



NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL

BELGIUM



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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present report is to give information about the implementation of the European Language Label (ELL) in Belgium.

Two different approaches have been used in this report.

Firstly, a top-down approach aiming to identify the national actions carried out in order to implement the ELL. This first part of the report includes: the identification of the national institutions in-charge of the ELL in Belgium, the description of the specific responsibilities assigned to each of those institutions, the national organization of the Label campaigns, the national priorities and the selection criteria, the statistics about awarded projects, the evaluation and the follow-up of some of the awarded projects.

Secondly, a bottom-up approach aiming to carry out a follow-up of projects that were awarded the ELL in Belgium. This second part of the report includes: the impact of the European Label on the awarded projects, the activities of dissemination and exploitation carried out by the awarded project promoters, the recommendations coming from the awarded project promoters in order to improve the ELL initiative.

2 THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL IN BELGIUM

The European Language Label initiative in Belgium is implemented by three different bodies, in-charge of awarding the ELL within the German, French and Flemish communities respectively. These three National Agencies have the same role in the Lifelong Learning Programme, the main difference in their activity comes from addressing their actions to three target groups (the German, French and Flemish community in Belgium).

These agencies are:

- Die **Agentur für Europäische Bildungsprogramme** – for the German-speaking community; the agency was grounded in 2006 and has taken on the following responsibilities within the Lifelong Learning Programme: activities related to promotion and distribution of information, administration of contracts with the European Commission, support in project management and application, performing the national selection processes, contractual project financing and individual measures, dissemination of project results, content and financial monitoring of the program beneficiaries;
 - **AEF - Agence Francophone pour l'Education et la Formation** tout au long de la vie – also for the French-speaking community; the Francophone Agency for Lifelong Education and Training has the following responsibilities within the LLP: ensure the relations with the European authorities for managing, promoting and offering information regarding the Lifelong Learning Programme, ensure the implementation of the actions of the European Union within the LLP, organize the call for applicants, organize the awarding processes, offer consultancy and technical assistant to project candidates and project coordinators, disseminate and facilitate the valorization of the project results. The AEF cooperates with Office communautaire et régional de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle (FOREM - the Community and Regional Agency for Employment and Vocational Training). The AEF also cooperates with Ministère de la Communauté française de Belgique; the ministry has the following responsibilities within international cooperation: monitor the activities of the CEDEFOP (centre for professional development and training) and of the counselling committees for European programmes
 -
- and
- **Europese Programma's voor Onderwijs, Opleiding en Samenwerking (EPOS vzw)** – for the Flemish community: EPOS is the National Agency responsible for the implementation of the European Life Long Learning Programme in Flanders. EPOS vzw stands for 'Europese Programma's voor Onderwijs, Opleiding en Samenwerking', or 'European Programmes for Education, Training and Cooperation'.

The agency for the **Flemish community** has the following national priorities for the years 2011 and 2012:

1. Improving participation in language learning of groups at risk
2. Raising awareness about language learning
3. Project focusing on (and/or): communicative, interactive and intercultural skills

In the **French-speaking** region of Belgium, the ELL Competition is co-organized by the Federation Wallonia – Brussels, FOREM, and the Belgian Francophone agency for education and lifelong learning (AEF – Europe) every two years. Also in the Flemish community it is a bi-annual event; in the German-speaking community it is an annual one.

The themes chosen in the French-speaking and Flemish community are mostly those that are proposed by the European Commission.

All levels of education are welcome to participate in the project, no matter if they are formal or non-formal – institutions of primary and secondary education, higher education, or training centres for adults.

By supporting transferrable and innovative projects, the Language Label's core objective is to raise the level of language teaching courses in Belgium and everywhere else in Europe, and to allow the proper use and appreciation of the work done in schools, organizations, institutions and bodies that take part in the promotion of multilingualism or that develop language learning material.

From the day the programme was launched, 79 projects were approved in Belgium.

The activities to be carried out by the National Agencies in the framework of the ELL include:

- promotion, information and dissemination of the opportunities and experiences offered by the European Language Label
- organization and publication of calls for applicants
- selection and awarding of candidatures
- organization of the award ceremony
- monitoring and valorization of projects that were awarded the European Language Label (e.g. publications, promotion of participation in national and international events of awarded projects, implementation of European databases of awarded projects, development of specific web sites for the European Language Label etc.)

In Belgium, as in the other countries of the programme, the European Language Label is addressed to institutions which have developed innovative solutions for the promotion of language learning. Potential beneficiaries of the European Language Label include:

- local and regional organizations;
- trade-union associations;
- employers associations (including chambers of commerce);
- vocational training organizations and centres (including language private schools);
- research centres;
- enterprises;
- universities;
- schools of any kind, public schools, private schools and officially recognized schools;
- volunteer organizations, non-profit organizations and NGOs;
- other organizations active in the field of education and training.

3 THE LABEL CAMPAIGNS

3.1 Promotion

Among their activities, the National Agencies have to carry out a significant action of promotion, information and dissemination of the opportunities offered by the European Language Label. Different strategies have been used for this purpose:

- The agency for the **German-speaking community** offers yearly, for the potential ELL applicants, a *Vorbereitungssseminar* (a preparatory seminar) which covers an introduction in the concept behind the award of the ELL and specific sessions for the theme of the respective year. For example, for the 2012 theme, one session was entitled “From the language lab to Facebook. Are teachers now redundant?”, another one was “How are teacher trainees trained for the usage of new technologies in the classroom?”. The preparatory seminar also included a discussion on the topic and a session on practical issues related to the application procedure.
- The agencies in-charge for offering the ELL within the **French-speaking community** have put together in 2012 a valorization brochure which includes a series of projects awarded since 1997. The projects have been selected based on their actuality and transferability into current contexts.
- Publication of information brochures or leaflets, aiming at presenting the European Language Label. The brochures inform about the benefits offered by the European Language Label, inform about European policies on multilingualism and present some of the Belgian projects that were awarded the European Language Label. See, for example, the leaflet produced by the agency in-charge of the German-speaking community at:
http://www.dglive.be/agentur/PortalData/16/Resources/downloads/260312_AGENT_SPRACHENSIE.12.pdf
 The leaflet of the Flemish community can be found at: <http://www.epos-vlaanderen.be/?CategoryID=457&ArticleID=721>
 In the Flemish community, the information brochure contains also explanation on the theme, the selection and eligibility criteria and the national (Flemish) priorities, information about the jury, the selection procedure, the application form etc.

3.2 Calls for applicants

The agencies in-charge for the French-speaking community (AEF) and Flemish community (EPOS) launch a call for applications every two years.

The agency in-charge for the German-speaking community launches a call every year.

The calls for applicants from the three Belgian agencies generally provide the same information about the objectives of the Label, about the yearly European priorities (and about the national priorities if any), about the procedure for the presentation of the candidatures and give guidance for the submission of the application form.

The calls for applicants are promoted through:

- presentations in public events organized and promoted by the National Agencies (together with different institutions¹)
- publication of information on the institutional websites

The award winners are attracted by the prizes, among these is the use of the ELL Logo and their visibility on the award ceremony.

In the Flemish-speaking community there are three award winners. They can use the ELL logo for 2 years. The Flemish ELL winners also get a glass trophy, a certificate signed by the European Commission and an amount of money. The 3rd winner gets € 300, the 2nd € 600 and the 1st € 1.000.

3.3 The selection of winning projects

The three agencies involved in awarding the ELL in Belgium have defined selection criteria based on institutional eligibility and compliance with the European criteria for the ELL award.

3.4 The awarding ceremony

Each of the three Belgian agencies organizes its own award ceremony. For the **German-speaking community**, in 2012, the ELL was awarded on the 24th of August at the headquarters of the Ministry for the German-speaking community. The ELL was awarded in a wider framework, an event called “the summer night of languages”.

For the **French-speaking community** the ELL for 2011 was awarded on the 11th October 2012 at the *Palais des Academies in Brussels* and brought together many individuals and eminent scholars including Professor Régis Ritz of the University of Bordeaux and the Head of Unit in-charge of the policy of multilingualism in the European Commission, Belén Bernaldo de Quiros.²

EPOS (the agency responsible for the **Flemish community**) organizes the award ceremony during the event for the European Day of Languages in order to maximize the impact of awarding the ELL (greater audience) together with several categories of stakeholders (inspectors, ministries etc. who make up a steering committee). The ELL for 2011 in Flanders was awarded in the premises of the Ministry of Education on 30th September 2011.

¹ In the German-speaking community for example, the preparatory seminar is organized together with the FUNDP (Facultés Universitaires Notre-Dame de la Paix)

² A more detailed description of the event can be found on the AEF website (in French): <http://www.aef-europe.be/index.php?Rub=aeef&page=009&Article=1423>

4 PRIORITIES

The European Commission proposes every year specific priorities for the European Language Label award. The yearly priorities aim to identify experiences that, for their specificity and for the results achieved, are clearly referred to a political and strategic framework for improving and promoting language teaching and learning.

For the 2012-2013 Campaign, the priorities defined by the European Commission are:

- language learning based on the new technologies
- multilingual classrooms

In relation to the first priority, *“technology influences many aspects of our lives, language learning included: computer and/or technology-assisted language learning and testing, blended language learning, virtual and distance learning have become very useful tools to teach and learn foreign languages efficiently. The creation and educational use of social networks also boosts the fostering of multilingual engagement and participation across boundaries, and represents a means to interact and to learn foreign languages. This innovative learning/teaching system should combine the inspiration and motivation of traditional classroom teaching and the flexibility of online or distance learning to create courses that are accessible and motivating for today's students, who develop their autonomy, interact by way of a computer with teachers "on the other side of the screen" and have fun in learning a foreign language”³.*

In relation to the multilingual classrooms, *“the phenomenon of multilingual classrooms has been constantly increasing. These classrooms are made up of students coming from different countries and not sharing a common mother tongue. Learners speak a variety of first languages, their behavior and cultures can be very different: this may create problems but can also be used as a focus of comparison and discussion. Herein lies the challenging task faced by teachers: they should adapt their teaching techniques in order to take this diversity into account and respect it, but focus on the main purpose, which is to provide learners with the best possible communication and grammar skills in the target language”⁴.*

The Belgian agency for the Flemish community has listed the following national priorities since 2006:

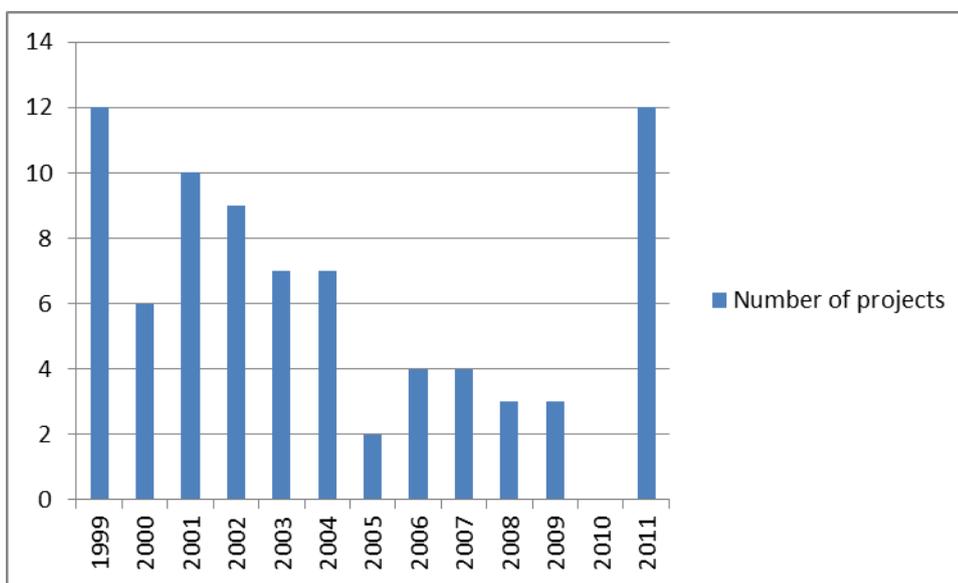
1. Improving participation in language learning of groups at risk
2. Raising awareness about language learning
3. Project focusing on (and/or): communicative, interactive and intercultural competences

³ European Commission (2011), European Label awarded to innovative projects in language teaching and learning

⁴ Ibi

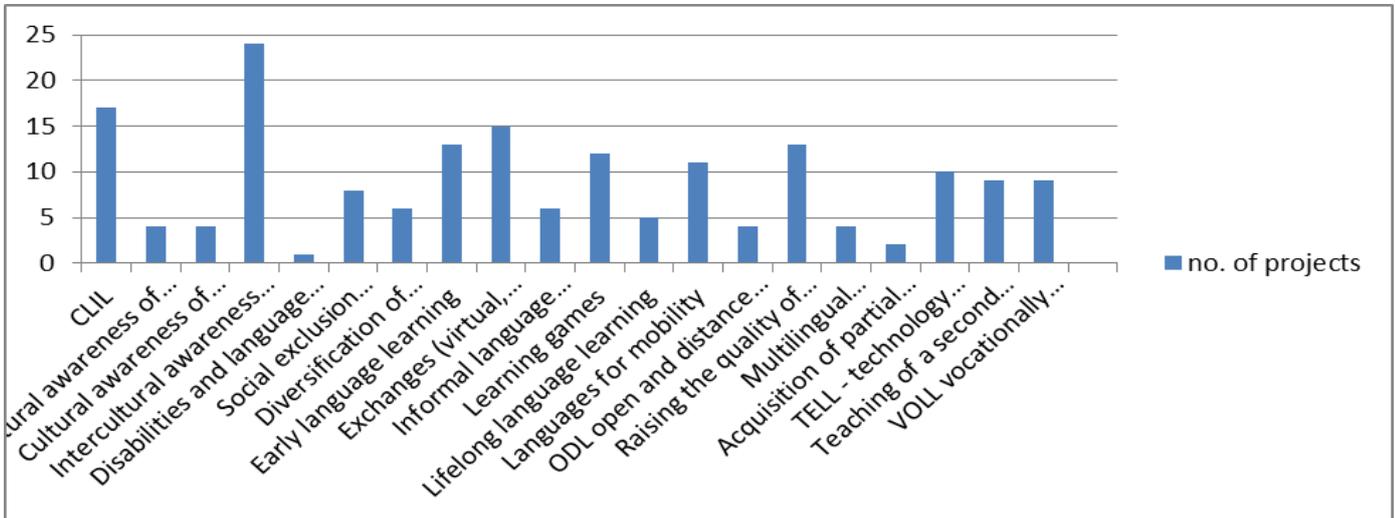
5 AWARDING THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL

Between 1999 and 2011, 79 projects have been awarded the European Language Label in Belgium. The statistical data, collected by the NELLIP team, offer a synthetic image about some strategic points: the awarded projects year by year, the educational sectors and the themes for which they have been awarded. These statistics include only the projects that have been uploaded in the European database:



Source: European Commission, Languages (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm>)

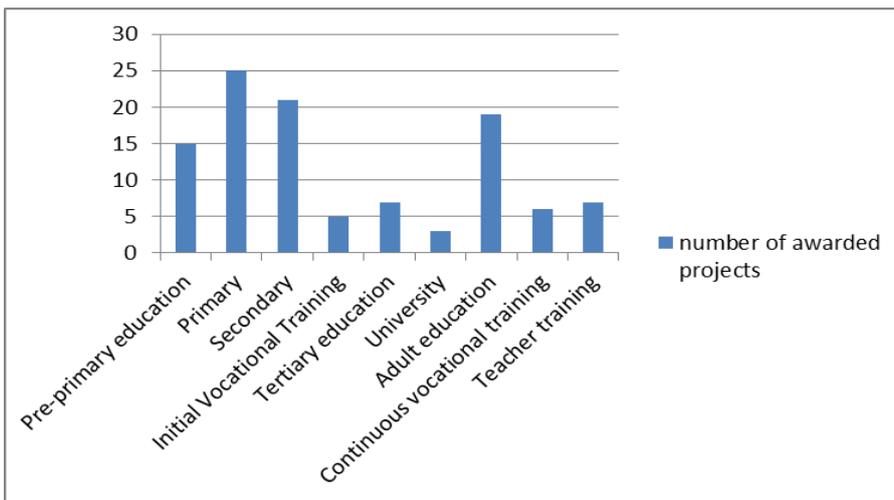
This statistics also shows that in Belgium an average of six projects a year have been awarded the label in between 1999 and 2011.



The graphic above shows that among projects that have been awarded the label in Belgium the best represented educational areas are CLIL, intercultural awareness, early language learning, exchanges, learning games, languages for mobility and raising the quality of language teaching / learning.

Source: European Commission, Languages (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm>)

This graphic below shows the distribution of the awarded projects on educational sectors and according to the data available on the Commission’s website, the best represented sectors are primary and secondary education and adult education, while the smallest number of awards was granted to the higher education (university) educational sector⁵.



Source: European Commission, Languages (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm>)

⁵ This statistics does not necessarily suggest that projects coming from higher education have a lower quality which results in a small number of awards but could also suggest the fact that the number of applications from the higher education sector is rather low.

6 EVALUATION CARRIED OUT BY THE NELLIP TEAM

The NELLIP network has the aim to promote quality in language learning through the implementation of the quality criteria used to award the European Language Label.

The European Language Label represents an important tool to assess and award quality language learning initiatives at national level. The Label aims to contribute to the implementation of the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning.

European language policies aim to protect linguistic diversity and promote knowledge of languages. The most recent key documents on language learning are: *The Council's Conclusions on Language Competences to Enhance Mobility (2011)*, *Languages for Jobs, providing multilingual communication skills for the labour market (2011)*, *Strategic framework for cooperation on education and training (2009)*, *EU strategy for multilingualism (2008)*, *Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment (2008)*, *Inventory of EU actions in the field of multilingualism (2008)*, *Online consultation on multilingualism (2007)*, *New framework strategy for multilingualism (2005)*. From those key documents, it is possible to understand the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning.

The main aspects the current policies on language learning focus on are:

- the enhancement of quality of language learning
- evaluation of performance of language teaching
- teachers training
- new approaches to language teaching and learning
- supporting mobility for language learning
- the promotion of multilingualism
- language learning for specific purposes
- tools for monitoring progresses in language learning
- recognition and validation of language skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning
- implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)
- promotion of links between VET (vocational education and training) qualifications and CEFR
- promotion of less widely spoken languages

By matching the quality criteria used to award the European Language Label and the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning (i.e. those mentioned above), the Romanian team of the NELLIP network selected 31 relevant language learning initiatives among those that were awarded the European Language Label in Belgium. Among all the awarded initiatives identified, we have selected 8 relevant case studies. The objectives and results of the selected case studies are consistent with the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning. The promoters of the selected case studies have been interviewed by the Romanian NELLIP team in order to collect more information about the methodology applied⁶.

⁶ The interviews were carried out in the form of an online Google questionnaire which was sent by email to all 31 project coordinators that have been awarded the ELL and were selected by the Romanian NELLIP team for the NELLIP database. The Case Studies were defined based also on the interviewees' responses. The questionnaire is available at: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dE9xbDY2NFBjVTNRY1dUeDJJMG1BUnc6MQ#gid=0>

As far as the typologies of applicants of the selected case studies are concerned, schools cover the greatest number of applications to the European Language Label in Belgium, followed by VET organizations.

In relation to the target group, the NELLIP team identified four different sectors of reference among the selected projects and, as a consequence among the selected case studies:

- School Education,
- Higher Education,
- Adult Education,
- Vocational Education and Training.

According to this further classification, the higher number of selected case studies belongs to the School Education sector, followed by the Vocational Education and Training sector. Few case studies belong to the higher education sector, and even fewer were addressed to a target group composed by adult learners.

7 IMPACT AND EXPLOITATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL AS ASSESSED BY THE NELLIP TEAM

7.1 Impact

The analysis of the case studies helped us understand the motivations at the base of the applications for the European Language Label. Most of the project promoters decided to submit their application to the European Language Label for increasing the visibility of their projects and for obtaining recognition of their efforts.

These are some of the areas where project coordinators considered the label had an impact on their project:

- the project has acquired a greater visibility
- the prestige of the school/organization was raised
- the coordinators have obtained an official and European recognition
- the label guaranteed a better sustainability of the project
- the coordinators had the opportunity to share a good practice (e.g. in teacher training)
- as a consequence of being exposed to the good practices in a certain project, some beneficiaries (teachers, teacher trainers) have decided to change their teaching practices (in testing and assessment for example)
- they were offered the possibility to create transnational partnerships
- the project obtained recognition in an area where there are not a lot of awards (as one VET project coordinator stated)
- foreign organizations became interested in implementing the project (in this particular context, one project coordinator stated that he has learned an important lesson with regard to the transferability of the project: translation of materials is necessary but not sufficient for internationalization of the project product. The final results must also be adapted to suit the needs of the target groups from another country)
- the presence of the posters of the ELL had an impact as a lot of external partners of the institution implementing the winning project got to know it and they had been in contact in order to obtain more information about the project
- one project coordinator stated that the ELL gave authenticity to their school offer, especially for the foreign languages department ; moreover, parents seemed to trust the school staff more when they wanted to involve the children in a new project or a new initiative
- the award of the label attracted more potential beneficiaries for the project activities (more teachers and learners wanted to be involved)
- the project team has noticed an increase in national and international interest. They have received many visits from students, teachers, school directors, minister of education. New perspectives were achieved through discussions

In conclusion, the ELL had a good impact on the awarded projects as it contributed to the visibility of the awarded project even if in some cases only at institutional level (only the teachers and students of the local school implementing the project). The awarding of the Label enhanced the motivation of the project promoters. The Label also contributed to the sustainability of the awarded projects: a labeled project has more follow-up opportunities in the framework of further related activities or projects (e.g. some of the projects successfully applied for further European /national public funding).

In addition, the official recognition acquired was often used by the project promoters as a quality label to demonstrate the value of the initiative.

The awarded project promoters, however, claim that the label is not sufficiently known even in the field of language education and that, as a consequence, its impact is limited.

7.2 Exploitation of project results and ELL award follow-up activities

With the purpose of spreading the information about the projects that were awarded the European Language Label, a number of solutions were implemented.

The project coordinators have used the awarded ELL as an instrument for quality assurance by using the logo and the reference in poster sessions, articles etc.

After the label was awarded, some project coordinators have organized poster sessions, press conferences, posted articles announcing the award in documents such as corporate newsletters, local newspapers. Others have organized dissemination sessions within their institutions where parents, pupils and other teachers were informed about the distinction and its aims. In the case of one project which was awarded the ELL for the second time, the local media presented the achievement.

8 BEST PRACTICES

Among all the awarded projects, some have been selected as best practices. The selected initiatives can be used as examples and benchmarks to refer to in the planning and development of quality future language learning projects and initiatives that have the necessary characteristics to successfully apply for the European Language Label.

The Romanian NELLIP team has also considered worth mentioning two best practice examples identified at the level of the agencies in-charge of promoting the label. The three practices mentioned below have a role in increasing the quality of the ELL implementation.

Best Practices projects not only meet the quality criteria adopted in the awarding of the European Language Label but are “special” in terms of: successfully addressing the needs of specific target groups, quality actions carried out, quality of results achieved, sustainability of the project, contribution in terms of innovation and originality, transferability of the project.

A detailed analysis of the selected best practices projects underlines that the main impact of the European Language Label on Language Learning initiatives is related to a contribution to the visibility of the projects. The Flemish National Agency embeds the award ceremony in the conference on the European Day of Languages, thus attracting a wider audience and a target group that is interested in language learning.

Another best practice example the Romanian team considers worth mentioning– identified at the level of the National Agencies and not at the project level – is the valorization brochure put together by the agencies in-charge of awarding the label within the French community. The valorization brochure includes several projects that have been awarded the ELL since 1997 and are still of actuality and whose products can be transferred to current contexts. We also consider that the initiative of the agency for the German-speaking community of organizing a preparatory seminar for potential applicants is also an example of good practice that can be taken over by other agencies at a European level.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

The projects promoters of the Belgian projects that were awarded the label and that were object of the case studies were asked to provide recommendations to future applicants for the European Language Label according to a peer to peer approach.

Also, they were asked to provide their feedback to those who intend to exploit the award of the Label (i.e. the Belgian National Agencies and the European Commission). This is where we have used the bottom-up approach, in that we have analyzed the testimonials received from project coordinators via the online questionnaire.

According to the promoters of the awarded projects, in order to develop a quality language project that can successfully apply for the European Language Label, it is necessary to start from a direct involvement of the target group: the project can be a successful one if it addresses real needs. The final beneficiaries should be involved in the definition of the project objectives and activities so that the expected results will be consistent with their expectations. During the phase of development of the language project, project promoters advice to focus on some of the criteria used to award the Label, for example innovation and the transferability. Moreover, project coordinators have emphasized the importance of a “solid and creative project team”, of maintaining an open mind and of being able to constantly adapt the project. Another benchmark for the quality of projects – as identified by the interviewed coordinators – is to create long-lasting initiatives, with a certain degree of consistency. Projects should also be able to fulfill the needs of the learners with regard to life skills and competences, in accordance with the demands of the 21st century.

Another recommendation from a project coordinator was addressed to the National Agencies that should encourage all projects which were developed under the LLP and have obtained a positive evaluation from the Commission to apply for the ELL.

The strengths of the European Language Label as it results from this report are that, it:

- has a good impact on the awarded projects because it contributes to their visibility
- enhances the motivation of the project promoters
- is considered as an assessment and confirmation of the quality of the initiative
- contributes to the sustainability of the awarded projects: a labeled project has more follow-up opportunities in the framework of further related activities or projects (e.g. some of the projects successfully applied for further European / national public funding).

The weaknesses of the European Language Label as it results from this report are that:

- it is not sufficiently known not even among language learning providers and experts.
- it is not sufficiently clear what are the benefits of receiving the European Language Label.
- the label’s logo is not recognized and sufficiently known even by experts of language learning. This is also due to the fact that different logos may be used in different countries and contexts.
- it provides very limited opportunities to create transnational partnerships. This is an aspect that should be taken into account especially considering that we are dealing with a European label.
- it is not relevant when identifying further funding to continue the activity (beyond public funding), for example, none of the awarded projects that were selected for the case studies (i.e. the best ones) managed to find business investors interested in their initiative.

Recommendations for an effective further implementation of the European Language Label are based on:

- The promotion of the visibility of the European Language Label among, first of all, language learning providers and experts. This could be done with, among others,
 - a targeted information strategy, based on, for example, presenting the ELL in international events on language learning
 - publication of articles on the ELL on specialized press both on paper and online etc.
 - provide more visibility to the European Language Label on the web site of the European Commission
 - make use of the social networks developed specifically by/for language learning providers
- The identification of strategies to make the acquisition of the European Language Label more appealing for Language Learning experts
- Raising awareness on the European Language Label's meaning and impact. In order to do so the information about the European Language Label should also include:
 - a clear description of the quality meaning of the label.
 - the benefits related to awarding. In order to do so, the case studies developed by the NELLIP network might be used to present best practices as far as the benefits of the European Language Labels are concerned.
- Only one single logo should be used for the European Language Label at transnational level. Moreover, there is a need for clear guidelines on the use of the logo (e.g. what does it mean, when and where can it be used, is it for the whole organization or just for the project or theme that received the award, for how long can it be used etc.). The certificate should also be continued to be signed by the European Commission but it should be the same for the countries involved.
- The offer to the promoter of projects that were awarded the European Language Label of opportunities for transnational networking, exchanges and sharing. This can be done, for example, with the annual organization of transnational events where the sharing of best practice developed by the awarded projects is promoted as well as transnational networking among the project promoters. The NELLIP network is also contributing to this objective as it is currently implementing a transnational network of promoters of projects that were awarded the European Language Label.
- Raising awareness about the quality meaning of the European Language Label in the Language Learning industry (e.g. specialized publishers) so as to encourage them to contribute with private funds to the further development of the awarded.

10 CONCLUSIONS

By matching the quality criteria used to award the European Language Label and the current political priorities of the European Commission in the field of language learning, the Romanian team of the NELLIP network selected relevant language learning initiatives that were awarded the European Language Label.

The analysis of the selected Romanian projects and case studies demonstrates that most of the project promoters decided to submit their application to the European Language Label in order to ensure a greater visibility to the project and obtain an official and European recognition. Other reasons are related to the willingness to promote the project's sustainability and to share the good practices developed.

The main strengths of the European Language Label as they result from this report are that it has a good impact on the awarded projects because it contributes to their visibility, it enhances the motivation of the project promoters, it is considered as an assessment and confirmation of the quality of the initiative. Also the ELL contributes to the sustainability of the awarded projects: a labeled project has more follow-up opportunities in the framework of further related activities or projects (e.g. some of the projects successfully applied for further European / national public funding).

The main weaknesses of the European Language Label as they result from this report are related to the fact that this label is not sufficiently known and recognized, not even among language learning providers and experts. Also, the benefit of receiving the European Language Label are not clear for potential applicants and, so far, the label has provided limited opportunities to create transnational partnerships.

The further implementation of the European Language Label should therefore be based on:

- The promotion of the visibility of the European Language Label among, first of all, language learning providers and experts (e.g. organization of sessions such as the preparatory seminar).
- Follow-up activities for the award of the ELL (such as publication of the valorization brochures)
- Raising awareness on the European Language Label's meaning and potential impact.
- The use of one single (recognizable) logo for the European Language Label at transnational level.
- The promotion of opportunities for transnational networking, exchanges and sharing among awarded projects.

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