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Pilot project taught ins-and-outs of project design & management

Few doubt the importance of social and technological innovation projects; in a period of ever-evolving playing fields or shifting sands, it is more important than ever that good ideas don't fall the wayside.

Charles University got on board the Excellence-in-ReSTI (Research, Social and Technological Innovation) pilot project for that primary reason: for participants – graduates - to be able to gain a solid foundation and valuable experience in getting projects successfully funded and off the ground.



The head of Excellence-in ReSTI, Gábor Szüdi of the Centre for Social Innovation in Vienna, told me more:

"Today we are basically celebrating the end of the project Excellence-in-ReSTI which was financed under the Danube Transnational Program. It ran for two-and-a-half years and the main idea was to create a blended learning program covering early stage project management. For graduates to get better in research, development and innovation project management. The result was 20 courses across five modules.

"The idea was to provide support in learning new things in project management, we had a virtual platform for communication, and provided a strategy moving forward as it was very important to show the participants that the results were sustainable. This strategy means that we can also pass on the information and innovative learning to others who come after. That is important."

Gábor Szüdi explains that 30 people from 14 countries were being awarded for successfully completing the program. Asked which courses were essential within the overall project, he pointed to several:

"One of the main things that participants needed was a strong understanding of EU policies, that is crucial if you want to get funded, the next is project design and once it is submitted, project management, to understand how to make it successful. I personally ran a course on budget development and that too is very important: we summarised a lot of materials for participants because every project is different. There is no way around it, this is something they really had to learn.

“And what we are focussing on mainly here are international projects, Horizon 2020 is the main research development programme and the Danube Transnational Programme (because we are financed under it) and we made two horizontal modules which sound a little more esoteric – social innovation and business innovation – but we needed to do that because that is what participants were really interested in.

“The project was so developed that it included a survey and interview process and in this way we were actually able to respond to what people all around the Danube region were really interested in and were able to react. We really wanted to provide something that people could apply practically in everyday life.”



Asked if he was happy with the success rate, **Szüdi** answered enthusiastically.

“Yes absolutely. Thirty people are being awarded and the success rate was something like 80 percent. There was a lot of material for them to tackle and they got through it. Because it was the pilot implementation, it is important to point out that they also provided us with a lot of valuable feedback so we also will know what to improve next time, so I am more than satisfied. That’s the next step: to improve our existing courses by August.

“Above all, we wanted to be sure, having gone through the programme that nobody would leave still in the dark about any of the aspects. Because that is otherwise a huge problem: lots of people have good ideas but many don’t know how to write them up in a way they can secure funding. They also have to know where to knock based on the project.”

Is it enough? **Gábor Szüdi** considered the question as proceedings on Monday got underway: he said it was a start and that the mandatory feedback was showing there was much more confidence among participants moving forward. He admitted it was a continuing process, a stepping stone, a start. If you want to get funding among all of the international competition, he said, there was, in fact, always more to learn and more to do.

That there is always a higher mountain to climb should probably surprise no one with even basic experience in this field: what is clear is that Excellence-in-ReSTI helped provide an understanding and essential tools moving forward, helping graduates navigate their way through the often confusing maze that is project creation and management - now and in the future - with a far greater chance of success.