Digital Erasmus+ as seen by a Digital Officer

This is a special "EWP Meet the Team" interview. Many of us across Europe are working together, in close collaboration with each other, to make Erasmus+ digital. Therefore, from time to time, we would like to present the thoughts of different actors from this broader team.

Tibor Tóth is a Senior Erasmus+ Coordinator for Higher Education activities at the Hungarian National Agency (NA), hosted by the Tempus Public Foundation. Among his duties as KA131 programme coordinator, national OLS contact person, and Business Expert member of DG EAC Erasmus+ Consultative NA Working Group on IT Tools, he acts as the Digital Officer of the National Agency.

You have followed and supported the digitisation process of the Erasmus+ programme from the very beginning. As a Digital Officer, how do you see the importance of the EWP?

Since the very beginning, many promising initiatives have been launched and are still underway. The vision is to bring these developments together. Ten years ago, the digital transition seemed unimaginable: the infrastructure was not even sketched on paper, and the whole attitude was very different from today (we all remember the 2002's movie L'Auberge Espagnole). The key to the digital transition is a cultural shift, a change in the way people think. I believe almost everything could be done digitally, instead of cluttering up archives and storage rooms with so many documents.

Of course, such changes take time, the more profound the change, the more time it takes. Several small projects have been launched in this area; the challenge now is to bring them into synchronisation.

You are in daily contact with Erasmus+ coordinators in higher education institutions. What is your impression of their attitude to the digital transition?

The idea that higher education institutions should be able to communicate and exchange data digitally is an inspiring concept that everyone shares. However, higher education institutions are still at different levels of preparation, have implemented various solutions, and now they need support and further motivation to make the transition happen.

How can the National Agency or the digital officer help the institutions?

I think National Agencies should play a role as a kind of information mediator. We can help to create a forum for institutions to share their experiences and expertise. For example, in Hungary, we launched our Digital Friday: we organise weekly one-hour online consultations where institutions can ask each other questions, help each other by sharing screens, and teach each other how to use the platforms. I hear that there are similar initiatives by National Agencies in several other countries.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the onboarding training for new coordinators. Being an international coordinator is not an easy job, thus we experience high fluctuation, and many of the new coordinators lack information at the beginning. There is a need for a starter kit that explains basic definitions, compiles information sources, shows the initial steps, what to do and who to contact in their own institution, at the national level, and also at the EWP level.

Do you think it is realistic to make the Erasmus+ programme paperless in the short term?

Personally, I expect that by this time next year, most of the Inter-Institutional Agreements and Learning Agreements will be truly digital, and we will be focusing on the next steps. Full digitalisation may take years, even decades, as many new needs arise while systems are constantly being expanded and improved.

As parallel developments are taking place and many third-parties are involved, transparent communication between actors as well as the harmonisation of processes are crucial. We are now seeing positive signs that this is being achieved and look forward to the implementation of the Interoperability Reinforcement Plan actions.

By Anita Kardos, Communications Officer, European University Foundation (EUF).

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