

„Education for Entrepreneurship” – EU-supported Post-Graduate Course in a Countrywide Academic

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Business and Administration School in Gdynia, Poland, is a partner of a unique venture, whose aim is to establish a network of universities offering post-graduate courses for employees of companies throughout Poland, drawing on the support of the European Social Fund. 15 universities and high schools established “Education for Entrepreneurship” – an association and a consortium to form a countrywide network of constant learning, linking the academic sector with Polish business. This initiative experienced a number of problems and was subjected to factors probing its integrity and endangering the planned enterprise. The article presents the Association, project development, its organisation, the launch phase, and planned research module, describing encountered problems and posing questions concerning academic network development with E.U. support.

1. The Origins of the Association and the Network Formation

In 2002, the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP), suggested to Polish universities, to consider cooperation in promoting entrepreneurship and offering education in that field, with the use of EU structural funds (available for Poland from 2004). The promotor of this idea was Mr Patrick Fourquette, then PARP’s pre-accession advisor, who toured a number of universities. At the time, Poland was not prepared to absorb the E.U. funds, especially in education. Universities had little experience in cooperation in countrywide educational projects and the threat was, that grants would be won by experienced European consultancy and training companies, leaving Polish institutions as mere subcontractors. Inducing universities to form a network would produce a partner of sufficient size and potential for state institutions.

The idea was picked up and developed by a group of professors, notably prof. J.Targalski and dr L.Piecuch, of the University of Economics in Cracow. On June 24, 2003, 15 academic institutions signed the Agreement, whose aim was to support entrepreneurship in Poland, to contribute to the building of a knowledge-based society, and to prepare a wide range of educational projects, financed with E.U. funding. The coalition was named ‘Education for Entrepreneurship (EdP). It was decided, too, that universities needed an institution, which would represent them and act as project leader (all institutions were to remain equals). First crucial decision was made: to found an association, named “Education for Entrepreneurship”. In the Polish legal system, only individuals can be full members of an association – corporate bodies can only serve as supporting members. This instantly ‘distanced’ universities from the Association – as they

would not perceive themselves as its full owners, but act through representatives. The only alternative: a foundation, in which universities would be trustees, required more financial resources and formalities. The Association was registered on Sept. 8, 2003. Thus, "Education for Entrepreneurship" is based on two 'pillars': the Association and the Agreement.

The composition of EdP reflects complexity of the Polish educational sector. One division is into state-owned and private institutions. The former are usually long-established, large institutions, like Universities, Academies, Polytechnics, financed by the state, with large resources and usually over 10.000 students. The latter have been founded after 1990, have grown to size of High Schools (not universities), offer education at a few faculties, at max. Master level, have usually a few thousand students, gather tuition fees, have no state support, and smaller accumulated resources. A general rule was agreed, that one state and one private institution would be admitted to EdP from a given town or city (their competitive position being so incomparable) As EdP's promoters were from Cracow, a majority of EdP members come from the south of the country – a geographical influence. The response to the initiative was also connected with the state/private divide. Private institutions perceived it as one of the ways to overcome the unfair competitive privileges of the state schools – and so were more open. As they were smaller, and engaged in fewer academic initiatives, such initiative was perceived as more important. The state schools, with their state funding, experience radically lower pressure to search for extra funding, and their structures are more bureaucratic and less flexible.

Another factor in the formation of the network, was the personalities of the initiators. A circle of enthusiasts was critical, as in any such venture. EdP was an initiative of individuals, and not academic authorities – professors, not rectors (who were scarcely aware of challenges of E.U. funds). Therefore EdP's composition is to a certain extent, a consequence of to whose hands at a university, the initial invitations came. Initially, the representatives of universities were e.g. vice-rectors for development, or international cooperation officers, heads of constant learning units, or simply professors from departments of entrepreneurship or management. At the time, no units concerned with E.U. funding or project management, were present at Polish universities.

Another factor was surely politics, both at academic, and at country level. It has to be appreciated, as the very scope of the initiative moved it close to political level. Unfortunately, ambition, prestige, splendor and 'fatherhood of success' are among the motivations, that the academic circles are prone to suffer from. This project was not an exception – which will be mentioned later.

The first task of the initiators was to formulate the programme of the Association. Although the task was accomplished, it became clear, that the Association would not have the support of the universities required to begin large-scale activity. It first had to prove its usefulness, build a structure and integrate itself around the first project.

2. Basic Figures, Project Development And Application Process

The first project of EdP aims to establish a countrywide network of universities, offering a wide range of post-graduate courses, which answer the training needs of Polish enterprises. The project is entitled: 'Post-graduate courses for managers and employees of enterprises'. Not all of the members of EdP entered into the project, therefore the project consortium comprised 16 universities. It also comprised the Association, as project leader, and the EFICOM company, which, due to its experience in promotion campaigns for the E.U., was to take responsibility for the promotion of the project. The project was filed first in November of 2004, and for the second time – successfully – in May of 2005.

The project gives 9,954 employees, a chance to develop their professional competences, and their companies – a chance to bring in knowledge and skills they require. There are over 150 courses to choose from, grouped into the following nine fields: information technology, production and industry, management, business in the E.U., communication/media, accountancy and finance, law/taxes/insurance, logistics. The offer is countrywide – a company may send one employee for a course in one city, and another – to a different course in another part of the country. The length of one course is two semesters on average, with 219 teaching hours. The total number of teaching hours in the project reaches 2,18 milion.

It is so far the largest project of this kind in Poland – its total budget is 51,66 mln PLN. The grant allocated by PARP is 45,82 mln PLN, which is almost 89% of the total budget. The rest is paid in by companies, that send their employees. SMEs pay 20% of the total cost of a course, large companies cover 40%. The direct costs of the courses will amount to 38,68 mln, and the remaining costs will cover the promotion campaign, the research module, project management and administration, audit and financial costs, including bank guarantees. Despite numerous extra costs required by the Programme, the project is markedly cost-efficient. The average cost of a course for one participant is 5.190 PLN, and in direct costs only: 3.905 PLN. These prices fit in the current market prices on post-graduate courses in Poland – and for an employee of a small or medium enterprise, the effective cost is 20%, or 1.038 PLN. The average cost of one teaching hour offered in the project, is only 23,70 PLN.

The project is going to last 2,5 years: the contract with PARP was signed on December 22, 2005, and the project will close at the end of Spring semester of 2008. Courses will be conducted from March 2006 to the end of 2007. For a 2,5-year-long-project, how long would the preparation phase be? Preparations started in January of 2004 – two years before the start of the project. The project development phase shows, how complex the process can be, and how many factors can endanger a new network.

The first initiative of a network is crucial to its development. The first project of EdP was to serve a number of objectives other than the main one. It would serve as an integrator for the network, provide resources to establish it at the universities and let it work on consecutive projects, bring benefits to participating universities and convince their authorities to support the network in future, allow it to gather experience and le-

gitimise the Association as a credible project leader, and let universities form close ties with businesses – which they lacked earlier.

The first project idea was a consequence of the prospective availability and targeting of E.U. funds. In Poland, the National Development Plan for years 2004-2006, defined several Sectoral Operational Programmes, among which was the ‘Development of Human Resources’ Programme (SPO RZL). Priority 2 – ‘Development of the Knowledge-Based Society’ – and in it, Measure 2.3 – ‘Promotion of Human Resources for the Modern Economy’ (Scheme a) – seemed an obvious choice, because it was the only one truly available to universities. And it was managed by PARP. Beneficiaries of Measure 2.3 a) were enterprises and their employees – the very group, EdP was founded to support. Two forms of education were allowed: short training courses or post-graduate courses. The former were eliminated, as universities did not want to compete with training companies. The latter were chosen, as universities were experienced in conducting them – and only institutions allowed to conduct them.

The Association was encouraged by PARP to start work on project development. In the beginning of 2004, PARP maintained, that it would be ready to issue a call for proposal right after May 1st, 2004 (the accession day). It was obvious, that the development phase of such a venture would take months. But to define a project, a clear legal framework and clear programme requirements are necessary. In Spring of 2004, however, they were unavailable. The National Development Plan was not accepted by the Parliament, not mentioning the Sectoral Programmes, priorities, measures and schemes, and their legal confirmation in the shape of acts and ordinances. A change of one regulation could mean a revision of the whole project. So, at this stage, the project concept was based solely on assumptions, unconfirmed by any binding regulations.

The launch of structural funds in Poland has been plagued with delays, shortcomings, omissions, mistakes, contradictions and incompetence. This bore hardest on the applicants. Thus, project development took much more time and resources than expected. Three groups of problems were most formidable:

- public institutions unprepared to manage the programme,
- programme requirements and regulations,
- network budgetting in the academic environment,

PARP opened a call for proposals in October of 2004 – six months after the initially declared date. Publication of key programme documents was delayed, too. Programme requirements were changed several times during that time, forcing the Association to rebuild the project. PARP’s experience in managing pre-accession funds was both an advantage, and a drawback. PARP had to re-structure, hiring a large group of new and inexperienced employees, and has had constant problems with huge staff rotation. Another factor behind its inpreparedness, is Polish politics. Instability, political wrangling, uncertainty, dominance of loyalty over professionalism – which have deregulated the administrative system. In short, ‘back-covering’ was (and still is) more important than efficiency and predictability. Burdens on PARP had been easy to predict, but were not accommodated for.

Lack of programme requirements and their contradictions, were another major obstacle. Structural funds for Poland assume a 75% contribution to planned activities – the remaining 25% are the national contribution. In Measure 2.3, no contribution from the applicant is required, but projects should be ‘balanced out’. Grants should cover all project costs – which in practice is impossible. Firstly, not all costs are considered eligible (e.g. project development). Secondly, some eligible costs prove impossible to document – that their documentation is unreasonable – e.g. building maintenance. Therefore – at least in financial terms – a ‘balanced out’ project is fiction. In PHARE projects, undocumented overheads were allowed. In structural funds overheads are ruled out. This may be a lesser burden to the state universities: the size of their budgets, and spending of state funds, mean, that they can afford a ‘project deficit’. Private institutions do not have that flexibility: their educational products have to be profitable. Any revenue (e.g. fees from participants) simply reduces the grant. Summing up, such approach to project costs discourages private applicants, or induces misuse.

Requirements and regulations of Measure 2.3, were clearly not tailored to promoting large countrywide projects. PARP based itself on its prior experience with pre-accession funds, with small, simple, schematic training projects. This was reflected in programme documents. Among dozens of examples, one can be quoted: it was required that C.V.s of all trainers should be attached to the application. It is easy in a small training project. But when in one post-graduate course there are on average 10 lecturers, there are 150 programmes, and each C.V. has to be copied 3 times – project application has to be delivered to PARP in a van – which was indeed the case. The very logistics of gathering 1500 C.V.s, with hand signatures, is daunting.

Another troubling requirement was to show prior experience in project management, in projects of such type and in projects funded by the E.U. The Association could not have a record. It did not matter, that universities had realised scores of projects – because they were not responsible for management in this one. No project of such nature and magnitude had been conducted in Poland before. E.U. experience could not be obtained thus far. That is why in 2005, EdP allied with the EFICOM company, which had had considerable experience in projects promoting Polish accession to the E.U.

Budgeting unleashed the true pioneer character of the venture. This huge task uncovered (or discovered?), how widely financial systems of universities differ. Each academic institution is a self-governing body, with its own specific regulations. Such huge variety had to be brought down to a common denominator, to express project costs in common terms. The budget had to be assembled under ever changing PARP requirements and eligible costs. Coordinators lacked experience in budgeting. They had to trace and learn all costs remotely connected with post-graduate courses. To Rectors and bursars, they posed questions, that no one had posed before. Some costs were simply uncalculable. A university, with tens of buildings – all with hundreds of different maintenance costs – finds it difficult even to calculate standard cost of a room for one lecturing hour for budgeting, let alone documenting all costs. Another example: travelling costs for lecturers could be reimbursed. But who would gather thousands of all types of tickets from hundreds of lecturers? The scale of the project multiplied difficulties: there were hundreds of wage rates for lecturers, with mixed up full-time, part-time and visiting con-

tracts. They had to be reduced to a ladder of just 12 rates. Even innocent coffee-breaks, multiplied by thousands, grew to millions of PLN. To omit one insignificant cost could mean major sum to be covered by partners. Reasonable estimation of (especially administrative) workload was very difficult. In consequence of a great learning process, costs were simplified and standardised. It meant limitations to prior freedom, but was necessary. Furthermore, the very courses were standardised. Earlier, they differed hugely in programmes, types of teaching, modules etc. Standardising 150 programmes is in itself a major achievement.

The attitude of PARP to large projects and network building, changed in time. At first, PARP encouraged them: it would be easier to deal with a small number of large projects. But faced with its own insufficient competence and political environment, it grew weary of them: they could grow in power and make demands on PARP. Also, failure of one could mean failed absorption targets. At 51 mln, the project seems large, but the original vision and budget were planned for over 200 mln.

The first version of the project was not approved by experts, main objections being lack of experience and the budget. The project was rewritten and costs were lowered. PARP accepted the May application, but proposed budget cuts. They partly resulted from insufficient awareness of the specificity of post-graduate courses, and were clarified in negotiations. But cuts reached management costs, markedly wages, which increased project risk. It is easy to cut posts or turn full-time to half-time, but work has to be done regardless, and with project of such complexity, partners must be able to hire experienced professionals, and not ambitious graduates.

3. Project Organisation And Problems With Start-Up Phase In The Environment Of E.U. Funding

Organisation of the project is the key to its success. The structure of the post-graduate courses' project is the consequence of EdP's prior history, choices made during project development, and time and financial constraints. The organisational model may turn out to be ineffective, but it seemed to be justified and reasonable in given circumstances.

The main Project Office is organised by the Association, is located in Cracow, and is responsible for project management, administration, control, finance and reporting, centralised public procurement, and communication. It represents the Association and other partners before PARP. It supervises execution of promotion and research modules, and most importantly – local project offices at partner universities. University coordinators, although working in their institutions, are also part of the Project Office.

Partner universities are responsible for their own project structures, according to their individual policy and specific situation. Institution budgets differ widely in size (from 7,34 to 0,68 mln PLN) and are in fact, small projects. Some partners have decided to organise a separate project office, others only name and empower a university coordinator and delegate other tasks to the existing organisational units. The latter is the case at most large universities, where the project is assimilated through the existing structure.

Coordination is placed in various units, mainly post-graduate courses' offices. Partner universities are responsible for recruitment, organisation and conducting of courses, public procurement, administration, documentation and reporting. They also participate in promotion and information, but overall responsibility for that lies with EFICOM. The model of organisation seems natural. It, among others, serves the purpose of not favouring any partner university by making it responsible for project management. The functions of the Project Office could not be allocated to different partners without the risk of communication blockage – they must be held by one partner. It can be argued, whether promotion could be de-centralised and tailored to local environment – but countrywide promotion was one of the project's strong points, and EFICOM – a valuable and experienced partner.

Balanced distribution of responsibility between the 'centre' and the network could not prevent the obvious: the Project Office would be overloaded with organisation and structure-building in the launch phase. Only after the project had been selected, did the Project Office move to define detailed procedures, rule books, handbooks, forms etc. It also had to develop communication channels, which is still proving difficult.

To assure proper conduct of the project at universities, basic conditions have to be met. Most important is proper empowerment of university coordinator by his/her superiors. The coordinator has to assure priority treatment of the project in the institution. Here, the coordinator's personality comes into play, too. Another condition is sufficient knowledge of E.U. requirements and procedures. Here, education of the bursar's office seems truly paramount. Another condition is to equip the coordinator with university resources, until the project's tenders are conducted. If new employees are to be recruited, it should be done prior to project launch. Because training for the project administration is not an eligible cost, and due to logistic challenges of large meetings and virtual teamwork, procedures and standards had to be developed by the Project Office, and partners' knowledge and experience could not be properly utilised.

Project application was filed in May of 2005. The project agreement with PARP was signed on Dec. 22, 2005. It took almost four months to evaluate the project, and another nearly four months to formally open it. It is just one example of problems with the launch of a large project. The other issues are: formal requirements of the implementing institution, bank guarantees, the liquidity of the project, public procurement, political influences, commercial institutions as partners, and communication among partners.

The delay in the formal beginning of the project, was caused by the delays within PARP, political environment in Poland, and withdrawal of one of the universities. PARP was clearly unprepared to deal with a flood of applications in May of 2005. It had to quickly organise four Project Selection Committees instead of one. The project was scheduled to begin in the Autumn semester of 2005 – but with the delays, the Project Office had to re-calculate the project yet again, scrapping one whole semester. PARP was also delaying the signing of the contract, and political factors were surely an issue: in Autumn of 2005 Poland had the misfortune of both parliamentary and presidential elec-

tions. Change of power means change of superiors, therefore many decisions were simply halted, regardless of troubles for the third parties.

Another issue was the requirement of financial assurances given by the applicants. In large projects, the only option was a bank guarantee. Two basic issues arose. Firstly, how 16 very differing universities, an Association with few assets, and a commercial company, should agree on how to secure a joint guarantee for a huge sum. The second was, which bank would be prepared to issue it? It turned out, that none – banks at the time were only discovering the niche of E.U. grants. And only the largest could contemplate guarantees of such proportion. PARP could not decide, if the guarantees should be given for the whole sum at once, or for the consecutive tranches of the grant. Fortunately, it finally decided, that only 25% of the grant should be guaranteed.

Liquidity of the leader is another important issue in large projects. The Association, as a new entity, was only supported by universities. But from the moment the grant is awarded, to first payment from PARP, the leader has to cover significant costs, associated with formal requirements and pay for the project team and indispensable experts (e.g. lawyers). Some payments can be delayed, but the pace and quality of work may suffer. Even small tasks in the project of this size, are considerable efforts.

Public procurement requirements are a crucial obstacle. They are probably the single largest source of paradoxes of E.U. funding in Poland. Clearly, the Public Procurement Act of 2004 was not written with E.U. funding in mind. The fact, that it is a problem, has only been discovered by the Public Procurement Authority through interventions of EdP and other applicants. The new Act was supposed to accommodate practices and standards applied by the E.U. – but completely missed the quickly approaching structural funds, to which it is applied by definition. State universities are a bit used to the procedures – they are treated as standard. But private schools have not had to apply them so far – it meant a dramatic change in their operations (thus far time- and cost-efficient). The limit, from which an institution is obliged to apply public procurement procedures, is just 6.000 EUR in Poland. This means, that small training projects could avoid them, but also, that a project like EdP's would have to apply them to every single cost category. Therefore, one of basic questions is the division of the budget. Normally, with yearly budgeting, it is easy, but how to approach a project? Should its budget be divided into years? That would hardly be reasonable, as a project is an entity. Normally, a budget is defined for one institution. But what about partnerships – can a budget of each individual partner be treated separately? Furthermore, budgetary units for universities were individual editions of courses. No university can be certain, how many editions will be conducted – it depends on the interest of companies. Could therefore budgets be divided into editions? Or rather, semesters, as courses usually fit in them? No such questions have been posed to the Public Procurement Authority before. And in part it has shed the responsibility by simply referring the inquirers to the Act! Experts also differ widely in their opinions. Uncertainty in legal requirements is a major obstacle to every large project, and results mainly in completely unnecessary delays. From a large collection of absurd puzzles, two examples can be quoted:

To sign a contract with PARP, the beneficiary has to give details of the project's bank account. But to do that, it has to choose the bank to service the project by public

procurement. But it does not have the right to do that, as it has not yet signed the project contract.

Quality of lecturers is paramount to project's evaluation, therefore all are named in the application, with C.V.s attached. But it turns out, that all contract (not full-time) lecturers, like outside experts, have to be chosen in public procurement! Self-contradictory? Well...

It must be said, too, that EdP has not made proper use of the public procurement experts working at the large state universities – they have not been made available for the project by their institutions. Besides, public procurement requirements are extremely time-consuming. To truly accommodate for them, a project contract should be signed at least six months before any initial (e.g. promotional) activities begin.

Coming back to the political influences on the project in its launch phase: an example of what may happen to such project, is the withdrawal of one of the partners. When the signing date of the project contract was named, and a meeting was being organised, one of the universities decided to withdraw from the project. Or more precisely: it demanded control over the project and the function of the project leader – which was categorically refused by all other partners. But it nevertheless almost aborted the project: the composition of the partnership would change, so the project would change, and PARP would refuse to sign the project contract. The project was salvaged, because all other partners declared to take over all obligations of the withdrawn partner, so that the content and the budget of the project remained unchanged. This shows: how risky the project's dependence on one of the partners can be, to what an unequal treatment of small and large partners may lead, and how important it is to develop contingency plans for such situations, with partners' readiness to take over project tasks. When tasks and functions are clearly divided, substitution of partners is more difficult: if a small partner's role is cannot be taken over (due to lack of competences), he finds it easier to defend his position. In another situation, when a number of partners perform the same task, but in different scale (one school conducting 3 courses, another – 30), the larger ones may unfairly demand better position, drawing on their 'weight' in the project, which other partners could not simply take over due to their limited potential.

In the environment of E.U. funds, and in the 'non-profit' projects, problems may also occur with commercial institutions. An example of such problems were initial delays on the part of EFICOM – the partner responsible for promotion. It cannot be more obvious, that promotion is absolutely crucial at the beginning of such a large project, to assure sufficient recruitment. But EFICOM, as a commercial partner, refused to undertake actions that would require it to forward its own financial assets, before the project obtains an 'in account' payment from PARP. This in turn cannot be obtained, before the bank guarantee is secured. That in turn has to wait for the executive agreements between the Association and every partner. Consequently, only the low-cost promotion has been launched, supported by public relations' activity of the universities, which engaged their contacts and marketing departments.

In a network project, communication is paramount – not only during the start-up phase, but especially in it. Project environment is sufficiently unstable and uncertain, to

add to that the uncertainty resulting from poor information within the network. A network has to find its ways to spread information most effectively, to answer questions posed by partners, to use the potential of all partners in problem-solving. Quality of communication comes into jeopardy, when the centre – the Project Office – is overworked. When the Project Office finds it hard to cope with its own tasks – especially with the unexpected situations requiring reaction of the leader – communication with partners has to wait. This has also been the experience of EdP: as the Association (being a small team with limited potential) had to cope with consecutive problems of the launch phase, other partners have been underinformed and uncertain, what to do – if they are allowed to go ahead with next tasks and if they have correct information to avoid mistakes (which may turn into losses). Poor communication can mean deterioration of trust within the partnership – which is the fastest way to project failure. Therefore to avoid this, the project office should have the necessary reserves to cope with unforeseen circumstances and keep partners informed at all times – especially in cases of ‘crisis management’.

4. Planned Research Module

The research module of the project fulfills the obligatory requirements of project research and evaluation, set out by the European Social Fund and the SPO RZL Programme. It is a large-scale research, which will last until the end of the main project, and is a project in its own right.

The first main objective of the module is to evaluate effectiveness of post-graduate courses, in the context of the development of the employee and his/her employer. Consequently, the questions in the questionnaires dedicated to this objective, will concentrate around: 1) the level of knowledge and skills of the employee, 2) the employee’s position and range of responsibility, 3) the employer’s training and development policy. The second main objective is to evaluate the quality of teaching delivered during the courses. To achieve that, every student will fill in a questionnaire at the end of each course module. Quality of three areas will be evaluated: the content, the lecturer and the learning environment.

Accordingly, two paths of research will be carried out:

Action A. – Evaluation of course effectiveness

Action B. – Evaluation of course modules

Action A. will be carried out through questionnaires at the beginning, and about three months after the end of any given post-graduate course. Research will therefore be conducted throughout the project, with greatest intensity at the end of 2007/beginning of 2008. Questionnaires will be filled in by employees and their employers. In total, four questionnaires will be used: two for students and two for their businesses. Research on the employees and employers, comparing state of affairs at the beginning and after the end of studies, will facilitate a multi-dimensional analysis of the level of effectiveness of

the courses. Data will be analysed after the end of the project, but analysis of partial data is also planned.

Action B. Will be conducted systematically throughout the project, as successive course modules finish at a given university. The questionnaires will be carried out by the lecturers of respective modules, or by pollsters. They then will be collected and passed to the Project Office. Data will be analysed after the end of the project, but analysis of partial data is also planned.

Depending on the objective of research, and information to be gathered, three groups of subjects can be distinguished:

Group 1. will comprise all students taking part in the project, and will be subject of research in Action B.

Group 2. will consist of 20% of students, and will take part in Action A – Evaluation of course effectiveness. The sample will be selected at random.

Group 3. will consist of 15% of enterprises, which send their employees to the courses, and will also take part in Action A. The sample will also be selected at random.

The size of groups 2 and 3 is sufficient to assume, that both groups are representative for the whole population. In Action B, where research covers the whole population, 9.954 questionnaires will be gathered. In Action A, it will be required to research 1.991 students and 1.493 enterprises. In both groups two surveys will be carried out: at the beginning, and three months after the end of the course – therefore in total, 3.484 questionnaires will be gathered.

An appropriate research team, and good organisation, are needed to carry out tasks of the scale mentioned. The research module of the project requires the engagement of three groups of executors: the research team, the coordinators, and the pollsters.

The research team will be responsible for the professional preparation of research, analysis of collected data, and proposal and edition of conclusions and publications. It is going to consist of: a key expert, a statistician, an IT specialist (preparing a dedicated application and database), and four team members (7 persons in total). The team is located at the University of Economics in Cracow.

A team of coordinators will take responsibility for the administrative and organisational side of the project. Their task will be to assure, that the research is conducive with the assumed standards and scenarios. The Research Coordinator will be responsible for the whole research module of the project. In each of participating universities, one coordinator will be chosen. Eight of them act as regional coordinators, supervising from one to three institutions. At remaining universities, local coordinators are appointed. (15 persons in total). Regional and local coordinators are mainly responsible for the selection and supervision of pollsters, distribution and gathering of questionnaires, and communication with the Research Coordinator.

Pollsters will be responsible for carrying out surveys with participants and their companies (ca. 175 persons). Another 10 people will be responsible for the data input

into the database. This will be centralised: all filled-in questionnaires will be sent to Cra-cow and results will be typed into the central database of the project.

As can be seen, a total of around 200 people is going to take part in the research module of the project. The scale of this task is considerable, will require discipline, attention, good communication and many hours of work. The scale can be exemplified by the number of individual records to be inserted into the database. The number of records for the module evaluation – Action B – alone (multiplying the number of respondents, by the number of questions in one questionnaire), gives over 230.000. The research module of the project is a significant part – over 3% – of its total budget.

Questions may be asked if, having access to such a sample of businesses and employees, an opportunity is not missed to carry out broader or deeper research. One has to bare in mind, however, the following:

the first obligation of EdP is to carry out research required by PARP, the Programme and ESF,

it is the first research of such scale by EdP, so breadth and complexity of planned research cannot put at risk the accomplishment of basic goals,

the research network is not yet proven and tested, therefore broader research could prove too demanding for local coordinators,

Smaller scale accompanying research, though, will be possible, e.g. at a given university. For example, at Business and Administration School in Gdynia, it is planned to research the involvement of employees in the knowledge xprocesses in their companies. The aim of this accompanying research will be to test a new tool to analyse and describe the role of individual workposts in organisational processes within knowledge management in an organisation.

Successful accomplishment of planned research in this project, will enable EdP to propose other projects – this time of purely research nature – drawing on the group of companies and employees and an efficient network of researchers.

Results of this research will be presented in articles published in scientific magazines and professional journals concerned with human resources' management. The summary of the plan, execution and results of research, will be presented in research reports. It is also possible to organise a conference dedicated to the methods of evaluation of training and education, where results of the research module will be presented.

5. Network Building With E.U. Support – Conclusions

The project has begun, recruitment for first courses is successful, and after two years it seems, that the EdP network will establish itself firmly. Success of this project will allow development of the network of constant learning for businesses and their employees, with wider offer and new initiatives.

In hindsight, a few critical factors can be named, that determined the formation of the network. Some are internal: they concern relations among partners. Some are external, forming the framework and environment of the first project.

Believers and supporters: such initiatives need 'believers', who would withstand adversities, at every partner school, and loyal school authorities, determined to support their efforts.

Partner loyalty and clear and equal rules for all partners, allow to focus on shared goals and benefits.

The larger the project, the more it has to rely on existing and tested educational offer. Organisational challenges are enough to cope with, to add shared development of new, innovative programmes to the project.

To establish a network of lifelong learning, establishing stable relations with beneficiaries (here: businesses) is crucial, and the first project should serve that purpose.

Value of communication in a network cannot be overestimated, especially for trust-building.

Attitude of national administration to E.U. funding – does it treat it as a chance, or as a problem? What is more important: their quick and beneficial use for the country, or avoiding failures at all costs?

Lack of time is the main problem with the implementation of E.U. funds. Public authorities, applicants and their projects could be much more effective, if there was more time available.

Lessons learned have greatest value, when compared with experiences of others – therefore it is justified to end by posing the following questions:

What are the rationale, advantages and drawbacks, opportunities and threats, of forming large academic networks in Europe?

How does presented example compare with experiences of other countries in using EU funding for projects and programmes in the area of lifelong learning.

How to best use an opportunity of large-scale research in large projects?

References:

- 'Education for Entrepreneurship' – project documentation,
'Education for Entrepreneurship' website, www.edp.org.pl,
Programme documents of the Sectoral Operational Programme 'Development of Human Resources' (SPO RZL), and the European Social Fund (EFS), www.efs.gov.pl,

