



ONE Interim Evaluation Report

Results of the interim evaluation

Authors: UNIMIB

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INTRODUCTION

This document reports on the results of the interim evaluation in the ONE project. The interim and the final evaluation are one part of the monitoring activities within the ONE project that include monthly and quarterly reporting. In their monthly emails UNIMIB reminds partners to update the status of their decks (milestones) and to fill out a monthly questionnaire that evaluates the ONE Cloud. In the subsequent monthly partner meeting, UNIMIB presents the results of the report which are discussed and followed by corresponding tasks or agreements. In their quarterly emails UNIMIB reminds partners to update the status of their decks (milestones) and to fill out a monthly questionnaire that evaluates the ONE Cloud and the collaboration within the project. In the subsequent monthly partner meeting, UNIMIB presents the results of the report which are discussed and followed by corresponding tasks or agreements.

The interim evaluation that is being reported on in this document at hand, plays a central role as moment of reflection and in-depth discussion about the project, its progress, and its impact. It is based on individual consultations with the partners to factor in all views and concerns. The evaluations report on progress, quality, and concerns investigating mostly the positive and negative experiences of partners, plus the three areas of impact that were initially defined by partners: methods and tools, collaborative project management, and environmental awareness and sustainability.

INTERIM EVALUATION

The interviews for the interim evaluation were conducted by the UNIMIB team in December 2021 partly as online interviews (four online video interviews from 12- to 52-minutes length) and partly as written interviews (one interview via email). Only one partner institution was not able to participate.

Project Management

To sum up the results, partners pointed out **good organization and team building as the main points of strength of the project**. This was particularly supported by the regular meetings and by the open and clear communication style, revealing an overall helpful attitude.

ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT

“the project is very well organised and to me the most interesting aspect related to the management of the project is the way that the leaders are leading this project.” (UOC:4)

“I’m so happy, I think the leaders are doing a very excellent job, it is amazing how Eva and the other people is managing, is handling this project.” (UOC:36)

“Coordinators always made it quite clear what was to be done and what were the steps of the process, and did it very well. The platform contains all the documents, everything is there for you to reach, very well organized and effective. Timeline is always quite clear for everyone to monitor their own schedule and that of the overall project. Coordinators are always very available for any doubt or problem.” (eucen:9)

“The positive contacts and helpful attitude when something was unclear. We always receive quick and clear answers to clarify possible doubts.” (JYU:4)

“The consideration and effort given initially to Team building.” (CCL:2)

ON THE MONTHLY PARTNER MEETING

“what I liked is that we met quite regularly as whole project team - once a month. I think this was important also due to the fact that we couldn't meet physically this year. So I think this was good and was important also to stick to the project during the year.” (FeU:5)

“I like these monthly meetings that we have, I like the communication that we have with the people of the management team, and also I like the interesting relation that we have with the other people of the Consortium on this project.” (UOC:4)

Another positive aspect is connected to the partners' direct experience: they are both meeting with other experts and acting as participants themselves, which improves the sense of being able to give relevant feedback about the studied methodologies.

“I appreciated very much also the analysing of our concertation with the experts, because we learned a lot about what they think is good for virtual collaboration and what are the problems with it.” (FeU:5)

If organization is one of the main virtues of the project, it also came up among the problematic aspects, with a specific reference to the **strict deadlines and the high density of monthly meetings**.

“the deadlines: they often are very tight, not often realistic.” (eucen:11)

“the project is in fact so organized, that in some aspect it may be even too much organized. Strict schedule. Project is demanding. Monthly meetings are, in fact, something very important, but also, we think if they are so necessary when other kind of meetings – more important for certain aspects – are ran every two months, and when sometimes bilateral, face-to-face discussion between two partners would better address certain topics.” (eucen:10)

Some partners feel they **need more time to reflect on issues and to discuss them with the others**, i. e. during monthly meetings.

“In the meetings, it might be an improvement not to speak every time of every IO or about details of the task, but rather to focus on things that really need to be discussed.” (eucen:11)

“[the monthly partner meetings] are very short-timed and rather structured. Every time there is something that would require a bit of discussion, but we have the feeling that ‘time is running out’. (...) What is the role of monthly meetings? They should be very effective, but if it's just a listing of things... we miss the opportunity to discuss open issues. In a face to face situation, such meetings would be more natural and open. Now we know we have less than an hour: some things you could also read from an email. But for other topics, more time for discussion and getting a shared understanding would be needed. (JYU:11-13)

Leading partners feel a more pressing need to steer the project and this is sometimes perceived by other partners as a **change in tone**.

“I thought we could steer less, so we could stay on our responsibility, but I still think sometimes that needs more steering and I'm not so happy about that. (...) I don't want to run after them and say please do... or... we need that now” (FeU:11)

“the tone I feel has changed somewhat in the last months” (CCL:10)

Timelines needed to be readjusted due to some delays in various aspects of the project, such as IO delivery and dissemination, so in some areas of the project partners feel more pressure.

“When you really have the toolkit ready, you notice that things need to be further processed. The timetable is no longer working, operations are still needed, but the planned time is not enough.” (JYU:9)

“Another structural thing: we put our products into the cloud, so that other partners can look at the materials in progress and provide early feedback- however, if comments on the materials are made only when the deadline has been reached, you will be late in order to address their comments.” (JYU:14)

The independent **cloud solution** chosen as a platform for this project has also been difficult to integrate in partners' workflows, with some of them not being able to make full use of it.

"the platform: it is very detailed, but so much that might be confusing in part: some tasks are duplicated and you find things in different places." (eucen:10)

"Initially, (...) we had to use our personal Google account, that we did not check frequently. Some messages were seen late, some other were in the trash bin" (JYU:24)

"ONE Cloud is... sometimes it is a problem. It is a little bit complicated to me to follow that. You know, I have my personal way to work, with my drive, with my other emails, mailing lists, etc., these kind of things and I have to work with this interesting tool - I recognise it is very interesting, it is a very good tool... to have everything there etc. but (...) usually I receive invitation to attend to the meetings and this invitation goes to my calendar, I receive this invitation by mail, with my personal mails or my professional mail But now I'm receiving a lot of messages from this tool." (UOC:10)

The **impossibility to carry out a face-to-face meeting** so far has been pointed out as a possible cause for discussion and collaboration issues.

"I don't like that role (strong steering) and I think maybe it has also to do with that fact we could not do our ONE meeting quite early. You know this informal talk does not work too much with the partners, because they partly didn't know each other." (FeU:11)

"We should think of when the good time for the face-to-face meeting is. When you know people, it is easier to communicate via email. It's better to have earlier this valuable, only one face-to-face meeting: so we know each other – sometimes we have problems and we cannot easily associate the name of the person to the team she's part of. Have this meeting at an earlier point. If you get to know each other, then you have easy going in later meetings. Also, you can be less formal and you can raise critical topics, without the fear of how the other people will react." (JYU:16-18)

"we need more time for ourselves. So, not on discussing topics or IOs, which we now do - and of course this is important because they are due, we need to get them out. But also for learning more about each other. I think what Erasmus + is about: a strategic partnership is to know more about each other; of course, this is informally, but also to know maybe on other things that we work on. Also the ideal in my view is to explore what would be maybe common interest, common ideas, maybe for further projects, for other issues, for research projects, not only for Erasmus +, but also for other... though we have some connection within the partnership already. But I think this could be strengthened in a way that it is not about this deadline or that deadline and what is now the next step... This is more about process and not always about deadlines." (Feu:22)

Possible adjustments contemplated by partners include the **setup of meetings outside the regular monthly flow** to discuss specific topics in depth, which is already being done but on a less frequent basis.

"One should not underestimate this human factor. It is kind of a compromise. Maybe, I would suggest to add some virtual meetings, concentrating on certain work packages or topics, so that the monthly meetings have a role as they have now, but we also have the chance to discuss on certain important topics – really discuss, more than just emailing." (JYU:20)

"We suggested that partners could meet one hour earlier, but I think they found other ways to meet. Maybe, to say if we have issues to decide before the meeting, people could have a meeting with us before, as project coordinator. Promote this hour before, for getting things clarified. This is an issue that takes some time in the meeting, and it is a bit in the rush in the end. We don't actually want to use the monthly partner meeting for short updates on everything. But we get in discussions about this timeline, is this possible, etc. I think it is important but the way that we have structured... it could make sense for this exchange time before - it would still be the same day." (FeU:14)

“the partners could meet; we could have breakout rooms in Zoom. But also, if you say ‘I have some issues to discuss’, we could say that we are just there one hour before, for maybe informal exchange. I think we would have two lines: one would be the informal exchange with us and the other could be like the partners again... tell the partners meet here before if you have something to clarify, and not in the partner meeting.” (FeU:16)

“[like an] open space... there are some colleagues who always suggested ‘could we meet’, you know? And you always have the problem: when? I think if we have it regular, you can decide, and you could say: well... we have an issue we could discuss it on this day. (...) Also, to raise issues that you maybe do not want to raise in the big group” (FeU:18-20)

Also, **prioritizing the face-to-face meeting** (which is currently not possible due to travel restrictions) seems to be important to solve relational, organizational, and technical issues.

“communication and steering, that could be adjusted. But I think one central issue in this is the trans-national partner meeting that we couldn't have at an earlier stage. We wanted to have it at the end of February, we had to move it again due to the pandemic situation and I think this is a pity and maybe ... it could have made sense to have still an online meeting this year, a longer one, that is more about the meeting, not on the contents. More on sharing things about each other and have this intercultural inter-change or exchange. And I think this is a bit of an issue. If you connect and disconnect it is a bit different than when you meet and you need to talk and you can't escape the people to some extent” (FeU:12)

“We decided to have this meeting because there are some content issues, but we were quite clear that we want a meeting face to face. And of course we need to do something there, but I think the main issue would be to see each other, to talk to each other, to have wine, water,... where you want to meet (outside or inside), and to talk to get this feeling of... well, what you are doing - and not to have in a power point what are the projects that we are doing now, but more talking about it and then maybe of course afterwards changing some input about that. But I think this is something that is so important that even when we had the meeting on Tuesday, I said: it's more about the meeting, even if we don't have the topic.” (FeU:24)

Revising deadlines is also a suggested adjustment, which is already being applied.

Impact

Impact is not yet perceived as very strong; most partners feel that changes in our habits are very difficult to produce and that what has actually changed so far was determined by the pandemic situation. Other partners are more optimistic.

“The pandemic is changing the habits, ONE will make a small contribution” (CCL:8)

“the Pandemic and growing environmental awareness generally is changing the way we collaborate and manage. And ONE will make a small contribution to that change.” (CCL:10)

“maybe it's not easy to differentiate what is the effect of the project and what is the effect of what's happening all the time (pandemia, climate change..) around us. For instance, our university has a strategy for being more sustainable. This project is very much aligned with it – it's trying to find solutions about doing sustainable way of things. We will try in the future to have projects with less meetings, for the sake of the climate. This is the way things need to be done in the future, we need to think about these issues. The project is contributing to our adoption of these practices.” (JYU:32-33)

“I think the ONE meeting would definitely have an impact. Maybe this is also a consequence of the pandemic. But I think our partners will definitely apply the ONE meeting approach. The IO will also probably help. They are very good tools when you start a project, or even where you write it.” (eucen:12)

One partner mentions the necessity of trying to **impact the European Commission** as the one instance that finances the projects and thus determines what kind of projects are being funded.

“we have also another challenge for us in this project. It is just to send this information and try to convince people at the European Commission that change the way to organise for instance the Erasmus + Projects. (...) We receive money to develop the intellectual output, but also we receive money for travel. And this an important part of the project. (...) I think one of the main actors that we have to impact is the European Commission itself, in order to change the way they organise the European projects. (...) ONE can have the responsibility to disseminate the final results and probably one of the ways to disseminate is to have a meeting with some people in the European Commission, who has the responsibility to develop projects and offer the opportunity to think the ways in another way or to pay for instance online meetings or this kind of things.” (UOC:32-34)

Methods and tools are difficult to change because even adjusting to new digital habits and to new tools requires time, and this is particularly difficult if it has to be done for one specific project among many others.

“I'm working with different companies, different associations, working at university and working with neighbours. (...) And that means sharing information by drive or sending messages to people to meetings and putting this in the personal calendar etc. etc. The only team that works in a different way is ONE, is this project. And I know and insist this is an interesting part of this project, but for me it is a lot of time-consuming, to start working with ONE Cloud.” (UOC:17)

“I have to admit that I could do more regarding using the cloud... You really need to trust that the cloud works well. (...) It takes time and you need some pressure from outside to switch – you have an uncomfortable period, then you start learning and using effectively the tools – a general psychological effect.” (JYU:24)

Collaborative project management depends a lot on small adjustments to already existing practices: in this sense the project is providing room for experience on both good and bad practices, in order to reach awareness on the overall state of things and on the results. Some partners think that the impact will be small in this sense, but also that participants will be able to use at least some elements of the experience gathered in this project.

“I always think that the learning is of good and bad practices. You could learn a lot of things you wouldn't do anymore. I think that there would be some learnings.” (FeU:41)

“It will definitely make participants think, and it will make them implement at least some parts or aspects of the method. I don't know how much it will have an impact, though, but to some I think it should.” (eucen:13)

Environmental awareness and sustainability is an area of impact that is currently quite far on the horizon, with partners envisioning it for the next one or two years at the earliest.

“I am sure that the final results of this project will be very interesting to be used for the future projects, probably when we'll realise that we don't need so many face to face meetings and we don't need to use our time travelling and etcetera and having this bad impact for the sustainability (...) I'm sure that this project will have a very strong impact, but probably in one or two years.” (UOC:30)

“I'm sure that the project will have a strong impact in the future, but nowadays to be honest the people are happy when they have the opportunity to travel, to see the other colleagues and to work with them in the same way.” (UOC:30)

ANNEX

Interview Guide Interim Evaluation

- Which aspects of the project and of its management have you appreciated more in this first year?
- Which aspects of the project and of its management have you found more problematic in this first year?
- Are there any aspects that should be adjusted?
- Methods and tools - do you think that ONE is actually going to (or beginning to) change habits of participants in terms of methods and tools that could lead to smarter and greener practices?
- Collaborative Project Management - do you think that ONE is actually going to (or beginning to) change the way participants collaborate and manage their projects?
- Environmental Awareness & Sustainability - do you think ONE is having an impact on environmental awareness and sustainability?