

Promoting Non-Formal Learning Mobility in the Field of Youth

Juha Kettunen

Abstract—The purpose of this study is to develop a framework for the assessment of research and development projects. The assessment map is developed in this study based on the strategy map of the balanced scorecard approach. The assessment map is applied in a project that aims to reduce the inequality and risk of exclusion of young people from disadvantaged social groups. The assessment map denotes that not only funding but also necessary skills and qualifications should be carefully assessed in the implementation of the project plans so as to achieve the objectives of projects and the desired impact. The results of this study are useful for those who want to develop the implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme and the project teams of research and development projects.

Keywords—Non-formal learning, youth work, social inclusion, innovation.

I. INTRODUCTION

LEARNING mobility is a policy of European co-operation in the fields of education, training and youth. It has steadily developed through the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union during many program periods. Student and staff mobility is financially supported by Key Action 1, Learning Mobility of Individuals of the Erasmus+ Programme. Key Action 2, Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices, includes the action Capacity Building in the Field of Youth, which is used to build the projects of research and development in youth work.

Learning mobility has become a stable and longstanding practice in the European education and youth field [1]. Mobility has been rediscovered as a means of education that transgresses the narrow objectives of formal education. Learning mobility goes beyond formal education and provides a fertile ground for alternative learning experiences. The interdisciplinary and non-formal approaches are helpful, because narrow disciplines and the degree programs of education do not provide a framework or access to the experimental realities of the youth field [2].

Mobility can be considered a means to open a new state of mind in a multiform and diverse world where new ideas can be adopted from other people, organizations and countries [3]. New ideas and open innovations are not only relevant in high-technology industries but also appropriate in more traditional and mature industries. The new ideas and theoretically developed concepts may take far too long to become part of practice. International environments provide opportunities to observe innovations in practice and gain from inbound open

innovations. The spread of these new practices, referred to as the diffusion of innovations, can be considered as an advantage of mobility [4].

The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework for the assessment of applied research and development projects. The framework is based on the balanced scorecard approach developed by Kaplan and Norton [5], [6] for the communication and implementation of strategic plans. This study extends the framework and develops an assessment map for the project assessment. Empirical evidence is based on the project titled Social Inclusion through Virtual International Mobility (SIVIM) and funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The results of the study emphasize the importance of funding from the European Union combined with the necessary knowledge and skills of the professionals in youth work to achieve the desired impacts on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The remainder of this study is set up as follows. The literature review in the next chapter highlights the importance of youth work and the inclusion of disadvantaged people in the European policy. The third section includes the data and methodology and presents the European youth policy described in the Erasmus+ Programme, the data on Capacity Building in the Field of Youth and the balanced scorecard approach. The next section includes the results and discussion and presents the assessment of the SIVIM project. The concluding comments are presented in the final section.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning is no longer understood as a result of knowledge transmission dominated by pre-established curriculum [7]. Learning is seen as professional growth, which includes not only the acquisition of skills and qualifications but also personal development [8]. The learning space can be extended from a confined classroom to a set of opportunities corresponding to open geography, including varied spaces. Learning-mobility means crossing boundaries between school and out-of-school spaces and between curricular objectives and extracurricular activities, which involves creating opportunities to learn.

Non-formal learning that takes place outside formal educational institutions typically is intentional but does not lead to a certification. Non-formal learning typically refers to learning through communication and collaboration in peer communities such as youth clubs under the guidance of a youth worker [9]. The communication is educational if it has a purpose and intent and if there is a commitment to facilitate learning [10].

J. Kettunen is with the Turku University of Applied Sciences, Lemminkäisenkatu 30, FI-20520, Turku, Finland (phone: +358-505985612; e-mail: Juha.Kettunen@turkuamk.fi).

The transnational learning mobility for the purpose of acquiring new skills is one of the fundamental ways in which individuals, particularly young people, can strengthen their future employability as well as their personal development [11]. Learning mobility can be seen as an interactive and social process rather than a psychological process within the individual. Foreign-language skills are among the major benefits of transnational learning, but non-formal learning also can strongly contribute to their personal development.

An important aim of learning mobility is to increase employability through qualifications acquired abroad; in that way, learning mobility can be seen to create skills and opportunities for employment. The highest peak in the demographic migration profile coincides with the transition from education to work [12]. The survey data studied by King and Ruiz-Gelices [13] indicate that graduates who have spent one year abroad are likely to carry over their international experience to their post-graduation lives and have better careers and higher income jobs.

Fielden et al. [14] made a survey of more than 20 large enterprises in the United Kingdom and found that about 60% of the top employers indicate that experience with international study improves employability. The study by Bracht et al. [15] found that employers consider the professional value of the Erasmus exchange students to be superior to that of other graduates and that mobile students will be more successful in their long-term careers. The study by Varghese [16] indicates that the advantages of study abroad on employment and prestige are higher in developing countries than in developed ones. Martin and Radu [17] studied the return mobility from West to East Europe and found a positive selection at return with an income premium of 10-45%, depending on the length of time abroad and the job sector.

Youth work has always included young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and cultural minorities. Social exclusion covers exclusion from the educational, labor market, spatial, relational and socio-political perspective [18]. It prevents individuals from accessing opportunities and resources that are available to members of society and necessary for social integration. The youth work supported by the social inclusion of the European Union aims to ensure that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion are able to participate fully in economic, social and cultural activities.

The study by Schur [19] showed that people with disabilities are almost twice as likely as other people to be employed in insecure temporary or casual jobs. The study by Honey et al. [20] indicates that the factors that are associated with the employment status of young people with disabilities may be distinct from those factors that influence the employment status of their peers. Young people with disability are less likely to be employed full-time, and those who are employed are less likely to remain employed. Ongoing support and attention to issues such as job type and reasonable adjustments are important.

An important challenge is linked to the contemporary media environment. Without moving to other countries, the learners'

orientation can be related to global social groups and networks. Virtual mobility is a set of activities supported by the information and communication technology that can be used to realize international collaborative experiences in a context of teaching and learning. Virtual mobility and collaborative online international learning are becoming popular means to foster international experiences at home and in the classroom. Internationalization at home refers to developments in curricula consistent with the international aspirations of institutions and training for mobility.

III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

A. Capacity Building in the Field of Youth

Youth unemployment is the most persistent problem associated with the economic recession in the European Union, and it has attracted notable political attention in recent years. The European Union has designed and introduced political funding programs to establish systematic approaches to education and youth policies. The Youth in Action Programme 2007-2013 was followed by the Erasmus+ Programme 2014-2020. The new program has shifted the focus from the personal and cultural development of young people towards the acquisition of professional skills by young workers, validation systems of non-formal learning and greater complementarities with formal education and training [21]. The youth policy has thus become more job- and market-oriented than before.

Zelding [22] identifies the creation of partnerships for the capacity building that is important for organizational development and competency. Capacity-building projects in the field of youth of the Erasmus+ Programme aim to foster cooperation and exchanges between the Programme and Partner Countries. They also aim to improve the quality and recognition of youth work, non-formal learning and volunteering in Partner Countries. The projects foster the development, testing and launching schemes and programs of non-formal learning mobility and promote transnational non-formal learning mobility, especially for young people with few opportunities. The projects can also involve organizations from the fields of education and training, as well as from other socio-economic sectors.

The Erasmus+ Programme Guide describes the desired impact of the projects of Capacity Building in the Field of Youth: "The potential impact of the project on participants and participating organizations, during and after the project lifetime and outside the organizations and individuals directly participating in the project, at local, regional, national and/or international levels." This statement is not clearly in accordance with the definition of an innovation, which is based on new ideas and applied in enterprises or other organizations to improve or create new processes, services or products [23], [24]. The impact of projects can be improved by defining innovations in the Programme Guide and requiring that that project proposals have innovative features.

The Programme Guide includes the following financial statement: "The existence and relevance of quality control

measures to ensure that the project implementation is of high quality, completed in time and on budget.” Quality control is not necessarily connected with funding, even though it is primarily a concept related to processes that produce high-quality services and products. The Programme Guide also includes the statement: “The extent to which the project is cost-effective and allocates appropriate resources to each activity.” The practical experiences of Erasmus+ project teams have indicated that there is too much paperwork involved in these projects and that more funding should be allocated for the core substance of the projects to achieve the desired impact.

The Programme Guide includes activities titled “Capacity-building activities” and “Mobility activities”. Capacity-building activities are intended to have an impact on the participating organizations and the personal development of project participants. Mobility activities include the mobility of youth workers and the European Voluntary Service between Partner Countries. It has been noted in the European Commission Green paper: “Promoting the Learning Mobility of Young People that mobility activities are non-formal learning that has a positive impact on the personal development and future employability of young people.”

Finally, the Programme Guide gives clearly articulated statements regarding the skills and qualifications perspective: “The quality of arrangements for the recognition and validation of participants’ learning outcomes as well as the consistent use of European transparency and recognition tools.” The Programme Guide includes also the statement: “The project involves an appropriate mix of complementary participating organizations with the necessary profile, experience and expertise to successfully deliver all aspects of the project.” The experience required of participants can be improved by using the European transparency and recognition tools, including the European Qualifications Framework.

The analysis of the Capacity Building in the Field of Youth indicates that the action is relatively well balanced, including reasonable statements to guide the projects. However, the Erasmus+ Programme can be improved in the future following the well-known principle of continuous improvement in quality assurance. A notable feature of the action is that the activities have evidence-based impacts on the employability and personal development of young people. The improvements of the Programme Guide are related to the unnecessary paperwork which reduces needed resources in the core substance of the project and the definition of necessary skills and qualifications in the projects.

The descriptive statistics of the capacity-building projects in the field of youth indicate that the approval rate of project proposals is 25%, which is rather low but is higher than the average approval rate of 17% in Key Action 2 of the Erasmus+ Programme in 2014. The lowest success rate, in the Strategic Partnerships action in 2014, was 4%, due to the limited budget and high demand for project funding. The low success rate can decrease the motivation of capable applicants; however, this can be avoided through the use of more funding and smaller project sizes.

B. Balanced Scorecard Approach

A quality criterion for evaluation is to find a balance between the political funding program, the skills and qualifications needed in the project, the project activities and the desired impact of the project. The balanced scorecard approach is used in this study to assess the implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme action Capacity Building in the Field of Youth. Kaplan and Norton [5], [6] developed the balanced scorecard approach to the communication and implementation of strategic plans. The Erasmus+ Programme implements the Europe 2020 Strategy of the European Union. Therefore, the balanced scorecard is also a fruitful approach for the implementation of the policy program. It is not only an approach to the communication and implementation of the future plans but can be used for the assessment of the networked plans [25]-[27].

The balanced scorecard approach is used to define the strategic objectives and place them in four perspectives. It also describes the causal relationships between the objectives and perspectives. The assessment map can be developed in light of the simple fact that development projects typically require two prerequisites. The first prerequisite is funding, and the second consists of skills and qualifications. These are the necessary inputs for the activities of the projects, which are supported by the processes and structures of the participating organizations. The activities produce outcomes that can be described by the desired impacts of the projects.

The perspectives of the assessment map can be written as follows:

1. Impact. The impact perspective includes objectives that are the outcomes of activities described by the processes and structures of the project.
2. Funding. In the funding perspective, the achievement of funding for the project is the prerequisite for project activities.
3. Activities. The objectives of the activities perspective describe the processes and structures needed to achieve the impact of the projects.
4. Skills and qualifications. This perspective describes the skills and qualifications of the project team that are necessary to achieve the objectives.

These perspectives and the objectives in the perspectives describe the necessary conditions for successful project implementation.

The assessment map can be used in the planning of the projects. The assessment map helps the project team to focus on the most important objectives to be achieved and avoid poor results of the project. Another use for the assessment map is the ex-ante evaluation of the projects by the experts who assess the project for the funding decision. Assessment experts are used by the European Union in its Horizon2020 and Erasmus+ projects. A proper procedure would help the experts in their assessment to select the projects that will produce the desired outputs. A proper framework is necessary to avoid subjective beliefs based on the versatile experiences of experts.

The assessment map is also an essential tool for the project

management, because the fulfillment of the necessary skills, qualifications and funding is necessary to achieve the objectives of the activities and, finally, the desired output of the project. These elements not only should be taken into account in the management but also can be used in the assessment of project outcomes. The Erasmus+ Programme implements the Europe 2020 Strategy. This novel tool can also be used in the assessment of strategic plans and funding programs that implement the strategic plans.

The projects funded by the European Union are networked, because there are several participating organizations from the Member States or Partner Countries. Necessary funding must be allocated for each participating organization, which in turn nominates skilled and qualified personnel for the projects. Each organization should know its activities and match the financial and human resources to achieve the objectives of the activities and finally the outcome and impact of the project. Hence, the assessment map can be drawn for the project and each participating organization in order to successfully implement the project.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recent trends in European youth unemployment have indicated that young people have serious difficulties in completing their studies, finding work and transitioning to independent adulthood [28], [29]. Even when employment is found, young workers often have precarious employment conditions. This kind of development makes meaningful mobility imperative to avoid being cut off from social integration at a considerable cost to themselves and their communities and to engage such groups and individuals via non-formal learning platforms [30].

The youth sector of the Erasmus+ Programme aims to create opportunities to raise the employability of young people. Learning mobility as a type of transnational mobility is a fundamental way in which young people can strengthen both their future employability and their personal development, as noted in a Green Paper of the European Commission, "Promoting the learning mobility of young people". Despite the efforts of the European Commission and the Member States of the European Union, there are still too many young people who do not have access to learning mobility for personal, economic, social and health reasons [31]. The project presented in this section is intended to use a novel approach to resolve these challenges.

The Social Inclusion through Virtual International Mobility (SIVIM) project aims at reducing the inequalities and risk of exclusion faced by young people who cannot access learning mobility opportunities – in particular, young people from disadvantaged social groups. Public administration and youth organizations from Spain, Italy and Poland created the Toolkit for Virtual Mobility in non-formal education in this project. The toolkit will give opportunities to young people who cannot travel to develop competence among them similar to that gained by those taking part in transnational learning mobility activities.

The coordinating organization of the project is the City

Council of Alcalá de Guadaíra (Ayuntamiento de Alcalá de Guadaíra) in Spain. Unemployment has become a serious problem in Alcalá de Guadaíra, reaching 12,162 people in January 2014. In order to decrease unemployment, the city developed programs aiming at the creation of employment and improving employability, especially among members of disadvantaged social groups. The participating organization Cantiere Giovani runs the social center "Il Cantiere" in Frattamaggiore, Italy, aiming at fostering social inclusion and active citizenship through non-formal and formal education tools. The third participating organization, Kulturatka, is a Polish organization that facilitates academic and cultural education among young people at risk of social exclusion. The main activities of the association are the promotion and the organization of cultural events, round-tables and debates with young people.

To achieve the aim of the project, the participating organizations will take part in a series of local and transnational activities in order to develop, validate and disseminate the Toolkit for Virtual Mobility in non-formal education. The project is a stepping stone towards reducing inequality by giving virtual learning mobility opportunities to young people who have no access to transnational mobility. The toolkit is being developed by the project partners, and it has been tested, validated and translated so that it will be available in three European languages.

The representatives of the participating organizations met in Alcalá de Guadaíra at the first meeting of the SIVIM project in May 2015. The partners of the project presented their proposals for the innovative content of the toolkit. The project partners have been working together to develop innovative educational materials in the form of the Toolkit for Virtual Mobility in non-formal education. The training of trainers took place in Alcalá de Guadaíra in October 2015. Youth workers from each participating organization were trained to use the toolkit.

The next project meeting was in Frattamaggiore in Italy in April-May 2016. The project partners organized workshops and tested the toolkit with young people who had not previously participated in any kind of transnational mobility activity. The project partners collected valuable feedback from youth workers and young people to improve the toolkit. The improvements were agreed upon in the meeting in Frattamaggiore and were implemented in the following months.

Fig. 1 depicts the assessment map of the SIVIM project, including the perspectives impact, funding, activities and finally skills and qualifications. The project proposal has met the award criteria of the Capacity Building in the Field of Youth of the Erasmus+ Programme. The project team includes members from a municipal youth organization, which ensures the presence of the necessary skills and knowledge in the project. The activities of the project produce innovative educational material and the Toolkit for Virtual Mobility in non-formal education. The project also supports the mobility of the members of the project team. The desired outcomes of the project include the better employability and personal

development of young people from disadvantaged social groups.

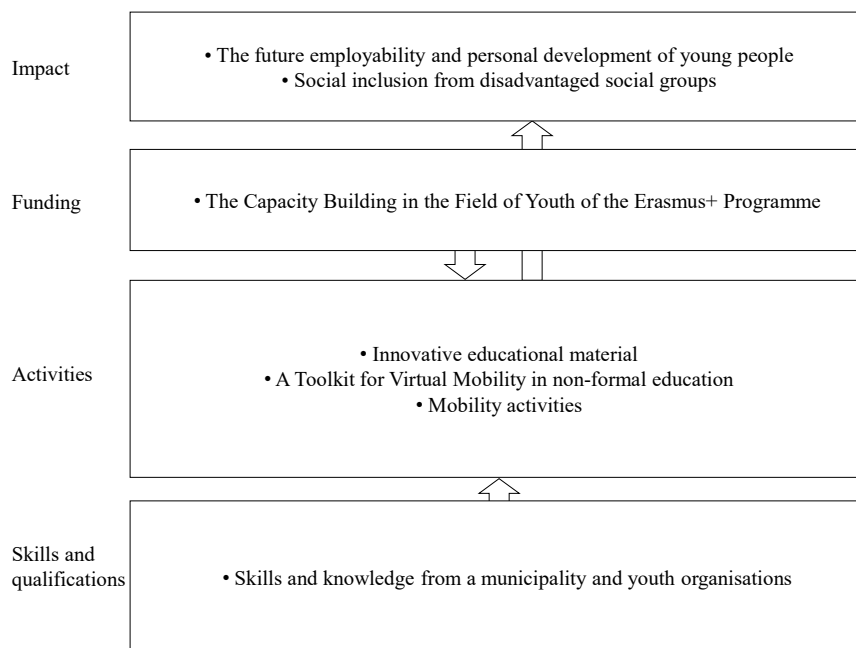


Fig. 1 Assessment map of the SIVIM project

V.CONCLUSION

This aim of this study was to develop an assessment map for the assessment of the applied research and development projects based on the strategy map of the balanced scorecard approach. The assessment map was applied in the SIVIM project, which aims to promote non-formal learning and to help young people tackle unemployment with learning mobility using information and communication technology. The project is funded by the Capacity Building in the Field of Youth of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

The assessment map was developed for the assessment of the projects funded by the European Union. The assessment map is also applicable to other funding sources, but its use should be carefully planned in each situation. It is important to define the objectives in the funding perspective as well as the skills and qualifications perspective to achieve the objectives in the activities perspective. The achievement of all these objectives is necessary to achieve the desired objectives in the impact perspective of the project.

The purpose of the SIVIM project is to reduce the inequality and risk of exclusion of young people who cannot access real learning mobility opportunities. The project developed the Toolkit for Virtual Mobility in non-formal education to promote employment that develops capabilities among young people similar to those gained by those taking part in transnational learning mobility. The virtual toolkit builds bridges to internationalization and is also useful for those young people who would like to internationalize at home before the transnational learning mobility.

The SIVIM project is an interesting pioneering case,

because it provides opportunities for further studies on learning mobility. Learning mobility improves the success of young people in their long-term careers, personal development and employment. The virtual toolkit, which will be freely available through Open Educational Resources, is a valuable contribution of this project. A fruitful avenue for further study is to examine whether the virtual toolkit is as successful as traditional learning mobility to achieve the desired effects on employment, personal development and other desired outcomes.

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