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## **INSTITUTIONAL BILATERAL COOPERATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN APPLIED SCIENCES. A MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE INTEGRATED IN A TEMPUS PROGRAM**

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### **RESUMO**

Life Long Learning in Applied Fields (LLAF) é um dos projetos aprovados pelo Programa TEMPUS IV e envolve 16 Instituições de 8 países, incluindo o Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, o ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa e a INOVA+.

Os parceiros colaboram no sentido de dar resposta ao desafio proposto pelas Instituições de Ensino Superior israelitas para manterem a sua relevância no ensino, através da criação de condições para o desenvolvimento de currícula que possa proporcionar aos estudantes ferramentas e capacidades para novos desenvolvimentos profissionais e inovação, também numa perspetiva de extensão à comunidade.

Com uma metodologia ativa, a operacionalização tem acontecido em reuniões periódicas dos parceiros e em trabalho de grupo, numa perspetiva de partilha de conhecimento e experiências, que produziu novos currícula e Educational Units (EDUs), adequados à realidade social e educativa de Israel, mas inovadores nas metodologias e estratégias. Neste momento, as Instituições selecionaram os EDUs ou módulos que lhes parecem ser aplicáveis na sua realidade e deu-se início à fase de pilotagem dos cursos.

A disseminação é um dos pontos fundamentais deste processo, pela importância de partilhar resultados, dificuldades de operacionalização e estratégias utilizadas para as ultrapassar. Este artigo surge essencialmente como contributo para esta fase.

**Palavras-chave:** Programa ERASMUS+, TEMPUS, Cooperação interinstitucional, Aprendizagem ao Longo da Vida

## **ABSTRACT**

Life Long Learning in Applied Fields (LLAF) is one of the selected TEMPUS IV Sixth Call programs and involves 16 different institutions located in 8 different countries, including Polytechnic Institute of Santarém, ISCTE - Lisbon University Institute and INOVA+.

Partners are collaborating to address the challenge of Israeli Academic Institutions to maintain their relevancy in teaching, by supporting the creation of conditions to the development of new curricula that can provide students with tools and skills for new professional developments and innovation, concentrating on working within and with communities.

With a participatory approach, this project is being conducted throughout periodical consortium meetings and workgroup discussion, in a perspective of sharing knowledge and experiences, which has produced new syllabi and curricula (EDUs), innovative and adequate to the social and educational reality in Israel. At the present moment, the Institutions selected the EDUs or Modules that may be applicable in their context and piloting phase is starting.

Dissemination is a structural point of the process, due to the importance of sharing outcomes of the work that has been done, process and its difficulties, as well as strategies used to surpass them. Specifically this is the phase to which this article aims to contribute.

**Keywords:** Erasmus + Program, TEMPUS, Institutional Cooperation, Lifelong Learning

## **INTRODUCTION**

The philosophy of learning throughout life has its first basis on the known need to learn from the cradle to the grave, something that has always been stated in almost every society. In our days, it has become a necessary guiding and organizing principle of educational reforms. It is recognized today as an indispensable tool to enable education to face its multiple current and emerging challenges.

Adama Ouane, Director for UNESCO Institute for Education, defends globalization has produced outcomes and processes which make the learning of new skills and competencies of paramount importance and highlights the need for acquiring a core of skills and competencies needed for all, related to learning to learn, problem solving, critical understanding and anticipatory learning (Medel-Añonuevo, Ohsako, & Mauch, 2001).

Aware of the importance of these topics, the European Commission supports initiatives related to the development of this philosophy, providing specific opportunities, within the new Erasmus+ Program, directed to supporting education and training in Europe and beyond.

Until 2013, TEMPUS was the European Commission program which supported the modernization of higher education in the member states and partner Countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region, mainly through cooperation projects within higher education providers.

Polytechnic Institute of Santarém, ISCTE - Lisbon University Institute and INOVA+ had the opportunity to join one of these projects (the LLAf Project), proposed and led by a group of Israeli Educational Institutions, aiming to promote the reform and modernization and enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in the partner countries, to build up the capacity of higher education institutions in the partner countries and in the European Union member states, in particular for international cooperation, for a permanent modernization process, and to assist them in opening themselves up to a society at large, the world of work and the wider world (European Commission, 2013).

Participation in one of these projects is an important opportunity to develop and increase institutional partnerships, within a very specific multicultural dimension, enriching to all involved, constituting a significant and truly important experience, not so common.

Because one of the main stages of these projects is dissemination, and the experience has been valuable to be shared, the main goal of this article is to divulge the implementation of the LLAf Program process and the participation of Portuguese institutions.

## THE LLAf PROJECT

The responsible institution is Hadassah Academic College, from Jerusalem, Israel, being Professor Michael Berman the leader of the process, and the partner organizations are from Israel (Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology and the Arts; Nazareth Academic Institute; Gordon, The Academic College of Education; Bar Ilan University; The Academic Kinneret College in the Jordan Valley; Sapir Academic College), Spain (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya), Austria (Paris-Lodron University of Salzburg); Germany (Hochschule Aalen), Ireland (University of Dublin, Trinity College), Italy (GIMBE Foundation), Latvia (Latvia Culture College and Latvian Academy of Culture) and Portugal (IP Santarem, ISCTE, Inova+).

With specific goals, proposed by the Project coordinators, the LLAf project it aims to:

- select tools that enable students of the applied fields: health care, education and communications to identify and use their lifelong learning (LLL) skills throughout their careers;

- create key courses of training for each discipline that examines and experiments constructivist pedagogy for LLL and pilot these courses in the partners' institutions.
- apply meaningful New Learning Environments (NLE) activities which could act as powerful means for improving students' ability to transfer knowledge, concepts, and skills learned in class to real-life contexts.

The LLAF project addresses the reform of higher education in light of the need for LLL for professionals, recognizing that the curriculum of higher education needs to respond to the challenges of LLL, especially in applied fields of health care, teacher training and communications. These disciplines are facing challenges resulting from the vast wealth of information and knowledge about their particular subjects, which is changing from moment to moment (LLAF PORTAL, 2014).

The creation of NLE that overcome the critical inadequacy between current educational goals and instructional methods, will contribute to engage learners in knowledge construction, which is carried out by modelling tasks in real-world contexts while enhancing students' ability to regulate their learning. The need to develop problem solving skills is recognized in this environment, throughout problem-based and project-based activities, pedagogical tools suggested to enhance students' general learning transfer and problem-solving skills (LLAF, 2013).

Globally, besides the NLE promotion, this program's contribution will also be in the development of new syllabi, courses and activities in LLL (supported on existing promising initiatives in the partner universities), develop and disseminate them so that they are seen as an indispensable part of the curriculum entitlement of all students, including students in the three applied fields and professionals practicing in these fields (LLAF, 2013).

### **METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES**

Structured in Work Packages, this LLAF's 3 year project aims to enhance the quality of educational programs for LLL through a program that will use NLE and EDUs that can support curriculum reform in Israeli higher educational institutions.

The program includes the development and piloting of teaching and learning programs developed in different EDUs for undergraduate and graduate students and practitioners of applied fields, workshops for faculty, and a portal that facilitates joint work and

dissemination. The project will evaluate the transfer of knowledge and skills from a learning situation to real-life (LLAF, 2013).

The strategies used to develop the sequential phases of the project are based on a participative approach, an adequate strategy to use when discussing and prioritizing development needs or local development planning.

A participatory approach advocates actively involving 'the public' in decision-making processes, whereby the relevant 'public' depends upon the topic being addressed, meaning they can be average citizens, the stakeholders of a particular project or policy, experts and even members of government and private industry (Slocum, 2003). In this specific case, the 'public' is a group of experts in different areas of educational knowledge and health sciences, selected intentionally according to the specific requirements disclosed in the initial call.

This active participatory approach, based in the promotion of open debate so all the participants organizations and staff members can be engaged in framing the questions, raising issues and in designing the procedures (Slocum, 2003), provided an opportunity to enhance not only the partners who proposed the project, main receivers of the outcomes, but as well the European partners who shared their knowledge and experience.

Small groups were formed according to the specific areas of expertise each participant organization and staff members involved, following the orientation of Delors' Education Pillars (Delors et. al., 1996): Learning to Know, Learning to do, Learning to be, Learning to live together.

After the theoretical discussion and operationalization of the EDUs, the training programs are concluded and a piloting phase has now started. These syllabus and curricula will be tested in diverse practical fields, mainly in Israeli learning contexts but, as the design allows, some will be piloted in European institutions as well.

## OUTCOMES

The outcomes of the program are still in development but, at the moment, some phases are concluded or almost concluded and some outcomes are clearly identified:

1. The Courses developed by the consortium are compiled into 4 distinct EDUs that can be used as a global course or in selected modules. Main subjects of EDUs try to respond to creating New Learning Environments and enhance community involvement of the participants in situations where they can have an effect, and expose them to challenging aspects of multicultural societies; promoting competencies of Digital and

Media Literacy and provide participants with skills and tools to continually evaluate and develop educational materials and practices throughout their careers (LLAF PORTAL, 2014).

2. A Portal was design and developed (<http://tempus-llaf.sapir.ac.il>) allowing joint work, project management, quality assurance, exploitation, dissemination within and beyond consortium and the sustainability of the TEMPUS program.

3. Training Workshops where conducted in order to the other Israeli faculty staff members understand the new pedagogical rationale, methods and practices, as well as attaining knowledge and skills through the process of the new curriculum piloting.

Piloting the courses it will be the next step when core faculty trained in piloting the new curricula will train other members of the faculty at their HEIs in the pedagogical objectives and the learning/instruction methods of the EU new.

Globally, this strategy will allow the consortium partners to determine which EDU is most appropriate for transferring the skills in the various target disciplines.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The participation in these workgroups or, in a wider perspective in the consortium, allowed a multicultural view of the lifelong learning underlying concept, with some of the decisions we take for granted in our daily practice being questioned by us and the others, due to multicultural realities and experiences.

The sharing between all partners in formal and informal moments created other connections, opened the opportunity for new projects / initiatives, for new knowledge acquiring, leading to the decision that pilot courses may as well be tested in Europe, including in Portugal.

Some of the knowledge produced or shared is broader than the project, some of the connections made are more than TEMPUS partnerships, more than work partnerships, giving truly meaning to the Erasmus + Program slogan: "*changing lives, opening minds*".

And, finishing as we started, we quote again Adama Ouane (Medel-Añonuevo, Ohsako, & Mauch, 2001) in the Foreword of Revisiting Lifelong Learning for the 21st Century, when he says that the "clamour for active citizenship likewise implies that individuals should realize their capacity for active participation in the shaping of democratic societies. (...) As the debate on lifelong learning resonates throughout the world, it is clear that there needs to be more discussion on how this concept will be put into practice".

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