



#WORKING WITH EUROPE COMMENT#

ERASMUS MINUS - TOWARDS BREAKDOWN?

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Scanning Erasmus minus round 2 tells us about an increasing number of applications across Europe.

The success rates vary considerably, from 5 to 20%. In general one can say that 1 out of 8 or 9 applications are granted, however many of them with significantly reduced budgets, which in fact indicates a lower real success rate!

So, a school would need to submit 8 or 9 applications to receive 1 grant.

Competition can be sound and constructive, but on the other hand the story is also about very many wasted resources, a lot of application work, a lot of evaluation work and few real results from approved projects going in sorts of directions.

There are several reasons for the increasing number of applications:

- Erasmus minus is becoming more known and perhaps even more “popular”
- institutions are building increased capacity to produce applications
- submitting in national languages might be attractive
- national funding of educational projects is disappearing in many countries
- educations might be increasingly oriented towards international cooperation

The problem is, as in Horizon, that if this tendency continues in 2016 the success rate will drop to between 5 and 10% on average, and in 2017 even lower.

This indicates that Erasmus minus, like Horizon, might be heading towards a “system breakdown”. Application activity and funding must be balanced.

One might argue that in that case people would most likely stop applying and a new balance would be obtained. We are not so sure about that.

How can a “system breakdown” be countered? How can the program’s credibility, balances and quality be restored?

Here are some suggestions:

- the submission process can return to centralized submission, including submitting only in very few languages, and ensuring that the best projects at European level are granted
- the Calls and the program can be much stronger focused on real educational innovation: what is at the top of European priority list and what European really needs (European money should support European policy, right?)
- the political relevance and real innovation value of proposals should be given higher priority in the evaluation criteria
- a two-step application process could be applied: a pre-qualification round inserted in which the evaluation is based on to what extent the proposals respond to the more focused European policies and to what extent the proposals indicate the delivery of real innovation in education
- perhaps we should return to the old model of two project formats, such as the old learning partnerships and the more substantial cooperation projects

In short: much more focus on the innovation potential of the proposals and less focus on the formal aspects of the application, governed by a centralized evaluation including a pre-qualification round.

(The Commission should not hesitate to demand innovation value for money. Europe needs dramatic innovation in education, and a sloppy Erasmus minus program is not helpful. The program is not about charity)

This point of view is supported by a scanning of granted projects in several countries: the scanning reveals, to be honest, a big mix of from time to time strange and less interesting projects - granted because they score high on the formal evaluation criteria, but not offering much European innovation.

We are looking forward to some official evaluations of the Erasmus minus situation from the responsible agencies in Brussels.