

Intellectual output 3

Improving missing competencies through digital open badge-driven learning

Final report

by Häme University of Applied science (HAMK)

Introduction

The SOSTRA project was started by partners from five countries (Finland, Spain, Italy, Poland and Romania) with the main objective of creating an innovative way to intertwine digital badge-driven learning approaches and competence-based education into soft skills development in the field of European adult education. Intellectual output 3 (IO3) intertwined the results of IO2 furthermore covering national priorities through digital and competence-based soft skills development and validation. A digital open badge-driven learning process was created to introduce the target groups with new ways to recognize prior skills and competence as well as generating a unique way to gain new skills and knowledge.

The target groups of the project were adult educators, HR staff in educational organizations, managers in educational organizations, in-company trainers and policy makers on local, regional, national and European level.

Methodology and Objectives

To achieve the objectives of the SOSTRA Project, 3 Intellectual Outputs had been established in the beginning of the project;

- IO1 Recognizing the soft skills needs. Studies / analysis – Data collection / analysis
- IO2 Identified 15 key soft skills
- IO3 Improving missing competencies through digital open badge-driven learning.

IO3 included two objectives; To develop an online self-reflective test for assessing soft skills and to co-create an open badge-driven learning process to improve missing soft skills. Furthermore, to reach the objectives, IO3 was divided into the following tasks:

1. Making the self-reflective test as a part of the portal
2. Creation of digital badges with translations
3. Creating multimodal material with translations
4. Designing the portal page
5. Publishing the portal and guidelines
6. Piloting the process
7. Evaluation and improvements
8. finalizing the process

This report collects the results obtained from the Intellectual Output 3, which uses the 15 most valued soft skills recognized in IO2 as the base for the self-reflective test and the creation of soft skills badges.

A three-day Learning, Teaching and Training Activity was held during October 2019 in Cordoba Spain, which focused on the principles and practices of the badging system and joint activities on five different soft skills.

Comparative results and conclusions

Intellectual Output 3, which dug deeper to the 15 soft skill identified, creating a self-reflective test, digital badges and multimodal materials including podcasts for each skill.

During IO3 Open Badge Factory (OBF) was used for validating and accrediting competencies. The project team created a specific format for badges and illustrated these with graphic design. Landing pages were created (Google site) for each country. Teaching materials and training process methodologies were integrated to the landing pages. The project developed 15 podcasts for each soft skill and all of them were recorded into project languages as well. Project outputs were adapted to local needs and contexts including translations in six languages. The technical solutions were made applicable for average users which was a conscious criterion to ensure the sustainability of the project results.

As the final step of the project the partners piloted the new digital learning process. The piloting was conducted in each partner organization between January and June of 2020 using various methods that included hosting training days, visiting VET organizations, advertising digitally or hosting webinars using wide-ranging digital learning platforms in six languages. HAMK also piloted the English badges with a group of 54 Slovenian VET teachers.

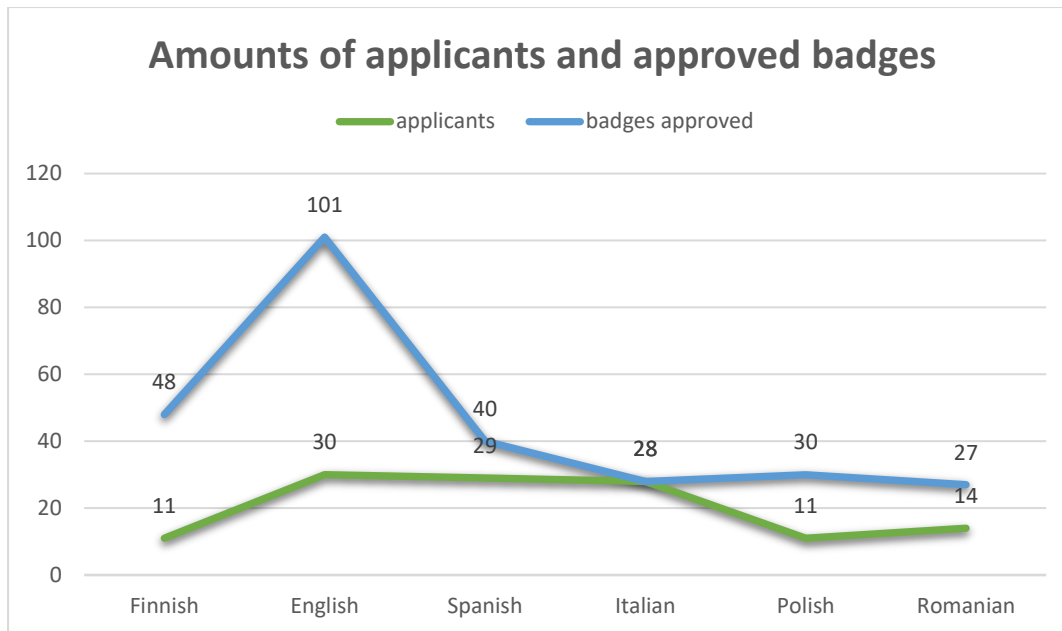
The partner organizations either selected specific soft skills for the piloting participants to carry out or let participants choose the soft skills they found most important for themselves. The pilots attracted 123 participants from various European countries and 274 badges were approved and issued around Europe. The applicants included adult educators in addition to some researchers, social workers and training managers. Two out of the seven piloting processes were held in person, the rest were held online.

Feedback collected from participants was divided into two categories; Feedback related to learning and teaching situations and feedback related to the badge application process.

All piloting feedback included a large amount of positive feedback related to learning and teaching situations. All participants felt that soft skills were important skills for educators and used in everyday teaching situations and appreciated the explanation of the SOSTRA Teaching-Learning process in the beginning of the sessions. Participants felt that the project was innovative and appreciated the involvement of many countries and felt that it could be linked to EQF levels.

There were concerns regarding the official recognition of the badges and the evaluation process which felt that it left a lot of discretion to the corrector. The participants also felt that there could be more levels to these skills, rather than basic achievement non-achievement levels. Questions about the objectivity of the self-evaluation were also raised.

There was some variation when looking at the feedback from the online piloting processes. Some participants felt that they could benefit from more interactions and the sharing of experiences when others felt the training was planned out well and kept their interest through the long online training day.



As seen in Graph 1. the highest number of badges was issued in English. This was due to some of the partners applying for badges as part of the LTT activity as well as HAMK hosting on-line piloting event for 54 Slovakian vocational teachers.

When gathering feedback relating to the application of badges in most countries the participants felt the process was straightforward and didn't have any problem although a few groups reported having difficulty with reporting especially with a certain non-responding link. This then led to the conclusion that the documentation needs to be instructed well. It was also concluded that the reporting system of accepted badges could be better in Open Badge Factor.

One group pointed out that some soft skills involved others in their perspective and it was hard to differentiate skills such as inclusion, diversity and respect for others when another one requested more extensive criteria for awarding badges.