

WISAR

Wirtschaftsnahe Strategien für lebenslanges
Lernen in der Region

QUALITY MANAGEMENT & EVALUATION Handbook

Research by



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1. Introduction

The present evaluation report was prepared by Auxilium for “Wirtschaftsnahe Strategien für lebenslanges Lernen in der Region”, a LLP Key Activity 1 project, proposed by *SZF, Austria*.

Apart from the coordinator *SZF* (P1) the following institutions participate in the project:

P2 - Dimitra Institute of training & development ITD, Greece

P3 - IteE, Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji - Panstwowy, Poland

P4 - School Center of Ptuj, Slovenia

P5 - COOP, Slovakia

The *Quality Management & Evaluation Handbook* was developed by *Auxilium* - an Austrian institution assigned with the *Quality Management & Evaluation Plan* of the project - in order to provide a detailed description of all activities to be carried out within the work package “Quality Management and Evaluation Strategy” (WP 2) of the *WISAR* project. In particular, the handbook tries to give an overview of the systemic indicators and guidelines defined for the implementation of WP 2.

In the following sections, we will discuss the activities which are to be carried out in order to monitor the quality of the project processes and outputs, and to assess the impact of the *WISAR* project on the target groups. We will give you a description of the quality management and evaluation strategies planned for the *WISAR* project and provide a detailed discussion of all activities conducted so far. In this context, our focus is on the *Quality Indicator Matrix*, which was developed by *Auxilium* in collaboration with all participating organisations in May 2010, in order to evaluate the quality of the project products. In the present manual we would like to discuss the numerous quality indicators defined by all partners involved and present the outcome of a first preliminary survey on evaluation priorities in form of charts and lists.

2. Overview of the Quality Management and Evaluation Strategies

2.1 Criteria Based Evaluation by Auxilium

A high project quality in European cooperation projects is definitely the key to a sustainable implementation of project results and products. The high quality standards of the contributions from all project partners are a fundamental but not necessarily a sufficient requisite for achieving an overall qualitative result. In respect to the quality management of transnational cooperation projects, it is advised to have an external, independent and holistic quality management approach. In this context, the actual *status quo* of the project and the project process towards its goals need to be assessed; moreover, potential deviances within the process must be detected and possible steering and adaptation suggestions must be offered.

For a successful venture, the quality management approach has to rely on specific quality criteria. Therefore, the *Quality Management Model (QMM)* developed by *Auxilium* for transnational cooperation projects is based on the following characteristics:

- **Scientifically and methodologically correct and realistic**

In this quality dimension, the model has to fulfil basic scientific and empirical criteria such as reliability, validity and objectivity. The results of the model are only valid and comparable if these basic criteria are taken into consideration.

- **Transparent**

A high grade of transparency of any information concerning the process and product quality is essential. Access to all information is equally important and - in case of deviances - clearly defined actions have to be taken and steering mechanisms have to be established.

- **Holistic**

It is important that the project process and project products be assessed from a holistic perspective.

- **Flexible**

Due to a wide range of products developed in transnational cooperation projects and due to various quality management approaches, it is necessary that the model applied guarantees flexibility. A high degree of flexibility is granted in a criteria-based evaluation of projects.

- **Realistic**

Although the scientific criteria always need to be considered for our purpose, the quality management model has to be realistic - and also able to include the financial and human resources available. In addition, it has to be simple in its implementation, which is only possible if the model itself has a complex and well-thought-out background.

- **Possible to control**

The model provides easy controlling and steering since it allows for valid comparisons, estimates, etc. This is only possible through a high degree of standardisation and (partly) through the use of ICT in the implementation.

- **Targeted**

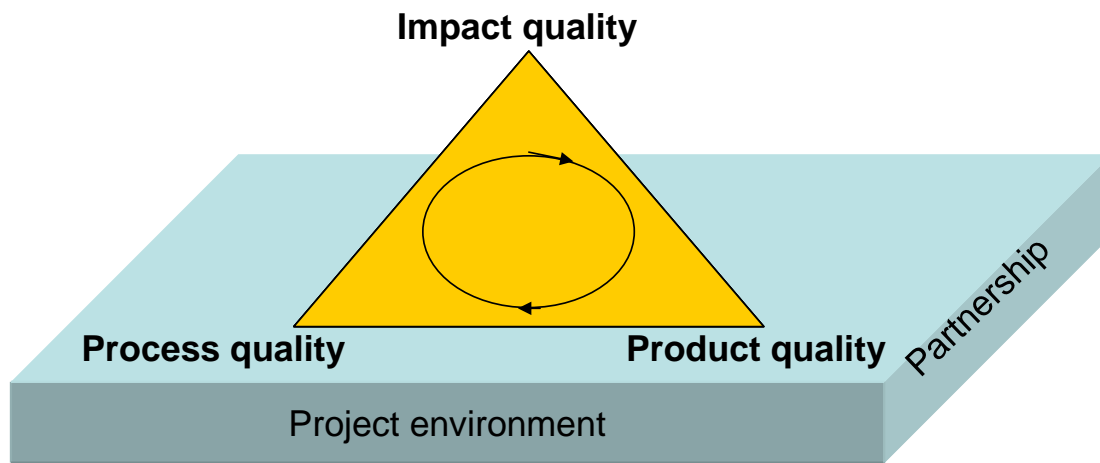
The quality assurance model compares the project status with the predefined target status at all project stages and can hence foresee and recognise deviances through a formative evaluation approach.

2.2 Description of the Model

The model developed and implemented by *Auxilium* is based on a triangulate evaluation approach. In the frame of this approach there are three different dimensions to focus on during the evaluation:

- a) Project process
- b) Project products
- c) Project impact

Only by taking into account these three dimensions, the project quality can be evaluated with a holistic approach. The developed model contains so called *Critical Success Factors (CSF)* for all three quality dimensions; these are tailored to the project and partly given in advance.



The *Triangulate Quality Assurance* approach implies that all three quality dimensions interdependently interfere, which allows us to ensure quality through a holistic approach. Furthermore, the method used by *Auxilium* is absolutely transparent and the evaluation data is accessible anytime to all the project partners.

The quality assurance method estimates the actual *status quo* by covering the targets set; it recognises deviances and suggests possible steering measures, which allows us to keep the project on track from the start and to obtain the project quality proposed.

2.3 Quality Assurance of the Project Process

The evaluation on the process level is essential for the success of the project as it analyses the quality of the interaction within the partnership with the aim of guaranteeing an effective cooperation. The evaluator gathers feedback from all project partners and - based on the results achieved - draws the attention to possible adjustments or to the need of intervention.

Transnational cooperation projects usually follow similar patterns and processes. Based on this aspect, the quality assurance procedure can be standardised in this dimension. For example, the *Critical Success Factors (CSF)* will focus on project

meetings, communication processes, knowledge management, problem and conflict solving approaches.

One of the components of this quality management strategy involves the monitoring of the project in terms of its processes. In this context, the following processes will be observed:

- communication among the partners
- communication between the contractor and the partners
- the level of information and awareness of the partners towards the contents of the project (and also goals, schedule, and budget)
- the degree of involvement of the different partners in the project activities.

In our evaluation of the *WISAR* project on the process level, the following quality indicators can be proposed:

Table 1: Indicators for assessing the quality of the meeting organisation

1. Quality Indicators/Organisation of Project Meeting (OM)	
OM-1	Appropriate accommodation was organised by the hosting institution.
OM-2	The meeting was held at appropriate facilities (e.g. room size, equipment)
OM-3	An adequate social programme was provided at the meeting.

Table 2: Indicators for assessing the quality of project meetings

2. Quality Indicators/Project Meeting (PM)	
PM-1	All participants receive sufficient information prior to the meeting (e.g. agenda, documents to be discussed).
PM-2	All partners provide preliminary information/data/products in the format requested to allow everybody to participate in the meeting accordingly.
PM-3	All partners attend the meeting well prepared and make valuable contributions.
PM-4	The partner representatives attending show the expertise requested for the discussion of the meeting topics.
PM-5	The meeting agenda covers all relevant aspects.
PM-6	All partners cooperate efficiently in accordance with the meeting agenda and all topics scheduled.
PM-7	The meeting is managed in a professional way.
PM-8	The meeting is generally successful: decision are made, deadlines are established etc.
PM-9	The working atmosphere allows the participants to express their ideas.
PM-10	The partners show the progress and accomplish the agreed workload until the meeting date.
PM-11	The WP leader gives appropriate guidelines and indications to the partners about the WP and on the activities to be done after the meeting.
PM-12	The partnership shows adequate time management.
PM-13	Potential conflicts are resolved.

Table 3: Indicators for assessing the quality of the cooperation in each project phase

3. Quality Indicators/Project Phase (PP)	
PP-1	The partners are well aware of their role/duties in the current project phase.
PP-2	The partnership understands the ongoing developments.
PP-3	The partnership is satisfied with the information flow in the project phase
PP-4	The coordinator efficiently communicates with the project partners.
PP-5	The partners efficiently communicate with the coordinator.
PP-6	The communication among the partners is very efficient.
PP-7	All partners contribute accordingly to the project content and activities in the planned timeframe.
PP-8	The WP leaders provide the partners with all relevant information, so they can conduct their activities at their best.
PP-9	The partners are well informed about the financial and administrative aspects of the project.

The instruments used for this evaluation offer a scientific approach and are based on the long experience of *Auxilium* in the area of quality management. To collect feedback from the partners, we rely on questionnaires that are customized for each situation and therefore, are focusing on relevant issues of the project in different phases of its implementation. The *measuring points* for the questionnaire based evaluation will be one to two weeks after each partnership meeting - as agreed with the project coordinator. *Auxilium* uses either paper-based or internet-based Learning questionnaires for this evaluation; although the evaluation forms are mostly designed as quantitative research tools, they also allow the partners to provide feedback in their own words.

Auxilium carries out the survey, collects the results, processes the information by creating graphical representations of the statistical data, includes a list of comments written by the partners and provides an overall analysis. The *Evaluation Report* compiled serves as monitoring tool for the coordinator and is part of the *Quality Management and Evaluation Strategy*. The evaluation questionnaire developed for this purpose focuses on the following areas:

- The transnational meeting (organisation and workflow)
- Activities and processes of the project phases
- Suggestions, recommendations and personal comments

In this section, questionnaire offers open questions in order to encourage the participants to express their opinion and give suggestions about the project and the meeting.

The questionnaires designed by *Auxilium* are based on the *Likert* scale, i.e. all the questions that have multiple answers are provided with answer categories from which the partners can choose. According to this scale used in social research, it is valid to have a middle answer category (neutral or undecided) if the evaluator does not need to force the respondents to choose a positive or negative category. Both methods (odd and even answer categories) are scientifically valid and can be used to serve the purpose defined by the evaluation team.

2.4 Quality Assurance of the Project Products

The product quality is often perceived as a big challenge in educational projects since quality is indeed a rather subjective matter; this aspect must be taken into consideration when we talk about the quality of educational measures.

The core question is whether the outcome of the project meets the needs and expectations of the stakeholders as well as the direct and indirect target groups. For this purpose, we have to find out about what their needs and expectations are. This also applies to the partners in the project - it is equally important to clarify what they expect of the project products and to identify their subjective quality criteria.

The quality assurance of the project products is to a large extent project-specific, so the *CSF* can hardly be standardised. For this reason, the model of *Auxilium* follows the approach of the *Criteria Based Evaluation (CBE)* - in regard to the product quality, the only solution for the various approaches.

- **Methods of Product Evaluation**

In order to evaluate the *WISAR* products, we are employing the following methods:

Method 1 - Desk research:

Desk research involves gathering data that already exist. Carrying out desk research at the initial stage is strongly recommended to gain background knowledge to a subject.

Method 2 - Observation:

In order to provide an evaluation, we will observe the success of the *WISAR* products with the target groups.

Method 3 - Questioning:

We will employ questionnaires, guided interviews and checklists, which will be described in more detail below.

Method 4 - Consultation:

We will consult external experts to provide an assessment of the *WISAR* products from different perspectives.

- **Evaluation Instruments**

The instruments used for the evaluation of *WISAR* are based on the experience of *Auxilium* in the area of quality management. In order to assess the *WISAR* products, *Auxilium* proposes the use of

- questionnaires
- guided interviews
- checklists

as the methods most suitable for the *WISAR* evaluation purpose.

The use of questionnaires along with guided interviews is intended to produce a combination of qualitative and quantitative information which should support the evaluation of the *WISAR* products in respect to the work process and the product itself. Furthermore, checklists will be applied when suitable - in particular, for the particular aspects that interviews and questionnaires are not appropriate for.

- **Samples**

The products will be assessed by our target groups:

- Local entrepreneurs

- institutions involved in lifelong learning
- labour market authorities
- individuals interested in
- and also by the *WISAR* partnership.

2.5 Quality Assurance of the Project Impact

In a holistic approach to quality management, the project impact - subject of a specific quality assurance dimension - presents a crucial factor. Similar to the evaluation of product quality, we mostly apply the *CBE Method* to impact evaluation, whereas in some cases we use partly standardised *CSF*.

We will evaluate the impact of the product on representatives of the target groups; the *WISAR* products will be assessed in respect to its short term but also in respect to its long term impact. Apart from the impact of the product itself, we will analyse the success of the dissemination and implementation activities. For this purpose, we will assess the product impact on the

- local level
- regional level
- national level
- European level.

In order to be able to achieve feasible results, *Auxilium* will provide the members of the partnership with questionnaires that focus on the project impact.

The assessment of the project impact is essential for the transferability of all outputs produced in the course of the project and should allow for necessary changes which are to be made before the end of the project. The measuring points of the project impact will be defined in agreement with the project coordinator and the partnership.

3. Quality Indicator Collection for the Product Evaluation

In the process of ensuring the quality of the *WISAR* products, all participating partners were assigned the identification of applicable quality indicators. *Auxilium*, the project partner in charge of quality control and quality assurance, was entrusted with the collection and analysis of data provided by all organisations involved in the development of the *WISAR* products.

In the initial phase of the evaluation process, a *Quality Indicator Matrix* sent out to the partnership with the request to provide quality indicators they considered relevant for the evaluation of the product.

The contributions received from the partnership were processed; the results obtained in our survey will be presented in the next section. In order to provide a transparent overview, we have created the following chart:

QUALITY INDICATORS - WISAR PRODUCTS

I. Project Newsletter	
IN 1-1	The newsletter offers relevant information on project activities and project results.
IN 1-2	The newsletter is published periodically.
IN 1-3	The newsletter is available in all partner languages.
IN 1-4	The newsletter is distributed by e-mail to relevant stakeholders by all partners.
IN 1-5	The newsletter is available in pdf format
IN 1-6	The newsletter comprises 2 pages at least.

II. Promotional Materials

IN 2-1	The project folder is available in all partner languages.
IN 2-2	The project folder is distributed to all participants in focus group and final
IN 2-3	At least 3 informative articles/press releases have been published in each partner
IN 2-4	The project folder is distributed to relevant stakeholders by all partners.

III. Project Website

IN 3-1	The project website is available in all partner languages.
IN 3-2	The project website offers information on the project aims and objectives, partners and activities.
IN 3-3	The project website fosters mutual exchange by providing a forum section.
IN 3-4	The project website offers products and materials for download.
IN 3-5	The project is convenient to navigate.
IN 3-6	

IV. 5 Strategic Papers

IN 4-1	The 5 Strategic Papers are available in hard copy.
IN 4-2	The 5 Strategic Papers are available in pdf format and are to be downloaded from the project website.
IN 4-3	The 5 Strategic Papers have been published in EN and in all partner languages.
IN 4-4	The 5 Strategic Papers incorporate all relevant national strategies and developments
IN 4-5	Each strategy paper comprises at least 20 pages
IN 4-6	The 5 Strategic Papers is distributed to relevant stakeholders by all partners.

V. Method Paper - Round Table

IN 5-1	The Method Paper - Round Table is available in hard copy.
IN 5-2	The Method Paper - Round Table is available in .pdf format.
IN 5-3	The Method Paper - Round Table comprises a minimum of 10 pages.
IN 5-4	The Method Paper - Round Table has been published in EN and in all partner languages.

IN 5-5	The Method Paper - Round Table comprises at least 10 pages
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VI. Method Paper - Panels	
IN 6-1	The Method Paper - Panels is available in hard copy.
IN 6-2	The Method Paper - Panels is available in .pdf format.
IN 6-3	The Method Paper - Panels comprises a minimum of 10 pages.
IN 6-4	The Method Paper - Panels has been published in EN and in all partner languages.
IN 6-5	The Method Paper - Panels comprises at least 10 pages

VII. Method Paper - Delphi	
IN 7-1	The Method Paper - Delphi is available in hard copy.
IN 7-2	The Method Paper - Delphi is available in .pdf format.
IN 7-3	The Method Paper - Delphi comprises a minimum of 10 pages.
IN 7-4	The Method Paper - Delphi has been published in EN and in all partner languages.
IN 7-5	The Method Paper - Delphi comprises at least 10 pages

VIII. WISAR Materials	
IN 8-1	The project memorandum has been published in EN.
IN 8-2	The project memorandum is available in hard copy and in pdf
IN 8-3	The project memorandum comprises 10 pages.
IN 8-4	Materials for all 3 tools (Round Table, Panels, Delphi) have been designed.
IN 8-5	Materials for all 3 tools (Round Table, Panels, Delphi) are available in EN and all languages.
IN 8-6	Materials for all 3 tools (Round Table, Panels, Delphi) are available in hard copy and pdf
IN 8-7	The report of the pilot phase has been published in EN.
IN 8-8	The report of the pilot phase is available in hard copy and in pdf.
IN 8-9	The report of the pilot phase comprises 10 pages.

4. Summary and Outlook

The present *Interim Quality Management and Evaluation Handbook* gives a detailed description of the quality assurance plan developed by *Auxilium*. It gives an overview of *Auxilium's* strategies in respect to the quality assurance of the project process, the project product and the project impact.

Therefore, guidelines on how to proceed on the process level have been established and summarized in the present manual. Furthermore, the quality indicator identification process in respect to the assessment of the *WISAR* products has been discussed in detail in Section 3.

In the upcoming stage of the assessment of the product quality, we will conduct our evaluation based on the quality indicators the project partners considered essential for the quality assessment of the *WISAR* products in our survey. For this purpose, *Auxilium* will now develop suitable tools for the evaluation of the *WISAR* products.