

Research Application Summary

Lessons learned from the participative process for the selection of the AgriSCALE project logo

Sassi, M.,¹ Palacios, R.,¹ Thakare, H.,¹ Laitinen, E.,² Somersalo, V.,² Villaman, N.,³ Kalibwani, R.,⁴ Kiguli, C.,⁴ Mugumya, N.,⁴ Okello, D.,⁵ Akite, I.,⁶ Syampaku, E.,⁷ Kiwanuka-Lubinda, R. N.⁸ & Chimai, B.⁸

¹University of Pavia, Strada Nuova 65, Pavia, Lombardia, Italy

²Häme University of Applied Sciences, P.O. Box 225, 13101 Hämeenlinna, Finland

³Aalto University, Post Box 11000 FI-00076 Aalto, Finland

⁴Bishop Stuart University, P.O. Box 9 Mbarara, Uganda

⁵Egerton University, P.O. Box 536 - 20115, Egerton, Njoro, Kenya

⁶Gulu University, P.O. Box 166, Gulu, Uganda

⁷Mulungushi University, P.O. Box 80415, Kabwe, Zambia

⁸University of Zambia, P.O. Box 32379, Lusaka, Zambia

*Corresponding author: maria.sassi@unipv.it

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to describe the process, findings, and lessons learned from the logo competition implemented by the project AgriSCALE to promote the replicability of this practice as a mechanism for the enhancement of project visibility. The project is a joint initiative co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union for creating a new entrepreneurship learning ecosystem in Sub-Saharan Africa by implementing problem-based learning methods in Food and Agribusiness programmes in higher education institutions. The project is a collaboration of six African and three European Universities. The logo competition was used in the context of the project as a strategy for promoting awareness and dissemination of the project scope and the problem-based learning approach among university students and staff. The study uses a narrative analysis approach based on the feedback survey and focus group discussions submitted to the representatives of partner universities implementing this activity in their institutions. The paper presents the experience of partners in the execution of a logo competition, which resulted in better collaboration and understanding of the project concept among stakeholders. Furthermore, it highlights the lessons learned and recommendations that could guide similar projects to enhance sensitization among students and staff, which are prerequisites for successfully implementing a capacity-building project. To the best of the knowledge of the authors, this is the first kind of study to explore the use of a logo competition as an activity for the dissemination and communication of the project.

Keywords: Erasmus+, European project, Logo selection, project visibility

Résumé

Le but de l'étude est de décrire le processus, les résultats et les leçons tirées du concours de logo mis en œuvre par le projet AgriSCALE pour promouvoir la répliquabilité de cette pratique en tant que mécanisme d'amélioration de la visibilité du projet. Le projet est une initiative

conjointe cofinancée par le programme Erasmus + de l'Union européenne pour créer un nouvel écosystème d'apprentissage de l'entrepreneuriat en Afrique subsaharienne en mettant en œuvre des méthodes d'apprentissage par problèmes dans les programmes alimentaires et agroalimentaires des établissements d'enseignement supérieur. Le projet est une collaboration de six universités africaines et de trois universités européennes. Le concours de logos a été utilisé dans le cadre du projet comme stratégie de sensibilisation et de diffusion de la portée du projet et de l'approche d'apprentissage par problèmes parmi les étudiants et le personnel universitaires. L'étude utilise une approche d'analyse narrative basée sur l'enquête de rétroaction et les discussions de groupe soumises aux représentants des universités partenaires mettant en œuvre cette activité dans leurs établissements. L'article présente l'expérience des partenaires dans l'exécution d'un concours de logo, qui a abouti à une meilleure collaboration et compréhension du concept du projet parmi les parties prenantes. En outre, il met en évidence les enseignements tirés et les recommandations qui pourraient guider des projets similaires pour renforcer la sensibilisation des étudiants et du personnel, conditions préalables à la réussite de la mise en œuvre d'un projet de renforcement des capacités. A la connaissance des auteurs, il s'agit du premier type d'étude à explorer l'utilisation d'un concours de logo comme activité de diffusion et de communication du projet.

Mots-clés : Erasmus+, projet européen, sélection du logo, visibilité du projet

Introduction

This study presents useful lessons learned and recommendations for project visibility and dissemination drawn from the logo competition process carried out by the project AgriSCALE. The objective of the paper is to describe the process of logo competition and present findings and lessons learned based on the data collected through a feedback survey and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs). This information can be used to promote the replicability of this practice as a mechanism for enhancing project visibility. This initiative, co-funded by the Key Action 2 of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, foresees a close collaboration between the academic sector and corporate partners. It aims to modernize the education of the agro-sector in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) through curricula transformation, enhancing the capabilities of academic staff and learning through real-life cases.

Nine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) from Africa and Europe constitute the project consortium. It includes two universities from Kenya: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and Egerton University, two universities from Uganda: Bishop Stuart University and Gulu University, two universities from Zambia: University of Zambia and Mulungushi University, two universities from Finland: Häme University of Applied Sciences and Aalto University, and one university from Italy: the University of Pavia.

This project aims at creating a new entrepreneurship learning ecosystem in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by implementing problem-based learning (PBL) methods in Food and Agribusiness programmes in higher education institutions. The PBL, first introduced by Barrows and Tamblyn (1980) in the late 1960s in the field of medical education, is defined as the "learning that results from the process of working toward the understanding or resolution of a problem". Since then, the approach has been widely adopted across multiple disciplines. Problem-based learning is an effective method for initiating students' learning and developing relevant skills by creating a need to solve real problems (Hung *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, the approach encourages the development of

soft skills and the transfer of subject-specific skills to students. The PBL approach became popular in agricultural education around the 1980s, although incorporating it into the agribusiness sector in African universities is still challenging (Mukembo, 2013; Parr and Edwards, 2014; Marliyah, 2018). The large class size and resource limitations in terms of infrastructure and technical capacity pose a major constraint in the adoption of PBL in several agricultural universities across Africa where agriculture courses have to often rely on traditional teaching or teacher centred approaches (Dahmz and Zakaria, 2015; Ra and Samfira, 2015). AgriSCALE aims at bridging this gap by providing African universities with the exposure, know-how and technical capacity for problem-based learning and its application in the agribusiness sector. The agriculture sector calls for reflexive actions and innovation by generating entrepreneurship learning opportunities to address the current global challenges associated with hunger, climate change, and poverty reduction. The application of PBL in agricultural education could act as a potential instrument for ensuring quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities, as stated in Sustainable Development Goal number 4.

The logo competition initiative was implemented in October 2020 to give visibility to the project and raise awareness about PBL and its relevance among students and university staff. It was also designed as a participatory instrument for involving students in the project image design, as they are one of the main target groups of AgriSCALE. While looking for an idea for the logo, students were encouraged to carefully read the project description to develop a design coherent with the project's purpose. In this sense, the logo competition's objective was to generate a logo/image for the project and raise awareness among students regarding its scope. Academic and non-academic staff were also involved and sensitized about the project's actions. In various cases, they also facilitated the distribution of the logo competition call and participated as judges of the competition, thus getting to know more about the initiative.

The partner HEIs adopted a general method for the implementation of the logo competition organized in three steps. First, the leading partner generated a standard call for proposals with the support of the other partner HEIs. Then, all the partner universities distributed the call for proposal to their respective students, and each of them selected two finalists. Afterwards, the project coordinators chose the best proposals presented by the different partner HEIs. The rest of our study is organized into three main sections. Section 2 describes the methodology. Section 3 presents the results and is structured in the following three parts: organization and implementation of the logo competition in all the partner universities; the most important lessons learned from this activity; and the final part presents recommendations for future initiatives, which is followed by the conclusions in Section 4.

Methodology

The data for the study was collected through two tools, namely: feedback questionnaires and FGDs, targeting participants or representatives involved in the implementation of the activity of logo competition. A qualitative narrative analysis approach was adopted to analyze the data and to understand the characteristics of the process followed to implement the logo competition and the impact of the activity in terms of dissemination and sensitization of the project among students and staff members of the universities.

The data were collected through a survey designed by the Dissemination and Exploitation team members at the University of Pavia and discussed and validated with all the members of the project's Dissemination and Exploitation team and Project Management team

Each university filled the questionnaire addressing the following key aspects:

1. Organisation and implementation of the different stages of logo competition.

- How did the university distribute the call for proposals?
- How many designs were received by the university? If possible, please describe the number of male and female participants and their level of study (MA, BA, etc.)
- How were the best logos chosen? Was there a panel of judges?
- How were the creators of the two best logos notified of their participation in the final stage of the competition? Was there a ceremony for announcing the finalists?
- Did the university make any publication (i.e. in the university journal) about the logo competition and/or its results?

2. Lessons Learned

- How did your university use the logo competition as an instrument to spread information about AgriSCALE?
- How did your university use the logo competition to involve students in the project AgriSCALE?
- What did you learn from the logo selection process regarding the importance of having participatory processes in a project?
- If your university does not receive any applications, what would you have done differently in order to promote the higher participation of students in the logo competition?

3. Recommendations for future projects

- What should future projects do to increase their visibility through a logo competition?
- What elements should be taken into account by other projects wanting to implement a logo competition process successfully?
- After this experience, what would you suggest for increasing the student participation in the logo competition?

The second tool was implemented after the collection of the data through the feedback questionnaires. The FGDs comprised of enumerators, members of project management, members of dissemination and exploitation team and few students. They were designed based on the specific research question. The FGDs helped understand the key themes that emerged, typical responses or unclear patterns across the responses in the questionnaires.

At the final stage, the data processing and synthesis was focused on the following three major aspects to thematize the key findings:

1. The patterns and common themes emerged in relation to the specific items.
2. Any deviations from the patterns.
3. Interesting stories interpreted as lessons learned.

We used discourse analysis to detect the focus group data.

Results

The following section presents the findings from the data analysis. The section is structured into three main parts. The first part presents the organization and implementation of the logo

competition in all the partner universities. The second part focuses on the most important lessons learned from this activity, and the final part presents recommendations for future initiatives.

Organization and implementation of the logo competition

Preparatory actions for the involvement of students. The competition for choosing the logo of the project AgriSCALE was launched simultaneously by eight partner universities in October 2020. During this time, most of the partner countries were experiencing mobility restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic, such as lockdowns. Thus, the implementation of the competition was challenging for various partners who could not reach students in person and had to rely on online channels. Nevertheless, the project consortium made great efforts to disseminate the call, and various interesting proposals were received from students.

In the first stage of the competition, the project consortium implemented a process for choosing the two best logos in each partner university. Thus, the project coordinator generated a standard call for proposals and sent it to all the partner universities for their integration into the document. This document contained the terms and conditions of the competition and the technical specifications required for the logo submissions. The call was open for undergraduate and master's students. Nearly half of the partner HEIs used students' mailing lists as the primary channel for announcing the call for proposals to their respective students. Three partners also used social networks and student intranet networks for this purpose. Two partner HEIs additionally used notice boards. In one case, the university announced the competition verbally. One of the partner universities also had the creative idea of sharing the contest with influential students who were encouraged to post it on their social networks, creating alternative channels to capture students' attention. Most of the HEIs distributed the call to all the students at their institution, and one HEI made the call for proposal available only to the students of agricultural programmes.

Response rate of students. The response rate of the students to the logo competition call diverged significantly among the partner universities. Considering the universities that received logo proposals, the average number of applications was 14, with a maximum of 30 and a minimum of 2. The deeper the communication, the larger the number of responses received. Generally, male candidates' participation was higher than the female candidates, and most participants were undergraduate students. Three partner universities did not receive any logo proposal from the students because the proposal did not raise students' interest. Moreover, the short time foreseen for the logo's submission discouraged potential participants. Finally, the unprecedented situation of lockdown and remote working due to the coronavirus pandemic acted as a constraint for participation. Despite these circumstances, the total number of entries received in the competition was high.

Selection process at the university level. The partner universities that received logo proposals from students utilized different mechanisms to select the finalists. In most cases, they evaluated the logo submissions by establishing a panel of judges integrated by academic staff, non-academic staff, or a mix of the two abovementioned groups. This modality allowed disseminating the project objectives among them. Another approach adopted by one of the partners HEIs was to let a group of students select the best logo through a vote, supervised by two staff members. This strategy also enhanced the project's visibility, despite the low response due to the constraints mentioned in the previous section; with this initiative, we could inform all the students, teachers, and staff

in each university about the project. The magnitude of the project's visibility was shown by the diversity of study programmes of the competition's participants, many of which were not related to agricultural faculties, and who would not have been informed about the project AgriSCALE if the competition had not taken place.

Some partner universities advertised the results of the first stage of the selection process on their websites. A case in point was an e-book containing all the participants' designs, an efficient mechanism to capture the students' and university staff's attention from different faculties. In addition, one of the partner universities carried out an award ceremony via Zoom and awarded certificates to participants, thus encouraging them to follow the project's next steps.

Second and final stage of the logo competition. The logo competition winner was selected by careful deliberation among the partner universities' core team members through web meetings. The process first involved the composition of a document that incorporated all the finalists by the coordinating university for further evaluation. All the partners participated in the logos' assessment, and the criteria used were the project's image, concept, colour and theme. For instance, logos with detailed design elements that could not be replicated as small black and white logos were dropped in the form of simple form, distinctiveness and strong visual impact. In the end, two logos were selected for final consideration, and through thorough discussion, a consensus was reached. The logo designed by the MSc agribusiness student from Kenya was selected as the winner of the competition. The winner was informed and given a monetary prize through the local coordinator of the partner university. All the finalists were awarded a certificate prepared by a partner university and signed by the project coordinator as a mark of recognition for their valuable participation. A graphic designer from a northern partner was chosen to give final touches to the logo for practical use; after the final modifications were made, the logo was used as inspiration for the broader visual identity designed for the project. Once the COVID-19 pandemic allows for face-to-face meetings in the winner's home university, we hope to give a big applause to the winner to recognize his talents and significant contribution to the project.

Lessons learned. The survey submitted to the partners' Universities of the AgriSCALE project showed convergence around some lessons learned.

The first group of essential lessons learned by the partners concerns students' and university staff's involvement in the selection process.

Participants' opinion was that the participatory component during the logo competition was visible in all selection processes. The exchange of ideas between partners regarding the visual attributes required in a logo reflected their cultural differences in aesthetics. This fact suggests the importance of discussing these aspects for a general understanding of the final product's desired characteristics. The dialogue generated by these different thought processes, sentiments, and ideas regarding a potential logo led to a co-owned and generally agreed visual image of the project. While African partners were more favourable to a detailed logo, European partners were looking to use a simplified one. In the end, the logo chosen was a middle ground choice between these two perspectives.

Colours have a different meaning for participants; African partners preferred colours drawn from

their flags and emblems. A clear finding was that the orange colour was linked to drought and non-fertile landscape. Instead, partners wanted to see the project related to green, reflecting harvest, food, safety and success. Text link to the logo was an essential communicator for the Southern partners. They perceived that strengthened the message of the project. Among the finalists were several proposals with text, and the winner's text was seen to capture the core of the AgriSCALE project. These kinds of logos are not common in Europe, where the current trend of logos favours simple stylizing of the company name. These can be visually striking, but their message remains obscure for those who do not know the company. However, these logo proposals were also very much liked by the Southern partners because they gave a feeling of bonding. This feeling differs strongly from the (current) European trends on how a good logo is defined.

The distribution of the logo competition call was an excellent opportunity to share information about the project AgriSCALE with students, academic staff, and non-academic staff. Partner universities had the chance to publicize the project among the student and university communities. Partner universities learnt that students' and staff's curiosity and willingness to participate in the logo competition process increased by including them in the project activities, which was highlighted during the FGDs.

Various partners learned that students are multi-dimensional in terms of capacities as students from numerous faculties participated in the logo competition, many of which were not related to the fields of art and design. In this sense, it would be optimal to distribute initiatives like the logo competition among the largest number of students to increase visibility.

Partner universities also learned from the logo competition that the development of a virtual ceremony due to coronavirus pandemic, for the presentation of the logos designed by students and for the announcement of the winner is an optimal mechanism to create a platform to discuss with them, present the project, and develop expectations about future activities of the initiative.

Another critical aspect agreed by the partners of the project is the importance of establishing a panel of judges as it is a useful mechanism for increasing the visibility of the project among academic and non-academic staff. This type of selection body can be an excellent tool for developing the project's partner universities' networks. A useful mechanism for recognizing the students and the academic and non-academic staff involved in the logo competition is distributing certificates to all the participants. These certificates provide a sense of appreciation and constitute a physical element that can remind them of the project in the future, leading to their possible involvement in future activities. The short time given to the students for the logo design was among the most critical harmful elements that emerged in the experienced activity. Logo competition organizers should consider this in future actions to encourage various students' participation.

Recommendations for other projects

Organization and structure. To ensure visibility, the organization of the logo competition process should consider the specific preferences of students in terms of the communication means used to engage students in different contexts. While European students were easily engaged with e-mails and online dashboards, African students seemed to be more interested in the competition if they were directly informed by a professor or a peer.

The project should entail a transparent process with detailed instructions and a reasonable schedule. Future projects should provide sufficient time for students to come up with logo proposals. Two weeks seems to be a limited time for distributing calls and receiving applications. Additional time

would allow students unfamiliar with design software to explore digital illustration options and generate a design. An extended duration of the competition would also give students more time to acquaint themselves with the project.

Furthermore, competition organizers should clearly specify conditions for participation. Designing a logo is a demanding task that might require extensive work hours; hence, it should be considered to reward the winning designer with a fee based on average worldwide design tariffs. This action would speak well of the project as it would recognize the students' effort.

It is recommended that a web platform be used to collect the documents generated by students in the future. The web platform would reduce the number of applications filed with missing documents. Still, it would also introduce a section of frequent questions and facilitate registration of each candidate's individual information.

Identification of target groups. Future projects should implement a system for identifying applicants, such as a candidate identification sheet. This instrument can later support the statistical analysis of students' participation, considering elements such as age, gender and studies. This type of information can be useful for improving the targeting techniques in future activities of the project. It is recommended to spread the call among the largest number of students possible to increase the possibility of reaching students willing to participate. To reach a wider audience and enhance the project's visibility, competition organizers should involve students from different faculties instead of sending the call to students in the project's work field.

Outreach of the competition. Remote working due to coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a greater reliance on online tools and more efficient use of available technology to disseminate and communicate competition activities. The learning gained from the execution of logo competition under these extraordinary coronavirus pandemic circumstances is valuable. It has helped in the more efficient use of online resources for the outreach of competition.

Universities should use banners in offices, classrooms, laboratory blocks, and billboards at strategic locations to promote the call's visibility. Investment in publicity like AgriSCALE t-shirts could also raise awareness of the project and encourage participants to be involved. Some stationery such as pens, booklets, folders, cards could be printed with the project name and distributed to various stakeholders to raise project visibility and make the logo competition lively and active. To increase students' participation in the logo competition, it is recommended to design a call for proposals that is short and concrete. The competition's information should be described on one page and displayed with an appealing graphic design in a poster. This information will encourage more readers to notice the call if they see it in a university notice board or as an attachment of an e-mail.

Additionally, if the project is presented briefly, it is easier for stakeholders to retain and share the project information. It is recommended to use multiple platforms for advertising the call, such as the student radio station and flyers on key notice boards. It would also help to include a website link in the initial call for those interested in the project, who may not necessarily be participants in the logo competition, to access more information about the project.

Ensuring equal participation. Infrastructures with internet connectivity like software/tools required for the competition should be made available to students to facilitate their access to calls

and resources. In similar contests, organizers should spread the calls for proposals among students in the most direct way possible. The competition organizer(s) should engage influencers within student groups to promote the competition and general awareness of the project.

Recognition of the participants. Organizing a ceremony for selecting the logo competition winner is an optimal mechanism to create a platform for discussion with students. The organization of a virtual event or an event in presence should be carefully planned to deliver a message to the students. It is a great occasion to present the project and create expectations about the initiative's future activities. Organizing a prize and certificate awarding ceremony would elevate students' attention in the logo competition and increase their interest in the project. It is recommended to provide certificates to all the project participants as a mechanism to recognize students' efforts and a tool to retain their interest in the project and involve them in future activities. Partners also suggested providing visibility materials to students such as notebooks or pens to reward their competition efforts and as a consolation prize in case they did not win.

Openness to diverse perceptions in the process of logo selection. The project highlighted evident differences in how the logo is seen or interpreted by northern and southern partners. Northern simplicity does not appeal to the Southern partners. The logo is a simple and tangible example of the project team's capacity to work in a participatory way to increase local ownership and show respect to the Southern partners' ability to see what is best for them. Our focus is on using all the possible ways to reach the project objectives.

Conclusion

The logo competition process was an innovative way of working, which resulted in an excellent logo and other good results. It helped raise visibility and awareness among students about the project and test their skills and talents outside the core studies domain. The competition has made the partners more resilient in terms of project capacity by overcoming the challenges of working remotely due to the COVID-19. This activity has resulted in greater learning and understanding among the partners to work more collaboratively, productive, and impactful. Moreover, it represented the first step of collaboration between and within regions among universities coherent with the objectives set by Agenda 2030 for education.

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