

EQUAL: VIRTUAL LEARNING SAUNA NETWORK

End user Requirements, Thematic Group

Final report

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The permanent members represent each of the involved project and countries except of Tampere, Finland (associated partner) and we have met regularly.

Aims & Objectives

The agreement identified the following:

Name of the activity	Description
1. End User Requirements [research]	Share methodologies and results of such methodologies Organise workshops/seminars Exchange of information/research and good practice regarding ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers Conference to disseminate Produce reports On-line learning cluster Home page linked to workgroups

Problems to be solved :

- Methodologies in working with the target groups and also to collect data about obstacles and best practice in end user requirements of our target groups. [content, management, rules, systems, evaluation tools, client evaluation, self evaluation, social added value etc.]
- Learning concepts; Open and flexible lifelong learning, Alternative learning, Learning customised for target groups, Client orientated.
- Validation

Goals :

This network has agreed to work together to benefit from the following activities in End user requirements:

Transnational exchange of experiences, benchmarking and comparison of methodologies, rules and systems and share of good practice. The partners will benefit from synergies resulting from good work.

Access different approaches / solutions to the same problem.

Work across countries to pilot and test new ideas and new tools

Opportunity to influence policy makers

Networking for future collaboration

Equal opportunities for all adults in life long learning - Empowerment and equality for our target groups.

What do we need to do?

1. Research and evaluate methodologies for making clear what prevent adults to participate in higher education and learning opportunities. To focus on visualizing obstacles which marginalise our target groups within societies and on working places, particularly people with changing identities and from diverse cultures
2. Share experiences, benchmark and compare our national results and observations and also our best practice in our transnational partnership
3. Encourage and support joint working between projects from our partnership, where there are common themes. Write reports, publish our results on the homepage and e.g. in leaflets, and influence politicians and decision makers to set aside and change rules to support our target groups in their life long learning.

What do we need to produce?

- A description from individual projects about obstacles that prevent our target groups from further education as well as good practice in supporting open and flexible learning/higher education for them.
- Analysis of the obstacles visualizing the most necessary end user requirements within our countries, to identify what has to be changed to open up for higher education for all, it could e.g. be necessary to change actual rules and develop new support systems.
- A report with a summary of end users requirements that are necessary to change before our target groups will be able to become implicated (mixed up) in a life long learning where equal opportunities can be realized.
- An easy guide to visualize rules and prerequisites that our target groups need to know to get help and to engage and motivate new learners, also highlighting some good examples from the Learning Sauna partnership.
- Material to influence politicians and decision makers in seminars and in direct contact with them.
- Disseminate our results to all partners.
- Evaluate the results.

Achievements and Outcomes

Exchange of information/research and good practice regarding ethnic minorities,

- Portugal:
- UK:
- SE:

Exchange of methodological and pedagogical issues, differences, similarities and experiences in Learning concepts; Open and flexible lifelong learning, Alternative learning, Learning customised for target groups, Client orientated, e.g. the following areas:

- client orientated learning (individual programmes), e-learning, open and flexible learning (learning centres, technical infrastructure, accessibility), learning at workplace, informal learning and learning customised for these target groups (these issues have even more been focused in the activity “Learning Environments”)
- how to hook people into learning and to motivate them – different untraditional methods and cultural codes, necessary to know
- attitudes to learning into the target groups
- attitudes to the target groups from the majority in the society
- guidance and counselling
- voluntaries work in UK
- learning stiles
- methods, e.g. study circles in popular adult education in Sweden
- initiatives and success stories

This has been confirmed in reality when we have had the possibility to visit each others organisations and seen work going on. We have also been able to meet beneficiaries in UK which has been specially valuable. We have in UK seen the diversity of actors and methods and how the target groups have been involved in the processes of e.g. basic skills learning, computer training and reception of new immigrants. (and to make comparisons with our system) We have seen this as very valuable because people from on target groups will meet the “right” cultural identification code and it will probably help and increase the possibility to involve these people in their first steps of integration and learning. Many barriers will not occur. In Sweden we are more bureaucratic, new immigrants mainly meet people from public authorities (also the school is public) and the staff is usually native Swedes (there is going on a change and more immigrants have been employed). This will make it more difficult, many misunderstandings and unnecessary language difficulties are inevitable.

To be able to meet the end user requirements interesting initiatives have been taken by all countries. Just to mention some of them. In both UK and Finland we have been visiting activities which have been very untraditional in creating possibilities for isolated people in urban areas or people living in rural areas and for young and elder people. The actors have been focusing end user requirements in very plain models.

Both UK and Finland have e.g. equipped busses to be more mobile and to be able to go out and meet the target groups in their own environments. UK was focused on young people and Finland had an elder woman perspective.

E.g. in Sandwell in UK there was a bus going out in the evenings to places were youngsters were trying to hook them into learning. The bus was well equipped and could connect to Internet in a lot of places.

The Finnish initiative was The “NettiNysse” (nick name for Net Bus), that was painted in brilliant colours and funny patterns. An old bus had been rebuilt by unemployed people and equipped with computers. It was driving around offering elder people, specially women in rural areas, to come and learn to use computers. It had become a cue because it had been very popular and people in small villages had started to book the bus.

In both cases there were similarities more than the busses with computers. It was very important to have “untraditional teachers” with right attitude to the target group not to damage the possibilities. These people needed more than the skill knowledge. They needed to be open, to have an attitude and also humour to meet these people in the right way. In Finland it was necessary to engage middle age women who had the right attitude, were patient and had a good sense of humour and they should be able to laugh easily, not to take everything too serious, because computers were not everything in life, just a good tool. It was necessary that they immediately become accepted by these elder women, and they should not feel sorry if they made mistakes. (This was really stressed in the information.)

Kista Open Academy has contributed by partners experiences in actual areas and also by presenting our development of learning environments, e.g. in libraries, untraditional search in guidance and counselling which has been very successful in hooking people from the target groups into learning. The possibility to approve grants for basic studies for low educated people has been decentralized to the guidance counsellors, which means that a person can get a decision immediately at the first meeting. This has been very successful.

Validation of knowledge, evaluation tools, client evaluation, self evaluation and social added value haven't been high up on the agenda even if it has been very actual. Kista Open Academy hasn't been working with it in the project but one of the main Swedish partner, Stockholm City, (head of the two partners from Education and Integration administration), has been deeply involved into these issues. Kista Open Academy has followed the work and informed the partners in. End User requirements and study visits have been arranged for a group from UK.

Portugal have contributed with interesting seminars and reports but there hasn't been that much of a dialog and exchange of experiences.

Organise workshops/seminars

End User Requirements has had six workshops and been meeting at every seminar in all countries. It has been the most stable of all groups because it has had a core of participants until the meeting in the autumn 2004. One person from Walsall has been the corner pillar but he had also finished in autumn 2004.

Produce reports:

Research and inquiries:

Following have been collected and reports have been made:

- Identification of obstacles and some examples of good practise/ ideas how to overcome obstacles – in English. Mapping of obstacles in the Swedish version was a bit more detailed
- Description of the Open University in Finland
- A comparison of students financing for education in Sweden and

- Finland (two reports) – only in Swedish, but presented in English
- Interim report – in English
- Final report – in English

Testing and On-line learning cluster

There hasn't been any direct testing (in End User Requirements) or creation of a learning cluster but a network of collaboration that will continue. This is mainly because of Kista Open Academy didn't had any money for piloting and because of the character of the issues. It wasn't possible neither natural to test anything. The short time for collaborative work and the diverged structure in Learning Kitchen has also made it more difficult to identify testing objects. There were some plans of starting up a cluster and there was an embryo to it before the first change of co-ordinator in the UK organisation and it didn't become fulfilled. There will now be further collaboration in the network and it can be as good as in a cluster.

Home page linked to workgroups and dissemination

A homepage is produced and all reports are on the homepage. Dissemination has been done continuously on every transnational seminar and by reports and seminars nationally in the countries.

Certain findings have been made:

- Portugal:
- UK:
- SE:
 - 1) Diversity in the UK organisations reflect the end user requirement in a good way. It is effective and it will increase the prerequisites for a good result in the target groups. To effectively fulfil the requirements of the target groups it is necessary to organize the work close to the target groups them selves. To increase involvement from well established country men in the work process will speed up the development and make it easier for the new combers to integrate and to start up basic skills learning. The long experience and the more mature acting in UK has been very useful to see and discuss.
 - 2) The Swedish system for higher education for adults very often leads to an exclusion, specially for immigrants and people without formal competence. Informal competence is stated as accepted in the system but very seldom applied. The selection of courses offered by the universities are not focused on adults' demands of further higher education, e.g. out of the demand of working life, but there is neither any economical support for this to universities from the state. In the comparison an adult student today will exclude a young student if they get a place. This is not acceptable for anyone. Adult students have a need of competence development on their on conditions and this will presume open courses on demand also on higher level.

During the last 10-15 years Swedish universities nearly in general (but not everywhere) have raised more obstacles for entrance to studies instead of reducing them to a minimum for our target groups. They have put up new and special demands (e.g. more of formal competence in e.g. mathematic) for participating into different courses. Lack of language knowledge is of course a big barrier for immigrants to be accepted on higher education but also the fact that it is difficult for immigrants who speaks Swedish to get their exams from

their home countries accepted. They have to start from the beginning usually from Upper Secondary School level and it will take about three years extra. At the same time exchange students from abroad are getting help and are welcome at all universities without any Swedish language knowledge.

UK and Finland have both well functioning open universities without formal demands for entrance. This is not the situation in Sweden. There is a big need of structural and economical change.

3) In distance education there also will be a discriminating regulation. No distance studies in other countries are accepted for students grants if the student lives in Sweden, but if the Swedish student live abroad and like to study by distance in a Swedish university he/she is getting the grants. People in Sweden have to go abroad for studies then they will get grants, but this is not normally possible for adults. Immigrants that have broken their studies in their home country when they moved could, if distance studies were accepted, finish their examination on their home language.

This has been presented and discussed in End User Requirements group and we have exchanged experiences and ideas. The aim was that an inquiry should have been done also in UK and Portugal but it hasn't. It had been good to have a comparable result to compare with, but unfortunately no one could do it.

An easy guide common for the countries is therefore not possible to produce.

Staff exchange

Staff exchange has been combined with seminars and study visits. There hasn't been money enough to do separate longer stays.
Not so far.

Material to influence politicians and decision makers in seminars and in direct contact with them.

Results and reflections from SE:

1) The diverged organisations in UK that reflect the end user requirement in a good way has been very interesting to disseminate. We have seen people from different ethnical groups very pleased and proud of their work with their country men. It seems to be effective and it will possibly increase the prerequisites for a good result in the target groups. To effectively fulfil the requirements of the target groups it is necessary to organize the work close to the target groups them selves.

These results have been disseminated by the partners in to their own organisation but also more formally on a national seminars in Sweden.

2) To avoid discrimination in higher education for our target groups it is necessary to change the regulation and also the attitudes. It is necessary to increase collaboration with the working life and implement incentives for the universities to make it able for them to offer courses on demand of adult people, unemployed and employed without the right formal competence. Real competence will be used as it is in Finland and UK. This question is now transformed up to national level (Action 3). It is a collaborative work between Kista Open Academy and NTG-Learn.

We have continuously had informal contacts with representatives for politicians and decision makers on national level. We have actively disseminated these results on seminars and in hearings on national levels. We have got strong support every time from many organisations as many universities and authorities and also from labour market unions, from regional municipality associations etc. At the moment an official letter is under production and it will be sent to the government in the end of June with many strong signatures. We do hope that there will be a change.

Evaluation and Recommendations

General evaluation from SE:

The work in End User Requirements group has been very valuable, specially the exchange of experiences and methodological issues and solutions. Some of the persons have made a great job, specially the main representative from Walsall and from the project “work-able”. As responsible for the group it has been difficult to carry out all activities as good as we had wanted because of several reasons:

1. The system with in kind additional financing. All participants have national responsibilities that are heavy enough. It is difficult to get time to work with transnational issues as well. (A special problem in UK and Sweden, not in e.g. Finland)
2. Limited time for meetings face to face. We have to blame our selves for that, all of us.
3. Just a few persons have actively worked between the meetings with the questions that we had to solve and had decided about (and it is because of short of time)
4. There have been too many changes in the group, specially from UK, and in the beginning from all.
 - Some of the people, specially from UK, showed up only once (not referring to beneficiaries) The persons above are the persons who were involved during many meetings.
 - Very difficult to find out the national organisation in Learning Kitchen and the connection to End User Requirements (was finally clarified by the main representative from Walsall)
 - The co-ordinator in UK was changed two times and it effected the process in the group and it was sometimes very hard to get any time at all for the group meetings
 - Portugal has been quite passive in this activity (This is very acceptable because they had a smaller project and not so many people to send to every activity.)
 - Finland disappeared after the meeting in Finland, without any explanation (associated partner to UK)
 - In the end of the period (spring 2005) nearly all in UK-participants had left the project and Portugal had finished COESIS in December 2004
 - There was no transnational group to discuss the final report with

The summary of the exchange of experiences is very positive. There has just been problems with continuity. This summary shows the overall issues that have been discussed but sometimes the group has been very big and sometimes very limited. It means that all people hasn't been involved in everything. This means that some from e.g. UK has been involved into some parts and other into another part. Portugal hasn't

been represented in all meetings. Sweden has had three persons continuously and two people now and then in the beginning.

Anyway. This is unfortunately usual. It happens too often in many European projects. Some of the people do an exceptionally good job and this effects the result in a positive way and gives an acceptable result. So in this as well. It's up to any one to contribute if they want to get anything back. It has into this group been enough persons who have contributed to the result. Everybody who has been active has got good profit. We have worked in a group with very competent persons from all countries. We haven't got any negative reactions from the partnership except of the change of co-ordinator and members. It has felt heavy to accept two new persons in the highest position a chance to get involved and it has slowed down the process. And this is no shadow on the persons! They have all done a good job.

A big disappointment was that on the last meeting there was no group in UK to discuss the evaluate the results with, neither to prepare this report. The members in the group had finished their work in Learning Kitchen and had got other tasks. From the leadership it was promised that the results should be collected and added to this report.

Reflections from SE: In Kista Open Academy we feel that we have got good experience and new knowledge. We have created a good transnational network. It has strengthen our empowerment and effected our work on national level in a positive way. Many persons have been involved for the first time in a transnational project and it has after all been a very positive experience. One of the more "silent knowledge" is a transnational thinking in an European dimension that has grown. Many of these people haven't got the chance to work in a transnational partnership before. This is of great value and will effect peoples thinking for the future.

For daily work in the Swedish partner group the experiences have strengthen the empowerment and people have got good and inspirering new ideas. We have been influenced by the way of working that we have met, specially in UK but also in Portugal and Finland, and we have got good contacts and good friends for further collaboration. It has been specially positive for the attitudes to see the possibilities in diversity. The dissemination has been very good on national level and influenced the acting in our participating municipalities.

We have learned that carrying out the work with integration and basic skills training as close as possible to the target group, mainly in their own organisations and associations is an easier way and it gives many positive effects. The target groups' requirements will be easier to fulfil for persons with the same cultural background already established in the new culture.

We have taken all opportunities to influence policy makers, specially in participating municipalities and we have got good response. They have been interested and our work has been respected. Our immigrant associations have been very active in taking initiatives to increase their possibilities to be partners into activities concerning their own member group. They have also been lobbying to get a decentralized system in Stockholm for reception of asylum seekers. (It is now decided to be so and they are working further to be more involved.)

We really appreciate the transnational exchange of experiences very much. It has added a lot of value to the national processes and daily work for our partnership. People testify that they now know how they can and will do their work better and some have said that they have changed many things and would like to change more. They have also been confirmed in many parts of their acting. The prerequisites for end user requirements have been focused and much more visible in our partnership. A special Thank you to Kevin and the other beneficiaries.

The cultural activities: These cultural events and meals have meant a lot for establishing a good relationship, increased the understanding of each other and the prerequisites for a further collaboration. It has been specially important because of the structure in the group. People had no experiences of transnational collaboration and we were also mixed up with beneficiaries. Very good. A special thanks for that.

Recommendations from SE: Do not rush in the beginning. Big partnerships need to get time to learn to know each other and to find out where they belong in the activity. The difficulties in the beginning when people didn't know where they belonged was because of that and it created a lot of unsureness and changes in the groups.. Don't start the activities at the first meeting. Start to discuss about the activities and let it grow until the next time.

To build an organisation where you don't have to change leading persons is important. We know it has been necessary but big efforts must be done to avoid these kind of changes. (Said for new projects, not for blaming UK because sometimes it happens.)