



TAMPEREEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
Tampere University of Applied Sciences

INTERNATIONAL MEETING 2009

Ideal platform for networking and project planning.

Niina Uusitalo

Opinnäytetyö
Huhtikuu 2010
Liiketalouden koulutusohjelma
Kulttuuri- ja kongressipalvelujen suunta-
tumisvaihtoehto
Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu

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Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu
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Kulttuuri- ja kongressipalvelujen suuntautumisvaihtoehto

UUSITALO, NIINA:

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Opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajana toimi kansainvälisyystoimisto korkeakoulussa nimeltä the University College of Teacher Education. Tämä itävaltalainen korkeakoulu järjesti lokakuussa 2009 tapaamisen nimeltä the International Meeting 2009. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli selvittää syitä miksi International Meeting 2009:n osanottajat ottivat osaa tähän tapaamiseen, minkälaisia henkilökohtaisia odotuksia heillä oli tapaamiselta ja toteutuivatko nämä toiveet. Tarkoitus oli myös kerätä hieman tietoa osanottajien profiilista sekä muista kansainvälisistä tapaamisista, joita muut instituutiot järjestävät. Lisäksi oli tärkeää saada palautetta tapaamisesta, jotta saataisiin parempi kuva siitä oliko tapaaminen onnistunut.

Tämä laadullinen tutkimus toteutettiin käyttämällä kyselytutkimusta tiedonkeruun metodina. Kysely suoritettiin paperisen kyselylomakkeen muodossa, johon osanottajat vastasivat itse henkilökohtaisesti, ja joka sisälsi avoimia kysymyksiä tutkimusaiheesta. Työn teoriaosuus keskittyi korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymiseen Euroopassa sekä kansainvälisiin toimintoihin toimeksiantaja korkeakoulussa.

Tutkimuksesta ilmeni, että the International Meeting 2009 oli tuottava tapaaminen eri opetusaineiden opettajille, jotka haluavat saada kansainvälistä kokemusta hyödyntämällä opettajavaihto-ohjelmaa. Tutkimuksesta saadun palautteen perusteella voitiin selkeästi todeta, että tapaaminen oli erittäin onnistunut ja osanottajien pääodotukset suurimmaksi osaksi toteutuivat. Tapaaminen toimi hyvänä alustana verkostoitumiselle, sosialisoinnille sekä projektien suunnittelulle, mitkä olivat suurimman osan odotuksia tapaamiselta. Tutkimuksen kautta ilmeni myös, että vastaavanlaisia tapaamisia ei järjestetä muissa instituutioissa ehkä niin paljon kuin tarve näyttäisi olevan.

Tutkimustuloksista voitiin päätellä, että suurta kehitystarvetta tapaamisella ei ole, sillä osanottajien palaute oli erittäin positiivista. Vastaajat eivät myöskään ilmoittaneet kohdanneensa mitään erityisiä ongelmia tapaamiseen liittyen, joihin toimeksiantajan pitäisi puuttua. Tapaamisen kestoa toimeksiantaja voisi kuitenkin harkita lyhennettävän yhdellä päivällä, sillä monen vastaajan mielestä lyhyempi kesto saattaisi olla toimivampi.

Asiasanat: Kansainvälinen tapaaminen, kansainvälistyminen, korkeakoulutus, Erasmus, opettajavaihto-ohjelma.

ABSTRACT

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This Bachelor's thesis was commissioned by the Office of International Affairs at the University College of Teacher Education (UCTE). This Austrian higher educational institution organised the "International Meeting 2009" in October 2009. The objectives of this thesis were to find out the reasons why the delegates attended the International Meeting 2009, what their personal expectations were and were these prospects fulfilled. The intention was also to gather some information on the delegates' profiles, and on other international meetings held by other institutions. In addition, it was important to collect some feedback from the meeting to gain a better picture of the success of the meeting.

This qualitative research was carried out by using a qualitative survey as a data gathering method. The survey was conducted in the form of a self-administered paper questionnaire with open-ended questions. The theoretical part of the thesis concentrates on the internationalisation of higher education in Europe in general as well as on the international functions of UCTE.

The main finding was that the International Meeting 2009 is a flourishing get-together for the teachers from different fields of study wanting to gain international experience by using the staff mobility. Based on the feedback, it was obvious that the meeting was very successful and the delegates' main expectations were, to the large extent, realised. The meeting worked as a good platform for networking, socializing and project planning, which were the expectations of most delegates. The survey also revealed that there are not that many similar international meetings being organised by other institutions, although there probably would be a demand for more of them.

The results of the survey showed that the meeting does not require great improvements since the feedback was very positive. The respondents did not either report on any significant problems related to the meeting, which UCTE should take action in. However, UCTE could consider shortening the duration of the meeting by one day since many respondents thought the shorter duration perhaps be more functional.

Keywords: International meeting, internationalisation, higher education, Erasmus, Teaching Staff Mobility.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The idea for this Bachelor's thesis came through my internship as an assistant in the Office of International Affairs at the University College of Teacher Education during the summer/autumn 2009. During my internship, I took part in organizing one of the international events of the institution, the International Meeting 2009, together with the Head of the Office of International Affairs, Mrs. Pia-Maria Rabensteiner.

The International Meeting 2009 took place from 22nd to 25th of October 2009 and all together 23 delegates from 13 different countries took part in the meeting. The delegates were teachers from the partner institutions of the University College of Teacher Education and they were invited to teach during that week in the framework of Erasmus Teaching Staff Mobility. During the meeting, other possibilities for the delegates were to present research-results, search for project-partners in possible common projects, as well as intensify and fix mobility's.

The objectives of this thesis were to find out about the reasons why the delegates were attending at the International Meeting 2009, what were their personal expectations, and if these prospects were fulfilled. The purpose was also to gather some information about the delegates' profile and about other international meetings held by other institutions. In addition, it was important to collect some feedback of the meeting to gain better understanding if the meeting was successful.

In the research qualitative method was used to get more in depth understanding of the research topic. As a data gathering method, a survey was conducted in a form of a self-administered paper questionnaire with open-ended questions and the data was chosen to be collected from all the 23 delegates of the IM 2009

because the number of the delegates attending this meeting was rather small. The research material was interpreted by using a descriptive method.

The structure of this thesis consists first of the theoretical part which includes information related to the internationalisation of higher education in Europe and afterwards the organiser of the International Meeting 2009 is presented. Secondly, the research process is introduced and finally, the findings and conclusions are presented.

2 INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

2.1 Cross-border Education

Cross-border education is only one component of the wider development, the internationalisation of education, which can be divided into two different dimensions. One dimension of internationalisation is purely domestic and refers to the means of internationalisation inside the institution itself, in its home country. That includes intercultural dimensions of curriculum, teaching and research. The students can therefore gain intercultural skills without ever leaving the country. (Internationalisation and trade in higher education 2004, 19.)

Cross-border education is the second dimension of internationalisation. It refers to situations when students, staff, programme, institution or even course material is crossing the national borders. The varied forms of cross-border education include student and staff mobilities, partnerships with foreign institutions to offer joint educational programmes or degrees, institutions operating abroad, and educational courses being supplied across borders through e-learning or distance education. Each of these means of cross-border education can exist alone, but often institutions are using many at the same time. (Internationalisation and trade in higher education 2004, 19.)

Demand for cross-border education is increasing. That is shown by the ever increasing number of students enrolled in educational institutions outside their home country. At the same time, educational institutions are operating more and more abroad by offering their educational programmes to foreign students who remain at home. (Internationalisation and trade in higher education 2004, 18.)

One of the reasons for the increasing demand of cross-border education is that domestic institutions cannot always offer the sufficient education themselves. Through studies in another country students also perceive particular advantages; cultural enrichment and language skills, high-status qualifications and access to better jobs. For educational institutions foreign students are a source of revenue and therefore they compete strongly for them. Teachers from different countries are also employed to raise institutional quality and enrich students' learning opportunities. (Internationalisation and trade in higher education 2004, 18.)

Governments, too, promote the international mobility because of a mix of cultural, political, labor market and trade reasons (Internationalisation and trade in higher education 2004, 18). According to Varghese (2009), knowledge is one of the major sources of economic growth in the present world. Economy needs highly skilled personnel and institutions of higher education are important agents in the production of skills. As the global market has a lot of requirements and needs for intercultural skills, recent trend seems to be encouraging higher education sector to orient its production through cross-border education. (Varghese 2009, 33.)

2.2 Lifelong Learning Programme

The Lifelong Learning Programme is a funding programme by The European Commission supporting education and training in Europe. With a significant budget of nearly €7 billion for 2007 to 2013, the programme enables individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue learning opportunities across Europe. There are four sub-programmes focusing on different stages of education and training: Comenius for schools, Erasmus for higher education, Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training and Grundtvig for adult education. (A single umbrella for education and training programmes 2009.)

2.2.1 Erasmus Programme

Erasmus is the EU's education and training program for higher education in Europe. The general aim of the Programme is to create a European Higher Education Area and foster innovation throughout Europe. The programme has been very successful as around 90% of European universities in 31 countries take part in Erasmus. (The Erasmus Programme 2009.)

The programme enables more than 180,000 students to study and work abroad each year with the target of 3 million Erasmus students by 2012. In addition to student mobility, it also gives a possibility to professors and business staff to teach abroad and university staff to be trained abroad. The programme also supports co-operation actions between higher education institutions across Europe through intensive programs, networks and multilateral projects. (The Erasmus Programme 2009.)

2.2.2 Erasmus Teaching Staff Mobility

In the framework of Teaching Staff Mobility, teachers can teach abroad between 1 day and 6 weeks and the minimum requirement for a teaching assignment is 5 teaching hours. The duration of 5 working days is recommended to ensure that teachers provide a meaningful contribution to the teaching program and international life at the host institution. (Teaching Mobility 2010.)

The teaching assignments are meant for teaching staff of higher education institutions and invited staff of enterprises. The sending institution where the teaching staff is coming from has to hold an ERASMUS University Charter and the teaching assignment must be carried out as well in a higher education institution holding an ERASMUS University Charter. (Teaching Mobility 2010.)

Teachers coming to teach from abroad is beneficial for the non-mobile students because they receive new lectures, different pedagogical methods and perhaps better knowledge of foreign languages. Moreover, teachers themselves benefit by acquiring different perspectives, establishing new contacts and facilitating better academic networking. (Staff Mobility 2010.)

The objectives of the Teaching Staff Mobility are:

- to encourage institutions to broaden and enrich their curriculum
- to allow non-mobile students to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of academic staff from other higher education institutions as well as from invited staff of enterprises in different European countries
- to promote exchange of expertise and experience on pedagogical methods
- to create partnerships and links between institutions and with enterprises
- to encourage students and staff to take part in mobile programmes and to assist them in planning and preparing the exchange period. (Teaching Mobility 2010.)

3 THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF TEACHER EDUCATION

The University College of Teacher Education is the international name of Pädagogische Hochschule Kärnten / Viktor Frankl Hochschule which is a post-secondary educational institution in Austria. The institution is situated in the city of Klagenfurt am Wörthersee which is in the lower parts of Austria and has around 90,000 inhabitants. The city is very close to the border of Italy and Slovenia and therefore Austrian, Italian and Slovenian cultures are all influencing in that area. In addition to German and English courses, the students can take courses in Slovene and Italian in The University College of Teacher Education which will be referred as UCTE from here onwards.

UCTE was founded in 2007 after an institutional change and ever since its students have been graduating from the institution in three years with a bachelor degree in education. The students are trained to become teachers in three different fields: primary school, secondary school or school for children with special needs. (Rabensteiner 2009, 3.)

UCTE is based on Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy "A Man's Search for Meaning". In another words, the institution implements his ideas in teaching which means in practice that the main focus of all the work is the human being with all her/his needs covering the physical, psychological, spiritual and social dimensions. UCTE also focuses on acquiring theoretical knowledge based on the latest research concerning education and pedagogy. (Rabensteiner 2010c.)

UCTE considers practical training to be an essential part of its students' study program. The heart of education is the school-practice. There are two affiliated schools in the same building with UCTE, one primary and one secondary school. They are important part of the institution because the students can practice their teaching skills there. (Rabensteiner 2009, 3.)

3.1 The Office of International Affairs

The Office of International Affairs of UCTE is coordinating international cooperation with its partner institutions and business partners. UCTE has currently agreements with about 30 European universities or university colleges and new partnerships are created all the time. (Rabensteiner 2010b.)

The Office of International Affairs provides services in the form of mobility programs for UCTE's students and staff. It also organizes international meetings in the field of education and hosts pedagogy experts from all over Europe. In addition, the office supports international incoming and outgoing students in any possible way. (Rabensteiner 2010b.)

3.2 Erasmus Intensive Programme BEAM

One of the international meetings organized by UCTE is BEAM, Building European Identity through Spirit, Sense and Meaning. It is one of the Erasmus Intensive Programmes which are short programmes of study that are bringing together students and staff from higher education institutions of at least three participating countries. One of the main aims of these programmes is to enable students and teachers to work together in multinational groups. Through working together they will benefit from special learning and teaching that might not be available in a single institution and they gain new perspectives on the topic being studied. (Rabensteiner 2010a.)

In 2010, on its third year, BEAM is a meeting of 60 students and 20 lecturers gathering in UCTE from twelve different European countries. The idea behind the programme is that the participants would learn to operate as opinion form-

ers in their home countries to build up a common European Dimension through Spirit, Sense and Meaning. (Rabensteiner 2010a.)

3.3 International Meeting 2009

The International Meeting 2009 which will be referred from here onwards as IM 2009 took place from 22nd to 25th of October 2009. It was the second international meeting held at UCTE since the yearly meeting was organised already for the first time in 2008. Teachers from all UCTE's partner institutions were invited to come and 23 delegates from 13 different countries decided to take part in the meeting.

The delegates were invited to teach during that week in the framework of Erasmus Teaching Staff Mobility. They were given the choice of offering a lecture about their home institution or the general school system in their home country. In addition to teaching, the idea was to offer the delegates a possibility to create and take part in workshops of desired topics. There were already a few ready planned workshops included in the program which were dealing ongoing projects such as BEAM and Erasmus Mathematics Project which is managed by another UCTE's partner institution.

During the meeting, other possibilities for the delegates were to present research-results, search for project-partners in possible common projects, as well as intensify and fix mobility's. School observations of the two affiliated schools were also offered to get to know the hosting institution better. In addition, there was a social and cultural program integrated to the IM 2009 with a small excursion to nearby cities in Slovenia and Italy, a walk through the old town, a common dinner, a book presentation and a visit to the theatre.

4 RESEARCH PROCESS

This chapter introduces the empirical part of this bachelor thesis. First the aims of the study are presented. Secondly, the research methods which were chosen to be used in this study are explained. Finally, data collection and analysis related to this study are presented.

4.1 Aims of the study

The aims of the study were to find out from the delegates of the International Meeting 2009:

1. which is the field of study in their home institutions' department
2. if they were for the first time taking part in IM 2009 and how did they find out about the meeting
3. what were their personal reasons to take part in the IM 2009
4. what expectations did they have concerning the IM 2009 and did these expectations become fulfilled
5. if they have international meetings organised in their home institution and if they had participated in other similar meetings somewhere else
6. what were their experiences and opinions of the IM 2009 and would they have any suggestions to improve it.

4.2 Methods

This qualitative research was carried out by using a qualitative survey as a data gathering method. The survey was conducted in a form of a self-administered paper questionnaire with open-ended questions.

4.3 Data collection and Analysis

To ensure an adequate research material, the survey data was chosen to be collected from all the 23 delegates of the IM 2009 because the number of the delegates attending this meeting was rather small. To get the highest possible response rate, the survey was conducted during the meeting so that it would be part of the program and therefore would encourage all the delegates to return the questionnaire. The survey was conducted anonymously and the respondents were informed about it. The confidentiality was maintained successfully throughout the whole research.

The questionnaire, which was included in the welcoming portfolio of the meeting, was handed out to the delegates in the beginning of the meeting to be filled in privately in desired location. After receiving the questionnaire, the delegates were given information about the research and instructions where and when to hand it back. The instructions were given in a group situation but the handing out was instructed to be done personally before leaving the meeting.

In the planning phase of the questionnaire, the organiser of the IM 2009 gave a few ready themes for the questions, of which it was interested. Those themes dealt the other international meetings, reasons why the delegates are taking part in the IM 2009 and the expectations they had towards the meeting. The rest of the questions were added to gain more background information of the

delegates and to get some feedback of the meeting which would give more insight what is important for the delegates in the IM 2009.

The following questions were included in the questionnaire.

1. What is your home department's field of study at your institution?
2. Is this your first time attending an international meeting at the University College of Teacher Education in Klagenfurt? If yes, where did you hear about the meeting?
3. What are your personal motivations for joining the International Meeting 2009?
4. Did anything particular about Austria or the University College of Teacher Education in Klagenfurt influence your decision to participate in the meeting? If yes, why?
5. What do you expect to personally achieve through the participation at this meeting?
6. Are there similar international meetings/visits organised by your home institution? If yes, can you briefly describe them?
7. Have you taken part in similar international meetings/visits at other institutions prior to the International Meeting 2009? If yes, can you briefly describe what they were like?
8. Did you face any problems prior to/during the International Meeting 2009 concerning anything related to the meeting? If yes, can you describe them briefly?
9. Did you find the duration (4 days) to be ideal for this meeting and why?
10. How satisfied were you with the programme of the meeting and why?
11. Did you find anything to be especially good at the International Meeting 2009? If yes, can you briefly describe what?

12. From your point of view, what are the characteristics of an ideal international meeting/visit?
13. Have you achieved to meet your personal expectations in participating at this meeting? How / how not?

In addition to the questions above, the delegates were also given the opportunity in the end of the questionnaire to make open comments and suggestions how to make the meeting even more successful and productive.

From the 23 delegates of the IM 2009, 17 returned the questionnaire. So, the response rate was 74% which resulted to an adequate research material that was to be analysed. After receiving all the returned questionnaires, the data was analysed with a descriptive method. The findings of the analysis are reviewed in the next chapter.

5 FINDINGS

5.1 The profile of the respondents

17 out of all the delegates of IM 2009 returned the questionnaire. The partner institutions where the delegates were coming from offer all teacher education but the fields of study at the respondents' home departments were varied. The respondents stated their home departments' fields of study to be pedagogical sciences, mathematics, computer science, linguistics, geography, language and literature, English and German language, health and social care as well as leadership, curriculum and art.

More than half of the respondents were attending the international meeting at UCTE for the second time. There were only seven respondents stating to be there for the first time. A question about where they had heard about the IM 2009 if they were in the meeting for the first time, was also presented. These seven respondents mentioned to have been receiving the information either from their colleagues or straight from the UCTE's Office of International Affairs which was contacting the partner institutions through E-mail invitations or by phone.

5.2 Reasons to join the IM 2009

Participants were asked about their personal motivations for joining the IM 2009, and there was usually more than just one reason for respondents to join the meeting. More than half of the respondents stated that one reason for coming to the meeting was to plan the joint projects such as BEAM and Mathemat-

ics project. Creating new Erasmus partnerships and enhancing already existing cooperation including mobility programs, were stated by approximately one third of the respondents. The same amount of respondents also mentioned that meeting other teacher colleagues from abroad, and through that being able to widen their network of contacts, had an influence on the decision to take part on this meeting.

One respondent stated a desire to learn from the educational experience of another participates while the other wished to develop a greater understanding of a range of comparative education systems. Simply getting work experience from abroad was also mentioned by one of the respondents.

The respondents were also asked if anything particular about Austria or UCTE influenced their decision to participate in the meeting. Austria as a place for the meeting didn't seem to have any specific influence on the decision to take part in the meeting. Although, it was mentioned by couple of the respondents that preliminary information about the successful teaching practice in the Austrian Universities was affecting on their decision.

Approximately one third of the respondents stated that the long tradition of cooperation between UCTE and their home institution was the key factor that influenced on their decision to take part on the meeting. One respondent for example stated that "we have had an agreement with the University College since 2001. It is one of our closest contacts, and we give high priority to keeping the contact".

Some respondents mentioned BEAM or the other common projects with the UCTE to be the influencing factors to come to the meeting. Especially with UCTE being the coordinator of the BEAM project. The fact that UCTE is implementing Viktor Frankl's methodology in its teaching was also mentioned by a few respondents. Some other influencing matters related to UCTE were men-

tioned to be the international emphasis and the way of working with the students.

5.3 Personal expectations

The delegates were asked what they expected to personally achieve through the participation at IM 2009. Meeting old friends and colleagues as well as coming to know new ones seemed to be one of the main expectations of many of the participants. Almost half of the respondents mentioned that they expected to meet new people, do research-work with colleagues from different countries, and exchange experiences with them.

Almost the same amount of the respondents pointed out that planning BEAM or getting to know more about the issues of BEAM was one of their expectations from the meeting. Getting inspiration for new common projects, taking part in the future projects and developing the recently started projects, were also expectations by approximately one third of the respondents.

Expecting to enhance their home institutions' international cooperation was pointed out by a few of the respondents. Two respondents also mentioned that through their participation in the meeting they expected to get their own students more interested in international issues. Expecting to enhance their own teaching experience and to get to know UCTE better were also mentioned by couple of the respondents.

The delegates were also asked if they had achieved to meet these personal expectations and how. All the respondents, despite one, thought that they had succeeded to meet their expectations. The reason why the one respondent didn't feel to have met his/her expectations was due to a fact that the respon-

dent wasn't able to stay the whole duration of the meeting and therefore didn't feel to have enough time for the planning of the project.

However, the planning of different projects seemed to have been successful for the other respondents. Seven out of all the respondents mentioned that they had either successfully got a new project into a start, been discussing about the future project or got a wanted outcome through the planning of a current project. Couple respondents also stated that they had met their expectations concerning to get to know UCTE better.

5.4 Other international meetings/visits

When asking if there are similar international meetings/visits organized by participants' home institution, there were only five respondents who stated to have these events to be organized at their home institution. Three of these events were described to be some sort of international visits to their home institution, and one respondent answered that they have couple of international research meetings organized. One respondent answered that "we arranged one this autumn for the first time, but on a much lower scale".

Rest of the respondents either didn't have any international events organized or they didn't know if there existed any in their home institutions. Two of the respondents that stated not to have any international events, pointed out though, that they are planning some for the future.

The participants were also asked if they have taken part in similar international meetings/visits at other institutions prior to IM 2009 and if yes, could they briefly describe what they were like. More than half of the respondents didn't have par-

anticipated before in any sort of international events. Only six respondents stated to have been taking part in similar meetings or visits.

Mostly the respondents described the other events to be similar to IM 2009, although couple of the respondents mentioned that the other events have been involving more teaching to students. One respondent stated to have been in many other research meetings as well as conferences.

5.5 Problems prior to/during the IM 2009

When asking from the participants if they had faced any problems prior to/during IM 2009 concerning anything related to the meeting, only four out of all the respondents stated to have faced some. One respondent mentioned that it was a challenge to organize time away from his/her home institution as he/she was very busy there, and another respondent stated that he/she would have preferred a little more room or time for planning of the projects during the meeting. Also finding suitable accommodation was mentioned to be a bit confusing by one respondent. "One confusion was about where to stay. Although a good list of hotels had been provided, it meant nothing geographically as I had no idea how far from the Hochschule they were situated."

One respondent also seemed to have a problem with the dates or the schedule of the meeting as he/she mentioned the following "only that I had to leave the meeting Friday at lunch time which only gave me 2 hours of planning the BEAM – the reason (major) to go to the International Meeting".

5.6 Duration of the meeting

The participants were asked if they found the duration (4 days) to be ideal for IM 2009 and why. The respondents were mainly satisfied with the duration of the meeting. “Yes – just enough time to fit everything in” was answered by one of the respondents.

The social activities organized during the following week-end were given a positive feedback as well by couple of the respondents, “I think that it is a quite good duration and the idea of a final trip is excellent for getting a more complete idea about the environment of the region”.

However, the duration of the meeting also could have been a bit shorter by some respondents. One respondent just described the duration to be a bit long and four respondents were suggesting shortening the duration by one day in the future. The reasons given by couple of the respondents were the Erasmus funding being more suitable for that three days duration and the difficulty of finding the time because of teaching schedule at the home institution. One respondent even stated that two days would be enough for this sort of meeting.

While most of the comments about the duration were suggesting the duration to be shorter, there was also one respondent who actually would have wanted the meeting to last for five days all together.

5.7 The program of the meeting

When asking how satisfied the participants were with the programme of the meeting and why, every participant stated to have been either very satisfied or

satisfied. The programme was said to be well organized and structured, “very satisfied – very well organized – good balance between social activity and work activity”.

Some respondents also stated that they were pleased because they learned valuable things about other educational systems in Europe and met interesting people. One respondent simply said that the programme fulfilled his/her expectations and another respondent was content about being able to observe the students as well as to work with them.

However, there were also some negative remarks as well. One respondent thought that there were too many activities for one meeting and another respondent would have wanted a little bit more time for planning the projects.

The participants were also asked if they found anything to be especially good at the IM 2009. The answers were quite varied. Approximately one third of the respondents mentioned that the school observations were interesting and three respondents also thought that the presentations to the students were especially good.

A few respondents mentioned that the time to plan the different projects was very good while another few thought that meeting other people was the most valuable thing, “as always the opportunity to meet people from a wide range of backgrounds and expertise that are equally passionate about educational issues”.

One respondent also liked the general introduction to the school policy on the first day and the book presentation was found to be really fine as well by three respondents, “the book presentation stands out as a particularly memorable event”.

5.8 Characteristics of an ideal international meeting/visit

When asking the participants to name the characteristics of an ideal international meeting/visit, one topic stood significantly out. More than half of the respondents mentioned that being able to socialize and network with other delegates was important characteristic of an ideal meeting. One respondent described that “a balance of time to enable delegates to gain/develop ideas and information in a formal/seminar setting combined with the opportunity to be interactive/ make new partnerships/ share common research idea” would be the ideal setting for an international meeting. The other respondents also described that an ideal socializing is making the contacts to other delegates as well as to students and having enough social events together such as meals etc.

From the respondents' opinion the ideal characteristics of the planning sessions during the working hours would be having enough time for planning and creating new ideas, having small group work and having a clear timetable and a lot of options. Some others stated that it was important to be able to choose a basic subject to work along the seminar, to get some keynote from local experts in education and training as well as being able to work in good facilities and rooms. Some respondents also mentioned that learning about the host institution and host country's education system would also be important characteristics of an ideal meeting.

5.9 Open comments and improvement suggestions

The delegates were also given the opportunity in the end of the questionnaire to make open comments and suggestions how to make the meeting even more successful and productive. The organizers got many thanks and a very positive feedback in over all “I think all meetings I've attended here have been excellent – very useful and productive and enjoyable”. The organizers' hospitality and

UCTE as a meeting place were also appreciated, “I just want to thank you for making this a very nice stay. Thanks to all”.

A few suggestions were also added concerning the future of the meeting. One respondent would have wanted more time on planning BEAM as well as some other projects and another respondent wished that the organizers could perhaps negotiate a good hotel rate in a central venue, close to the bus station of Klagenfurt. From the respondents point of view that would be a way for the majority of the delegates to stay together and the post formal programme opportunities could be enhanced and developed over meal times instead of everyone going in different directions.

Another improvement suggestion by one respondent was as following, “probably we international partners might have had the possibility to try out delivering classes to the same level students we are working at our home institutions. Only telling about the institution and education system in our countries is not enough motivating for students; but we might have been given a list of topics to prepare exactly for a specific year students which would be necessary and according to their syllabus. It would be a challenge for us as professionals and useful for students and student-teachers – to see a different perspective from another country”.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the main findings gained from the empirical research material are presented and the relation of the findings and the theory is discussed. Secondly, reliability and validity of the research is evaluated. Finally, there are conclusions which also include recommendations based on the research material.

6.1 Key points of the findings

To sum up the findings, it can be stated that obviously the IM 2009 was successful in a way that it fulfilled its purpose. The meeting worked as a good platform for networking, socializing and project planning which were the expectations of most of the delegates.

6.1.1 The profile of the respondents

It was interesting to notice that the fields of study at the respondents' home departments were very varied. It obviously shows that there is an interest to take part in these international meetings in different fields of study in higher education institutions. In the SOCRATES 2000 Evaluation Study the research result was the same when asking mobile teachers' subject areas. "The respondents came from various fields of study: 8-15 per cent from languages and philological studies, engineering, social sciences, natural sciences, business studies, and humanities." (Teichler, Gordon & Maiworm 2000, 121.)

Many of the respondents were attending the international meeting at the UCTE for the second time but seven respondents stated that they were there for the first time. The seven respondents that were there for the first time mentioned that they received the information about the IM 2009 either from their colleagues or straight from the UCTE's Office of International Affairs which was contacting the partner institutions through E-mail invitations or by phone.

6.1.2 Reasons to join the IM 2009

It was pretty clear that the main reason why the delegates of IM 2009 came to the meeting was an interest for the joint projects and more specifically the planning of already ongoing projects such as BEAM and the Mathematics Project. That indicates that there is a lot of demand and interest for such common projects.

The other major reasons to take part in IM 2009 were the desire to find new Erasmus partners, to enhance already existing partnerships and to be able to widen personal and professional network of contacts. This result indicates that this meeting had a value for the delegates in functioning as a platform for making new contacts and enhancing the existing ones. In the study called "The Professional Value of ERASMUS Mobility", all respondents also assessed an ERASMUS teaching period having a strong positive impact on the international networking. The comments gained through the study emphasized that international networking is a very important point which has an influence on future research contacts and invitations to scientific events. Moreover, the impact of an ERASMUS supported teaching period on the international networking of teachers was seen by the respondents as one of the main advantages of teacher mobility. (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler 2006, 40.)

Austria being the host country for the meeting didn't seem to have any specific influence on the decision to take part on the meeting. UCTE instead and more specifically the long cooperation between UCTE and the delegate's home institution seemed to be important for many.

6.1.3 Personal expectations

The delegates' expectations were pretty much in correlation with the given reasons to come to the meeting, which were mentioned above. Meeting old friends and colleagues as well as coming to know new ones were the main expectations. The respondents also pointed out that planning BEAM or getting to know more about the issues of BEAM was one of their expectations from the meeting. Getting inspiration for new common projects, taking part in the future projects and developing the recently started projects, were also expectations of many. These results emphasize even more the importance of networking and project planning for the delegates.

The expectations were fulfilled successfully according to the delegates. The planning of the different projects seemed to have been especially successful because many respondents mentioned that they had either successfully got a new project into a start, been discussing about the future project or got a wanted outcome through the planning of a current project. Only one person wasn't content of the outcome after the meeting and that was because of personal matters that didn't allow the person to stay the whole duration of the meeting. So, everything indicates that the meeting was very successful and especially concerning the projects.

6.1.4 Other international meetings/visits

Some respondents stated that there are meetings like IM 2009 organised in their home institution or that they have participated in similar ones organised by other institutions. Nevertheless, the majority replied not to have any meetings at their home institution or that they had never been attending similar ones in other institutions. Based on this research result, it seems that there aren't that many similar international meetings being organised by other institutions. Though, there probably would be a lot of demand for more meetings like IM 2009 since the delegates obviously have the need to network and participate in common projects and they think that the IM 2009 was functioning as a good platform for that.

6.1.5 Problems prior to/during the IM 2009

The delegates were mainly content with the whole organisation of the IM 2009. Only few problems were mentioned in the answers. The problems were related to finding a suitable accommodation, needing more time for planning the projects or having troubles with being able to stay the whole duration of the meeting. In the SOCRATES 2000 Evaluation Study, it was also studied what sort of problems the teachers encountered while teaching abroad. The similarity that could be found was related to not finding time to stay the whole duration of the meeting. Difficulties in interrupting teaching and research commitments at the home institution were the third most stated problems in the results of the other study. This indicates that obviously the higher educational institutions in general should still work on with the feasibility of staff mobility for their teachers. (Teichler, Gordon & Maiworm 2000, 125.)

6.1.6 Duration of the meeting

The respondents were mainly satisfied with the duration of the meeting and the social activities organized during the following week-end were given a positive feedback as well. However, the duration of the meeting also could have been a bit shorter because a few respondents were suggesting shortening the duration by one day in the future. Couple of given reasons were the Erasmus funding being more suitable for the three days duration and the difficulty of finding the time because of teaching schedule at the home institution. The result indicates that perhaps three days might be more compact and therefore more suitable duration for some of the delegates. On the other hand, if the duration is only three days, it might result a too tight schedule for all the activities that the delegates were pleased to have.

6.1.7 The program of the meeting

The program of the meeting received a really positive feedback in overall. Every participant stated to have been either very satisfied or satisfied. The programme was said to be well organized and structured and some delegates were pleased because they learned valuable things about other educational systems in Europe and met interesting people. The only negative remarks were mentioned to be having too many activities for one meeting and not having enough time for planning the projects. Nevertheless, these remarks don't seem to have significant importance because a strong majority of the delegates thought that the program was good as it was.

The things that were especially good in IM 2009 according to the delegates were the school observations, the presentations to students, the planning of the projects and the networking. Also the general introduction to the school policy on the first day as well as the book presentation was mentioned to be very

memorable. These research results indicate that there are no necessary changes that would have to be done to the program of the meeting but it would be good to keep it in the future as versatile as possible.

6.1.8 Characteristics of an ideal international meeting/visit

The main characteristic of an ideal meeting was mentioned to be the possibility of socializing and networking with other delegates. The ideal socializing was from the respondents' point of view, to make the contacts to other delegates as well as to students. When referring to the planning sessions of the projects, the respondents stated the following desired characteristics: having enough time for planning and creating new ideas, having small group work and having a clear timetable and a lot of options. These results refer to the need of emphasizing the networking and socializing perhaps even more than before in the meetings like the IM 2009. The planning sessions of the projects should be also given attention since it seems to be important to the delegates that the planning sessions would be as productive as possible.

6.1.9 Open comments and improvement suggestions

The organizers got many thanks and a very positive feedback in overall, but also some interesting improvement suggestions were given. One respondent was suggesting that a common accommodation for all the participants of the international meeting should be organized next year. The idea behind the suggestion was to be able to socialize even more when having the same accommodation.

Another improvement suggestion was about the international partners maybe having the possibility to try out delivering classes to the same level students that they are working with in their home institutions. It would therefore be more useful for the students when the lectures would be more according to their syllabus. It would be a good challenge for the professionals and useful for students to see a different perspective from another country from the respondents point of view.

6.2 Reliability and Validity

Limitations that could have resulted because of choosing the self-administered questionnaire were the possible misunderstandings of the survey questions. It seemed that the level of English was also varied among the delegates. However, there were no problems stated by the respondents and also the interpretation of the answers was done without any problems. The response rate in the survey research was very good, 74%.

6.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

To sum up the main findings, it can be stated that the International Meeting 2009 is a flourishing get-together for the teachers from different fields of study wanting to gain international experience by using the staff mobility. A bright future can be seen for this meeting if it keeps being as productive as it has been in the previous year.

From the research results raised no significant problems which the International Office of UCTE, as being the organizer of the meeting, should take immediate

actions against. It was only discovered that the higher educational institutions in general should still work on with the feasibility of staff mobility for their teachers.

The research results about the duration of the meeting indicates that perhaps three days might be more compact and therefore more suitable duration for some of the delegates. On the other hand, if the duration is only three days, it might result a too tight schedule for all the activities that the delegates were pleased to have.

It seems that there aren't that many similar international meetings being organised by other institutions. Though, there probably would be a lot of demand for more meetings like IM 2009 since the delegates obviously have the need to network and participate in common projects and they think that the IM 2009 was functioning as a good platform for that. So, it is clear to see the importance of IM 2009 and its continuation for its delegates.

Based on the research results, it was obvious that the IM 2009 was very successful and especially in its purpose to function as a platform for networking and project planning. The main expectations of the delegates were to a large extent realised which indicates the successfulness of the meeting as well. The new projects were started, the future projects were being planned and the wanted outcomes through planning of the current projects were achieved.

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