

IMPLEMENTATION OF A QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR TRAINING IN ORGANIC FOOD RETAIL – EcoQualify III

LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME
LEONARDO DA VINCI Transfer of innovation
2010-1-GR1-LEO05-03967

Ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu once observed: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Lao-tzu would have been a successful at project management, because as he so wisely understood, one can achieve success with any project – no matter how large or complex – by first dividing it into a series of smaller tasks that, once completed, result in progress.

STRATEGY

of EcoQualify III project management and fulfillment of the objectives

- The strategy for project management is based on the following **principles**:
- Understand the project *objectives* and ensure they are thoroughly followed and achieved;
 - Prepare a *project work plan* with achievable schedules and performance goals;
 - Ensure the *project team* is well-organized, adequately staffed, and working well together;
 - Establish efficient *partners' collaboration*, based on mutual agreement, good manners and permanent contacts.
 - *Manage project schedule in terms of time* and deadlines according to the requirements of the LLP and design the activities adequately to the work program;
 - Provide regular and traceable *budget management*;
 - Evaluate the project regularly (internally and externally) in order to follow the achievement of the project *goals*.
 - Identify and manage project *risks*.
 - Working and managing the project in a *sustainable* manner.

I. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- The main objectives of EcoQualify III will focus on the following:
- Adaptation and testing of the Quality Assurance System (QAS) at the national level and modification and adaptation of the QAS for the national needs and conditions (in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Turkey);

- Transfer and implementation of the QAS in the practise of educational institutions (universities, colleges, vocational training centers, etc.) and retailers/farmers in the receiver countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Turkey).

II. PROJECT METHODOLOGY AND WORK PLAN

The **key phases** of the project (as they are outlined in the timetable) will be:

1. Project management and administration

Strategy of project management will be developed aiming to establish efficient management of the project concerning the overall planning, co-ordination and administration of the project in order to ensure completion of the tasks on time, within cost and to required quality standards, according to the planed budget and in compliance with the Administrative and Financial Rules of LLP. A Project Management Board (PMB) will be established to monitor and ensure that the project runs according to the budget and schedule and the quality of the outcomes are according to the standards acceptable to the Partners and the LLP programme.

2. Framework analysis

The key objectives of this Framework analysis will focus on the following:

- to update the previous investigations that had been made in the preparation of the project proposal;
- to analyze the results of the testing phase in the exporter countries and to receive indications about the perspectives for adaptation and implementation of the QAS in the importer countries;
- to provide the framework for the subsequent adaptation and customisation activities;
- to inform stakeholders about the project activities and to create the basis for subsequent exploitation and dissemination.

3. Adaptation of Quality Assurance System for training in organic foods retailing to the national requirements.

That phase aims to:

- identify the relevant contents and the degree of change required to the existing content and functional design of the EcoQualify products and to take account of linguistic, pedagogical and socio-economic requirements for adapting them to the local conditions in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey;
- to provide support to training institutions and other stakeholders who can integrate the results of EcoQualify III into their teaching and qualification offers in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

4. Testing of the quality assurance system in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey

Apply the products in real situations in the partner countries and to verify if the adaptation and customisation of the draft materials fulfil the expectations of the target partners in real-life situations with the respective target groups.

The methodology of transfer and testing cycle will focus on the following phases: purpose and plan for implementation and testing; implementation; assessment and evaluation; feedback and procedure for change/improvement.

5. Creating the final version of the QAS - it will be an important step of the project life aiming to:

- produce the final versions of the products;
- to inform the partnership about these project results and to enable them, on the basis of those products, to initiate the subsequent project steps;
- to provide the materials for national and trans-national dissemination activities.

6. Dissemination and Valorisation

All dissemination and exploitation activities will be part of the general Valorisation Plan. The plan describes the valorisation activities, the period in which these activities are scheduled, and the participating partners.

7. Evaluation

The evaluation process will be carried out as a permanent accompanying process during the whole lifespan of the project. It will support the project management to clarify and facilitate the operational project objectives and strategies and provide continuous recording instruments for feed-back processes. There will be a mid-term reflection workshop for identification of possible project adaptations, feedback workshops with the co-ordinator and interviews on three levels: partners, target groups and organic food retailing stakeholders. The results will be presented at the **Final conference**.

III. STRUCTURE AND QUALITY OF CONSORTIUM

▪ Project coordinator/contractor

The applicant and project promoter is the **University of Thessaly (Greece)** that has an extensive experience in the development of EU projects, especially in the LEONARDO DA VINCI programme. The work team of the promoter has developed some of its main activities to ecological themes and has recently participated in another Leonardo da Vinci project that focuses on training on ecological agricultural production.

The consortium consists of a selection of specialised organisations that cover the various working fields of the project. **The partnership consists of 3 groups:**

▪ Partners of the initial projects

The partners of the initial projects, presenting their experience, views and outcomes - (Institute Equalita (Germany) and the Organic Retailers Association (Austria))

▪ Core partners - education and training providers

The three core partners, providers of education and training are all working in the field of vocational qualification, and know therefore the didactic situation and requirements:

- University of Thessaly, Greece
- Higher School "Agricultural College, Bulgaria
- Chanakkale University, Turkey

▪ Associated partners

Besides, CVT Georgiki Anaptixi (Greece) with its previous experience in VET and its European projects will contribute dynamic to this project.

The Eurocenter - Land and Environment (Bulgaria) and the Romanian RCPMOP - EP will contribute to the framework analysis of the organic food retailing, relevant

legislation and inspection conditions, research, education and possible professional qualifications for the organic retailing sector in Bulgaria and in Romania.

The Organic Product Producers and Industrialists Association (Turkey) together with ORA (Austria) will support and monitor this development and make sure that the results is in line with the needs of the sector.

IV. EFFECTIVE COOPERATION AND COMMUNICATION

For effective cooperation and communication between the partner institutions, from each partner, one person will be nominated as project manager. He/she will participate at the meetings and be professionally involved into the content work, especially at the adaptation process.

All project managers, together with the project coordinator nominated by University of Thessaly, will form the **Project Management Board (PMB)**. Decisions involving the overall project management strategy will be taken by the PMB.

Conflicts that cannot be resolved at lower levels are referred to the PMB. In the unlikely event that the PMB is unable to reach consensus or where a partner formally contests a PMB decision in writing, the dispute will be referred to the Partner Committee (PC). The Partner Committee is made up of one director or high-level manager from each partner organisation. The Partner Committee will make the final resolution of disputes and a majority decision reached by the Committee shall be final and binding.

Communication Flow within the Consortium: The project home page will contain an internal area that will allow easy access and communication between the partners. This facility will allow progress on work-packages or individual tasks to be reviewed and monitored. The system will allow proactive management and communication through e-mail and virtual conferences.

The working language of the Partnership will be **English**. We know that all communication must take into consideration linguistic and intercultural differences.

Support actions: Special attention will be paid to support partners who have less experience with LLP projects, in order to empower them to acquire competence in EU project management.

Intellectual property rights and exploitation issues: The Consortium Agreement between the promoter and each partner will contain rules of sharing intellectual property.

Allocation of tasks to third parties concerns subcontracts for web site design, translations, production of print versions and eventually for external evaluation.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND CALENDER OF ACTIVITIES (See the attached Timetable)

V. BUDGET MANAGEMENT

The project addresses the introduction of this innovative Quality Assurance System for further education in organic retail trade in Europe in 3 EU countries (Bulgaria, Greece and Romania) and in the candidate-country (Turkey).

The following has been taken into consideration when planning the EcoQualify III project:

- There will be 4 international meetings of the partners in the 2 years project lifespan which will take place in the import countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Turkey).
- Besides, the partnership will organise a **Final conference** in the country of the coordinator (Greece) in order to promote the final products and disseminate the project outcomes.
- Aside from organising the project meetings in the import countries, each of the partners will organise their own dissemination activities within the country. In these countries, the project will also be presented and promoted at national levels. That makes this project, as related to the effect and impact, very cost effective. There is a planned budget for the partners for internal travels for implementation of project outcomes.

The major contribution to achieve a favorable cost-benefit ratio was the decision to form a partnership where not only one country benefits from the transfer of innovation process. In the selection process which countries we should add to Greece, we took into consideration that the developers group should consist of partners from neighboring countries, in order to enable a closer cooperation, and also because of similar impacts on the users and beneficiaries.

Staff costs count for 67.17 percent of the total project costs, which is reasonable, because the major works are the linguistic and socio-economic adaptation and the validation phase for different beneficiaries in the real learning context of the partners.

Travel costs are with 18.73 percent, the next largest expenses. In order to keep travel costs low, we have calculated not the maximum daily subsistence rates.

No equipment costs have been calculated.

Subcontracts account for 4.29% percent; most of these expenses will be for translation of the products into 4 languages (Bulgaria, Greek, Romanian and Turkish), for the maintenance of the server hosting and for publishing of printed materials (handbooks, flyers, manuals, CDs, etc.

VI. DEVELOPING RISK RESPONSE STRATEGIES

The project team should be prepared to identify the possible risks in order to mitigate them and to take immediate action. The effectiveness of planning determines whether risk increases or decreases for your project's objectives. Several **risk response strategies** are available:

- **Avoidance** - changing the project plan to eliminate the risk or protect the objectives from its impact.
- **Mitigation** - reducing the probability and/or consequences of an adverse risk event to an acceptable threshold. Taking early action is more effective than trying to repair the consequences after it has occurred.
- **Acceptance** - deciding not to change the project plan to deal with a risk. Passive acceptance requires no action. Active acceptance may include developing contingency plans for action should the risk occur. An example of active acceptance is creating a list of eligible instructors that can be called upon if last minute replacements are needed for your project.

Since not all risks will be evident at the outset of the project, periodic risk reviews should be scheduled at project team meetings. Risks that do occur should be documented, along with their responses. Your lessons learned may be useful to others or on future projects.

VII. PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

For the VET providers (University of Thessaly, Higher School "Agricultural College", CVT Georgiki Anaptixi and the Chanakkale Onsekiz Mart University) the qualification courses for employees and managers of organic retailing will form an integral part of their study offers.

The administration of learners (enrollment, administration throughout the course, assessment, certification and Europass-CV) can be integrated into the other day-to-day activities of the administrative staff of the partners. However, the planned expansion and cooperation with other training institutions might require additional personnel, but this would be decided only in connection with increased business activities.

The collaboration during the project will intensify the networks between the project partners, and include new possible cooperation partners through the intensive networking activities, which will result in new joint collaboration projects in the field of adult education.

VIII. EVALUATION

The evaluation reports will contain the accumulated findings of the entire project period and describe:

- The background of the project (justification, staff and resources);
- The project environment and its context in other European programmes
- The purpose and design of the evaluation (strategy, process, working methods),
- The evaluation results: partnership, work plan, outputs, dissemination, impact, potentials of the project.

In general, the evaluation report will focus on the following aspects:

- Which outputs have been produced by the project?
- Which impact has been achieved as a result of the project activities?

The evaluation reports will also cover the aspects of the testing phase on the QAS carried out in the recipient countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Turkey). This will be presented at the final Workshop 5.

Prepared by:

Prof. Stergios Tzortzios/
P₀ - University of Thessaly - Project Coordinator

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Ivanova
P₂ - Higher School "Agricultural College"