

I – FRAMEWORK

This report hopes to describe the implementation of the Entrepreneurship online course for four schools that took part during the TBG – Transnational Business Groups project, supported by Erasmus +. The course helped the students to create and develop four business ideas.

This project had four Schools – two regular Secondary ones (from Greece and Turkey) and two VET Secondary ones (from Croatia and Portugal). They had the support of two organizations who have a lot of expertise in supporting entrepreneurship in educational environments – from The Netherlands and Italy. This Italian partner created a new methodology of practising entrepreneurship, having a regional and national contest within the participating schools – “La Scuola d’Impresa”. A seventh partner, from Belgium, an international association of VET providers, was responsible for dissemination.

II – BEFORE THE COURSE

The first meeting of the project was held in Portugal, where, besides the administrative and financial aspects of the project, the course creation and implementation was discussed and planned. It had only teachers and staff members.

There were key factors that were considered:

- The course had to be user friendly and run over OER – Open Educational Resources;
- Had to be targeted to secondary students, including those not attending Management, Marketing, Finances, ..., courses;
- Teachers would help them during the course and defining learning materials guidelines but the materials should be gathered by the students.
- It had to have a step by step approach, so the students could make a successful learning pathway.
- It should be multilanguage – students could learn on their own language, but for the International work, an English version should be used.

Each school would have 4 groups of students, each one with several organizational jobs. The same methodology for the internationally mixed groups was agreed: 4 groups with 5 students (at least one from those national school’s group) would be created to work both online and during the mobilities.



III – THE BEGINNING OF THE COURSE

The second mobility, in Italy, was the first one to have students. It was very important as it allowed students to understand the concept of the project and what it aimed, because they visited schools where the original concept - “La Scuola d’Impresa” – had been running for some time, and debated with their Italian colleagues how they had created business ideas. They had also attended several workshops where they practised creativity, planning and strategic thinking. These experiences played a key role so they could have an applied creativity approach.

Meanwhile, the group of teachers and staff members were preparing the first module of the course – The Business Idea – and how it should be implemented on the moodle platform. The school partners agreed on the translation in their national language and on gathering the training contents. In particular school partners’ students would, for this module:

- organize and document a training event where the students who were in Italy present the activities to the other students;
- search for one or more inspiring videos on Creativity;
- identify a link to a website with socio-economic information about their local area;
- start-up the arrangements with the Municipality/Chamber of Commerce for the school visit;
- search for one or more inspiring videos on Real Business idea;
- prepare, after attending the entire module, four business ideas – one for each national group, to be presented during the third mobility.



IV – THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COURSE

IV.1 CROATIA

The third mobility, in Croatia, we had a special guest, an expert from TeleCentar Croatia, a non-governmental, non-profit organization formed in 2005 as a coordination center for the regional network of civil society organizations from Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The network has developed a lifelong learning program consisted of 32 modules covering English language, computer skills, social skills and entrepreneurship.

This meeting was the first where the students had already attended the first module of the course. Therefore, as foreseen, each partner school's students presented their four ideas. Each national group appointed one representative to show one's concept, using several means to do so, from posters to videos and powerpoint presentations.

Diversity and creativity was in order, so sixteen projects were presented and explained. During this stage, it was made clear that there weren't any winners or losers, but only ideias that could become real businesses after attending the next modules. But for that, under Italian and TeleCentar partner's orientation, the sixteen had to be reduced, gathering the similar ones and letting go the ones that had no viability. The main concern was to explain to the students that they could have had a very creative idea, but the market could not want it or it would really difficult to find financial support for it.

After two days of hard work with the students, the final projects were ready to be shown, under Italian and TeleCentar partner's orientation: "Mom's assistant", with products to help active mothers to make it easier taking care of babies; "Mustra SC", an innovative handbag; "Tecbag", a suitcase with several innovations and with a mobile app; "Vita-Berry Juices", a company that creates and sell natural juices. The national groups were then organized around each international idea – each partner school would since then have a "national branch" of each idea, which would be able to work both online and during the mobilities over their ideas.

During that period, the teachers and staff were preparing the second module, debating and assessing the first one. For the next mobility each national group had to attend that module – Business Idea and Market Research: now that they already had the concept developed, they had to gather materials, perform activities and learn how to make a market research, so they could present their results and debate them with their international colleagues, both online and during the next mobility. Each idea would then gather all their contributions.



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IV.II GREECE

In this meeting students had already attended two modules of the online course, namely the second one: Business Idea and Market Research.

Therefore, each representative of each national subgroup presented to their colleagues of the International team the results of their national market research – the different steps of the market research: preparation, SWOT analysis, identification of the target group, the questionnaire, analysis of the results.

They learned most of these concepts from the online module, and according to the students assessment, what they liked the most was the SWOT analysis and the questionnaire. A special word for this tool, as they had to learn how to create it, prepare one for this project, test it, implement it to the target group and analyse its results.

The goal was to compare the results obtained with the market research in all the countries, combining them in a coherent and structured way. For that they had the help of the teachers and the staff members.

As each group were to show the conclusions to the other teams and, back home, to their national subgroups, in the end of each meeting, to improve these presentations was considered relevant in Croatia to provide the students with a workshop in Greece on how to effectively communicate an idea through images, social media and marketing tools, which was animated by the Dutch partner.

While the students were left with part of the teachers to mentor them through a collaborative work on the preparation of a promotional message of their ideas, the other teachers and staff members were preparing the next module – The Communication Strategy.

To conclude the meeting each group presented their promotional messages (powerpoint presentations, vídeos, posters) and provided a detailed explanation of the mental process they had followed and the meaning of the chosen elements of the market research for each idea. The videos were specially evaluated, as the students went out of the venue and shot them outside, acting if it was a commercial, with their mobile devices. Creativity, target group focus, clear message and product description were the dimensions assessed.



IV.III THE NETHERLANDS

For this mobility meeting students had attended the third module – The Communication Strategy. However, one key issue the partners had decided during the application phase is that the course should not be alone. In other words, the course is very good for the students to learn about entrepreneurship but it should also be complemented with workshops that provide them an inside look from someone who has already gone through the process of actually creating a company.

Therefore, during this meeting the theoretical concepts the students have been learning were complemented with two workshops animated by a young entrepreneur – “How to create a successful company”: it was considered really important that the students could see and hear by themselves that what they have learnt is, not only true, but relevant and contemporary. Related to that and to the market and communication strategies, the other workshop, by the same entrepreneur, was also extremely interesting and valued by the students. Obviously that during the meeting students also had to work hard - the group sessions covered the relation of the business ideas (TecBag, Mom's Assistant, Vita Juices and Mostra) to social media marketing and selling a product on the market place. The first important lessons were through the workshops about one's own brand, explaining that, if it's important to discover oneself and that one is a brand on social media and in life, the same is valid for the four business ideas.

The students worked hard on their group assignments around their business ideas, also. Showing what they have learnt on the third module, in the end each group had to make a presentation of their idea on the market place, broadcasted though Periscope as a live TV show, which had to include: the logo and its explanation; a description of the target group; a description about the product, with a slogan; two social media platforms accounts. After those explanations, the four project ideas were ready to be presented to the market, as the only thing it was lacking was the financial part. It would be very important for the students to understand the acceptance of their ideas and still be able to make the necessary arrangements, if needed.

Therefore, a simulation competition was held – all the participants had to assess each product (except their own) on the basis of one's connection with the product with a sticker (green: I would buy it; orange: I would probably buy it; red: I will not buy it). The conclusion to be achieved was that the feel with the product has nothing to do with its quality - it has only to do with the market demand. The seller must listen to the customer and not imposing its will/idea.

The last module, Business Plan, was prepared, so everything had to be ready for the last stage, in Turkey, the final mobility, where the product, including its financial part, would be assessed.



IV.IV TURKEY

This was the final meeting and where the four ideas were assessed by real businessmen. For that the students completed the last module and which was considered the most difficult one, the Business Plan. This module had to be the definitive one, but the students believed it required more time in order to be fully understood by those students with less contact with entrepreneurship subjects.

Each subgroup had also to prepare, if possible, a visit to a business incubator, a chamber of commerce, ..., in order to have a complete awareness on the various administrative, bureaucratic and financial requirements for the start-up of a specific type of company.

Each project group had the help of Italian tutors to conclude and present their business idea in a coherent way. Even so, they had to be prepared for the final presentation and evaluation by two external guests. In fact, this project aimed to prepare them to be entrepreneurs and, if on the previous meeting, their idea was assessed by their peers and teachers/staff, this final one had to include a true evaluation, which meant by people external to the project.

The Turkish partner was able to invite two key persons – a businessman and a top officer of Ankara Chamber of Commerce. The students presented their ideas to them and had to answer their questions. In the end, those two also made a detailed analysis of what should be improved, debating it with the group members.



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V. CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the course and its surrounding activities were a success, according to both students and teachers/staff.

Here are the key factors, according to the assessment.

The strong points nominated by the partners were:

- Students performed several pedagogic activities using new learning technologies they were not used to (Moodle), and some of them use it for the first time;
- Some teachers used for the first time an online learning platform;
- It could be taught at any subjects, from vocational ones (Marketing or Management), to language (English) or technological (ICT);
- Students developed their group work skills, as all tasks, from gathering learning materials, doing the research, implementing the questionnaire, preparing the presentations, showing them in public, were all done in groups, both national and International ones;
- Students developed their sense of responsibility and commitment towards a final goal – they knew they had to perform several activities, both learning and practical ones, with fixed deadlines, and they succeed;
- Students developed Self-Learning - DIY (do it yourself) – although they were mentores by their teachers, most of the activities were performed alone or in groups;
- Students developed their creative thinking, as they learnt how to use creativity in a practical dimension, as they were able to create practical ideas under any thematic they wanted.
- School community and school stakeholders were involved in the project through dissemination and active participation.

The weak points were:

- Like all online courses, in the beginning students complaint from lack of permanent tutorship during Moodle usage, specially those who had the first contact;
- This project, although successful, could have been better for students if they communicated more with their international colleagues during the periods within the mobilities. As no one wanted to use Moodle forum, a Facebook group was created. It improved a bit the situation, but students felt uncomfortable to use FB as a professional tool.
- Due to the previous item, meetings had to be reoriented for international working groups to develop their ideas;
- Terrorism attacks in Belgium and Turkey caused difficulties getting travel authorizations from the parents, which caused some mobilities to have less students than expected.
- Although the decision to have national subgroups was intended to actively involve more students in the entrepreneurship learning, the fact that not all could attend the meetings, added to the problem pointed out on the previous item, caused that the same students could not be present during all the mobilities, which caused communication gaps during the business ideas development process.

For coming course implementations and developments:

- Plan the mobilities from the beginning towards the international groups work, setting the online course for the national work within each partner, so that during the mobilities they can gather and achieve common results;
- In each mobility define the work each group had to do for the next one and held them responsible, despite the members that will attend;
- Plan the teachers workload so they can provide efficient tutoring for moodle sessions;
- (For vocational schools only) Study the possibility of having the learning outcomes recognized through ECVET.