

First Evaluation Report of the UP-RES project

1 Introduction and rationale

This first evaluation report of the UP-RES project covers the work of the project during the first 24 months (01.09.2010 – 31.08.2012). As discussed later in detail, the evaluation work started later than planned and foreseen, and thus also the first actual evaluation report is covering already 80 % of the work of the project. This evaluation report includes also as an annex the Risk analysis report, which was delivered to the project partnership in July 2012. The draft version of this report was presented in the Brussels meeting of UP-RES partners on 8-9 October 2012 and the draft version was finalized after comments received from the partners.

The UP-RES project is addressing an important and essential subject area. The preparatory work of the project – and, in particular the project application and its Description of the Action – was of a high quality and sufficient detail. The Description of the Action was also showing the actual need for the project and its activities. The consortium of the project was well-planned and brought together versatile academic and practical experience. However, the work of the consortium was suffering from the alteration of the partnership in the early stages, and the actual challenge for the project was the lengthened procedure with the Agency of the contractual changes.

The implementation of the UP-RES project has been clearly suffering from the economic crisis, which has been hitting hard the training resources (both time for training as well as funds for training courses) by the potential customers of the UP-RES courses. This has been shown in the challenges in fulfilling the quantitative performance indicators of the UP-RES project. However, of all the evidence (which of the training courses still at the time of writing was very scattered) to judge, the training courses have been of a good quality and have been well received by the participants as well as by the stakeholders.

In the work of the UP-RES project, the striking challenge is the delay of the various actions of the project. Although the project started well and crisply (with the reservation of the delays with the amendment procedure to the contract), during the actual work of the project, small delays have been growing to longer delays, and the consortium seems to struggle with keeping deadlines, in particular, regarding the authoring and delivery of various required deliverables. Many of the deliverables are very late – some of them many

months – and as the work plan of the project in many cases was planned according to a “critical path”, the delay of essential deliverables caused delays in the following work phases. For instance, at the time of the writing of this evaluation report, the deliverable 3.4 (Evaluation report on short training courses) was not available and not even in appropriate working process. As the short training courses were an essential part in the “proof-of-concept” idea of the UP-RES project, there has not been available a summarized document of the participants’ feedback of the short training courses. As at the time of the writing of this evaluation report the UP-RES project consortium has less than five months to finalize its work, the project consortium must work hard to fulfill all its contractual obligations with high-quality actions and deliverables.

According to the sustainability of the UP-RES project, the challenge is the still emerging understanding within the project consortium of the actual product (and services). It can be asked what high-level universities and professional training institutions would actually want to procure and/or use as training resources for professional development courses and how should the various resources (curriculum for the courses, training materials, support materials etc.) be packed. The training materials the UP-RES project consortium has produced and translated are important and already tested during the courses held, but the real important question is whether these materials are sufficient for other academic and training entities to apply in their own environment.

In the following, the evaluation of the work of the project is presented work package by work package. This evaluation report includes also as an annex the Risk analysis report, which was based on the risk assessment made by the partners of the project during late Spring 2012.

2 WP1: Project management

The project management function has been lead by Aalto University. The organisation of of work of the UP-RES project at Aalto consisting of a European project expert (project coordinator) and subject matter expert is a valid and good model.

The consortium – after finding its composition in the early stages of the project – has been working of all to judge well and in a cooperative manner. The partners of the project consortium have not previously worked closely together, and also alterations both in the project consortium as well as the representatives of the project partners in the project, have meant that the implementation of joint working methods and approaches have had a natural learning curve.

The project consortium has had both actual meetings as well as regular audio conference meetings (however, minutes of the audio conference meetings have not been set for the use of the evaluator). The minutes of the meetings are adequate, but the consortium has not made clear, binding decisions often – rather the minutes are describing discussions in the meetings and listings of work partners have been declaring to do. Thus the work of the consortium would probably have been benefitting from more detailed, stricter decisions, which would have been followed in consequent meetings. Listings of who is to do what by when with which resources would have been clearer than the concurrent form of decision

making. Also the direct communication with the partners should be increased, as well as the direct communication between the coordinator and the partners.

The delay in the amendment process by the Agency according to the documentation available seems unreasonable. The lengthened amendment procedure hampered in a severe way the planning of the project activities and implementation of the project actions. Also the communication with the Agency – due e.g. to the changes of the project officers of the Agency – could have been smoother and more fluent. As stated earlier, the UP-RES consortium seems to struggle with meeting the deadlines of its deliverables - these repeating delays lead to poor technical performance appearance of the project. The Agency has also pointed out this aspect in its assessment of the interim report. The challenge for the project management is also to provide in the final report all required deliverables within a relatively short period of time – thus the work load with the final report is larger than foreseen during the last months of the project.

The delays in the amendment process have not been the sole contractual challenges. The project consortium agreement has been very late, and this imposes dangers also for the sustainability of the project. Also the project consortium seems not to have a very clear stand on intellectual property rights and of the fluent management of the intellectual property of the project after the project has been ending. This becomes even more important to agree upon, as the project has been delayed in its dissemination activities.

The project has utilized the mechanism of National Steering Groups (NSG), which has been an appropriate and good way to communicate with the stakeholders. It is natural, that in various countries the NSGs work in a varying way. In general, this has brought the project clearly added value and enabled fluent communication with the stakeholders. In retrospect it could be asked, whether also an external advisory group on the European level would have been beneficial for the project, as the project during its implementation has met many such challenges (e.g. the certification issue) which could have been discussed on the level of European stakeholders.

The UP-RES project has had an internal “Optima” web environment hosted by Aalto University. It is useful to collect all the documentation into one web environment, although the partners have submitted to this environment documents without a strict joint policy. This Optima web environment would serve better the project purposes, if the all the partners would have been complying to the same standards and routines in delivering their documents.

The UP-RES project has also built up an own open access website. The website is quite traditional, but works fluently. As the key outcome of the project at the moment seem to be the training materials in ten languages, it seems peculiar that the website is presenting its content in English only. In addition, the training materials might be better presented as a totally own section – now they are displayed on the same page as “Project documents and presentations”. If the UP-RES project consortium expects that the training materials are used through this website, the website should also include information of intellectual property rights – e.g. if Creative Commons licenses are applied, what rights do the users have. It would be also recommendable that the UP-RES consortium would know more about the users who are utilizing the results of the project.

As discussed in more detail in work package 5, the competitive tendering for the evaluation work was late and thus also the contracting of the evaluator took place almost a year later than foreseen. Unfortunately,

this has also meant that the work of the evaluator has not been supporting the project management work from the earlier stages of the project.

3 WP2: Training needs analysis and tools modification

In general, this work package was well documented and is a consistent work package both according to its deliverables as well as scheduling. The UP-RES consortium has indicated that the deliverable 2.2 would still be reviewed.

The UP-RES consortium has worked well with the training needs analysis, and thus it should also elaborate how the questionnaires, results etc. can be used in the marketing of the UP-RES products. For instance, the website of the UP-RES project does not utilize in any way the results of the training needs analysis, although these results would be essential for the marketing of the UP-RES products. Furthermore, the UP-RES consortium the potential customers of UP-RES could use these training needs analysis questionnaires in directing and fine-tuning their own training provision. In addition, the UP-RES consortium could also use this European comparative material for conference papers and articles, but there is no evidence that the UP-RES consortium would have been thinking further of utilizing these results in public.

4 WP3: Short training courses: Training design and delivery

The position of the short training courses was designed to be both valuable in marketing of the long training courses as well as in “proofing-the-concept” of the training contents of the UP-RES project. The evaluation task of this work package is more than challenging – although it is elementary as a work package in the project – as the evaluation report covering the short training courses (deliverable 3.4) has not even been properly started and the project ends in less than half a year at the time of writing of this evaluation report. The fact that the UK courses are still running is not a credible excuse of delaying the evaluation summary of the short training courses. After this deliverable is available, it is also possible to identify those issues which are essential for the external evaluation (in work package 5) and decide upon the required external evaluation activities (e.g. possible additional questionnaires for the participants and stakeholders as well as the possible interviews with the participants and stakeholders).

The material submitted to the Optima web environment is varying much between different countries and it cannot be the task of the evaluator to draw these materials together, as there is a clearly assigned work package with a lead partner in charge of the deliverable. The oral feedback of the short training courses has been positive, but all this is still anecdotal information before the actual deliverable summarizes the feedback provided by the participants.

The short courses were hit by the economic crisis, as the municipalities and regions were cutting their training budgets and also restricting the time to participate to the short training courses (as well as the long

training courses). According to the quantitative performance indicators, the UP-RES project has not been meeting the figures according to the Description of the Action, but there is sufficiently evidence of work undertaken for the short course design and delivery. Although the exact numbers have not been reached, the level of magnitude is the right one in understanding the quick and unexpected changes in the operating environment.

Also the format of the short training courses was altered during the project and the composition of the training courses in various partner countries differed from each other. However, the main thing in the implementation of the short courses was that the UP-RES consortium established access to the key participants. As the summarized information regarding the short training courses is still missing, it is not possible to assess how many participants were recruited from the short training courses to the long training courses in general and in various partner countries in specific.

Also the evaluation task of this work package is hampered by the fact that there is not a unified and standardized format what the partners include in their reporting to the Optima project environment and what not.

The problems with keeping the schedules in the project have been discussed above. However, it should be pointed out once again, that as the design and delivery of the short training courses took in some countries longer than foreseen, the delay in short training courses lead also to “domino effect” in delaying the planning and implementation of long training courses.

5 WP4: Long training courses: Training design and delivery

This work package is the most important work package of the UP-RES project both by its significance to the project as well as its budget proportion. The fundamental idea of the UP-RES project has been to prepare the success of the long training courses by training needs analysis (to identify the critical needs in the target population) and short training courses (to market the comprehensive long training course). Subsequently, the training material produced for the long training courses has been meant to serve the dissemination and marketing activities of the UP-RES products (and services) to other high-level training institutions. This conceptual approach is more than valid. The consortium needs, however, still to work to prove that the results of the training needs analysis and short training courses have been utilized to their full potential in the design and delivery of the long training courses.

However, due to reasons discussed already earlier (financial crisis, difficulty in recruiting participants etc.) the long training courses have not met their quantitative performance criteria. The UP-RES project consortium has been accurately modifying the format of the long training courses and allowed very different types of implementation of the long training courses. This shows good adaptability of the UP-RES project to the altering market conditions.

The particular challenge for the UP-RES project is that the German long training course will not under any circumstances be finished during the project time. The project consortium should have available a feasible plan during Autumn 2012 to visualize how the long training course will be implemented in Germany.

The summarized feedback (deliverable 4.5) of the long training courses is still due by the end of October 2012, so no conclusions can be drawn at the moment based on the feedback by the participants. After this deliverable is available, it is also possible to identify those issues which are essential for the external evaluation and decide upon the required external evaluation activities (e.g. possible additional questionnaires for the participants and stakeholders as well as the possible interviews with the participants and stakeholders).

6 WP5: Evaluation

Due to the nature of the evaluation report – which is written by the evaluator – this chapter is relatively short. However, as indicated previously, the contracting of the evaluator was started nearly a year later than foreseen and this meant also that the evaluator was not in place during critical work phases – such as design of the courses or design of the training materials.

For the Erfurt meeting in April 2012 it was decided that the concentration in Spring 2012 should be in undertaking the risk analysis, which would also highlight for the UP-RES consortium the critical decisions and steps to be taken to finish successfully the project.

The delays in many deliverables have also made the evaluation tasks more challenging; some challenges have also been created by the versatility of the project material in the Optima web environment.

The feedback of the Agency highlighted that the important task for evaluation work was the evaluation of the training material. For the evaluator it seems that the UP-RES project consortium has not clearly defined the wanted support by the evaluator for the training materials and specified the actual work expected in this area by the evaluator. This has been partially also due to the fact that the training material development was well on its way before the evaluator was contracted.

7 WP6: Communication and dissemination

Although the communication and promotion plan (deliverable 6.1) and marketing materials (deliverable 6.2) have been well prepared, these documents were mainly concentrating on the marketing of the UP-RES

short and long courses. The project consortium should still clarify its provision for the time after the project – what are the elements of the UP-RES product (and service) provision.

The consolidated training materials (deliverable 6.3) have been recently published, but the adequate challenge is their use. It is doubtful that any high-level university or training institution would use only PowerPoint slide sets without further support material (curricula, reference literature, course outlines etc.). Thus the consortium must work with consolidating the provision for the education and training market. In addition, the consortium should clarify its intellectual property right approach and policy.

The consortium has been following up well its presence in the media and partners have reported actively their marketing and public relations activities. However, the project partners have seen that during the life of the project it can be challenging to get published in scientific, peer-reviewed journals due to the lengthy review and publishing procedures as well as the tough competition in top journals, which might not easily welcome practical articles.

8 WP7: Certification

The potential of European certification was seen in the preparation of the UP-RES project as a critical success factor for the dissemination of the UP-RES products (and services). However, the work undertaken during the project has shown that certification at an expected level is difficult, if not impossible, to undertake. In retrospect one could speculate whether the project partnership should have been more acknowledgeable of the challenges with European-level certification in the early phases of the project.

The local certification procedure has been producing better results, although in some countries country-wide certification is not possible (as the certification for professions is taking place on state level).

The UP-RES consortium should look openly also to the different complementary models for certification, which of all to judge has not yet been actively taking place. For instance, the UP-RES consortium might look models, such as Professional Development Degree (PD) granted jointly by several participating universities, and assess, whether this type of a degree would serve the same causes as European certification. At the time of writing this report, no deliverables or their drafts of this work package were available for evaluation purposes.

9 Conclusions and summary

The work of the UP-RES project is covering an important area, in which high-level educational and training courses for professional development have been scarcely organized. The basic concept of the project as well as its Description of the Action are solid. However, the implementation of the project has suffered from external and internal factors.

The main external factor has been the quickly accumulated financial crisis, which was cutting in a severe way the training opportunities of the designated target audiences – both budget wise and time wise. Internally, the project has been fulfilling its fundamental obligations, but the UP-RES project suffers from several delays in its actions, which means that the project consortium has a very busy period of five months from October 2012 to the end of February 2013 to finish all its work. Unfortunately, much of this work needs even to be started and the time pressure towards the work of the consortium might also lead to unwanted compromises in the quality of the work and the deliverables.

This evaluation report includes as a separate annex the risk analysis undertaken during late Spring 2012 and the summary of the risk analysis includes also clear decisions the UP-RES consortium should make to fulfill both its contractual obligations as well as its service promises.