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DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN COOPERATION PROGRAMMES IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND THE IMPACT OF SUCH ACTIVITIES

Abstract

Erasmus+ is the largest EU programme in the field of education, training, youth and sport, based on three decades of tradition, and aiming to strengthen and enhance the education systems in Europe. In this article we wish to present the historical background of the creation of the EU programmes, as well as possibilities and opportunities provided to schools, with a focus on the preparation of the European cooperation projects – Key Action 2. We highlighted the key project management phases required for a successful project implementation and recognition of its impacts. In the conclusion of the article we focus on the impact brought by international cooperation to basic and upper-secondary schools. We also present the findings of studies used to evaluate the impact, and which CMEPIUS had to conduct in 2013 and 2017. The results show that cooperation in EU projects has a positive impact on the school, teacher's work and students. However, the highest impact was observed with respect to the improved organisational climate, professional development of teachers, as well as increased motivation and self-esteem of students. Nevertheless, a further increase of the impact of such projects is subject to the support and commitment of the school's management and continuity of school's international cooperation activities.

Keywords

Erasmus+ Programme, education and training, international cooperation, impact, basic and upper-secondary schools

Introduction

The first organised supported European activities under the name of ERASMUS started three decades ago, in 1987. Therefore 2017 has been dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of European programmes in the field of education and training. The initial founders of the programme could not have dreamed of the success that the programme would achieve, nor that it will be the first of many programmes which followed. During this period over 9 million individuals participated in the programme, while the number of participating countries increased from the initial 11 to the current 33. Tibor Navracsics, the Commissionaire for education, culture, youth and sport, said: "Just as each Erasmus+ exchange delivers an enriching life experience — both professionally and personally — 30 years of mobility and cooperation have given Europe an open-minded and entrepreneurial generation of 9 million people who are today shaping the future of our society."¹

Slovenia has been participating in these activities since 1999, while the first project in the field of school education (Comenius) were supported in 2000 with a small amount of funding. If, during that period, schools used to be slightly sceptical towards international activities, which they had not known, today about 76% of basic schools and 96% of all secondary Slovenian schools participate in the Erasmus+ programme.

From 1999 to 2017 the participants in mobility abroad included over 8,700 vocational education students, 27,200 teachers, educator and youth workers and 23,500 university students. In the last decade (2007-2017) Slovenia received over EUR 106 million solely for the field of education and training, and it used these funds to support the participation of 875 organisation. The National Agency for the programme found that a very high percentage (96%) of funding awarded through grant agreements was actually used.²

The success of the programme is confirmed by the mere numbers, however, we were interested what changes, if any, the international cooperation brings to schools and individuals. Since we began with the implementation of the programme in Slovenia, we also began to detect the positive impact of cooperation in international projects; the benefits were reported by head teachers, project coordinators, as well as studies from countries with a longer tradition of participation in the EU programme (e.g. France, Great Britain).

The aim of this article is to show the possibilities and opportunities offered to schools by the current EU Erasmus+ Programme, as well as the positive impact of project participation on schools, head teachers and students.

¹ Source: press release http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1574_sl.htm.

² Source: online statistics of CMEPIUS: <http://statistike.cmepius.si/>.

Background of education and training in the EU

The European Union, which Slovenia joined on 1 May 2004,³ uses a very different approach for the management of Union policies in different fields. As a union of sovereign states, it requires more or less coordinated political actions, however, the level of autonomy of different policies is also very different. Education and training addressed by this article are left to the full discretion of each member state, however, the functioning within the Union requires close cooperation between individual independent policies of member states.

The evolution of this co-dependence occurred due to many reasons. Historically, the development of education and training was very dispersed, while the political structures of the historical communities did not manage education centrally. On one hand, the incentive originated religious associations (due to the expansion of literacy and philosophical ideas), while later the development of artisanship and town communities helped strengthen the more vocationally-oriented branch of education. Some sort of centres of excellence, i.e. the first universities, were established as early as in 11th and 13th century. We mention this mainly due to mobility, since – even back then – individuals from all over Europe travelled to these centres with the aim to acquire knowledge. Only at the end of the 18th century, and more obviously in the 19th century, a more transparent/planned approach to education started to form. If we limit ourselves to Slovenian territory, the first basic school act (*Splošna šolska naredba*) was adopted in 1774, while its upgrade (*Politična šolska ustava*) was adopted in 1805 (Gabrič 2009). The above-mentioned and several other circumstances led to the development of different national policy systems and organisation of education and training.

On the other hand, after the foundation of the European Union, education and training system started to become affected by two facts, i.e. free mobility of persons, and a common approach for solving more or less the same problems. The free flow of people allowed individuals with different certificates and qualifications to find jobs in other systems, which did not automatically recognise such certificates or qualifications, and required at least some sort of testing, and – sometimes – even additional training. Moreover, the wish for mobility and mobility opportunities of individuals expanded to the period of education and training, so that individuals could pursue the best available knowledge and know-how, even if these were not available at their home institutions. Of course, the individuals did not pursue this knowledge for their own sake. They wanted the knowledge to be recognised within the scope of their education and training. These needs led to increased communication among systems, increasing coordination, and cooperation. E.g., within the EU the individual agreements on the recognition of knowledge acquired elsewhere led to the development of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

³ Subject to special conditions, participation in cooperation programmes in the field of education and training is also available to non-EU countries.

European programmes in the field of education and training

The European Community recognised that the above-specified circumstances made a positive contribution to the society's progress: this primarily applies to all the participants, who then in-turn provided policies with various initiatives that such support and recognition would not be only in principle, but also financial. The most active in this field were university students. The European Commission provided pilot financial support for these students from 1981 to 1986 (Phillips and Ertl 2007). Financial support for mobility was first offered in 1987 upon the adoption when the first cooperation programme in the field of higher education, i.e. ERASMUS (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students). In 1994 a broader programme was designed and named Socrates. Besides cooperation in the field of higher education this programme also supported cooperation in other areas (i.e. general school education, adult education, and foreign language teaching and learning). At that time the cooperation in the field of vocational education and training was also initiated within the scope of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. As we already mentioned different fields of education and training each experienced a very different historical development, which is the basis for different organisation and funding approaches, which called for a different approach to further development (this is why two different programmes were established). The merger of different initiatives happened in 2007 with the establishment of the Lifelong Learning Programme, which was upgraded by the current Erasmus+ Programme, which is being implemented from 2014 to 2020.

Aims, objectives and basic structures of the programmes

During all this time the key objectives and activities offered by specific programmes varied. The main goals of the Socrates programme were to expand the European dimension in education, to improve the knowledge of European languages, to promote cooperation and mobility (Official Journal EU 2000). The main objective of the Leonardo da Vinci programme was to support policy development in the field of vocational education and training in member states to make vocational education and training more attractive, to improve the qualifications of the labour force and the competitiveness of the European economy (Official Journal EU 1999). The recession after 2010 strengthened the need for improved competitiveness, while after the refugee crises in 2015 and 2016 the role of education and training as a social factor also increased. One of the most important objectives of the current Erasmus+ programme is to aid the education and training systems, and youth to adapt to the quickly changing world (Official Journal EU 2013).

An important aim of the Erasmus+ programme is to modernise education and to ensure that teaching and learning are relevant for skills, required for the jobs of today and tomorrow, for the jobs, which we cannot even imagine and which will develop in the near future (European Commission 2017). Why? Because active inclusion of individual through work is one of the key rights (Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

In simpler terms, Erasmus+ means a higher (40% more compared to the previous programme) investment in the cooperation and mobility in Europe and wider, since the programme now supports cooperation with all countries in the world.

The programme itself contains very ambitious objectives for the seven-year period. From 2014 to 2020 an estimated four million individuals will participate in learning opportunities in Europe and wider – here we need to stress that the Erasmus+ programme is not only intended for students, but it focuses also on teachers and other teaching and other staff at schools, other education organisations, on upper-secondary school students, young volunteers, youth workers, and organisations active in the field of sport.

Erasmus+ funding will be used to support:

- 650,000 students in vocational education and training;
- 800.000 teachers, lecturers, coaches, mentors, and youth workers;
- 2 million university students (including 450,000 company traineeships for university students);
- 500,000 volunteers and youth in youth exchanges;
- 125,000+ organisations in and outside of Europe will engage in mutual cooperation with the aim to modernise education and training.

However, the implementation of activities on its own is not the final objective of the programme. It is the impact of these activities that matters, both individually as well as synergistically. Mobility has the highest impact on individuals (European Union 2014), while projects usually have a higher impact on the participating institutions. The impact of activities is much broader – they impact the participating institutions, which will be highlighted in more detail hereunder.

A single programme definitely provides for simpler access to activities, since it constitutes a single point of access to a wide range of opportunities. It is very important that it brings together different stakeholders, which – through the exchange of knowledge, information, experience and practices – not only strengthens European education and training, but also the economy and society as a whole (European Commission 2017). Closer links among the education sector, decision/policy makers, and the economy is supported by teaching and learning which is relevant today, and shall remain relevant tomorrow.

Although the Erasmus+ programme supports international cooperation with all world countries we must make a distinction between two groups of countries, i.e. programme countries and partner countries. The *programme countries* include all EU and EFTA member states (with the exception of Switzerland) and the countries in the accession process (Macedonia and Turkey), and they jointly constitute some sort of an “internal area” of the Erasmus+ programme. All cooperation with countries outside of this group is considered international cooperation in the Erasmus+ programme (e.g.: with respect to the Erasmus+

programme mobility from Slovenia to the USA is considered as international mobility, while mobility from Slovenia to Germany is not).

The programme structure is adjusted in part to the nature of the field/area, to which the programme is dedicated, and in part to the type of activities offered.

Basically the programme is based on three pillars:

- Activities in the field of education, training and youth;
- Activities in the field of sports; and
- Studies focused on European integration – Jean Monnet programme.

Within each pillar the types of activities slightly vary, however we can roughly divide them into three types:

- Mobility of individuals (Key Action 1);
- Cooperation and innovation development projects (Key Action 2);
- Development projects (Key Action 3)

The programme at the EU level is administered by the European Commission, i.e. GD Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. The commission prepares the legal basis for the programme and all the associated call documentation (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, annual calls for proposals, application forms, grant agreement documentation, etc). From here on the activities are implemented in two different ways. Some activities are left at the discretion of each state (decentralised activities), while some are administered by the Commission itself (centralised activities). Decentralised activities are implemented through national agencies; each programme country appoints one or several organisations (national agencies), which then implement the decentralised programme activities in that country on behalf of the Commission: they promote the call, train applicants, make a selection in their own country, manage funds for decentralised activities at the level of the country, monitor the approved projects, etc. All national agencies must follow the unified European Commission guidelines (*Guide for National Agencies Implementing the Erasmus+ Programme*), in compliance with their national education and the specifics of their education and training systems. Centralised activities are fully managed and implemented by the European Commission and/or the Executive Agency, established by the Commission.

The information provided below relate solely to the fields of education and training, since the activities for youth fall within the responsibility of another national agency.

Mobility projects (Key Action 1)

It is important to note that an individual cannot apply a project in the programme as a natural person. The project is always applied by an organisation/institution, which either sends the individual abroad or receives an individual from abroad. Mobility project includes the sending

organisation, the individual, and the host organisation. It is a fact that preparations for the mobility constitute one of the key elements of a successful mobility (for studies, traineeship, etc.), therefore the time before and after (i.e. preparation and re-integration) mobility is very important.

Mobility project relate to the field of education in which the applicant is active:

- School education: preschools, basic and upper-secondary schools;
- Vocational education and training: vocational schools and organisations providing vocational education and training;
- Tertiary education: short-cycle programme providers and higher education institutions;
- Adult education: community colleges and other organisations which form a part of the adult education system.

These fields are standardised for all participating countries. However, we must note that the eligible institutions in each country are defined by that country's national legislation. The level of legislative restrictions in all countries varies significantly, therefore a similar organisation in one country can participate in the programme, while a similar organisation in another country cannot (this mostly applies to the fields of vocational education and training, and adult education).

Within the scope of the mobility project the applicant organisation can, however, enable the mobility of different groups and individuals. Eligible candidates for mobility can include upper-secondary school student, university students, teaching and other staff (mentors, coaches, traineeship coordinators and others).

Different types of mobility are available depending on the target group. In principle, the learners (upper-secondary or university students) participate in training (traineeship) or education (studies) at the partner institution, while staff is eligible for participation in organised training (courses), job-shadowing or teaching at the partner institution.

Within the scope of Key Action 1, two activities are implemented centrally. Both are intended exclusively for higher education institutions and students, therefore we will not describe them in more details here. You can find more details on the European Commission's website: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en.

Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices (Key Action 2)

The expected results of this key action include the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices at the organisational, local, regional, national and European level (Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2017). Key Action 2 projects have a double emphasis – they are focused on activities related to inter-organisational cooperation (and not

on the activities of individuals), while the main desired impact should be observed at the level of participating institutions and wider.

Within the scope of this activity the *Programme Guide* highlights the expected outcomes at the organisational level and not at the level of individuals. At the level of organisations we expect (according to the *Programme Guide 2017*):

- Innovative approaches when dealing with target groups;
- More modern, dynamic and professional, as well as committed environment within the organisation and strengthened capacity for organisation's operation in the international environment (within the EU and wider)

Due to the expected and possible impact on the organisations and impact on organisations and, wider, on the education and training systems project cooperation is especially important for the attainment of the aim and objectives of the Erasmus+ programme. If we look at all activities of the programme as building blocks, the projects for innovation and exchange of good practices form the backbone structure, contributing to the impact of the Erasmus+ programme.

The projects can be focused on:

- The exchange of good practices; or
- Concrete, innovative outcome.

The decentralised activity within the scope of Key Action 2 are **strategic partnerships (SP)**. Similar to mobility projects the substance of SP projects is linked to education. Their common characteristic is that the applicant (with the exception of the Erasmus+ school-only SP) can be any legal entity within the applicant country, while the definition of the field is related to the substance of the project and field of expected impact. Strategic partnerships can be applied in the following fields:

- General pre-tertiary education (including early childhood, basic school and upper-secondary school education);
- Vocational education and training (initial and further);
- Tertiary education;
- Adult education.

Very welcome are *cross-sector* projects, which address the priorities in two or more different fields. It is important that the project outcomes are relevant for several fields, so that the project can lead to improvements (impact) in at least two different fields.

The *priorities* are defined within each annual call for proposals. Some are cross-sector priorities are cross-sector, and can include projects from any field – each from their own perspective – while other priorities are specific for a particular field (e.g. supporting efforts to increase access to affordable and high quality early childhood education is an exclusive priority in the field of school education). Each project must address at least one priority.

Within the scope of strategic partnerships the programme introduces an exclusive form of cooperation for schools (i.e. *strategic partnerships for schools only*), which esp. promote contacts among European preschools and schools. This action is open only to preschools and schools from programme countries, while two schools from two countries suffice. The SP project also enables the mobility of pupils (training, teaching and learning activities – hosting of a group of pupils), due to which this type of activity is extremely popular among schools.

SPs for schools only are limited solely to the exchange of good practices; their main aim is to connect preschools and schools in order to facilitate the transfer of knowledge, experience, methods and forms of work. The major anticipated outcomes should appear at the level of partner organisations, however, due to the extent of such cooperation (these are the most common projects within the scope of KA2 decentralised activities) we also expect an impact at the system level.

Centralised activities within the scope of Key Action 2 are also based on projects. However, compared to strategic partnerships, these are larger-scale projects, but in these projects schools cannot act as the applicants. More information is available on the European Commission's website: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en.

Support for policy reform in the field of education and training (Key Action 3)

Activities under Key Action 3 are completely centralised. Within this action the European Commission provides opportunities for cooperation which contributes to the implementation of the policy framework of the EU 2020 and Education and Training 2020 strategies, therefore the applicants of these projects mostly include policy-makers and decision-makers.

In these centralised activities the schools cannot act as applicants, however, they can apply as partners of organisation, responsible for policy-making (national organisation or ministries), i.e. upon invitation of such organisations. You can find more information about these activities on the programme's website: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/organisations_en#tab-1-3.

Project management and coordination (Erasmus+)

Regardless of the diversity of project activities and projects, we must hereby list a few general characteristics. These characteristics or recommendations are based on experience gathered through the monitoring of projects, and from the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme and its predecessors.

Past experience with applicants show that prior to applying a project, each applicant should answer a few key questions and clarify the main elements of project management and

coordination. Some aspects are general (referring to all projects), while others apply specifically to activities of the Erasmus+ programme.

1. What is a project?

Since there are countless projects, there are also many definitions of the term “project”. If we highlight a few most typical and common ones, a project is (according to Stare 2011):

- A series of unique, complex and inter-connected activities with a common goal and aim which must be completed within a specific time and according to the budget and in line with specific requirements (Wysocki 2009 in Stare 2011);
- A unique task, with which we wish to attain the desired results within a limited time by involving different sources (Andersen et al 2004 in Stare 2011);
- Final objective-oriented, partially unique process characterised by the typical coordination of implementation of the inter-connected activities (Frame 2003 in Stare 2011).

The Slovene Literary Language Dictionary provides a very plain and illustrative definition of the term “project” (SSKJ, headword: “*projekt*”): “what defines what is planned to be done and how this will be done; a plan”.

However, it is even easier to define a project by comparing it to regular (day-to-day) work.

Table 1: Project vs. regular work

Project	Regular (day-to-day) work
Single implementation	Repetitive tasks
Final	Constant implementation
Revolutionary changes	Development changes
Instability	Balance
Unbalanced objectives	Balanced objectives
Temporary sources	Permanent sources
Emphasising of objectives	Performing of given tasks
Risk and insecurity	Experience
Non-standardised process	Standardised process

Source: Stare, 2011

All applicants should be well-aware of these differences whenever they start thinking about any type of project. In most cases everyone is aware of the uniqueness and finality of projects, while other aspects become important only when problems arise. Besides all of the above, we also wish to highlight the fact that project-related organisational activities are most often done additional, in parallel to regular work. This is not necessary, nor it is always the case, since specific regular work assignments can also be performed within the scope of a project (e.g. mandatory work practice can be completed either as mobility within the scope of the

project; within the project, a regular requirement can thus be implemented slightly differently).

2. Key questions

Based on the above-listed definitions and differences between a project and regular work, the applicants must really clearly answer a few key questions. According to the SSKJ definition, when “*something* is planned to be done” it is really important:

- Why the change is necessary (a needs analysis);
- What is the revolutionary change, which the project should bring (project impact).

The questions are not listed in any particular order, since they are equivalent and standing next to each other. In fact, each project should begin with a vision of the future – how we would like to see things in two, three or five years. The more detailed and clearer the definition of this future state, and the better we support this vision, the easier it will be to define, and implement the project. The desired change and/or anticipated impact can be very simple and small, and can constitute the first, or any other step towards a more significant change, an improvement.

The “revolutionarity” of the change can be demonstrated at the level of an individual and/or at the level of organisation and/or even broader.

From a clear definition of the state that we wish to achieve in the future, we return “back” with our questions:

- What can we do ourselves to achieve the defined objective, and what depends on others (and on who it depends)?
- How can we do it?
- Who can do it?
- When can we do it?
- What resources do we need (financial, human, material, etc)?

These are only a few basic elements referring to the second part of the project definition from the SSKJ (“how this will be done”), and which lead us to the next point.

3. Main project phases

Similar to the definition of the term “project”, there are also many different definitions and clarifications concerning its phases. A simple demonstration is provided in *Projektni management* (Stare 2011), from which we borrowed the following scheme.

Table 2: Project phases according to different authors

Burke, Charvat	Cleland, Frame, Dinsmore	Lewis	Meredith and Mantel	Thomsett	Moriss and Pinto, Milošević	Wysocki and McGary
Design	Design	Design	Design and selection	Feasibility study	Start	Definition of the scope
Start	Planning	Definition	Planning	Production of analyses	Planning	Plan development
		Planning				
Planning and development of the product/service	Implementation	Implementation	Control and supervision	Planning of the product	Implementation and control/supervision	Implementation of the plan
Implementation				Construction and testing		Supervision
Hand-over	Completion	Completion	Evaluation and completion	Hand-over	Completion	Completion

Source: Stare 2011

If we return to the key questions above, **project design** is clearly the most important project phase. Unfortunately, too many times the project begins with the planning of activities and, sometimes, even implementation. If we skip the project design phase, and we fail to design a completely clear vision (we fail to unambiguously answer, what we wish to achieve and why), project participants (individuals and organisations) can have different visions of the project objectives, which can and does, sooner or later, lead to problems and disagreements. We could compare this situation to a car with several steering wheels and several drivers, who would – prior to the journey – discuss only road regulations and technical characteristics of the car, but would fail to agree the destination, where they wish to arrive.

It is a fact that all phases of the project matter, they are inter-dependent and follow each other in a timely order – we cannot agree the methods for evaluation of the end result, if we failed to provide a good definition of such result. We cannot plan the measuring of impact, if we failed to provide its quantitative and qualitative definition (how we will measure it - approach and criteria; what is the base value and what shall be the criteria of a good project).

If we simplify, the phases of an Erasmus+ project would be, as follows:

Design → Planning → Implementation & Monitoring → Completion & Evaluation →
Application of outcomes = changes of regular work

4. Točke preloma ('Breaking point')

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." (Benjamin Franklin)

Which are the most common reasons due to which projects fail? According to the Project Insight⁴ website there reasons include:

1. Lack of visibility of all projects – the management, project team and other employees have too little information and/or different/non-harmonised information, they receive the information too late.
2. Unclear (or different) project objectives
3. No visibility into resource workload
4. Gaps in communication

On the basis of many years of experience we find that in Slovenia the two main reasons for problems (not necessarily failure) include:

- Inadequate design and
- Gaps in communication.

Both of this is due to the simple fact that Erasmus+ projects are not the projects of individuals but projects, implemented by organisations, i.e. groups of people. It is a well-known fact that each and every individual within an organisation thinks differently or in their particular way. If we want to reach an objective together, we need to invest our effort and ensure that everyone within the organisation will see the joint objectives, plans and activities in the same way. Let us stress that this does not mean that different perspective on matters are not welcome, or that there is no room for different ideas or creativity. Definitely not! This is only regarding a clear definition of facts: what is our vision, what will be different in the project, how different it will be, and how will we achieve this (who, when, what, in what form, with whom, and for how much, as well as the source of money).

Impact of participation in the EU programmes

We, at CMEPIUS, were interested, what is the impact of schools' cooperation in international projects. Does anything change when a school is internationally active? Do schools implement projects solely to spend the awarded funds? The project quality is not only about high-quality management, high-quality results and the spending of the awarded funds, but also about the expected and actual impact. Such impact, i.e. a change at school, either at the level of learning

⁴ <https://www.projectinsight.net/white-papers/four-common-reasons-why-projects-fail>.

and teaching (e.g. new methods, new approaches, new materials, etc) or at the level of teacher guidance, organisational/institutional climate, etc. should last beyond the end of the project. This is the most significant and top priority objective of the programme if we wish to improve the quality of the system at the national and European level (Official Journal of the EU 2013). Given the fact that sustainability of the impact decreased through time after the end of the project, we need to ensure constant contact with the international environment (Sentočnik 2013).

For several years, when reading numerous interim and final reports, during regular monitoring of projects and through daily communication with teacher coordinators we have been noticing that something is happening at schools as a result of leverage from the EU programmes. Our findings were confirmed by individual head teachers and coordinators of international projects who reported amazing stories linked to international activity. Therefore, we decided to support these findings with a professional/scientific evaluation/analysis at all basic and upper-secondary schools which participated in the EU programmes. Our assumptions and the statements of head teachers and teacher coordinators, while the most recent analysis (Klemenčič, unpublished) re-confirmed the positive impact of participation in European projects.

Methodology and sample

In both studies (2013 and 2017) we applied a combined quantitative and qualitative approach. In order to acquire data, we used a questionnaire, while we conducted semi-structured interviews to additionally clarify the results. The collected data were processed with SPSS software.

In the first study respondents included head teachers and teacher coordinators at basic and upper secondary school, which have participated in the Lifelong Learning Programme (sub-programmes: Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Study visits and e-Twinning). The response rate was high, as 32% of all head teachers and 56% of all teacher coordinators participated in the survey.

Only school leaderships (mostly head teachers) participated in the second study, conducted in 2017. We invited all Slovenian basic and upper-secondary schools to participate in the project. However, the answers regarding the impact of international cooperation on schools and teachers' work were provided only by schools which participate in international projects. The response rate was high, at 38%. In this study, we additionally validated the results with a consensual group.

Findings

Cooperation in international projects of the EU programme projects has a positive impact on the school, teacher's work, as well as pupils/students. This claim can be supported by the fact that nearly all statements, which were presented to head teachers and teacher coordinators received positive scores. According to head teachers, project cooperation brings the most benefits to the school and teachers, while teacher coordinators believe that it has the highest positive impact on pupils/students and schools. Relations between variables demonstrated that a positive impact in one field also has a positive impact in other fields (Sentočnik 2013). The main shifts which are the result of international cooperation and were identified in schools include: *improved organisational climate, professional development of teachers and non-cognitive aspect of pupils'/students' learning* (Sentočnik 2013). The 2017 study confirms these findings and additionally finds a positive impact on the internationalisation of the school (Klemenčič, unpublished). Through international projects the school is transforming itself into a learning community, which is essential to preserve the quality of education in today's rapidly changing world (Erčulj 2006).

Impact of international cooperation on the school

Both head teachers as well as teacher coordinators believe that cooperation in international projects has a *positive impact on the operation of the school as institution*. According to head teachers international cooperation has a positive impact on head teacher's support to teachers, cooperation of teachers with the head teacher, as well as on contacts of teachers with foreign teachers. Teacher coordinators observed the highest positive impact on the contact of teachers with foreign teachers, head teacher's support to teachers and the possibilities for international paths for students/pupils. Compared to teacher coordinators the head teachers awarded higher scores for the impact on the school's reputation in the environment and its openness towards the local community, collegiality among staff, and staff dedication to common objectives. On the other hand, teacher coordinators only awarded slightly better scores for the contact of pupils/students with foreign pupils/students.

The impact on school was assessed as slightly more positive by the head teachers of urban schools. The main statistically significant difference was identified with respect to the impact on contacts of teachers with foreign teachers. With teachers there was an opposite trend, since teacher coordinators from rural schools assessed the impact on school slightly better. However, the main difference was observed in the assessment of impact on the dialogue among staff, provision of additional activities for pupils/students, openness of the school towards the local community, cooperation and coordination of teachers, collegiality among staff and the reputation of the school in the environment. Teachers from urban schools awarded slightly higher scores only for *contacts of teachers with foreign teachers* (Sentočnik 2013).

The second survey on the impact of cooperation in EU project, conducted in 2017 (Klemenčič, unpublished) confirmed the positive impact of international cooperation on schools. As shown in Figure 1, the percentages of agreement with specific statements slightly deviate from the

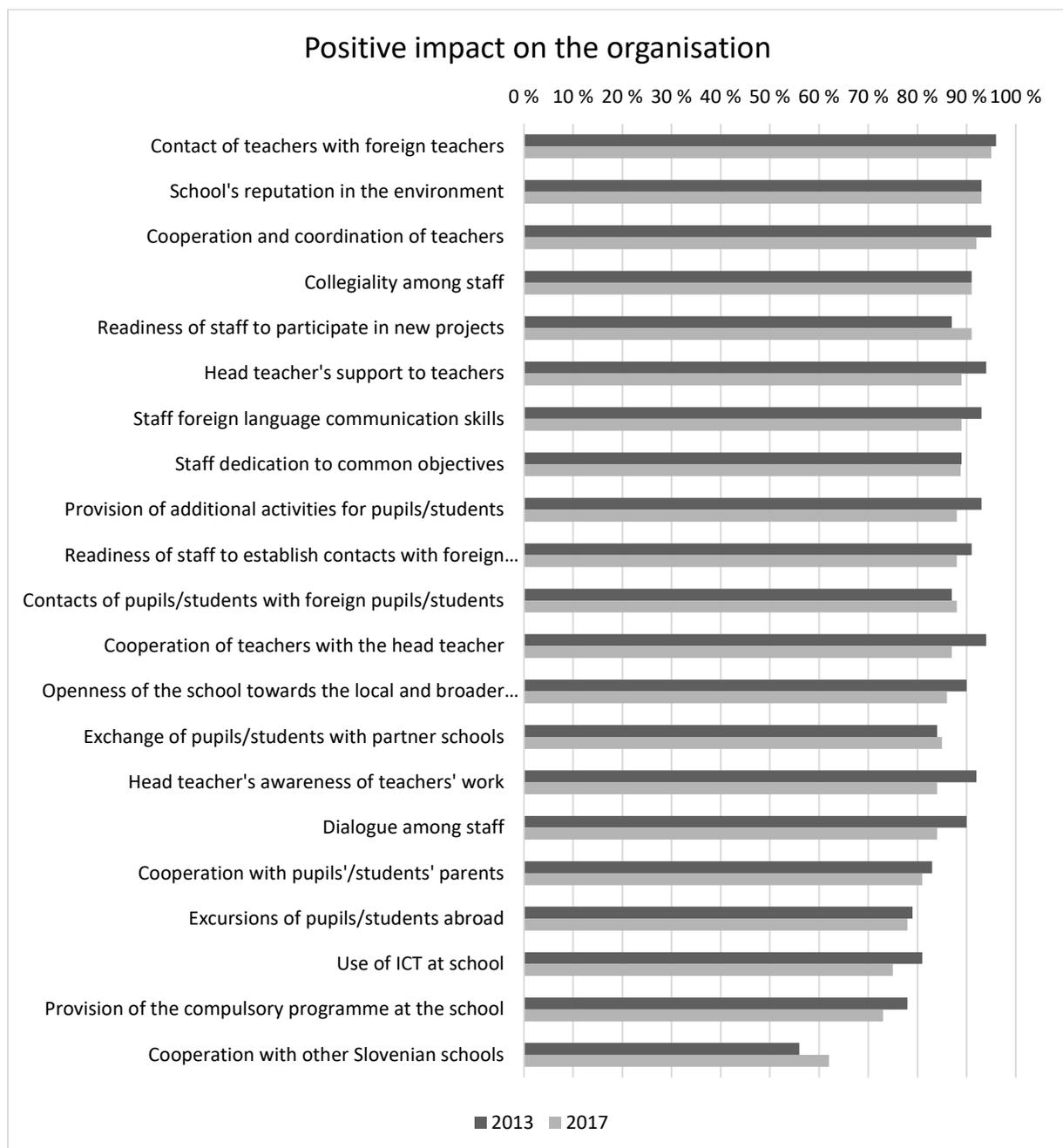
results of the 2013 study. According to head teachers, international cooperation continues to have the highest positive impact on the contact of teachers with foreign teachers (95%), followed by the reputation of the school in the environment, and the cooperation and coordination of teachers (project work, inter-curricular links). Strengthening of internal connections between the head teachers slightly decreased (by 5%) according to head teachers (i.e. head teacher's support to teachers and head teacher's awareness of teachers' work), although the level of agreement with the statement remains very high (above 80%). Given the big step forward with respect to the content related to the preparation of projects within Erasmus+ Programme projects for schools, we believe that the results remain really good despite a slight decrease, since schools had many problems in their first years of applying to the new calls for proposals.

When we compare the opinion of the head teachers of basic and upper secondary schools we can see that their assessment of specific criteria are more or less aligned. Higher discrepancies were recorded only with respect to the *exchange of pupils/students with partner schools* criterion, which was supported by 96% of upper-secondary, and only 77% of the basic school head teachers, and the *use of ICT at school* criterion, which was assessed as positive by 80% of basic school head teachers, and only 65% of upper-secondary head school teachers.

However, no statistical differences were observed between urban and rural schools.

The schools noticed the main contribution to internationalisation in international cooperation in the form of partnerships, and teacher and student mobility projects. Head teachers of basic schools also highlighted the participation in the eTwinning projects.

Figure 1: Positive impact of international cooperation on schools – 2013/2017 comparison



Source: Sentočnik 2013, Klemenčič, unpublished

In 2015, CMEPIUS began to develop the concept of *internationalisation of the school* since this is a field of focus of modern school systems (Deardorff 2009 in Slapšak and Lenc 2016). The basis for such reflection were the documents, seminars and internationalisation strategy in the field of higher education, as well as the review of relevant literature on the topic from other countries. On these foundation CMEPIUS adopted the following definition of the internationalisation of an institution: “Internationalisation is a process of integration of the international, intercultural and global dimension into the objectives and work (teaching, learning) of the school.” (Flander in Klemenčič, unpublished).

The questionnaire for the 2017 survey included a question, which activities contribute the most to internationalisation of the schools. According to head teachers, the activities contributing the most include research/project activities, participation in international mobility projects, mobility of teachers participation in the eTwinning projects and school twinning. The results show that most respondents are not adequately familiar with the term internationalisation of the school, which is demonstrated by the fact that respondents believe that only international activities contribute to the internationalisation. In the context of internationalisation of the school (Slapšak and Lenc 2016) the above-listed activities mostly relate to internationalisation abroad, whereas the schools can also provide for internationalisation at home, in the domestic local environment, by involving foreign literature into lessons, by inviting hosting university and upper-secondary students to participate in activities at the school, by organising international competitions, meetings, and other similar activities, etc.

Head teachers agree that internationalisation has a positive impact on the education system, i.e. both the overall quality of schools, as well as the quality of learning and teaching.

Impact of international cooperation on the work of teachers

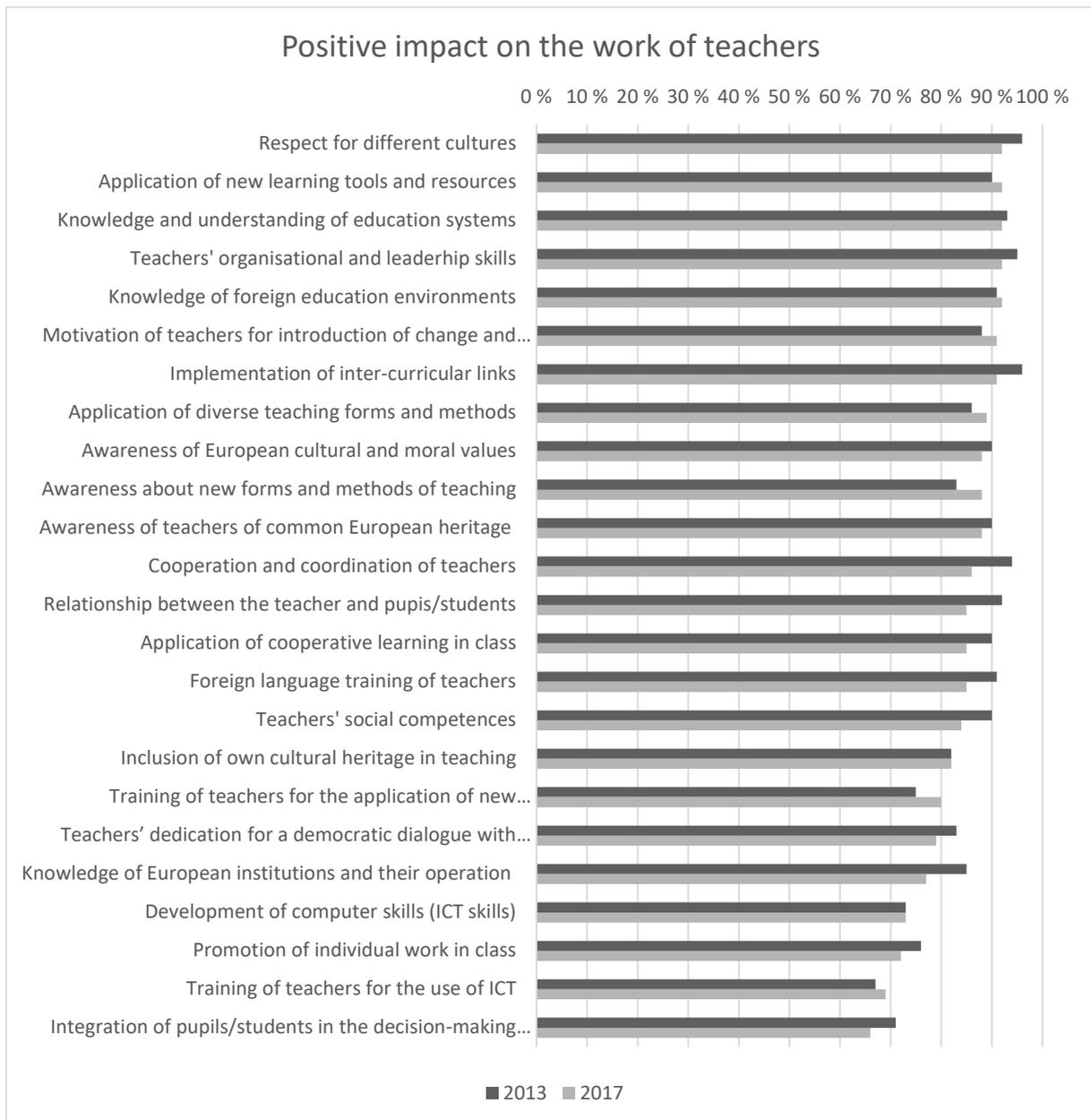
With teachers who participated in international projects we measured and try to establish in which areas of their work they could observe changes. We identified the highest impact on the criteria related to the strengthening of teachers' intercultural competences and their professional development (Sentočnik 2013). The study from 2017 (Klemenčič, unpublished) further confirmed the positive impact on the work of teachers.

The criteria, which indicate the strengthening of the intercultural competence, e.g. respect for different cultures, teacher's dedication for a democratic dialogue with pupils/students, readiness to readiness of staff to establish contact with schools abroad, staff foreign language communication skills, inclusion of own cultural heritage in teaching, and teachers' awareness of European heritage, and European cultural and moral values, received the highest scores both with head teachers, as well as teachers. In 2013 the most teachers (98%) and head teachers (92%) ranked the *respect for different cultures* criterion at the top, which was also the case in 2017, when it was ranked highest by 96% of head teachers. Other criteria from this area also received high scores; in 2013 the lowest ranked criterion was *teacher's dedication for a democratic dialogus with pupils/students*, (76% of teachers and 83% of head teachers). Figure 2 shows the opinion of head teachers in 2013 compared to the 2017 study. We were also looking for differences between upper secondary and basic schools, and between schools in the urban and rural environment. The results showed that teachers in rural areas awarded slightly higher percentages, however, the discrepancies were insignificant. Well-developed teacher competences are becoming a prerequisite for teachers, if they wish to manage classes which are becoming increasingly heterogeneous from religious, ethnic and cultural perspective (Vrečar 2009). With the help of intercultural dialogue we battle the stereotypes and prejudice about other nations and cultures, thus reducing the number of conflicts, associated therewith. Cooperation in international projects puts participant in a real-life

situation in which both the participating children as well as teachers must find their way in a foreign environment, by adjusting to communication and type of work. Although these are usually short-term mobilities, these activities bring a long-term impact, mainly due to the direct personal experience.

Another especially significant information is that participation in international projects impact the way of teaching, the readiness to change traineeship, and team management capacity. "A rather high share of teacher coordinators (62.9%) and a slightly lower percentage of head teachers (52.6%) assesses that work in international projects had a *high long-term positive* impact on the improvement of teachers' organisational skills, which is a significant contribution to the development of their leadership skills that constitute an essential element when introducing innovative management approaches (e.g. distributed or shared leadership) and project team related organisation of staff." (Fullan 2004, Rupar and Sentočnik 2006 in Sentočnik 2013). The relevance and need for teachers' leadership skills is also discussed by Ažman and Zavašnik Arčnik in their paper "*Usposabljanje strokovnih delavcev za vodenje strokovnih aktivov z namenom ustvarjanja profesionalnih učečih se skupnosti kot temeljev za prihodnost šol*" (Training of professional staff for the management of professional working groups with the aim to create professional learning communities as a foundation for the future of schools) (2017). When measuring the impact on teachers' teaching the results have shown that "individual in-service training of teacher coordinators contribute the most to the expansion of their pedagogical knowledge and is discussed also with teachers abroad" (Sentočnik 2013). Both at the level of teachers as well as the level of head teachers the highest impact was identified by staff from basic schools. There are, however, several challenges how to efficiently disseminate the acquired knowledge to colleagues, who did not participate in project activities, and how to convince them to apply the new approaches in practice.

Figure 2: Positive impact of international cooperation on the work of teachers – 2013/2017 comparison



Source: Sentočnik 2013, Klemenčič, unpublished

Impact of international cooperation on pupils

The impact of international projects on pupils was examined in the study of the impact of international cooperation, conducted in 2013, which was based solely on the opinion of teacher coordinators. According to them the main added value of international cooperation was brought to pupils/students. Participation in international projects has a positive impact mostly on the *non-cognitive aspects of learning*, such as self-esteem and self-confidence, motivation, interest, and respect for diversity due to the awareness of different cultures. The

findings are supported by extremely high positive scores for statements like: self-confidence when using and/or talking in a foreign language, respect for diversity, interest in other countries and their culture, cooperation skills and motivation for foreign language learning. Due to international projects classes had to be more planned, but this led to increased coordination of different teachers and subject fields, which – in turn – enabled more authentic and productive learning for pupils/students. Participation in projects also increased pupils'/students' creativity (Sentočnik 2013).

Conclusion

Both CMEPIUS studies of the impact have confirmed the positive impact of international cooperation on the school as an institution, on the work of teachers, and on pupils/students. However, these results do not appear out of nowhere upon selection/approval of the international project. To achieve relevant impact it is essential to ensure the support of the head teacher as well as dedication and positive attitude of teacher coordinators, who must know how to connect and inspire their colleagues. The projects must be embedded in the school's vision and the annual working plan and linked to the school's priorities. This is the only way to ensure that all staff are aware of its significance and to take cooperation seriously. Nevertheless, to provide for the sustainability of project impact, it is essential to ensure continuous contact with the international environment.

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