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## **International Internship Agora – I2AGORA**

Final Report

Public Part

## Project information

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# Executive Summary

Core partners of I2AGORA consortium started the first collaborative European ‘employability’ project (CSVM, Cross Sector Virtual Mobility) in 2006 with the objective to facilitate students to enter into online working, stimulate their employability, and provide educational systems with increased business and market connectivity by means of flexible modality internships. Meanwhile several other projects supported by different EU programs focused on enhancing mobility programs and virtual collaborative tools. I2AGORA aims to synthesise and exploit experiences/results of such projects focusing on flexible modality work placement mobility programs, especially accessibility, adoptability and sustainability of their results.

The prime objective of the I2AGORA project is to open up synergic potential between EU projects, focused on this challenging area. Survey, systematization and synthesis of previously implemented and running relevant projects follows a 3\*3 dimensional approach - a „magic” cube of Virtual Internship Programs – involving:

- vertical dimensions – periods of internship in chronological order, (pre-, implementation and post-internship activities),
- horizontal dimensions – pedagogical patterns, technological tools and methodological models, as elements of the „educational” approach,
- layers of actors/stakeholders: student, university and enterprise and intermediaries/multipliers.

Special pilot internship programs were announced and managed by the partners – students were involved in different development activities.

I2AGORA offers a single entry-point portal, delivering:

- 1) Multipurpose Ide-Agora or Intern-Gateway as a one-stop access point to virtual mobility/internship projects, guidelines, etc. for supporting all stakeholders to get easy access to find adoptable models, operable tools, descriptions of good practice examples.
- 2) IdeAgora – a web-based meeting point for sharing ideas and solutions within the Community of Practice, supporting academics and company instructors in exchanging experiences.
- 3) Based on the former ViCaDiS-campus, a user-friend, open-for-all, ICT-based, modern working environment may support all stakeholders in technical (ICT) and methodological aspects,
- 4) Multiplication of the impact was provided by „Employability Cliniques” events with proven showcases for wide range of facilitators, intermediates and multipliers, e.g. students organisations, professional associations, etc.;
- 5) Lessons learnt, a confrontation of conventional placement assumptions with flexible models have lead to recommendations for European policy, to recognise extreme efficiency of virtual/ blended mobility programs.

Deliverables of I2AGORA offer preferably databases and collaborative tools, freely and on-line accessible for all interested students, teachers and companies. The support we wish to offer should be versatile, practice-oriented, relevant and operable.

I2Agora consortium comprises wide range of experts, representing 11 partners from 8 countries, all involved in several EU projects, throughout one and half decade of successful collaboration, with adequate geographical coverage (Baltic, Mediterranean, West and Central-Eastern European partners.) The consortium possesses the required high-quality expertise and competences for the subjects addressed.

More information available in the multilingual portal of the project:

<http://i2agora.eu> , offering links to the ViCaDiS platform and the wide range of guidelines, manuals, showcases and databases developed or collected and adopted by the project.

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# 1. Project Objectives

I2AGORA aims to promote the widespread application of effective models, methods and tools of flexible (virtual and/or blended) work placement mobility programs. As a major goal, we wish to explore synergy of the numerous EU projects, already implemented in this area. In the view of the Key Action 1, *Learning mobility* of the *ERASMUS for All* initiative of the European Union for the period of 2014-2020, we cannot overestimate the importance of enhancing the beneficial, long-term impact of these projects on the employability, career prospects and professional success of young generation of Europe.

I2AGORA wishes to contribute to the development, extension and expansion of professional skills of (both) conventional students and students outside traditional cohorts, by disseminating, promoting and valorising state-of-the-art, flexible, work-placement strategies to major European educational operators, associated stakeholders, and e-learning networks. The projects build on extensive collaboration between ODL/e-learning experts with key-roles in the associated projects. The core activities are focused on surveying, analysing, adopting/improving and synthesising the valuable results, operable models and innovative tools to reach the objective. Complexity of the problem was analysed in the referred projects – I2AGORA systematises their findings in a 3x3 dimensional model, the “Magic cube” of virtual internship programs. I2AGORA wishes to disseminate and valorise the results by implementing the new education paradigm - students are not simple “receivers” or “users” but become developers of their virtual learning/working environment – addressed by “Internship 2.0” test-bed – this may led to full-scale involvement of also the students in the exploitation process.

I2AGORA proposes actions to address the availability and accessibility, moreover the practical applicability and adoptability of the tested models:

- (1) multiply the impact of good practice examples by versatile means: establishing a single-entry point gateway and virtual communities of IdeAgora and organising fast-track multiplication Cliniques with proven showcases, as major engines of exploitation;
- (2) provide innovative ICT support for facilitating the effectiveness of virtual internship (VIWE) and also the structured mediation between universities and enterprises (IdeAgora);
- (3) attribute a regional perspective in diagnosing and possibly remedying any obstacles;
- (4) confront existing assumptions with the empirical outcomes of the referred projects, and set out recommendations for policy.

## 2. Project Approach

I2AGORA Workplan involved four WPs of development nature: all of them addressed the development of elements for an effective valorisation/exploitation framework. All these activities aimed to facilitate the key activities, offering versatile methods/tools, accessible by and tailored for different stakeholders. Analytical surveys of relevant cases have been widely published and discussed, and will be kept on agenda through the IdaAgora communities. Students are seen as not only passive “target” of these investigations, but their active involvement were considered in modelling and improvement while launching “Internship2.0” work placement programmes at local and international levels. Improvement and testing of a Virtual Internship Working Environment - based on former ViCaDiS experiences as well as on new web 2.0 technologies – is expected to provide user-friendly, easy-to-adopt possibilities for the new „digital learners”. These open tools are offered to be used for testing/implementing any of the virtual/blended internship models in practice, even before the home university of such actors can/wishes to launch and support flexible modality work placement options. Examples may rise the demand from the students community – such bottom-up approach proved to be effective in pressing the university management towards the innovation. Good practice cases were not only presented/disseminated at Employability Clinique events, but also available in a new database of case studies. Synthesis reports from the aspects of different stakeholders summarise operable/adoptable models in the “Magic cube” system, available via the “Gateway” of virtual internship programmes.

I2AGORA promotes the transparency of good practice found in European States in as far as it relates to catering for new methods of obtaining work experience for a new generation of learners, more aligned to the emerging needs of the labour market within the knowledge society. Different approaches are promoted for reasons of European comparability and exchangeability, and differences may come to light. Impact and multiplication of good practice examples is assured by versatile ways: multiplication "Cliniques" have achieve wide range of stakeholders all over Europe, and beyond the lifetime of the project, Standard dissemination procedures have been widened with new, innovative Web 2.0 media outlets, social networking tools. Systematic analysis and modelling, explored synergy of results are exploited and geared towards valorising showcases, multiplication strategies, and structured university-enterprise partnerships. Systematic dissemination will be also continuously mainstreamed by EADTU's multi-country network, as well as multi-sectoral networks. Key strategies for dissemination are used to spread results to these leading networks like EUROPACE, EADTU, Online Educa, EDEN, ICDE, SEFI, UNESCO, ACRU. Results are spread to the 25 members counting EADTU Board, Association Assembly and Executive Committee (covering most of the EU and Central-Eastern

European countries). Recommendations have been and will be transferred to policy makers of the partner countries.

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

I2Agora developed/adopted versatile resources and tools, however even more, special care has been given to offer access to all these information, guidelines, templates, good practice models, theoretical surveys, ICT tools etc. via an easy-to-find and easy-to-apply manner. Coherency and cross-reference access to these results were considered with special care as well.

A set of Surveys and Guidelines comprise valuable experiences of previous projects, like EU-VIP and others - helping the stakeholders to answer the question: Why and how to organise flexible modality work placement. Deliverables of the project focus on the followings:

- (1) Review and analysis of projects/models on flexible-modality placements, as positioned and evaluated in the 3x3 dimensions “magic cube” model:
  - a) from the perspective of students, as summarised by EADTU (involving its Student Council)
  - b) from the perspective of Industry and Economy as summarised by Chamber of Commerce, BOKIK
- (2) Guidelines for diagnosing and remedying obstacles with regards of flexibility dimensions of work placement – summarised by OUNL
- (3) Guidelines and pedagogical patterns based on good practice examples by OUAS
- (4) Reports and recommendations as outcomes of the Clinique events and the Final exploitation event – a joint Seminar with another EU-LLL project, Cross Border Virtual Incubation – leading recommendations to EU policy, as summarised by UNED

Another set of useful resources and recommendations may support the implementation of flexible work placement by using advanced ICT tools. In such a way, the Toolkits involve:

- (5) Multipurpose Gateway to virtual internship projects (VIP) – portal for general interest – UPT&UBIT
- (6) Databases of previously implemented projects and pilot cases - UoM
- (7) Refined, extended collaborative environment for implementing Internship 2.0 programmes – VIWE, implemented by UPT
- (8) “IdeAgora” – portal for Communities of Practice – advisory and networking tools, tutorials, templates, etc. – implemented by University of Miskolc

Project results are available via one single portal, offering not only lists of different resources, but databases for directing the user to the most relevant ones. Moreover, I2AGORA fosters to create an informal community of users, becoming owners and promoters of the platform, sharing their experiences and commenting, recommending the lessons they have learnt.

## 4. Partnerships

The consortium comprises 11 partners from 8 countries, based on several years of successful collaboration, well balanced regarding the former West and East /old and relatively new Member States, with adequate geographical coverage (Baltic, Mediterranean, West and Central-Eastern European partners). The consortium possesses high-quality expertise and competences for the subjects being addressed. Although not in a coordinating position, EADTU – the leading representative association of distance education and e-learning of Europe – represents a nucleation centre of the partnership. Two of the single mode open universities of Europe (UNED and OUNL) represent special needs of the off-campus learners and high level of expertise in ODL. Two of the 5 traditional/blended mode universities represent countries and institutions, famous from educational innovations (OULU UAS) and also from international networking (K.U.Leuven). The further three HEIs (Tallinn University, “Politehnica“ University of Timisoara and University of Miskolc) have also about 15 years of experiences in joint EU projects, as all they were involved – and have become flagships - of the former PHARE Multi-country Network, established in the late 90s. As University of Miskolc plays a bridging role between the two determinative associated projects, VICADIS and CSVM – it was committed by the partnership to coordinate the present project. From outside of HEIs, Chamber of Commerce (Hungary), a private Business School (Hungarian representative of EfVET) and an SME from IT sector (RO) not only represent different stakeholders, but take active roles in the WPs.

Partner No.	Role	Organisation Name	City	Country
P1	APP	Miskolci Egyetem	Miskolc	HU
P2	PA	EADTU - European Association of Distance Teaching Universities	Heerlen	NL
P3	PA	KULeuven - Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	Leuven	BE
P4	PA	Politehnica Univ. of Timisoara	Timisoara	RO
P5	PA	Oulu University of Applied Sciences	Oulu	FI
P6	PA	OU NL - Open Universiteit Nederland	Heerlen	NL
P7	PA	UNED - Universidad Nacional De Educacion A Distancia	Madrid	ES
P8	PA	Tallinna Ülikool	Tallinn	EE
P9	PA	Chamber of Commerce - BOKIK	Miskolc	HU
P10	PA	ECBS - Euro-Contact Business School	Budapest	HU

P11	PA	Timisoara Software Business Incubator	Timisoara	RO
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Besides the formal partnership, four Associated partners – expected to launch similar programmes beyond the lifetime of the project and/or to disseminate the I2AGORA results - have been invited to join the initiative – 2 more universities from two more countries (LT, SK), an European association (SEFI, BE) and an SME from IT sector (IT).

**List of Associated Partners:**

Nr	Name of organisation	Type of institution	City	Country
1.	KaunoTechnologijos Universitetas	HE tertiary level	Kaunas	LT
2.	Visioni di Di Caro arch. Ernesta	SME in IT sector	Palermo	IT
3.	Technical University of Kosice	HE tertiary level	Kosice	SK
4.	SEFI – European Society for Engineering Education	Assoc. of universities	Brussels	BE

Representatives of all associated partners participated on the Final exploitation event and were involved in final evaluation. Their positive feedbacks – together with similar reflection from other invited stakeholders – show high interest for further development and implementation of flexible/virtual work placement mobility programmes.

## 5. Plans for the Future

I2AGORA partnership paid special attention to valorisation and exploitation – addressed by a separate workpackage. As detailed in our Exploitation and Valorisation strategy, exploitation activities need to achieve ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘multiplication’. Mainstreaming is the planned process of transferring the successful results of programmes and initiatives to appropriate decision-makers in regulated local, regional, national and European systems. Multiplication is the planned process of convincing individual end-users to adopt and/or apply the results of programmes and initiatives. Valorisation activities need to achieve sustainability through consultation of all stakeholders, in order to make sure the project results are relevant from an end user’s perspective.

We identified the keys to successful exploitation and valorisation of the results as:

- Producing relevant results from the project to satisfy the users’ demands and needs; and
- Ensuring, through the use of effective dissemination and exploitation that such results reach the right target audiences in a format and at a time which enables them to benefit from them.

Successful exploitation and valorisation may lead to sustainability of project results.

Based on the exploitation strategy and stated in the Final exploitation report the I2AGORA partners commit themselves to keep the networking in IdeAgora alive, maintaining the Portal as a virtual meeting point and continuing versatile activities as follows:

- Partners will intensively disseminate the results in different national and international conferences and workshops beyond the lifetime of the project. Ide-AGORA portal – offering wide range of resources, surveys and databases, as well as versatile tools - will be promoted via several networks, newsletters, websites and by social media, and in all forms of their regular promotion and communication activities as seminars, meetings, etc. All partners believe that through their own communication channels they can reach a large and wide audience in the European Higher Education Area to be introduced and further informed on the potential offered by flexible/virtual work placement mobilities.
- Community of Practice will be widened by invitation of stakeholders having different background and interest: one important target group will be the consortia/ representatives of the referred, previous projects, who will be invited to comment and evaluate our findings, to give feedback information to be collected via the Ide-Agora/ Community of Practice. Another important strategic issue is the involvement of students and their organisations in any further development and implementation.
- Several I2AGORA partners are member of or have strong relationship with EADTU, making this network suitable as becoming a linking pin between partners to guarantee collaboration is continued in the years to come. Some

other I2AGORA partner - as BOKIK and UBIT (with their strong ties to regional companies and entrepreneurs) – are also well placed to mobilize their members in further activities on virtual and blended mobility in work placements. Also the other partners, e.g. the higher education institutions are involved in networks through which they can further relay project information. An example of this is the Task Force e-Learning of the Coimbra network which is chaired by KU Leuven and which – based on their long tradition of involvement in projects on virtual mobility/internships – is clearly a valuable instrument to foster further ideas on this topic.

- As another example, University of Miskolc has long-term collaboration with several professional networks. As a strategic professional partner network, the International Federation for Heat Treatment and Surface Engineering can be mentioned, which was a project partner in some earlier educational development projects, and was represented on the final exploitation workshop of I2AGORA as well. This world-wide professional association committed some experts of the University of Miskolc to establish an Education and Training portal for the network, and students in I2AGORA Internship 2.0 took part – and still are involved - in collecting resources for this portal under development. Collaboration with such professional organisations may open further, new possibilities for educational innovation – including exploitation of virtual mobility and work placement practice. Demonstrating the process and benefits of such a collaborative model, case study developed for and published by another LLL project – Open Educational Innovation and Incubation – may be mentioned as an example.
- Regional networks of HEIs may be again important strategic partners in further exploitation and valorisation activities. University of Miskolc is one of the founding members of the ACRU – Association of Carpathian Region Universities. Executive Board members discussed the proposal for establishing joint e-learning platform and activities – among them virtual mobility and internship – for the network.
- Furthermore, in the short term uptake of the topic of virtual internships and the I2AGORA project results is guaranteed through the recently started EU-funded project PROVIP (“Promoting Virtual Mobility in Placements” – 1 October 2012 – 30 September 2014). Collaboration with this KU Leuven lead project and especially with the predecessor project EU-VIP (“Enterprise-University Virtual Placements”) was already established during the project duration (EU-VIP was presented as best practice during several I2AGORA events, PROVIP has been briefly presented during the I2AGORA final event. The PROVIP project will focus on the topic of virtual(ly supported) placements. The project will build on the conclusions and results of EU-VIP that looked into the possibilities virtual mobility can offer in the context of enhancing and facilitating international work placements. The aim of PROVIP is the further dissemination and exploitation of the EU-VIP results, guidelines and training material on how to integrate virtual mobility in international internships. The project will realize these goals through both dissemination and training activities and the facilitation of structural cooperation between HEIs and

companies via an online platform. These kind of activities are an excellent way to ease future communication and cooperation between the different stakeholders in virtual placements, also for the I2AGORA partners.

- UPT is now part of a national project led by the Romanian Minister of Education, but initiated by UPT, IS - Virtual Enterprise, funded through the ESF POSDRU as a project to close the gap between higher education and industry, with the objective to create a methodology and environment which will allow students to proceed to have virtual internship - their compulsory practical work in companies to be done, in the early stages of study, virtually by working on projects and study cases for companies using online and ICT tools and communicating with their industry tutors remotely and during the academic year. A different angle of a virtual internship which the Romanian partners are now deploying to 25 companies and almost 800 students across Romania during this academic year.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

I2AGORA aims to open up synergy between former EU projects focusing on innovative approaches for improving flexibility and internationalisation in HE. The planned new programme of the European Union in Education and training – Erasmus for All - would significantly increase the funds allocated for the development of knowledge and skills. Effectiveness of utilizing this huge amount of resources for leading the maximum benefit needs continuous improvement based on analysing the results and exchanging the experiences of previous projects.

I2AGORA promotes the assessment and successive multiplication of good practice for virtual or virtually supported work placements in higher education, dealing with flexible-modality placement strategies for both conventional students i.e., traditional universities, and students outside traditional cohorts i.e., open and distance teaching universities. As such, it supports the goals of ERASMUS for All in helping young people to gain more and better skills by studying & training abroad. Flexibility and internationalisation are the keys to unlocking people's potential, regardless of their age or background. It helps them to increase their personal development, gain new skills and boost their job prospects.

The majority of I2AGORA partners is well-experienced innovator in education and is involved in wide-scale networking all over Europe. The EADTU network itself, with its universities and consortia from more than 21 different countries, is a powerful instrument to disseminate information all over Europe. Moreover, the I2AGORA project intends to provide an incentive for raising the innovative capacity of partners in the different European regions. As such, it supports enhancing teaching quality in the EU and beyond, contributing to modernisation of education and vocational training systems.

The project facilitates with its on-line tools and on-site events, the “Cliniques”, a better access to (cross-regional) information on flexible-modality internships. Good-practice cases, models offered for adaptation are disseminated by local partners, by native language dissemination materials as well. Herein, I2Agora is able to act as a broker, helping all to gain better access to information, knowledge, technologies, finance, expertise, and assistance they need, from the resources available, and the way, as they are familiar with. The main benefit will be the stimulation of possibilities for cross-border partnerships and European cooperation.

Flexible modality and/or remote internships allows for more students with disabilities to enter into a situation in which they can develop their professional experience at a distance, and truly work on a company's work assignment. They have improved access to provisions that suits their special needs. The promotion of flexible internships and Web 2.0 technologies helps to facilitate integration of deprived learner groups into higher education and training.

Many universities are still locked into conventional strategies and offer (inflexible) programmes to conventional cohorts of students. They fail to open up to other types of learners and learning modalities. Such strategies are far too rigid to serve a (flexible) lifelong learning context. In that same light, internship placement programmes for 21st Century (flexible) learners must change as well, and not impeded access to professional (work) experience.

Enhanced flexibility of work placement may open up possibilities for much more students to get access to an international, multicultural community, to recognise the added values of linguistic and cultural diversity, to destroy negative stereotypes on nations. Mutual understanding and awareness may contribute to combat racism, prejudice and xenophobia.

I2AGORA hopes to facilitate joint activities to assist the European strategy for inclusive, smart and sustainable growth, via improving the efficiency of mobility schemes and widening the involvement of stakeholder in modernising HE.

## 7. Extra Heading/Section

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