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TRANSFER OF INNOVATION

Sustainability of European Cooperation Projects in VET

Check list for Project Designers

Introduction

The implementation of European cooperation projects should lead to generating added-value in vocational education and training in Europe. In order to achieve this, the benefit that the project results offer should be sustainable. Sustainability may not concern all the aspects of a project. In each project some activities or results may be maintained, while others may not be possible or necessary to maintain. Sustainability means that **crucial** activities and results of the project are maintained and continue to deliver benefits to the target group, structure, sector or system **after** the end of the EU funding. Ideally, the sustainability of a project should also generate impact, meaning direct or indirect long-term effects on actors, structures, sectors or systems **beyond** the original project environment.

Factors that support and favour sustainability, and even impact, are the following:

Project level factors:

- Quality of project design meeting the needs of target group/s and/or sector/s
- Involvement of partners: sense of ownership and motivation
- Effective management and leadership
- Active participation of the target group/s and/or sector/s
- Capacity for securing adequate resources for continuation

Context level factors:

- Institutional support
- Public authority and political support
- Socio-economic support

This check list provides project designers with guidance on what to take into account and to do to support the sustainability of their proposals.

The following check list is structured (1) around conclusions from a European Commission study on the sustainability of international cooperation projects¹, and (2) practical recommendations how to ensure, factor by factor, the sustainability of project activities and results.

¹ "Sustainability of international cooperation projects in the field of higher education and vocational training", November 2006, European Commission, Directorate-General Education and Culture:
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/tools/publications_en.php

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| Project-level factors |
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| 1. Quality of project design meeting the needs of target group/s and/or sector/s | | |
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| Conclusions | Recommendations | Check |
| C1.1. Proposals matching clearly identified needs are more likely to attract target group/s and end user/s, socio-economic actors and the labour market respectively funding and support after the end of EU funding. | Undertake an in-depth assessment of the needs of the target groups (research analysis) in order to match existing or future requirements more satisfactorily. Ensure to anchor your proposal in key future issues of reform in your institution or country (see also C8.1). | |
| | In case you will review and modernise a learning programme, analyse long-term labour market trends in order to estimate the potential beneficiaries in the coming years and argue on the future relevance of learning content (cutting-edge knowledge), and attractiveness of the programme (professional or international recognition). | |
| | Sustainability issues must receive more attention in case of more far-reaching proposals such as setting up completely new courses, systems or solutions, that involve more than reforming or extending existing solutions / practices. | |
| | Develop links to the labour market (to business and/or to public authorities depending on your proposal). | |
| C1.2. The proposals that present a high level of innovation for the "importing" partner country require closer examination of for example accreditation procedures or existing quality standards. | Where possible, embed innovative training materials/practices within existing accredited programmes or in line with the evolution of accreditation criteria. | |
| C1.3. Provision to ensure the high level of quality of the proposal for all "importing" partners is a key factor of sustainability. | Plan the application of appropriate tools and practices for quality assurance in the project (continuous quality evaluation, peer reviews, benchmarking activities...). | |

| 2. Involvement of consortium partners: sense of ownership and motivation | | |
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| Conclusions | Recommendations | Check |
| C2.1. The individual involvement of the consortium partners is one of the most crucial factors of sustainability; it may counterbalance a lack of institutional support (see C6.1). | Analyse the sources of the consortium partners' motivation, their capacities and develop a shared interest based on mutual benefits for all the partners. | |
| | Make sure that there is a good match between the aims and results of your project application and the expertise and “authority” of the partners in the consortium. Be sure to involve the right decision makers and/or competent institutions and give them a fitting role as a (strategic) partner or silent partner. | |
| C2.2. Provisions for a maintained and continuous commitment of all the consortium partners are important factors for ensuring sustainability: “commitment is necessary, enthusiasm is not sufficient”. | Try to create a shared interest based on mutual benefits regarding future outcomes. | |
| | Foresee a participative management with clear decision-making procedures and regular reporting (e.g. regular meetings). | |
| C2.3. The experience of cooperation amongst the consortium partners is a factor of sustainability. | Highlight existing cooperation relationships between consortium partners. | |
| | If possible, define a consortium around a limited number of partners who have already worked together (possibly also in other than EU projects). | |
| | If possible, involve European partners who already know the other partner countries or are really willing to discover them. | |
| C2.4. The particular importance of a precise definition of the roles within the consortium is evident. | Draw up an organisational chart of consortium partners, depicting their capacities, roles and contributions. (tasks) | |
| C2.5. Respecting the others’ values is particularly important: the lack of mutual consideration between the partners can hinder sustainability. | Keep you partners informed on, and involve your partners in, the planning of the project and consult them regularly. | |

| 3. Effective management and leadership | | |
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| Conclusions | Recommendations | Check |
| C3.1. Effective management can favour the involvement of partners, fundraising and the capacity to anticipate sustainability issues. Experienced project managers can ensure this. | Be sure that there is at least one coordinator experienced in international projects in the consortium. | |
| C3.2. Sustainability can be linked to the fact that the project leadership combines institutional influence and professional interest. | It is important to involve the most influential persons in the own and in the partner organisations as well as the most active ones. | |
| | Ensure that project coordinators are formally accountable and that the roles and responsibilities of the consortium partners are clear (see C2.4). | |
| | Ensure that all consortium partner organisations integrate the involvement of their project coordinators into their professional assignments and that that is compatible with their other tasks and overall workload. | |
| C3.3. The proposal is potentially sustainable if it fits the career aspiration of the project leaders in the partner organisations | Be attentive to the personal interest of project leaders in the success and the sustainability of the project (integration of project activities in their professional tasks and responsibilities). | |

| 4. Active participation of target group/s and or sector/s | | |
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| Conclusions | Recommendations | Check |
| C4.1. The help of target groups and end-users on the project activities can be useful. | Plan the <u>formal</u> involvement of target groups and end-users in the project activities through sector or professional associations or social partners | |
| | Use risk analysis to identify any obstacles to target group and end-user participation (linguistic, financial and cultural gaps) and plan possible remedies. | |
| 5. Capacity for securing adequate resources for continuation | | |
| Conclusions | Recommendations | Check |
| C5.1. In most proposals, the continued financing of project activities after EU funding has not been foreseen, even when only a part of the activities continue and need adequate resources. Securing continued financing is linked to institutional support (see below C6.1). Some projects have found interesting solutions by mixing different sources of financing: public, private and international. | During the project design phase identify precisely which activities are going to be sustainable and their costs and anticipate continued financing since the beginning of the project. | |
| | Actively lobby your own organisation to secure the main resources and do your best to create an autonomous entity in charge of implementing the proposal. | |
| | Identify beforehand precisely which actors (private, public) could help you to finance the relevant project activities after the EU funding and try to obtain some kind of formal agreement for future support. | |
| C5.2. The sustainability of projects is linked to continued international cooperation where direct relations and exchanges are maintained. | Foresee various other (than EU support) opportunities to maintain the cooperation with your partners. | |

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| Context-level factors |
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| 6. Institutional support | | |
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| Conclusions | Recommendations | Check |
| C6.1. An important factor for sustainability is if the proposal is supported by the hierarchies of the partner organisations because this is a precondition for later financial commitments (see C5.1 above) | Actively seek the support of the hierarchies of the partner organisations by demonstrating how the project proposal could add value to their development strategies. | |
| | Already in the planning phase seek commitment for regular (not continuous) involvement of the hierarchies in the project (in the steering committee or in national networking or spin off meetings, for example). | |
| | Identify precisely the types of activity that can benefit from support (material, financial and human) and obtain formal commitment regarding resource allocation. | |
| C6.2. Existing cooperation with partners is an advantage for institutional support (see also C2.3, C5.2 and C7.4). | Identify existing cooperation relationships between consortium partners. | |
| 7. Public Authority and Political support | | |
| Conclusions | Recommendations | Check |
| C.8.1 Political support and support by the authorities or authorised or professional bodies is a key factor for the sustainability of project results. It is important to find the right level of support: local, regional, national or professional organisations. | Identify precisely the right level of support and try to obtain (formal) commitments already in the planning phase. | |

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| C.8.2 | Political support and support by the authorities or authorised or professional bodies can be favoured by direct links between the project team and them. | Try to establish personal contact with influential players in ministries, parliament, regional/local authorities and key education and training organisations (e.g. accreditation bodies, national umbrella organisations) and actively lobby for your proposal. | |
| C.8.3 | For proposals aiming at review/modernisation of learning programmes: support by the relevant authorities or by accreditation/certifying bodies in the countries of the partners is a key factor | Already during the planning phase establish relevant contacts for future accreditation or recognition. | |
| C.8.4 | Integration in existing <u>national and international</u> networks and associations is important. | Establish contacts between consortium partners and national and international networks already in the planning phase. | |
| 8. Socio-economic support | | | |
| Conclusions | | Recommendations | Check |
| C8.1. | Depending on each project and context projects can be relevant to the local socio-economic communities around the project partners. The more a proposal corresponds to socio-economic needs, the more it will be able to obtain support from local actors. | Check that your proposal really corresponds to the socio-economic needs by implementing a needs analysis (see also C.1.1). | |
| | | If relevant for your proposal, try to obtain support from local (private or public) actors to ensure sustainability (see C5.1). | |
| | | Identify cultural gaps or economic impediments to socio-economic support in order to facilitate active lobbying once the project is implemented. | |
| C8.2. | Integration in existing <u>local and regional</u> networks and associations is important. | Establish contacts between consortium partners and local and regional networks in the planning phase. | |