



Reviewing (traces of) European Virtual Campuses

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Abstract: This document contains the final (summative) evaluation report of the Re.ViCa Project, with a reflection on the operational evaluation and its outcomes (also included as Annexes).

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Final report on Evaluation and Quality Management

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This report, completed after the last deliverables had been created, contains the outputs of the operational and outcomes evaluations within the Re.ViCa project. The operational evaluation dealt with the evaluation of project meetings and project process (formative and summative). The evaluation of the outcomes incorporates the evaluation of the Re.ViCa outcomes and products.

The evaluation had three main stages:

1. Begin: The creation of the Evaluation Plan.(Annex 1)
2. Mid: External evaluation :Assessment of project results.
3. End: Self-assessment of the Project by the project partners

The role of the University of West-Hungary evaluators within the Project, providing formative support to the partners and contributing directly to some of the Project activities and deliverables, removes the option for a strict summative assessment, which itself requires distance and independence from the Project. (This was also a remark in the evaluation of the eacea expressed in the progress report) That is why, we also organized an external evaluation of a number of the project outcomes in the middle of the project. The quality of the operational evaluation is guaranteed by the substantial experience in the evaluation of EC-funded projects by the University of West-Hungary.

This final report is organized in two parts. The first part deals with the operational evaluation. The second part focuses on the outcomes evaluation and review.

This report gathers the information and results from the different quality reports issued during the project's lifetime. The annexes gather the reference materials we used and produced within the evaluation work package.

1. Operational evaluation

1.1 Method

To evaluate the project progress, a questionnaire was designed prior to the kick-off meeting and distributed by e-mail after each meeting to all partners for their evaluation. The summative project evaluation was done in the form of a self-assessment by the partners at the very end of the project. The following summary of the operational evaluation has been created with a retrospective review of the various activities of the project and challenges.

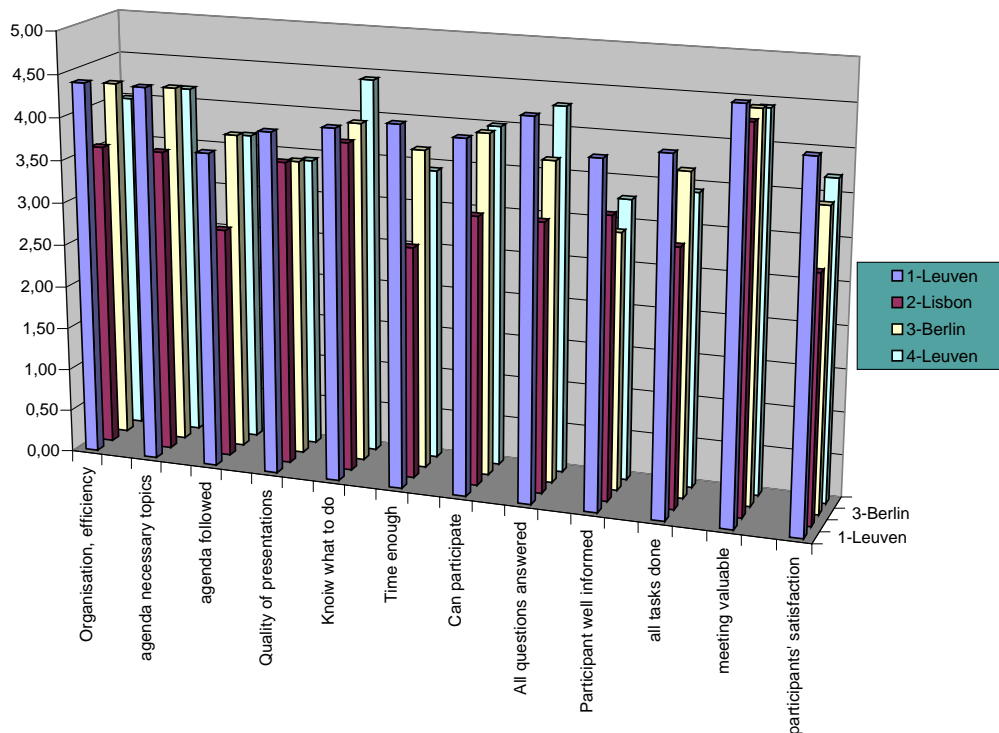
1.2 Results of the operational evaluation

1.2.1 The partner meetings

The graphic below details the results for each meeting.

As the challenges varied during the project lifetime, the results for the different criteria also changed from one meeting to another. The high scores show that the expectations of the partners were met for the different meetings. The criterion 'meeting valuable' hit a very high

average each time and shows how partner meetings were important for the partners to cope with the important ongoing activities.



1.2.2 Management and coordination of the project

The leadership of the project by EuroPACE was strong and firm whilst giving the freedom to the work package leaders to take the lead of their own work package. The coordination work done during the project, in order to keep the project moving in a good direction, was remarkable.

Communication was also well managed: the communication tools provided to the partners were adequate. To keep the project monitoring process ongoing, the project management, organised 'Flashmeetings' every two weeks.

1.2.3 Partnership and collaboration

The strength the most commonly cited by the partners was the project partnership. The partnership was particularly well balanced and partners appreciated very much working together. It consisted of partners from all corners of Europe. This heterogeneousness was a great richness to the project, but at the same time, it was a challenge for the project management to bring the different views on the project together.

There were differences of several sorts: partners who were real experts in the virtual campus topic and those with less expertise; partners who had a practical approach and others with a more theoretical approach, ... This resulted in interesting discussions and the project management did a good job in trying to bridge these differences.

1.2.4 Project outcomes

The outcomes of the project (Re.ViCa wiki which contains: historical overview – definition – country reports – Inventory – In-depth case-studies – theoretical categorisation – glossary – critical success factors) help new Virtual Campus proponent initiatives to build on previous

experience and gathered know-how (good-practice, lessons learnt, critical success factors) and provides them with a validated and comprehensive view of the Virtual Campus landscape in Europe. The objectives set in the proposal are hereby reached. The wiki format of the project outcomes is well chosen: it enables users to keep adding new initiatives and new information to the programmes list or the country reports.

Through the IAC, the involvement of European and non-European experts which shared their view on European initiatives as well as their own experience, the project took into account outsiders' points of view. The contribution from the International Advisory Committee whose members came from different cultural contexts has been significant in identifying strengths and weaknesses common to European initiatives and in defining key factors and critical success factors of the Virtual Campus initiatives. The network of people that have been built up around the project in terms of experts – IAC members, those who now receive the newsletter regularly and others is extensive.

Another important strength of the project outcomes is the wealth of information on the virtual campus phenomenon published in the wiki.

1.2.5 Overall impact of the project

The high quality of the project outcomes created the opportunity to continue the wiki and establish a community around virtual campuses. The wiki could become a major reference point on the topic of virtual campuses in Europe and probably worldwide. Leveraging on the successes of the wiki and the growing community that supports it, it is clear that this is a very useful tool that of itself provides opportunities for the consortium. There are many opportunities to work with collaborators to extend the number of countries covered, the number of world languages supported for analysis, and the depth of country reports, to cover major countries (outside OECD and EU) where English-language reports are few (Hispanic America, Middle East, parts of Asia). There are also opportunities to extend to virtual schools, commercial training and NGO community building/updating. In this context, the partners mentioned the sustainability of the wiki as a cornerstone to the sustainability of the project. A partnership agreement has been signed between the partners to keep the wiki alive and updated.

2. Outcomes evaluation and review

Taking into consideration the evaluation of the progress report by the European Commission for the first project's period – stating that the “external credentials of the evaluation were not clear” – we decided to emphasize more the external evaluation of the project's outputs during the second project year. The Re.ViCa outputs were evaluated by the International Advisory Comity during three IAC key meetings, organised during the lifetime of the project. (June 2008 – December 2008 – June 2009) The self-assessment planned in the middle of the project duration was changed into a peer assessment and external assessment of the country reports. (The final self-assessment followed the original work plan proposal.) The feedback we gathered and the lessons learned written by the peers helped us to improve the country reports. Contacting the peers was also profitable to the project dissemination and exploitation. In summary, this change in the work plan turned out to be very beneficial to the project. Therefore, the partners also decided to carry out even another evaluation by contacting all programmes listed on the wiki in order to improve the information on and categorisation of these programmes. Again, this effort also served as dissemination and exploitation activity.

2.1 Country reports

The Management and Research WP leaders did a first general review round to identify existing weaknesses and gave some advice. After that, each partner received several country reports to cross review. The evaluation template was designed in the form of a questionnaire and put online. All evaluation results were accessible to the responsible partners so that they could improve and re-edit their country reports, using the advice and comments given by the reviewers. This was a valuable exercise and improved the quality of the country reports a lot.

After the internal cross review, an external review was planned. Each partner had to find two external reviewers for each of the country report they wrote. It was not easy to find volunteers for this kind of work. With a great deal of effort the partners managed to get an external review of 19 out of the 31 country reports. Taking into consideration the work that still had to be done and the remaining time on the project, the decision was taken to concentrate efforts on the remaining issues. However, the time spent and the effort made by the partnership to handle this peer review work must be highlighted.

All evaluation results were made accessible to the partners after which they had to improve each country report, using the advice and comments from the external reviewer.

The remarks and comments given by the experts provided an excellent guidance for the improvement of the country reports. By giving their point of view, the reviewers helped the partners:

- to edit the country reports and more generally to enrich the country reports content.
- to complete the list of most relevant virtual campus initiatives
- to classify the country initiatives inside the country report.
- to compile the lessons learned from their country. (This was a great help for the handbook.)
- to bring external input into the project.
- to disseminate the country reports and wiki using their network.

A lot of attention was paid to the inputs of the external reviewer and the country reports were edited a third time to integrate the new elements brought in by the external evaluation.

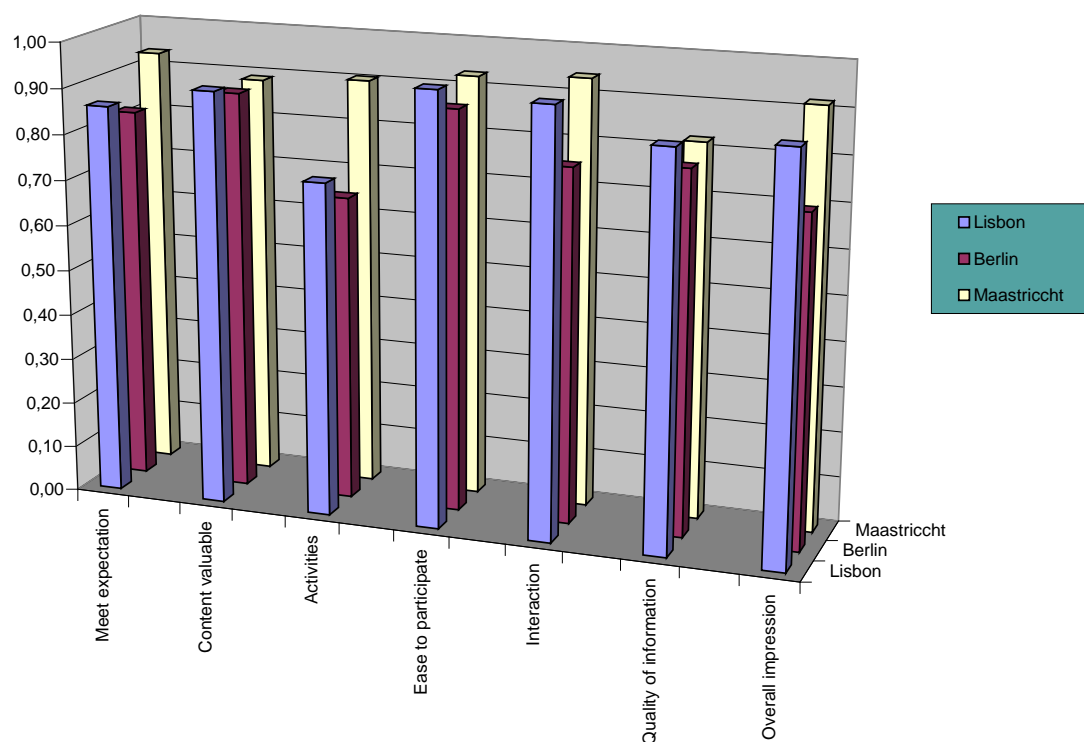
2.2 Other procedures relevant to the quality of the outcomes

<i>Schemes</i>	The use of templates for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - country reports - case studies - programmes. 	Several rounds for checking the categorisation of the entries in the wiki
<i>Results</i>	Homogeneous content, same quality level for all the materials	Exhaustive categorisation of the initiatives and programmes.

2.3 Output validation with IAC

The output validation process officially took place during the three IAC meetings, where the experts were presented each time with the methodology, the status of the project, and the status of the outputs and products. They were invited to give their recommendations and comments. All discussions and exchanges were recorded and reported. On every meeting the wiki and the new elements available were presented to the IAC members. The three IAC meeting reports can be found in the annexes 3 WP promotion and Awareness Raising. The feedback from the experts helped the project consortium to make decisions on the orientation and focus of the outcomes.

To gather participants' opinions on their participation in the IAC meetings, an evaluation questionnaire was distributed after each meeting. The following graphic summarizes their impressions:



2.4 List of programmes

A questionnaire was designed, focusing on the size and characteristics of the virtual campus initiatives. The results helped mapping and categorizing the initiatives. This evaluation was also used to gather some views on the programme list output and to disseminate the results of the project.

This external evaluation was not planned in the quality and management plan. It was a supplementary evaluation made during the last months of the project. The idea, taken from the lessons learned from the external review of the country reports, was to involve external reviewers in order to combine the dissemination of project results and to continue to improve the categorisation of the initiatives.

Conclusions

The variety of evaluation schemes set up, the variety of reviewers involved (experts for country, virtual campus experts, project outsiders) and their very different geographic origin reflect very well the general belief and atmosphere of the Re.ViCa project: to involve various stakeholders in our work and research to give a representative image of what is a virtual campus – not only in Europe but also in the rest of the world.

In terms of indicators of success the project reached excellent results with the partner meetings and the IAC meetings (as figured by the graphics of this document).

To illustrate the project performance with regard to evaluation, these are some indicators of progress: 31 country reports evaluated internally; 31 external evaluations realised for 19 different countries; 17 answers for the list of programme for more that 300 programmes responsible contacted, more than 30 different experts who attended the IAC meeting and gave their opinions about the project results.

The quality of the Re.ViCa project's results reached a high level thanks to the efforts provided by the partners in the evaluation and the methodology work packages. The results from the self-assessment show that partners are satisfied with the project results which most probably has a lot to do with the fact that the project outcomes go even further than what was defined in the initial project proposal.

To conclude this evaluation report we wish to highlight the project's main strengths : creating a rich network of people that are experts in the field of virtual campuses, and creating an impressive inventory about virtual campuses that reflect both European and non-European initiatives gathered in a unique place and open to the world.