



LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME AS MECHANISM OF CHANGE AT NATIONAL LEVEL: CASE OF SLOVENIA

Klemen Širok

University of Primorska, Faculty for management Koper
klemen.sirok@fm-kp.si

Katarina Košmrlj

University of Primorska, Faculty for management Koper
katarina.kosmrlj@fm-kp.si

Abstract:

European Community funding programmes in the field of education and training present supranational policy instruments bringing change to various levels of social reality at the national level. In attempt to present the holistic view of their impact, the results of the Lifelong Learning Programme impact evaluation are presented that applied a mixed method research approach combining a focus group discussion method, interviews, content analysis and survey research. Results show that EC education and training funding programmes do bring change to national (system), mezzo (organisational) and micro (individual) level. Yet the impact seems to be different at observed levels as well as in the different target domains, being weakest at the system level. This opens the question of how much (economic) sense does it make to exploit EC programmes as a mechanisms of national policy goals implementation.

Key words: social change, EC programmes, impact, evaluation, education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Community education and training funding programmes have been present in the Slovene education system since 1999. With the Erasmus, Comenius, and other actions within Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes between years 2000–2006, more than 3600 teachers and mentors, 4000 students, 3000 pupils and 500 organisations participated in these programmes in Slovenia. The figures are increasing with the Lifelong Learning Programme (henceforth LLP) replacing aforementioned programmes. In 2006 the European Commission (henceforth EC) has proposed to the Parliament to integrate its various educational and training initiatives under a single umbrella, the 'Lifelong Learning Programme' “with a significant budget of nearly € 7 billion for period 2007 to 2013; the new programme replaces previous education, vocational training and e-Learning programs, which ended in 2006” (European Commission 2009, 1). Considering the scope of these programmes, question immediately arise of what kind of change (impact) such supranational policy instruments bring to various levels of social reality at the national level.

We answer this question by presenting the impact of the LLP – that presents the next generation EC action programme in the field of education and training in Slovenia. We present two aspects of change the LLP brought to Slovenia. First one is the scope of LLP implementation, followed by the presentation of results of impact evaluation carried out between December 2009 and February 2010 covering the LLP implementation in the period from January 1st 2007 through December 31st 2009.

We consider change as programme impact manifesting itself at various levels of social reality: macro (i.e. education system) level, mezzo (i.e. institutional) level and micro (i.e. individual level). Since it is impossible to observe change in all its manifesting forms, we observe the LLP impact across different pre-selected programme goal areas (i.e. substantive areas) determined by LLP programme goals and evaluation stakeholders. This article also fills up deficiencies in empirical research in this field. There are many available evaluation studies, but they predominately deal with either specific sub programmes (for instance Erasmus), or are plagued with considerable deficiencies that hinder proper conclusions on programme impacts (Širok and Petrič, forthcoming).

The analysis shows that LLP represents a supranational policy mechanism, bringing important change to different levels of social reality at the national level, predominantly at the individual level. First, data indicate high levels and high quality of LLP implementation in Slovenia. Second, LLP objectives are found to be relevant for and influential within the national policy priorities. However, more than unadulterated LLP impact, the primary policy stakeholders understand the '*LLP – national education policy*' relationship as extension of the EU education policies at the national system level. Third, the comprehension of where and how national education policy documents overlap and relate to the EU goals and priorities are being often left to the implementation level. At the institutional and individual level LLP importantly contributes to development of numerous competencies as well as to initiation of interpersonal cooperation, but predominantly at the lower cooperation intensity levels. The recognition of common cooperation goals and intentions among individual LLP end-users is also only weakly present or not present at all. No significant impact in the dimension of personal growth in individual end-users was possible to observe, while LLP was considered by the same respondents to contribute to individuals' employability.

The text is organized as follows. The next section provides a short overview of the scope of LLP implementation in Slovenia. Section three presents our research approach to measuring and explaining the LLP impact in Slovenia, as well as evaluation data sources. The fourth section presents the empirical evidence on the LLP impact in Slovenia. We conclude the paper by debating the role of supranational policy mechanism at the national level.

2. EC FUNDING PROGRAMME AS MECHANISM OF CHANGE AND LLP IMPLEMENTATION IN SLOVENIA

EC programmes are financial mechanisms introduced to trigger change in EU (educational) area, and so on national level, too. In this section, we present the main characteristics of these programmes and their implementation at national level in the case of Slovenia.

European Communities' Funding Programmes in the area of education and training are promoting changes agreed on supranational level to national levels by supporting the development of common policies and activities in the field of education and training. Lifelong Learning Programme (European Parliament and the Council, 2006) is the largest programme for Community action in the field of lifelong learning. Its general objective is "to contribute [...] through lifelong learning [...] to the development of the Community as an advanced knowledge-based society" (ibid., 48: art.1, sec. 2). Historically there are several purposes as to why European programmes came about and developed and consequently set education and training as a key element in uniting Europe and people in it: to unite the European area in a way to understand diversity of national education systems, to improve the labour market mobility, to introduce various novelties, mainly tools for transparency and raising quality into national education systems, to improve competitiveness in comparison with other continents and to enable interconnection, comprehension and understanding (Pepin, 2007).

In the second half of the 1980s first programmes from the field of education and training were implemented (Comett, Erasmus, Petra, Lingua, Eurotecnet etc.) designed with political aim to narrow the EU – USA gap in certain key areas. With the development of a common European market, focus shifted on the recognition of diplomas for professional purposes and later from emphasising harmonisation to emphasising mutual trust and comparison above all in the field of vocational education and training and tertiary education. Here Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and more-less all actions under their umbrella played important role. In the 1990s the concepts of knowledge-based society, lifelong learning and quality became ever more well-known. Since 2000 they have become the pillar of further development of the European Union (European Commission, 2011). In the same period the lifelong learning has gradually emerged as a principle. When European Union adopted a new economical, social and environmental strategy till 2010 (Lisbon Strategy) in March 2000, education and training have stepped in front of labour, in order to build the Europe of knowledge. In this period politicians attached great importance to the education and training system also with the aid of Socrates II and Leonardo da Vinci II programmes. In 2002, the European Parliament stressed that the content of education systems should not be determined exclusively by references towards economy and the labour market, indeed, it should rather develop awareness of one's citizenship, communication capability, intercultural awareness and social skills, paving the enriched focus and role of recent LLP programme.

Despite considering the EC funding programmes in the area of education and training as supranational mechanisms of introducing change at the national level, it has to be noted that they are and they have been predominately decentralised, meaning that implementation has

been left to the national - state level. European Commission and Council did not wish to harmonise Europe but rather tried to establish mutual trust and pave ways of identification of national systems. That is why certain actions remained in the domain of a particular country which has the possibility to implement an action in accordance with the needs of its education system because the European Commission plans and sets such actions only in certain basic aspects (common priorities, use of funds, etc.). In the new programming period (2007–2013), LLP programmes are also divided into decentralised and centralised activities, the difference being that the implementation of decentralised activities (mobility, partnerships, projects for transfer of innovation and study visits) is carried out by the National agencies (henceforth NA, in Slovenia CMEPIUS), whereas the Executing Agency in Brussels implements the centralised activities. Contrary to the past periods, as much as 80 % of programme resources are earmarked for decentralised activities.

The EC education programmes have been extensively present in Slovenia for over a decade, with their presence gradually growing, both in terms of programme end-user numbers as well as in financial terms. During period 2000–2006 more than 3600 teachers and mentors, 4000 students, 3000 pupils and 500 organisations participated in following European education and training funding programmes in Slovenia: Erasmus, Comenius, Grundtvig and other actions of Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes. For these purposes, the European Commission granted Slovenia € 22,754 million (Cmepius, 2007). Before mentioned programmes were consolidated in 2007 under LLP programme (European Parliament and the Council, 2006). The extent of the programme is continuing to grow in financial terms. Funds for LLP implementation in Slovenia rose from 6201 (thousand Euros) in 2007, over 6744 in 2008 to 7533 in 2009 (Flander 2010, p. 12). The level of financial realisation remains high from 2007 onwards, with a rate around 95 % (Flander 2010, p. 12), making it difficult to improve. The number of LLP participants grew as well. In table 1 we present the numbers of submitted and approved projects and the yearly increase of new applicants (end-user growth). The observed participation dynamic can be explained by several more or less specific factors, but the most evident reason for some decreasing applicant numbers lies, according to CMEPIUS management, in the changes of national rules of application that have been introduced within the LLP.

Figure 1: LLP implementation in Slovenia: applicants and end-users

NA yearly reports data	2007		2008			2009		
	applic.	signed	applic.	signed	yearly applic. increase rate	applic.	signed	yearly applic. increase rate
Comenius multilateral partnerships	184	76	134	47	-27%	113	56	-16%
Comenius bilateral partnerships	24	3	24	7	0%	15	4	-38%
Comenius in-service training	86	69	118	65	37%	200	56	69%
Comenius assistants	30	9	12	12	-60%	51	10	325%
Comenius host schools	52	11	42	9	-19%	30	11	-29%
Comenius preparatory activities	38	37	41	38	8%	23	22	-44%
Comenius Regio partnerships						9	4	
Erasmus mobility - EUC	28	28	29	29	4%	8	8	-72%
Erasmus mobility - students and HEI staff	1910	1469	2312	2041	21%	2454	2130	6%
Erasmus mobility - others						35	34	
Erasmus Preparatory Visits						5	3	
Erasmus intensive programmes	6	5	13	5	117%	13	8	0%
Erasmus Intensive Language Courses						6	4	

LdV Mobility	83	49	81	56	-2%	76	42	-6%
LdV Partnerships			42	13		35	13	-17%
LdV Transfer of innovation	33	7	38	7	15%	23	6	-39%
LdV Preparatory visits						20	15	
Grundtvig learning partnerships	36	9	48	10	33%	33	14	-31%
Grundtvig in-service training	29	11	45	19	55%	27	9	-40%
Grundtvig preparatory activities	3	3	6	4	100%	10	7	67%
Grundtvig assistants						3	1	
Grundtvig visits and exchanges						15	6	
Grundtvig workshops						6	1	
Grundtvig senior volunteering project						1	1	
Study visits	52	18	57	47	10%	49	32	-14%
visits								
organizing						5	5	
SUM		1804	2409	33,54%		2502	3,86%	

3. METHODOLOGY

Below we explain the data sources and methodology used in the empirical analysis that follows.

We consider change as programme impact manifesting itself at various levels of social reality: macro (i.e. education system) level, mezzo (i.e. institutional) level and micro (i.e. individual level). Evaluation study treats impact as long-term and sustainable changes introduced by a given intervention in the lives of beneficiaries, related to the specific objectives, an intervention, or to unanticipated changes caused by an intervention Blankenburg (1995) and Weinwright (2003) and classifies as ex-ante impact assessment evaluation (Rossi et al, 2004). Major difficulty of this evaluation type is to validly assess programme impact (ibid.), which also plague majority of other EC education programme evaluations (Širok & Petrič). In order to minimise this deficiency within constriction of our evaluation context, three research strategies were applied: mixed method research approach, quasi experimental design in survey research and data source triangulation.

First; mixed method research approach was selected in order to draw valid evaluation conclusions of programme impact at the macro level, combining a focus group discussion method (Krueger, 1994), interview (Foddy, 1994), content analysis (Babbie, 2007) and survey research. The envisaged use of various research methods is a necessity originating from the need to combine different data sources and the perspectives of LLP stakeholders.

Second; research strategy addressing the limitations of evaluation context was addressed by the quasi experimental design in survey research, applied in order to validly measure change on mezzo and micro level (micro impact of macro level policy programmes). Impact was operationalised as latent variable, partitioned on areas where latent, sustainable programme consequences are anticipated or reasonably expected. Such partitioning resulted in a list of theoretical concepts (Meehan, 1994) that grasp the impact domain (i.e. cooperation, tolerance, employability), assuming that the action has an impact. Impact scope was determined through ex-post quasi-experimental design, where the difference between Y_{1t1} in time after the action (Y_{1t1}) and Y_1 in time before the action (Y_{1t0}) was attributed to the participation of beneficiaries in action (X), controlling other factors (X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n). In our approach $Y_{1t1} - Y_{1t0}$ was measured by respondent's subjective evaluation of this difference. Additionally

measuring instrument was developed in such way that the programme effects cannot be attributed to the (non)participation in action (X), yet X can be treated as an intensity of involvement/participation in an action. Impact was measured as a mean value of a variable measuring a specific impact domain, either as a difference between two states or the subjective evaluation of the difference. In survey the five level bipolar rating scales were utilised. The average scores below 3 are interpreted as a negative impact, values around 4 and more as a positive impact and values around 3 as no impact (i.e. impact absence) (Širok in Petrič, forthcoming).

Since the political programme ambitions outweigh the research abilities and restrictions of evaluation context, evaluation applied addition strategies to isolate/narrow the LLP impact domains of evaluation interest. LLP and its subprogrammes all together follow more than 30 programme goals. Since it is impossible to observe change in all its manifesting forms, we observed the LLP impact across different pre-selected programme goal areas (i.e. substantive areas) determined by LLP programme goals and evaluation stakeholders, following the principle of utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 1996) in the survey phase. Primary evaluation users were thus actively integrated in the development and testing phases of the survey questionnaire. To this end, the NA established a working group consisting of members of the contracting authority and evaluators in order to determine the fundamental premises of the ongoing evaluation. First, the structure of programme goals was determined upon the LLP decision (European Parliament and the Council, 2006). Next, the NA coordinators were asked to list up to five goals that captured the essence of every evaluated sub-programme/action within the LLP programme. In the next stage, selected goals were examined and anchored to appropriate sociological concepts. Selected concepts were then reviewed by the NA coordinators, who added points and areas of interest such as customer satisfaction and additional contextual variables. Lastly, the 'action-impact domain-measurement level' grid was formed, integrating the appropriate LLP impact domain (i.e. employability) with the corresponding programme action (i.e., Leonardo da Vinci mobility projects) and measurement level (individual or organisational). The actual impact of the LLP on programme end-users has been measured both at the organizational (*mezzo*) level and at the individual (*micro*) level within the following LLP goal areas: competence, cooperation, networking, and the European dimension. At the individual level, the impact in the area of employability and personal growth has been additionally assessed, as has tolerance at the institutional level. Since each study should take into account as many relevant control variables as possible, a careful selection of relevant control variables was guided by a strong theoretical understanding of a particular impact domain in cooperation with primary evaluation users.

Use of various data sources and associated research methods enabled both data and method triangulation and thus the coverage of relevant stakeholder perspectives, also providing evaluation findings validity. Various data sources were used in order to achieve data triangulation: documentary sources including reports, accounting data, focus group discussion, interview transcripts and raw survey data. Two focus groups were organised: one with relevant policy makers in the field of education (9 participants) and one with NA management (3 participants). Additionally, 2 interviews were conducted with one representative of each aforementioned target groups. Data sources and evaluation findings thus reflect perspectives of the following stakeholder groups: LLP end-users at individual and institutional levels, relevant policy makers in the fields of education and training, NA management and LLP sub-programme/action coordinators.

Survey was carried out as web survey. The survey was pilot tested in May 2009 and then officially carried out in the period December 2009 – February 2010. All final beneficiaries of evaluated actions during the 2006–2009 period were targeted and invited to participate in the survey. Their e-mail addresses were drawn from the NA records. Target respondents in organizations were programme coordinators. Managers/leaders were not chosen in order to avoid pro-organizational bias. In total, 123 questionnaires were returned for 8 sub-programmes based on organizational participation, representing 36,5 % response rate. Target respondents in individuals' survey were all individuals who participated in LLP programmes of individual mobility. In total, 658 individual questionnaires were returned for 9 sub-programmes, representing 17,4 % response rate.

4. RESULTS

Below we present our empirical analysis. As mentioned, it consists of two parts – the first presents the LLP impact at the macro level on the basis of qualitative data. The second part presents the LLP impact at mezzo and micro level by presenting the survey data. Macro – system impact of LLP in Slovenia can be characterised as the transfer of EU guidelines to the national level, missing on complementarity, coherency and instructive moment. Thus the implementation is primarily guided by bottom up approach, as well as it is the LLP impact. The findings of mezzo and micro level impact confirm and complement the macro level findings, showing the LLP impact in observed impact domains, with the exception of personal growth.

4.1. LLP impact on national education policy and system

Considering 'LLP – national education policy' relationship, the relevance of LLP objectives to national priorities is evident, but not as unadulterated LLP impact, but rather as the extended impact of EU education policies at the national (system) level. Relevant policy makers within Slovenian education system expressed relatively coherent perceptions that LLP objectives are relevant for and influential within the national policy priorities. But more than the unadulterated LLP impact, the primary policy stakeholders understand the 'LLP – national education policy' relationship as the extended impact of the EU education policies. The mechanisms and results of the internationalisation and Europeanization processes imply the context of various national priorities, thus implementing it through the same process. When Slovenia joined the EU, the establishment of national priorities was predominantly stimulated and shaped by EU goals and priorities, despite the principle of subsidiarity. This subsequently led to greater awareness and recognition of the importance of having national priorities, which in turn caused the gradual interweavement of national, and programme (Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, LLP) goals and priorities throughout the Slovenian education system. Erasmus goals and priorities are, for instance, fairly close to the goals followed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (Resolution on the National Programme of Higher Education, Republic of Slovenia, 2007–2010) due to the Bologna process.

Relation of LLP to other programmes in education and training shows a high degree of overlapping, but it misses out on complementarity. Relevant policy makers and NA focus group as well as documentary sources show that LLP overlaps but does not complement other national and international programmes, although the straightforward and unequivocal added value is difficult to demonstrate due to the already mentioned characteristics of LLP goals described previously. LLP does complement national master programmes (Strategija vseživljenjskosti učenja v Sloveniji, Resolution on National Programme of Higher Education

Republic of Slovenia 2007–2010). These policy documents are namely broad enough to completely overlap with LLP (Strategija vseživljenjskosti učenja v Sloveniji) or leave it completely open to interpretation. When considering programmes as financial mechanisms, programmes tend to run separately, although certain stakeholders tend to be aware of opportunities of subject complementarity. This complementarity is hindered by administrative obstacles, which became evident when trying to complement LLP with national rules on public spending and rules on the European Cohesion Fund. Therefore, the complementarity among programmes as financial mechanisms is rarely visible (for instance Erasmus grant and National scholarship scheme).

Both aspects of LLP complementarity to the national education system show lack of systematic and coherent policy approach, which in turn leads to situations where primary stakeholders are left on their own to search for opportunities and to achieve their own goals. LLP goals indirectly support national goals, yet LLP primary stakeholders are facing the difficulties when trying to follow them as guidelines since they are too broad, too general and are not prioritized, making them everything but impossible to attain. LLP goals indirectly support national goals (Strategija vseživljenjskosti učenja v Sloveniji, Resolution on National Programme of Higher Education Republic of Slovenia 2007–2010). Despite goal coherence at EU and at the national level, the empirical results showed that all LLP primary stakeholders are facing the same difficulty when trying to follow LLP aims as guidelines. The LLP goals and priorities are too broad, too general and are not prioritized, making them everything but impossible to attain. As one focus group member said: 'Everything we found to be important for us to achieve, we also soon found within (EU) priorities'. Consequently, *lifelong learning* is considered as commonly accepted and often misused term, being uncritically transferred from EU to national priorities and actually not being reflected or implemented at all in reality.

4.2. LLP impact on end-users

We observe four different *competencies* dimensions: individual general competencies (such as research abilities, team work, communication, etc.), independent use of knowledge, general understanding, and developmental orientation. At the institutional level, on average, the sub-programmes and actions exhibit comparably high positive impact (average score ranging from 4,1 to 4,3) on development of (1) cultural diversity and multiculturalism, (2) understanding of other cultures and their customs, (3) ability to work in international environment, and (4) project leadership, while competencies on which LLP has the weakest impact (average score ranging from 3,2 to 3,3) are (1) learning how to learn, (2) competencies to work with socially disadvantaged groups (lower social classes) or different ethnic backgrounds, (3) cooperation with other stakeholders in the educational process, and (4) ability to read texts in other European languages. Individuals, on the other hand, perceive high positive impact (average score ranging from 3,9 to 4,3) on what we can call communication and internationalization competencies: (1) speaking European languages, (2) listening of European languages, and (3) understanding of other cultures and their customs. The weakest impact (average scores 2,4 and 2,7) at the individual level is found at (1) the entrepreneurship competencies, and (2) project management. On average positive impact on competencies is higher on institutional level and weak impact is lower. Individuals, it seems, tend to report less differences in impact on competencies. The measured impact of LLP on competencies can be partially compared to the impact of preceding programmes - Leonardo da Vinci II and Socrates II programmes (Širok et al, 2007).

When observing the impact on the LLP goal of *networking*, the concept of social capital (Putnam, 2000) has been applied. At the institutional level, the following impact aspects of sub-programme have been measured. Bridging social capital was measured through the observation of institutional utilisation of information sources and tightness of its affiliation to the community. Expansion of social network size and structure was also assessed. At the institutional level, we observe LLP having an impact on institutional bridging social capital. The LLP also contributed to expansion of the end-users social network within Slovenia. On average, the organizations that take part in LLP have increased their network by a little less than 16 organizations within Slovenia and a little less than 15 organizations abroad. Numbers vary more in national area; however, important information is that all participating institutions have established contact with at least one organization nationally and at least two organizations internationally. The increase in network size is much less when the membership in international (transnational) organizations is considered. On average, the surveyed organizations entered only 2 new organizations in the past year. On the other hand, one observes the absence of LLP impact on networking at the local level (average score 2,98). Here again, caution should be taken when interpreting the results. High variability in social network increases presumably relates to differences in organization size. At the individual level, the relatively weak impact of LLP on bridging social capital is also evident (average score 3,27). As a result of LLP participation, individuals on average increase their social network by 2.7 people. Statistically significant differences are observed between end-users of different sub-programmes/actions for both social capital and social network increase. This indicates that sub-programmes/actions differ in their impact in networking domain. Individual end-users do not report significant impact of LLP on networking.

LLP impact on domain of *European dimension* has been observed on following aspects: presence of supranational (European) identity, recognition of common European values, frequency of behaviours and activities that indicate presence of European identity; and recognition and consciousness of opportunities and challenges within/for EU. Analysis shows that LLP significantly contributes to end-users' European dimension. This is reflected in direct perception of a European identity, as well as in recognition of common European values, behaviours that indicate the existence of supranational identity and awareness of opportunities and challenges within EU (average score 3,55). For 65–70 % of individual end-users, LLP contributed to the development of a European identity. Taking part in LLP enabled almost 85 % of individual end-users to apprehend common European values and they started, on average, more than 2 new activities that indicated supranational, i.e., European, identity. For now, there are no indications that different sub-programmes/actions exert different impacts on the European dimension domain. The current incidence of supranational organizational identity (Puusa, 2006) is rather low – present in less than 10 % of participants included in the LLP projects focused on institutions. However, 80 % of those organizations perceive a positive impact of LLP on change in their outer organizational identity in direction of supranational identity. Considering LLP as a whole, it can be argued that organizations do change their internal European identity (average score 3,67). Similar to its effects on external identity, taking part in LLP also exerts impacts on organizational inner identity (average score 3,55). An identical average value is found by the dimension 'recognition of common values of European education area'.

The impact of LLP *tolerance* goals within organizations has been measured on the following tolerance dimensions: tolerance to disagreement, tolerance to nonconformists, tolerance as academic freedom and lifestyle tolerance (McClosky & Brill, 1983). Results show a positive LLP impact on increased tolerance to disagreement and increase of tolerance as academic

freedom. On the other hand, there is no firm evidence for an LLP impact on social tolerance (i.e., tolerance to nonconformists and lifestyle tolerance). There are statistically significant differences in impact of different subprogrammes; Leonardo da Vinci partnerships and Leonardo da Vinci innovation transfer reporting the weakest impact.

The LLP impact on the *employability* domain was measured at the level of individual end-users with focus on: (1) an individual's capability to gain first/new employment; (2) the capability of finding a fulfilling job (i.e., one that enables realisation of individual's potentials); (3) employability competence (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Considering LLP as a whole, the data can be interpreted as showing a weak positive impact on increased employability. LLP namely contributes to increased employability at all three employability aspects. More considerable impact has been detected in the domain of employability competences. Statistically significant differences exist between impacts of different subprogrammes with Erasmus individual mobility reporting the strongest, and Study visits reporting the weakest impact.

We measured LLP impact on *personal growth* considering aspects of personal growth according to Jones and Crandall (1986): (1) autonomy, (2) self-acceptance and self-esteem, (3) acceptance of emotions and freedom of expression of emotions; (4) trust and responsibility in interpersonal relationships, (5) purpose in life. Since no statistically significant differences were found between sub-programmes and since the average scale value is near 3, we can conclude that at the moment we have no firm evidence for LLP having any impact in the personal growth domain.

The LPP goal of *cooperation* has been evaluated on following sub dimensions: (1) recognition of common goals and intentions that can be accomplished through cooperation; (2) a cooperative stand, as willingness of individuals to cooperate with other social actors; (3) actual cooperation, monitored through following cooperation development stages: initial phase of establishment of communication channels; cooperation phase of different intensity levels; phase of common cooperation goals establishment (Tuomela, 2000).

At the level of individual end-users analysis established that LLP has an important impact on initiation of interpersonal cooperation, but predominantly at the lower, less intensive cooperation levels. We also found that the recognition of common cooperation goals and intentions among individual LLP end-users is only weakly present or is not present at all. Statistically significant differences in impact to competence development can be found within group of competences on which LLP has the weakest impact. Average score 2.61 shows absence of impact or even negative impact of LLP on recognition of common cooperation goals and intentions. This does not pose a solid foundation for cooperation since it represents the constitutive first step in cooperation. On the other hand, one recognises a high willingness of individual end-users to cooperate (high average cooperation willingness of 4.24). Regarding the aspect of cooperation development (i.e. cooperation intensity and depth), less developed cooperation forms prevail (establishment of first communication contacts, information exchange without common cooperation goals). More developed forms of cooperation are otherwise present, but to a much lesser extent. This is also expressed throughout the relatively weak attainment and accomplishment of common cooperation goals (average score 3.5). A considerable number of cooperation attempts have not been successful. The results are similar on institutional level. The number of cooperation cases decreases with increasing quality and intensity of the cooperation relationship. From an average of 6.75 established contacts, only 4 cooperation cases developed to regular information exchange. In

3.6 cases, on average, the cooperation evolved to the level of preparing a new project and only in 1.2 cases did the cooperation reach sustainable cooperation beyond the existing project. In order to confirm the positive LLP impact, we have to point to the fact that all organizations established at least one contact on all observed cooperation levels. At the cross-border cooperation, a considerable number of unsuccessful cooperation attempts exist. The scope of impact within all observed cooperation levels (contact establishment, information exchange, preparation of new projects and cooperation beyond existing project) statistically significantly varies among LLP sub-programmes and actions. A high dispersion of survey results can be observed, which might be assigned to rather substantial differences in cooperation between large and small organizations (detailed analysis of variance still needs to be carried out).

According to opinions of relevant policy makers and NA focus group LLP does promote cooperation between participating countries. This is taking place both at the secondary and tertiary education levels, although the intensity is much greater in higher education due to the corresponding goals of LLP and the Bologna process. All changes in higher education follow the framework of the Bologna process and the LLP programme is – directly or indirectly – an EC tool for implementing the Bologna process, creating common guidelines, activities and space fostering cooperation. LLP thus intensified cooperation to greater extent at other education levels and among other target groups (for instance, adult learners). LLP, as such, is a cooperation mechanism and promotes cooperation at the same time. Thus, one can consider the cooperation between participating countries as the key added value of LLP. Comparing LLP to similar (in its function) financial mechanisms, LLP is considered by relevant stakeholders as being less complicated and more efficient. On the other hand, LLP is still facing the problem of particularism as an excessive focus on individual programme end-user's benefits.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we describe different aspects of changes brought by EC programmes on the case of Slovenia. Impact evaluation of funding programmes in education and training, LLP shows that these programmes introduce change to all levels of social reality: national (system) level, mezzo (organisational) level and micro (individual) level. Yet the change seems to be different at observed levels as well as in the different observed (target) domains. The weakest impact seems to be present at the system level.

Among many questions that arise, we chose one to conclude with: are these and/or similar instruments sufficiently utilised as the change agents within national education system. How much (economic) sense does it make to exploit LLP and similar EC programmes as a mechanisms of national policy goals implementation? Because of the established influences and impacts which funding programmes in education and training have, one will soon have to consider a tighter integration of the mentioned mechanisms into national policies in the field of education and training. This seems reasonable also because, in the case of decentralised actions, the players at the national level can search for and use synergetic impacts of funding programmes in education and training. But to do so, clear national policy priorities seem to be a necessary precondition.

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