

Recommendations to the EC and the National Agencies for Future Activities

The DiVa Recommendations are targeted mainly to funding agencies and outline needs and expectations of those who are implementing educational projects concerning dissemination, exploitation and sustainability results.

It complements the two other distinct products of the DiVa project to present European project results and good practice examples:

a Good Practice Catalogue, showing ideal candidates for transfer and further development and a Handbook for Dissemination, Exploitation and Sustainability of Educational Projects.

The DiVa consortium is composed by seven European organisations:

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MERIG acts as editors for the Recommendations from the sources available with feedback and contributions from all consortium members.

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About DiVa and this document

The main aim of the project DiVa is to carry out studies about successful educational projects, to evaluate them based on defined criteria and to elaborate a good-practice catalogue and recommendations for those who are planning and implementing projects as well as for funding authorities.

The “Recommendations to the EC and the National Agencies for Future Activities” are based on inputs from previous steps, documentations and discussions within the DiVa project (e.g. the six regional round table reports, reporting about the final workshop where this topic was explicitly worked on and discussed).

The main steps in the DiVa project were the definition of criteria for successful valorisation of projects which are based on focus group interviews and a survey. These criteria were used to establish a self rating tool for projects/project promoters.

After validation of the project descriptions of the selected “*good practice projects*” from all EU countries, the partnership invited project coordinators to regional round tables in Portugal, Belgium, Italy, Austria, Finland and Bulgaria. In each round table between ten and fourteen project coordinators discussed dissemination and exploitation strategies and exchanged knowledge and experiences. The round tables took place in September and October 2010. In each of the round tables two projects were chosen to participate in the final Workshop in Graz.

The DiVa final workshop was held in Graz on Nov. 23rd and 24th 2010. A total of 13 project representatives and the DiVa consortium formed a working group of about thirty people who intensively worked on the topic of dissemination, exploitation and sustainability of European educational projects.

The reports produced as a result of those events were crucial contributions for the “Recommendations to the EC and the National Agencies for Future Activities”. Another source of information were existing guides and handbooks available from European and national agencies and other books, articles and papers.

The “Recommendations to the EC and the National Agencies for Future Activities” are complementary to two other main papers produced within the DiVa project: “The Good Practice Catalogue” which summarises the identified good practices in dissemination and exploitation, and “The Handbook for Dissemination, Exploitation and Sustainability of Educational Projects”, a document providing information and hints mainly for those, who are planning and implementing educational projects.

MERIG acts as editor for the “Recommendations to the EC and the National Agencies for Future Activities” and contributions and feedback from all consortium members are included in this document.

Introduction

The main target groups of the “Recommendations to the EC and the National Agencies for Future Activities” are, as the title suggests, persons who work in funding agencies (responsible for the management of European, national or regional funding programmes), persons who are involved in the definition of and decision making process about programmes, in the supervision of projects, etc.

The “Recommendations” summarise the discussions during the different stages of the DiVa project whereby the document intends rather to formulate needs and expectations as well as ideas of project promoters than to provide strict recommendations.

The DiVa consortium decided that the “Recommendations to the EC and the National Agencies for Future Activities” should be a very concise document, highlighting key points.

Executive summary

This document discusses in three chapters needs of those who work in planning and implementing educational projects (mainly in the framework of the LLP) and outlines what is expected concerning the dissemination and exploitation of projects from funding agencies. Thereby we first discuss dissemination, followed by exploitation. In the concluding chapter ideas for future funding programme generations are outlined.

There are many guidelines and support offers for planning and implementing dissemination strategies. Nevertheless many promoters and partners express the need for further support.

The chapter *Dissemination: Needs, expectations and recommendations* discusses four main areas where projects are in need of support:

- publicity: support projects by attending events, publishing information in newsletters and other media,
- networking: support networking between projects, with stakeholders and decision makers,
- training/information/feedback: provide feedback, mentoring and highlight potentials for improvement, and
- guidelines/regulations: formulate clear expectations and action-specific guidelines).

Exploitation: Needs, expectations and recommendations also address the

- clear formulation of expectations, regulations and guidelines,
- networking, whereby here the main focus lies on networking with decision makers and project mainstreaming, and
- training / feedback with similar elements as in the chapter about exploitation.

In the concluding chapter about *ideas for future funding programme generations* we discuss the idea of bonus systems introduced during the project duration as well as the idea of special funding mechanisms for an exploitation period after the project end.

Dissemination: Needs, expectations and recommendations

Even if the dissemination of project results has been an important component in project applications since generations of different funding programmes, it has gained much attention in the previous years.

In most funding programmes it is a requirement to probably plan dissemination activities already in project applications and therefore definitions and expectations are formulated. For example in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), the flagship European Union funding programme in the field of education and training, basics and expectations concerning dissemination and exploitation are communicated in the project guidelines, handbooks, etc. In the funding period 2007-2013 a transversal programme on dissemination and exploitation of results has been launched. Moreover there are rich sources provided by DG Education and Culture, many literature and other supporting guidelines available (see overview on further reading in the DiVa Handbook), and European platforms which support spreading project results.

Nevertheless for many projects it is still challenging to establish and follow a targeted dissemination strategy. The reasons for that are manifold ranging from insufficient availability of resources to weaknesses in the target definition for dissemination (What shall be disseminated to whom?).

In the discussions, focus groups and workshops within the DiVa project about expectations from and recommendations to funding authorities regarding dissemination a broad spectrum of experiences and opinions was displayed, depending on the different project types, people were speaking about and had experiences with. We identified four headings under which the needs of projects (promoters and partners working in the projects) can be summarised:

- PUBLICITY support
- NETWORKING support
- TRAINING/INFORMATION/FEEDBACK
- GUIDELINES/REGULATIONS

The fifth group are IDEAS, e.g. for changes in funding mechanisms. They are outlined in the chapter “Ideas for future funding programme generations” in this document.

Publicity support

To support the publicity of projects is very important and funding agencies already set several activities. Project databases have been established not only to disseminate project results but also to get an overview about projects which are ongoing and which have been already finalised in the field of education and lifelong learning. Thereby the ADAM database covers Leonardo da Vinci projects, while the EVE database covers all Lifelong Learning (LL) sub-programmes and actions.

In addition awards (e.g. LL award of the Austrian national agency), brochures and best practice catalogues from national agencies and the EACEA as well as the DG Education and Culture are published to highlight good practice projects and support the dissemination of results.

But even if funding agencies already support projects to disseminate their results, which was very appreciated by participants in the DiVa activities, the need for more publicity support was expressed:

- It was highlighted that it is often very difficult to motivate representatives from funding agencies to participate in events organised within projects or by project consortia (especially smaller events). But this participation is essential on the one hand to gather feedback, but on the other hand also to underline the “importance” of the event by the participation of agency representatives.
- Easier access to contact databases (or parts addressing different stakeholder groups). This is often a problem due to data protection issues.
- To extend existing possibilities like publications from funding agencies, awards, newsletters, good practice catalogues etc. and to better disseminate the information available.
- Furthermore, an expansion to the mass of European citizens and more media presence of EU projects with support from the EACEA was recommended.
- More contact of funding agencies with the projects in their region was requested to get to know about possibilities to appear in publications of agencies.

Networking support

Also concerning networking funding agencies are actively supporting projects which is clearly underlined by the support of European networks (thematic or dissemination networks), by the organisation and/or support of events etc. Also this engagement is seen very positive and important for projects. Ideas how networking could be supported even more efficiently are summarised in the following points:

- Support of the creation of clusters (groups of projects which address similar topics or work with similar target groups) in which project consortia can exchange their ideas, elaborate joint dissemination and exploitation strategies.
- Already established networks have often problems to sustain after the end of the funding period because of lack of resources. So continuous support would be necessary for successful dissemination networks.

- Projects working in similar fields or with similar target groups should be encouraged to disseminate results together for example in publications, other media and press etc.
- Projects often have problems in getting decision makers or interest groups actively involved - even if these groups have expressed their interest in a project during the application phase. To support networking with these groups fostering publicity (see above) is important.

Concerning the support of networking activities the funding agencies might use their overview of different activities ongoing in different programmes as well as different stakeholder groups and pass information to project coordinators which might be interested in collaborations.

Support by training and feedback

Also in the fields of workshops and individual consolidations funding agencies are active. In many cases information events are organised when a new call for proposals is opened and project promoters are invited to workshops or are visited on individual bases to explain reporting, management etc. (e.g. monitoring visits). On these occasions dissemination should be addressed and references should be made where project applicants or partners can get more information. Here specifically KA4 projects could serve as references tackling different topics of dissemination and exploitation.

- Workshops and traineeships organised by funding agencies are recommended and seen as necessity for project coordinators to be well informed about their possibilities and about what is actually required from them. Thereby dissemination should be on the agenda and expectations should be explicitly discussed.
- The development of special mentoring programmes for not so experienced project promoters or projects which obviously have troubles in disseminating their results could be launched.
- More feedback concerning dissemination and clear expression of expectations already in progress reporting phases.
- In these training and information offers especially results of KA4 projects concerning dissemination strategies could be used by national/regional agencies.

Clear but flexible regulations and guidelines

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter about dissemination many documents are already available and general expectations, regulations and guidelines have been formulated. Nevertheless many participants at the DiVa workshops/focus groups expressed that they would be keen to see more concretely expressed, what is expected from them in terms of dissemination. Thereby some participants expressed the feeling that “mainly” big numbers of copies, targeted persons etc. are seen (and evaluated) positively while this is not directly reflected in the mentioned guidelines.

- There might be a need to disseminate the existing dissemination regulations, tools and guidelines better to avoid that people overlook them.
- Special guidelines and expectations should be formulated (might be in addition to the general ones) for subprogrammes or even actions because dissemination levels are very different depending on project size, subjects etc.
- Dissemination plans and dissemination activities should be evaluated in terms of quality and quantity. It is clear that from a project funded with European funds a certain broadness of dissemination activities can be expected, but it is most important to reach the target group/s with attractive information.
- In parallel to the requirement for clear planning of dissemination activities for the project, a certain flexibility is necessary in order to be able to react to developments and contingencies.

Exploitation: Needs, expectations and recommendations

Exploitation of project results gained much attention in the recent years and the current funding programmes, whereby exploitation in short is described as consisting of mainstreaming (transferring results to decision makers) and multiplication (adoption and/or application of results by end-users). This shows that the concepts of dissemination and exploitation are closely connected and interrelated whereby dissemination focuses on the visibility of processes, results and products, exploitation on the application of successful results by different target groups.

The discussions about exploitation in the DiVa focus groups and workshops showed that for many participants the concept of exploitation is seen very different related to project type, topic, activities and outputs. Discussions were addressing questions like for example:

- Is commercialisation the main aim of exploitation?
- In the discussions it was highlighted that it can be one aim of exploitation to commercialise certain products and results. But there are also many other ways of exploitation like the usage of products and results by target groups within and beyond the partner organisations.
- What about exploitation activities for pilot tests?
- According to the short definition in the LLP Guides “successful results” are subject of exploitation so obviously pilot activities do not refer to exploitation, because the results have not been proven to be successful at the piloting stage.
- How to regulate IPR in different types of projects?
- Here discussions showed that very different approaches are possible but that there is a lack of know-how about this topic.

We also identified headings under which the needs of projects (promoters and partners working in the projects) can be summarised and which are similar to those outlined in the chapter about dissemination but address the needs from a different perspective:

- EXPECTATIONS, GUIDELINES, REGULATIONS
- NETWORKING support
- TRAINING/INFORMATION/FEEDBACK

Ideas for changes in funding mechanisms are outlined in the chapter “Ideas for future funding programme generations” in this document.

Clear formulation of expectations, regulations and guidelines

Also concerning exploitation it was outlined that the available information, guidelines and expectations should be clarified in more details.

- More detailed general as well as programme or action specific expectations would be welcomed addressing what is expected in the project planning phase (What makes an exploitation plan / work package good?) and the project implementation phase (Components of successful exploitation? What is evaluated positively concerning exploitation in the progress and final reporting phase?).
- Expectations could also be formulated using FAQ or good practice exploitation catalogues or compendiums of successfully exploited projects.

- Guidelines should also value explicitly the internal exploitation of results (sustainable usage of results within partner institutions and/or the consortium) as well as the exploitation of methodologies developed within the projects.

Networking support

Especially the mainstreaming of results to appropriate decision makers is often challenging for projects. Under dissemination we already mentioned how important it is to raise awareness at decision makers level.

Funding agencies could support successful projects by

- assisting them in establishing personal contacts to decision makers who might be interested but also in
- assisting to establish contacts to experts who may give advice on exploitation, not only on a superficial but a very in-depth level.

Since many funding agencies act as “intermediates” between DGs, ministers etc. and projects, mainstreaming could be efficiently supported by them.

Support by training and feedback

Also concerning exploitation the field of training and feedback has been outlined in the discussions, focus groups and workshops. Similar points can be highlighted here like.

- Exploitation should be explicitly referred to in information events, briefing for projects etc. and expectations should be clearly outlined and discussed.
- Development of special mentoring programmes for those who implement projects to support better mainstreaming and multiplication.
- Also here more feedback concerning exploitation and clear expression of expectations already in progress reporting phases.
- Specific information/training about different possibilities of how to regulate intellectual property rights in different types of projects would be necessary.

Ideas for future funding programme generations

In this chapter we intend to outline ideas which have been discussed during the DiVa activities, focus groups and workshops, which could be reflected in future programmes and which go beyond what has been said in the previous chapters. Partly the mentioned points are already subject of discussions about future funding programmes in the field of education.

Bonus systems during project implementation

The idea is to develop a system which gives projects the chance to get an additional bonus for the successful dissemination and / or exploitation of methods, processes and results during the implementation phase.

The existing awards, good practice catalogues etc. could be seen as bonus systems and are very helpful because they support the dissemination and exploitation of results. But mostly they target final results and so they are positioned after the end of the project.

Bonuses could be financial (for example for an additional event, publication, advertising etc.), in form of public appearance (for example on TV, radio, via publication) or of appearance in specific meetings with decision makers (presentation in commissions, policy work groups etc.).

Clear rules and regulations how to apply for the “bonus” and unbureaucratic award procedures are therefore necessary. For example projects which perform much better than planned, which produce results with high impacts etc. could be awarded to underline the importance and boost motivation.

Funding for an exploitation period after the project end

It is clear that each project has to plan and implement dissemination and exploitation activities also during the project. In reality many projects develop very valuable results but the results are only available at the very end of the project duration. Even if the projects have planned to have their results finalised earlier and to have time for an exploitation phase in the last few project months, in many cases overambitious work plans, delays during the project etc. do not allow for active exploitation.

So the idea is to provide successful projects the possibility to apply for an exploitation grant for example covering a period of 6 months after project finalisation. The right for such a grant could be based on the final report assessment (for example projects scoring higher than 80% or 85%) and the assessment of the detailed exploitation plan provided for the exploitation period. Thereby mainstreaming activities could be covered (e.g. workshops with decision makers) or marketing of products to end-users.

Also here clear rules and an unbureaucratic application system is necessary but also the quick submission (responsibility of the coordinator/partners) and evaluation (responsibility of the funding agency) of the final report. Ideally such a phase would start shortly after project finalisation to guarantee a frictionless crossover to this new phase.

Annex

Photos from workshops



FH Joanneum (Graz, Austria)
www.fh-joanneum.at

Multidisciplinary European Research Institute Graz – MERIG (Graz, Austria)
www.merig.org

AidLearn (Lisbon, Portugal)
www.aidlearn.com

Catholic University College Ghent – Sint-Lieven (Ghent, Belgium)
www.kahosl.be

University of Vaasa (Vaasa, Finland)
www.uvasa.fi

European Center for Quality (Sofia, Bulgaria)
www.ecq-bg.com

University of Genova (Genova, Italy)
www.unige.it



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