

Evaluation Report

Intellectual Output 4

Elaborated by



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a formative evaluation of the Social Inclusion of People with Autism Spectrum

Syndrome Through Virtual Reality (VRAA) project funded under the Erasmus+ EU programme for two years from September 2019-January 2022. The report provides an internal and objective perspective on the achievements of the project to date and findings regarding these with a view to informing future activities. The report will form the basis for a summative evaluation to take place during the final three months of the project. The report content is informed by desk and field research undertaken by Intellectual Output (IO4) leader LBHF. The evaluation process happened alongside the duration and delivery of the project and several informative reports were produced summarising the results of each output; meeting; event and overall project impact. LBHF worked closely with the coordinator and other IO leader to ensure that activity was not duplicated whilst enabling the partnership to share findings and plan future activity.

This partnership of five organisations from five EU countries has four Intellectual Outputs (IO) led by different partners which together aim to meet the Erasmus+ programme focus on **promoting social inclusion**; *Supporting individuals in acquiring and developing basic skills and key competences and improving and extending the supply of high-quality learning opportunities tailored to the needs of individual low-skilled or low-qualified adults.*

This report details the project achievements to date and recommends actions aimed at supporting partners to address issues which have been raised and require attention to further develop effective partnership working an achievement of the project outputs and outcomes.

Project Introduction

The project aimed to develop VR simulations for young people with ASD, with the simulations decided on, chosen, and technically developed by partners (3D modelling, programming, etc.) and ultimately tested by the target group themselves.

The project was originally set to run from September 2019 to August 2021. – however, the onset of a global Pandemic demanded new and innovative ways of working, and the project was extended until January 2022.

The **Target group** were young people with ASD age 16-30, 20 per country. The **Secondary target group** focussed on trainers who will help young people with ASD in using VR, as well as potential employers.

Background information and context

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF) was the project lead for Intellectual Output 4 (IO4) undertaking the evaluation of VRAA, a two-year project, funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme KA2 – Strategic Partnerships for Adult Education.

The overall aim of the VRAA project was ‘... to enhance the social competencies of young people with ASD and increase social inclusion and employability, helping to improve work related learning skills and expand employment options. The development of innovative VR-learning scenarios, which can be used for support and training of individuals with ASD to enhance their social and employment skills. Furthermore, the project intended to create guidelines for potential employers of young people with ASD. In this way, the aim is to foster social integration and employment opportunities for the target group through VR technology.’

The project aims and objectives:

- Develop computer assisted learning and training in navigating standard situations, based on practicing spoken dialogue and interaction within VR-scenarios
- Through simulated everyday situations, people with ASD will undergo training to enhance their social skills. Training will improve their ability to navigate standard everyday situations and interact with people around them.
- Preparation for the labour market: Through the VR-environment design, developers with ASD will enhance their workplace competencies.
- The technical development of the VR training tools will contribute to advancing the use of digital methods and materials in rehabilitation and education, thus enhancing the digital understanding and level of competence of both the users and the trainers.
- Advancing the rehabilitation methods digitally will contribute to changing the way of thinking around the rehabilitation and education of people with ASD. Trainers will become open-minded towards digital teaching methods and gain

new perspectives on digital solutions and possibilities, which might very well contribute to the integration of more creative learning paths in rehabilitation and education.

- Enable trainers to spend more time in addressing the needs of the individual user and the ability to closely monitor the progress and performance of each student. The user will be the one entering the VR-environment, but the technology allows the trainer to follow the interaction and thus allows for feedback in the actual situation.
- To produce an effective and efficient tool for people with ASD that can support a learner-based learning method. Among the very few institutions in Europe that will offer VR-learning environment directed towards people with ASD.
- Develop virtual reality tools that, through simulated everyday situations, will train and enhance the social skills of young people with ASD.
- Offer a new learning and rehabilitation opportunity and contribute to improving digital and social competences.
- Offer young adults with ASD the opportunity of training in everyday situations, which will enhance key competences and help in progress towards higher qualifications.
- Help to improve skills in social interaction and enable a fuller participation in society.
- Generate an employment opportunity for the toolkit developers with ASD, in that it hones and promotes their employability skills and generally trains them for the real world, ensuring they are job ready and socially aware.
- People with ASD who possess IT-skills will develop the tools under the supervision of capable trainers. By developing the assistive tools/technologies, those with ASD will enhance their workplace competencies.

Project Partners

The project has been delivered by five partners located across Europe, strategically located geographically in Denmark, Germany, France, Cyprus, and the United Kingdom.

VIFIN

Vejle- DK (Project lead)

Resource Centre for Integration (VIFIN) is a knowledge and research centre at the Municipality of Vejle established in 2002 to collect and process knowledge on integration, and to develop and implement integration projects and activities. It creates, disseminates and mainstream good practice on integration and social development at the local, regional, national, and international levels with the vision to be the leader in knowledge building, dialogue and innovation on integration and development.

Wisamar

Leipzig- DE (Project partner)

Wisamar is a non-profit educational institute in Leipzig, Germany, acting in vocational, cultural, and adult education. Wisamar has been accredited by TÜV as an education provider according to the Employment Office of the Federal Employment Office (AZAV) and at the Office of Migration and Refugees as Integration Course Provider.

The quality management system in the AZAV accreditation process is audited on an annual basis. Wisamar works in four areas: Integration; Labour market and social integration; Further education; Project Office; EU Mobility & Mobility Consultancy. The aim of the organization is the promotion of education, tolerance, and international attitude in all spheres of understanding between different peoples, cultures, and education.

LBHF

London - UK (Project partner)

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is a local authority in West London that provides services and information for residents, local businesses, and the local community. Children's Services is a department within this authority and works with schools, colleges, and training providers to support students in identifying their options and opportunities. This includes meeting the Special Educational Need Development (SEND) agenda for all special needs young people, providing support through education and the curriculum along with projects specifically designed to aid young people with complex needs, such as Autism, Asperger's, ADHD.

Pistes Solidaires

Pau - FR (Project partner)

Pistes-Solidaires is an association that develops its projects and actions according to UNESCO's 4 pillars of education: learn to know, learn to be, learn to do, learn to live together and with the others. The organisation creates educational situations to develop social skills, to facilitate living together and to learn to be. The organisation bases its work on non-formal education methods, particularly those based on experiential learning. Our goal is that each young person may benefit from the unique experience of international educational mobility. Education goes hand in hand with openness to the world and an understanding of local / global interdependencies.

SYNTHESIS

Nicosia - CY (Project partner)

SYNTHESIS Centre for Research and Education Ltd. is a pioneering enterprise aiming to develop and support social entrepreneurship in Cyprus. It initiates and implements projects of positive social impact (in the fields of employment, migrant integration, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion) and operates "Hub Nicosia," a collaborative space and a community of organisations with primary social purpose.

Key tasks

There were several tasks that were set out to be delivered including:

- 10 different VR scenarios for the target group to practice and test their skills (10 learning modules)
- A platform for the developed scenarios and learning materials
- A user's handbook – in a video format held on the project website

- A manual for employment of people with ASD and related good practices
- Local training events (20 people/country X 5 countries = 100 people)
- A Trainers Training Event (4 teachers/trainers per country x 5 = 20)
- Local Multiplier Events (20 x 4 = 80 participants)
- A final dissemination conference (30 local participants + 8 international participants)
- A dissemination plans
- An evaluation Report

Roles and Responsibilities

Each Partner was responsible for and led a different output which reflected their experience and expertise, with active contribution from all partners.

- 1) Needs Analysis/VR Environment Design and Description: Wisamar
- 2) Technical Development & Implementation and Platform Development: VIFIN
- 3) The local roll out of the VR Training Scenarios (20 per country =100 total): All partners
- 4) Manual for Employment of People with ASD and Related Good Practices: SYNTHESIS
- 5) Evaluation and Assessment: LBHF
- 6) Development of Dissemination Plan: Pistes-Solidaires
- 7) Multiplier Event – A final Conference: All Partners
- 8) Local Multiplier Events: All Partners

Results and Impact

The partnership met regularly to clarify roles and responsibilities, and these were closely monitored and led by the project lead and the partnership. All aims and objectives were met as originally set during the kick-off meeting in November 2019.

Needs analysis and Environment Descriptions

The implementation of this IO was led by the German partner Wisamar and carried out by all project partners. Wisamar developed the necessary templates and instructions in close cooperation with the lead of IO2, VIFIN, enabling the further development of the VR scenarios. This set the scene and created a strong foundation for project development.

The tasks of this IO were implemented in four steps:

1. Needs analysis in all partner countries

A template was shared by Wisamar, and partners were asked to conduct 10 semi structured interviews in-country in order to identify typical difficult daily situations for people with ASD. This enabled partners the opportunity to select the most appropriate and relevant scenarios that could be developed into VR formats.

2. Selection of the 10 training environments

The data was summarised, peer reviewed and a final template with all scenarios was shared by Wisamar as a foundation for the final 10 scenarios.

3. Description of the 10 training environments

The descriptions include the following points:

- Overall learning objective of this environment
- Storyline (What will happen from the beginning to the end?)
- Environment itself (Where are we?) with pictures
- Characters within the environment (Who does the user interact with? Are there any extra people?)
- Quests (What small tasks does the user perform?)
- Game objects (Are there any special objects the user needs to finish a quest?)
- Teacher/trainer overview: possible distractions

4. Description of the trainer's interface and the log system

Each VR scenario has been developed with varying levels of difficulty in order to enable progressive “training” of the target group. These were designed and included in each environment description, although not all elements have been incorporated due to interface difficulties.

Technical Development & Implementation and Platform Development

The implementation of this IO was led by the Danish partner VIFIN and carried out and supported by all project partners. VRAA scenarios were created based on the Needs Analysis with input from each partner.

VIFIN created a clear development plan to monitor all technical developments. Starting with storyline and quests, establishing environments, creating characters, audio recordings, testing, and feedback from teachers and trainers. see fig 1

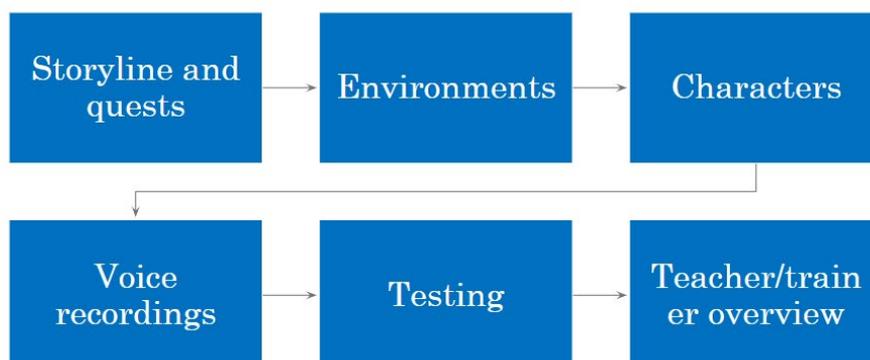


Figure 1 VR Development Process

VR training videos were developed based upon the above activities and shared within each partner country.

Manual for Employment of People with ASD and Related Good Practices

The implementation of this IO was led by the Cypriot partner, Synthesis who wrote the Employer Manual with input from each partner, as a guide for employers when recruiting young people with ASD.

The manual has been divided into 3 sections:

1st Section refers to processes of pre-employment (how to advertise the positions, how to interview, how to tailor questions etc).

2nd Section refers to the initial stages / weeks / 1st month of employment, and includes induction training, how to manage corporate events, how to assign tasks and how to offer constructive feedback.

3rd Section consisting of topics of special interest (how to address physical interactions i.e., handshakes, etc, how to manage and address conflict, how to handle terminations, how to deal with intense, emotional situations).

Dissemination

The implementation of this task was led by the French partner Pistes Solidaires with input from all project partners. At the beginning of the project a dissemination plan was shared setting out essential aspects such as the identification of target groups and beneficiaries:

- Target group: agencies that can reuse the results of the project (e.g., organisations dealing with TSA, Employers, schools, and colleges)
- Beneficiary: person that benefits from the project results without being able to reuse them (people with TSA)

Dissemination Report and results:

The stakeholder analysis: gathering data on relevant contacts, agencies and organisations that might be find the project and its results of interest. This was regularly updated during the project lifetime.

A final dissemination report along with 3 newsletters have been produced.

Multiplier Events:

A webinar was held on the 21st of May 2021 to enable the gathering of valuable feedback and discussion around the project development

6 local multiplier events were organised to disseminate the project reaching a total of 100 participants and attendees.

Final Conference:

The final conference took place in December 2021, online, with presentations from each partner and attendance from several professionals in the field across the EU and UK.



Figure 2 Final Conference Agenda

Training

Learning Teaching and Training Activity (LTTA):

The LTTA saw representation from each partner country, at an actual 'physical' event in Pau, France. Teachers and education professionals were present, and the training activity covered the following aspects:

- To present the results of the project to professionals
- To test the virtual reality environments
- To gather feedback to improve the content
- To prepare the implementation and testing with people with ASD

Local Training Events:

A mix of local training events took place with the aim to further disseminate the tools of the project as well as upskilling professionals in using the headsets; provide feedback on the current scenarios and how to best utilise them on a day-to-day basis. Each project partner followed a different approach as a result of the timing of the activity, current measures in place in each country (Covid-19) and availability of participants. As a result, across the 5 countries there is a mix of training the trainers & feedback from end users.

Evaluation and Assessment

LBHF began evaluating activities at the start of the project, with individual reports on all outputs and outcomes, and this report is the outcome.

EVALUATION PLAN

The initial VRAA Evaluation Plan ensured that there was a focus on the activities linked to the main outcomes and intended results of the VRAA project. This was reviewed and agreed at our first partner meeting in November 2019. The evaluation plan aimed to identify and select the criteria used for assessing the project progress in comparison

to targets set, underlining which aspects of activity are essential to the project success and reaching qualitative outcomes. An evaluation strategy included methodology and processes for evaluating each activity.

Evaluation Priorities

Objectives and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide an external and objective perspective that would explore the strengths and weaknesses of the VRAA project in order to evaluate achievements and provide recommendations for future improvements.

Specific objectives were to assess the project's:

- **Relevance:** the extent to which the objectives were consistent with beneficiaries' needs and priorities
- **Effectiveness:** the extent to which the targeted project objectives were achieved
- **Sustainability:** the extent to which the activities and results are likely to continue after the project
- **Impact:** where possible, the long-term effects produced by the project (directly, indirectly, intended, unintended, positive, and negative).

Evaluation stakeholders

The results of the evaluation are intended for internal use by the partners to inform future improvements and to transfer learning across the network.

Relevant results and lessons learned will be shared with other stakeholders, including employers, youth organisations, universities and colleges involved in delivering training to educators and policymakers involved in ASD.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this internal evaluation was formative and intended to improve performance, thereby ensuring the project progressed as planned. This involved collecting information to illustrate that main objectives were met and to also identify unexpected developments.

Regular scrutiny of project progress and the project plan was undertaken, feedback was gathered and acted upon during the project lifetime and fed into consistent improvements and updates.

At the product level, the evaluation of VRAA was summative, or outcome focused, and the quality of achievement was compared with the project's proposal requirements.

The impact evaluation was a combination of both methods, collecting information during the project and summarising the main achievement compared to the main objectives at the end of the project, focusing on the dissemination and exploitation of project results. The methods for the data collection combined quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative methods (interviews, information collected at meetings, document reviews).

This evaluation report is based on the following activities:

Desk research:

- Background material: the project application form, which identified the rationale for and expected achievements of the project.
- Evidence of the project's activities: minutes of meetings, emails and liaison, reports and research documents, records of activity, evaluations, and feedback from partners.
- Internal evaluation and monitoring of the project's intellectual outputs: research undertaken i.e., needs analysis, meetings i.e., transnational, and regular meeting and all other activity to date.

All written materials were subject to scrutiny as quantitative and qualitative evidence of the achievements of planned outputs.

Field research

Online: email; slack; zoom; teams and other meetings with partners

Face to face:

Attendance and evaluation of the Kick-off meeting in Denmark in 2019

Attendance and Evaluation of the LTTA and Transnational Partner Meeting (TPM) in France in 2021

Validity

The ability of the evaluation to establish the success of the VRAA Project was limited by:

- Engagement of stakeholders due to the ongoing pandemic: four months after the project outset the pandemic started impacting with immediate effect upon the second transnational meeting, engendering instability and anxiety amongst the partnership with a knock-on effect in terms of training and multiplier events and the delivery of the project.

– this was addressed and in place of the face-to-face meetings, online meetings were scheduled and held despite IT related difficulties.

• Closure of VIFIN:

Delays occurred in securing engagement and active participation when the lead partner announced they were in the process of closing.

– this was addressed by partners remaining in regular communication, the lead Partner provided regular updates and the issue was resolved enabling the continuance of the project.

Evaluation Terms of Reference

A Terms of Reference for Evaluation was written at the start of the project and shared with Partners at the Initial Kick off Meeting in Denmark.

The evaluation was conducted in two ways:

- 1) the quality of the partnership
- 2) the quality of the output.

- A Quality Assurance Plan¹ was drawn up by LBHF, in consultation with the partners. VIFIN, and partners' consensus established a procedure of regular reporting of the implementation of the actions and its progress.
- At the kick-off meeting, the coordinator and partners decided upon the common formats of documentation necessary for evaluation, such as project publications, reports, and other deliverables to facilitate exchange, reporting and comparison of achievements.
- A common detailed methodology including quantitative and qualitative indicators for monitoring the implementation process was developed in a participatory manner with all partners contributing.
- Indicators were defined at the partner meeting with contribution from all participating organisations. (See Output 4 for details of measures.) These are composed of qualitative and quantitative indicators, among which are the following:
 - **Quantitative:** no. of participants in local/transnational events, no of multipliers; no. of participants to the closing event; no. of users of the modules.
 - **Qualitative:** quality of the VR modules and scenarios and platform developed through the project.
- The indicators were based on the analysis of: - participants' and check lists; - surveys and interviews after the pilot-testing as well as after the results. Internal evaluation was conducted to ensure that targets were reached, as well as to allow adjustments for future activities.
- The evaluation plan aimed to identify and select the criteria used for assessing the project progress in comparison to targets set, underlining which aspects of activity are essential to the project success and reaching qualitative outcomes. It established the strategy for evaluation, including a methodology and processes for evaluating each activity.
- The project progress was assessed through project reports, budget spent, (TBC) actions implemented, number of people involved, deliverables produced,

followers on media and others defined by the project partners. It also included an analysis on what has been achieved and what can be improved in the project implementation.

- Each partner was responsible for monitoring and evaluation of activities in their countries and activities for which they are responsible. Project management maintained regular discussions on its implementation with partners, exchanging feedback, identified positive/negative aspects and created a space for improvements. This allowed raising the questions of risks and their prevention.

Key Tasks	Location	Time Period
Review of background materials and literature review	Remote	June – July 2019 and ongoing
Kick-Off meeting	London	July 2019
Submission of evaluation framework and workplan	Remote	August – September 2019
Field work, including interviews with stakeholders	Remote and in 4 of countries of partnership	May/June 2020 and March/April 2021
Review of monitoring data	Remote	August 2020 – Mar 2021
Interim report submitted	Remote– via Skype and videoconferencing where possible	July 2020
Draft report submitted	Remote– via Skype and videoconferencing where possible	June 2021
Final report submitted	Remote	July 2021

Tools for data collection included:

- Project records: documenting the project, identifying goals and objectives, including needs, expected outcomes, activities, resources, stages of development, context etc.
- the projects' monitoring records were collected and analysed to establish the extent to which the project has successfully recruited and retained intended

participants and delivered planned activities. This included exploring the progress and success/impact of the dissemination plan. And checking that financial systems were fit for purpose.

- Pre and post questionnaires: collecting and collating the views of young people, and staff, including outcomes, distance travelled and impact.
- Qualitative interviews: in-depth qualitative data, through interviews with partners and participants, to establish context, delivery, impact, outputs, added value and lessons learned.

EVALUATION ANALYSIS

Project Management

The Project was led by VIFIN, and at the outset a clear division of roles and tasks, work plan and timetable were established.

On-going assistance to partners was manifested in consistent and regular feedback to/from partners, providing support to all project partners. All partners were consistently supported by VIFIN and the different intellectual output/work package leaders, with the employment of online platforms like Trello, Slack, and Google Drive.

Various criteria of successful quality management were assessed and approved by the consortium at the beginning of the project: This included the evaluation of management within the regular surveys sent along with the project, including setting agendas, and the preparation and chairing of partnership and transnational meetings

The VIFIN coordinator was available to assist in all the reporting elements, allowing a fully supportive environment and, a clear division of roles and tasks engendered an efficient work plan and timetable.

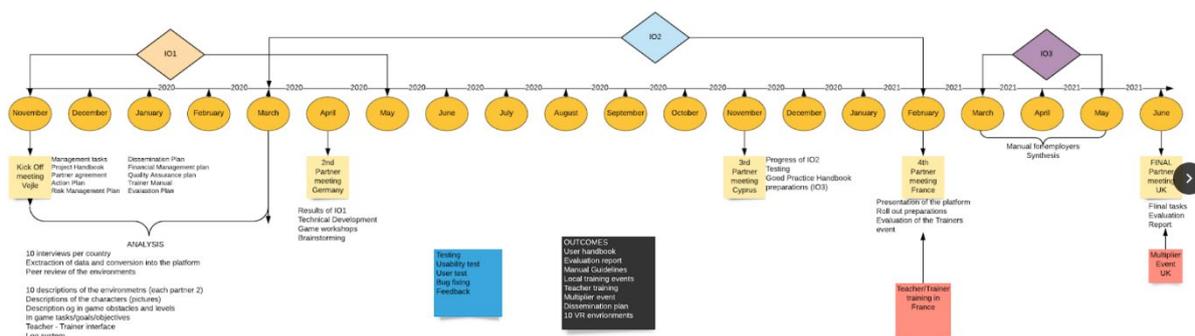


Figure 3 Project Milestones

The partnership met the deadlines where possible, and the Covid-19 pandemic demanded an adaptation regarding activities such as workshops, LTTA and testing and, dates were adjusted accordingly. Whilst these delays had little effect on the project outcomes, they did impact on the project delivery plan and milestones. However, the overall evaluation analysis is positive.

There was a short hiatus of a few months when Project Management experienced some difficulties. VIFIN were closing their offices earlier than anticipated and in October 2020 we were informed that projects would continue. However, there was a lot of uncertainty and partners, whilst waiting for updates on new management, continued regular communications and liaison. The VIFIN Coordinator updated and supported the partnership on a regular basis which helped to maintain momentum.

By the 1st of December 2020, the partnership was secure in the knowledge that the project would continue and by March we also had a new coordinator from VIFIN to lead the project. This was a very smooth transition and enabled the partnership to continue at pace with scenario developments and planning for our international Webinar in May 2021.

There was a requirement on two occasions to extend the project. The first was requested in August 2020, for 3 months, as many assignments had to be postponed because of the Pandemic. The second extension requested in November 21, was for 1 month and again was a result of the Pandemic, and to allow for testing activities to take place. All revised deadlines and outputs and deliveries were met as rescheduled, and the project management oversaw clear financial reporting.

Transnational Meetings

The unprecedented effects of the pandemic saw the cancellation of some planned transnational activities and, in general, partners met online, and workshops and multiplier events were conducted online via zoom and teams.

Even so, the partnership was able to hold the first kick off meeting in November 2019 in Denmark and there was a small window of opportunity in September 2021 where participants were able to meet for the LTTA in France, this also allowed partners to have a face-face TPM.

The partnership was satisfied with all online meetings, whether it was about the logistics itself or about the content and the contributions of each partner. All transnational meetings were preceded by the sending of an online agenda asking the partners for their input and the opportunity to add agenda items or discussion points.

Kick Off Meeting

face to face in Denmark- full evaluation [here](#)

In the evaluation of our 1st transnational meeting there were overall positive responses to how the partnership was formed.

This was the first time all partners met, and it was held in the premises of VIFIN in Vejle. Over two days partners were able to discuss how each of them would conduct and lead on their assigned responsibilities and collaborate with each other. In addition, the group was able to do a local visit to Aspit a local autism school focusing on the teaching of IT related subjects aimed at young people diagnosed with ASD.

b) What was the most valuable aspect of this meeting for you?

- Clear perspective of the project, working plan and actions to do + kindness of the hosts
- Clarification of time and tasks
- Exchange of ideas; meeting the partners;
- The group synergy and exchange of ideas and practices
- The final outcome and understanding of the project, project methodology and next steps.
- There were new partners, so good to meet. Also, the topic itself was good to get an open discussion on.
- Finally meeting everyone!

1



Figure 4 Image extracted from Kick Off Evaluation Report

Transnational Partner meeting II

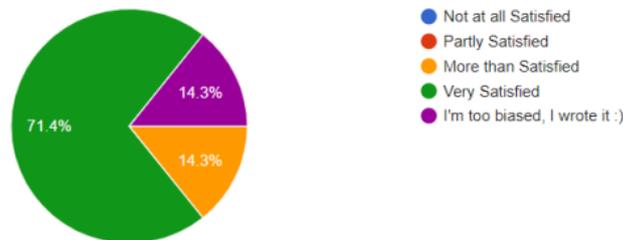
online in place of Leipzig- full evaluation - [here](#)

The 2nd transnational meeting was the first event to be disrupted by the Pandemic Covid-19 and meant that partners had to meet online. Overall, a good meeting and Some positive comments were shared in the evaluation.

VRAA Evaluation Form Transnational Meeting II – Online Meeting replacing Leipzig March 2020

1. Clarity of the agenda sent out

7 responses



2. Organisation and administration of the meeting

7 responses

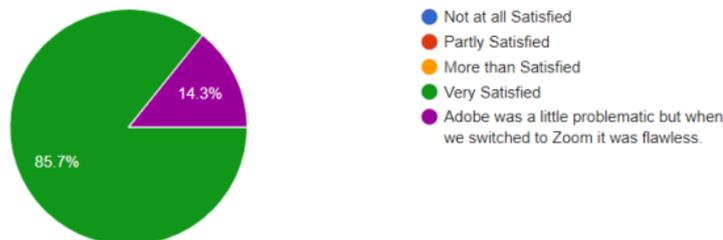


Figure 5 Image extracted from TPM 2 Evaluation Report

When asked ‘What was the most valuable aspect of this meeting to you?’ partners responded:

12. What was the most valuable aspect of this meeting to you?

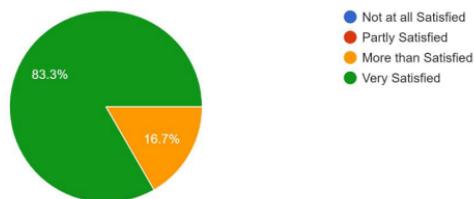
- Seeing the progress of the project, hearing about first results, everyone’s involvement with the project is very positive.
- clear and pragmatic decision on how to proceed
- The pacing, clarity and efficiency of the meeting.
- That everybody was very quick in agreeing on the next steps
- clarity and excellent cooperation
- Figuring out how we are making the virtual environments

Transnational Partner meeting III
face to face in France- full evaluation [here](#)

The 3rd transnational meeting was held face to face again in conjunction with the delivery of the LTTA held in Pau. This was a great opportunity for partners to be able to reconnect with each other and plan the last steps of the project more effectively.

VRAA Evaluation Form Transnational Meeting III -Pau

4. Pace and timing of the meeting
6 responses



5. All partners came to the meeting informed about the tasks and well prepared
6 responses

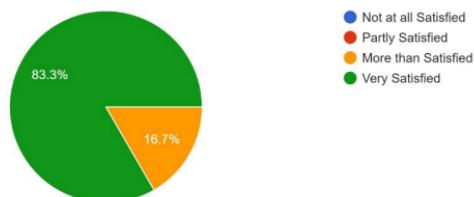


Figure 6 Image extracted from TPM 3 Evaluation Report

Transnational Partner meeting IV
online in place of London- full evaluation - [here](#)

The 4th transnational meeting was held right after the delivery of the final conference. Covid-19 measures and concerns essentially provoked the meeting being postponed and eventually held online. However, this last meeting allowed all partners to be plan

the closure of the project assigning last tasks necessary as well as looking at sustainability.

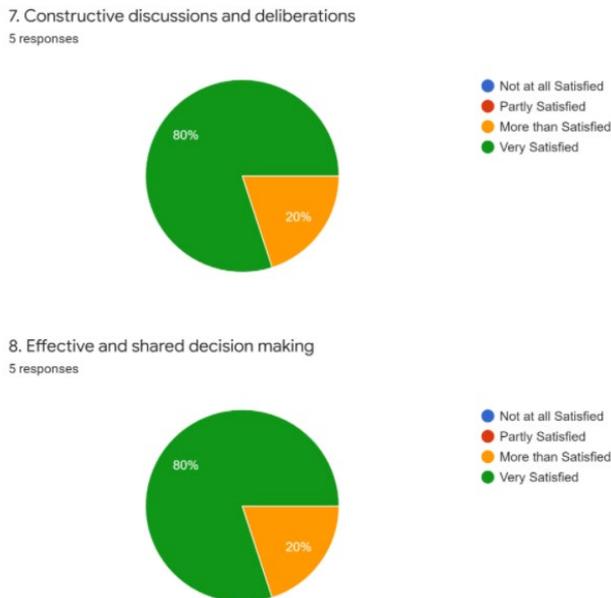


Figure 7 Image extracted from TPM 4 Evaluation Report

Transnational Partner meeting V

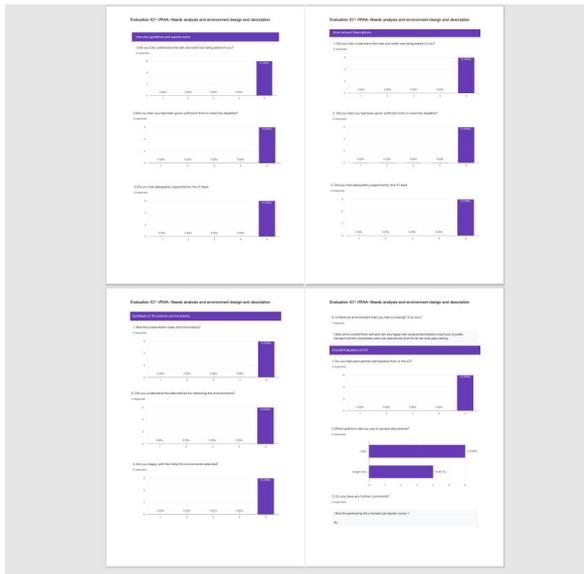
In principle 5 meetings were planned to be held for the duration of the project. Yet only 4 transnational meetings were documented and evaluated. This was largely affected by the period when VIFIN announced its closure, and they were negotiating transferring the coordination of the project. It meant that there was a hiatus and the meeting in Cyprus didn't go ahead. Despite this fact, the group kept in constant contact through slack and email and although the work had to be paused until a decision was reached to reinstate the project coordination other work still carried on albeit less intensively which has resulted in a higher peak and catching up on some delays further on in the project cycle.

Intellectual Outputs

INTELLECTUAL OUTPUTS

The evaluation process included an evaluation of the intellectual outputs. After each output had been completed an evaluation questionnaire was circulated to determine any issues arising; important points and lessons learned. This was internal given the fact that the tools developed were included in the evaluation process. For the first and third outputs, there was an extra layer of evaluation as it involved consulting with field experts in the autism and business field respectively.

Evaluation IO1 - [here](#)

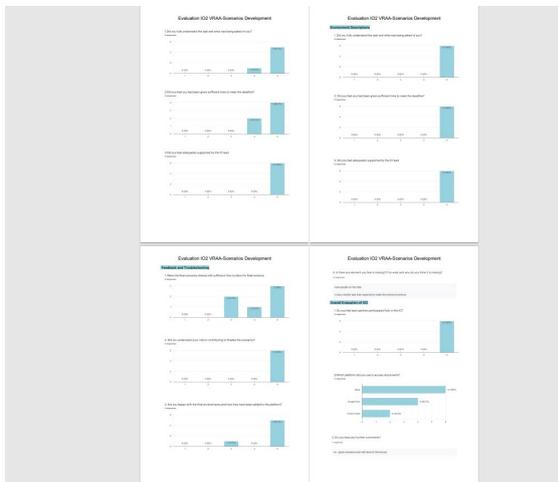


Evaluation IO2 – [here](#)



Figure 8 Images extracted from IO'S 1;2;3 Evaluation Reports

Evaluation IO3 - [here](#)



Multiplier Events

Webinar

Held on the 9th of May 2021, the webinar was conducted with 53 attendees from across the globe, including a few countries in Europe and extending to Bangladesh and Mexico.

Full Evaluation available [here](#)

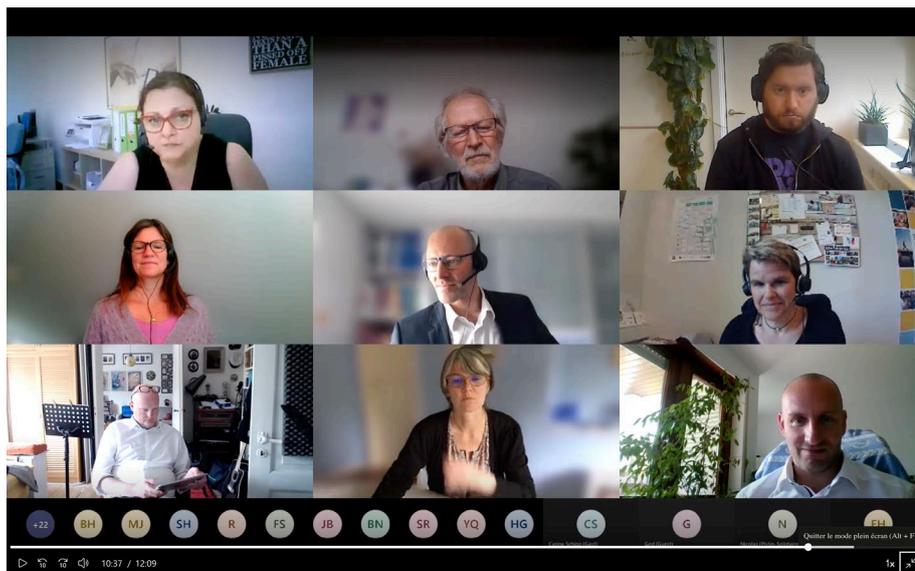


Figure 9 Online Webinar Screenshot

Local Multiplier Events

VIFIN had planned for a local multiplier event to take place on January 26, 2022, where the scenarios were fully implemented. However due to the pandemic this event was changed to instead become a training workshop for the teachers. The project was presented along with the partners and the outputs available. The event centred around the presentation of the scenarios and discussion among the teachers at CSV (Centre for Special Education of Adults). 5 of the teachers were physically present and 14 were online (again due to the corona situation)

Wisamar held a multiplier event on the 26th of January. Due to the Covid Pandemic it was held online via Zoom. 19 participants from 2 different organisations who work with people on the autistic spectrum in different fields of life followed the invitation. One was the Austismuszentrum Leipzig, the other one the Oberlin Haus in Potsdam. The partnership and the project aim presented, the main objective though was to grant a glimpse into the developed scenarios and the testing process. The organisations do not own VR headsets yet, so this was part very important.

Another central point was to get feedback about the scenarios, where participants as experts see their application in their fields of work and discuss how they imagine a further development of the project results.

Pistes Solidaires also encountered difficulties and the Covid-19 situation at the time meant it was impossible to organise any public event with the number of attendees expected. Instead, and to find a solution it was decided that various smaller scale events with professionals and autists could take place. In total, 2 events were delivered: on January the 12th for 12 people and January the 19th for 13 people. Various stakeholders were gathered at these meetings. The first session comprised autists, while the second comprised organisations working with autists, whether these activities are at the core of their action or reaching young autists as some of their participants. An additional session, with another organisation, was set for March 17th.



Figure 10 Synthesis Online Social Media Post

Synthesis like the other partners were still experiencing COVID-19 restrictions in Cyprus at the time of realisation of their multiplier event. This concerned not only the number of participants they could host, but primarily the necessity for them to present a SAFE PASS under the regulations of the time. However, the partner decided against online delivery since participation in those is not as interactive and it can be difficult to attract and maintain participants throughout the presentations. Therefore 1 event was held on the 28th of January 2022 and hosted in their premises which aimed to introduce the project and the IOs produced to all 12 participants.

Although multiple headsets were available not one participant was willing to try it out due to safety and sanitary concerns. However, all participants were instructed on how to download and access the latest build to use with their own equipment or equipment they had access to. In addition, 4 individual meetings / info sessions were delivered (the first with 2 participants, and the other 3 with 1 participant each), totalling 7 extra participants. This was directed at people engaged in the hiring process and who coached for employability, as well as some others with a personal interest in candidates on the spectrum. These info sessions also presented the project but relied heavily on working through the manual in Greek, chapter by chapter and introducing the tools and techniques described in it.

LBHF was always meant to organise and deliver the final conference. This was held on the 7th of December 2021, online counting with a total of 23 attendees from which 5 were teachers that attended the LTTA in France. All partners presented their outputs but also chaired a panel at the end with a Q&A session.

Full Evaluation available [here](#)

In summary the pandemic greatly affected the ability to deliver in person and meet the capacity for larger events. Although partners were unable to meet the requirement for the 20 participants per multiplier event, the partnerships also recognise that the project was disseminated effectively and to people who have a vested interest in using the outputs produced even after the project ended.

In general, the events targeted people with ASD, and these were very interested in the dynamics and even gave some additional feedback that was communicated to VIFIN so they could update (when it was technically possible) the content of the environments. In addition, the partnership was able to reach other targets of the project, by engaging with businesses, social workers/training centres and psychologists.

Most sessions lasted around 3 hours, after an introduction, a presentation on the scenarios and the environments and some partners were also able to test and gather feedback on the employer's manual.

The multiplier events organised across demonstrated how the project didn't reach its full potential and all tester users kept asking for more virtual reality environments, with different challenges and situations. The consortium is working on further developments, and it is anticipated that another project could further fulfil the needs and ideas around more ASD scenario developments.

Training Activities

LTTA

The LTTA happened almost a year later, in September 2021 and saw representation from each partner country, at an actual 'physical' meeting in Pau. It really was quite astounding that the partnership was able to meet face to face



Figure 11 LTTA Event

almost 2 years later,

despite embracing news ways of working. Logistically it was challenging for some partners, with less flight connections available, availability of flights; unpredictability of travel and extra costs attributed to PCR tests before and after travelling.

The training event proved immensely useful for all involved specifically the teachers that hadn't had the chance to use the VR headsets, and discuss applicability in their own work environments, expectations, and possible future outcomes and, how to adapt this for ultimate users. This buzzing atmosphere of excitement enabled incredible participation and feedback which fed into the whole overall quality of the project. Responses emphasised the efficiency of each session with participants reflecting on a variety of themes.

The chance to discuss and finalize the project and the final activities

So delightful to see everybody, meet new colleagues, work so well as a team, and spend time in such a beautiful city. And not forgetting our excellent host, Nicholas!

Feedback on previous work

getting to know so many people and their perspectives

Very competent and engaged participants

very good session with good insights into what is happening in terms of production

more time with the headsets would have been great

Full Evaluation available [here](#)

In country activities: Training the Trainers / People with ASD

VIFIN was not able to deliver any training activities do that due to Covid-19. Despite having planned a workshop with the students at the centre for special education of adults (CSV), this had had to be cancelled and with the closure of the project so close to happen it was decided that priority would be given to the local multiplier event as described above.

WISAMAR held 6 different testing activities between the 10th and 31st of January. Testers were experts for autism spectrum “disorders”, either because: they are on the autistic spectrum themselves; they are people who work with people who are on the spectrum or both.

In more detail:

“In the Autismzentrum Leipzig we tested with 3, and later 5 people at the time. One participant tested a scenario, while the others followed on a screen via stream. So, everybody was able to give feedback and discuss their thoughts. The Testing itself was limited to 15 to 30 minutes, so no one tested all the scenarios. They stuck to one or two and tested them several times.”

In addition, Wisamar also conducted training sessions with 2 professionals, mainly to gather feedback on the interface of the virtual environments, usability, and practicality to introduce this as a teaching method for people with ASD.



Figure 12 WISAMAR Training Activities

PISTES Solidaires's testing took place in November and December, and It was held in the facilities of GEM Jardin Divers, a space rented by an NGO managed by young autists. The participants (young people) and professionals present were very interested in all results, especially the virtual environments that constitute the core of the project. In total 21 people participated in these sessions and were accompanied by professionals the whole time. Each participant tested the environments for 15 to 20 minutes, so that everyone could try one. During that time, the other participants could see what was happening through a smartphone that was paired to the headsets.

Furthermore, Pistes Solidaires held a train the trainer's activity in January, at the SAMSAH, a local public organisation working with young people diagnosed with autism. 3 of their staff attended and tested the different environments.

“For them, to see the possibilities offered by virtual reality was a great opportunity to try a tool that they would be able to use in their daily work, especially since they just needed a VR headset. They were really interested in the product and planned to organise further testing with autists themselves. These sessions will be organized during Spring 2022. “

Overall, all users and the professionals thought the project was very useful, very exciting, and all the comments were positive: they wanted the environments to be improved to be even more efficient.

LBHF supported by Turtle Key Arts did a session with 15 young people on 29th January part of their Key Club initiative, this was mainly geared at collecting feedback on the use of Virtual Reality and find out from young people if they had any issues with the headsets; getting dizzy or overall struggling to concentrate on the task for longer than 15 minutes.

“The Key Club organizer emphasized the need to have a instructions booklet or video to introduce how to use the headset and the hand command and be briefed prior to experimenting with the young people, also as they only had access to 2 headsets, they struggled with keeping the group engaged and shorten the sessions to the maximum. “

For the trainers LBHF partnered with the Education Psychology department who worked with colleagues at Queensmill centre for Autism in Hammersmith and Fulham. During a CPD meeting 5 members of staff received training in using the VR scenarios and experimented the transport scenario in Hammersmith. At the time some bugs were being fixed and the teachers felt that these should be improved in order to help young people navigate the system better.

In their opinion “the scenarios were “too empty” and there are not enough challenges or overstimulation's in adding together the fact that the operation of the program was not intuitive, more (detailed) instructions or a practice level would have been appreciated.”

Synthesis was not able to deliver any training activities related to the scenarios due to Covid-19 and the difficulty around using a limited number of headsets. However, they focused on testing the employer manual with employers and consultants and had key conversations around the usability of the resource and how it could be incorporated in entry to work strategies.

Exceptional Costs

In terms of exceptional costs there was a change from the material listed in the application and the actual purchased items. This was due to at the time of application submission (2019), it focused on which hardware was available and appropriate at that specific time. The market developed extremely fast at that time and specifications for headsets and hardware, in general, changed quite a lot. This was also true in the period from when the application was written, to when it was granted. When the application was written, VIFIN was looking at the HTC VIVE as the most likely VR candidate, but ended up with the Oculus Quest, which in retrospective was not even on the market at the time, also witnessed by the fact that WISAMAR could not even buy it directly in Germany at the time and it had to be purchased by VIFIN.

VR Headsets:

A total of 10 - headsets have been purchased (2 per partner organisation).

360 Camera:

A total of 5 - 360 cameras were acquired (1 per partner organisation).



Figure 13 Oculus Quest 2 VR Headset

IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

COVID-19 Pandemic Impact

In the midst of winter, I found within me, an invincible Summer.
(Albert Camus)

When the partners met, at the very first partner meeting back in November 2019, nobody could have predicted that it would be almost the last time before the end of project. This Kick-Off meeting was meant to be where the discussion of the overall project would take place; clarification in terms of roles and responsibilities, timelines, outputs, and outcomes would be further clarified – all the things one would normally go through at the initial stage.

When, in January 2020 the first reports on a mysterious new illness in China emerged, not one person could have imagined that what was going to follow. At that stage there was not a lot of information and no definitive signs of any spread going further or getting to Europe even. In February, the news got more intense, along with reports of widespread illness across the globe, afflicting cruise passengers and European ski resorts. Italy took the first big hit, and the rest of us were not far behind.

By early March, many countries had started to ‘Lockdown’ – a new word for us ‘civilians’ that would become part of our standard lexicon. And by mid-March, the whole world was in ‘Lockdown’, shops started flooding with people queuing for essentials; major events got cancelled; people were advised to avoid using public transport and all international travel was severely affected. All this at a point when the partnership was about to “meet” again in Leipzig – Germany

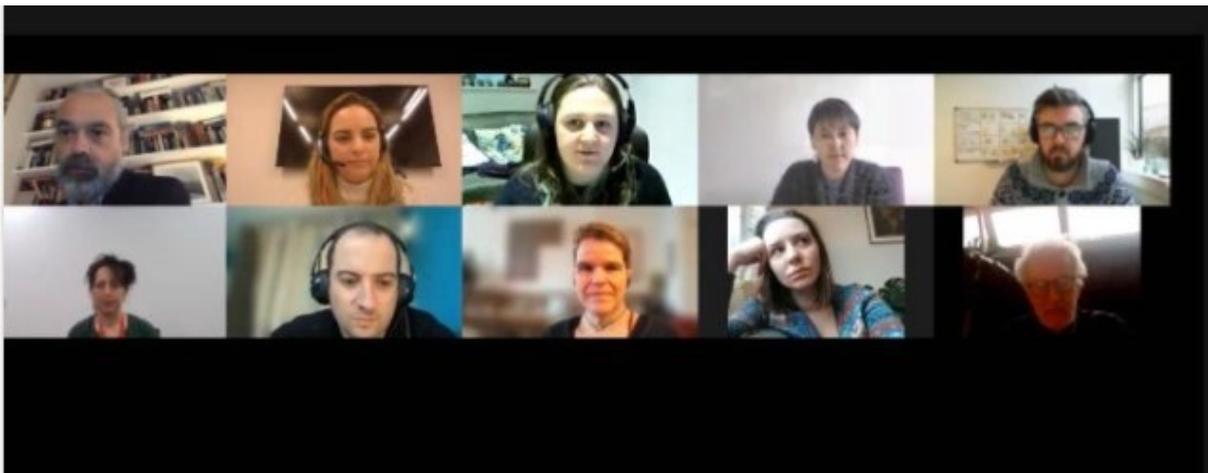


Figure 14 Online Conference Speaker Screenshot

Alongside this, there followed the more severe consequences. Hospitals overflowing with patients; no cure or even certainty of what “we” were fighting meaning the total closure of all non-essential shops, and everything else. The world metamorphized into a new, dystopian environment where streets, town and cities became eerily quiet, cars

disappeared from our roads, planes left the skies and creating ideal conditions for nature to thrive.

With all this happening “how on earth would we continue our project amid a global pandemic”?

We had cancelled our second physical meeting and there were no signs of making the next one scheduled for October that same year. This all meant that an extension was required to adjust timelines and meet the ultimate aims and objectives of the project.

The year was rapidly coming to an end, and VIFIN announced it was closing, which coupled with an ongoing pandemic added to the pressure of delivering a high-quality project almost midway through.

For all the reasons above, the partnership felt it was essential to properly evaluate the impact to date and partners in LBHF conducted a mid-project review. This enabled the capture of data around the partnership morale in meeting key objectives, adhering to their intellectual output’s responsibilities, and assessing how the pandemic may have influenced the partnership and the completion of the project.

Full Evaluation available [here](#)

Comments included . . .

Communication is good, also du(e) to good channels, but TPMs are missed. Deadlines have been affected due to the closing down of the coordinator. TPMs continually postponed or held online due to COVID-19 Training activities postponed as have project deadlines.

The direct, immediate communication in the project is simply missing. Of course, everything factual and technical can be clarified online and the work on the project is implemented excellently. But the personal level, the exchange, the inspiration ... fall by the wayside without f2f meetings

Clearly the pandemic and VIFIN closing has affected the whole project.

Despite our current ‘difficulties’ the project has managed to meet deadlines; overall management has been highly professional with regular comms and updates. We should give ourselves a big round of applause for overcoming huge life events!

2021 heralded a new year and new beginning, or so everyone thought. The project kept progressing albeit online and the development of scenarios had progressed substantially. The online learning teaching and training activity was initially planned for Spring 2021 and there was hope it would happen. If not, at least there was the option of holding an online webinar to give the project some buzz and “recruit” any interested parties in the tools developed so far. Despite high hopes, the LTTA was postponed, and the webinar took place in May 2021.

Restrictions were slightly lifted towards the Summer, but diaries quickly became packed with many other delayed projects and meetings taking place. Consequently, the LTTA and Transnational Partner Meeting was rescheduled for the Autumn term in Pau, France.

In October 2021, after the LTTA, we planned to conduct local training activities implementing the scenarios and planning the local multiplier events to disseminate the project with a culminating final project conference and TPM to take place in London in December 2021. Yet again, the Pandemic altered our plans as along came another variant of Covid-19.

The final conference and final TPM end up both taking place online and the project takes another hit in terms of reaching its final stretch.

So then, like the rest of the world, we adopted the Darwinian route - To Adapt and Survive – and our journey has led us here.

The accounts from the last two pages give a detailed and thorough overview of events to better understand the full impact of the pandemic and how, despite these difficulties, the partnership adapted, persevered, and thrived in an environment of constant unpredictability. Without such a strong partnership it may have led to a very different denouement and consequently, it is indeed quite incredible that the project reached over 90% of its targets and objectives.

Local, Regional and National Impact

The dissemination report demonstrates the local, regional, and national impact each organisation estimates. Numbers reached are based on calculation of publications vs readers/ clicks on website, meetings held, and events delivered. A total of 514 people have been reached via face to face and online meetings. Online publication estimates are based on the figures available per partner country upon distribution of printed and online materials, these include newsletters, intranet access and local media channels, 121 259 impressions have been estimated in this instance.

	VIFIN	PISTES	SYNTHESIS	WISAMAR	LBHF
Project website	Website available in all languages				
Project NL	✓ (EN)	✓ (FR)	✓ (EN-GR)	✓ (DE)	✓ (EN)
Dissemination report	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Face 2 face / Online Meetings	170	70	24	52	198
Online publications	706	2196	2600 (est.)	2757	113 000 (est.)
Multiplier events	19 (hybrid)	25 (face to face)	12 (face to face)	19 (online)	25 (online)
Total	895	2336	2636	32828	113 223
EPALE (audience impossible to count)	✓ (DK)	✓ (FR)	✓ (EN)	✓ (DE)	✓ (EN)

Figure 15 Table from Dissemination Report

CONCLUSION

Change is the new normal.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated change at an incredible rate, and this evaluation took on a whole new meaning and level of significance considering the challenges facing the project and individual organisations.

This output has proved to be not only an exercise on data collection, accountability and monitoring but also a deeper consideration on the overall experience of the VRAA project throughout the last 2 years. This evaluation has allowed the partnership to reflect and understand how the project evolved and achieved its aims and objectives in such a challenging environment.

This final chapter aims to achieve the following:

- Analyse its Findings
- Building on lessons learned
- Offer Recommendations

Findings

Findings are a key aspect which enable the partnership to reflect on their collective success:

- 1)The ability of the partnership to quickly change and adapt to new ways of working along with developing and creating new ways of working and new project partnerships
- 2)Satisfaction with processes and organisation – including necessary controls and systems and logistics
- 3)Partners happy with data sharing platforms chosen for communication e.g., slack and google
- 4)Deadlines met along with valuable tools shared on these forums
- 5)Monitoring data & data sharing agreements: sufficiency of data, and form in which data is collected/shared
- 6)Quality and effectiveness as well the usability of the VR scenarios
- 7)Quality and effectiveness and usability of the Manual for Employers

Recommendations

The following recommendations were key learnings and may be considered for future partnership working:

- 1)Physical meetings enable more creativity, feedback, discussion etc.
- 2)Identify early any challenges or obstacles to the achievement of the objectives
- 3)Forecast any unintended consequences and detail them in the risk assessment log
- 4)For partners to conduct pre and post surveys for each IO allowing for improvements to be measured and processes that could be suggested.
- 5)Focus on the impact of strong partnerships with external organisations therefore keeping them in the loop as the project develops
- 6)Transferability of materials purchased and future beneficiaries use- included in the application summary

Final Remarks

When we embarked upon our Erasmus + project over two years ago, we were clear what we wanted to achieve, and how. This journey has been exciting, fascinating and, at times frustrating but the strength of our partnership has seen us achieve our aims and learn so much from each other.

Together, we have met a variety of challenges, along with a huge once in a lifetime challenge, overcome them with alacrity and, experienced the essential nature of true transnational working, all be it largely in an online fashion.

This in turn has given us the opportunity to virtually immerse ourselves in the educational worlds of each partner and meet staff and students at a variety of agencies and institutions.

Thank you to all members of the VRAA Partnership for their hard work and commitment to the project and, despite these unprecedented times, working through barriers and difficulties to make the VRAA Project a success.

It is hoped that we will continue to work together on future projects and continue with our vision to help to raise standards and improve well-being for young people with autism on an international basis.



Figure 16 LTTA Teachers and Partners in PAU

ANNEXES



Evaluation TM4
online - London.docx



evaluation tm3
face2face - pau .docx



Evaluation TM2
Online - Leipzig.docx



Evaluation of Kick-Off
meeting VRAA .doc