

BRIDGE

Bridging the Gap - Youth Work-Based Learning Cooperation with the Western Balkans

Framework and Modelling for Practice Enterprise Cooperation

WP2 Report

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Introduction

The final report on the analysis of the collaborative activities and events for the modeling of Framework represents summarized experience in Practice Enterprise training of partner countries and institutions as part of Work Package-2 of the BRIDGE project.

The main objectives of the BRIDGE project are to build cooperation between Western Balkan and EU partners for developing common Practice Enterprise activities and events, encourage the exchange of best practices between the partner countries, and create a common framework for a cooperative activities programme for Practice Enterprises that can serve as a framework for future cooperation with other regional institutions. The project will connect Western Balkan national Practice Enterprise networks with their peer networks in the EU, and build a better understanding for youth in the Western Balkans on how the EU market works.

The partners of the BRIDGE project are:

- PEN WORLDWIDE - International Practice Enterprise Network (Germany)
- BUCT - Bulgarian Centre of Training Firms, Ministry of Education and Science (Bulgaria)
- MESTI - Ministry of Education, Science Technology and Innovation (Kosovo)
- CSO – Centre for Vocational Education (Montenegro)
- ESC - Economics school – Čačak (Serbia)
- CPCD - Centre for Civil Society Promotion (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Each partner had their own methodology for the research:

PEN Worldwide used a focus group of 12 experts to get more information on the given topic.

BUCT also held interviews with 10 people - teachers, volunteers, BUCT staff, and university lecturer, to get information for their part of the research.

The CSO report was designed according to the responses of 20 respondents from the community (students and teachers from Practice Enterprises) and the CSO staff.

CPCD surveyed Practice Enterprises, their importance, spread, capacities, and problems in 11 schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

ESC research was done with the coordinators of the Central Practice Enterprise Bank from Serbia.

MESTI research was carried out by PEN Worldwide, of which KPFC is a member of the civil society association. PEN used a focus group from different Kosovo schools as a source. And it was reviewed and complemented by the coordinator of the KPFC, officers from MESTI and teachers of Practice Enterprises.

Practice Enterprises as an Innovative Learning Model

Practice Enterprise represents an innovative teaching model in which the acquired theoretical knowledge from various fields is applied through practical work in the company. The model makes it possible to simulate flows that are regular in a real company with different degrees of difficulty and thus become transparent for the learning process.

Practice Enterprise is suitable for acquiring and further improving theoretical and practical knowledge from various fields (economics, finance, accounting, banking, finance, law, administration, etc.), developing key competencies, as well as forms of behavior in all entrepreneurial structures, from employee to entrepreneur. The strength of the Practice Enterprises lies in its contact with the public. Like companies in a real market economy, in the same way, Practice Enterprises maintain business relationships with each other. Thus, students make contact with the economic culture of their partners in the country and abroad.

Various jobs are performed in the Practice Enterprises, such as procurement, service provision, and sales. Business transactions in this regard should be carried out by students, concerning industry customs and legal regulations. However, goods and services, as well as money for payment, are not real. Information and documents necessary for the company are created and exchanged using modern technologies.

Each Practice Enterprise is, according to practice, divided into sectors: personnel service, secretariat, marketing, sales, auditing, accounting, logistics, etc. Students go through various departments and perform tasks specific to them.

The goal of Practice Enterprise is the multidisciplinary transfer of knowledge about workflows within the company and the interdependence of the company, oriented towards performing activities and solving problems, with the student in the center of attention. Activities initiated, first of all, by business partners encourage the learning process and achieve high motivation among students. Through the acquisition of key competencies, students are trained for business mobility and flexibility in the international business and professional world.

For the teacher as a manager of the Practice Enterprise, this form of teaching is a big challenge, as they have to change roles from lecturer to team associate, from supervisor to advisor.

Practice Enterprises Worldwide

The PEN Worldwide network is of utmost importance due to its role in facilitating crucial international connections. These connections are vital for establishing strong ties with other national offices, enabling international trade, and participating in significant global events. The worldwide network aims to connect members with diverse specializations, allowing them to collaborate and share resources.

This multi-domain approach brings trainees from different specialized fields together, fostering a collaborative learning environment. The future of Practice Enterprises lies in embracing a diversity of concepts, incorporating aspects like targeting specific groups, fostering entrepreneurship, and integrating digital and sustainability elements into the curriculum. By doing so, Practice Enterprises can evolve and remain relevant for future generations, according to PEN Worldwide.

BUCT considers the main advantage of Practice Enterprises worldwide network membership to be the networking opportunity and the international experience students can get during their school and university years. The establishment of stable communication with the Practice Enterprises of PEN Worldwide network, implementation of international sales between Practice Enterprises, as well as the use of a common platform for domestic and international payments, electronic modules for wholesale trade, Yellow Pages, access to the database of PEN Worldwide, participation in international events and trade exhibitions, participation in projects, in working groups, and in PEN worldwide meetings.

As a result of the good cooperation within PEN Worldwide Network Bulgarian schools have been invited and participated as partners in international projects and various international competitions, including online events, and international fairs both in person and online. The possibility to assess the quality of educational and working processes applying common criteria in accordance with the quality standards of PEN Worldwide and the possibility to obtain an international quality certificate, both for the Practice Enterprise and for the trainees gives a good opportunity for applying and keeping to international educational and trade standards.

Students and teachers highly appreciate their participation in international fairs, internships in foreign companies (Switzerland), and participation in international business competitions. According to the BUCT report, in Bulgaria they need more opportunities for the exchange of experience and common training for teachers, opportunities for students to participate in projects and meetings of schools and organizations from different countries and thus enrich their experience and develop skills related to the primary goal of the Practice Enterprises training, for example, development of communication and negotiation skills, understanding the practices of foreign companies, etc.

A problem for effective cooperation is the different organization of enterprise activities, time difference, and insufficient study time for Practice Enterprises training at school. A need for better support from state institutions and real companies is evident.

The most important advantage of membership in PEN Worldwide is the exchange of experience in the field of entrepreneurship, among teachers and students. Practice Enterprise's learning model provides a creative and innovative way of realizing teaching content, which affects the development of professional competencies, as well as

all key competencies. So membership in the Worldwide Network enables connection and exchange of experience, ideas, and visions, on national and global levels, according to respondents from Montenegro.

For Serbia the advantage of membership in PEN Worldwide is a possibility to connect Practice Enterprises for the exchange of knowledge and experiences, improving the practical knowledge of students and teachers. The international network enables students to get in touch with each other and carry out business correspondence.

How can Practice Enterprise cooperation be improved in the Western Balkans?

PEN Worldwide considers that one of the challenges faced in this endeavor is the lack of motivation and interest among trainers regarding digitalization and modernization. There should be more efforts to provide adequate support to the trainers, addressing these challenges and encouraging trainers to embrace new technologies and methodologies. The training sessions for trainers can also be organized for different countries promoting regional internationalization.

To enrich the network capabilities, the involvement of teachers from different Western Balkan networks will be encouraged. Thus international speakers can be invited to participate in trainers training sessions, facilitating knowledge exchange and bringing diverse perspectives.

Enhancing the visibility of the international network is a key objective. By promoting the network activities and achievements, it can attract more potential members and collaborators from around the world. This increased visibility will help raise awareness of the Network benefits and opportunities.

The crucial step in the development of the Network is defining its future strategy and role. The Worldwide Network has to decide whether it wishes to grow by expanding its membership base or focusing on stabilizing and strengthening its current member relationship. A clear and well-defined strategy will provide directions for future initiatives and endeavors.

Considering the ways to improve the cooperation between Practice Enterprises, respondents from Montenegro suggest the formation of a digital platform where teachers and students can post their business plans, ideas, and other documents that are essential for the work of a Practice Enterprise. On that platform, teachers could communicate easily, and exchange their problems and challenges, as well as examples of good practices. It is also suggested to organize online teacher training and online meetings of teachers where they could exchange ideas and experiences.

For Serbia the cooperation can be improved by the development of as many projects as possible that support the cooperation of teachers who teach in Practice Enterprises and institutions that are willing to establish or have already set up Practice Enterprises Organization of as many live meetings and trainings as possible where experiences can be shared and teachers will gain new knowledge. The possibility for the teachers and the students to carry out professional tours and exchanges in other cities and countries would certainly increase the motivation for greater engagement of teachers and students in their further education and work.

For Kosovo, cooperation can be improved by having a stronger national office and team for its national Practice Enterprise network. At the moment, the team is quite small and does not receive a good amount of support from the Ministry, apart from adequate funding. Human resources need to be increased, and more cooperation with both the

worldwide network and the regional Western Balkan networks must also be improved. It is hoped that the cooperation will be increased through participation in the BRIDGE project activities and mobilities.

Good Practice Examples

Bulgaria

The examples of good practice are International Fair of Practice Enterprises TF FEST Young Entrepreneur in formats 22 in person, 3 online and 1 hybrid. The regular participation of Practice Enterprises from National Trade and Banking High School in international fairs Spain, USA, Plovdiv. They were invited to participate in the Korea Practice Enterprise Network's HI-ESG CROSS-BORDER SALES & MARKETING COLLABORATION PROJECT.

Examples of projects with school participation are: Secondary School "Asen Zlatarov" participated in two projects under the ERASMUS+ program; practice Enterprises in schools - Innovative education and training solution to early school leavers. The project objective was conducting research and creating a model of a Practice Enterprise that develops key, social, ICT and entrepreneurial skills for students aged 14-16 at risk of early school leaving, as well as the application of the model in an international aspect; support for policy reforms - Social inclusion through education, training and youth activities;

Project RUSESL - Reducing Upper Secondary Early School Leaving with Practice Enterprise, the objective for this project was reducing early school leaving and acquiring entrepreneurial skills in upper secondary school (ages 16-19), using the Practice Enterprise method.

Montenegro

Agreements on cooperation at the school level between two countries and joint participation at international fairs in terms of sharing costs and raising the attractiveness of companies - each represents the other, and talks about their country, business, etc.

Development of projects such as BRIDGE that will support Practice Enterprises to cooperate at international level, access to PEN Worldwide, financing of participation in international fairs of Practice Enterprises, exchange of students and examples of good practices at international level, training of teachers who work in Practice Enterprises. Organization of meetings of teachers and coordinators in different countries to promote their national Practice Enterprises.

Serbia

An example of good international cooperation is the cooperation with Practice Enterprises from Montenegro, which was initiated by a meeting of project participants organized by Kultur Kontakt Austria in Milocer ten years ago. Since then, companies from Serbia and Montenegro have been actively cooperating in the Practice Enterprise economy, and are engaged in international trade, payment and correspondence.

PEN Worldwide

The database and clearing processes are important for the efficient functioning of the international network. These two aspects play a crucial role in managing and organizing various activities within the network, especially when it comes to short-term events. The database serves as a central repository of information, storing details of members, trainers, specialized fields, and resources available within the network. A well-maintained database ensures quick access to relevant information, streamlines communication, and facilitates effective resource sharing among members.

That is also what respondents from Montenegro suggest, that it would be necessary to make the databases on the international level more accessible to students so that they could find their way around more easily, find important data and contact information about other Practice Enterprises.

Clearing processes are equally critical in maintaining transparency and accountability within the network. These processes involve managing financial transactions, resource allocations, and ensuring fair distribution of opportunities and benefits among the members. During short-term events, efficient clearing processes help handle payments, reimbursements, and any financial transactions related to the events, ensuring smooth operations and a positive experience for all participants.

To summarize, the database and clearing processes are the backbone of the worldwide network playing a vital role in organizing and executing short-term events and ensuring the overall effectiveness of the network activities.

When we talk about observed shortcomings in cooperation between the participants within the PEN Worldwide network, PEN considers that pairing up active Central Offices with less active ones is a strategic move to promote collaboration and knowledge exchange within the international network. Active Central Offices can motivate and engage less active ones, encouraging their participation in network activities and events.

Trainers will play a crucial role in this process actively working to connect and involve other trainers from different Central Offices, fostering a sense of community and support. Trainers often face reluctance to invest extra effort in improving or training beyond the curriculum. To address this, the network can implement recognition and incentive programs, such as end-of-year awards for the best trade results or Best Practice recognition. Acknowledging and celebrating trainers' achievements will boost their enthusiasm and commitment to contributing to the network. Some Practice Enterprises may have limited hours of operating per year, highlighting the importance of event participation to maximize engagement.

Central Offices and national networks can collaborate to identify specific needs and preferences, facilitating events that cater to those requirements and ensuring active participation from all members. Establishing a permanent Working Group on Innovation, consisting of selected members like the Managing Committee and Coordination Center is a strategic approach to foster innovation in services, sectors, products, pedagogy, and methodologies. The Working Group can focus on connecting these innovative approaches to real-world companies and external stakeholders will strengthen the network relevance and impact.

Involving trainers and operational Central Offices staff, along with alumni (students or trainees), in the innovation process ensures diverse perspectives and practical insights are considered. This collaborative approach will foster a dynamic and adaptive network that stays at the forefront of developments in vocational education and training. Overall, this initiative will help create a thriving and connected International network, where Central Offices, trainers, and members actively contribute, share knowledge, and drive innovation within the network and beyond.

Serbia pays attention to the lack of financial resources for participation in PEN Worldwide, insufficient incentive for teachers to use this network, and insufficient initiative by the Ministry to recognize the importance of this activity.

A 5-year vision: Practice Enterprises concept development

For PEN Worldwide the proposed changes aim to enhance the worldwide network by connecting members with Practice Enterprises specialized in certain fields for facilitating resource sharing. The curriculum will undergo significant competency-based adjustments, introducing professional qualifications in various areas such as Future Technologies (e.g., AI).

Some members also said that the current generalization of the Practice Enterprise Concept in vocational education and training (VET) cannot be sustained. The educational reform demands that each Practice Enterprise program must specialize in a specific vocation. Consequently, discussions on broader concepts, such as commerce, logistics, accounting, and HR, are no longer permissible within the Practice Enterprise curriculum

A Trainers Guide will be prepared to support and reach out to Practice Enterprise trainers, fostering the exchange of best practices and concepts among members. To promote diversity, the network plans to focus on entrepreneurship and explore opportunities related to digital topics and sustainable development. However, a challenge lies in the limited interest of some teachers in embracing modernization and change, compounded by the retirement of motivated teachers and difficulty in finding enthusiastic trainers.

The network will work on a Trainers Concept Development, encouraging the younger generation to join and contribute with common training systems like short video capsules. Special attention will be given to new trainers to ensure they receive adequate training on company processes and Practice Enterprises specifics.

To support these initiatives, European Funds can increase the training opportunities for the trainers and teachers, potentially exploring international training of trainers programs. The Network aims to gather more information about other national networks, promoting collaboration in EU projects and rebuilding its reputation.

Additionally, an updated Certification System for Practice Enterprises will be established, and a comprehensive commercial platform will be adopted for various functions like buying and invoicing. Furthermore, a system for validating knowledge in Practice Enterprises throughout the life-long learning process will be explored, ensuring continuous development and improvement within the Network.

To diversify the concept, the curriculum will include topics such as financial literacy and job search skills. There will be a greater emphasis on collaboration, with a focus on institutional best practices, pedagogical developments, and

innovative methodologies. The Network envisions embracing new structures and training approaches, moving away from purely technical services.

BUCT considers the expansion of the Practice Enterprises network by the inclusion of more educational institutions. The offices of Practice Enterprises should be closer to or within real company premises. There should be a provision of year-round methodology and material help from the mentors. Practice Enterprises are to be seen as a business start-up for new young entrepreneurs. The idea of developing entrepreneurship will be preserved, but the Practice Enterprises concept will be enriched with the opportunities provided by artificial intelligence and the new technologies of production, trade and communication.

Application of the new technologies – robotics, artificial intelligence, 3D design, prototyping, green technologies, sustainable development, and circular economy, with which the professions of the future will be bound; the emphasis will be on the practical application of STEAM activities and strengthening the connection between them in an interdisciplinary way.

Establishing contacts and carrying out activities with Practice Enterprises of PEN Worldwide Network. Participation in educational seminars and forums with other Practice Enterprise trainers and trainees. Presentation and exchange of documentation used by different Practice Enterprises on an international basis - participation in international fairs and business competitions; students exchange for internships in real offices of business partners; teachers training and familiarization with positive practices of international partners; more online fairs, and competitions, spreading regularly throughout the calendar year; conducting real international fairs; regular information for the trainees and their teachers about upcoming events and news, for example by a monthly newsletter; provision of a preliminary plan for the possible meetings and participation of trainees in international events, to make a timely choice and planned actions for the upcoming academic year; regular workshops for the trainers to share experience, as well as an annual conference to report the results of the past year, identifying measures to improve the process in the next school year, share good practices, and solve problems. Inclusion of more educational institutions in joint projects financed by European funds and other sources.

Possibilities for joint projects of Practice Enterprises from different countries, which have a similar trade activity and are interested in developing new technologies, green and social economy; willing to work together on innovative products, services, and ideas, even to register Practice Enterprises with mixed participation is considered to integrate the experience of different countries.

Analyzing the vision of the Practice Enterprise concept development in 5 years, the respondents from Montenegro and Serbia both agreed that they also expect more digitalisation in all areas of Practice Enterprise functioning. The development that is expected is to have all actors more connected, get information more easily, and faster, have more communication with other Practice Enterprises, and more activities overall.

In Serbia, they expect an increase in the number of Practice Enterprises and to other countries to join the Practice Enterprise economy and if they don't have their own Practice Enterprises to systematically start introducing and establishing them through their educational system and by the curricula of the Ministry of Education.

In Kosovo the network is financed by the government of the Republic of Kosovo. The Kosovo Practice Enterprise Centre is part of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. The pre university education, including Practice Enterprises, are financed by the government through the SPECIFIC GRANT FOR EDUCATION. The local level (municipalities) is responsible for managing the specific grant for education covering the economic categories: salaries and per diems, goods and services, utilities expenses for VET Institution (schools and, they fund additional the professional practice part every year. The VET institutions and Practice Enterprises have to plan in advance the running costs for internet, office material, softwares etc. and for participation in fairs and other activities. Most of the Practice Enterprises have a real partner company and they support them with advertising materials, real products, and so on. The Practice Enterprises are applied in the 12th grade in the hours of the subject professional practice. In the new curricula for VET Institutions it is introduced as the subject Practice Enterprise and it will be mandatory.

International Practice Enterprise Fairs

The topic Preparation of and/or participation in trade fairs of Practice Enterprises is part of the Practice Enterprises program of the economic specialties in Bulgaria. Not all Practice Enterprises and trainees take part in the fairs, but they gain knowledge and practice in the preparation as a team and can take part as visitors, both in-person or online on the TF FEST platform. Practice Enterprises trade fairs and the competitions that are held before and during the fairs give ground for hands-on experience and skills development in real situations (acquisition of experience and business skills in international deals, getting to know and using soft skills, teamwork, building confidence and practice basic business skills, developing communication skills, development of entrepreneurial skills).

Teachers feel satisfaction with their students' performance. They meet colleagues, get to know other colleagues, and exchange experience, opinions, good practices, and update their knowledge.

Before, during and after the fairs all participants get acquainted with specific characteristics and traditions of different countries and the competitions give fields for benchmarking.

Obstacles:

There are serious obstacles for providing sustainability in the organization of in-person events for the Practice Enterprise trainees – financial issues, organizational (including travel, accommodation, food, visas, different school year schedules), high prices of exhibition premises, concurrence of event dates, lack of funding specially directed for such kind of participation. Participation in competitions and exhibitions is not part of the training policy of the VET providers and the funding policy of governmental institutions. Communication problems due to foreign language fluency and internet access also cause difficulties for smooth in-person and online participation.

Recommendations and ideas for future development:

Organization of meetings - training and events after the working hours of the fair.

More opportunities for participation in seminars and workshops, working groups and campaigns.

Use of common accommodation, cultural, entertainment and catering facilities.

Early announcement of performance evaluation criteria.

At least one month before the fair, each company should present itself to the other Practice Enterprises with a short presentation about its activities and after that preliminary session, they can invite other Practice Enterprises for meetings and negotiations during the trade fair.

Provision of workspaces for conducting negotiations. The space for negotiations will make it possible to pay serious attention to corporate clients, and all individual clients will be able to be served at the stands.

Conference for the trainers to share experiences and an opportunity to discuss the problems related to achieving the goals of Practice Enterprise training, as well as providing opportunities for sharing and developing innovations, better communication, and collaboration.

Western Balkan Practice Enterprises

Networks

The Montenegro national network operates every year with around 50-60 Practice Enterprises. In the smaller schools there are 2 to 8 Practice Enterprises per school, and in the larger schools 8 to 16 PEs. Around 15 students are trained in each Practice Enterprise, so the average number of students included is 800 to 1000 per school year. When we talk about teachers - the number is more or less equal to the number of the Practice Enterprises, so 50 to 60 teachers per school year.

Bosnian network consists of 1 to 8 firms per school in the national network each year. BHS service reports over 300 registered firms. However, CPCD considers the information irrelevant because the service is outdated. According to the respondents, most schools do not have contact with the national network of Practice Enterprises, nor are they familiar with its work. In the future, more work has to be done to build an active network supporting the Practice Enterprises. The number of students varies between 10, 40, and 200 per school, and the number of teachers varies, depending on the number of companies. These statistics certainly depend on the size of the school, the type of activity of the Practice Enterprises itself, and on the student's motivation. According to the survey, the lowest number of involved teachers per school is 2, which is the most common answer, four respondents answered that four teachers were involved in their schools, while the highest number of involved teachers was 12.

The Serbian network operates with about 400 Practice Enterprises every year. There are about 500 active teachers and about 6000 students who work in Practice Enterprises.

The Kosovo Practice Firm Centre (KPFC) was established in 2009 by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation.

KPFC provides all necessary services yearly to 100 - 130 (based on number of students per year) Practice Enterprises throughout Kosovo. The first Practice Enterprises were established in 2004/2005 where VET institutions and the

MESTI saw the Practice Enterprise in Albania in 2002 during the official visit and they requested support from development partners to establish them. The development partners from Austria and Switzerland provided support through their Service Centres with teacher training, fairs, mentoring the KPFC from 2009 till 2016, when we became the member of PEN Worldwide.

Advantages – gaining skills and benefits

Practice Enterprise methodology is suitable for the acquisition, practical testing and deepening of business-related knowledge, as well as for personal skills and behavior development in all areas of company structures, starting from junior employee to entrepreneur. Students who were trained in a Practice Enterprise become more and more responsible, demanding of themselves, looking for new challenges, most of them continue their education in a university with a similar or the same specialty that they had occupied in the Practice Enterprise. They start work or an internship in companies immediately after completing their secondary education, including those who have already created their own companies in various fields. Their experience in the Practice Enterprise is really positive and motivating to continue forward and upward in their personal development.

Some of the trainees develop their own business, others get involved actively in the family business, and some simply apply what they have learned in their workplaces. Graduates share: we don't remember and use what we did for homework and course assignments, but what we learned at the Practice Enterprise helps us everywhere.

Among the most important skills they gain in a Practice Enterprise are those in the field of trade, marketing, advertising, accounting, documents-related tasks, linguistic knowledge and social and practical skills; managing a diverse workforce, ensuring equal employment opportunities, implementation of new technologies and managing an enterprise in the face of a multifaceted crisis.

They gain experience and business skills in international deals, getting to know and using generally accepted soft skills, awareness of the importance of teamwork, building personal confidence and practical basic business skills, communication skills development, development of entrepreneurial skills. Trainees get acquainted with business documentation, regulations and implementation of good practices.

Being a flexible educational environment Practice Enterprise can give fields for applying a STEAM entrepreneurship program, circular economy, sustainable development issues, social entrepreneurship.

All respondents in Montenegro agreed that Practice Enterprises have a stimulating and motivational effect on students in the development of their entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. The Practice Enterprise allows students to get acquainted with the importance of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, techniques for the development of business ideas, the structure and methods of creating a business plan, forms of economic activity and promotion of products and services.

Students' attitudes change and are directed towards starting and running their own business, thanks to the work at Practice Enterprises. Some of the respondents think that Practice Enterprises also encourage them to think outside the usual boxes and patterns and direct them to look for business opportunities instead of waiting for jobs to find them.

For the students in Montenegro it would be important to improve their knowledge in marketing (digital in the first place), finance, sales and communication skills, soft skills, Interpersonal skills. They all agreed that the most significant skills they gain at the Practice Enterprise fairs, where they communicate with other PEs, and see how they operate locally and internationally. Practice Enterprises also encourages them to think outside the usual boxes and patterns and direct them to look for business opportunities instead of waiting for jobs to find them

According to the Bosnian respondents, Practice Enterprises positively impact students' entrepreneurial creativity and competence. The respondents believe that the Practice Enterprise methodology is an ideal substitute for the previous practical courses, and they expressed the opinion that students better understand the way and concept of business operations through Practice Enterprises, creating opportunities for future business ventures.

The program contributes to developing students' work habits, independence, and practical business skills. It increases their interest in learning, as well. Practice Enterprises play a key role in developing entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. Students experience real business challenges and develop analytical, communication, and teamwork skills. Students actively participate in projects and competitions and achieve significant results. The program provides real-life experience and trains them to work in real industry.

Out of all the responses, it is significant that the participants prepare for the job market through company operations, they apply their theoretical knowledge in practice, which creates a great advantage, especially for students attending schools with specific educational programs.

According to the survey results, the knowledge and skills that need improvement among students participating in the implementation of Practice Enterprises depend again on the Practice Enterprise itself. Respondents stated that these skills and knowledge are in the IT field, accounting, entrepreneurship, statistics, law and management, organization of work in office business, economics, writing project proposals, creating business plans, web design, and legislative framework.

Especially at vocational colleges, it is possible to improve knowledge in the production field, and organization of work in production. Students improve practical business skills by simulating real situations and develop team cooperation, communication skills and entrepreneurship by working in teams.

Bosnian respondents stated very differently among themselves, and said that those areas that students can improve working in Practice Enterprises are: IT field, accounting, entrepreneurship, statistics, law and management, organization of work in office business, economics, writing project proposals, creating business plans, web design, and legislative framework. Especially at vocational colleges, it is possible to improve knowledge in the production field, and organization of work in production.

The application of practical skills attracts students' interest and helps in deciding on the choice of business, name, visual identity, assortment, marketing and decision-making through the subordinate role of sales and other roles. Through the symbiosis of the most diverse skills - from digital to language skills, from social to communication skills, students are better prepared for the labor market.

The experience of students who graduated from our school and got a job speaks in favor of the fact that the knowledge and experience gained helped them significantly in the workplace. Students who have participated in Practice Enterprises improve their knowledge and skills in many areas and in the way they are prepared for the labour market.

In Kosovo the national Practice Enterprise fair has been organized annually in Kosovo since 2007. Until 2010 it was organized mainly by the donor projects and with their support. Since 2010 it's been organized by KPFC with support of Kosovo Ministry of Education and Municipal Directorate for Education.

The KPFC Trainers Training Program is accredited and has 9 Trainers. Teachers from VET schools have to undergo an accredited training by MESTI to become Practice Enterprise teachers. The teacher's training program has 7 modules and at least 3 are mandatory to start Practice Enterprise, also required by an administrative instruction, to become a teacher for Practice Enterprise. Training is organized by MESTI/ KPFC.

Kosovo Practice Enterprises are from around 35 economic, agricultural, tourism and business VET schools in Kosovo, so there are advantages for all sectors of education. There are also Practice Enterprises from private schools registered in KPFC, benefitting the private educational sector. For VET, Practice Enterprise is directly included in the VET Curricula, which is an advantage for students, as they get course credit for participation.

Teachers

Teachers are always focused on additional professional development, primarily in the field of digital and IT competencies. More projects are needed where teachers could present their problems and work situations and receive advice on how to overcome them. It is necessary to acquire membership status in PEN Worldwide, which would enable communication at the international level. Regular attendance at international fairs would greatly motivate teachers to be additionally engaged in their work in the Practice Enterprise economy according to Serbian respondents.

Teachers are the key for the success of Practice Enterprises. They need to be always in step with the market, to constantly improve their skills and knowledge in many areas, for example IT area, marketing, sales, finance. They should attend as many professional training sessions as possible professional training in the field of entrepreneurship. But they also have to be good motivators for students, according to the respondents from Montenegro.

Respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasize the need of professional seminars, workshops, and training, which means providing regular professional development in the field of entrepreneurship for teachers to give them access to all the tools available in the marketplace, as well as access to relevant educational material and mentoring from industry experts to keep up with the latest business trends.

Also, if teachers received some financial incentive for their involvement through Practice Enterprises, this would surely be one of the biggest motivators for increasing teacher involvement, that is, for advancing their desire to gain additional knowledge. Certainly, specialized training, connection with the real sector, and specific benefits at work can improve teachers' efficiency.

Examples of good practices

For Bosnian respondents the experience of having a functioning Practice Enterprises is a good practice itself - Practice Enterprise programs and plans, teaching tools, practical classes, advanced software tools and simulations for real business experience, visits to real companies, interaction with successful entrepreneurs, and guest lecturers, TABLA project, Challenge 2023 competition, smartboard, 3D printer.

The respondents from Montenegro, having good experience in Practice Enterprise school training and participation at Practice Enterprise trade fairs, have good examples of the impact of Practice Enterprise training on the future career development of their former students - ones who started their own business, a student who designed an application for the provision of tourist services in Montenegro, and a student who set up a small factory to produce homemade juice.

In Serbia by doing practical work in Practice Enterprises and doing internships in real companies, students gain useful knowledge that will make their work easier when they get a job. Work in groups and pairs, visits to entrepreneurs in real companies, cooperation of Practice Enterprises with real companies, and administration at the local level, connection with students attending other educational programs. All that influences the choice of business idea and activity of Practice Enterprise and organizing school competitions for the best business plan, using the Internet and social networks for establishing contacts and marketing.

It is a relatively common case that students contact us later to implement a business idea that they have developed with other students within the framework of working in a Practice Enterprise in practice and in real life. Students are better prepared for the establishment of their own company, they know the procedures and steps in the establishment, they are able to compete adequately in other companies. Often, students who have succeeded in the role of entrepreneurs come back to school after their graduation to convey their knowledge and experiences to the students. Students who have finished school are often happy to accept our students for internships because they know how useful internships were for them when they were students.

In Kosovo the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, together with international projects, have trained ToT and certified 9 ToT for conducting Practice Enterprise training modules for teachers across Kosovo. The Teacher Training Sector in the Ministry is responsible for further training of the new teachers together with the Central Office.

Kosovo has an annual competition for quality control for all Practice Enterprises and has a catalogue with criteria which Practice Enterprises have to fulfill, there are mandatory and voluntary criteria. Each Practice Enterprise has to undergo this process at least once every 3 years.

Collaboration with other regional Central Offices

Montenegro has experience collaborating with other national Central Offices from other Balkan countries. They think that fairs are the best way for the improvement of knowledge in a Practice Enterprise, so the students and teachers have made good contact with other Balkan countries (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Bulgaria) which is always an enriching and motivating experience.

Bosnian schools have less experience in cooperation (2 schools had, and 9 schools didn't have any). It's due to the lack of good international cooperation. Indeed, schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have the possibility to make independent decisions about the way they can cooperate on an international level.

Serbia has experience in cooperation with other national central offices from other Balkan countries. They also note that fairs are the best way to improve knowledge in a Practice Enterprise, and the country has been part of them for years, so the students and the teachers have made good contacts with other countries (Montenegro, Romania, Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia). Respondents said that these contacts with teachers and students from other countries are very useful for exchanging and improving knowledge and experience in their Practice Enterprises.

Until 2013 Practice Enterprises were supported and had been involved in a project with funding from the Swiss Development Agency. We have been furthermore involved and taking part in the regional south-east European Project ECONET, funded by Austrian Development Agency and implemented by KulturKontakt Austria. Since then the central office from Austria (ACT) and Switzerland (Helvartis) have been collaborating closely together with the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation.

Preferred events and Practice Enterprise activities

Students are very interested in fairs. A large number of students want to participate in competitions and want their work in different categories to be evaluated at PE fairs. A large number of teachers and students have participated in many international fairs over the years, such as fairs in Montenegro, Romania, Austria, Bulgaria and Slovenia. In the physical format, students and teachers are additionally motivated to attend the fairs when they are held in person.

According to the results, seven schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina prefer fairs, one school prefers contests and competitions in addition to fairs, another school prefers online trade among PEs in addition to fairs, and the remaining four schools indicated that they prefer "something else". One respondent said they meant community work with citizens by the term mentioned. The second answer was that they preferred school bazaars. The third answer was that they were aware of activities and education but unfamiliar with the activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As it turns out, schools with their own PEs lack creativity and mostly use existing forms and ways of communication. In the future, creating an atmosphere where schools can initiate a more innovative form of direct communication and placement of their products and services on the market would be desirable. Four schools participated in fairs, while the remaining six did not have such experiences. These types of answers result from the divided education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is the responsibility of the canton and entity level. Namely, some cantons do not introduce guidelines that allow the establishment of Practice Enterprises, while others allow some small autonomy in their operation.

Most Practice Enterprises participate only in local events. All schools said that their experience was based on fairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and three out of four said that they had experience in fairs in Croatia and Austria. Two schools, in addition to Croatia and Austria, also have experience in a fair in Montenegro. Comparing the answers, we conclude that it is necessary to transfer positive practices and experiences and allow every school to participate in one fair annually.

In Montenegro, the most preferred are trade fairs, in the second place are trade activities, and in the third place some respondents give the competitions as the preferred type of events. Most of the respondents said that they participated in the years in many International fairs, such as fairs in Bosnia, Albania, Bulgaria and Slovenia. Some of them were online and others were in physical format.

In Bulgaria all students and teachers equally appreciate commercial activities and contests, competitions, fairs, hackathons, projects, etc. Each of the listed activities has its role, first and foremost for rising competitiveness and motivation are the fairs and economic competitions (Business Challenge, Marketing, HR, Responsible Business, etc.), competitions for "Best Trader", "Best Stand", "Advertising Materials", "Best Catalogue".

Conclusions and recommendations

The concept of Practice Enterprise is very admired by students and teachers. Practice Enterprise allows them to be creative, active, and to communicate with participants on a global level. Given that the concept imitates the real world of work and teaches students to cope with real working conditions. It should be further developed and innovated to follow the changes that are happening in the real sector. Constant and solid communication with real companies, training from real entrepreneurs, and further digitization and modernization of the system are needed.

The network provides excellent opportunities, but all participants need to be aware of its importance and make it functional. Exchange, sending inquiries, answering inquiries, transactions, appearing together at fairs and presentations, meeting and comparing with each other, that's what makes Practice Enterprises alive and interesting. All further activities would be good if they aim at strengthening the exchange at all levels.

Recommendations for improving the system:

- Conducting training of trainers at least once a year, to be updated and innovative;
- Organizing trainings, meetings, and events for presenting the new trends and practices;
- Presentation of new educational technologies, new ICT tools, new business models, the impact of crises on education, and Practice Enterprise concept development;
- Training with experts from real business on the future development trends of companies;
- Annual organization and participation in international fairs, for example holding school trade fairs;
- Creation of database (samples) of business documentation;
- Developing contacts with long-standing mentors - creating good business contacts with new mentors;
- Implementation of group and individual coaching approaches in the learning process;
- Application of different teaching methods - Problem and Project Based Learning, Design Thinking and the Flipped Classroom, Design Sprints, STEM Approach and Methods, STEAM Entrepreneurship, LEGO Robotics;
- Advertising widely the concept within Open Days, Career Days at school;
- Ability to access the PEN Worldwide network (lack of financial resources for the membership fee - Serbia);

- Ensure the support of the Ministry of Education (fairs are not in the high school competition calendar - Serbia);
- Ensure additional financial incentives for teachers who run Practice Enterprises (Bosnia and Herzegovina);
- Promotion of the importance of Practice Enterprise to school administrations and education system in general, to maintain teachers' enthusiasm;
- Provide new equipment and spatial conditions in schools;
- Visits to real companies;
- Organization and study visits to fairs.

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