

e-CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC GUIDES: A SUCCESS STORY, PRODUCT OF A SWOT ANALYSIS ON STUDENT MOBILITY PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Among the weak points identified through a 10-year experience on mobility projects, were activities necessary for the preparation of students into the “environment” of the receiving Enterprises (practical training). The necessary preparation focuses in two different areas: cultural and linguistic.

A global and integrated activity for the above preparation was not feasible, mainly for financial reasons, time-schedule, level of existing knowledge and certified teachers/centers, capable of providing a similar training. Edition of Guides containing information on: geography, art and cultural heritage, education, development and finance and other useful information for each country, proved to be a successful tool to overcome the above problems. Twenty- three of these guides were developed diachronically and financed by the LdV programs. Moreover, dissemination actions added a European value not only to students-scholars of LdV projects, but also to other movers coming from Greek Universities and Training Organizations, financed also by LLP Programs.

INTRODUCTION

The T.E.I. of Athens has a ten year experience on mobility projects within the framework of these mobility projects more than 1.000 students and young graduates have been placed in over 200 enterprises throughout Europe. With the

programmes dealing with the Leonardo da Vinci placements network of Universities and Enterprises has been created in the European Union and has been evaluated as a high quality entrepreneurship tool. A difficult problem was the smooth development and preparation of Linguistic and Cultural qualifications for the scholars willing to participate to the above programmes. This problem was overcome with the edition of a series of e-Cultural and Linguistic Guides given to the beneficiaries for the host countries.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In order to identify the success factors for a quality development of students/graduates placements the method of the SWOT Analysis was used. Within the framework of SWOT Analysis the following parameters have been examined and evaluated:

A. Strengths

Among the strong factors identified throughout the implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci projects are the following:

- Strong European Environment
- Development of a reliable Network (home-abroad)
- Academic recognition of the practical training
- Extra support (residence, food etc.) from host enterprises
- Implementation of quality management philosophy and systems

B. Weaknesses

Among the weak factors identified throughout the implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci projects are the following:

- Different structures established in each country (bureaucracy in enterprises)
- Lack of sufficient financial support (avoid expensive cities)
- Persons not willing to provide continuous support to the students, in some Institutions (Departments)
- Deficiencies on surveillance on SMEs
- Insufficient language communication in very small Enterprises, in some EU countries

C. Opportunities

Among the opportunities factors identified throughout the implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci projects are the following:

- European dimension / added value on studies

- Knowledge of the European Labor Market
- Cross-country collaboration between Industry and University (research projects, technology transfer)
- “fermentation” of new projects (transfer of technology and expertise *via* beneficiaries, 3/6 of PT period)
- Improvement of language and cultural competencies
- Job opportunities in EU countries (potential employees)

D. Threats

Among the threat factors identified throughout the implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci projects are the following:

- Economic barriers in living in expensive cities/countries
- Lack of interest of the training subject
- Poor communication outside the Company
- “Home – sickness”, sensitive students
- Not a very friendly environment in the host Enterprise
- Insufficient knowledge of the foreign language and the culture of the country (for a qualitative “reception-acceptance” of the trainee)

E. Critical Success Factors

Among the Critical Success Factors identified throughout the implementation of the Leonardo da Vinci projects are the following:

- Human resources (academics, administrators) committed to support students and inspired with the LdV philosophy
- Win-win situation for all three : students – institutions – companies
- Clear understanding of mission
- Flexible administration at four levels (National Agency, Coordinating Institution, Sending Institution, Host Enterprises)
- Flexible and adaptable structures (office, telephone, internet, fax, PC and relevant facilities)
- Exciting subject of practical training
- Close supervision and on-going evaluation (interim/final reports, EUROPASS)
- Reliable NETWORK

RESULTS

Since the Cultural and Linguistic preparation of the scholar has been evaluated as a major issue which was also feasible to be developed within the coordinating Institution (T.E.I. of Athens), the edition of Guides containing information on:

geography, art and cultural heritage, education, development and finance and other useful information for each country, proved to be a successful tool to overcome the above problems.

CONCLUSIONS

Within this activity twenty three (23) Cultural and Linguistic Guides have been developed for the following Countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey.

These guides be offered to all LLP movers coming from Greek Universities and Training Organizations and provide information for the Cultural and language spoken to each country.

REFERENCES

- Approved LLP/Leonardo da Vinci Mobility programmes by the National Agency with reference numbers: EL/2006/PL/213, EL/2006/PL/214, LLP/LDV/PLM/2007/EL-201
- Reports of the students