

Reminder

ESF 6 CIA - thematic seminar

Mechelen, 03. 12. 2009.

Location: Office of the RESOC Mechelen, Hendrik Consciencestraat 5-7, Mechelen

Participants:

Resoc Mechelen

- Elke Schellekens
- Björn Macauter
- Nele Coenen
- Elke Tillmann
- Myriam Heeremans

Labour Office (VDAB) – Mechelen

- Nathalie Vivic
- Carl Van Den Eynde

Flemish government – Agentschap Ondernemen

- Philippe Rousseau

Linguapolis

- Katalin Balogh (translator)

- János Baksa (South Transdanubian Regional Development Agency, STRDA)
- Gyula Gelencsér (DDTG Kht.) (Dél-Dunántúli Terület és Gazdaságfejlesztő Kht, South Transdanubian Regional and Economic Development Non-for-profit Ltd.)
- Diána Poór (South Transdanubian Regional and Economic Development Services Non-For-Profit Limited Liability Company)
- Melinda Benák (DDRFK Kft.) (Dél-dunántúli Regionális Forrásközpont Szolgáltató Nonprofit Korlátolt Felelősségű Társaság, South Transdanubian Regional Resource Centre Non-For-Profit Limited Liability Company)

The meeting was started with the introduction of the partners, followed by a report by Myriam Heeremans, an expert of Resoc, on the programme of Resoc on lifelong learning.

The Ministry of Education of the Flemish Government assigned Resoc to deal with the issue of lifelong learning. Participants in the programme are employees, employers, representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (VDAB). The members of the participating organisations created a committee whose task was to define what forms of education should be used in the programme; also, they looked at whether full-time or part-time jobs were in greater demand. In addition, their objective was the development of higher education and the exchange of experiences.

In the early phase of the programme they faced many difficulties, most of their relations were established ad hoc, but of course they also gained positive experiences.



Resoc made up a draft in which the most important factors were defined and the questions to be answered were put into two groups. First, concrete questions were identified in connection with the problems arising in the field of education, and a general picture was made of those jobs for which employers can only find adequate labour force with difficulty. The employers' demands were assessed and the direction of the studies to be followed was defined.

The most important among the concrete issues raised was the issue of the training of apprentices. The apprentices had no choice of training places, it was difficult to find new places for them, and so a solution was sought with the inclusion of the employers, which was realised in the form of a new apprenticeship training book.

The solution was sought in a tender system for example for the foundation and the improvement of the different skills of students, and the range of the supply of educational services was also created in tender systems.

An organic part of the practices that we wish to adapt is the establishment of a welding training centre, the process of which was presented by Björn Macauter, an expert of Resoc.

The idea of the training centre was conceived in 2004, as the profession of welding was among the most wanted and deficient vocations in the region. The demand for well-trained welders was raised by businesses; the initiative was managed by the Chamber of Industry, and they made a demand survey among employers that revealed an actually existing demand for welders. The consequent establishment of the centre was supported by the Ministry of Education, local entrepreneurs, and also VDAB. The establishment of a welding training centre was needed because the region lacked adequately trained experts, welders had outdated skills. The aim of the training centre was to teach the latest, most state-of-the-art technologies.

The demand and the request for the training centre were expressed, but the financing of the implementation was uncertain. The Minister of Education would have happily supported the project, but he was dismissed after the elections held in the meantime and the project was laid aside. However, Resoc insisted on the implementation of the idea of the training centre and luckily they found a possibility for that in the framework of an ERDF tender, supported by the European Union and just launched at the time. Resoc became responsible for managing the implementation. This was not an easy task, however, because the necessary tools for that had to be acquired. The EU and the Flemish government gave support, in addition to which a 15% own resources had to be provided. The location of the building of the centre was provided by a nearby college free of charge, and the college also let the centre use its staff, the lecturers and the equipment and machinery necessary for the training. This of course also meant an obligation for Resoc.

The welding training centre should be opened in early 2010; its capacity utilisation is expected to reach one hundred per cent.

János Baksa: How much was the amount of the tender? Did the state decide to support the project on its own, or was it obliged to do so?

Björn Macauter: The breakdown of financing was the following: 40% EU, 45% state support and 15% own resources. The state is not obliged to finance projects like this, still it decided to support the establishment of the training centre, and no less than three Ministries participated in the implementation. In addition, the resources of the ERDF were used. The total budget of the centre amounted to € 3.7 million, but the expenses were underestimated when the tender was submitted, it turned out during the implementation that half a million euros more would have been needed.

J. Baksa: Did the decrease of the purchasing power due to the economic crisis cause any problem during the implementation and was an emergency scenario made?

B. Macauter: No emergency scenario was made.

Philippe Rousseau: The local regional Development Agency did realise the economic crisis, it is shown in the slower implementation of projects.



J. Baksa: Do you wait until the situation turns better or do you initiate an own crisis management programme?

P. Rousseau: Projects are revised by three committees every 24 months, if they see that a project does not bring the required results, the “project is curtailed”.

Gyula Gelencsér: Is this actually a control?

P. Rousseau: Wee would not call it control, because after one year it evidently turns out if a project is viable or not.

J. Baksa: If a project fails to bring the required results, do beneficiaries have to repay the support?

P. Rousseau: No failure has occurred so far.

J. Baksa: How can a trainee gain admittance to the welding centre?

B. Macauter: In Flanders there are many places where welding can be learnt: these are further trainings launched by VDAB, or in the adult education system and in vocational training institutions. The employers will also be included in the operation of the training centre.

Carl Van Den Eynde: Job seekers can also state that they would like to learn welding, or they can apply via the website of the VDAB, maybe the advisor of the job centre can recommend the welding profession to the clients.

J. Baksa: Were the would-be welders involved in the planning of the centre, were their needs assessed?

B. Macauter: There was an initial group whose assistance was used, also, the college had a welders’ workshop and accordingly some experiences as regarded demands. In addition, the needs of the different partners were assessed and VDAB also made recommendations for the introduction of welding techniques. One negative phenomenon occurred during the construction of the centre: the permission of the nearby inhabitants was not asked for at the beginning of the construction, only later, and this led to several problems. However, Resoc drew the conclusion from this that in the future more attention should be paid to this issue.

J. Baksa: How is progress with the technology integrated into the system?

B. Macauter: I have no exact information on this, but I can tell you that the college mentioned above has a research group that deals with this issue and is led by an expert of international recognition. This group monitors the progress of the technologies. There is a certain European level and there is a continuous effort to meet this.

J. Baksa: Will those who complete the training in the welding centre certainly find a job?

B. Macauter: There is such a big demand for welders for the time being that their employment is certain. We have to add that it is not only students who can participate in the trainings of the centre: the employees of different entrepreneurs can also train themselves here.

J. Baksa: Do you plan the inclusion of handicapped groups?

B. Macauter: We do, a marketing campaign is going to be launched in the near future for the propagation of the centre, and VDAB is asked for the inclusion of the minorities.

The next issue was the introduction of the apprentice handbook worked out by Resoc, presented by Nele Coenen.

The need for a universal handbook for trainees was raised by the local vocational schools, because it was a problem that students usually attended the same apprenticeship places but this did not satisfy the needs, because schools wanted to approach other places as well but they did not know how to do it.

Resoc set three goals:

1. Definition of the criteria of success for schools, e.g. apprenticeship places’ human resources managers should work well for a place to be taken as good practical training place.
2. The development of tools designed for assisting the person leading the apprentices for the most adequate operation of the apprenticeship system.



J. Baksa: What are these tools?

N. Coenen: The Ministry of Education can make recommendations for what are the things that the students will definitely have to learn.

3. Some assistance for the students to allow them to develop their skills more efficiently.

J. Baksa: This is the field that is especially interesting for us.

Myriam Heeremans: Not all of the students are able to learn the same way, learning process may vary from student to student, and this must not be forgotten. Some students will have to listen to the work process first so that they can learn it, others can more efficiently acquire the given work phase during actually implementing it. The handbook was compiled with the application of the already existing schoolbooks.

J. Baksa: Who makes these schoolbooks?

M. Heeremans: Each school and sector has their own handbooks, but it was a problem for the businesses where the apprenticeship training was done, this is why a decision was made on the compilation of a comprehensive practical handbook.

J. Baksa: Could we get a copy of this handbook?

Elke Schellekens: Unfortunately we do not have a copy right here and now, but you can have a look at it later and we are happy to have the parts that you are interested in translated into English or Hungarian.

J. Baksa: The best solution would be if we could get the translation of the contents.

The closing topic of the meeting was the introduction of a project that assists young people in their career orientation.

The programme is designed for the age group 18-25, but as soon as in primary school (i.e. also for the generation aged 6-18) it is possible to get help in finding the profession most appropriate for the students. This method helps the youth explore what competencies they possess, what they are interested in – irrespective of what sort of school they actually attend and what their qualification will be. Those who graduated in administrative field e.g. did not acquire those skills at school that are necessary on the labour market, so this programme may be of help for them as well.

J. Baksa: How do you manage the fact that students are only interested in well paying jobs and are not driven by dedication to their jobs, and what do you do to handle the problem that the majority of students leaving secondary school want to carry on with their studies in higher education institutions?

M Heeremans: This method does not allow answering this kind of question, because the main objective is to find out what motivates the youth, what they are interested in. Another important element of the programme is to move the members of the target group towards the professions that are in demand, to motivate them to learn these professions.

Baksa J: How does it happen? Do students have a personal advisor who talks to them?

M. Heeremans: Yes, they participate in group trainings; there are two advisors for eight students. At the training sessions they are given different tasks, the results are discussed in the group, but there are also individual advisory and consultancy sessions.

Elke Schellekens: It may be interesting for the members of the Hungarian group because this method was successfully used for the members of minorities and the long-term unemployed.

Baksa J. What sort of experts are the advisors?

Nele Coenen: There are psychologists, sociologists, social workers, teachers and also VDAB advisors working in our programme.

Elke Shellekens: Advisors took part in training before the launch of the programme and they were also given a booklet.

M Heeremans: A few primary school teachers tried this method with their pupils in the fifth and sixth class, and they gave us positive feedbacks.



Because this time we did not get a full insight into the Resoc practices that we wish to adapt, after the conversation Elke Shellekens offered the possibility to continue our discussion at another round table session in February 2010, at the “thematic seminar” to be organised in Brussels.

Methodological summary:

Looking at the ‘good practices’ of the Mechelen partner most important for us we can say that no novelty has appeared in the system. The lessons of the meetings reinforce the well-known fact that mutually advantageous cooperation and partnership may bring positive results in the short run, already.

In the present case the centre screening the labour market trends (VDAB, i.e. the local ‘Job Centre’) identified and forecast a profession in demand which offers a competitive income and long-term employment.

Following this, due to the community cooperation, the partners found each other, one of whom offers location and the ‘know-how’ necessary for the high quality training at a reduced price, the other secures the conditions necessary for employment and workplaces, the third one promotes the acquisition of the most advantageous EU support available, while the fourth partner provides civil and community consensus control for the project. In addition, the civil attitude towards the work is of course good enough so that an adequate number of (voluntary) participants show up in the trainings, and having successfully completed the trainings they are able to find jobs and reintegrate into society. In our experience the operation of the project (motivation of the participants) is greatly promoted if ‘jobseekers benefit’ is actually only enough for a minimal level of existence, and employment in the vocation discussed above (skilled welder) leads to a significant increase in the living standards.

The important lesson of the project, in the succession of the milestones built into the system, is as follows:

Appearance of well paying jobs → Demand for labour force → Identification of the demand → Creation of partnership to meet the demand → Provision of financing, community cooperation

We believe that the project introduced above and also the ‘good practice’ can be integrated into the Hungarian system as well, provided that the actors featured in the summary find each other and the most important element, the workplace offering a good salary, appears in the system.

Recommended further activities:

- As the main driving force was the local Job Centre in Mechelen, it is recommended to finance a pilot project for the test of the methodology from the resources of the TÁMOP (Társadalmi Megújulás Operatív Program, Social Renewal Operational Programme), which is also supported by the employment focus of the topic.
- It is recommended to look at the local employment pact project, in order to see where the pact cooperation is different from the ‘civil control’ seen in the project above.
- It would be important to make an exact employment trend analysis with the inclusion of the Job Centre, which forecasts the need for similar jobs or skills in our region.

