

ENHANCED EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS VIA ENTREPRENEURSHIP-BASED PROJECTS

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Abstract:

European funded programmes such as Erasmus+ projects have played a tremendously supportive role in students' and teachers' educational development process over the past years due to their limitless training activities that can be easily accessible to anyone willing to get out of their comfort zone and acquire further knowledge or even give a boost to their skills. "Career based opportunities" Erasmus+ K2 project stands for an innovative and creative way of increasing participants' entrepreneurial skills, self-esteem as well as their chances of insertion on the labour market after graduation. Throughout the first year of the project lifetime, this collaborative extracurricular activity brought about a great deal of positive changes in our students' perspective on their career path and entrepreneurial skill as well as on teachers' personal and professional development.

Key words: project, education, entrepreneurial skills, labour market, career

Chapter 1: "Career based opportunities" - general overview

"Career based opportunities" is a European funded partnership that has been developed by five secondary schools from Poland, Romania, Italy, Turkey and Bulgaria since 2017. It was designed to last for two years, that is until August 2019 and meet the objectives of the European Commission. Taking into account the different rates of youth unemployment in the countries participating in this project (Poland: 26.5 %; Italy: 40.1 %; Romania: 23.3 %, Turkey: 23,2 %), there is a great need for innovation in this matter. In the context of increasing unemployment rates nowadays, the above results come from the difficulty of graduates to find jobs in accordance with their interests, abilities, skills or personality traits. Therefore, this project is intended to meet the needs of young European citizens in secondary schools and allow them to choose a suitable career path and make the right career choices. Young people should also be fully aware of their potential and have access to information regarding the general economic environment of the European labour market.

The project is established around the central concept of exchange of experience and good practices. Participants will benefit from the expertise of professionals and the beneficiaries' associated partners. They will assist students in transferring the information and applying it to a modern and dynamic school environment. The project focuses on the development of students' entrepreneurial skills and offers them opportunities to connect to the labour market, local/regional/European institutions or private companies with the same scope. It will allow students to develop a genuine adaptability to the market at a local, national and EU level. The project will last for two years and there will be two Transnational meetings at the beginning and closure of the project and four Learning/Teaching/Training Activities. There will be workshops during student exchanges and observation good practices in the Italian school (Good Practice 1: The developed connection between school and Labour Market in Italy) and Romanian school (Good Practice 2: Creating the training firms as real firms - Mock Companies). Those practical and useful applications will be integrated into the project activities and in the second year all the partners will apply the two actions. During each exchange seminars will be given by professionals from the labour market in order to easily achieve the transition from school to work and reduce the labour market segmentation.

The purpose of the project is international. It will create a strong synergy among partner schools and it will provide inspiration for students to develop their future career path. The project includes 2630 participants in a direct and indirect manner.

Pupils: All the project activities at local and international level will involve students as beneficiaries directly and indirectly. Approximately 1200 students/teenagers will indirectly be affected.

Teachers: Teachers will be involved both as instructors and beneficiaries by observing other schools and their education system). There will be teams of 5 teachers in each partner organization so 25 in total will take part actively in the project activities. Approximately 150 teachers/adults will indirectly be affected.

Administrative staff: They will tackle the running of the legal issues of the project, observing other school education systems and transferring good practices into the school curriculum. Approximately 36 administrative staff will be indirectly affected.

Graduated students: Questionnaires will be applied on minimum 100 students and this evaluation will offer the state of their professional working life. 500 students will be involved in total.

Parents: The number of the family members will be 300 in total and they will contribute to introducing the host country culture and tradition. Approximately 480 family members will be indirectly involved in the project.

Labour Market members: Minimum 15 members from the labour market will be involved in the project in every school.

Local community: Local community members such as university lecturers, local press, municipality, directorate of national education and PTA will help to disseminate the project to a wider community. Approximately 300 people from local community will be indirectly involved.

A positive direct effect is expected at a rate of 30% from our pupils and target groups by: gaining basic skills in term of entrepreneurship; reducing labour market segmentation; offering pupils opportunities to connect to the labour market through local/regional/European institutions or private companies; leading students to analyze their own marketability; increasing student flexibility and align to the concept of continuous learning and flexible career options; adapting to labour markets in local, national and EU level; providing a unique opportunity for students to acquire knowledge and deeper understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the European community.

Chapter 2: "Career based opportunities" and its impact after the first year

As it was established at the application stage, the activities of the first year of the project have been carried out by five secondary schools from Poland, Romania, Italy, Turkey and Bulgaria. Throughout the former part of the project lifetime, that is from the 1st of September 2017 till the 31st of August 2018, all the partner countries actively involved in the initially planned activities of the project, thus being able to reach all the project aims: improvement of students' entrepreneurial skills, development of the relationship between school and labour market, increasing the chances of insertion of all pupils on the labour market by ensuring chances and socio-professional inclusion, the development of communication, digital and mixed groups cooperation skills, the growth of our schools institution's internalization. Through a very close communication process among all the project partners, which was led by the Polish coordinator, we managed to adjust the activities' plan so that a constant progress of the project was assured. The initial stage of the project was the one during which we introduced the project to our schools-teachers and students included, created its facebook page, chose the students' and teachers' project teams, created logos, posters and leaflets to promote it. Then, 2 members of the teachers' project team, that is the Romanian manager of "Zinca Golescu" High School together with the project coordinator, took part in the first transnational project meeting TPM which was organized in Poland. On this occasion, the participants met for the first time face to face, got to know each other better, presented their own schools, the educational system in each country, the SWOT analysis of each school, discussed the features of each activity as well as possible problems and their solutions, reorganized the plan of activities, created the draft surveys to be applied to current students and graduates, chose the logo and poster meant to represent our project, negotiated a

fair distribution of tasks, decided the sectors of improvements in the case of the official website and agreed on the dates of the learning-teaching-training activities/ LTTs in Italy and Romania. What is more, the Polish partnership coordinator presented the education opportunities in vocational education training/ VET around Europe, which was later on showed to the students in each country during our local meetings. Before the meeting in Italy, each partner school applied, interpreted and made power point presentations with both the graduates' and the current students' surveys, created presentations of their country, region, school and educational system, made an Erasmus+ corner in their schools, delivered leaflets and project brochures to parents and other stakeholders, organized mini-conferences for stakeholders. All these intermediate project results were shared during the LTT in Italy. In order to make our stay in Italy more comfortable, the Italian team designed a travel manual about Italy and especially Limbate region. What is more, thanks to the meeting in Italy (25th February to 3rd March 2018) our students were introduced to the notion of big business and teachers learnt how to link our schools with local businesses to give our students a connection with today's job market. Talks with successful business people both during our field trips in companies (CEMP SRL, GIORGETTY SPA) and the interviews with successful labour market members, gave the students an array of warm-hearted advice and encouragement.

The LTT in Romania (15th April to 21st April 2018) was carefully organized so that meaningful and useful activities be implemented based on teamwork. One week before this transnational meeting, the Romanian project team designed a travel brochure meant to promote the country, region, school and provide our partners with useful information to make their stay here easier. The whole LTT in Romania concentrated on enlarging all the participants' knowledge and practical skills regarding the stages of setting up a company through multiple workshops such as: stepping into the world of entrepreneurship; entrepreneur versus Employee; writing a cover letter; writing a business plan-revealing 10 essential steps to be taken when planning to start a business, enlarging on the 9 sections of the lean canvas, sketching 5 different business ideas and posters to promote them; Mock Firms Fair-good practice examples, visits to mock firms stands, filling in worksheets regarding details related to the businesses presented previously; field trip to Dacia Renault Group - Mioveni, Romania and IPEE Company - Curtea de Arges; "Paving the way for success" Conference – presenting the profile of various successful people on national, regional and local level; Speech about success; interviews with 2 successful people; watching a video with two young entrepreneurs. Additionally, participants got familiar with a myriad of European and Romanian certificates, designed the draft magazine of the LTT's results and immersed in the Romanian culture.

In terms of impact, the project intends to meet the needs of young European citizens in 5 European secondary schools so that they find a suitable career path and make the right career choices in full self-awareness and having access to the suitable information regarding the general economic environment of the European labour market. The project is focused on the exchange of experience and good practices. The expertise of professionals, of the associated partners who assist students in transferring the information and applying it to a modern, dynamic school environment has had a beneficial influence on every participant in the project. The project aims at developing students' entrepreneurial skills and offers them opportunities to connect to the labour market or local/regional/European institutions or private companies. Students are in the process of becoming aware of their personal skills needed in the work environment, are increasing their flexibility and align to the concept of permanent training and flexible career options, developing their adaptability to labour markets in local, national and EU levels.

Impact on students:

- SWOT analysis prepared for their schools made students aware of the importance of strategic thinking, taking into account foreseeable risks
 - They have learnt how to analyse surveys run on present-day students and graduate to become aware of their knowledge/lack of knowledge on the today's labour market.
 - they have practised various ways of promoting a project
 - they improved their ICT skills while designing customized logos, leaflets, posters, roll-ups, brochures, a travel manual, key rings, pens, folders, flag, T-shirts, PPTs, Prezi presentations, Publisher, Kinemaster, googledocs, youtube)
 - They have learnt how to design and run a Facebook page of a project
 - They became accustomed with European Instruments like Europass, ECVET, Youthpass, ECTS
 - They got a crystal clear picture of the current labour market requirements
 - They discovered new links to the labour market through their field trips in Italian and Romanian companies.
 - The have learnt about company's structure and possible career paths
 - They have been inspired by meetings with successful business people in Italy and Romania, and learnt about the possibilities and challenges connected with running a firm
 - They have paved their way into starting their own firm by preparing drafts of their business plan and watching simulations of a firm fair, including 3 mock firms of the Romanian partner school and 2 of a local partner school
 - During the short exchanges, the students discovered the characteristics of a successful entrepreneur in other countries, in this way becoming aware of the possibilities offered by the labour market in other European countries and trying to adapt to the necessities needed on the labour market at local, national and European level.
 - They have practised and improved their public speaking skills as well as their critical thinking, problem solving ability, creativity
 - They have increased their self esteem, confidence in speaking English on a daily basis, cooperating skills when working in mixed-nationality teams
 - They have overcome previous stereotypes
- Impact on teachers:
- Refreshed teaching strategies, better English communicative skills, improved teamwork skills
 - Teachers involved in the TPM in Poznan, Poland received participation certificates.
 - Not only did all the participants in LTTs got an official certificate of attendance, but the Romanian school also cooperated with the Italian partner and jointly issued Europass Documents for the 8 participants.
 - The educational organisations have gained important links to various institutions on the local and regional level, which started a long-lasting process of cooperation and innovation. Partner schools involved in the project development gained social fame and recognition on the local, regional and European level.
- Impact on partner institutions: local companies have gained a possibility to attract young people to their market segment; in cooperation with schools, they tailor and update the education offer, making it more practical and skill oriented.
- Impact on families/local community: due to the dissemination activities, families have become more aware of the European dimension of education and their children opportunities during their school period. Moreover, parents have turned into more tolerant, flexible and open-minded people during the student exchanges.
- "Career based opportunities" Erasmus+ K2 project is the extracurricular activity that has been in progress in our high school for more than one year and brought about a great deal of changes in our students' perspective on their career path and entrepreneurial skill as well as

on teachers' personal and professional development. On no account should educational institutions avoid getting involved in such inspiring, innovative and experimental projects as they do urge teenagers to embark on a self-discovery and personal development program that will undoubtedly boost participants' self-esteem and their chances for an easier insertion on the labour market.

Selected References

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