



Erasmus+ IN-COMM GUIDE – Towards a More Inclusive and Sustainable Future

When Research, Knowledge, and Experiences Come Together through an Erasmus+ Project ...

Erasmus+ projects have become a key instrument for promoting international mobility, collaboration, and improving the quality of higher education in Europe. They foster international cooperation in the fields of education, training, youth, and sports, with their main aim being to enhance the quality of education, strengthen social cohesion, and boost the competitiveness of the European Union's economy.

A successful Erasmus+ project story has been written at the Faculty of Tourism, University of Maribor. The two-year project titled "Active and Inclusive Teaching of Literacy and Communication Skills for More Effective Employment and Sustainable Economic Development" (acronym: IN-COMM GUIDE) involves researchers not only from Slovenia but also from the University of Udine in Italy, Zwickau University in Germany, and the University of Pula in Croatia. It was initiated and designed based on years of research work by Dr. Jasna Potočnik Topler, who is also the head of this international project. In the Slovenian part of the research team, Dr. Mojca Kompara Lukančič and Dr. Vita Petek collaborate, while project administrative tasks are managed by Hana Čosić, Dr. Jerneja Šavrič, Irena Lazanski, Mateja Kuntarič, and Maja Zorčič.

The main goal of the project has been to develop curriculum modules for undergraduate and postgraduate studies that would enable modern teaching of communication skills using methods and tools suitable for successful learning in the classroom and/or online. Dr. Jasna Potočnik Topler chose communication skills as the



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central theme because employers consider them among the most crucial skills in various professional fields, not only in tourism, where professional communication is known to be the foundation of success and development.

In the curriculum developed by the international team of researchers, which includes researchers from the University of Maribor and the Faculty of Tourism, as well as Prof. Dr. Iva Blažević and Assistant Jelena Gugić (both from the University of Pula), Prof. Dr. Francesco Costantini and Dr. Delia Airoidi (University of Udine), Prof. Dr. Alejandro Oviedo, Assistant Susanne Klein, and Assistant Sophie Wintrich (all from the Zwickau University of Applied Sciences), they emphasize innovative approaches and methods, creativity, diversity, multiculturalism, and the inclusion of marginalized groups. They also raise awareness about deaf and hard of hearing communities and the importance of non-verbal communication and sign languages.

To ensure successful teaching of the modules, the project team has prepared teacher manuals that include teaching guidelines, method descriptions, and examples of tasks to assist educators. The materials created as part of the project are available for free on the EPALÉ platform, and you can download them from the following link:

<https://travelwritersonline.blogspot.com/2023/07/erasmus-project-master-in-comm-guide.html>

As the project nears its conclusion, there has been even more intensive focus on informing, raising awareness, and educating about the project's outcomes. In this regard, a so-called multiplier event was held in September 2023, which has a significant impact on disseminating knowledge, exchanging experiences, and expanding the project's effects.



Picture 1: Title page of the Multiplier event leaflet (source: own)



This is a pivotal event that contributes to achieving the project's objectives and improving its impact. Through this event, we are disseminating knowledge, aiming to raise awareness



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among decision-makers, enabling participants to acquire new knowledge and skills, creating opportunities for international networking, and encouraging participants to consider new approaches, projects, or careers in the international environment. We also strive to inspire them to actively participate in the Erasmus+ program.

The multiplier event for the IN-COMM GUIDE project began on September 12th with an online workshop on travel storytelling and well-being featuring Dr. Charlie Mansfield (UK). On September 13th, we started with a live introductory presentation of the project's outcomes, followed by a roundtable discussion on project work and the effects of research within the project. We then conducted a brief workshop on raising awareness about non-verbal communication and the importance of inclusion. This was followed by presentations from representatives of the business and higher education sectors.

Katarina Ceglar from Arctur (Slovenia) presented project communication within her company. Dr. Ivana Trajanoska, a writer and professor at the American University in Skopje (North Macedonia), highlighted the role of interdisciplinary approaches in learning and teaching communication skills. Dr. Philipp Wessler from the University of Bergamo (Italy) discussed the exceptional role of literature in communication, including in the context of communication for tourist destinations through travel storytelling. Finally, Dr. Hugues Seraphin, an associate professor at Oxford Brookes University (UK), emphasized sustainability aspects in organizing various business events and the appropriate communication of sustainability.

The project's leader, Associate Prof. Dr. Jasna Potočnik Topler, dedicated her presentation to Aristotle's principles of persuasive communication and travel storytelling. The project team ensured that the morning activities were available for online viewing (Jan Škofljanec handled the streaming), and all participants received a leaflet summarizing some of the project activities and results.



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The afternoon and evening portion of the event took place on-site and had a workshop-oriented approach. It was designed to showcase various forms of business communication and provide practical demonstrations of some didactic methods that the project team adapted or enhanced for inclusion in the undergraduate and postgraduate modules. We also engaged stakeholders from the business sector in project collaboration.

One of the participants was Janez Zupan, the owner of the Pomona tourist farm, who is developing a unique tourism story, along with his colleagues. Additionally, representatives from Rogaška Glassworks, a company that is expanding its communication related to the Tourism Trail, were involved. We placed a strong emphasis on integration, sustainability, green practices, health, digital innovation, and creativity.

The IN-COMM GUIDE multiplier event was attended by nearly 100 individuals from abroad and Slovenia, primarily university professors and students, but also business professionals and university administrative staff. Participants came from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, North Macedonia, Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Poland, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Of course, we also received support from our colleagues at the University of Maribor and the University of Ljubljana.

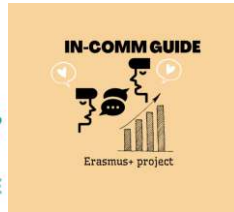


Picture 2: Project team presenting results (BA and MA curricula & BA and MA Guidelines for teaching, Photo: Constanze Wiesner)

Picture 3: Roundtable discussion in the frame of the Multiplier event (pfoto: Constanze Wiesner)



Picture 4: Workshop with Dr Charlie Mansfield (pfoto: Jasna Potočnik Topler)



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Picture 5: Non-verbal communication workshop with Prof. Alejandro Oviedo in Maribor (pfoto: Jasna Potočnik Topler)



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Picture 6: Workshop with the owner of the Tourist Farm Pomona (pfoto: Constanze Wiesner)



Picture 7: Travel Writing, Movement, Health & Digital in Tourism Practice (pfoto: Jasna Potočnik Topler)





Picture 8: Travel Writing around the Rogaška Glassworks (pfoto: Jasna Potočnik Topler)



For the successful execution of dissemination and multiplier events, it is exceptionally important for the project leader to have a well-developed network of international collaborators, and for all project partners to be as active as possible in spreading the project results and educating about them. The international project team of the Erasmus+ IN-COMM GUIDE project would like to express their gratitude to the national agency CMEPIUS for their support. They also extend their thanks to everyone who contributed to shaping the program of the multiplier event and demonstrated the possibilities. Special thanks go to external partners: the Association of Disabled Students of Slovenia, the Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People of Slovenia, and the Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People of Podravje Maribor. Educational and beautiful moments have been woven into new stories that they will gladly tell and build upon.



SUSTAINABILITY OF THE IN-COMM GUIDE PROJECT RESULTS

The IN-COMM GUIDE project strived for sustainability by fostering local engagement of every partner country (local participants, companies, public institutions, associations, media etc.). At all times the environmental impact of the project has been considered (minimum number of face-to-face meetings, online work, online collaboration, e-publications etc., minimizing the carbon footprint).



Picture 9: Print screen of an online meeting with the Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People of Slovenia, and the Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People of Podravje Maribor (photo: Jasna Potočnik Topler)

Significant emphasis of the project has been on capacity building (the goal has been to equip participants and other interested parties with skills and knowledge that contribute to sustainable development through social responsibility, cultural sensitivity and raising awareness about non-verbal communication and the Deaf community).



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The project tried to be inclusive and thus it considered the needs of diverse participants (especially raising awareness about the Deaf), promoting equality, and creating an environment where everyone feels valued and observed. The project also emphasized cultural sensitivity and awareness (including respecting different needs, different cultures, local customs, traditions, and the environment).

The IN-COMM GUIDE project ends on 31 December 2023, but the initiatives designed around the project continue. The project partnership is planning to continue the work online (teaching activities, project activities & work with the local communities). Educational materials prepared (curricula, guidelines, tasks) are free to use at any university or other educational institution. University of Maribor will offer the courses as free elective courses. or community initiatives. Cooperation with the Association of Disabled Students of Slovenia, the Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People of Slovenia, and the Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People of Podravje Maribor will continue through joint promotional and teaching activities. Cooperation between the project consortium and the local associations proved successful and mutually beneficial as it helped raising awareness about the Deaf and Hard of Hearing People and students with specific needs.

In addition, through international connections of project partners and promotional activities, the project team has ensured the international visibility of project results. There is a great interest in the developed curricula, materials, guidelines and the upcoming monograph. Colleagues from abroad ask for presentations of the materials and guest lectures by project collaborators. Naturally, the project team accommodates the interested parties as much as possible, including by delivering various presentations online.

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Coordinator



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