

What goes around comes around – staff mobility and its diverse benefits

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Mobility is a fundamental part of any international project. In the context of education, what most people think of first is probably student exchange. But there are other ways how mobility can have an impact in this area, for example at its very base: the project »EDULIVE – Transforming Higher Education to strengthen links between universities and the livestock sector in Argentina and Peru« applies staff mobility at the level of teachers, trainers and researchers. The experience of the project team so far provides insight.

Project EDULIVE – a representative example for staff mobility

EDULIVE is an Erasmus+ project in the field of Capacity Building in Higher Education with 18 partners in Europe and South America. This three-year project (2015–2018), coordinated by BOKU-University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna aims at improving university programmes on Animal Science in Peru and Argentina. The project's approach to reaching this goal lies in connecting universities with research institutions and farming organisations in the livestock sector (alpaca fibre, sheep wool and dairy cattle) and consists of four main elements: establishing and strengthening cooperation between universities and stakeholders, identifying individual needs and upgrading tools and equipment, staff training: various teacher trainings and visits to European universities, as well as constant quality, evaluation and dissemination measures to ensure transparency, consistency and visibility.

The diversity of bidirectional staff mobility

There are two directions of mobility in the project: on the one hand, the partners in Argentina and Peru travel locally, visit one another and Europe. On the other hand, the European partners fly to South America on different occasions.

Stakeholders of the livestock sector meet at the partner universities of their region for cooperation workshops and give expert talks for students and staff. These face-to-face meetings are a requirement for understanding each other's circumstances, finding common grounds and cooperation mechanisms. With many stakeholders in remote areas, organisation can be challenging. Despite – or perhaps because of this – a new level of networking is inspired.

University professors travel to the industry partners in their country to get to know their institution and land, organise student internships and return to the sites for student monitoring visits. The university staff of each country also meets for teacher trainings and travels to Europe for inspiration on curricular organisation and internship structures. These connections and trips provide the rich opportunity for each project member to get to know the expectations of the stakeholders in their field of expertise – possible future employers of their graduates –, plus the challenges and best-practice solutions of other institutions at a national and international level. Furthermore, these new findings – upon reflection – offer a new perspective on one's own institution, country and teaching method or contents.

The EDULIVE project partners from Europe provide teacher trainings in South America. The project coordinators travel to Argen-



The EDULIVE team at an alpaca farm in Peru.
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Transversal Skills training in Argentina
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tina and Peru for consortium meetings and administrative visits. While this might seem solely coordinating at first sight, this direction of mobility also bears great potential. While exchanging knowledge and ideas, the European partners likewise experience differences in cultural backgrounds, between continents, countries and even regions and they get to know realities of university structures, circumstances and, thus, operating methods different to their own. Thomas Guggenberger, Head of Quality Management at BOKU, who held two QM courses for EDULIVE, underlines this: »During my workshops with project partners in their respective institutions, I got to know not only the colleagues and universities, but also the individual challenges in each place. Understanding the complex connections and different realities leads to a global perspective and is an advantage in any case – especially when it comes to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.«

Feedback of course participants shows that, by means of exchange, one's own reality and world view is put into a new perspective: networks to tackle common problems are created and some challenges are revealed in a different light when compared to what others are facing. Trainings offer new input for teaching methods and make structures and patterns obvious. With this, reflection and conscious teamwork become more aspirational.

Guggenberger explains: »My trainings and their stimulated proces-

ses aim at substantial changes – be it related to perspective, structure or curriculum – so that participants may have reservations at first. This has inspired me to learn about the causes of resistance to change, how to make problems visible and tangible and how to raise consciousness about institutional processes of change. Finding ways to get people to question the status quo and open up for new ideas is something I have acquired over time in my workshops and I definitely benefit from these experiences back home.«

Multi-faceted benefits

Beyond anticipated effects, the strong network created within the project provides new ideas on curricular improvements: such as more practical features in all semesters – as opposed to one long internship, common in Austria, – e-learning management and distance learning or advanced technological facilities on campus. Moreover, cooperation for thesis and publications has developed. Staff mobility in Higher Education projects, in all its diversity, represents a great way to strengthen the base and value of education and to keep it up-to-date. Exchange, reflection and networking are the key aspects that can lead to valuable, market-oriented, hands-on teaching and high job expectations for graduates through an active cooperation between educational and stakeholder institutions. Last but not least, everyone involved in the project benefits at a professional and personal level.