

The user perspective in projects

– summary of the analysis on EU funded guidance projects,

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The Voice of Users?

The analysis was based on the description of the active role of users in guidance, which has been stressed in many recent EU documents and initiatives, especially in the Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practises in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe (2004)¹. In addition to this specific focus the analysis reflected to what extent the resolution priorities were identified in the projects.

The methodology used in the analysis

The analysis was focusing on a sample of projects illustrating the active role of users in guidance and also the continuous improvement of guidance by involving the user voice in quality assurance². The sample of 94 EU funded guidance projects came from two different sources. The Leonardo da Vinci Thematic Monitoring Group had collected information on their database on projects focusing on VET and the Labour market, Guidance and other specific groups. The Ljubljana conference organisers had selected a sample of 72 projects focusing especially in guidance. Additionally, the organisers provided data on 22 projects which were candidates for the Leonardo da Vinci projects Helsinki awards in December 2006.

Origin of the analysed projects	Number of projects
Proposed candidates for Helsinki Awards 2006	22
Projects in the Thematic Monitoring Theme 1 database	72
Total	94

Table 1. Sample of the analysed projects

The analysis was conducted by three independent experts with qualitative approach. The goal of the analysis was to identify 5-10 projects which would meet the criteria identified in the following three key reference points defined in the Resolution of Lifelong Guidance and the European common reference tools of lifelong guidance. The analysis was conducted according to the following phases:

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/resolution2004_en.pdf

² The citizen and user involvement is highlighted in the EU common reference tools for lifelong guidance: *Improving lifelong guidance policies and systems*; see http://www2.trainingvillage.gr/etv/publication/download/panorama/4045_en.pdf

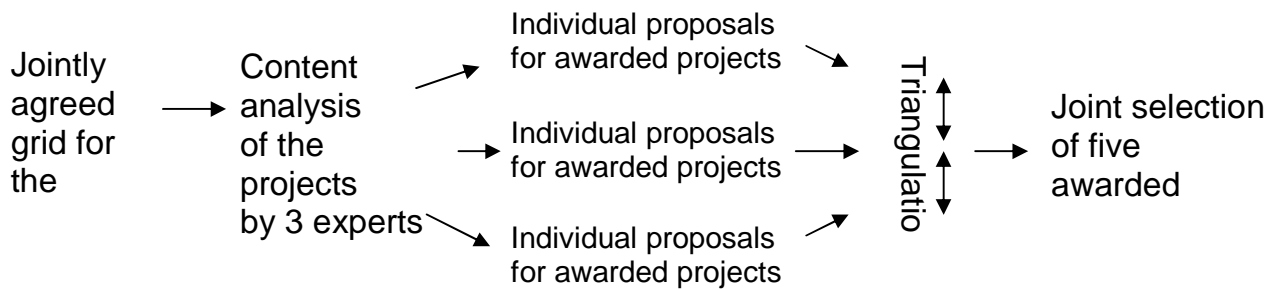


Figure 1. The phases of the analysis

The first criterion referred to the common aims and principles for lifelong guidance from two aspects. The centrality of the citizen includes independency, impartiality, confidentiality, equal opportunities and holistic approach. The analysis examined also to what extent the projects aimed to enable citizens by means of empowerment and active involvement. The grid included taxonomy, whether these principals were described to be operational, whether it was described explicit to users, whether there were descriptions how it was made operational or whether the operationalisation was monitored.

The second criterion examined the methods used to determine the user needs from two perspectives. The analysis focused the identification of the target groups and what screening instruments were used to define the user needs.

The third criteria analysed the citizen and user involvement in quality assurance systems for career guidance. The taxonomy in this criterion examined to what extent the projects provided information for the users regarding their entitlements or whether there was evidence on consultation of the client satisfaction. The research team searched data on systematic use of consultations, e.g. how user voice was used in the design, management and evaluation of guidance services and products. Finally the projects were analysed, to what extent the users had co-responsibility of the provision of the services. In addition to these three criteria, the grid included more details to rank the selected projects if necessary.

Criteria	Taxonomy
Criteria 1 Principles of guidance provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centrality of the beneficiary; • Enabling citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle is described to be operational • Principle is described explicit to users • Description how principle is made operational • Operationalisation is monitored
Criteria 2 Methods used to determine the user needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the target groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method/Instrument is described to be operational • Method/Instrument is described explicit to users

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening instruments used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description how method/instrument is made operational • Operationalisation is monitored
<p>Criteria 3 Citizen and user involvement in Quality assurance systems for career guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information for the users regarding their entitlements • Consultation of the client satisfaction • Systematic use of consultations • User voice is used in the design, management and evaluation of guidance services and products • Users have co-responsibility of the provision of the services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria is described to be operational • Criteria is described explicit to users • Description how criteria is made operational • Operationalisation is monitored

Table 2. The grid for the analysis

The project descriptions were subjected to a textual analysis according to the criteria and taxonomies described above. It is important to note, that the evaluation team faced some challenges with illustrate some limitations to the methodology used. The data describing the projects came from two different sources, thus the quantity and quality of the data varied. Also the documentation of the projects varied in quantity and quality. In some cases the documentation indicated only anecdotal information to what extent the user voice was explicit in practise. Some of the projects were not directly targeted to end-users; they were databases of existing projects or the project aimed to develop a portal with references to existing pilots. These types of projects provided hardly any data for the planned grid. Thus, the number of projects for thorough analysis was quite limited and the final selection of the projects was done by expert triangulation.

In addition to the selection of good practise the analysis has also pedagogical value. Some of the findings may reflect a general lack of synergy and sustainability among EU funded projects in Member States. The analysis may help to identify key challenges for selecting and implementing new projects under the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013.

Key Findings

The content and nature of the projects varied. Within the data there were examples of self-assessment tools, matching tools and devices for making personal development plans. Some of the projects were databases on educational and occupational information. A few projects had a wider paradigm to establish services for disadvantaged groups or groups at risk and develop measures to support placement and self-employment. Some of the projects aimed to develop measures to promote dialogue between employers and employees. The voice of users was not explicit in training modules or networks for practitioners. In some cases the project was targeted to service providers and they included quality

frameworks and portals for guidance related research. The sample included also two merely research projects.

The common principles of guidance; the centrality of the citizens and enabling the citizens, were widely described in the project goals. However, there was not much evidence how these were implemented in practise. The data showed some cases of methods used to determine the user needs. In general the target groups were described explicitly, but there was less information how the users were involved in the process or service design. Some projects provided information on screening the needs of the target groups, and in most cases the screening referred to the use of self assessment tools. Due to the nature of the projects the voice of the user was not explicitly visible in projects focusing on networks, training of practitioners, databases or quality standards. In terms of the citizen and user involvement in Quality assurance systems for career guidance, in most cases the data was collected on client satisfaction. Only few projects informed statements of using the data in the service design.

The state of the art?

The following table summarise general observations and questions arising from the analysis.

Observation	Questions arising
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The target groups, the guidance contexts as well as the guidance setting and methods seem to be rather traditional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The experimentation with new target groups (like specific disadvantaged, minority or employed citizens), with new guidance contexts (like workplaces, citizen communities etc), with new guidance settings (e.g. multi-professional working and cross-sectoral methods), and new methods (interaction of individual and groups counselling, face-to-face counselling and distance or Internet counselling etc.) should be encouraged.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing guidance is mostly about developing guidance for the clients, not so much about developing guidance with the clients • In some cases the goals seem to be supplier driven rather than citizen-centered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More encouragement and instructing the citizen/client involvement in the Leonardo programme and on the national level.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In spite of some innovative technology assisted applications the overall impression seemed to represent “re-inventing the wheel”. Many projects seem to repeat what already had been invented and developed. • Existing transnational databases are not utilised enough. • Some of the projects were traditional matching tools. • The new tools were developed to solve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting more definite pre-requisite for the projects to relate its goals to the work done earlier in the field. • For supporting and enabling this the EU should develop different forms of “tutoring”/”mentoring” mechanisms as well as data bases for pre-negotiating the individual projects’ goals. • Any form of improving mutual learning within the EU should be strongly encouraged.

problems deriving from previous guidance paradigms and schemes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New jointly developed “European dimension in technology assisted guidance”?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall project aims and objectives were in congruence with the major guidance policy documents • Threat of fragmentation of guidance. The development of guidance seems to lose its core idea in the jungle of specific and detailed projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the “de-fragmentation” mechanisms? • Mechanisms according to the idea of Clearinghouse of practice in European/National levels should now perhaps be developed? • Analysis of the need for regional and cultural practise requiring context-specific development? • How to use transnational peer learning more systematically in the development?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are gaps in dialogue at all levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dialogue between the Leonardo programme and the national programmes, between the national programmes and the projects as well as between the projects should be encouraged and developed further.

Key questions for further consideration

The sample of projects in this analysis illustrate many cases of good practise of guidance. In general the projects are implementing the European lifelong guidance policy priorities. There are already many examples of productive peer learning activities.

In promoting the user voice in guidance there are some questions to remain in project activities and also in project management. In order to enhance sustainability of the project outcomes there is a need to explore how to disseminate the already available examples of the user voice more systematically? This should be discussed parallel both in practise and in the training of practitioners.

The project managers and promoters could enhance the cost-effectiveness of the EU programmes by promoting synergy among the projects and clustering the various projects more systemically. Already in submitting the project proposals the promoters should be able to identify how they are building upon existing practise. There is a need for a shift from pilot projects to the transfer of innovations. In enhancing the thematic monitoring a remaining challenge is how to implement a more explicit and structured data collection framework. This framework could be developed to a European database which could be utilised in processes related to designing, promoting, selecting and evaluating the projects both from practise and lifelong guidance policy development perspectives.

The sample of projects also illustrates an interesting multiplicity of guidance practitioners, methods, approaches and theories in the European Union. Because of the differences in the political and economical situations of the member states and because of the specific history of guidance in each country also the concept of guidance seems to be understood in many ways. The evaluators encourage the actors within the European Life Long Guidance Community to carry open discussion on the

philosophical and methodological frame for guidance and contextualise the definition of lifelong guidance in the 2004 Council Resolution e.g. by means of the EU common reference tools. Multiplicity is a richness but defining together the basic concepts, goals and values could strengthen the status of European guidance and enhance the effectiveness and quality of the services.