



NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL

FINLAND



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FINNISH NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE LABEL

1 Introduction

The aim of the present report is to give information about the implementation of the European Language Label (ELL) in Finland and also to present the European framework for this reward procedure.

The European Language Labels have been awarded for the European language initiatives since 1999. According to Ms Androulla Vassiliou (European Commissioner for Education, Multilingualism and Youth), *year after year, the aims of the ELL have become more and more ambitious. The label now concerns every level of education and training, aims to highlight and reward innovative initiatives in the field of language teaching and learning in any phase of education and training, functions as a stimulus to exploit and disseminate the results of initiatives in the field and promotes public interest in improving language skills as well. The more ambitious goals of the ELL initiative are therefore perfectly in line with multilingualism becoming increasingly important* (European language label – empowering people, Limassol , 26-28.9.2012.

This report concentrates both on the National Agency's (The Finnish Board of Education) policies and procedures of awarding the European Language Labels and on Finnish initiatives that have been awarded by an ELL. The European Commission's annual guidelines show the main themes for language teaching and learning.

2 The European Language Label in Finland

Since 1999 European national agencies have awarded the European Language labels according to various themes.

The ELL procedure is co-ordinated by the European Commission, but managed by the individual Member States, with national juries deciding on detailed criteria. The general criteria for winning an award are agreed at the European level, but individual countries can introduce their own requirements.

In Finland, the implementation of the European Language Label and the development of specific actions, in accordance with the EU general strategies, are delegated to the National Board of Education. It selects annually, based on applications sent by the national initiatives, those that receive a European Language Label and also those that receive a special mention of honor. The language teacher and the language learner of the year are also awarded annually at the same event.

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) is the national agency subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Culture. The FNBE has a wide range of tasks related to the development of education all through pre-primary and basic education, general and vocational upper secondary education and training, adult education and basic education in the arts.

FNBE is responsible for drawing up the national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education and general upper secondary education and the national qualification requirements for vocational education and training and competence-based qualifications. It also coordinates the annual ELL procedures and operates in all educative levels related to the ELL awards.

The activities to be carried out by the Finnish National Board of Education in the framework of the European Language Label include:

- promotion, information and dissemination of the opportunities and experiences offered by the European Language Label
- organization and publication of calls for tender
- selection and awarding of candidatures
- organization of the award ceremony
- monitoring and valorization of projects that were awarded the European Language Label (e.g. newsletters, 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 2012 the European Commission recommended that all the member countries should have the common strategies for ELL procedure: these strategies are language learning in a community and language learning in the workplace. In addition to these themes the national aim of the European Language Label in Finland was the diversification of language programmes.

3 The Label Campaigns

3.1 Promotion

Among the above mentioned activities, the Finnish National Board of Education carries out the significant actions of promotion, information and dissemination of the opportunities offered by the European Language Label. Different strategies have been used for this purpose:

- publication of bulletins informing about the ELL procedure
- newsletters and e-mailings aiming at informing about the ELL procedure
- information on the ELL procedures through various networks and channels
(e.g. <http://kieltenopetverkossa.ning.com/>)
- publication of press releases aiming at presenting the rewarded initiatives and persons (language teacher and learner of the year) (e.g. <http://www.oph.fi/lehdistotiedotteet/2011/053>)
- organization of the annual ELL ceremony where the winners are introduced and delivered an ELL prize
- publication of the winners' project descriptions and contact information in the European Commission's database (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/index.cfm>)
- support to the ELL initiatives for getting more visibility and being able to disseminate the project outcomes and results in an efficient way.



ELL Award Ceremony in Helsinki, 24.11.2011

3.2 Call for Tenders

The Finnish National Board of Education launches every year the call for tenders for the European Language Label. All educative target sectors are involved. The deadline is usually in April- May. The call for tender provides information about the objectives of the Label, about the yearly European and national priorities, about the procedure for the presentation of the candidatures and provides guidance for the submission of the application form. A specific form for applying the label is also attached to the call of tenders and is provided by the National Board of Education.

A jury that is named among the professionals of the Finnish national board makes the selection for the labeled initiatives, language teacher and language learner.

The call for Tender is normally promoted through:

- mailing lists
- information letters to training organisations and schools
- teachers' associations and channels
- the website of the Finnish National Board of Education

The priorities launched by the European Commission for the years 2010-2011 were *Language Learning in the Community* and *Language skills as a preparation for work*.

3.4 The Awarding Ceremony

The ELL awarding ceremony is arranged by the Finnish National Board of Education. The event takes place annually in Helsinki, in the end of each year. The winners and the labeled initiatives are published at the ceremony, where they also are given the opportunity to introduce the project and its innovative approach or results. The event offers also a possibility for networking between the project teams, teachers and learners. Often the winners write also a short article to the school's newsletter, or even in some professional magazine.

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”¹.

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”².*

A special national priority for the year 2012 set by the Finnish National Board was *Diversification and strengthening language studies*. The selection criteria aims at finding training institutions that have developed efficient and innovative ways for having an impact on the diversity of languages on offer as well as on early choices for languages. Initiatives that deal especially with the Swedish language teaching are also considered significant.

The call for tender was launched in March, 2012, and during the autumn the new ELL initiatives are presented and invited to the ceremony that is held in Helsinki.

Selection criteria are also established by the Finnish National Board of Education. These criteria are fully consistent with the indications and the expectations set by the European Commission.

Selection criteria expect an awarded project to have the following characteristics: a comprehensive approach, provide a tangible improvement in the teaching and learning of foreign languages, motivate the students and the teachers, introduce previously unknown approaches to language learning, be adapted to Europe's linguistic diversity, be a source of inspiration for other projects.

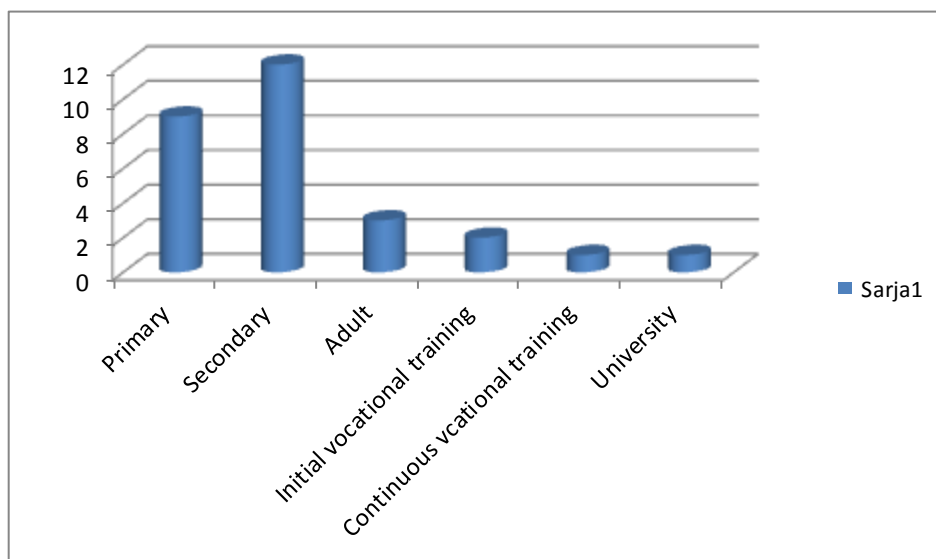
¹ European Commission (2011), European Label awarded to innovative projects in language teaching and learning

² Ibi

5 Awarding the European Language Label

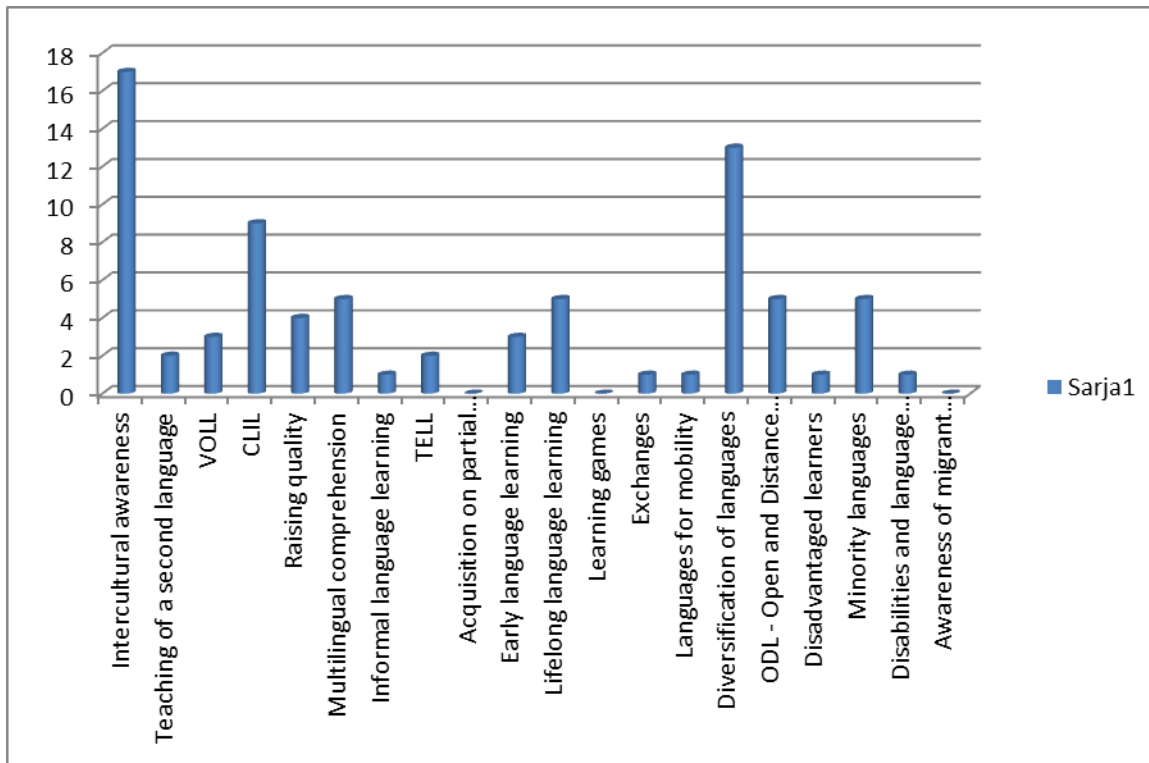
During the first 12 years (1999-2011), 28 Finnish projects have been awarded the European Language Label. The statistical data, collected by the author, offers a synthetic image about some strategic points: the educational sectors, the themes for which they have been awarded, the most studied languages.

Educational sectors among the ELL initiatives:



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

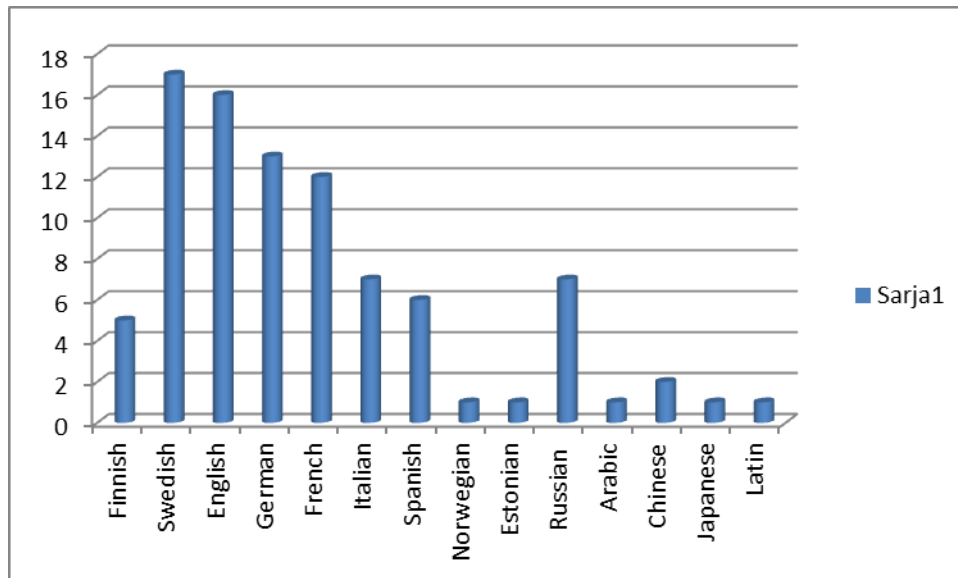
During the 12 years of ELL procedures, most of the initiatives awarded by an ELL were from the secondary (12) and primary (9) sections. Three initiatives (3) were related to the adult section, and one initiative to the initial vocational training, one to continuous vocational training and one to the university sector.



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

In this graphic the thematic areas of the ELL initiatives are covered. One must remember that each initiative may have selected three thematic areas maximum. In other words, the graphics cannot be interpreted by the number of awarded projects. However, the image shows clearly the most important thematic areas chosen by the training institutions for the development work, and also considered significant by the jury of the Finnish National Board of Education during the last ten years.

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



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

The main languages that the ELL initiatives have targeted were, according to this graphic, Swedish (appeared in 17 initiatives), English (in 16 initiatives), German (in 13 initiatives) and French (in 12 initiatives). Finnish language was targeted by 5 initiatives.

6 Evaluation carried out by the NELLIP Finnish 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. It aims at an important impact on the theme of promoting language learning initiatives on a European context since it has a network of partners and of associated partners covering a significant number of countries all over the Europe.

The European Language Label represents an important tool to assess and award quality language learning initiatives at the 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: *Key data on Teaching languages at School in Europe (2012)*, *First European Survey on Language Competences (2012)*, *Europeans and their languages (2012)*, *The Council's Conclusions on Language Competences to Enhance Mobility (2011)*, *Languages for Jobs, providing multilingual communication skills for the labor 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 most recent publications were introduced to the public in Limassol at the Multilingualism in Europe conference in September, 2012.

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 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 Finnish team of the NELLIP Network selected 22 case studies that presented best the innovative approaches or sustainable results. As there are – until the end of year 2011 – only 28 awarded initiatives in Finland, it has shown some difficulties for the project team to find the people connected to the initiatives at a time. The staff of the National Board of Education responsible for the ELL procedures has provided the project team with information about the selection procedure and about the criteria for the annual awards. Sometimes it has been possible to find further information also on the internet or on the training organisation’s website, and in the most successful cases the interviews and deeper descriptions have been carried out. However, the project team would like to remind of the importance of the integration of the project activities on the training organisations’ everyday work and teaching procedures.

Among the mentioned current political priorities, the ones mostly referred to by the national Agencies in the selection of the case studies focus on the promotion of: new approaches to language teaching and learning, diversity of languages on offer and minority languages and promotion of teaching Swedish . Those principles are also consistent with the annual priorities defined by the European Commission, with a specific reference to the ones for 2012. In relation to the target group, the NELLIP team identified four different sectors of reference among the awarded projects:

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

According to this further classification, the higher number of awarded projects belongs to the School Education sector (including pre-primary, primary and secondary sectors). All other sectors covered only initiatives in Finland. Four languages take a clear lead among the Finnish initiatives: Swedish, English, German and French are the most usual target languages followed by Russian, Italian and French. It is worth of mentioning that remarkably few initiatives concentrated on the Finnish language (Finnish as a second language). The initiatives focusing on the Swedish language were on the top as regards the number of awarded initiatives which goes well together with the national recommendations by the National Board of Education in Finland.

7 Impact and Exploitation of the European Language Label as assessed by the NELLIP Team

7.1 Impact

The analysis of the case studies allowed to understand the initiatives' motivation for applying for the the European Language Label. Most of the project promoters decided to submit their application to the European Language Label in order to:

- disseminate the project's theme and the results that were considered important and relevant
- share a good practice
- show the project's impact on various or minor target groups
- obtain national and European recognition for the results
- fulfill the dissemination strategies in a national network
- disseminate successful teaching methods and materials with good learning results
- ensure a greater visibility to the project
- enhance multicultural approaches
- promote work-related language learning
- enlarge the project activities to new regions or networks

The leaders of the initiatives were also asked to analyze the impact of the European Language Label on the awarded projects.

The Language Label strengthened the feeling that the project team was doing the right things. The teachers in many initiatives have been active on other project and development work, too, and the ELL was a recognition for their work. It had an impact on motivation and on the comprehension of the contents of own work among the project actors. The significance of communication and cooperation was strengthened. There was seen interest for the project activities and results by other teachers and among other subjects to be taught. An active cooperation and development work between different teachers and other agents began.

An important fact was also that the language label, and thus the work done in the initiative, were also noticed locally. In many cases the number of invitations to events and to present the project was significantly increased.

The award of the label might also help project promoters to find new partners in Finland, but also in other European countries. It has helped the project to gain international interest, which has strengthened the project teams' and coordinators' intentions to enlarge the activities to a wider area.

As a conclusion it can be considered that when receiving the European language label, the initiatives have gained more status, normally on a national scale and sometimes also on an international level. The label has had a special impact on the project members and on the teachers' motivation and they have been able to disseminate the best practices and outcomes to a wider audience.

However, there are different ways for exploiting the benefits and publicity that the ELL has brought to the initiatives. For some projects the recognition of the good work and interesting results has been enough, while other institutions have started new ways of cooperation and networks in Finland but also in other countries after the ELL awards.

7.2 Exploitation

Most of the project promoters produced a local press release or wrote an article to a local newspaper or to a professional magazine. Some of the project promoters also organized and participated in specific seminars and conferences with the purpose to inform about the project and the Label awarded. Many promoters received invitations to event and conferences related to language teaching which was a good opportunity for presenting their project and its results. The initiative Kielitivoli, awarded in 2011, was also invited to the Multilingualism in Europe conference that was held in Limassol in September, 2012. Some initiatives' coordinators appreciated also the Nellip team contacting and interviewing them. In some cases the project activities could continue in the same partnership or with new partners. The Finnish National Board of Education has offered opportunities for teachers and project teams to present their experiences and project outcomes in seminars and other events. Interest groups have been informed more actively about the possibilities that certain initiatives offer. The good results have also been acted as a model for other trainings and for other languages,

8 Best Practices

Among all the awarded projects, four 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. All of the initiatives are still ongoing projects with different funding. Some training organizations have integrated the methods and outcomes into their everyday training procedures and some have applied for national or European funding for future development.

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 (e.g. migrant workers), quality actions carried out (diversity of languages on offer), quality of results achieved (teaching Chinese), sustainability of the project (online learning materials and new materials for new languages and new sectors), 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 two facts: first of all it has contributed to the visibility of the projects and secondly it has strengthened the motivation of the project team by recognizing their successful work.

9 Recommendations

The projects promoters of the Finnish projects that were awarded the label were asked to provide recommendations to future applicants for the European Language Label. At the same time they were asked to give feedback to the National Board of Education about the ELL procedures.

The promoters of the Finnish initiatives considered that one of the most important things is to have a clear idea of the need for the project when applying for funding and planning the work. A needs analysis should be made together with the management and the actors / target groups, and it should be related to the local strategies. One should be able not only to react but to anticipate the needs of the different actors in the community. The project planning will be successful only if it has the full support and understanding of the training institution's direction. Internal flexibility from educational organisations and extensive co-operation across domains is required.

The core project team should be named, too, at an early stage, to be able to get the project started as soon as possible. It is an extra "plus" if you can find an enthusiastic team of teachers to work on the project work inside the training organization. Planning takes also hours after the working days and therefore needs interest, willing and readiness to put also hours after the working day on the work. However, it is recommended to put some time on finding the right persons who really are devoted on the development work. Also concrete resources (i.e. time and money) dedicated to the project are needed.

It is good to make a "marketing strategy" for the project's action plan: how to show the relevance of the project aims to the target groups. A good network supporting the project aims is important. Strong coordination and clear share of work tasks help to progress. It is important that the project actors feel that they are part of the actions; every one has a clear role to carry out the activities. Close contacts to the management are also crucial. A good project serves a large target group and produces sustainable procedures that last also after the project period.

Dissemination and implementation plan should be created at the very beginning of the project: how to integrate the project results into training organization's everyday activities? How can the the project be useful for other organizations, how to let them know about the results an outcomes?

The promoters also wished that in order to be able to exploit the awarded ELL initiatives thoroughly, a permanent up-to-date internet site would be useful.

10 Conclusions

The analysis of the selected Finnish projects and case studies demonstrates that most of the project promoters decided to submit their application to the European Language Label in order to to obtain an official recognition for the work and for the results achieved. This has worked out in a right way by raising teachers' motivation and trust on the fact that they are doing the right things. This is even emphasized in some cases where teachers are voluntarily put extra hours to the development work and to the experimentations. . Other reasons are related to the willingness to disseminate project's results and innovative approaches as well as share experiences.

The European Language Label has increased the awarded initiatives visibility, giving new opportunities to present the results and outcomes and also to find new partners and networks for future cooperation.

The challenges of the ELL procedure are mainly related to the application procedure. There are not many applicants for the ELL in Finland, and some training sectors are less active to apply than others. Successful language projects are not presented to a large audience and best practices developed in those projects are exploited only by the small project team or partnership. It would be most important to encourage more actors to share their outcomes and results with others and thus perhaps receive also new partners and new ways for developing language teaching and learning procedures.