

Key Factors for a Successful E-project Application

The concepts of life long learning, distance education, e-learning and blended learning are discussed not only in higher education institutions, but also in the industry, employment agencies, public companies and government. Education has lately been recognized as one of the key factors for success. This is one of the reasons why CARNet has started the project “Reference Centre for e-education”, which focuses on all aspects of e-learning. One of the reference centers is also “Reference Centre for E-project Application”.

The Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb and CARNet are co-founders of the “Reference Centre for E-project Application” that offers a variety of information, mostly on EU financial schemes that are supporting scientific projects, R&D projects, networking and regional projects. The main project focus is on the following programs: Tempus, 6th Framework Program (FP6), Eureka, COST, etc. Croatia, together with all other European states, has decided to support the decision of transforming Europe into the knowledge-based society¹. In order to achieve this goal it is necessary for Croatian academic and industrial society to actively take part in the EU and other international projects.

Up to today, Croatian participation in EU projects was not at a satisfactory level. According to the statistics on CARDS² ([Tempus_statistics]), 20 Joint European Tempus Projects from Croatia have been approved for funding in the period 2000-2002. Unfortunately, the number of approved Croatian projects is lower than the number of funded projects from FYR of Macedonia (22 according to the latest statistical reports) for the same period and almost the same as the number of projects in Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) (19 projects) in the period 2001-2002 (SCG was not eligible for participation in Tempus in year 2000).

We can learn more about participation of Croatian partners in Eureka projects from the Central & Eastern European Participation in Eureka [CEE_Eureka] from the mid-2000 until 2003 and compare these results with other CEE countries. Croatia joined Eureka in year 2000 and has invested in Eureka projects 6.8 million Euro since then. If we compare this

¹ Lisbon Declaration 2000: «...making EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010.»

² CARDS countries are: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, FYR of Macedonia and Albania

investment with the Czech investment of 46.7 million Euros or Slovenian investment of 33.1 million Euros, it is obvious that Croatia is lagging behind in investing in market-oriented R&D projects. Furthermore, there is also a lack of available information about the international funding schemes.

Despite the efforts of Croatian scientists, Croatia is still considered as a third country in the FP6 funding scheme and therefore cannot be the project coordinator. Croatian partners can participate in the EU projects only as a fourth partner or, exceptionally, as a project applicant in INCO programs. All details regarding FP6 Calls and managing FP projects can be found in [McCarthy 1] and [McCarthy 2].

The international funding schemes are supporting joint work of scientists, academics and entrepreneurs all across Europe that will result in the creation of a strong and enlarged European High Education Area (EHEA) and European Research Area (ERA).

The main goal of this paper is to highlight the key factors for a successful E-project application. This “E” stands for European, e-learning and education.

As we have already concluded, there is insufficient information about European programs and funds, as well as inadequately organized dissemination of information about running and finished European projects.

The Reference Center for E-project Application has conducted a survey among participants of the Workshop on Applying for and Managing International Projects at MIPRO 2004 Conference. The survey results have shown that the Croatian academics are very interested in applying for international projects, but because of the lack of information they rarely apply.

Therefore, the first key factor for a successful application is:

- Suitable information about European programs and funds

According to the [Tempus_statistics], the ratios of funded and submitted Tempus projects are as follows in Table 1.

Year	2000	2001	2002
Funded	32	46	39
Submitted	100	161	120
Funded/ Submitted	0.32	0.29	0.325

Table 1. Ratio of funded and submitted Tempus projects.

Roughly speaking, only each 3rd submitted project was funded. The submitted projects include projects from all of the Tempus eligible countries (CARDS, Tacis and MEDA countries³). The situation is even more unfavorable in the EU Framework programs (FP) where the chances of getting funds for the project are between 20-30%.

We can go one step further and try to be ahead of today's funding opportunities. This means that it is important to search for future reports, analysis and European Commission communications such as "The New Generation of Community Education and Training Programs after 2006" (see [EU_communication]) in order to be up to date with the latest information. When we know all of the possible future financing opportunities we have enough time to prepare for the upcoming change and we are able to make all adjustments in human and material resources.

The project idea is usually the first thing that we have. It is then necessary to find the program most suitable for its optimal realization. For which project type to apply, depends primarily on the outcome of the project. The main outcome can be a scientific result; product, service or process for the market; contribution to the reform etc. According to the set outcomes, the project application can be sent to the programs COST or FP6; Eureka; Tempus or some regional program. Based on this, the following key factors are vital for a successful application:

- Original and feasible project idea
- The project idea that fits into the selected program

It is necessary to have an insightful and original idea, which gives an added value to the European Higher Education Area or European Research Area, but this will not guarantee the

³ Tacis countries are former states of the Soviet Union and Mongolia
MEDA countries are Mediterranean countries (Africa and Asia)

successful project application. The other basic Key Factor in the project application process is the technical side of the application.

After fitting the project idea into the suitable funding scheme, we can proceed into the project preparation process. During this first phase of project preparation process the consortium members should be defined. Regardless of the project goal, two main aspects should be fulfilled: R&D recourses and management abilities. Commitment of the project partners must be shown from the beginning, because it will be of crucial importance when responsibilities for the work packages are negotiated. Having this in mind, the next key factors are being introduced:

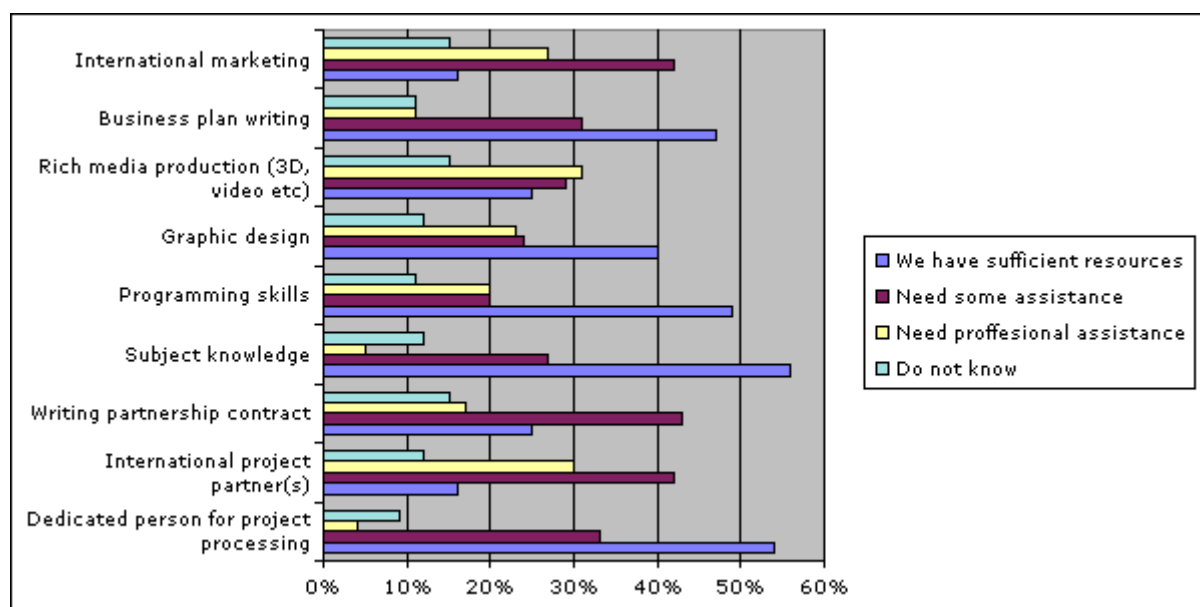
- Well-balanced and dedicated project consortium
- Both sides of project application are addressed: R&D recourses and management abilities

In the next paragraph, we intend to stress the necessity of continuous development of managerial skills. Considering the situation in Croatia, there is considerable R&D potential, but this potential is not organized in an optimal manner and it is also underestimated in some aspects. On the other hand, after quantitative and qualitative (Eurolearn survey on e-learning) analysis it can be shown that the level of managerial skills must be raised.

Eurolearn is a Eureka umbrella and its goal is generating new international market oriented E-learning projects with innovative technology and/or methodology. There are twelve partner countries in Eurolearn and each of the countries is represented by national coordinator. The national coordinator for Croatia is prof.dr.sc. Blaženka Divjak (Faculty of Organization and Informatics).

Based on the survey results [Eurolearn_survey] we continuously adjust Eurolearn services and through it we justify the role of Umbrella itself. Up to now, 183 applicants, who want to join the network, filled out the survey, 41 of them with their own project idea. The applicants were from 26 different countries and from different institutions, like SME's, academic institutions and also a few individuals. Out of these 183, 20 participants from Croatian institutions filled out the survey. An interesting question regarding the resources was asked: Which project resources are available to you? Graph 1 shows the results of the survey regarding this question. According to answers, most of the survey participants have sufficient resources in

professional knowledge areas like subject knowledge, dedicated personnel and programming skills. But the majority needs some assistance in international marketing, finding international project partners and writing partnership contract. These answers justify the role of our Reference center as well, because here is where the Reference center steps in and gives the most valuable assistance.



Graph 1: Survey results on the availability of project resources

Some of the network scheduling techniques that are most often used are Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) and Critical Path Method (CPM). PERT enables efficient management planning. The purpose is to determine how much time is needed to complete the project. It uses time as a common denominator to analyze the elements that directly influence the success of the project: time, cost and performance. The critical path on PERT, which is established by the longest time span through the system of events, tells the management the events most critical for success of the project.

The second step in completing the project application is construction of Logical Framework Matrix (LFM). LFM is a four-row and four-column matrix, which summarizes the project, records the assumptions, which underline the project's strategy, and outlines how the project may be monitored.

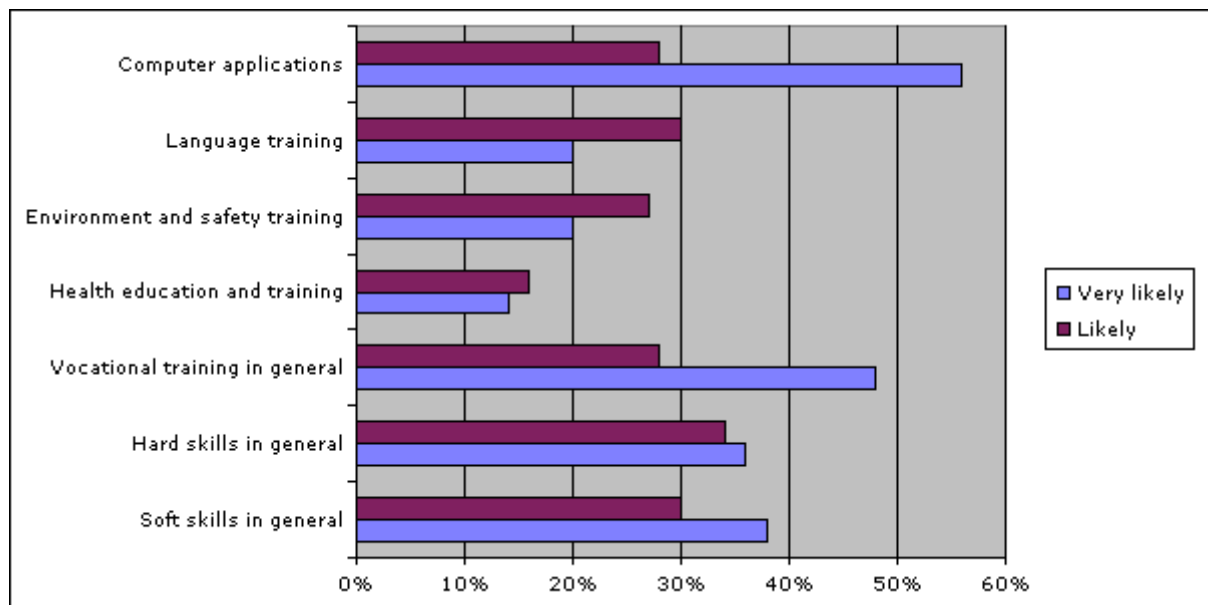
Furthermore, detailed and objective needs analysis has to be presented based on the actual situation in the specific area of project application. For that reason, we emphasize the following key factor:

- Use of appropriate planning techniques to cope with complexities

Additionally, one of the most important lessons our group learned during our participation in international programs is that it is necessary to select one or two persons in the organization to search for opportunities, to participate in seminars, meetings, etc. At first it is good to participate in project consortia as a partner to gain experience and knowledge. After this first stage it is necessary to define the areas of participation in future projects and as most rewarding phase to apply for your own projects.

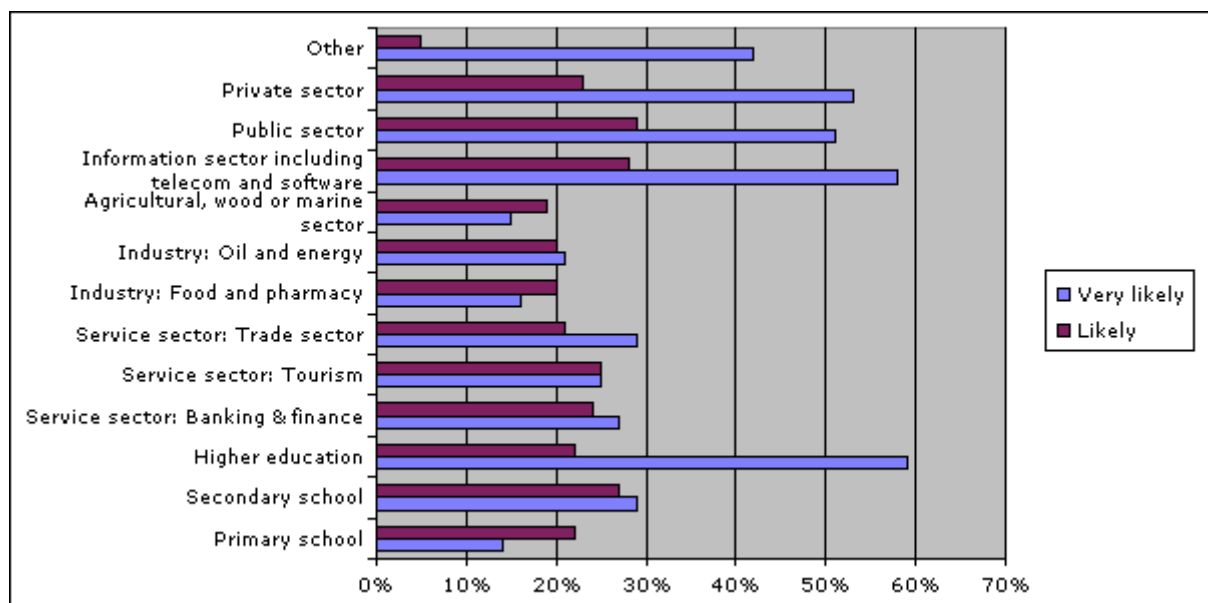
The first question in the Eurolearn survey [Eurolearn_survey] mentioned before is: In which application areas (training topics) are your project interests? As we can see from Graph 2, most of the potential applicants are interested in computer applications (56 % very likely and 28% likely), then vocational training and then hard and soft skills. The survey shows very vividly that the major of interests are in the computer applications, around 85%.

The survey results are one of the most commonly used instruments of the European Commission that show how the market “breaths” and what will the future trends be. They are then used for the adjustment of EC’s programs, priorities within the particular programs and most important of all, the defining of the funding scheme.



Graph 2: Survey results on the project interests of applicants

Another interesting question in the survey is: In which market sector is your project result usable? As it is seen from the Graph 3, the majority of the applicants is interested in using their products in the following market areas: information sector, including telecom and software; private sector; public sector and higher education. The applicants are also interested in the other market areas as industry, trade, tourism, banking and so on, but not primarily.



Graph 3: Survey results on the sectors of interest

It is very important to identify your own niche and try to fill the gaps between the markets need and the service/product/research/expertise offer.

In addition, we can look into the Report on satisfaction with FP5 in Finland [Finland_FP6] where it is stated “... many recognized a need to forge closer links between the Framework Programs, national research programs and other collaborative research programs such as Eureka and COST.”

Due to all that is mentioned above, we are able to identify two practical factors for a successful project application:

- Search actively for opportunities
- Define your own niche

Last, but definitely one of the most important project elements is the impact that this project will have on the general level and also the added value which it will bring to ERA and EHEA.

Finally, we list the following eight key factors that are crucial for a successful E-project application:

1. Suitable information about European programs and funds
2. Original and feasible project idea
3. The project idea that fits into the selected program
4. Well-balanced and dedicated project consortium
5. Both sides of project application are addressed: R&D recourses and management abilities
6. Use of appropriate planning techniques to cope with complexities
7. Search actively for opportunities
8. Define your own niche

References

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