

PROVIDING COMMON APPROACHES FOR DIFFERENT NEEDS – CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN EUROPEAN PROJECTS

Miguel Santos; Ana Ribeiro; Ana Solange Leal; Pedro Costa

Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação

e-mail: HYPERLINK "mailto:miguelsantos@spi.pt" miguelsantos@spi.pt ; HYPERLINK "mailto:anaribeiro@spi.pt" anaribeiro@spi.pt ; HYPERLINK "mailto:analeal@spi.pt" analeal@spi.pt ; HYPERLINK "mailto:pedrocosta@spi.pt" pedrocosta@spi.pt

Abstract:

The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) of the European Commission aims at fostering interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the Community. Through projects developed within the various LLP sub-programmes, European partners (often organised in consortia) identify and design new solutions to transversal issues, develop innovative tools and transfer best practices. In this process, one of the major challenges is to adjust solutions to the particularities of each country, target group and context. Therefore, when developing an LLP project, several aspects must be observed to ensure adequate common approaches without neglecting specific aspects, such as different languages, stages of development, tools and concepts, local realities, etc. Three LLP projects coordinated by SPI (projects CESSIT, FREE and G8way) illustrate how creativity and innovation are used to provide common approaches to different needs of trainers and jobseekers.

Key words:

Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), education, training, European, partnership, trainers, jobseekers, creativity, innovation, approaches.

Creativity is seen as such relevant and transversal theme in European Policies, as it is regarded as increasingly important in today's society. Considering that fostering of creative skills impacts positively in one's employability, it is important to explore this aspect in educational contexts. Several definitions of creativity have been proposed over the years, each of them seeking to highlight different aspects. A selection of examples of definitions for this term is provided:

According to the European Commission report on “The Impact of Culture on Creativity”, *“Creativity is a positive word in a society constantly aspiring to innovation and «progress»”*[1].

In a more economical perspective, *“Creativity is the production of new ideas that are fit for a particular business purpose. (...) Creativity generates ideas that have the potential to be turned into successful innovation.”*[2].

Additionally, the European Ambassadors for Creativity and Innovation, European Year 2009, express their understanding of creativity competence as *“To be creative means to imagine something that didn't exist before and to look for new solutions and forms”* [3].

It is clear that creativity is linked to aspects such as: generation of ideas, analysis of situations through different perspectives and development of something distinct. In this line, innovation can be the result of creativity which is understood as a crucial aspect for economical and social growth.

Over the years the European Commission seeks to promote innovation through creativity in the educational and training areas by promoting a set of initiatives and opportunities where this theme assumes a high degree of relevance. In this sense it's important to know the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), the biggest European Programme focused on Education and Training, covering the period between 2007-2013.

The LLP programme of the European Commission enables people at all stages of their lives to take part in stimulating learning experiences, as well as helping to develop the education and training sector across Europe. The programme funds a range of actions for individual students and learners, but also for teachers, trainers and all others involved in education and training and is organised in four sub-programmes: Comenius (schools); Erasmus (higher education); Leonardo da Vinci (vocational education and training); Grundtvig (adult education). There are thus projects "transversal" to all levels of education, such as: language learning, ICT, policy co-operation; dissemination and exploitation.

More and more, various organizations at a European level build and strengthen consortia to carry out projects within the different sub-programmes. According to the priorities set out every year by the European Commission, consortium members gather to identify and design new solutions to transversal issues, to develop innovative tools and to transfer best practices. In fact, innovation and creativity are key words of these projects, in the sense that these characteristics are essential to bring European Members states at the level set out in the Lisbon Strategy of being a knowledge based economy.

Both in the stages of proposal development and project implementation, one of the main challenges faced by LLP participants is to ensure the adequate balance between a common European approach and the need to respond to the specific needs of each country, target group and context. The initial stage of each project, usually dedicated to the needs

assessment or to the characterisation of the state of the art of the theme envisaged among the participating countries, shows this very clearly: on one hand, there is clearly an “European issue” to be addressed (e.g. need to qualify trainers in a certain area, ageing society, migration, transitions, etc.) but on the other hand, each situation might have very different characteristics in each country (e.g. different national legislation, different public perception, different level of supporting tools, etc.).

Therefore, when carrying an LLP project, several aspects must be observed to ensure adequate common approaches without neglecting specific aspects. It is certainly not enough to provide translations of the products developed to different languages – one must consider all aspects that might influence the access and the acceptance of target groups regarding each project. It is not unusual to have, within the same project, different tools and technologies for each group and/or country, different vocabulary, different requirements and different levels of participation. This challenging balance demands for creative and innovative solutions to address common problems.

In this context, many LLP projects not only include creativity and innovation as main tools for problem solving, but also aim to develop these characteristics among students, trainees, teachers and trainers all over Europe.

Generally one can say that the LLP projects have a common structure. There is always a common “problem” with a European dimension to address too that is the reason for a consortia to come together in a pilot project aimed at developing a new solution or to adapt a given result to different realities or target groups.

The first stage of the project development is in fact a needs analysis (or characterization of the state of the art) conducted in the partners countries aimed at define the real needs of the target groups as well as the main characteristics of the final project result (a training course, an handbook, an interactive tool, a given methodology, etc.). The needs analysis might involve several activities and will lead to a report with the main guidelines for the project development.

After this first stage, the consortia will develop a pilot version of what is meant to be the project result. Very different activities might be conduct at this point. If a training course is the final result, in this stage partners might have to: develop a course structure, the learning contents, the evaluation methodology, etc, accordingly to the needs analysis report conclusions and specification. Note that sometimes, if the LLP project is a transfer of innovation one, the process must involve adaptation of existing contents and development of new ones, both at the same time. Additionally, it’s relevant to point out that when the result of the project is, for example, a interactive tool, an interim stage must be perform, where technical and pedagogical aspects must be defined and analysed.

After the completion of the development stage, a draft version will be ready and the consortia will conduct a test phase with representatives of the target groups. The aim of this stage is to test and validate the draft product and to identify a sort of improvements and modifications to be implemented in the final version of the project result. It's a crucial moment in the overall project development where the acceptance of the results will be tested upon the real needs and expectations of the target groups. Even if not compulsory this stage is one of the most important in the development of a pilot project, so partners shall make all efforts to implement it.

After the test and validation phase, and based on its conclusions, there is a final stage of implementation of the improvements and production of the final project products.

In the framework of the LLP pilot projects there are a set of transversal stages, necessary to the management of the project and of the consortia, but also important for the quality of the results and also to generate awareness and exploit the project results and achievements: Project Management, Dissemination and Exploitation and Quality and Evaluation, are usually project phases that have the exact duration of the all project (24 months) and involve relevant activities that should be planned from the beginning and implemented on a regular basis. Project Management aims at ensure an efficient administrative, financial and strategic management in cooperation with the partners. Dissemination and exploitation aims at elaborate and implement a strong and coherent dissemination and exploitation strategy that will generate awareness to the project, project activities and project results and foster the exploitation of the results to future multipliers. Quality and Evaluation, covering the all project duration has two main dimensions: internally it aims to guarantee the efficient implementation of the work plan; externally it aims to guarantee the evaluation of the quality of the results and events of the project.

Three LLP projects coordinated by SPI (projects CESSIT, FREE and G8WAY) illustrate how creativity and innovation are used to provide common approaches to different needs of trainers, jobseekers and other educational agents.

1 - CESSIT – Creativity and Entrepreneurship Seeds for Social Inclusion Trainers (www.spi.pt/cessit), a 2 year-long project, funded by sub-programme Grundtvig under the Lifelong Learning Program, aims at providing educators and training managers with the necessary tools to develop these aspects among early school leavers (ESL), by helping educators to improve their pedagogical approaches and to increase adult training attractiveness and effectiveness. Coming together as a European partnership, this project is in its final stage and is the result of a joint consortia of 7 organizations from different European countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland. The partnership has been conducting a number of tasks according to a defined and clear methodology making sure that educators and ESL are actively involved in this

project by providing their personal and professional perspective on how such skills can be fostered.

The partnership has established a set of specific objectives which have resulted in relevant outcomes for adult educators:

- to assess the actual needs of adult educators dealing with ESL - The involvement of the target-groups was without question very important in order to bring a realistic vision to construct a competency model for educators and a general description of ESL. This process was based on interviews and questionnaires applied to 188 educators that work with ESL and 199 early school leavers. The main findings of this survey were gathered in a final report [4];
- to identify training techniques and methods used by educators that has been successful to help their learners to develop new competences (namely, creativity skills). A set of good practices methods and techniques for fostering creativity and entrepreneurship skills [5] were also gathered under the CESSIT project, making sure that such practices are widely available and used and ensuring that characteristics such as critical thinking, becoming a less rigid thinker, managing critique or how to communicate effectively, which are inseparable of the mentioned skills, are passed on;
- to promote practical workshops at national level for educators exchange experiences and to discuss the impact of creativity and entrepreneurship aspects on training and competences development. Partners implemented workshops at national level providing training to over 220 educators and training managers that work with ESL. Feedback from participants showed that the workshops are an effective way to guarantee a long-term effect of what this project aims for and that is important to establish a system of continuous education for teachers / trainers, with emphasis on personal development, new knowledge, and teaching methods; or to keep up to date with professional developments in the field (theory presented at school often lags behind what is happening in practice already).
- to provide a tool to adult educators and training managers which support them in developing transversal competencies such as creativity and an entrepreneurial spirit and having them more aware of the importance of these competences: The Guidebook for Adult Trainers and Managers [6].

By showing educators the tools available for increasing creativity skills in learning contexts, the CESSIT consortium is willing to contribute for a more attractive and motivating lifelong learning initiatives, in general, and those addressed to vulnerable groups, such ESL, in particular.

2 – FREE (Fostering Return to Employment through Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Creativity) is a Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation project. Started in October 2009 will end in September 2011 the project counts with partners representing Portugal, Spain, Czech Republic, Greece and United Kingdom,

The project is aimed at providing an interactive tool to be used by those who work with the unemployed willing to create their own job, such as counsellors, tutors, trainers and other professionals, allowing them to gain not only hard skills in the areas of entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity, but also new soft skills, such as those required to support individuals who want to start a business.

By improving skills in these key areas, counsellors, tutors and trainers will be able to provide better support to those who are unemployed and wanting to reintegrate into the labour market by starting a new business.

The FREE Interactive Tool is more than a pedagogical resource covering innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity; it is practically focused through the provision of training materials, case studies and interactive exercises on helping counsellors, tutors and trainers provide improved guidance to unemployed people.

As such, in this tool users will find not only training courses, which will help them to assist the entrepreneurs in developing a business plan or creating a business network, but also relevant exercises and tips, which will teach them to apply everything that was learnt in their daily work with potential entrepreneurs. The areas in which the professionals can improve their competences are: Innovation and Creativity; Hard Skills; Soft Skills; Case studies; Programmes and Initiatives.

The section Innovation and Creativity aims to train counsellors on how to develop creative and innovative thinking competences in the unemployed individuals they advise. The objective of this section is that after completion counsellors will have a better understanding of what 'Innovation' and 'Creativity' are, how they can be identified; their importance for entrepreneurship; and where to find more information, such as tools, events and organisations.

The section of Hard Skills aims to provide counsellors with all the essential information needed to assess and evaluate whether a person has the functional skills required to start and develop a business. The second part of this section provides information and tools for counsellors to help clients lacking these 'hard' skills to acquire and nurture them.

The section Soft Skills aims to help the counsellors, who deal with entrepreneurs every day, to assess the soft skills of a person. The section describes in detail what soft skills are and how soft skills can be used to foster entrepreneurship. Soft skills are highly individual

and can be difficult to categorise at such, thus this section is meant as an overview of the most common soft skills and how counsellors can identify these in people.

The section Programmes and Initiatives it is possible for counsellors to find further information about programmes, initiatives and institutions that support entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs.

The section Case Studies provides inspiring case studies from all the partners' countries, which aim to provide real life entrepreneurs that succeed in creating their own business. The case studies vary within business area and profile of the entrepreneurship, in order to show that entrepreneurship can indeed be many different things.

3 - G8WAY ("gateway") to Educational Transition is a Grundtvig project that aims to support young people's learning processes during transitions, focusing on 2 transition periods: from school to work and from higher education to work. Special attention is given to the potential of web 2.0 for managing these transitions. This 2-year project with partners representing Portugal, Germany, Greece Italy, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom shows how creative and innovative tools can be developed at European level to support specific issues: partners developed an online tool ([HYPERLINK "http://www.g8way.eu/"](http://www.g8way.eu/) <http://www.g8way.eu/>) based on web 2.0 to provide the target groups an environment that allows them to develop the competencies needed for their transition periods. The G8Way tool has a main interface with a description of the common approach, outcomes and areas and then, within each area, different competences and tools are provided, according to the needs of the different users. The four areas are: information, knowledge sharing, competency management and mentoring. G8WAY provides a flexible solution that brings together the benefits of the internet and of potential interactions between European youngsters, but does not neglect the specificities of each transition.



REFERENCES

- [1] European Commission, Directorate-General Education and Cultural (2009), The Impact of Culture on Creativity. http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/study_impact_cult_creativity_06_09.pdf.
- [2] Pryce (2005), Creativity, Design and Business Performance. DTI economics paper No. 15. November 2005. p.iv.
- [3] Acosta, Aho, Brandeburg, Courtois, de Bono, Keersmaecker, Ďurovčik, Florida, Händler, Holý, Koolhaas, Kumar, Langevin, Levi-Montalcini, Losonczi, Lundvall, Mariscal, Mihăileanu, Moura, Říhová, Robinson, Rubik, Savall i Bernadet, Spiekermann, Starck, van Broeckhoven, van Broeckhoven (2009), Manifesto from European Ambassadors for Creativity and Innovation, available at [HYPERLINK "http://create2009.europa.eu/fileadmin/Content/Downloads/PDF/Manifesto/manifesto.en.pdf"](http://create2009.europa.eu/fileadmin/Content/Downloads/PDF/Manifesto/manifesto.en.pdf) <http://create2009.europa.eu/fileadmin/Content/Downloads/PDF/Manifesto/manifesto.en.pdf> .
- [4] Aguiar, Balcar, Bondolfi, Gonzalez, Havlena, Kaštan, kampf, Kidney, Leal, Mikisko, Modrzejewska, Monteiro, Reiter, Santos and Tinturier (2010), CESSIT Project, Need Analysis Report: No More Early School Leavers.
- [5] Aguiar, Balcar, Bondolfi, Gonzalez, Havlena, Kaštan, kampf, Kidney, Leal, Mikisko, Modrzejewska, Monteiro, Reiter, Santos and Tinturier (2010), CESSIT Project, Good Practice Handbook.
- [6] Aguiar, Balcar, Bondolfi, Gonzalez, Havlena, Kaštan, kampf, Kidney, Leal, Mikisko, Modrzejewska, Monteiro, Reiter, Santos and Tinturier (2011), CESSIT Project, Guidebook for Adult Trainers and Managers.