

MANAGEMENT OF EU PROJECTS (writing, coordinating, reporting). A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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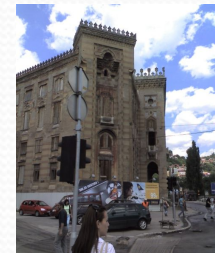


How a Professor gets involved in International Cooperation and Project Management?

It is the result of a set of events, coincidences, desires and interests. Nobody is born for this. The know-how is something that is learned the hard way during years

You have to ask yourself:

- Are you ready to travel and meet new cultures?
- Travel to places which are not usually tourist destinations and to where otherwise you would not go?
- Feel yourself useful or increase your ego maybe?
- Test yourself, sometimes nearly to the limit?





Demystifying International Cooperation:



-Logistics

- Many hours of dedication in silence and many angry moments.
- At 5 o'clock in the morning you have to send an urgent email to a partner when you realise that there is some documentation missing. Or your partners request urgently a report for its Minister of Education without which the project will be stopped.
- You have to be patient, sometimes very patient. Sometimes you have to repeat instructions many times. Developing countries are called such for a reason.
- You have to be careful and manage and go around some injustices or things you disagree with. You learn diplomacy in practice. Detained at a border, not allowed to visit a Rector anyone?
- Many times going to some countries is a sort of flash-back

Preparation of Projects



- Everything starts with an idea... it can be the development of a set of courses, a Masters Degree, or a full Degree; reorganisation of a university service or a more ambitious plan targeting a whole country. With Erasmus+ the options are greater than with Tempus.
- The type of Project chosen directly impacts the type of management. It is not the same to deal with HEIs as with Ministries or stakeholders.



Preparation of Projects

- Choice of the Partners

- It is one of the most important things for management because it is like marriage. They accompany you during the whole life of the project.

- It is better not to have preconceived ideas based on nationality. Stereotypes are sometimes misleading.

- Before inviting partners, it is a good idea to do some research and ask colleagues for references, as well as to Erasmus+ National Offices. Even to work in other smaller programmes before.

- In general it is not recommended to accept proposals in the last hour without first knowing the prospective partner.

- During the process of drafting the application one can learn about the prospective partner.

- Sometimes it is good to repeat partners and mix them with new ones.



Preparation of Projects

- Characters that show up in International Cooperation projects (beneficiary point of view)
 - In general there are huge differences between interests and commitment
 - Sometimes it is better for individuals to keep a low profile and not to attract too much attention
 - Many times there is lack of trust that has to be addressed
 - HEI also have internal balances of power that one has to spot soon and reckon with
 - To be avoided:
 - The Ancien-régime type
 - The what-about-my-staff-cost-invoice? (sub-species: traveler / tourist / dunkin fellow)
 - The non-university profit project

For an efficient management it is essential to channel everything through one single contact person in each institution



Preparation of Projects



- **Selection of Projects**

- -In the process of selection of projects, the description of the mechanisms of management and coordination and the distribution of tasks (horizontal coordination, project ownership...) are each time considered more important.
- -One has to show that all partners are equal in relative terms and that democracy is the rule of management. One should also show conspicuously that there are well established mechanisms of resolution of conflicts. Appropriate means of communication are also necessary for an efficient management.

- From former Tempus IV: you get 20/100 points:

The partnership includes all the skills, recognised expertise and competences required to carry out all aspects of the work programme (both technical expertise and experience in project management);

There is a suitable distribution of tasks across the partners in consistency with the required expertise and balanced involvement of partners in the activities to be carried out;

Effective measures have been planned to ensure efficient communication and cooperation;

he applicant and partners have sufficient staff, equipment and other resources to handle and manage the project and its budget. Projects in which management and coordination activities are not carried out by the academic partners will be negatively marked.

- In practice, each project needs a coordinator that carries out the management activities, as well as an active contact person who is well placed in each partner institution.

Cultural differences



- In itself, cultural differences are a friend to the project, not a foe. One has to be very careful when managing these differences (e.g. Time to answer and react. (e.g. Central Asia civilizations are very refined and more hierarchical, they respect elderly people more etc)).
- From the point of view of the EU institutions, staff has to make an effort to put themselves in the position of the staff of the beneficiary institutions, but is a necessary effort to undertake.
- It is a good idea to observe behaviours and patterns and try to accomodate from the very first time. (When in Rome...)
- Nobody is superior. Yet the EU institutions, and specially the coordinating institution, is the final responsible if fair execution is not achieved.
- One has to prepare experts before their missions and provide them with information on what they should expect upon arrival.

Coordination and Administration of Projects

- The managing bodies of an average project are the following:
- 1) Steering Committee
- 2) Coordinator
- 3) Administrator
- 4) Contact Person in each Institution
- 5) External evaluators & benchmarking



The Coordination of the Project

- A project needs coordination.
- Daily coordination is necessary.
- The Coordinator has to impulse the Workplan. However, each WP coordinator cannot skip their role. Each WP coordinator is in charge of their deliverables under the LFM.
- The Coordinator evaluates progress every four -six months and reports to the Steering Committee.
- The Steering Committee is responsible for assessing execution and taking strategic decisions.
- The Administration is the person in charge of budget. He has to be independent from the Coordinator.



Staff selection for missions

- Careful staff selection on both sides is the key difference between a good project and a bad project.
- US chooses its participating staff taking into account professional merits. In general, people are willing to travel and engage in EU projects.
- US does honor selection of trainees and visitors chosen by our beneficiary institutions. Yet, to avoid or minimise characters described before, there are some limitations.
- International Cooperation is a two-way action. It has a positive effect in the beneficiary country, but at the same time it has a positive impact in the HEI of the organising country (e.g. Town Hall of Sevilla and Cuba). In my experience positive impact is higher in staff than in professors.
- There are many different practices in how to choose staff. But there are some basic rules (age, CV, professional interests and /or position).



Distance and the Execution of Activities



- Distance is still a major problem in many aspects of project execution.
- -First, in general, for communication. For that reason, one has to take advantage of every meeting of partners to turn it partially into a coordinating meeting.
- -Then, also for specific tasks, such as e.g. Choosing an academy to do a language training , inspecting equipment purchasing, verifying execution of activities.
- In the new Erasmus+ unit costs the problem has increased as you cannot come up with extra trips for emergency situations as if e.g. these trips are not scheduled they are probably not being considered eligible.
- One has to take into account that infrastructures in many countries are not good.
- Management tools. At US we have used different intranet platforms . Recently we have moved from Ning into Teamwork. It is important to stick to a protocol of communications.

Cooperation from within your University and Reporting

- It is essential to find support from your International Office, specially with the degree of complexity of the next Erasmus +.
- Within the International Office you need to set up or refine a specific unit devoted to administrative support for ongoing projects and proposals. Some externalisation is ok, but one cannot lose control.
- Finally, the University has to support you in the reporting process.