



Recommendations

From the MapAbility Training

29th of May to 1st of June 2014

Brussels, Belgium

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Introduction

ExchangeAbility is a long-term project of the Erasmus Student Network. It was developed to increase the participation of students with disabilities in mobility programmes and make ESN an accessible organisation.

The **MapAbility** project, funded by the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe, is a sub-part of ExchangeAbility. It aims at creating a map of accessibility and services of European Higher Education Institutions for students with disabilities, in order to provide practical information to them and encourage them to go abroad.

From the 29th of May to the 1st of June, 46 youth volunteers were gathered in Brussels for a training on inclusion, disability and accessibility of the European Higher Education Area. They received trainings and workshops by experts from the disability field and had the chance to develop specific skills. Through different capacity building activities and workshops, they have learned how to improve their work with students with disabilities and enhance tolerance and mutual understanding towards diverse groups of society.

At the end of the training, a working session on drafting 3 types of recommendations took place. The following recommendations are aimed to:

- **Local NGOs** how to make their activities accessible
- **National NGOs** and National stakeholders how to raise awareness of the existing structural problems and the persisting lack of information about mobility programmes towards students with disabilities
- **EU Policy makers** how to take inclusive study mobility to the next level, making the Higher Education Area and mobility programmes accessible for students with disabilities

These recommendations were presented by the participants themselves during the International MapAbility Conference which took place on the 2nd of June 2014.

Recommendations for local ESN Sections

Obtaining Human Resources dedicated to the ExchangeAbility project

Increased internal knowledge of ExchangeAbility

The ExchangeAbility project is not enough known at the local level. Introducing and promoting the project to the members in general meetings of the local section is necessary as well as nominating a responsible for the implementation of the project during the year.

Experiential learning

In order to become more sensitized to issues concerning inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities, ESN volunteers should learn through direct interactions with students with disabilities. By organising experimental exercises and situational workshops (Dinner in the dark, blind route, Paralympic games, Challenge your Senses, etc.) they can experience first-hand the life of a disable student

Recruiting

Collaboration with departments of Social Sciences is encouraged in order to recruit students with Social Sciences background.

Getting students with disabilities involved in the activities organised by the local section both as volunteer or beneficiary (active and passive participation) to make them experience the concept of “*Internationalisation at home*”.

Promote ExchangeAbility to local stakeholders

Collaboration with Disability Units of Universities and local NGO’s

It is essential to collaborate with experts in the disability field at the local level, due to the sensitive field of this project. The NGOs and the Disability Units may provide you valuable information about the disabilities, access to people with disabilities and even, a co-organization of the section’s events.

Database for communication

Create an archive on how the project have been implemented in the past. All the contact information need to be gathered in order to continue organizing and improving the events. An Event Report is proposed for the best organization possible.

Recommendations for the National Level

Create an internal material package for National and Local Coordinators

Information about ExchangeAbility and MapAbility

- Promotional Material
- Country Information (MapAbility & ExchangeAbility Country Reports, Country's Contact Information for the national and local coordinators)

Sharing best practices

It is useful for the national and local coordinators to have access to a database with the existing best practices events and be able to contact the responsible person of each to get more information about them. For that reason, a public information database is highly suggested, containing for example an Event Report.

Guidelines for National and Local Coordinators

The guidelines are referred to the key points a national and local coordinator needs to know: information about the project, basic tools and guidelines on how to organise various events, how to fill in the questionnaire, how to advocate at local and national level for ExchangeAbility using as a tool the ExchangeAbility and MapAbility project and their goals.

ExchangeAbility and MapAbility Logos

To be available for the national and local coordinators to download and use them at anytime.

Enhance project promotion through the following mechanisms

Information on HEIs Webpages

To have the HEI's information as submission to the MapAbility Questionnaire to be implemented on the Map (or provide a link of the HEI on the MapAbility map)

Create cooperation with experts in the field

ESN Countries are highly encouraged to start cooperating with National stakeholders and NGOs active in the field of disability, accessibility and inclusive Education.

Find official Promoters

A good example comes from ESN Croatia. Their Official Promoter for the ExchangeAbility Project is the Paralympic Champion Mihovil Španja. Every country should look for an official promoter such as a Paralympic Athlete.

Project implementation

Human resources

Recruit a National ExchangeAbility Coordinator who is motivated and dedicated to the project and the topic of accessibility and inclusion

Recruit a network of local coordinators in each ESN section and create a community of local ExchangeAbility coordinators

Organise a National Meeting for the local coordinators

The goals of this meeting will be:

- Information about the project
- Best practices sharing
- Workshops, Trainings, Brainstormings

Establish an ExchangeAbility Week

The goals of this week will be:

- Promotion
- Raising awareness about inclusive Education and accessibility obstacles of HEIs
- Mapping

Recommendations from the Erasmus Student Network to EU Policy Makers

Recommendation N°1: Common understanding

As the definition of “disability” is different in each European Nation, the creation of a **European-wide database of definitions** which qualifies a student as a “**student with disabilities**” in each European Nation is strongly necessary. This database should include information about the services and support students with disabilities are entitled to. The direct benefits would be:

1. The student with disabilities would know in advance about the **level of support** in the different countries.
2. Both the host and home institutions, in accordance with the student’s will, could **adapt their services** to provide high quality support to the student.

Recommendation N°2: Required factors for an inclusive environment

Consistent efforts should be made to make sure the **EU regulations on accessibility** are **implemented and respected** (services provided, University buildings and its surrounding area).

All the **stakeholders should be trained** on how to deal with students with disabilities: from the Higher Education Professionals to Non-Governmental Organisations and Students’ Associations.

Professors should be trained on how to **teach in an inclusive way**, making their learning material accessible. A standardised training system to support educators should be implemented to meet the student’s needs.

Recommendation N°3: Coordination of cross-sectorial communication

There is a **lack of communication** about the social model of disability and a general **lack of information** flow. In order to better support the exchange of information on all levels, ESN members would like to address both National stakeholders (because of country specific legislation, policies and stakeholders) and European stakeholders:

- At the National level, the creation of a **centralised platform** where students can find **information** about opportunities of **exchange programmes, supplementary grants and top-ups** and other **practical information** in an easy and accessible way (voice recording, subtitled videos, positive testimonies of other students with disabilities, ...)
- At the European level, the **recognition** of projects fostering inclusion, the **empowerment** of National stakeholders to support local initiatives and a **coordination and monitoring** of National strategies

Recommendation N°4: European-wide mapping of cities’ accessibility

Because students are not only going from home to their University and from their University back home, **mapping the accessibility of the whole cities** is highly needed. Shops, banks, administrations, sport centers, museums, parks, pubs and so on.

The Erasmus Student Network welcomes the existing initiatives such as Wheelmap.org or JACCEDE.com which are mapping the public places of everyday. Those initiatives should be broadly promoted and supported.