

## PEER-COACHING SUMMARY REPORT

### The *peer-coaching* within the context of the SUSTAIN project

Within the context of the SUSTAIN project the **peer coaching** was planned as *part of the test-implementation process* which was purposed to facilitate the process of adaptation of the suggested lesson plans for different educational and cultural contexts. It was expected also that it will provide valuable feedback from the implementing teachers about the applicability of the lesson plans and will contribute to the good practices selection (ref. SUSTAIN project application, description of deliverable 18).

Furthermore, the peer-coaching was considered as a way to promote the online networking and as a stimulus for creating collaborative culture and collegiality among teachers.

At the time of the setting up of the project application the peer-coaching was considered mainly as communication between colleagues from different countries. It was foreseen as a process which will contribute to the wider applicability of the SUSTAIN lesson plans in European context as it will allow considering cross-cultural matters or solving practical issues that may occur as a result of differences between curricula or educational practices in the partner countries.

In the process of project implementation it became clear that the peer-coaching is a useful instrument for collaboration between the teachers within one and the same country too, as they work in different contexts and exchange of experience supports advancement of their professional performance and contributes to improvement of the quality of the education. Furthermore, the peer-coaching was important part of the collaboration between the local experts and the implementing teachers.

However, the purpose of the present summary report is to give an outline of the **international peer-coaching** implemented within the frames of the SUSTAIN project.

### The peer-coaching *process*

The peer-coaching was implemented via **synchronous** (video-conferencing or live meetings) and **a-synchronous** methods (through the SUSTAIN Database Tool for Users' Comments or through e-mail).

Some peer-coaching sessions were conducted **before the implementation** of activities with students – with the aim to clarify some aspects of the suggested lesson plans, to discuss with the author of the lesson details of the activities which gather teachers' attention or to comment possible adaptations.

Other peer-coaching sessions were conducted **after implementation** – to communicate the steps of the implementation process, the impact of the activities on students, the adaptations made on the lesson plan in order to match the students profile and needs, to emphasise important aspects of the activities, to suggest additional materials used during the implementation and, in some cases, to make suggestions for the lesson plan's improvement.

## The peer-coaching *methods*

### **Video conference**

Videoconferences were realized via Skype or other programs allowing on-line communication. In some cases the videoconferences were video-recorded. Such records can be accessed at: <http://conf.dogakoleji.com>. The videoconference allowed direct communication between the two sides (author and implementer) and helped for the understanding of the educational and cultural contexts. Very often the participants in the videoconferences were not only the author of the lesson plan and the teacher-implementer, but also project expert/s or foreign language teacher who acted as translator or facilitator of the communication.

The challenges of this form of peer-coaching were:

- the requirement of foreign language competences or participation of translator/s;
- the time-coordination which requires preliminary communication for finding the most suitable time for both sides;
- necessity of preliminary planning and drafting a basic scenario of the videoconference, as some important questions might be forgotten during the conversation;
- occasional technical difficulties, due to low internet speed, computer settings, etc.

### **Live meetings**

The international live meetings which allowed implementation of peer-coaching took place at the 4<sup>th</sup> Project meeting in Targoviste (Romania) in March 2013, at the ITTC in Istanbul (Turkey) in June 2013 and at the SUSTAIN Biennale in Istanbul (Turkey) in November 2013.

*During the 4<sup>th</sup> Project meeting in Targoviste* the Romanian hosts from Valahia University invited local teachers active in the SUSTAIN project to join a session of the meeting and to share their experience from the test-implementation with the project experts. Teachers gave their feedback about particular lessons which they implemented and shared with the international experts suggestions for new activities or adaptations of lesson plans and for possible follow up activities.

*During the ITTC in Istanbul* was organised a special feedback session and discussion. As part of the pre-course activities, all ITTC participants had to review 3 lesson plans from the SUSTAIN online database and to share their comments. Some of the participants in the ITTC have been part of the project implementation as authors of lesson plans and/or test-implementers. They had the opportunity to share their opinion about particular lesson plans with details about the strong points and weak points, or to tell in detail about the changes and adaptations they implemented. The project experts also took part in this session and had the opportunity to give their recommendations to the teachers from all project countries.

Live peer-coaching also took part during the implementation and lesson observation at the *SUSTAIN Biennial in Turkey* in November 2013 which was attended by teachers who presented outcomes of their work with children and pupils on the topics of sustainable development.

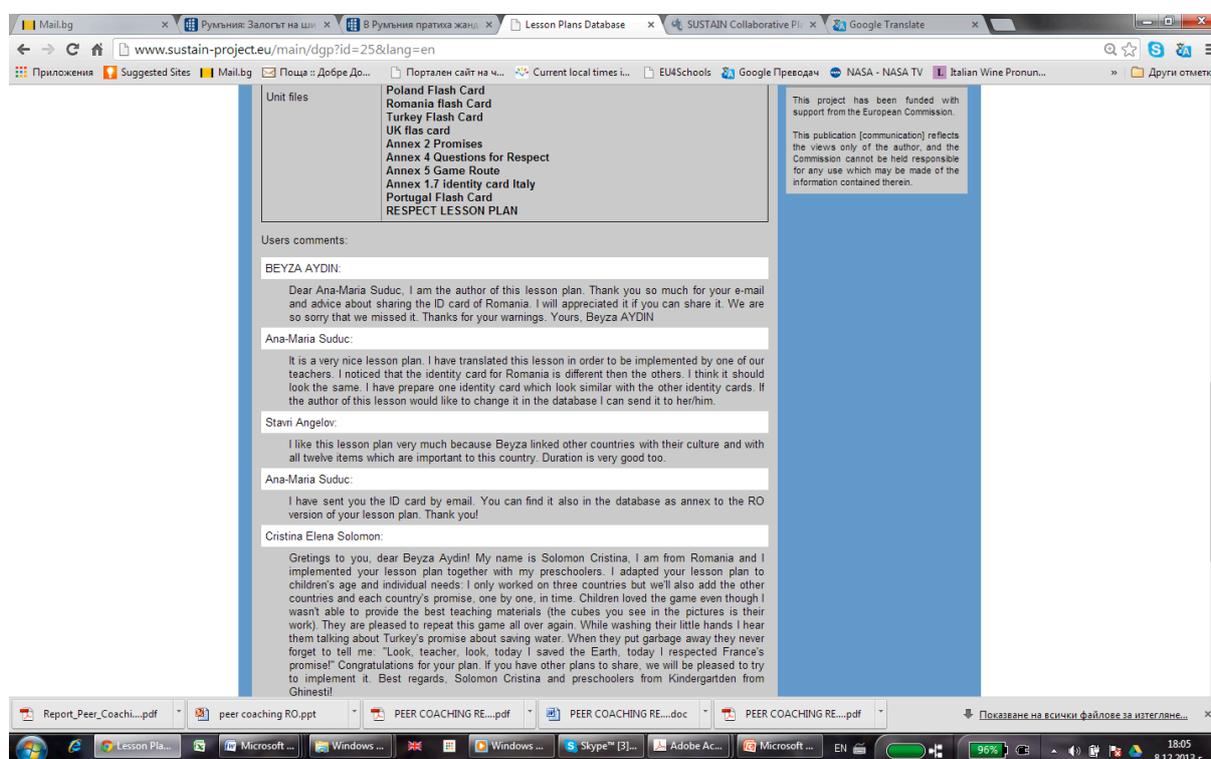
The challenges of this form of peer-coaching were:

- the limited occasions for such meetings, the implementation of which requires substantial financing;
- the requirement of foreign language competences to the participants.

## SUSTAIN Database Tool for Users' Comments

The availability of the Users' Comments Tool integrated within the SUSTAIN lesson plan database proved to be very useful for collecting implementers' feedback about the particular lesson plans. In many cases the postings are short and have the aim to encourage the author rather than to provide detailed feedback or collegial advice. Although these comments are supporting the creative teachers and are building their confidence, we did not consider all postings as peer-coaching.

As peer-coaching were considered those comments in which teachers shared their experience from the implementation, explained how they modified or adopted the lesson to fit the age of their students or the context in their school or country, shared the impact of the lesson on the students, their reaction or feedback, as well as comments posted by experts or teachers who expressed opinion which was enriching the original concept of the lesson plan.



As instrument, the Database Tool for Users' Comments allowed indirect communication between the author of the lesson plan and the implementing teacher/s and promoted the use of the SUSTAIN lesson plan database, which may continue after the end of the project.

Although similar communication can be implemented by e-mails exchange between the author and the implementer, the use of the tool was beneficial for much wider range of teachers-implementers, as it was providing indications on how easy or difficult the implementation of the lesson plan might be, for which occasions it could be useful, hints for enrichments or simplifications with respect to different groups of learners, etc.

Not the least, a benefit of the use of this tool is also the opportunity for the implementers to post a comment in their own language. Although this was creating difficulties for immediate understanding of the comment, with the use of on-line translation applications which are

now available, it allows feedback also on behalf of teachers who do not have sufficient foreign language knowledge to allow them more formal or extended communication.

The challenges of this form of peer-coaching were:

- its efficiency depends a lot of the regularity with which the SUSTAIN lesson plan database is visited;
- not all implementers share their opinion, so some lesson plans lack comments which may create impression that they were not preferred due to some deficiencies;
- comments in national languages require conditional use of an on-line translation tool.

### **Communication through e-mail**

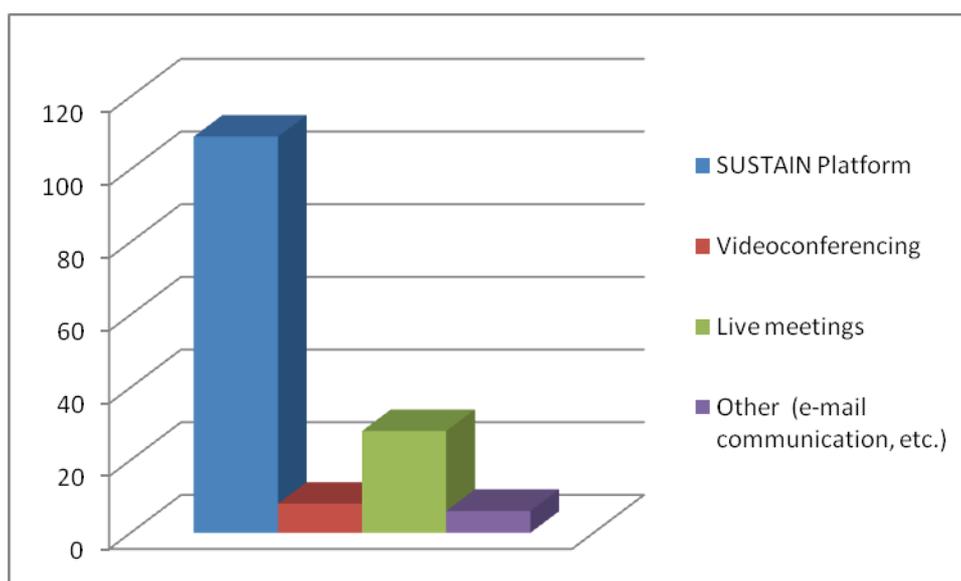
The e-mail addresses of the registered users of the SUSTAIN platform are available to the other registered users and this allows direct correspondence between them if and when there is an interest or occasion for this. Teachers involved in the project implementation could request also assistance from the project experts in case they wanted to get in touch with a particular colleague from another country. Using the e-mail communication is much faster and more efficient, and allows also confidentiality of the correspondence.

The challenges of this form of peer-coaching were:

- the requirement of foreign language competences of the communicators – not only oral, but also written;
- lack of possibility for tracking the e-mail communication between the teachers.

### **The impact of the peer-coaching**

Statistically the channel used **most often** by the project participants for peer-coaching was the *SUSTAIN Database Tool for Users' Comments*, the benefits of which have been explained above. Some peer-coaching sessions were conducted by two different channels (e.g. by SUSTAIN Database Users' Comments Tool and by live meeting or other).



*Graphic representation of the frequency of the usage of different peer-coaching channels*

The channel with the **most sustainable impact** is the *live communication*, which provides floor for extended exchange of information that exceeds the limits of a single lesson plan and provides platform for long-term cooperation between colleagues from different countries.

The *videoconferencing* is a low-cost alternative of the live communication which has good perspectives to gain popularity. While face-to-face meeting can occur without preparation and still to be very successful, the videoconferencing requires extended preparation and pre-established contacts.

In spite of the difficulties and hindrances due to the lack of foreign language competences and the time-consuming preparation, the videoconferencing has good potential, since technologies nowadays are widely available. The videoconferencing also allows facilitation and/or involvement of translator. It worth mentioning also that the experience gained during the successful implementation of video-conference sessions builds the confidence of the participants and stimulates them to use this method of peer communication also in the future.

## The benefits of the peer-coaching

Foreseen mainly as activities intended to support and facilitate the test-implementation process, the peer-coaching had more complex impact on the SUSTAIN project implementers. Teachers reported that most of the lesson plans were well explained and enough detailed to be understood and implemented without additional explanations from the proposer. This limited the necessity to seek peer-coaching prior to the implementation. On the other hand, many teachers got inspired to communicate the outcomes of their work after the implementation, to share the impact of the activities on students, the adaptations of the lesson plan, which they made in order to match the students profile and needs, etc. As a result, the peer-coaching sessions had positive impact on the lesson plan authors, as well as on the implementers.

### The benefits for the peer-coaching for the implementer teachers:

- helped them to clarify some aspects related to the proposed activities;
- allowed them to coordinate (or share) some changes and modifications;
- the peer-coaching conducted through the Database Users' Comments Tool helped other teachers to see how the lesson plans were adapted and implemented in different contexts.

### The impact on the lesson plans' authors:

- showed them that their work is appreciated by teachers from other countries and proved that it is transferable in other contexts and to other target groups;
- helped them to improve the lesson plans, to enrich the applicable resources and, in some cases, to get a new perspective on their own work.

All groups of teachers benefited by the peer-coaching as it helped for deeper understanding of the educational and cultural contexts. It stimulated creation of new working relationships across borders and also within the same school (when translation or other support was needed). Due to the active sharing and exchange of experience were inspired and planned new teaching activities. Furthermore, a basis for further international collaboration between schools and teachers was build.