

**CURRICULUM
FOR ADULT EDUCATION
IN RURAL AREAS
(CAERA)**

**FINAL EVALUATION
REPORT**

**Prepared By
WIZARD PROJECT
SOLUTIONS**

Introduction

This is an independent evaluation of the project 'Curriculum for Adult Education in Rural Areas' (CAERA) which was delivered by a multi-agency partnership over a two year period from October 2005. The results of the evaluation process have been collected over the duration of the two-year period and comprise a series of 'snapshots' designed to explore and assess the effectiveness with which the project has been implemented.

Principal tools used in the evaluation process have included (i) questionnaires; (ii) observations; (iii) communication; and (iv) self-reflection. Interim feedback has been offered at regular intervals, for example at each of the partnership meetings. In addition to face-to-face meetings, contact has been maintained with the project co-ordinator and partners email and Yahoo Group. The Evaluator has sought to offer feedback in a balanced way.

The focus, aims and objectives of the evaluation process were established at the inaugural partnership meeting in Timisoara (RO). These included: the project's aims, objective and results; the workplan and its implementations; the partnership and its effectiveness; project management and co-ordination; financial management and use of resources; implementation of the dissemination strategy; and finally an assessment of the evaluation itself.

In addition, many of the partners conducted their own self-evaluation (or self-reflective) activities. The following pages represent a culmination of the results of the observations, reflections and surveys undertaken over the course of the two-year project.

Aims, Objectives & Results

In terms of the aims, objectives and results, it is necessary to question the success with which these have been delivered. Some very innovative solutions have been found in addressing some of the pre-existing problems, for example setting up a community park in Romania to facilitate social interaction.

Equally, the project appeared to develop something innovative (a key criteria for the Lifelong Learning Programme) as evidenced by some of the partner's comments: *'We experienced new aspects in the selection of target group, measuring people's existing competences and the pilot trainings as well'*

Even more importantly, it has been clear from the partners' progress reports, comments and exit strategy, that there are clear plans to continue and sustain the activities beyond the end of the funding period, for example: *'We will be using the adult education training method examples in our future work'*

In terms of the impact on the final beneficiaries (the people living in rural areas) the project has clearly delivered additional benefits and ultimately, this might be regarded as the most important indicator of all, as the following comment illustrates: *'Beneficiaries have received more encouragement to be active and search for solutions to make their life better in the rural areas – searching for new employment possibilities, becoming self employed, continuing their studies etc'*

Nevertheless, at the time of writing the Handbook and European Guide had not been completed and it has therefore been impossible to assess the impact of these two important products upon future potential target groups.

Work Plan & Implementation

Although some re-scheduling of the activities occurred the project still succeeded in reaching over 250 beneficiaries, which for a project of this nature is a tremendous achievement. This number also demonstrates that the tools and methodologies developed have been tested on a statistically significant audience.

The partners unanimously agreed that different needs and ideas had been incorporated within the revised work plan. As a result of the activities which followed, members of the target group were able to develop new skills and identify appropriate strategies for the improvement of rural communities.

'Beneficiaries have received more encouragement to be active and search for solutions to make their life better in the rural areas. They have acquired new competencies and skills (e.g. using the internet and email) and learnt how to petition local authorities etc.

From a less positive point of view, there was significant slippage in terms of the timetable, with many of the original deadlines being missed. Although partners agreed most of the deadlines collectively, almost all of them failed to respect these, which by their own admission caused a knock on effect and delay in producing some of the key outputs and products.

It is the partners' intention that the booklet on Community Development be used to help other support agencies understand the processes of activating rural citizens. If this can be achieved, the project will have succeeded in helping to ensure a long term and sustainable impact.

Effectiveness of the Partnership

Are there clear indications of a real and effective partnership with even distribution of tasks and responsibilities as well as contributions from the organisations involved? In answer to this question, the partners themselves were asked to state whether aspects of good practice had been identified and exchanged as a result of the project.

Unfortunately, outside of the face to face meetings, there appeared to be a lack of collaboration between the partners, with insufficient exchange of expertise or best practice taking place as the following self-reflective comment demonstrates: *'All of us did the job independently; there have been a very little interaction between partners'*

In terms of the partnership meetings themselves, only two of the partner organisations were represented by the same personnel throughout the project's duration and this caused some difficulties in terms of continuity. This difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that the Spanish Partner (FASE) did not attend either of the final two meetings.

There was also a clear feeling amongst some of the partners that because they had not been involved in the original project (SAERA) from which this initiative developed, two distinct groups appeared within the partnership. As an independent observation, this issue appeared to improve after the third project meeting in Poland.

Although some partners were critical of the organisation of the second project meeting (ES), the team building process clearly developed as the project progressed, culminating in a most successful meeting in Estonia in September 2007.

Project Management & Co-ordination

In assessing this criterion, the evaluation has taken into account issues such as whether individual partners had opportunities to contribute to discussions, make collective

decisions and whether clear guidelines and deadlines set had been set by the Co-ordinator.

An overwhelming majority of partners felt they had received clear instruction from the co-ordinator. Considering the fact that there was a change in personnel within the Co-ordinating Organisation roughly 12 months into the project, this is a positive observation.

The majority of partners also felt that relevant and appropriate monitoring arrangements had been put in place. The Co-ordinator established clear monitoring documentation/templates during and immediately following the first meeting in January 2006.

The partners used recognised communication tools during the project (e.g. the Yahoo Group) which enabled further necessary discussions to take place, particularly during the transition period between Project Co-ordinators.

The Co-ordinator also established an appropriate financial monitoring system, which helped to ensure that the project finances remained on track and that the interim and final claims were submitted on time.

'The change of project manager caused confusion and communication problems for quite a long period of time, however given such changes in personnel, the project has been well managed'

Implementation of the Dissemination Strategy

From an early stage, the project established its own independent website, which provided the potential for online dissemination of the aims, objectives, results and lessons learned within the project. It also helped to create a corporate identity, shared equally by the various partners.

Although the website (www.caera.org) contained links to each of the partner organisations' individual websites, not all of the partners used their own websites to help disseminate the project. A further weakness lies in the fact that summaries of the project (in each national language of the partnership) have not been uploaded.

Beyond the internet, the partners have nevertheless used a broad range of dissemination tools and activities, including both conferences and printed media. Their activities have achieved a wide coverage not only at local, but also regional, national and international level.

Unfortunately, due to a delay in producing two of the key project outputs (the 'Guide to Rural Community Work' and 'Booklet on Rural Community Development') it has not been possible to assess the impact of these two important dissemination tools.

The partners did however, discuss distribution of these two products in some detail during the meeting in Estonia and it was reassuring to see that there are clear plans to try and sustain the activities beyond the end of the funding period, as the following quote demonstrates:

'We will use the booklet to help other organisations understand the process developed within CAERA. We will try to promote the agro-tourism courses in different regions'

Conclusions & Recommendations

On the whole, this has been a successful project which has been delivered broadly in line with the aims and objectives as stated in the original application. Although there were some

delays in the activities, most of the intended results have been delivered and in some cases exceeded.

In terms of future planning, most of the partners have identified networks of other support agencies (e.g. Rural Development Associations, Rural Tourism Organisations) with whom they intend to work. A future project might look to include some of these agencies as Associate Partners from an earlier stage.

There have been many examples of good practice used in the teaching of competencies and innovation in the methods of delivery, for example the use of role plays to develop sales techniques in Estonia and creating personal websites in France to teach communication and presentation skills.

If there has been a weakness within the project, it is that the partners, whilst working very effectively as individuals, have not always collaborated as well as they might. Having said that, there is clear evidence from the completed 'Guide to Rural Community Work' for example, that they have worked towards common goals.

In terms of evaluation, the partners have responded positively to any feedback and recommendations that have been made. In addition to the all-encompassing observations of the evaluator, all partners undertook their own self-reflective assessment, which demonstrates their commitment to continuous quality improvement.

The participants are to be complemented on the quality of the work produced, which clearly had a positive impact on the beneficiaries.