Directorate-General for Education and Culture

Sustainability of international cooperation projects in the field of higher education and vocational training

Handbook on Sustainability

European Commission

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Directorate-General
Education and Culture

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This document draws on a study by Eureval for the Directorate-General Education and Culture on the sustainability of international higher education and vocational training cooperation projects.

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Sustainability

A project is sustainable when it continues to deliver benefits to the project beneficiaries and/or other constituencies for an extended period after the Commission's financial assistance has been terminated.

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About this Handbook

This Handbook is intended for applicants for the Tempus or the EU-US/Canada programmes. It provides guidance and advice for achieving sustainable outputs, in line with the project objectives.

By publishing this Handbook, the Commission emphasises the importance of sustainable partnerships in the field of higher education and vocational training. The European Commission would like to support project holders and applicants in achieving more sustainability. Issues relating to sustainability will therefore receive more attention from project assessors in the selection process and throughout the life cycle of the projects, particularly in the monitoring context.

In this Handbook **applicants** for Higher Education cooperation programmes will find advice on considering and gauging the future sustainability of their project in order to help them to design it effectively and fill in the application form.

The ability to anticipate and ensure the sustainability of projects will be taken into account by the European Commission in its assessment of applications.

Project managers will find advice to ensure the sustainability of their project during its implementation.

The Handbook provides:

- A description of the various features of sustainability to bear in mind when designing or managing a project;

- A presentation of the key factors of sustainability to take into account in order to anticipate threats or opportunities for safeguarding project activities and/or outcomes;

- Useful recommendations for project leaders to design and manage their Higher Education cooperation project with a view to enhancing its potential sustainability.

The following paragraphs first focus on Tempus Joint European Projects for Curriculum Development (**CD projects**) (see Tempus Guide for Applicants Part 2 for more details). Details concerning projects on University Management (**UM projects**) and for Training Courses for Institution Building (**IB projects**) are mentioned in specific boxes (**UM-IB projects**).

Each sustainability factor is illustrated by examples from previous cooperation projects.

Details concerning the cooperation programmes with US/Canada will be presented in a second part, since their characteristics differ significantly from the Tempus ones.

About Sustainability

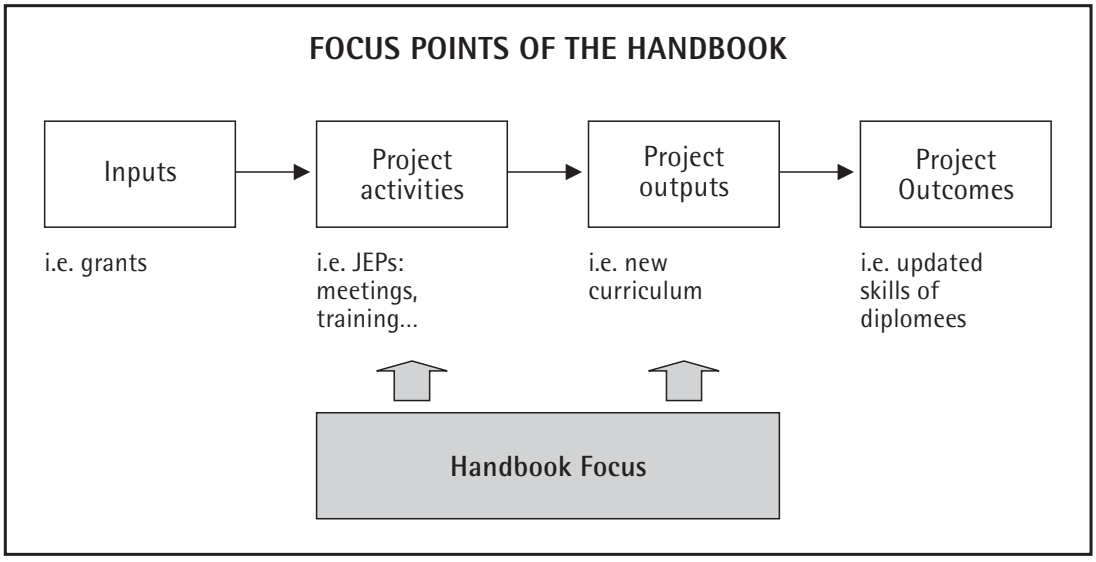
How to define a project's sustainability in the field of Higher Education cooperation?

A project can be considered as sustainable if its outcomes continue after the end of EU funding.

However, since the sustainability of project outcomes may be difficult to anticipate and to describe – most are not tangible and are difficult to see –, this Handbook focuses on the sustainability of activities and/or outputs.

Sustainability may not concern all the aspects of a project. In each project some activities or outputs may be maintained, while others may not be so necessary to maintain.

A project can therefore be considered as sustainable if relevant activities are pursued and outputs are maintained or developed after the end of the EU funding (i.e. duration of new courses, up-dating of new tools).



How to describe the sustainability of a project?

A practical way to describe the potential or achieved sustainability of a project is to use the following two criteria:

- **Diversity and intensity of activities/outputs maintained or developed after the end of the funding:**

  — Activities/outputs are maintained, i.e. new accreditation procedures (activities) / a curriculum is still used (outputs)

  — Activities/outputs are developed, i.e. needs are assessed annually (activities) / a training centre has developed new training sessions (outputs)

  — Activities/outputs can be disseminated, i.e. creation of a web site presenting e-learning sessions (activities) / Curriculum developed is included in existing courses in universities which do not belong to the initial consortium (outputs)

- **Intensity and enlargement of the cooperation:**

  — The international network is maintained, i.e. partners take care of the follow-up.

  — The local network is maintained, i.e. the universities meet regularly with the private firms concerned.

  — Finally, the initial network can be enlarged to incorporate other domains or entities, i.e. new universities or research teams join the constituencies.

An example of sustainability in a new Training Centre specialised in environmental questions established in Russia:

The Russian university set up a Training Centre specialised in environment, with the support of four European partners. The Centre was officially recognised in 2002 and courses were accredited. Student participation is flourishing: from 130 in 2003 to 720 in 2005. The Centre's activities have also been diversified: e.g. training for local firms, new services such as provision of environmental databases.

The Centre has developed sound relations with actors in the environmental field (firms, local and national actors). The consortium members may cooperate again on a new Tempus project (new technology development). Research links are maintained with two European partners and lecturers keep in contact personally (e.g. invitation to conferences).

The global assessment is highly positive and the results can be qualified as sustainable.

Specific sustainability issues for UM and IB projects: The above two criteria will not have the same importance in UM and IB projects. Maintaining international cooperation seems less crucial for such projects, which should lead to a degree of autonomy of the participants in the partner countries. Moreover, sustainability can be described by the maintenance, further development and/or dissemination of outputs and outcomes, rather than the simple continuation of activities, which might no longer be necessary for UM and IB projects. This maintenance of outputs/outcomes depends on local contexts in partner countries. See the example below.

An example of fragile sustainability of a University Management project in Albania and Kosovo:

This project aims at developing software systems concerning financial and administrative management and web sites in three Albanian-speaking universities. The project was set up and managed by a German professor, already involved in similar Albanian projects. It lasted for two years and all the software systems were set up and the staff trained in Albania and Europe.

Maintenance of the results seems fragile: although the software systems still seem to be used, the web site is no longer maintained and updated. The high staff turnover in Albanian universities (due to low salaries) is an impediment. These universities lack resources to renew their equipment and employ staff.

Cooperation between the German coordinator and staff members in Albania is maintained in connection with the lessons learned.

An example of uncertain sustainability in a Consortium Implementation Project (CIP) between Europe and Canada:

This was an ambitious International Master's project in a cutting-edge area: Health Technology Assessment and Management (HTA&M). A consortium of 10 partners in Spain, Canada and Italy (universities + HTA&M agencies) was set up. Four sessions consisting of 2 weeks of courses were organised during the project, with 23 students. This project turned out to be a real success and the partners expressed the desire to continue the course.

A second cohort of the Master was organised in 2003-2005 with 25 students from different nationalities. A third is starting (2005-2007) and many applications have been received. This is a sign that the course is a success, despite the high travel expenses involved (no more grants are available in Europe and few in Canada). Canadian partners are now the leaders of the consortium since the Europeans suffer from a lack of financial resources, and the consortium has been enlarged (Canada and England). However, financial sustainability is in question even if the project continues.

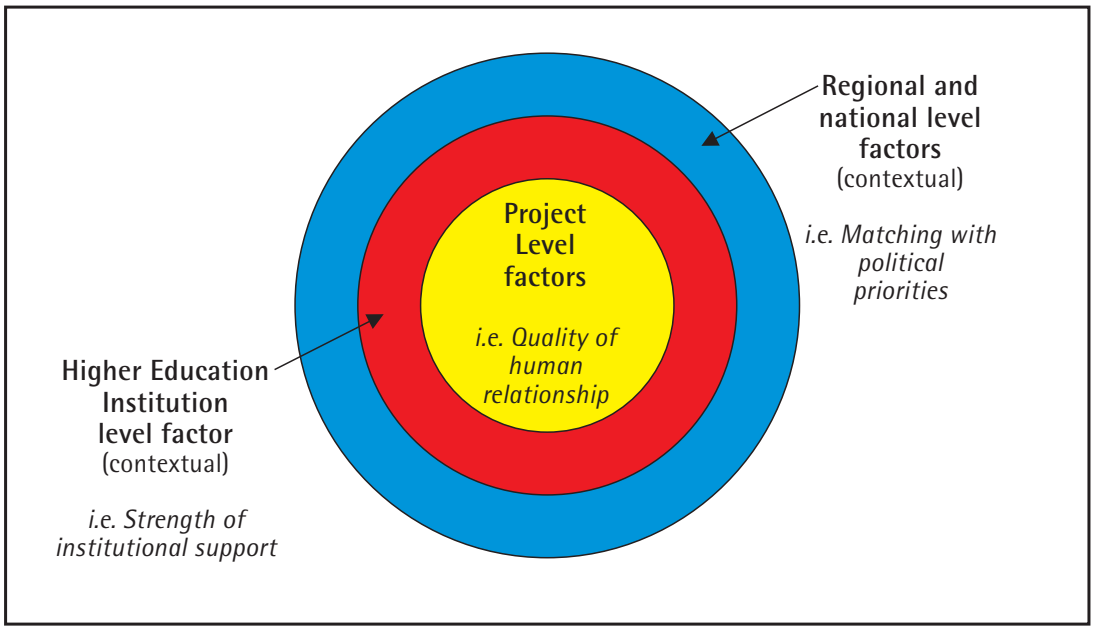
Which factors ensure or hinder the sustainability of Tempus projects?

This Handbook will help you to identify the main sustainability factors in Higher Education cooperation projects. Their importance depends on the type of project (Tempus CD, UM, IB projects or US/Canada projects). They can have a positive or a negative influence on sustainability, depending on the specific characteristics of each context.

These sustainability factors can be classified in two categories:

1. project-level factors, that is, elements of the project on which you have a direct influence (i.e. the quality of the project's design)

2. context-level factors, that is, elements external to the project itself but that you may influence somehow (i.e. the national support).



Five sustainability factors have been identified at the project level and three at the context level:

- **At the project level**

1. Quality of project's design in meeting academic, professional and/or social needs

2. Involvement of consortium members: sense of ownership and motivation

3. Effective management and leadership

4. Active participation of the audience (direct target groups)

5. Capacity for securing adequate resources for continuation

- **At the context level**

1. Academic and/or Institutional support

2. National support

3. Socio-economic support

How to ensure the sustainability of your project?

It is important to take the main project and context-level factors into account during the project design and implementation, to enhance its sustainability. Since these factors may not all have the same importance for your specific project, don't hesitate to highlight the most influential ones in your application form.

Each factor is presented below, followed by some recommendations concerning the Provision for the Project Design phase, and others concerning the Project Management phase.

Taking care of sustainability factors at the project level

1. Quality of project design in meeting academic, professional and/or social needs

The "quality of the project design" is the first sustainability factor from a time logic point of view. A project should be designed to meet specific needs and constraints in the Partner country: academic or professional needs for new skills, university needs for institutional change, etc. This is why design is such an important phase.

Projects that match the real needs of students, socio-economic actors and the labour market are more likely to be sustainable. They will attract more students, more funding and more support from the universities. Needs can change, however, during the project's life and endanger it if the project managers are not able to anticipate them.

Moreover, innovative projects can be more risky if they fail to correspond to the specific needs and constraints of the partner country and especially of the target groups.

A new Training Centre specialised in environmental questions established in Russia:

The first factor of sustainability is the efficient answer that the Centre gives to a real need for training in environmental matters in Russia. The participation of private firms in the Centre is a sign of this success. The training sessions given to these firms are an important source of income, which helps to guarantee the Centre's sustainable development.

Recommendations for project design

- Undertake an in-depth assessment of the needs of the target groups (a kind of "market study") in order to match existing or future requirements more satisfactorily. Be sure to anchor your proposal in key future issues of reform in your institution or country.

- Analyse long-term labour market trends in order to estimate the potential beneficiaries in coming years and to argue on the future attractiveness of the new curriculum.

- Do your best to obtain close involvement of the institution/s in the partner country during the design phase.

- Be sure that the project is innovative enough to remain attractive in the future.

- Sustainability issues must receive more attention in case of risky projects such as setting up new degree courses, which is more risky than reforming or extending the existing curriculum.

Recommendations for project management

- Once a year at least, review, assess and, if necessary update the risk and needs analysis and decide on appropriate improvements (e.g. by means of a quality process and regular assessments).

- Safeguard the innovative components of your project during its implementation and at the same time ensure that the innovation is acceptable in the partner country.

2. Involvement of consortium members: sense of ownership and motivation

The involvement of consortium members is crucial in a "bottom-up" process usually adopted in Tempus projects: "commitment is necessary, enthusiasm is not sufficient". This means that the partners share common interests in the project and respect one other's values.

The involvement of all the consortium members is one of the most crucial sustainability factors. It can sometimes counterbalance a lack of national support. Shared involvement can also favour efficient management and the capacity to find alternative resources and support. Close cooperation amongst members generates opportunities to launch new international projects after the end of the Tempus project.

Training sessions about local democracy, for local public administration in Albania (IB project):

The sustainability of this project has been favoured by the logic of mutual interest for all the partners (University and local administrations). The fact that the partners also managed other projects during the Tempus project has created a real dynamic in the partnership. They have finally identified new needs to satisfy and wish to create new projects to maintain their cooperation.

Existing experience in cooperation amongst the consortium leaders is certainly a factor of sustainability, as is the provision made during implementation for encouraging individual commitment within the consortium.

When high turnover concerns the staff members in the Partner universities it usually hinders sustainability. Generally speaking, the lack of a feeling of ownership from the counterparts is one of the main threats to sustainability.

Development of software systems in Albanian-speaking universities in Albania and Kosovo (UM project):

The importance of the European coordinator's strong involvement is evident here. These actors had sound experience and knowledge of the local logics in Albania. They had managed another similar Tempus project in Albania and had learned a great deal, as noted in the first report: "the experience in Tirana has shown that it is not enough to convince the staff members of the new practices' usefulness. It is important to involve the university Top Management in the debates in order to motivate the staff members". The German leader's sound knowledge of Albania was a way to develop a trusting relationship with the Albanians and to ensure that after the end of the projects they were under constant pressure to keep using the new tools: "If you just go there for two years and then leave, nothing really happens", he commented. He noted that the Europeans should not forget that they are guests in the Partner countries and should behave accordingly.

Specific issues concerning UM-IB projects: In the UM/IB projects, the international cooperation may stop at the end of the project without endangering its sustainability, since the counterparts in the partner countries become autonomous.

Recommendations for project design

- Analyse the sources of the consortium members' motivation and develop a shared interest based on mutual benefits for all the partners.

- If possible, organise the consortium around a nucleus of members who have already worked together or, at least, who show a pioneering spirit and enthusiasm.

- Make sure that you can recruit dedicated staff for your team and, if possible, link career opportunities to their work on the project.

Recommendations for project management

- Ensure continuous and well-balanced involvement of each partner throughout the project's life (in order to avoid risks of partners dropping-out or, on the contrary, becoming over-involved).

- Introduce participative management with clear decision-making procedures and regular reporting (e.g. regular steering committee meetings)

- Promote prospects of new correlated projects between consortium members.

3. Effective management and leadership

This factor relates to the project leaders and to their professional motivations, skills and ability to manage the whole project.

Effective management favours the involvement of partners, fundraising, and the ability to anticipate sustainability. For instance, the project manager can anticipate language problems, implement quality procedures, and organise an active dissemination of the project results to potential financiers or donors.

Good leadership combines institutional influence with the coordinators' managerial skills. It is favoured by the project leaders' previous experience in international cooperation and by the proper use of advice from experienced colleagues or professionals such as the National Tempus Officer.

Effective management is also favoured by a clear distribution of rights and responsibilities, which develops confidence amongst the partners.

A Training Centre on soil and water resources developed in Russia (CD project):

The participation of the Polish professor as an expert partially ensured the success of this project. It was provided for as "Participation in Provision for Project Management Group" and "Evaluation, monitoring, dissemination. The EU partners noticed that, owing to his experience in cooperation with Eastern European universities and in the Tempus project, this professor became a good "mediator" between the various partners. He contributed to the project as an advisor on a scientific as well as managerial level. Moreover, he has played an important role in communication between EU and Russian universities. This person has in-depth experience of Tempus projects.

Specific issues concerning UM-IB projects: A high staff turnover in the Partner countries may endanger the project (i.e. problems of low salaries in less developed countries), especially when the project trained them and thus enhanced their attractiveness for the private sector.

Development of software systems in Albanian-speaking universities in Albania and Kosovo (UM project):

In this project sustainability is not only a matter of financial support; it is linked more to the high staff turnover in Albania. For instance, the International Relations manager changed twice during the project, and each time the experience acquired was lost. High turnover is due to the low salaries paid by universities in Albania.

Although the involvement of European actors is a factor of success, that of Albanian actors is a real factor of sustainability: good will, maintaining staff members, transmission of skills in case of turnover, etc.

Recommendations for project design

- Take advice from and/or include in the consortium an experienced manager of international projects.
- Include in the project design those persons in partner universities with the most influence in order to gain support and promote the acceptability of the innovative part of the project.
- Ensure that project leaders are formally accountable and that the roles and responsibilities of the consortium members are clear.

- Ensure that the involvement of project leaders will be fully integrated by their institutions into their professional assignments and that is compatible with their other tasks and overall workload.

Recommendations for project management

- Organise participative management with clear decision-making procedures (i.e. online forum).

- Involve National Tempus Coordinators or external advisers in decision-making processes inside the project consortium (participation in coordination committees) and schedule regular feedback to consortium members by Internet, as well as appropriate dissemination of selected information to the most influential top-level bureaucrats (e.g. a newsletter).

- Project leaders should implement quality procedures in line with Western academic practices, to guarantee the appropriate content of the new curriculum and facilitate its future accreditation.

- Anticipate the outcomes of possible staff turnover by developing the relevant professional capacities in other employees and have a specific budget to cover these extra costs.

4. Active participation of the audience (direct target groups)

Beneficiaries' help is obviously useful, particularly in universities where resources and professional staff are insufficient in order to participate by kind if not by funds. Moreover, the target groups (students, employees, etc.) can be actively involved during implementation of the project for lobbying purposes but also for building a sense of ownership, recruiting new participants, and so forth.

Specific cultural contexts (e.g. linguistic capacities, social norms etc.) may not encourage audience participation. In turn, local project ownership is more difficult to gain.

Recommendations for project design

- Make provision for involvement of students and target publics in project activities.

- Use risk analysis to identify cultural specificities (e.g. linguistic capacities, social norms etc.) which do not encourage participation, and plan creative and culturally sensitive means to overcome the related inhibitions.

Recommendations for project management

- Promote participation of students and target publics in the implementation of activities (dissemination, tutoring new participants, building a website, etc.).

- Organise symbolic rewards to the most committed ones (e.g. article in the newsletter).

5. Capacity for securing adequate resources for continuation

A sustainable project should secure appropriate resources in order to be maintained: financial resources (internal or external to universities) as well as human resources and material equipment. The project managers should anticipate the end of the EU funding sooner rather than later by seeking alternative sources of finance or making the project self-sufficient.

If the curriculum is attractive (based on real needs and with a socio-economic support) a part of the students can be asked for tuition fees.

In most cases the financing of the projects is not necessary since only part of the activities need resources to be maintained. However in less wealthy partner institutions the capacity to secure adequate resources is crucial for continuation.

Typically, in the case of sustainable projects, the managers anticipated financing from the outset and found solutions to diversify it.

A new Training Centre specialised in environmental questions established in Russia:

The actors of this project are fully aware of the importance of finding alternative financing. The Russian university's website indicates that: "Sustainable development of the Centre is fundamentally linked to the development of a business and financial plan, the setting of targets and the measuring of outcomes. The Centre will continue to develop training courses (applied to regional needs) to run as fully or partially funded short courses and workshops for employees of the city and regional government, and commercial enterprises (including those related to the oil and gas industries)". The Centre has developed training sessions and services to private firms.

The least sustainable activities are those involving travel expenditures (i.e. teacher and student exchanges). Alternative solutions can be found (E-learning, video-conferences).

Concerning the financing of activities, most of the funding comes from the universities even if it is not always enough, especially in less wealthy countries. Interesting solutions have been found, especially in Russia, by mixing different sources of financing: public/private and national/international with new projects.

Creating a separate unit in the university, dedicated to the project, is a key factor of sustainability in CD projects. It prevents the institution from having to recycle project staff and resources as soon as the funding comes to an end. The staff will be highly motivated to raise funds if they are assured that the budget obtained will not be captured for other "more urgent" purposes in the university.

Recommendations for project design

- Identify precisely which activities need to be sustainable and try to estimate their cost.

- Identify beforehand precisely which actors (private, public) could help you to finance the project after the EU funding and try to obtain some kind of formal agreement for future support.

Recommendations for project management

- Actively lobby the University to secure the main resources and do your best to create an autonomous entity in charge of implementing the project.

- Actively lobby private and/or local organisations in the partner country to support the project's activities after the EU funding has come to an end (e.g. selling services to private firms).

- Anticipate possible ways to continue the most expensive activities with reduced costs; you may develop other solutions like E-learning courses, videoconferences, local rather than EU experts, etc.

- If the curriculum is attractive, part of the students can be asked for tuition fees.

Taking care of sustainability factors at the context level

1. Academic and/or institutional support

A project can be supported by institutional and organisational leaders ("central authorities") and/or by academic bodies (Curriculum Development projects). Official authorities (the university vice-chancellor for example) inside the institution are one of the key counterparts since they countersign the project proposal. "Top management" support is crucial for operational managers in supporting the project's activities and processes.

"University leaders", that is, opinion leaders in the academic community, can play an important role since their acceptance or neutrality towards the project is necessary for official approval.

This is the factor with the most decisive influence on sustainability because most of the financing and support comes from the universities. Gaining confidence among the central authorities and university leaders can ensure sustainability, especially if your project is in line with the university strategy. Real support can be obtained by active involvement of the top managers in the project's design and life via interviews, conferences etc. The involvement of many faculties in the project can also help to secure support.

A training centre on soil and water resources developed in Russia (CD project):

One factor that promotes sustainability is the university's particular interest in this project and its support. Owing to its modern and international dimension, the project became a source of pride for the university. The project benefits from this through a feedback process.

There has been strong support from the universities involved in the project. The Dean of the University is Professor of Water Resources and has extensive international experience (in Africa, Cuba, etc.). These elements have been very important for the project. The fact that the Deans were invited to project meetings from the very beginning fostered the university's support.

The existence of prior cooperation with European partners in the Partner countries can be an advantage for obtaining academic/institutional support. A sustainable project is a project through which the participating universities and/or faculties acquire renown and academic acknowledgement.

Specific issues concerning UM-IB projects: In UM projects in particular, academic recognition is less important than the political support of the top management of universities, although it may not be enough in the case of less developed universities.

Development of software in Albanian-speaking universities in Albania and Kosovo (UM project):

The Universities have supported this project and the Deans have been involved in its implementation. They have formed trusting relationships with the European coordinators, for instance during a training session in Germany.

However, even if specific salaries for specialists in New Technologies were planned before the project, they have not always been maintained, due to a lack of resources in the universities. A web site is up-dated thanks to a Professor who does so in his personal time. Sustainability of the results can thus rely on individual commitments if the project suffers from a lack of support from the university.

Recommendations for project design

- Identify precisely the types of activity that can benefit from university support (material, financial and human) and obtain formal commitment regarding resource allocation.

- Make your project attractive from a university strategy and image point of view to gain sustainable support.

Recommendations for project management

- Organise active involvement by the top managers in the project's life.
- Pay attention to publicising the project in order to enhance added value for institutions: e.g. leaflets and newspaper interviews.

2. Support from national authorities

National support refers to the support of the national state institutions through the competent ministries, political and administrative means. This support may be in the form of financial resources as well as communication or political support and, above all, accreditation. Its role and importance depend largely on the organisational scheme of the countries concerned.

Ministries' support for accreditation is a key factor for CD projects and can be anticipated. Making provision for accreditation as early as the design phase is a form of best practice.

Tools built to modernise language teaching in primary schools in Croatia (CD project):

Contacts were established, early in the project, with the Ministry of Education and the National Board for the European Year of Languages, which recognised the importance of the project in Croatia and published information about it on its website.

The accreditation was anticipated from the beginning of the project. The Ministry recommended the use of the tools (built during the project) in primary schools. Unfortunately this support came late in the project's life. It was an outcome of active lobbying by the project manager and regular communication about the results. The support was not financial; it consisted in official support for communication to primary schools.

National support may also be favoured by direct links between the project manager and members of Ministries, and by active lobbying.

Specific issues concerning UM-IB projects: In IB projects political support is a key factor. An example is the Ministries' support for cultural and social changes brought about by the project, especially in Tacis and CARDS countries. In UM projects the national support can be limited in the name of universities' autonomy: it is more important to ensure that the university top management will support the project.

Recommendations for project design

- During the project design, test the opportunities and threats for future accreditation.
- Enhance attractiveness and future visibility of the project for national and academic bodies.

Recommendation for project management

- Try to create individual contacts with members of the Ministries and to actively lobby at this level.

3. Support from socio-economic actors

Socio-economic support in the partner countries refers to the support which can also be provided by private firms, local public administrations, professional bodies, NGOs, etc. The socio-economic support strongly depends on the level of identification of professional and/or social needs during the project design and the lobbying of private and/or local actors. The more a project corresponds to socio-economic needs, the more support it will be able to obtain from local actors. Even if local socio-economic financing in the partner countries concerns few projects, this factor can be important to ensure their sustainability.

A new Training Centre specialised in environmental questions established in Russia:

The Centre offers many activities that favour its sustainability: a curriculum on the environment integrated into university curricula; training sessions for specialists in natural resources in local firms; free or paid access to information on environment (e.g. data bases).

On the other hand, private firms have contacted the Centre to deliver specific training. A town in the same area has also organised a training session on "Water-based Management Systems". The dynamism of these activities responds to local needs, ensures financial resources and favours the involvement of many local actors.

Specific issues concerning UM-IB projects: It may be noted that support can come from local actors as well as public administrations, especially in IB projects.

Recommendation for project design

- If it is relevant for your project, try to obtain support from local (private or public) actors to ensure the project's sustainability. You can identify them through a study of needs.

Recommendations for project management

- Identify cultural gaps or economic impediments to socio-economic support in order to facilitate active lobbying.

- In IB projects, calculate the critical mass of "clients". How much does it cost to run the courses? How much the potential "clients" can afford to pay? Does it cover all the costs or not? If not, is the university willing to step in for the rest?

Specific provisions for EU – US/Canada cooperation projects

Sustainability factors differ significantly in the case of US/Canada projects due to different goals but also to profound differences in national contexts.

Most of the above comments and recommendations do nevertheless remain relevant for US/Canada projects, with the exception of the elements listed in this section. Special consideration will be devoted to the following two factors of sustainability:

- Integration and dissemination of good and/or innovative practices
- International, national and local recognition.

Taking care of sustainability factors at the project level

1. Design corresponding to needs/demands shared amongst the participating countries

This factor puts the emphasis on a shared opinion as to the importance of needs among partners. In US/Canada projects this factor is particularly important: if the project corresponds to needs, then it is attractive for students and is able to attract funding.

The existence of substantive benefits for the students participating in the project is an important element for sustainability: benefits mean scientific and professional knowledge, national or international recognition.

An example of in-depth analysis of students' needs:

In a project for the creation of a Master's degree a study of student and labour market needs was undertaken beforehand. The success of the project showed that it corresponded to the needs of both students and the labour market. The target audience was thus successfully reached.

This influenced sustainability. The fact that the project corresponded to real needs explains the success of the Master's degree among students (some even pay their travel expenses). The degree course corresponds to students' constraints and gives them a high-quality education, thanks to the consortium's formative evaluation to improve the qualification. In the course design emphasis was put on adaptation to both European and Canadian culture.

Recommendations for project design

- Analyse long-term labour market trends in order to estimate the potential beneficiaries in coming years and argue on the future attractiveness of the new courses (research links, accreditation, professional recognition, etc.).

- Organise regular assessments to check that the project remains in line with students' current and future needs.

- Be sure that all partners are agreed on the usefulness of the project.

2. Integration and dissemination of good and/or innovative practices

Pedagogic, technical and scientific innovations in terms of content or tools are a powerful driving force for US/Canada projects. It is important to see how these innovations will be integrated into ordinary work and possibly disseminated towards other universities.

Provision to maintain and enhance a high level of innovation for all partners (high-profile projects) is an influential factor. Linking teaching cooperation to joint research projects can ensure sustainability by fostering partners' motivation on both sides.

Recommendations for project management

- Use new information technologies to disseminate as much information as possible about the innovations amongst the partners and to attract new potential partners.

- Build strong links between courses and research projects with a view to maintaining the highest profile of the project (at the cutting-edge of scientific knowledge).

3. Involvement of consortium members – sense of ownership and motivation – Committed leadership within the consortium

The involvement of consortium members is a key factor, especially when universities' support is more formal. Solutions can be found for shared involvement on both sides, such as a coordinating committee.

An example of strong commitment of all the partners:

The first sustainability factor is without doubt strong commitment of all the partners, who are truly motivated to ensure that this Master's course is maintained. This motivation can be explained by a balanced sharing of the roles between partners (as noted in the final report: "the two most important principles governing the project have been sharing of responsibility and reciprocity" – for instance, each university was the leader of a course), previous international experience, and knowledge of one another. This is witnessed in the energy spent to maintain this Master's course. For example, the European coordinator paid her travel expenses for the second edition from her own pocket, since she had no source of funding. She spent much time and energy but was disadvantaged by a lack of resources and institutional support.

For the purpose of participative management a coordinating committee was created with members of each institution, and a phone conference held every month in order to take the main decisions. 27 such conferences, lasting from 60 to 90 minutes, were held between December 1999 and July 2003. Minutes were taken at each meeting. Three subcommittees were also set up, in which all the partners participated. A new one (Canadian) joined the consortium and contacts were established with potential new partners.

In US/Canada projects we witness the particular importance of a precise definition of roles on both sides, as a factor of common involvement. Respect for others' values is especially important for US/Canada projects where a lack of mutual consideration between the partners can hinder sustainability.

Recommendations

- Draw up an organisational chart between consortium members.
- Find solutions to create shared involvement of partners throughout the project's life (e.g. a coordinating committee).
- You should already know the parties that you would like to co-operate with.

4. Target groups participation

If cultural issues are not taken into account they can hinder the students' interaction. Students may be reluctant to go to a partner country if they have a poor grasp of the language or feel that the proposed courses do not correspond to their needs (e.g. local business environment, local labour market) and constraints (e.g. a semester abroad can be long for students with a family).

Recommendations

- Anticipate the cultural restraints by a study of the needs and constraints of the target groups in all the partner countries.

- Make sure that the relevant study programmes are taught in English in all European universities or that the students have sufficient knowledge of the languages.

5. Capacity for securing adequate resources (staff, diversification of funding, infrastructure, etc.) for continuation

The sustainability of US/Canada projects is linked, in particular, to the sustainability of the international cooperation (direct relations and exchanges maintained).

The least sustainable activities are student exchanges (lack of financing), although their financing can be anticipated in the project's life and other solutions can be found (e-learning courses etc.).

Recommendations

- Anticipate alternative solutions for the financing of student exchanges (private actors, students, international institutions, etc.).

- Propose alternatives to student exchanges, like e-learning courses and videoconferences.

Taking care of sustainability factors at the context level

1. Academic/institutional support – integration in university strategy and stability of academic staff

This factor is also important in US/Canada projects, but it is preferable for the academic/institutional support to be balanced on both sides.

An example of an EU-Canada project with different level of university support among partners

There has also been insufficient support from the universities in Spain which have not really understood the potential of this international Master's degree, the first of its kind within the university structure, although the partners did do some lobbying: "In most institutions, this process proved cumbersome, bureaucratically lengthy and time-consuming" (final report). Support has been easier to find in Canadian universities.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the university is fully aware (of the existence of the project) at the beginning of the project, and agrees in writing.

- Look for the support from the top management of the universities through lobbying or creating links with research teams.

2. International, national and local recognition

Since distinction between these three levels of external support seems less relevant than in Tempus projects, they are considered together.

In US/Canada projects it is important to find the right level of support: local, state, professional or private organisations. The national level is less important than in Tempus projects because universities are more autonomous.

Recommendation

- Identify precisely the right level of support and try to obtain it by various means before the end of EU funding.

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