

INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOLS IN A KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' KEY COMPETENCES FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *In our paper, we chose two case studies of international summer schools focusing on developing competences in order to underline the importance of such activities for the personal and professional development of university students and professors. Beside the topic-focused activities, summer schools provide insight in the geography, the history, the society, and in the economics of the investigated regions, also dismantling preconceptions. Such scientific and didactic events, with international set up and interdisciplinary approach offer the frame for an enriching exchange of ideas, to acquire knowledge, to develop team work, analytical and critical thinking, etc., and especially key competences.*

1. Introduction

In a knowledge-based society and in an increasingly interconnected world, knowledge, skills and attitudes are integrated as competences necessary for individuals in order to adapt quickly and efficiently to any changes affecting their lives, to innovation, and to competitiveness. In the larger context of lifelong learning, those competences that provide added value for employment, for social inclusion and cohesion and for active citizenship, also ensure individuals' motivation and eventually their satisfaction.

In the European Union, the European Parliament and the Council (*Recommendation 2006/962/EC*, 2006; *Brochure: Key Competences for Lifelong Learning - European Reference Framework*, 2006; *A Summary of EU Legislation Establishing the European Framework of Key Competences*) defined eight key competences necessary for personal development and fulfillment and for further learning (also known as lifelong learning).

In our paper, we chose two case studies of international summer schools focusing on developing competences in order to underline the importance of such activities for the personal and professional development of university students and professors. We also organised those two summer schools (Kinga Xénia Havadi-Nagy organised the summer school in Hungary and Romania and both authors of this paper were co-organisers of the summer school in Germany). Their thematic focus is on local and regional development. Participants to these summer schools (especially university students and professors) can develop the following key competences (*cf. A Summary of EU Legislation Establishing the European Framework of Key Competences*):

- *communication in foreign languages*; also facilitating intercultural understanding, managing cultural diversity;

- *basic competences in science*: in order to explain the natural world, individuals have to know how to use and apply scientific knowledge and methodologies. Thus,

individuals should understand the changes caused by human activity and they should be aware of their responsibility as citizens;

- *learning to learn*: it is the individuals' ability to pursue and organise their own learning (individually or in groups), while being aware of learning methods and opportunities;

- *social and civic competences*: the social competence refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence, especially to understanding codes of conduct and customs in diverse contexts; the civic competence refers to individuals being aware of the meaning and enacting of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights in order to engage in active and democratic participation;

- *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship*: it was defined as the ability to turn ideas into action, while involving creativity, innovation. It also refers to the ability to plan and manage projects focusing on realistic objectives, to seize opportunities and to be aware of and observe ethical values, and thus promote good governance.

These key competences provide a reference framework for education and university students should acquire and develop them to a level that ensures their success both for adult and working life. Also tutors during summer schools have the opportunity to update their key competences, as the proposed activities include learning situations for all those involved. In conclusion, these competences, due to their transversal nature, are essential as they provide added value for students and are also a priority for all age groups.

There are numerous opportunities offered by several institutions or organizations supporting summer schools. This kind of exchange and experience usually combines theory and methods with field work or practice. We discuss two examples below.

2. DAAD Go East Program

The Go East program of DAAD (“Deutsch Akademischer Austauschdienst”/“German Academic Exchange Service”) was set up in 2002 to encourage the students enrolled at German universities to undertake exchange semesters in Russia, in the Eastern European and CIS countries (“Commonwealth of Independent States”) or to participate at summer schools in these countries. One of the purposes was to establish a balance in the student exchange between Germany and the Eastern European Countries. According to Dr. Dorothea Rühland, the general secretary of DAAD, 40% of the foreigners sponsored are coming from this region. Yet only 6% of students enrolled at German Universities and supported by the DAAD in their exchange semester or year choose Eastern Europe as their destination (<https://goeast.daad.de/de/23285/index.html>).

Dr. Dorothea Rühland considers the collaboration with these countries as an enormous opportunity for Germany, both from an economic and an academic point of view. Germany is for almost all countries in Eastern Europe the most important trading partner, and there are a variety of good quality universities whose graduates are ideal partners for German companies and institutions. To take advantage of these opportunities of cooperation with Eastern Europe, Germany needs well-trained professionals who know the languages and cultures in the eastern part of Europe from personal experience (<https://goeast.daad.de/de/23285/index.html>).

This personal experience can be gained through studying in these countries, by carrying out an internship or by participating at a summer school. In 2013, the interested students can choose between 57 summer schools from 13 different countries with various thematic foci which are supported and promoted in the frame of the Go East program. This year three summer schools organized by Romanian universities (one in Bucharest and two in Cluj-Napoca) receive support in the shape of scholarships for interested participants from German universities.

One of the summer schools conducted by the “Babe -Bolyai” University from Cluj-Napoca is organized by the Faculty of Geography and runs under the following title: “*Von der Puszta in die Karpaten – Kulturlandschaften im Umbruch. Herausforderungen und Ansätze nachhaltiger Raumplanung in Südosteuropa*” (“*From the Puszta to the Carpathians – Changing Cultural Landscapes. Challenges and Approaches of Sustainable Spatial Planning in Southeast Europe*”). The two weeks event takes place in the second half of July, in different locations in eastern Hungary and in Transylvania. The trans-national/cross-border summer school addresses to German speaking students and gives insights into the problems of spatial planning and regional management in post-socialist Romania and Hungary. Using selected case studies, it discusses topics and aspects of sustainable planning and development in both rural and urban areas.

The participants – who are for the first time in these European countries– come from different German universities – such as Leipzig, Kiel, Neubrandenburg, Bremen, Göttingen, Trier, etc. – and study similar topics with related research focus, mainly in the field of Spatial Planning, Rural Geography, Land Use and Nature Protection, Agricultural Sciences, Regional Management and Development.

The coordinators of the summer school are professors from the Faculty of Geography from the “Babe -Bolyai” University. To accomplish the aim of the summer school, they collaborate with colleagues from the University of Debrecen (Hungary), experts and professionals, with local actors and representatives of the local authorities or involved NGO’s and organizations. With this strong support of expertise from academia and non-academia, the participants process the following main topics:

1. *Nature protection and sustainable cultural landscape preservation* is visualised on the basis of the Hortobágy National Park and the protected area of the Tisza-lake in Hungary. Guided tours in the area of the National Park accompanied by explanations from local experts in nature preservation and biodiversity, and combined with on-site presentations from representatives of the National Park administration provide the premises for a good overview and understanding of this topic with everything it implies.

2. The question of *urban management and planning of post-socialist cities* with their various aspects is exemplified with Cluj-Napoca and Sibiu in Romania. Local experts involved in urban planning present general information about urban planning and characteristic approaches of the challenges in these two Transylvanian cities. Sightseeing and guided tours in the centre, periphery and suburb area of the towns facilitate insights in a diverse set of problems.

3. Case studies in various Transylvanian villages (Sâncraiu in Cluj County, Rimetea in Alba County, and Viscri in Bra ov County) emphasize distinct issues and procedures of rural and regional management and development. On-site meetings with local actors and representatives of involved institution, NGO's and authorities, and project presentations assure a complex image of the challenges these regions face in a period of political, social, and economical transition.

We set up a web platform with complementary important links and further information about the summer school (<http://sommerschuleubb.wordpress.com/>) so the interested students can have more details about the event and the topics to be handled, so they can undertake a preliminary ground preparation. The participants receive ongoing thematic materials (maps, thematic booklets) and a selection of recommended literature to complete and fathom the gathered data and insight.

Students' active participation and involvement during the event is amplified through periodic feedback and group reflection after completing each of the main topics. During this summer school, they also process in groups one of the subjects, presenting the results and discussing the conclusions at the final colloquium session. The reports to each topic will be integrated in the overall report that includes also the program of the summer school, useful links, a selected bibliography and photographic documentation of the project.

During trips, coordinating professors provide complementary information about the geography, the history, the society, the political, and the economic situation of the visited regions for a better comprehension of the studied phenomena. Beside scientific input, very important is also participants' personal experience in their free time included in the program with the purpose of own exploring of the different locations of the summer school according to their interests and to facilitate the development of their social and civic competences, while interacting with each other and with the locals.

Interviews with project coordinators and planners, meetings with representatives of local administration, sightseeing, excursions, lectures and guided tours show participants the current developments and trends. The combination of present, historical, and of cultural approaches aims to provide students with insightful knowledge about a target area, whose regions and society are usually only superficially known in Central Europe.

3. ERASMUS Intensive Programs (IPs)

In addition to promoting individual mobility, ERASMUS³ offers an attractive short-term measure for professional and intercultural competence expansion for students and professors in the shape of the so called Intensive programs.

An Intensive program is a compact study program of two to six weeks in the form of a summer school or of a block seminar. A European university, as a project coordinator, plans the program along with at least two other ERASMUS partner universities in two different countries

³ The ERASMUS program is an European student exchange program established in 1987, offering university students a possibility of studying or working abroad in another European country, for a period of at least three months and maximum 12 months.

(<https://eu.daad.de/erasmus/management/intensivprogramme/de/11627-intensivprogramme/>).

The IP is supported by DAAD and in the ERASMUS exchange program framework it is considered as an innovative experimental ground for European partner universities. Funding is offered for particularly innovative projects with an interdisciplinary approach, which also should have a high European added value. Students and professors from partner universities have the opportunity to get in touch with new learning and teaching methods and content in a multi-national group (<https://eu.daad.de/erasmus/management/intensivprogramme/de/11627-intensivprogramme/>). It also stimulates the inclusion of experts from other social and administrative institutions and the business community.

In addition, the academic achievements should be recognized by all participating universities in the shape of credit systems such as ECTS credits. Moreover, coordinating universities receive through the Intensive program also an effective tool for promoting individual mobility: an IP can generate among participants interest for a subsequent extended period abroad at one of the partner universities involved. Partner universities can advertise themselves in less known regions of Europe.

The International Summer School at the University of Applied Sciences (UAS) – Hochschule Neubrandenburg, Germany (*cf. Shaping Regions in Transition...*, 2013; *Programme – International Summer School...*, 2013) – “*Shaping regions in transition: Small town and rural development challenged by socio-demographic change*” – brings students and teaching staff of different disciplines and European countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Finland, Poland and Romania) together to gain a common multi-perspective understanding on securing public services and community development in rural regions (mostly underdeveloped) within Europe, challenged by demographic change and socio-economic transformation.

The summer school will be held at UAS Neubrandenburg and Lassan, a small town and communal centre in the Vorpommern-Greifswald district, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Germany in September 2013, within the Erasmus Intensive Programme. The summer school has the duration of 13 days with ten working days. Romania participates with 12 students and 3 professors. Students receive ECTS which will be fully recognized by all partner universities, existing also the possibility of integrating the summer school into the regular curriculum.

Professors have diverse professional background and thus they are able to offer multi- and transdisciplinary perspectives. Selected students have also diverse undergraduate studies background, but common research questions and knowledge needs and they work with professors, regional experts and actors (from politics, economy, public administration, and from planning authorities), local decision makers and people, and with the civil society as well.

Students learn advanced theoretical and practical knowledge in order to develop practical and transferable strategies and solutions which adapt to their home country reality. Therefore, they are provided with European, regional and local strategies and

models of adaptation to change, with relevant themes, as well as with methods and tools for field work in the community.

The teams are to be made up of participants from each partner institution and from different professional backgrounds in order to work on selected topics and methods. The purpose of these international and interdisciplinary exploration teams is to exchange professional perspectives and train transversal competences.

For preparation in advance, to ensure a common knowledge basis, introductory courses at their home institutions, seminars, lectures, and workshops take place.

Participants at the summer school attend trips to interesting sites (e.g. city walk: “Urban development and structural change in Neubrandenburg”) in order to learn about the characteristic features of Eastern Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in a wider Europe and to foster interaction and intercultural learning. They will also go on trips to interesting sites within the region, in three groups, with subject focus on: renewable energy, environmental protection, technical infrastructure; planning/architecture/social aspects/mobility and nature protection/agriculture /tourism. Exploration and documentation tours will take place within Lassan and its community villages and participants will get to know best practice examples (e.g. a national park, a resort town, eco-farming).

They will also listen to lectures on *general themes* (“Shaping regions in transition: Small town and rural development challenged by socio-demographic change: European, regional and local perspectives” and “European Regions in Transition” – Presentations of participating countries’ perspective and main thematic focus from Bulgaria, Germany, Finland, Poland and Romania), on *thematic aspects* – *Village development (social and cultural innovations by “Space Pioneers”)*; *Quality of life (family-friendly and hospitable place)*; *Sustainable tourism (infrastructure and services improvement)*; *Regional economy (small business opportunities and local energy production)*; *Sustainable mobility (rural transport and integrated mobility plans)*; *Town planning (multigenerational campus)*; *Sustainable infrastructure (supply and waste management)*, and *Ecological land use (landscape valorization and nature education)* – and on *the region* (“Regional development and spatial planning in the district Mecklenburgische Seenplatte”; “European agricultural policy and its effects on regional transition in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania”; “Nature protection and land use planning”; “Perspectives for educational institutions in small towns rural communities”; “Social cohesion and health situation in small towns and rural communities in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania” – lecture and workshop).

Participants also take part in a short presentation of methods and tools for practical field work (e.g. qualitative social research, regional analysis, urban structural survey, interviewing techniques, photo documentation, etc.).

In addition, preparing for field work also includes establishing objectives, presentation of proposed field teams and subjects/tools, team building, as well as subject and methodological focus, spatial orientation, identification of relevant actors, and preparing of working groups moderation. The proposed field teams focus on village development (space pioneers); social development and health; tourism; regional economy

(renewable energy); mobility; town planning (Centre for Education); sustainable infrastructure; and ecological land use.

Field work includes two public workshops. The first one consists of discussions and development of research questions and knowledge needs for Lassan, in working groups with local people and with the local community. Involving the local people in a participatory research project is an innovative qualitative method (Breitbart, 2012). Interim presentation of results and group reflections follow. The work on results supposes analysing and discussing results within teams, possible strategies and solutions for Lassan, scenarios for Lassan 2030, and documentation. A second public workshop will take place. Returning to the local community, students present and discuss possible strategies, solutions and ideas for Lassan (scenarios Lassan 2030) and reflect on their learning experiences during a public workshop with citizens and decision makers from Lassan.

During the summer school in Germany, organisers encourage problem-orientated, interactive and situational learning approaches. In this context, students will acquire and develop social skills by dealing with local people different as age, gender, and as level of education. In addition, rhetorical and public presentation skills in a foreign language will be developed.

The activities of the summer school in Germany involve students and professors in team work. They share knowledge and methods as team members. Moreover, this summer school is an opportunity for socializing, for experiencing European cultures (e.g. the Finish-Bulgarian and the Romanian-Polish evening; or the day off).

At the end of the summer school, participants reflect on the implications of IP results for *European transfer of possible strategies for shaping regions in transition and of solutions for small town and rural community development challenged by socio-demographic change*.

4. Conclusions

Beside the topic-focused activities, summer schools provide insight in the geography, the history, the society, and in the economics of the investigated regions, also dismantling preconceptions. Such scientific and didactic events, with international set up and interdisciplinary approach offer the frame for an enriching exchange of ideas, to acquire knowledge, to develop team work, analytical and critical thinking, etc., and especially key competences.

Summer schools often gather specialists with a different focus, who, by working together, produce and add up complex and complementary insights on the same issue.

Meetings and discussions with specialists, local actors, representatives of the administration, with NGOs – according to the focus of the event – not only offer insight in the working environment, but also underline the various points of view involved and encourage the critical analysis of the situation, as well as the skills of empathy.

The presented university summer schools provide participants with complementary materials, web platforms for information and exchange, with case studies and with best practice

examples, they support further cooperation between the organizing institutions, creating networks for participant students and for young researchers.

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