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Tempus Programme  
of the European Union

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# SWING SUSTAINABILITY AND EXPLOITATION REPORT

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*March 2016*

This document demonstrates how the SWING project has met deliverables relating to:

<b>Work Package 6.1.</b> Exploitation and sustainability plan
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<b>Activities:</b> Exploitation and sustainability plan
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## **Sustainability**

### Introduction

A project can be considered as sustainable if its outcomes continue after the end of EU funding. It is not only a matter of simply continuing some activities, but sustainability can be described by the maintenance, further development and/or dissemination of relevant outputs and outcomes after the end of the EU funding.

The sustainability of a project can be practically described considering both the activities/outputs maintained or developed (i.e. procedures and tools are still used, new sessions of training have been developed, new users are involved, ...) after the end of the funding and the intensity and enlargement of the network (i.e. partners take care of the follow-up, the universities have involved other local and national institutions, new universities or research teams join the network, ...).

Finally some factors influence the sustainability of a project and they depend on the type of the project and on the context external to the project itself (i.e. culture and traditions, socio-economic needs, ...).

### Exchange experiences: know practices and criticalities

The first characteristic of the SWING Project and its offer is closely related to the nature of project, indeed it is a TEMPUS project. This means an exchange of practices and know-how from EU countries to specific areas extra EU.

This type of project often implies not only a previous experience of these practices, but also a deep knowledge about the critical situations that can be encountered during the implementation and the realisation of the actions required to reach the goals expected by the project. Moreover it requires the capacity of observation and reading of the contexts where these practices have to be explained and trained.

Firstly, for example, the previous and deep experience of Disabled Students Services of the European Universities permit to know:

- what is a Disabled Students Service and what are its functions;

- how to realize and how to manage a Disabled Students Service;
- how to improve and evolve a Disabled Students Service regarding tools and technologies.

The know-how about functions, management and tools/technologies has driven the construction of effective and incisive training for partner countries with the aim to guarantee a solid background for the implementation of an Accessibility Centres. In other words, the exchange of knowledge and competences about disability and inclusion has been necessary not only to assure a base for valiant reflections and working experimentations related to the Assistive Technologies, but also to make these actions and efforts an operative reality even after the conclusion of the SWING Project. Indeed the experience of a Disabled Students Services was new for partner countries and a simple training about AT would have risked to give only a transitory support without enduring results.

That means the sustainability of the project itself has been related also to the chances of survival and enlargement of the Accessibility Centres after the actions of SWING Project.

Consequently, a sustained action of training and updating about the general theme of inclusion should be maintained to avoid the risk to tie the service to the same actions or a specific category of users. Similarly to the European experience the partner countries contexts have shown how some disabilities rather than others tend to be more considered because more visible and culturally accepted, while a global concept of inclusion is recommended and has to be followed for almost two main reasons:

- it is more convenient (it costs less) because it permits to integrate different competences, strategies and tools;
- it is more effective and durable because it permits to think and find always new ways of support.

Accordingly with these assumptions in Morocco a draft framework law on the protection and advancement of persons with disability has been presented to the Parliament in order to be discussed. Directed by supporting social cohesion fund and includes the following themes:

To Give scholarships to students schooled in the status of disability in all educational levels (1.000 Dh) per month

To give Support granting non-refundable for holders of income for school projects through the creation of a company

Technical and equipment aids for students with a disability

Creation of centers belonging to the institution (The National Cooperation) in all cities for the reception and guidance.

- Development of a national system to assess disability and give the card of (person in the status of disability)

At that regard, some of the recommendations emerged from the conferences held in PC concern the role of the Ministries of Higher Education and the Parliamentary Committees of Education in order:

- to be responsible for supporting individuals with disabilities through making amendments with some laws governing the admission of learners with disabilities at universities, especially since they are only allowed to adopt limited majors at faculties of social and theoretical sciences. Thus, these learners should be admitted to study in varied fields as sciences, information technology, engineering, mathematics, such that their admission is based on their merits and educational accomplishments;
- to provide comprehensive training programs for faculty members as well as employees at institutions, universities, and schools. This is done with the aim of letting faculty members and employees acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that enable them to provide an effective support for learners with disabilities.
- to allocate a budget for enhancing scientific research in the field of assistive technology and curriculum development for individuals with disabilities. This is in addition to the provision of the necessary facilities and assistive technology at colleges and schools. This includes providing libraries with books and references that are accessible to learners with disabilities to enhance their educational accomplishments and to improve their academic and cultural level (e.g. providing audio-visual material in Braille).

Secondly, the knowledge about AT, and AT themselves, can not be considered learnt and obtained for good, but it requires a constant updating not only to remain informed about the last innovations and developments, but also to be aware of the most convenient and accessible for all solutions. Indeed a barrier against the sustainability

and maintenance of an Accessibility Centre able to offer suitable AT is the lack of knowledge about the existence of different and often cheaper technologies.

Regarding this theme, the common experience between European countries of profitable cooperation with private institutions expert in AT has been extremely useful not only in order to plan a considerable training, but also as a concrete example to show and describe to partner countries. Indeed a key for sustainability is closely linked to the possibility to create a strong network and cooperation between Universities and other institution (private or public, educational or health, ...) that research and work in the AT field. This collaboration is worthwhile for both the Universities and the institutions because it permits to develop new studies and maintain a link between research and real needs and requests from people.

Finally, even if the possession of the technologies is one of the fundamental steps to create an Accessibility Centre, it can not guarantee by itself the long duration and the development of the service. Again the experience gained through the years by the European partners has suggested a spread used of AT. In other words the aim is to introduce the AT approach not as a special practice confined in a specific room, but as shared strategy whose know-how and functions are well-known by different actors. Indeed sustainability meant also as the capacity to involve new participants is deeply linked to the communication to other areas of the Universities involved of the results and outputs obtained during the project. Furthermore sustainability is also supported by the physical accessibility to the AT, so it is highly recommended to organise and branch all the equipment (hardware, software, ...) received so that the enrolment of students with disabilities will be facilitated.

To summarise, there are 3 main frameworks where to identify factors or suggestions for sustainability:

- standing training about the general themes of: inclusion, special needs and AT;
- strong collaboration with other institutions in order to study and develop new tools and technologies;
- widespread and sharing of the equipment and the know-how.

## The importance of the network

It has already mentioned the importance of a strong network with private or public institutions that are concerned about the development of AT, nonetheless the for obtaining optimal use of the project results beyond the lifetime of the project it is important to establish solid networking base with partner universities and other institutions and associations involved in education of persons with disabilities.

Indeed create and enlarge a network between different universities, educational institutions, health departments and local and national political advisors provides many benefits and encourages success of the experience. Networking with others is carried out because the sustainability mostly depends on the information, exchange of materials, technology and knowledge in order to make the results obtained by the project continuously developed and answering to social needs.

Consequently the networking action is essential for the sustainability of the project thanks to its implications.

Firstly, a networking approach entail itself and promote a real inclusive vision. The collaboration between different actors puts into play more points of view and competences with the result to reach higher goals and have more opportunities of maintenance.

Strictly linked to this point are an economical and a cultural considerations. Indeed a saving of economical resources is really possible if everyone contributes to the planning of the life project of a disabled person because networking and collaboration prevent the risk of few (expensive) super-specialised figure who hold the knowledge. Furthermore, networking permits the widespread of a culture about disability that is claimed by ICF (WHO, 2001) and affirms the importance of the functioning over the function, and the role of the interaction between people and the contexts where they live.

Secondly, networking promote sustainability facilitating the enlargement not only in the number of disabled students that are involved in the support experience with AT, but also in the number of disabled students that can access to the higher education.

Finally, it opens the opportunity to create new technologies and new strategies of use, useful also in other situations and able to renew teaching and learning methodologies, and consequently to identify and produce even new jobs.

Specifically, the resources on the SWING website have been noticed and appreciated by the Royal National College for the Blind in UK, that have signed a contract with a university in Saudi Arabia to assist with a curriculum for the blind in a new institution catering for blind and visually impaired students, and have contacted Coventry University in order to arrange not only the use of the material but also further collaborations.

#### Involve the other level of the educational system: the role of an early investment

The main purpose of SWING Project was the development of sustainable strategies to ensure disabled students' equal access to learning environments. Indeed, it has been shown how in many Arab countries there still are disabled children who are not integrated into the mainstream educational system. This lack of inclusion is likely due to the shortage, or even absence, of specific educational material, knowledge about AT and training or researches about this themes. Consequently SWING Project has tried, using the experience of EU partners as well as international best practices, to give practical assistance in removing as much as possible these barriers to the accessibility at the educational system.

The main focus of the SWING Project was of course the higher education access, through the involvement of students, teachers, administrative staff. However, the sustainability and the maintenance of the results reached with the project are linked to the possibility of enlarge the competences and the know-how about AT to a larger target of students. Indeed an earlier investment in training and funding for younger disabled people will generate a generation of students more self-reliant and able to move firstly across the university system and after into the world of work easier with less cost of economical and social resources.

Therefore, it is possible to trace an element of sustainability in the SWING Project itself if it is considered as a prototype of experience of training and needs assessment to spread in other contexts in order to make them expert and accessible

to everyone. In other words the sustainability can lie in the model presented by the project and in its capacity of transmit a different approach to disability.

### Students as teachers

A change in paradigms has been moved not only regarding the approach to disability, but also considering the role of the disabled student himself. Indeed disabled students are not simply the users of a specific training about AT, they are at the same time the main protagonists of SWING and their feedback is not only important, but essential because has offered indications useful to adapt the path and the actions of the project in order to make them more effective as possible.

Indeed, a further factor of sustainability is linked to the role of the students. Their active participation guarantees the equipment will be used also in the future. In addition new sessions of training can be planned involving students themselves as teachers and experts in AT, also in other levels of the educational system (i.e. high school).

## **Exploitation**

The SWING exploitation strategy is organized along two axes: a) provisions common to all partners (horizontal elements) and b) activities specific for each partner (vertical elements).

### Common Exploitation Strategy

The common exploitation strategy revolves around the two main dissemination tools of the SWING project: the SWING website and the virtual Community. These tools will be sustained after the end of the project in order to continue bringing together teachers, researchers, policy makers, educational technologists, content providers,



and other potential end-users. Particular emphasis will be paid to the sustainability of the following networks:

- Network of Associated Partners

The consortium will continue to disseminate all project outcomes at local, regional and national level in order to maximize the impact and promote new knowledge and expertise in the field of assistive technologies to both relevant organizations and potential end users. More specifically, all partners will utilize their wide network of associates, including Universities, NGOs, Vocational Training Centres, schools, educational and parent organizations, networks of professionals etc. not only at national but also at regional/local and international levels.

- Project's Network of Associates

Through the SWING dissemination activities that were implemented during the implementation phase of the project a network of associates was developed. The overall goal is this network of project associates to operate as a project multiplier, furthering the sustainability of its outputs.

- Relevant stakeholders

In addition to the previous section the consortium will make an effort to attract relevant stakeholders/ organizations, which are actively involved in activities, related to the SWING project end users to diffuse the project outcomes not only at national but also at European level.

Partner-specific Exploitation Plans

Beside the overall exploitation strategy each partner, on the basis of its mission and activities will develop individual exploitation tools based on the outcomes of the SWING project.

- The findings of the "SWING" project will be incorporated in future training courses which will be offered to teachers and academics. More specifically, Assistive Technologies will be used in future courses and trainings, and will be promoted to teachers the idea of adapting assistive technologies into their daily activities.

- The SWING training model and the training resources will be applied in relevant training courses which will be offered to academic teachers and students in the following years.
  
- The SWING website will be maintained and promoted through news items.
  
- The SWING material and video tutorial will be stored in USB pen drives that will be distributed to the consortium and the networking created during the project in order to obtain a product useful in other training and courses in the universities' network in partner countries.
  
- Maintaining the contacts between SWING consortium they will be explored and developed new proposals that will continue to elaborate the SWING project main idea, and sources of finance for future development of the Assistive Technology centers at the aim of achieving a self-financing.