Evaluation report of the project

Enhancing the quality of higher education for disadvantaged groups through the provision of student counselling services

Content:

1. Project specification:

Grant scheme*: IPA BGUE 0406 Human resource development: Integration of disadvantaged groups in regular education system*

Grant contract*: no. IPA4.1.2.2.02.01.c05*

Project Partners*: University of Zagreb, (UNIZG)*
University of Rijeka, (UNIRI)
Faculty of organization and informatics, University of Zagreb (FOI)
Duration of the project: *18 month (22 August 2013 – 21 February 2015)*

Financial cost of the Action: *253.100,90 EURO*

Location of the Action: *7 Croatian counties (Varaždin, Sisak-Moslavina, Koprivnica-Križevci, Bjelovar-Bilogora, Primorje-Gorski Kotar, Krapina-Zagorje, Međimurje County) and City of Zagreb*

Target groups:

Students with disabilities and students in need of temporary assistance and advising through student support services – minimum 100 students strengthened

Academic and administrative staff of constituent units of UNIZG and UNIRI – minimum 50 academic and administrative staff members educated through workshops with emphasis on workshops specially carried out for employees of student counselling services and student advisors

Final beneficiaries:

Students with disabilities and those in need of temporary assistance and advising, as well as university staff at partner universities and other Croatian universities

2. Introduction

The goal of this review is to examine the general adherence of the project realization to the project goals and plans as well as to give more in-depth analysis the project implementation and its results. In order to achieve that goal the report will first focus on the relation between the project background and project goals as the basis for the evaluation of the overall project relevance and potential to contribute meaningfully to the quality of Croatian higher education. In the next steps the efficiency of performance and quality of the outputs will be discussed according to the specific objectives and addressing within each section the achieved results. The analysis is based on project documentation provided by the project team. [1]

3. Project background – continuum of efforts to support high achievements and academic excellence in higher education

In the last decade, since introduction of the Bologna process in Croatian higher education, the massive transformation of both structural and functional aspects of educational process has been performed. One of the critical goals of those transformations has been to provide an enhancing educational environment that would yield high achievements both in academic teaching and student learning. On the other hand the general trend of massification of higher education has also been pronounced while the institutional infrastructure did not change accordingly, raising thus teaching loads and developing the feeling of educational alienation among majority of students. Such parallel developments seriously jeopardize proclaimed goals of excellence in both teaching and learning leading to the feeling of overload among teachers and lower self-efficacy in teaching.

With rapidly growing diverse student population more students need access to effective counselling and advising in order to achieve their full potential in tertiary education. The enrolment to the university means for majority of student population taking over a new complex life role where without proper support it can be expected that quite a few students might fail to meet expected academic standards due to the lack of specific skill related to the self-regulated learning such as: time management, emotional control of test anxiety, communication with teachers and peers, fear of failure, goal orientation, loss of motivation and concentration problems. In addition to that, the entrance to the higher education coincides for quite a few students with a critical developmental period in their lives. As they enter early adulthood, a variety of conflicting issues may surface: the need for autonomy versus attachment, increased emotionality and susceptibility to other's judgments versus need for acceptance by others, the search for personal identity and intimate partnership, accompanied by decreased self confidence in one owns capabilities to meet these challenges. A lack of appropriate support at this important

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[1] The list of consulted documents and web sites is provided in the Appendix

life transition period often results in a high dropout rate and prolonged studying period, as well as in experiencing some serious emotional difficulties such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders and alcohol and drug abuse. Besides the rather large number of students with adjustment and learning difficulties, the greater diversity of students also means a raise of number of students with disabilities.

The Croatian Constitution and related legislative on higher education proclaim the importance of equal educational opportunities for all citizens. Also the need for the quality provision of psychological and academic counselling, advisory support and practical assistance has been recognized in most institutional documents. The significant role in the development of student support services at Croatian higher education institutions has been the opportunity to participate in various EU financed projects. The other important factor has been the implementation of the internal and external quality assurance procedures and the institutional accreditation of higher education institution led by Agency for science and higher education. Recognizing the benefits of learning from examples of best practise and cooperation.

The rational and elaboration of the project *Enhancing the quality of higher education for disadvantaged groups through the provision of student counselling services* have been grounded into three major areas of expertize: knowledge from previous similarly oriented developmental projects, empirical evidence of students psychological well-being as well as policy concepts and guidelines outlined in the key strategic documents adopted at the EU and national level.

In the retrospect, since 2003 the University of Zagreb has continuously put efforts into initiating and mobilizing its academic staff and students in comprehensive projects with international partners in order to learn from the examples of best. The project *Enhancing the quality of higher education for disadvantaged groups through the provision of student counselling services* builds directly upon knowledge and experience from two previous Tempus projects in which University of Zagreb and University of Rijeka took active part collaborating with distinguished EU institutions of higher education. Those projects were "Developing of university counselling and advisory services – DUCAS" and "EduQuality - Education for equal opportunities at Croatian universities"

Moreover the project *Enhancing the quality of higher education for disadvantaged groups through the provision of student counselling services* relies also on the solid empirical evidence on psychological problems of student population presented in two studies conducted at the University of Zagreb and Rijeka since 2008. The screening study conducted at the University of Zagreb revealed that majority of students have transient psychological problems with approximately 25 % students expressing serious and continuous feelings of stress and anxiety. In the longitudinal study conducted at the University of Rijeka students report the significant increase of psychological problems after one year of study. The project strongly promotes the concept of social dimension of higher education which was strongly emphasised in major EU documents related to the implementation of the Bologna process since 2006 as well as the national policy regarding disadvantaged and vulnerable groups as expressed in the Croatian declaration on the rights of the persons with disabilities and National strategy of Equalization of possibilities for persons with disabilities (2007-2015).

4. Project goal and objectives

In line with the background context and information the project overall and specific objectives were defined as follows:

Overall goal of the project was to increase the number of students from disadvantage groups accessing and completing their higher education.

Specific objectives were defined as:

1. Verification of the model for the provision of the student support services
2. Provision and promotion of relevant student support services
3. Improving the quality of education and facilitating social inclusion of students with disabilities and students in need of temporary assistance and advising in higher education
4. Dissemination, management and sustainability of results

Within each specific objective a certain number of results was further elaborated varying from 1 to 5. Achievement each of those results depended upon carrying out several linked activities. The evaluation of the project achievements will be presented in accordance with the specific objectives and expected results. The presentation of the activities and related outputs within each result will be sequenced following the structure of the original project proposal.[2]

The overall scheme of project results and activities was organized as follows:

Specific objective 1.	
Results	*Activities*
1.1. *Verified sustainable model and Guidelines for the provision of student support service*	1.1.1 Establishing and organizing regular meetings of the Working group for development of the model for provision of student support services 1.1.2. Operationalization of the proposed model in the form of published guidelines and recommendations for the provision of student support services at the higher education institutions 1.1.3. Publishing and dissemination of the Guidelines

[2] It should be noted that at in some cases some outputs are shared between related specific objectives due to the complex project plan. (eg. *Purchasing of equipment for students* with dissabilities appears as output in Result 2.1. as well as output in Result 3.5.)

Specific objective 2.	
Results	**Activities**
2.1. *Establishment of the student counselling centre at the University of Zagreb*	2.1.1. Organization of the working group for the preparation of the legal act as a basis for the establishment of the student counselling centre 2.1.2. Carrying out of the legal procedure for the establishment of the student counselling centre 2.1.3. Constituting the centre's governing body Expert council of the Student Counselling centre 2.1.4. Procuring equipment for the Student Counselling Centre
2.2. *Skilled human resources available for the provision of student services*	2.2.1. Employing of 4 full - time experts for the student support services at University of Zagreb and University of Rijeka (2 at UNIZG and 2 at UNIRI) 2.2.2. Performing continuous individual and group counselling for students at two universities
Specific objective 3.	
Results	**Activities**
3.1. *Developed guidelines for procedural action and data collection system concerning students with disabilities*	3.1.1. Organizing the workgroup for development of Guidelines for procedural actions and development of data collection system 3.1.2. Drafting the Guidelines for procedural actions concerning students with psychological problems and disorders 3.1.3. Establishing data collection system concerning students with disabilities
3.2. *Educated academic and administrative staff in higher education institutions*	3.2.1. Planning workshops for academic and administrative staff at the universities 3.2.2. Educating staff members within student services for offering support to academic staff 3.2.3. Conducting workshops for academic and administrative staff at UNIZG and UNIRI 3.2.4. Developing on-line material for academic and administrative staff
3.3. *Students empowered for retention and completion of their studies*	3.3.1. Creating workshops and on-line materials for students aimed at enhancing their academic, social and coping skills 3.3.2. Educating trainers (student service staff members) for conducting workshops 3.3.3. Performing workshops at UNIZG and UNIRI

	3.3.4. Organizing and supervising peer support workshops at UNIZG
	3.3.5. Developing model for early detection of students with the need for temporary assistance
	3.3.6. Organizing round able with representatives from student organizations in order to increase participation of students with disabilities in student organizations at UNIRI
	3.3.7. Developing an interactive on-line application for students of UNIRI
3.4. Increased mobility of students with disabilities at University of Rijeka	3.4.1. Organizing and training of volunteer assistance for students with disabilities at UNIRI campus.
3.5. Increased availability and adjusted academic materials for students with disabilities	3.5.1. Procurement of equipment for students with disabilities at UNIZG and UNIRI
	3.5.3. Adjustment of academic materials for students with disabilities

Specific objective 4.

Results	*Activities*
4.1. Project management plan and its realization	4.1.1.Development and realization of the project management plan
	4.1.2. Employing project management assistant (part time)
	4.1.3. Project team meetings and consortium meetings
4.2. Dissemination of results	4.2.1. Creation of dissemination and visibility plan and promotional materials
	4.2.2. Organizing two dissemination events: kick off meeting and final conference
	4.2.3. Updating student web-sites and social networks at UNIZG, UNIRI and FOI
	4.2.4. Creating information materials for future students and organizing informative lectures for secondary schools on accessibility for students with disabilities into higher education

5. Evaluation of Project results

5.1. Specific objective 1. *Verification of the model for the provision of the student support services*

This specific objective is focused on development of comprehensive framework for providing support to students specially to those from under-represented groups which might serve as a general model for building student support service in Croatian higher education.

Evaluation of the result 1.1.

Activity 1.1.1. Establishing and organizing meetings of the Working Group for the revision and verification of the model at UNIZG and Guidelines for the provision of student support services in Croatian HEIs

Realization of the activity 1.1.1. started at the University of Zagreb prior to the project approval. Earlier in 2013 by Rector's appointment the special expert group consisting of 11 experts in the field of student support services was established for the revision and verification of the University Strategy for the development of student support services system.

That group continued their consultations during the first project year until the new *Strategy for the development of the system of student support services* (2015-2025) has been prepared and adopted by the University of Zagreb Senate in May 2014. Although the development of the new Strategy was not explicitly mentioned in the project proposal this additional activity at UNIZG shows continuous commitment of the UNIZG to the enhancement of the student support services by recognizing previous experiences and achievements and building upon the results of the earlier projects in the strategic long term planning process in that field. The elaboration of the new strategy also served as a referencing framework for the development of the *Guidelines for the provision of student support services*.

The key activity related to this result started with the establishment of the Working group for the development of Guidelines for the provision of student support services in the 2nd quarter of the Project implementation. That group consisted of 8 members, 5 from UNIZG, 2 UNIRI and 1 FOI. The members were student service staff and 3 academic - experts in the field of psychological counselling, students with disabilities and underrepresented groups of students. The heterogeneity of group members can be estimated as well balanced combination of practical and theoretical expertize covering key aspects of student support services.

That activity was conducted in accordance with the action plan and planned outcome was achieved.

Activity 1.1.2.: Development of Guidelines for the provision of student support services

Realization of the Activity 1.1.2. comprised of two meetings of working group in Zagreb as well as continuous on-line consultations between group members. During the first meeting, in March 2014, members of the Working Group for the development of Guidelines for the provision of student support services defined the concept and working plan for the Guidelines' development. The model for the provision of the student services was developed using evidence-based approach combining a desk review of existing documents with survey results.

A questionnaire was sent to all Croatian universities through which relevant information on existing student support practices and services being provided was collected.

At the second meeting, held in July 2014, the Working group developed the initial draft of the Guidelines presenting general model of student support services in higher education with extensive recommendations as well as presentation of the examples of good practice from American and European universities. The initial draft of the Guidelines was sent to all Croatian universities asking for their feedback in order to improve proposal and prepare the final version of the Guidelines. All universities except one responded and all of them (6) positively commented on the concepts and content of the working version of the guidelines.

That activity asked for the revision of the planned timeline meaning the earlier starting point and duration until the end of the project. Having in mind the complexity of the preparations for creating the comprehensive model of student support services as the basis for the guidelines development such extended timeline is understandable and justified. The Working Group decision to use two time-consuming but relevant evidence-based procedures (screening of the existing practices at HEI's and feedback on the working draft of the document) speaks in favor of the Working Group understanding of the importance of combining theoretical concepts with the real-life context of Croatian higher education institutions.

Activity 1.1.3.: Publishing and dissemination of Guidelines

The *Guidelines for the provision of student support services,* a 20-pages document which gives the overview of key themes related to the development of the comprehensive model of study support services, had been finalized within the planned timelines in the last month of the project. The document is organized in 4 sections revealing funnel structure, starting with broad overview of the field and ending with the focus on concrete principles and recommendations. In the first section *General Framework for the development of student support service*s the recent basic EU and national policy and strategic documents referring to the concept and models of student support as a part of quality assurance system in HE are presented. The general policy framework is supported and illustrated by the relevant national research findings related to the examination of student needs for provision of different types of support in Croatian HE context. The second section *Study support systems – international experiences* explores the examples of good practice in student support services from several USA and EU universities. This section summarizes the most common features of analyzed systems: diversified types of support (e.g. academic, psychological, financial, career and international student counselling), professionalization of services, and role of peer support, assistance to students with disabilities, health service, and student employment office. In the third section the relevant context - situation at the Croatian higher education institutions presents the results of the survey conducted at Croatian universities. Although all institutions declare the importance of the organized study support systems the collected data reveal significant differences among institutions in the levels of study support services organization and functioning. The findings support the main intention of the project team to offer general guidelines for the provision of the student support services in order to harmonize the scope and quality of professional support

to students across Croatian higher education. The final section describes *General guidelines for the provision of student support services* defines main goals and tasks of the student support service putting in focus quality of student learning and life as well as support to underrepresented student population in increased risk of academic failure and dropping out. The final section offers common Principles and recommendations for the development of student support services in following areas: support in career management, support in development of academic and life skills, psychological counselling and support to students with disabilities, underrepresented and other vulnerable student groups.

The Guidelines are written comprehensively, refer to the most important themes regarding development of the student support services, advocate evidence-based approach to policy planning and clearly outline the basic requirements for the systemic approach to the quality management of student learning and academic experience within university community. They can be considered as useful and applicable instrument to the whole higher education system in Croatia.

5.2. Specific objective 2. *Provision and promotion of student support services*

The second specific objective, related to the University of Zagreb, is focused on building of the necessary infrastructure for the professional provision of the student support services through the establishment of the distinct organizational unit and by enhancement of human resources capacity for professional counselling and advising. Within that specific objective two closely related results were planned.

Evaluation of the result 2.1.

Activity 2.1.1. Organization of the working group for the preparation of the legal act as a basis for the establishment of the student counselling centre

The Temporary Expert Council/Working group for the development of the Establishment Act was established at the UNIZG consisting of 11 members - experts in all fields of student support. From September 2013 to January 2014 three meetings of the Expert Council regarding were held at the University of Zagreb with further consultations carried out via e-mail. The Expert council meetings started in the 2nd month, which was according to the timeframe and drafted the proposal of Ordinance on organization and functions of the Centre for the student counselling and support.

Activity 2.1.2. Carrying out of the legal procedure for the establishment of the student counselling centre

As the formal decision of the Senate was needed in order to establish the temporary Expert Council/Working group for the development of the Establishment Act carrying out of this

activity needed to be modified due to lengthy period necessary accomplishing formal procedures. As stated in the Interim report, the activity timeline was moved forth and the *Ordinance on organization and functions of the Centre for the student counselling and support* was drafted in the fourth and sent to the Statutory Committee for confirmation in the fifth month of the implementation period which presented a minor change in the time plan while the Establishment Act was approved at the Senate shortly before the implementation of the Project (July 2013). These changes were stated in the 2nd Notification letter (11th November 2013) according to the project regulations.

The university act *Ordinance on organization and functions of the Centre for the student counselling and support* is the concise document consisting of 20 articles defines goals and tasks of the Centre, the governing bodies of the Centre (manager and expert council), financing sources and needed qualification of the professional counsellors. The tasks of the Centre are: informing, counselling, advising and educating as all students studying at the UNIZG. The Centre also coordinates the activities of specialized services such as: supporting development of academic skills, career management, and development of social and communication skills, psychological counselling, physical and mental health, assistance to students with disabilities and advisement of the underrepresented groups of student population. Centre also provides advisement for the academic and administrative staff regarding the effective support for students. As outlined in the *Ordinance,* the Centre is being established as a professional unit aiming to be the coordination and steering point across the university which is taking care to reach students at all 33 constituents and offer them high quality diversified types of support.

Activity 2.1.3. Constituting the centre's governing body Expert council of the Centre for Student Counselling and Support

As explained in the interim report, although the Rector's decision for the constitution of the Expert Council was made a couple of months prior to the Project implementation, the whole formal procedure for its approval was still in process. Therefore the Council started functioning as a temporary one during the first quarter of the Project implementation. The temporary Expert Council consists of 11 members - experts working in the field of mental health, students with disabilities, counselling, career guidance, prevention programs, employed at the University of Zagreb. During the project lifetime Council held regular meetings. Since its establishment Council has developed important strategic documents: a three-year Action plan for the Center's work as well as annual financial plan. Members of the temporary Expert Council have been actively involved and consulted on other matters regarding the Center's regular activities. Therefore it can be concluded that by efficient execution of its role Council enabled the effective functioning of the Centre.

Activity 2.1.4. Procuring equipment for the Student Counselling Centre

Due to the changed dynamics in the establishment of the Centre itself the timeline for the procurement of the equipment has been partly delayed. In spite of that all the planned equipment including office furniture, electronic equipment, and other commodities had been purchased in accordance with the required legal procedure and put to function during the first project year. Office furniture was purchased for the Student Support and Counselling Center at the University of Zagreb while the technical equipment was purchased for all partner institutions.

Evaluation of the result 2.2.

Activity 2.2.1. Employing of 4 full - time experts for the student support services at UNIZG and UNIRI

Four expert counsellors were employed: 2 experts at UNIZG (one expert in the established Student Counselling and Support Center and one expert at the student support center at FOI, Varaždin) and 2 experts at UNIRI (Psychological Counselling Services and Office for SWDs). According to the interim report all employment procedures including public job announcement, selection procedure and contracting procedure were carried out in line with legal requirements in the first quarter of the project. All employees are experts in the field of "helping professions" i.e. psychologist, pedagogue and social pedagogue. It should be noted that during probation period one person did not reach expected performance standards so the replacement took place a couple of months later. The replacement incident indicates the recognition of the need for close supervision of newly employees as well as setting the high performance standards for the provision of Centers' services.

Activity 2.2.2. Provision of counselling services for students at UNIZG and UNIRI

The newly employed counsellors were included in all Project activities including the provision of student support services and activities. As the Centre at the University of Zagreb was newly established one during the initial phase of the Project the work was more focused on the organization, creation of programs, workshops and educational material for students as well as the promotion of the Center. During the first 12 months of the Project, 72 students were included in individual or group counselling. The counseling was provided for students with disabilities, students in need of temporary assistance and advising in relation to their academic and/or emotional problems. By the end of the Project total number of students who received support through counselling services was 111.

The information from the interim project report indicated that some unforeseen challenges regarding privacy issues occurred in provision of the counselling at both universities. Although the students who came for counselling were guaranteed the confidentiality it appeared that they were generally reluctant to give their personal information for the obligatory questionnaires of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport. The additional efforts were put into gaining

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students trust and securing the collection of required data for administrative purposes. The undertaken actions aimed at building trust relationship with students also show Centre's staff commitment to provision of high quality service.

5.3. Specific objective 3. *Improving the quality of education and facilitating social inclusion of students with disabilities and students in need of temporary assistance and advising in higher education*

That specific objective had two focuses. One on building up capacities of expert counsellors as well as academic and administrative staff for providing timely and effective support in learning to the students with disabilities and students in need of temporary assistance and advising as well as facilitating their social inclusion. The other focus was on developing concrete support measures for targeted group of students which would strengthen their capacities for coping with the requirements of their studies and facilitate their participation in student life. It should be noted that the evaluation of results 3.2. and 3.3. will rely upon the findings from preceding evaluation report focused solely on the evaluation of the educational activity. The short meta-evaluation of that report is below.

Box 1. Meta-evaluation of the evaluation of educational activities (results 3.2. and 3.3.)

According to the Action plan all educational activities related to this objective were meticulously monitored and comprehensively evaluated by an independent evaluator. The evaluation process was well planned, methodologically adequate with focus on both formative and summative outcomes. Multiple methods approach was designed with pre- and post-measuring wherever applicable. Rich set of instruments was composed, each carefully picked up, newly designed or adapted to fit the purpose in order to achieve valid and reliable information. Such approach allowed for assessing not only immediate reactions to educational experiences of both trainers and participants but also assessment of short-term outcome effects in terms of knowledge and self-evaluation of acquired or improved skills. The collected data were adequately processed and the results were critically interpreted offering in-depth insight into the dynamics and outcomes of educational activities. The evaluation is published as a separate document *"Enhancing the quality of higher education for disadvantaged groups through the provision of student counselling services– evaluation of workshops and lectures"*. The review of the text reveals good organization, clear presentation of concepts, procedures and results and can serve as a useful tool future similar evaluations as well as guidance for further planning and improvement of educational activities.

Evaluation of the result 3.1.

Activity 3.1.1. Organizing the workgroup for development of Guidelines for procedural actions and development of data collection system

Working Groups for the development of Guidelines for procedural actions and data collection system were established in accordance with the timeline defined by the action plan. The Working Group for the development of Guidelines for procedural actions concerning students with psychological disorders and problems had five members, 4 from UNIZG and from 1 UNIRI. The Working Group for the development of data collection system had four members, 3 from UNIZG and 1 UNIRI. Each group had two meetings using also electronic communication in between. The format of meetings followed same pattern, at the first meeting they agreed about conceptual framework and methodology and at the second meeting they reviewed and finalized the first drafts of the documents to be presented to the Expert Council for formal adoption. Before finalization the document drafts were also distributed for consultation to other stakeholders in academic community i.e. coordinators for the students with disabilities and coordinators for student support.

The functioning of both working groups can be described as efficient and effective as they performed their tasks timely and realized in full scope planned outputs.

Activity 3.1.2. Drafting the Guidelines for procedural actions concerning students with psychological problems and chronic disease

The *Guidelines* developed within this project can be regarded as an important contribution to the building of a comprehensive approach to the student personal and academic support across academic community. They fit well into the already existing information tool-kit for academic and administrative staff at the University of Zagreb as they are complementary to the already existing similar materials regarding support to the students with disabilities and students with dyslexia. Development of the document was modified and expanded through the consultations with the both experts and university staff. They had expressed need for broadening the initial theme on students with psychological problems and disorders with the relevant information on students with chronic disease. Therefore the document had been accordingly re-conceptualized indicating the sensitivity and readiness of the working group to flexibly approach the needs of the beneficiaries. The Guidelines' main aim is to provide general standards for creating equal learning opportunities students with psychological problems and disorders and chronic diseases as well as to enhance their full participation in academic life and pursuit of their personal and professional goals. The Guidelines text with 26 pages consists of two parts. In the first part the basic etiological description of the specific categories of students to whom the Guidelines apply is given, which is followed by the clearly graphically presented protocols for procedural actions concerning support to different categories of students. The second part consists of concrete practical recommendations for academic adjustments both in terms of psychological and physical conditions necessary for the optimalisation of the learning process leading to the high

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academic achievements as well as to the students' general well-being. The valuable information can be also found in the appendices part where the description of the most common chronic diseases in student population is presented as well as information on general health services for students and services offered by University Student Counselling Centre.

The material is well organized and is presented in "user friendly" way that it can be seen as valuable contribution to the realization of Project overall goal.

The suggestion for the possible improvement of the text is that the Appendix 1 could be supplemented by the overview of the most common psychological difficulties/disorders in student population.

Activity 3.1.3. Establishing data collection system concerning students with disabilities

In order to perform that task collaboration was established with two national agencies. The first one was the National Center for External Evaluation of Education which provided information on the number of students using assistive technology and procedures during the state "Matura" exams. The information on candidates with disabilities enrolling the universities was obtained from the Agency for Science and Higher Education.

Working Group members designed a questionnaire containing 14 questions in multiple choice format related to students with disabilities and also other disadvantaged groups of students assessing their needs for support activities and services. The data collection system was presented on a joint meeting of the Expert Council of the Student Counselling and Support Centre and the Commission for SWDs at UNIZG in June 2014 and a month later at the vice-deans' meeting of all 33 constituent units of the University of Zagreb.

Questionnaires were applied during the summer enrollment period in July 2014 to all first year students (approximately 10 000) of the University of Zagreb. In that way the data collection system was piloted on the entire cohort of the freshmen students. After piloting the extensive data analysis was conducted with twofold purpose. One was to use data as screening tool in order to gain insight into the structure of the new freshmen generation, specifically the proportion of students with specific difficulties and their needs and preferences for support at the beginning of their studies. The other was to use collected data for the inspection and improvement of the psychometric properties of the instrument itself.

The intended output of this Project activity was fully accomplished with practical implications valuation of to use collected data for devising action plan for support services for the next academic year, as well as to start up the comprehensive database for continuous longitudinal assessment and monitoring of the trends in that field of institutional functioning.

Evaluation of the result 3.2.

Activity 3.2.1. Planning workshops for academic and administrative staff at the universities

Five external experts from constituent units of the University of Zagreb were engaged for curriculum development of workshops at UNIZG and at UNIRI for academic and

administrative staff. Experts were engaged according to their field of expertise needed for the planned topics in workshops. All of them are known as distinguished scholars with a lot of practical experience in their respective field. They have designed 3 one - day interactive workshops on the following topics: psychological disorders, chronic diseases, learning difficulties - dyslexia and ADHD. Also, they were engaged for conducting a training for student support service staff members.

Activity 3.2.2. Educating staff members within student services for offering support to academic staff

The engaged external experts conducted 3 one- day workshops for 13 student support service staff members from UNIZG (5), UNIRI (5) and FOI (3). Each workshop was focused on one specific topic i.e. psychological disorders, chronic diseases, learning difficulties - dyslexia and ADHD. The workshops were delivered as combination of theoretical presentations and interactive sessions where participants could observe, practice and discuss specific issues. The trainings were held in March 2014. The goal of the trainings was to empower student service staff members in offering support to teachers with regard to their approach and academic adjustment for students with mental health problems, learning difficulties and chronic diseases. Participants received a set of materials addressing these topics for future consultation in their counselling practice.

Activity 3.2.3. Conducting workshops for academic and administrative staff at UNIZG and UNIRI

All the workshops for academic and administrative staff at UNIZG and UNIRI covering above mentioned topics were also prepared and implemented by external experts according to the Action plan timeline. The important data for further consideration in planning educational activities for this target groups i.e. the workshop on mental health problems attended 16 participants, workshop on specific learning difficulties -dyslexia and ADHD- attended 18 participants and workshop on chronic diseases attended 25 participants. It can be presumed that the intrinsic motivation and professional interest is extremely low as both universities have several hundred who are directly involved dealing with such issues and also several thousand of staff who should be in position to recognize the relevance of these topics for their professional development. On the other hand the results from the Workshop evaluation report clearly show that all participants rated very positively usefulness, importance and quality of delivery. So the main future challenge for the Student support services is to develop strategy for increasing visibility, accessibility and attractiveness of the educational activities for those target groups.

Activity 3.2.4. Developing on-line material for academic and administrative staff

The engaged external experts created "user- friendly" materials on the three topics in order to ensure the availability of workshop material to a wide range of faculties, raising awareness of

a much higher number of academic and administrative staff members then it would be possible to achieve only through workshops. The materials were put on the UNIZG and UNIRI websites after the delivery of workshops for academic and administrative staff. Such approach gave space for the possible revision based on feedback from the workshops. In relation to the above stated challenge such material would definitely raise visibility and accessibility to this themes. The statistics on the number of visits to the on-line material could be useful indicator of achieving those two goals.

Evaluation of result 3.3.

Activity 3.3.1. Creating workshops and on-line materials for students aimed at enhancing their academic, social and coping skills

The external experts (7) from constituent units of the University of Zagreb were engaged for the creation of workshops/lecture curricula and educative materials for students for the realization of planned educational activities. The final choice of topics: *Presentation skills, Social skills, Stress management, Time management, Academic adjustment – Orientation programs, Adaptation to student life and care about mental health* shows that experts had developed curricula taking into account the relevant information from the literature review as well as the accumulated evidence from several studies dealing with assessment of student needs for quality studying and participating in student life. The goals and respectively the modality of the educational activities were diversified relying on the constructivist pedagogical approach using interactive and experiential teaching/learning methodology.

Jointly to the curricula development the appropriate evaluation approach was designed. Each educational activity was formatively and summatively evaluated using self-reporting measures of different personal characteristics and competencies which were targeted by educational activity. The assessment of pre- and post- knowledge on certain topics was also done indicating the change effect in the cognitive domain. In addition the trainers were also asked to reflect on their experience in conducting workshops and to estimate the level of their self-efficacy.

Activity 3.3.2. Educating trainers (student service staff members) for conducting workshops

The engaged experts educated 13 student service staff members from the UNIZG (5), UNIRI (5) and FOI (3) for the realization of workshops with students. Two trainings lasting 2 days each were held in February 2014 at the University of Zagreb. The topics covered were as mentioned above: *Stress management, Presentation skills, Time management, Academic skills, Social skills, coping skills, Academic adjustment – Orientation programs, Stigma of asking for help.* It should be noted that the activity of educating trainers was realized a two month ahead of schedule. Immediate oral feedback of the participants was very positive with clear ideas how to implement the content to their specific context.

Activity 3.3.3. Performing workshops for students at UNIZG and UNIRI

According to the planned goals the modality of the educational activities in this area were respectively diversified into three categories.

The first category refers to the workshops aimed at the general student population with the emphasis on students from disadvantaged groups, attracting all those who would like to improve their interpersonal social skills and presentation skills.

The workshop on development of presentation skills was developed and implemented as 4-hours event. The session had two parts with a 20 minute break in between. The first part was focused on presenting key ideas on the topic and in the second part students had opportunity to practice target skill. The workshop was repeated 10 times at the premises of the University of Zagreb with the trained staff employed at the Student Support Service Centre. The total number of students attending workshop was 91. The formative evaluation revealed that students were on average very satisfied with all aspects of the workshop and considered it as a useful opportunity for further improvement of their presentation skills. The evaluation of effects concerning knowledge gains and skills acquisition estimation was carried out by questionnaire application in three time points (before, immediately after and 2-3 month after workshop). The results reveal the significant gain in knowledge about different aspects of presentation planning and delivering, while the self-reporting on presentation skill development showed improvement on two dimensions: performing in front of the public and answering questions. The trainers also rated their self-efficacy as very satisfactory on all dimensions what was highly congruent with student perceptions.

The implementation of the workshop was in line with the action plan, and even surpassed the expected outcomes in terms of student interest. It can be assumed that the half-a-day format was appropriately designed as it allowed students to attend without pressure of endangering their regular schedules. Also the small number of participants in each group gave enough opportunity for quality practice. Combined with the appropriate attractive announcement this workshop certainly can serve as a model for other similar educational activities. Moreover part of the material used in the workshop has been adapted for on-line use from the workshop material and other necessary topics were developed separately by student support service staff members increasing the visibility and accessibility of the presented topic.

The workshop on development of social skills was developed as event with three – sessions, each lasting half-a-day and was implemented at the University of Rijeka. Each session was dedicated to the specific social skill: relationship building, cooperation with peers, and assertiveness in relation to university staff. The topics were adjusted for the needs of the special group of students, i.e. those students who were already engaged as assistants for the students with disabilities. The fact that the target group was relatively narrow was reflected in the number of participants (N=5). Therefore the evaluations were presented mostly at the qualitative level. The students were in general satisfied with the workshop experience, specially emphasizing the usefulness of the experiential learning activities and opportunity for self-reflection in the respective domains. However they also suggest broadening the perspective in some topics i.e. cooperation should be elaborated not only in academic context but others as well. The trainer's experiences were mostly positive as well although in the case of relationship

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building session due to insufficient time one planned activity could not be performed. The evaluation of the workshop clearly reveals its usefulness and relevance for the involved students. However the main challenge remains how use that insights to make the workshops visible and attractive to greater number of general student population who would undoubtedly realize considerable personal gains from getting involved in such educational experiences.

The third category refers to shorter interactive lectures (120 minutes) covering two topics of stress management and time management designed to fit needs of general student population at the UNIZG. The lecture on stress management was carried out 6 times with total number of 76 students attending. The responses from evaluation questionnaires reveal that students were very satisfied with both the lecture content as well as with the interactive approach of its delivery. Moreover the comparison of their results before and after attending the event regarding the knowledge and understanding of stress management skills shows the considerable increase in average values after the attending event.

In the second interactive lecture on time management, which was repeated on 8 occasions, 84 students participated. Here again students reported on high satisfaction with the lectures. Also the significant gains in the level of knowledge about time management skills, as well as more accurate perception of their self-organizational skills and better identification of one's own weaknesses and barriers to effective time management were revealed by comparison of results of pre- and post- testing.

The lecturers also expressed the moderate to high satisfaction with their performance.

It can be assumed that such shorter events are appropriate for sensibilitation of general student population as they provide opportunity for raising awareness of one's own strength and deficiencies and facilitate decision making.

Activity 3.3.4. Organizing and supervising peer support workshops at UNIZG

The organization of that activity included cooperation with student coordinators at 4 faculties of UNIZG (Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences/Department for Psychology, Faculty of Law/ Social Work Study Center, Center for Croatian Studies/Department for Psychology). The coordinators informed the students at the respective faculties of the intended activity to provide peer support through the workshops and 16 students agreed to participate.

During three joint meetings of students and coordinators in May 2014 the concept and format of implementation of two workshops were defined. Based on the agreed outlines students prepared a draft version of two interactive workshops (90 to 120 minutes long) and finalized them in cooperation with coordinators to be implemented according to the action plan in the winter semester (October to December 2014) with first year students of their respective faculties. The topics were organized in two half-day sessions: *Adaptation to the academic environment* and *Adaptation to student way of life and care for mental health.* The total number of 152 students participated with 118 students attending the first workshop and 34 attending the second one). The evaluation results revealed very positive reactions of all participating student

with a relevant recommendation regarding implementation period, i.e. it was suggested to organize workshops at the very beginning of their freshman year.

The specific approach used to the planning and implementation of those workshops had been based in the relevant theory of social learning which emphasizes the strong learning potential from so called "coping" or peer models. Such peer models acting as trainers have more credibility, are easier to identify with and can more effectively facilitate interaction and cooperation between all participants.

Activity 3.3.5. Developing model for early detection of students with the need for temporary assistance

The application was developed by the staff members at the University of Rijeka from October 2013 to February 2015 in cooperation with external program designer. The model consists of two questionnaires that measure mental health and coping skills. After the questionnaire is filled out, students receive the results and proposed strategies for coping. Thus, the activity also included creating invitation letters, description of the model purpose, psycho-educational materials and feedback format to the students.

The implementation of the pilot model for early detection of students in need of temporary assistance started by sending 815 inviting e-mails to the selected sample of students at one faculty. The 214 students completed the on-line application questionnaires.

The implementation of exploratory model for early detection of students in need of temporary assistance started by sending approximately 500 inviting e-mails to the selected sample of students and up to now 214 students completed the on-line application questionnaires. In the next step of the exploratory phase, 668 students completed the same two questionnaires in paper and pencil version, so more data for improving the online application was gathered. Final phase of this activity meant implementing all adjustments needed for this on-line model for early detection to be applicable for the final users - students of University of Rijeka and University of Zagreb.

The offered model falls in to category of "user-friendly" screening procedures and is very economical regarding the potential for reaching vast numbers of students in short time offering them prompt feedback and suggestions for further actions if needed. It can be recommended to use the developed model at other Croatian universities.

Activity 3.3.6. Organizing round table with representatives from student organizations in order to increase participation of students with disabilities in student organizations at UNIRI

Round table "Challenges of studying with disabilities" with representatives of student organizations was organized at the University of Rijeka in April 2014. The goal of the round table was to raise awareness of student representatives for adjusting certain activities for students with disabilities, enhancing the social inclusion of students with disabilities and

empowering and informing students with disabilities about the possibilities of establishing a student organization for students with disabilities.

Only six representatives of student organizations participated who initiated discussion on the topic and later developed meeting conclusions with suggested follow-up activities aimed at awareness raising and developing new activities. As a direct result of this round table, a student forum "Are we doing enough?" was organized with 20 students participants. The proposed format of establishing cooperation and coordination between various stakeholders in academic community proved to be very efficient instrument not only for promotional and raising awareness purpose but also as activating means for future actions. In addition to that event the public discussion "Why is the activism of students with disabilities important?" was organized on International Disability Day (3rd of December) at Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at University of Rijeka in cooperation with students with disabilities and Student club "Agora". The public discussion was organized as an extension of round table "Challenges of studying with disabilities" that was held in April 2014. The goal of public discussion "Why is the activism of students with disabilities important?" was to empower students with disabilities for student activism and involvement in student organizations, associations and clubs. Public discussion "Why is the activism of students with disabilities important?" was organized because of the low response of student organizations at the round table "Challenges of studying with disabilities" resulting in only 7 participants. In cooperation with Student club "Agora" public discussion was organized with 23 participants. Although that new approach gave better results the challenge remains how to attract and activate even more student representatives regarding the greater involvement with students with disabilities in the student organization activities.

Activity 3.3.7.: Developing an interactive on-line application for students of UNIRI

This activity was new to the project and it was approved in Notification letter no. 10. The informative on-line application covers all areas of competencies and support developed throughout the Project.

The idea for application was presented to relevant stakeholders to finalize its concept. Student volunteers of the psychological counseling center and students with disabilities were invited to contribute with their ideas concerning the name of the application, design and content suggestions. The students picked-up the appropriate name of the application - **"Script".**

Psycho-educational materials and video animations were created covering 13 destinations – themes which students can explore in personalized setting accompanied by their Avatar – an animated guide.

Through the meetings with the designers, main visual identity was defined. The authorization to host the interactive on-line application on the University server was approved and the collaboration with the University IT services was established.

The application serves as a comprehensive tool for all actual and future students to get vivid insight into main issues concerning basic information about studying and adjustments to student life. It is also a good basis for sustainability of all project results.

Evaluation of the result 3.4.

Activity 3.4.1. Organizing and training of volunteer assistance for students with disabilities at UNIRI campus.

The activity was based on the sustainable model of volunteer support and volunteer recruitment was developed in cooperation with students with disabilities who took part in in-depth interviewing in order to detect their specific needs for support.

After the expert selection process contracts with 7 volunteers were signed and they started working in the 3rd quarter of the Project. The volunteers were continuously supporting 6 students with disabilities with campus mobility at the University of Rijeka. The volunteer support activities for Campus mobility at the University in Rijeka include regular supervisions with each volunteer on a monthly basis and during the workshops for social skills development. Support to students with disabilities was mostly related to support on arrival/departure to college and moving around the faculty, support in going to the student restaurant and in the procurement of literature and photocopying, but all in accordance with predefined needs of students with disabilities. At the beginning of academic year 2014/2015 contracts with 7 new volunteer were signed and they started working at the beginning of winter semester of academic year 2014/2015 supporting 7 students with disabilities with campus mobility. During the Project period volunteer support was provided for 13 students with disabilities in total with 14 volunteers.

The evaluation interviews with students with disabilities who participated in the action revealed their high level of satisfaction with the service. Moreover, the student volunteers during their supervision sessions emphasized the life-long personal value of the experience. As the activity gave very good results it is planned to be continued in next academic semester although the activity was initially planned for just six month.

The activity was well planned and supervised. Beside improvements in the life of target group its special value lies in raising awareness and obliterating mental barriers of mainstream population about the persons with disabilities building life-long perspective about importance of building socially sensitive and inclusive environment.

Evaluation of result 3.5.

Activity 3.5.1.: Purchasing equipment for students with disabilities at the UNIZG and the UNIRI

The activity was performed in full only with a slight delay due to the delays with competitive negotiation procedure which lasted longer than expected. The outputs are very tangible and consist of 22 pieces of electronic equipment for students with disabilities.

Activity 3.5.2.: Adjusting academic material for students with disabilities

That activity was also fully realized with certain delay due to prolonged purchase of necessary equipment. Within this activity meetings and online appointments were held with the head of library, students and professor with disabilities at the Faculty of Law at University in Rijeka. Meetings with students for adjusting the academic material were organized and a work plan was created. With the list of preliminary literature defined and all the necessary material collected the adjustment procedure was carried on resulting in 2209 pages of teaching material and literature was adjusted for the use of students with visual impairments in the period from June to end of July 2014. The organization of the work in that area besides having important consequences for quality learning of students with disabilities has also a great potential for opening possibilities for other students to get involved in such socially constructive tasks and experiences.

5.4. Specific objective: *Dissemination, management and sustainability of results*

Evaluation of the result 4.1.

Activity 4.1.1. Development and realization of the project management plan

Project management plan was elaborated following the given format using the clear alignment of goals, resources, procedures and outcomes. As the approach based on definition of SMART goals was consistently applied in all phases of project development it resulted in timely realization of almost 90% of scheduled activities. It should be noted that a couple of activities were even initiated ahead of planned deadline. Only activities which required prolongation of deadline were related to the extended administrative procedure (e.g...confirmation of equipment purchase).

Contacts with project partners regarding project activities, timeframe, project reporting documentation and financial management were realized regularly. Regular correspondence, mainly in the form of Notification letters was also carried out with ASOO DEFCO (Contracting authority) concerning specific issues which arose during the project implementation period. The realization of the project management plan was carefully monitored so that scheduled reports (3 quarterly, 1 interim) were delivered on time with complete documentation.

Activity 4.1.2. Employing part-time project management assistant

In order to perform timely and satisfactory all complex procedures concerning the management of project one project assistant was employed at the University of Zagreb. The employment procedure was carried out in accordance with existing regulations and legislations (employment add, selection process and contracting procedure). That activity was carried out in accordance with the implementation plan (during the first months of Project) but it had to be repeated in the 3rd quarter of the Project implementation as the first assistant left finding full time job and

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had to be replaced by another one. The project manager evaluated the performance of both project assistants as professional and highly satisfactory.

Activity 4.1.3. Project team meetings and consortium meetings

During the first year of the Project, 3 Consortium meetings were held – 2 in Zagreb and one in Rijeka, while in the second year of Project 2 were held. 12 to 14 out of 15 Consortium members (6 from UNIZG, 6 UNIRI, and 3 FOI) participated at each meeting, except for the last meeting when bad weather conditions did not allow members from Rijeka to join the meeting. Contents of meetings were related to project implementation (implemented activities, achieved results and indicators, plans for upcoming activities and administrative and financial procedures). Regular correspondence with project team members was conducted on a weekly basis. The joint Project team meetings were also regularly held in total 11 meetings.

Evaluation of result 4.2.

Activity 4.2.1. Creation of dissemination and visibility plan and promotional materials

Dissemination and visibility plan was designed and is being realized as scheduled. The Project activities were announced on partner institution and counselling center websites. The promotional material (600 sets) assuring project visibility was designed included notebooks, maps pens and calendars. The materials were distributed to participants of all project events. In addition to that 6000 promotional flyers for the student counselling center activities at both universities were published and handed out at the centers, at workshops and other relevant events to students, university staff and other stakeholders. The promotional flyers in concise and visually attractive way present general information about the types of support offered at student counselling centre's leaflets "With us is studying easier!". The special informative leaflet was created for high school students *Future student? Get informed!*. The Project was also made visible to the academic community by distributing 500 posters across both university constituents in order to attract attention of both students and staff.

Activity 4.2.2. Organizing two dissemination events: kick off meeting and final conference

The kick-off event was held at the beginning of the project at the University of Zagreb. Representatives of all relevant stakeholders attended the event: university staff, coordinators for student support), including representatives of national and local government, higher education authorities and all partners and experts in the field. However it should be noted that regarding the size of the involved partner institutions their number was not very high (29 participants).
The final conference event held at the end of the project at University of Zagreb attracted more attention from the relevant stakeholders (58 participants). The program of the final conference was planned as a two day. The first day presentations offered the general overview of project activities illustrated with major Project achievements. On the second day two workshops

conducted by experts in the field of learning difficulties and clinical psychology were organized as demonstration of examples of good practice provided by student support centers and also served as opportunity for sensibilization of academic staff for the presented topics. The topics included referred to students with dyslexia and destigmatization of mental illness.

The information and materials from both events are made available at university web-sites contributing to the project visibility and dissemination of key information to wider audience.

Activity 4.2.3. Updating student web-sites and social networks at UNIZG, UNIRI and FOI

Student counselling center websites of all project partners were regularly updated. Apart from providing information on Project activities, the websites were regularly updated with educational and informative material for students which is also part of Activity 3.3.1. As stated in the interim report putting educational materials on-line is very important in achieving project goal as contributes a great deal to the project visibility. But even more in such a way materials they become easy available to a large number of students what helps beating stigma on mental health issues, provides general orientation for better understanding of student adjustment and learning problems, helps beating stigma on mental health issues and guide students toward asking expert advisement and support at student counselling when needed.

Activity 4.2.4. Creating information materials for future students and organizing informative lectures for secondary schools regarding the HE accessibility for students with disabilities

This activity was carried out according to the project plan during February 2014 covering secondary schools and special education schools in Zagreb (81 institutions). The aim of the activity was to inform school students and staff about the activities of the Office for students with disabilities and possibilities regarding entrance exams. In order to attract schools' attention office brochures were sent to them. Through this activity, teachers and secondary schools were informed about rights and possibilities of students with disabilities in higher education.

During spring 2014 2 informative lectures in special education schools (Vino Bek and Dubrava) were organized in Zagreb and one in Rijeka at the high school - Ekonomska škola Mije Mirkovića with students with disabilities. Lectures were organized and held by staff members from the student support services and eighteen students participated at the lectures (12 students in Zagreb and 6 students in Rijeka).

The aim of the lectures were to inform future students with disabilities (candidates for higher education) about all the rights they can implement in higher education as well as all about student support services (at UNIZG and UNIRI) and opportunities that have been provided at the universities in order to ensure the quality of their studies. Flyers with relevant information were disseminated at the lectures.

The activity has a special significance for development of the practices of reaching out of the university boundaries and directly addressing future students of under-representative groups of all possibilities and necessary procedures for ensuring their rights while enrolling higher education institutions.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Process level

The examination of the Project accomplishments at the process level reveals that the extensive operation consisting of 33 activities have been managed in order to achieve 10 intended results linked to 4 specific objectives. The whole process and its outcomes were evaluated at WO levels by two external experts. One report is focused on evaluation of the educational activities and their outcomes, and the other one presents the final evaluative overview of the whole project. The whole structure, although complex, was adequately managed by a main project team which steered the process in accordance to the well elaborated management plan. It can be assumed that the overall efficiency in carrying out the project activities is also due to the capability of the project team to recognize and involve relevant external experts and professionals when specific expertize was necessary. All the downwards contacts with project partners regarding project activities, timeframe, reporting documentation and financial management were performed in due time, as well as contacts with the contracting institution, key stakeholders within the higher education sector, and even beyond it reaching out to the other beneficiaries in educational context. The carrying out of each activity was closely monitored, the achieved outputs were registered, documented, in most cases publicly presented either as published documents or web applications.

Consequently such approach secured the timely realization of practically all activities with minor delays in only four cases due to formal administrative procedures. However the project management team showed adequate flexibility in such situations which successfully alleviated the possible harm and further made up for lost time. It should be noted that were also positive occurrences in the other direction i.e. the earlier beginning of some educational activities was notified as well. The project activities were diversified according to the existing level of student support provisions at the respective partner institutions. Such approach also enabled the piloting of a greater number of service provisions which in the future phases of implementation the partner institutions will be able to exchange and further develop in order to raise the scope and quality of their provisions.

Overall conclusion concerning the process management and activity realization is that the project was professionally steered and skillfully coordinated at all phases and regarding all stated project objectives leading to the highly efficient and effective performance of all involved expert staff in line with planned results.

6.2. Outcome level

The project results fall into four broader categories functionally linked between themselves: development of the institutional model for establishment of the comprehensive system of student support services; building infrastructural capacities for service delivery concerning both material, informational and human resources; development and implementation of various

types of educational and counselling service; achieving high visibility within academic community and with key stakeholders.

- The first category refers to the development of the institutional framework for the establishment and implementation of the student support services system at the University of Zagreb. The well augmented and clearly elaborated model has been formally approved at the institutional level. Published as *Guidelines for the provision of student support services* it can have wider impact even beyond UNIZG context serving as a useful orientation tool for the development of comprehensive student support service system across higher education with the possible application at the high school level as well. Within category also falls formal approval of establishment act Student Counselling Centre which opened space for the constitution of Centre's Expert Council. The Expert Council became fully operational immediately upon its constitution by designing a three-year Action plan for the Center's work and annual financial plan what enabled timely and effective functioning of the Centre.

- The second category of results comprises the operational infrastructural components of student support services system in terms of procurement of material equipment, development of informational tool-kits for service provision, and enhancement of the human resources. The project made possible procurement of important electronic equipment needed for the support of students with disabilities at UNIZG an UNIRI (22 pieces) which were put into use immediately after purchasing. The informational infrastructure has been developed at two levels: as a tool for creating databases needed for monitoring and planning evidence based service provisions and as the interface between support services and students as final beneficiaries. The tool-kit have been developed in order to secure establishment of data-basis concerning students with specific problems hindering their learning and adjustment capacities. The tool-kit consists of the document *„Guidelines for procedural actions concerning students with psychological problems and chronic disease"* which served as the basis for the development of the short screening instrument for collecting information on students with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups of students assessing their needs for support activities and services.

  The piloting of the questionnaire on the newly enrolled generation of students at UNIZG has been the starting point for the development of the comprehensive data collection system needed for the analytical purposes of student support services. Parallel to that at UNIRI another set of useful screening tool for early detection of mental problems has been designed (CORE-om and SACQ) with special motivational and informational value for the students. Besides building student counselling services data-basis the on-line version of that questionnaires also provides immediate feedback to students on their mental health status and advices how to seek help if necessary. The other informational package in the similar vein is an interactive on-line application for students of UNIRI called "Skripta" which also helps student to achieve better adjustment to student role but also serves as source for data collection on students needs for advisement and support. These two well designed, useful and "user friendly"

applications could serve as excellent examples of good practice to across higher education sector beyond project partner institutions.

- The project results regarding human resources development are twofold. The first result concerns actual employment of new staff – two at each partner university - who immediately started their with their job at the respective student counselling service under supervision of their expert peers. The special attention has been paid to the strengthening of the professional competences of all 13 expert staff employed at the student support service units. In that respect one training has been held for expert staff regarding their further support to academic staff across university and two trainings were held for empowering staff to conduct thematic workshops with students. The relevant materials needed for the realization of those activities were also made available for personal consultation in workshop preparation.

- The project implementation resulted in important outputs regarding delivery of professional support to students as well as university staff. The three thematic workshops university staff were offered concerning students with disabilities with total number of 59 participants. In spite of relatively small number of the participants, those who attended were very positive about the trainings. It is actually not surprising as it has been shown also on some previous occasions that university academic staff is generally not much in favor of continuous professional development beyond their academic discipline. It can be assumed that in this area lie special challenges for the student support services staff who should devise flexible approaches for motivating university staff to participate in similar activities. In that line in order to reach lager number of university staff all the workshop materials are made available on-line.

The outputs regarding provision of support to students are the really impressive ones within the whole project both in the sense of variety of types of support offered as well as regarding the number of participants and their positive feedback on the content, organization and impact of the services provided. The rich array of diversified types of services for students has been offered such as: individual counselling, educational workshops, peer assistance to students with disabilities, on-line materials for self-reflection and need assessment as well as information on possible support provisions. It should be pointed out that in this area majority of the targeted outputs resulted in higher rates of achievements that expected. That includes higher indicators for the students receiving counselling support, greater number of conducted workshops as well as total number of participating.

The important output in IT support for students with disabilities had been adaptation of 2209 pages of study material for students with visual impairments. In that area the important improvement has been achieved by up-dated the support services web-sites with the recent relevant informative and educational materials developed during the project lifetime.

The special innovative contribution to our higher education context has been the effective use of strategy for greater involvement of students themselves in providing peer support. In that respect two examples of good practice should be pointed out:

building capacities of student volunteers to act as personal assistants to the students with disabilities, and also the creative engagement of student team in designing on-line informative application for students at UNIRI.

The general impression created by close examination with the project outputs is very positive regarding both the scope and level of attainment which in many cases exceeds targeted standards. The guarantee for the quality of the intended outputs might be in a way expected due to the careful and purposeful definition of project goals, adherence to the project plans and commitment of the involved whole project team and expert staff to the project implementation. The evaluation results collected during project activities implementation clearly indicated the high self-efficacy of the engaged staff as well as high satisfaction and recognized benefits of all services recipients of all.

6.3 Project visibility and sustainability

Throughout the project implementation the project team paid special attention to the assurance of high visibility of the project activities and results. The outputs related to this objective have been wide dissemination of informational materials (project leaflet, promotional material packages, poster) across academic community on every event concerning project presentation. At key dissemination events (kick-off meeting, final conference) the key stakeholders have been regularly invited. Additional contribution to the project visibility has been realized thorough successful cooperation with important stakeholders when their assistance and consultancy were needed including cooperation with the Agency for Science and Higher Education, National Center for External Evaluation of Education and other Croatian universities regarding the development of data collection system for students as well as with high schools and special education schools in delivering information regarding the future educational opportunities of school students with disabilities. At all such occasions the cooperating institutions were informed about project goals and main activities. The key project goals and results were presented at the web pages of student support services together with all the relevant materials and documents of interest for student and academic public.

Sustainability of the project activities should be on one hand assured by the fact that the main policy documents regarding establishment of the project have been formally approved at the institutional level. On the other hand considerable investments in material and human resources necessary have been already spent for development of the infrastructure for student support services. The expenditure of the financial means have been clearly justified by the highly positive results from project formative and summative evaluation reports. Furthermore, in favor of the sustainability of the project also speaks the benchmarking exercise performed during student support provision model development which revealed that implementation of student support services have become the standard component of the quality assurance system in international higher education context.

Appendix 1. Project sources consulted in preparing evaluation report:

1. Project documents and publications

- Data collection questionnaire
- Evaluation report "Enhancing the quality of higher education for disadvantaged groups through the provision of student counselling services– evaluation of workshops and lectures".
- Guidelines for the provision of student support services
- Guidelines for procedural actions concerning students with psychological problems and chronic disease
- Leaflet "Future student- get informed!"
- Leaflet "It is easier with us!"
- Materials from the final project conference
- Modified action plan
- Notification letters no. 1 and no. 10
- Ordinance on organization and functions of the Centre for the student counselling and support
- Project Interim narrative report
- Strategy for the development of the system of student support services at University of Zagreb (2015-2025)

2. Web pages:

- Educational materials for student support- UNIZG Student counselling Centre
- http://www.unizg.hr/studiji-i-studiranje/podrska-studentima/centar-za-savjetovanje-i-podrsku-studentima/edukativni-materijali/csps-materijali/

- Educational materials for psychological counselling at UNIRI Counsellig Centre
- http://www.ssc.uniri.hr/psiholosko-savjetovaliste/savjeti/

- Interactive on-line application SkRiptaLink:
- skripta.uniri.hr

- Screening tools for early detection of mental problems:
- CORE-OM: http://studisupport.ssc.uniri.hr/preview/#/test/coreom
- SACQ: http://studisupport.ssc.uniri.hr/preview/#/test/sacq

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