- Medicine mobilities undertaken in Norway;
- networking has a high impact and together with knowledge leads to development;
- cooperation between universities and schools “open door”
- increase of competences/skills of math and IT teachers;
- new study materials for teachers;
- change of lifestyle to a more healthy one (driven by motivation and phisycal activities);
- engagement of teachers from secondary school in mobility projects;

- improvement of cooperation within institutions, which leads to better integration;
- cultural understanding;
- wider perspectives;
- comparative approach;
- changes in academic curriculum (adaptation to a new society);
- visibility of academic research results;

Poland

- training for academics for becoming tutors in languages;
- refreshing: to get them out from burn-out state building new relation with students refreshing and updating the relationship between academics and their students
- offering of top quality studies;
- for students: to get something more in one-to-one relation. Quantifying personal relations

Romania

- students lack motivation (Sibiu). Teachers needs to motivate students to go in the mobility;
- internationalization is a demand from ARACIS (the external body in charge with the quality evaluation of HEIs);
- the message is: "It is possible to have a more skill-oriented education"; different paradigm; critical thinking ;
- deep intercultural understanding. "There is no such thing as too much international cooperation";

Slovenia

- to study in an agricultural advanced country and acquire new knowledge. Impact: working with/in better research facilities (eg. probiotics for fish diseases);
- academic development for staff, academic promotion. Reintegration: for the students coming from the mobility; reflecting on the experience;
- NA have researched the new competences gained during the programme: team-work, pro-active behavior, new environment. Need to empower the participants and employers to recognize these new competences;
- the management encourages teachers to participate in mobilities to develop soft skills, to obtain new energy;

Latvia

- sensing students is easy. Personal development of the students - higher profession education in Northern model of economy for teachers: for future activities/research and new didactical skills

Conclusions

- a major improvement in the educational process in the universities, in Romanian students, teachers and other beneficiaries' information and in the quality of learning, work and research.