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Follow-up study of SALTO EECA activities 2004-2009

The present analysis was prepared on the basis of answers from a follow-up questionnaire submitted by 76 ex-participants of the SALTO EECA activities organized between 2004 and 2009. They represent around 13% of a whole group of ex-participants that were asked for filing in the questionnaire. Among 76 answers to the follow-up study, 46% were from representatives from Programme Countries and 54% from representatives from East Europe and Caucasus countries.

GENERAL ASPECTS

Motivation

Most respondents participated in a training course and study visit, some took part in a contact making seminar and just a few of them were engaged in other events. Motivation to participate in SALTO EECA activities was driven by different but at the same time common reasons. The most frequent answer was:

- to get know better, explore and develop knowledge of the Youth in Action programme,
- to improve the quality of Youth in Action projects in the EECA countries,
- understand more deeply the concept of EVS.

The participants from the Programme Countries were especially interested in:

- reality of youth organizations in Eastern Europe and Caucasus,
- possibilities of cooperation with new organizations from EECA and
- project implementation in the EECA region.

The issue of an international exchange was arisen quite often. First of all, many of the participants would like know how to receive information on possibilities to create contacts with different youth organizations and then establish lasting partnership between organizations from the Programme Countries and EECA countries. The possibility of sharing an experience with other youth workers was also very important.

Some of the respondents stressed that professional reasons were crucial in choosing the type of the event: developing new skills and abilities, getting exposure to working tools and methods were considered as motivating factors to participate in the SALTO EECA activities. The topic of the event

(inclusion, interreligious dialogue etc.) often had an influence on the decision to take part in the activity.

Expectations

According to the all ex-participants who submitted the follow-up questionnaire the events met their expectations. They could deeply understand the Youth in Action programme, what let them implement and develop youth projects. The quality of the training courses was very high, the trainers were motivated well-prepared and the participants well-selected. The events cleared up the ambiguity of NGO and governmental structures. The SALTO EECA activities gave them the possibility to:

- get to know active and experienced people,
- create new, mostly international contacts
- establish long-term partnership.

Some of the respondents emphasized that the events showed them different approaches and levels of youth work in Europe.

Quality

72% of the ex-participants evaluated the event they participated in as excellent. The rest of them considered that the quality of the activity was good. The standards of trainings were really high, the programme was organized perfectly and professionally. The sessions were useful and informative. The majority of respondents answered that the trainings were well-balanced, of the equal quantity of theory and practice, although several opinions stated, that some events were too informative and less practical. Also the training's teams were evaluated very high, however a few ex-participants thought that not all trainers had the same high qualifications.

PROFESSIONAL IMPACT

Impact on work

For more than half of the ex-participants the event had a good impact on their work, 33% considered that the activity they participated in, played an excellent role in their future work. 13% of the respondents answered that the influence of the event was average and for nearly 3% was rather poor.

New projects

According to 82,7% of respondents the events were useful in developing new projects. In spite of the fact that the several projects were rejected by National Agencies, the ex-participants considered the SALTO EECA activities as very helpful in creating and developing new ideas and projects. They look optimistic for future cooperation and are going to apply again and again making necessary updates. They are in touch with the partners they met during the event. Many ex-participants realised

their projects successfully, even small local projects or training courses, seminars were very important for them, some did huge international projects, mainly a youth exchange. Few of the ex-participants decided to do their EVS, other actively promoted Action 2 and realised hosting and sending projects.

Partnership

Over 90% of respondents believed that the events were useful in establishing new contacts. The list of partners from different countries was extensive and the commitment of youth workers from both, the Programme and EECA countries was noticeable. First of all, new contacts were valuable in exchanging information on different projects, sharing experience and ideas. The events gave the opportunity to establish lasting international partnerships and implement joint projects in spite of cultural differences. The new contacts increased personal and professional networks. For many participants it was very important to meet future project's partners face-to-face what facilitated building common activities. Personally, the events gave a nice chance to take a look on each other, to have conversation, to share and to get closer.

Competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes)

Participating in the SALTO EECA activities enabled the ex-participants to develop certain skills. Intercultural communication and understanding skills appeared most frequently among the answers. Work in the international environment was for the respondents beneficial. They could get to know better a new culture, tradition, history, social and youth policy of another countries. The events were a chance to learn a lot from the people with a different backgrounds - this developed intercultural sensibility and tolerance. Moreover, the cooperation with people from different countries gave the possibility to improve English.

During the events, ex-participants could work on project management, problem solving, presentation, leadership, negotiation, team-work and training skills that enhanced their self-confidence, creativity and influenced on the better results of work. According to the respondents the events were very informative, they received detailed knowledge of Youth in Action programme, EVS, SALTO EECA Resource Centre, NGOs working in youth field, youth policy in different countries and steps of preparing and implementing international projects. They could learn new methods and tools which now are commonly used in non-formal education.

Tools, methods and resources

90% of ex-participants answered that the received tools, methods and resources were useful in their work, particularly in cooperation and coordinating EVS projects. Most respondents took an advantage of new gains preparing and implementing own projects. New resources helped them to make the work in organizations more qualified, qualitative and useful for people who are involved in the activities.

Obstacles

Cooperation between the Programme Countries and the EECA region although is very fruitful often raises a number of obstacles. One of the most common problems which appeared in the follow-up questionnaires concerned the mobility. The prices of transportation are really high and sometimes it is hard to get a visa and other permissions. Bureaucratic issues and difficult political backgrounds often cause problems. Another obstacle is related to ignorance of English (EECA countries) or Russian (Programme countries), cultural differences and many negative stereotypes what makes difficult to communicate and cause misunderstanding. The problem that was arisen quite often touches the subject of unequal cooperation. The EECA countries cannot apply for the Youth in Action projects directly, they do not have enough opportunities and have to relay on partners from Programme Countries that are placed on priority position. Sometimes it is very difficult to find trustful partners. All this makes EECA organisations less effective.

The participants from both sides complained as well on lack of motivation to cooperate and different approaches. On the one hand the problem is related to the lack of EVS accreditation (that starts from beginning of 2011) and information flow in the EECA countries, on the other hand the Programme Countries organisations often do not have enough experience to work with the EECA region. It causes financial problems (getting grants for projects, reporting, legal transferring of the grant, etc.) and inability to cooperate easily.

PERSONAL IMPACT

Impact on the personal life

Over 85,5% of the ex-participants believed that the event had an impact on their personal life. They could meet experienced people and made very good friendship. The event was a great importance for development of skills that nowadays influence on their personal life. The respondents stressed that they became more self confident, active, motivated and inspired. Through working with youth workers from different countries they got intercultural awareness, they are more recipient and open minded to the world and could enlarge the amount of responsibility which comes with additional knowledge. Moreover, it favourably reflected on their work with youth, after the event some of the ex-participant understood that it is *worth to stop concentrating on the idea, that problems of youth is a challenge they have to solve, but the youth has to be involved and not wait for solving it's problems.*

OTHERS

Suggestions concerning the organization of future SALTO EECA events

Apart from the statements like “go on like this” in the follow-up questionnaires a large number of proposals that hopefully will improve the organization of future SALTO EECA events appeared. The ex-participants suggested organising more study visits or seminars to explore concrete youth work reality, but also occurred opposite opinions that there were too many visits, and not enough time to

discuss them together. The proposal to arrange some follow-ups after the events and send a report to participants with all contacts was stressed as well. With regard to the trainings organised by SALTO EECA the respondents suggested making them more advanced by more practical work. It is important for them to stimulate a real project situation or even to start the preparation of real projects before a training ends what will increase responsibility on participants and impose continuity of the event.

Other suggestions were related to the selection of participants. Firstly, the groups of participants should be less than 20 people. Secondly, the profile of participants has to be considered more carefully, since some of them seem to behave “more like tourists”. Simultaneously, it was proposed to involve new organizations, as mostly the organizations from various networks take an advantage of participating in the events. It would be better if the participants would have different qualifications, so everyone will have the chance to share its experience.

Regarding the organisation of events, there were suggestions to provide more activities with the working language other than English (for example Russian). Prepare some presentation about the country where the TC takes place and not make activities longer than 8 hours a day with brakes.

According to the respondents, SALTO EECA should be more open and flexible. Promote its activities not only on Youth in Action and SALTO websites. During the events organise more meetings with the local community. Provide deeper integration with regions by making more training courses for regional NGOs, organise activities not only in capitals and involve new organizations that have not heard about non-formal education although they do very similar work.

Professional needs in consideration of future SALTO EECA events

A large number of professional needs suggested by ex-participants concerned project management – how to plan and realise projects to make them more visible, efficient and acceptable by National Agencies. There was proposal to involve in such trainings some guests from other experienced organisations, who can present their example of what is the difference between the real life and project application. Local organisations would like to pay more attention on young people who are from villages and other disadvantage areas. The respondents suggest providing materials not only in English, follow up activities after the main event, intercultural activities that will give a possibility to share experiences, develop new projects and get better understanding of the situation in EECA countries appeared here once more.

Efficiency of Youth in Action

Over half of the respondents believed that efficiency of Youth in Action programme for cooperation between the Programme Countries and the Eastern Europe and Caucasus region is good. 21% saw it as excellent, almost 20 % evaluated it on average and for 4% the efficiency is poor. Cooperation between those two regions positively influences on the participants and coordinators and provides unique opportunities for young people from all over Europe to learn European values and

grow personally and professionally. However, there are few obstacles that make this cooperation less efficient. First of them concerns financing, it is still really difficult to gain a grant for a project, especially for small not-well-recognized organizations.

Secondly, the Youth in Action regulations are too strict and inflexible, according to the respondents the programme becomes every year more "bureaucratic" and some organisations start leaving it. Suggestion that it would improve efficiency, if EECA organisations could directly apply for grants, like other partner regions, appeared quite often.

Another problem relates to the language barrier limiting possibilities of participation in projects. Furthermore, NGOs in the EECA countries are sometimes unsecured and that lessens the efficiency of cooperation. Therefore, it was proposed to provide special support for organizations that try to work with EECA. To make the cooperation more efficient, more attention should be paid on selection of participants, this will prevent "a training tourism". New organizations have to be taken in account in order to get the opportunity to learn more about Youth in Action programme and disseminate it among their local volunteers and youth workers.

Other comments

Almost all comments are very positive. It was nice to read words like : "Thank you! You're doing a great job! Good luck! :)" According to the respondents SALTO EECA encourages and provides opportunities for youth to work together and create an European youth networks, what helps to understand other values, cultures and habits and spreads democratic principles in countries that are currently in the transition period. Considering the central role of National Youth Councils in European youth field, SALTO should strengthen its cooperation with them in order to maximise the multiplayer effect of its actions.

Conclusions

The follow-up questionnaire although was submitted by far less ex-participants than it was expected gave a broad and diverse feedback of the SALTO EECA activities. Favourable opinions, affirmative feedbacks and first of all positive results and advantages of the SALTO EECA events stressed by the respondents, motivate to further work. However, the challenges underlines in questionnaires, suggestions for improvements, needs and comments that were presented in the questionnaires are of a great importance for SALTO EECA Resource Centre and its future events.