



Public Report on the 2nd Discussion Event for Policy Makers

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1. Quantitative description of the 2nd Discussion Event for Policy Makers

Date: 18-21 March 2013

Location: Amsterdam

Target: Policy makers

Participants: 4

Mode of the discussion event: in-depth interviews

Topics: dissemination strategies, previous experiences, dissemination obstacles and barriers

Interviews were conducted during the Conference of the INSTEM project. The conference was held in Amsterdam from 18 to 21 March 2013. INSTEM, a Comenius 3 years project, is a network of coordinators of European (FP 7 and LLP) educational projects and it aims to set up sustainable structures at European and national level, involving policy makers, researchers and practitioners, in order to enhance science and mathematics teaching. One of the topics covered in the conference focused on strategies for the dissemination of the results of European projects. The interviews were administered, separately, to four people with extensive experience in the management of national and international projects:

- Tricia Jenkins, Director of international Centre Excellence of Education at Liverpool University, Principal Investigator of several European projects, UK
- Dan Sporea, Director of Centre for Science Education and Training of Bucarest, Romania
- Francesca Magrefi, Project Manager of Amitié University-Enterprise Training Partnership, Bologna, Italy
- Christa Juen-Kretschmer, College of Education –Tyrol, Innsbruck, Austria

Each interview was organized by addressing three topics:

- dissemination strategies and how can we improve dissemination of results from STEM projects to target groups;
- references to previous experiences on methods, tools and technologies for the dissemination activities;
- obstacles, barriers and policies that limit the dissemination of results and best practices.

The views expressed are briefly given below.

2. Qualitative description of the 2nd Discussion Event for Policy Makers

2.1 Successful strategies

“We live in a global connectivity, identify effective strategies is crucial: think about the Obama campaign for the presidential elections in the U.S.... But to be honest we do not know what is the best strategy to disseminate the results of our projects. However we know that some ingredients are essential. “

There is a need to study in detail the context. We have to see what tools are most effective in that particular context. Educational systems are part of the culture and society. Contexts can be very different: to reach people, organizations and institutions we need to understand what are their needs and how the relationships between them are developed. Dissemination is actually a process of transformation. Individuals, organizations and institutions are invited to change perspectives and behaviors. To achieve this goal is necessary to stimulate and interact, not only promote and we have to look at existing media and tools

2.2 Respondents' previous experiences

In our experience is important to understand what we want. When the project ends we discover that the outcomes are different from those indicated in the proposal and dissemination need to be revised in the light of the processes involved and the results obtained. It's very clear we want promote collaboration and not only cooperation. Collaboration is co-creation (sharing understanding), cooperation is aggregation. Cooperate could mean put together, it can mean aggregate without necessarily creating new things together. Then play a key role responsibility. In our experience in the dissemination process, which is a process of transformation, it is important to identify the responsibilities and roles of the individuals who interact. It's like a contract and must be clear that we must take charge of the effects of changes in demonstrating that we have a plan to help individuals and institutions in the process of change.

In our experience in Romania dissemination produces good results. We provide teachers with materials produced in various STEM projects through the web platform, which is much visited. The activities are monitored and teachers who were engaged are also supported with training activities. In particular, it seems greatly appreciated by teachers the opportunity to review the teaching, interacting with researchers and other teachers, abandoning routine activities.

In our experience in Tyrol, in the involvement of teachers in a national program of innovation in mathematics education, has become clear that it is necessary to involve many teachers from the same school. We need a critical mass in the same school and you need to have on your side the head of the school if you want to promote the dissemination and maintenance of innovation.

The update of the material in web platforms we use in dissemination activities is fundamental in our experience. People need to know that information are updated and that they can find resources not envisaged. The material must be opened and stimulate as much as possible the creation of new material that adapts to the specific environment.

2.3 Major obstacles

Beginning teachers are reluctant and resistant to change, for example by stating that they have little time to experiment first on their own proposals for innovation that we present. Often this time necessary to the design of the educational activities is not acknowledged.

In some situations, teachers are pressured by parents who demand that the entire program is developed rather than improving significant parts of teaching.

In some countries teachers are exposed to a large amount of educational proposals without having the opportunity to frame the proposals in a coherent and convincing plan of innovation.

Sometimes school inspectors, policy makers and researchers propose changes without involving the teachers on the evaluation of activities and projects carried out previously. Then sometimes, policy makers and researchers disappear when the project ends.

The biggest obstacle is fear of change. The changes require fatigue and people tend to defend themselves defending that daily make for a long time. This fear is also fueled by a lack of responsibility and thus educational policies and communities play an important role.

Moreover, the lack of accountability at the European level is visible in the lack of synergy in collecting and linking educational projects in STEM.