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PROPOSAL FOR WORKING GROUP III
THE PEDAGOGIC OF A STUDY VISIT

How to build a program taking into account the EC and national priorities

In this workshop it will be attempted to draw a line between the building up of an Arion visit programme and the follow-up of the Lisbon objectives for 2010, the Arion themes and 13 objectives adopted by the European Council, as well as the national priorities.

It is important when planning an Arion visit that we take care of all the different parties: the course participants, the organizers, the institutions, the students, the intercultural aspect, the exchange of knowledge and good practices, constructive dialogue, dissemination and future cooperation. It goes without saying that the “objectives report” will mark European cooperation in education and training up to 2010.

This keynote will focus on the pedagogical aspects, contributing to a coherent and successful study visits programme.

1. EC and national objectives

How can the organizers include as many different objectives as possible? E.g. improving education and training for teachers and trainers, or developing skills for the knowledge society, access to ICT for everyone, making the best use of resources, open learning environment, making learning attractive, equal opportunities, social cohesion, active citizenship, strengthening the links with working life and society, developing the spirit of enterprise, etc and at the same time showing how we implement this topics to our national educational system?

How can the organizers build a program that makes possible for the participants to be active in the process of exchanging ideas about the objectives, active in comparing the goals of the visit to their national educational systems, and at the same time give them the time to reflect about new ways of implementing things in order to increase mobility and exchange and strengthening European co-operation?

This is a challenge that makes the visit to become a success or a disaster: a success when participants can experience precisely the main goals of the visit in practice. They wish to see things as concrete as possible. A disaster when they only can attend long lectures about the main goals without anything concrete. I have never experience as an organizer any participant who is pessimistic about implementation of our topics. They sometimes feel they must adjust it the educational culture of their own country. Some countries are more alike in the way of thinking than others.

2. Practical arrangements

How were all practical arrangements managed?

What kind of information was given before the visit?

What was the first meeting like?

How can the organizers make the participants feel welcome and secure?

The arrival, travel, accommodation and documentation about the programme should be fully arranged. This can be achieved through frequent and responsive e-mail. All available information should be sent out in advance.

3. Language problems

How can the participants and organizers cope with language barriers?

Should only people who are fluent in the working language of the visit or another foreign language be allowed to participate? Some of the participants have little command of the working language and have to rely on translation into their mother tongue by the visit co-ordinator. They find the content and discussion less accessible and their separate conversations could be distracting to other participants.

Should all participants be perseverant and including for those who have language difficulties? Perseverance from all participants ensures that this is largely overcome as the week progressed. There is some debate about the fairness of using English so often as the first language for these visits – 80% overall. Perhaps the programme directors need to consider this as a policy issue. On one hand some of the objectives of the EC are to improve foreign language learning, equal opportunities and increasing mobility, therefore we can not close the door for those who do not speak fluent English. Participants should be more tolerant and opened for new inputs and experiences.

4. Establishing of Contacts

How should participants introduce themselves and their educational challenges?

The organizers must provide opportunities to all participants to introduce themselves but not to explain their own education system rather than its challenges. Presentations made must be short and give the possibility to ask questions and discuss the implications; this can lead to quite passionate debates involving philosophy and belief. The presentations must concentrate on the challenges according to the main topic of the Arion visit. This focus must be very well clarified before the start of the visit or demanded at the time of the presentation.

Why is dialogue during the Arion visit so important?

Both formal debates and informal conversations are important to create new contacts and give new ideas to the participants. All of us have expectations about the Arion visit that might or might not be fulfilled. But, for sure, neither the organizers nor the participants can lay back and observe. Both the organizers and the participants should take an active part on the process of learning and creating. One of the main goals must be to learn something from the visit and both disseminate and/or implement the results of the week back at home.

How should participants introduce their countries according to the intercultural aspect?

International lunch the first day with traditional national products, flags, leaflets. Opening for mutual interest and further contacts in Comenius projects, Grundtvig, etc. The programme should also leave room for participants to present the situation in their home country.

How could these contacts be maintained after the Arion visit?

The contacts with the host country or other participating countries will be maintained when it is clear that there is mutual benefit in doing so. Some countries have a more advanced position with respect to certain areas while there is perceived slower progress in others. However, it is true for all participants that there are things to learn from each participating country's and representative's experience. For example when there are particular agreements between two schools with special strengths in the same topics to share products, methodologies and difficulties. In general, contacts for all participants can be pursued through email, video links and potentially staff and student visits. All participants must disseminate the output at their particular levels (principals, vice, inspectors, etc)

5. Programme content

What should the content of the programme be?

The lectures about the topic should not be too long because of the language difficulties. The Arion visit should include different topics in order to see the correlation between the national curricula, the European framework the EU topics and objectives, the parents' involvement, the implemented methodology, the community's involvement, the pupils, the senior staff, etc

Should the approach of the course be practical or theoretical?

The participants mean that the more practical the more interesting it is. Contact must be provided with teachers in particular subject areas, including the senior staff, who can refer constantly to their own classes and teaching methods to illustrate principles and methods. The other teachers, staff or educational officials can be chosen from subject areas of particular relevance to the themes of the visit. There can be created further opportunities to explore recent developments with other members of staff or visiting other kind of institutions. It is important for the participants to sustain contact with the senior staff of the host school. It is very stimulating in learning from practice on the ground to complement the theoretical perspective.

Should the organizers provide contact with the education end users?

The organizer must give the participants the opportunity to talk with students in order to get an evaluation from the end user point of view. Depending on the theme the contact with pupils might be extensive, with opportunities for all participants to discuss with and question students. The students can make interesting and lively presentations which exemplified the skills they gain through the education system of the host country. It might also be possible to mix with the students while they are in lessons and ask them about how the main topic of the Arion visit is working in practice from their perspective.

How can the organizers cover the participants' needs and objectives for the Arion visit? What are the duties and rights of the participants and the organizers according to the NA? How should organizers behave when participants don't participate in the social aspect, or the work, or other activities? Should the group be together as much as possible?

How can the content of the course give a complete experience of the main theme/themes, the social experience, the sightseeing, quality, full service?

There must be a balance with all components.

How can the NA contribute to the success of the Arion visit? What conditions should be met by the NAs to make the participation successful?

All participants should get part of their Arion grant in advance. The lack of money among some participants contributes to social differences, bad group environment and isolation. Even though the organizers make everything possible to get group prices, the standard of life in some countries is further more expensive than in others. This section of the debate should not be limited to finance aspects, but especially cover all preparatory aspects, such as briefings, documentation, guidance.