

Dear Reader,

The debate around DEBATE goes on – welcome to (re)join the discussion!

DEBATE is an Interreg IIIC operation with the objective of the raise of quality of business advisory in Europe, a joint initiative and challenge of business advisers and educators. Since the release of the latest International Newsletter in June 2006 various stimulating but also puzzling topics have been introduced to the agenda and addressed.

The survey on the validity and applicability of the Professional Profile, the description of the key competences of a Business Adviser, has been finalised and publicised. The opinion of business advisers outside the DEBATE project as well as their clients, entrepreneurs above all, about the Profile was asked. Also the expectations of the entrepreneurs and other stakeholders of Business Advisers were investigated.

The results of the survey are now being carefully analysed in the DEBATE regions. For example, ideas for the further development of the curricula for the (in-service) training of Business Advisers are being tracked. The first drafts of the curricula have already been presented and discussed. You can find intriguing examples also on this Newsletter!

The Professional Profile will be further developed based on the results of the survey. It will eventually lay down the criteria for the profession of a “European Business Adviser”. The process of the ultimate certification of the profession in the partner countries has already been launched.

The professionals will self-evidently need a forum for their dialogues in the future, too, beyond the Operation. The DEBATERS have already set the date for a historical event: the establishment of the European Association of Business Advisers in April 2007 and the elaboration of a portal (E-Network) as a tool of the Association is proceeding with full speed.



But what is actually the essence or “core” of the daily work of a Business Adviser? And are there differences between the partner countries? During the 4th International Workshop in Mosonmagyaróvár, Hungary, in October 2006 the exchange of methods and practices of business advisory was initiated.

The inspiring comparison of everyday tools is continuing in the context of the pilot exchange programme. During a study visit to a selected business advisory organisation in another partner country the Business Adviser will reflect on her or his own work. The outgoing Business Adviser is supported by a personal tutoring teacher (trainer) who helps in the analysis and structuring of the inherent learning process.

Follow us up – stories from the exchanges will be told in the next issue of the International Newsletter in spring 2007!

Nina Holopainen
DEBATE Head Coordinator
nina.holopainen@pkamk.fi

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Tailor -made training for Business Advisors- international and national approaches!

The development work in elaborating the training programmes for BAs continued in Hungary workshop. Each representative of the educational institutions was asked to complete the first draft of the training module which was introduced and cross-evaluated in the international groups in the seminar. While formulating the drafts of the programmes, the representatives were asked to find answers for the critical questions of the training like:

- Why is this programme elaborated?
- For whom is the programme aimed at?
- What kind of competences (knowledge, skills, and attitude) the programme will provide for the students?
- What kind of teaching methods will be used?
- How will you guide the student and his/her learning process?
- Who will evaluate and by which method?

After constructive and encouraging discussions we can state that the demand for such training is obvious because there is no homogeneous structure for BAs' education in Europe. The main target groups for the training will be the "junior" as well as the "senior" BAs with heterogeneous educational backgrounds. Efficient tool will be a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) of the BA to formulate the training according to the needs of the participant! The educational institutions will develop a separate programmes as well as special modules integrated in the MBA/MSc context.

The contents of the programmes will reflect special features of the national BA-system, the results of the professional profile of the BA as well as the results of the surveys. The

main focus will be on promoting innovative way of thinking, international perspective, relationship management, legislation and economical issues. All the participants emphasized the importance of the combination of theory and practice, e.g. case-studies and problem-based learning methods. Virtual learning was recommended to be used only in some parts of the training, but the programmes should be realized as a part-time studies.



The role of the BAs and experienced entrepreneurs as mentors was appreciated as a tool of guiding the student. The supervisor of the BA should participate actively in the PLP –interviews during the studies. Every group emphasized that the studies must be evaluated with marks based on the assignments.

As a summary of the discussions we can conclude that there are some international similarities as well as national differences which have to be considered in the next phases of the development work of the training programmes. The great challenge will be to develop a high quality, customer-oriented educational module for BAs in each partner region or country of DEBATE – project, because the basic educational structure and demands (e.g. certification system of the BAs/programmes) for such products varies a lot in each country. DEBATE – project offers an excellent forum to elaborate training together, not only in the international context, but also in co operation with the BAs and the representatives of the educational institutions.

*Ms. Ulla Asikainen
Component 5 coordinator
Degree programme Director in Rural Industries
North Karelia University of Applied Sciences*

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THE GREEK CONCEPT of the educational module

The objective of the educational module is to construct an educational unit (course) that will aim at preparing and developing the skills needed by SME BAs to convey to their clients (SMEs). The educational content should serve to educate/inform BAs on their knowledge 'gaps' (based on the national survey results); and, to build a better collaboration with their customers (SMEs). The audience should consist of all prospective BAs and current BAs under request. The total duration of the course should not exceed 20 hours. It would better be incorporated in the context of the programme of an MBA/MSc course.

The education content should involve teaching notes related to each country's content and needs; slides linked to teaching notes; and, a bulk package of related reading materials (articles, national or European reports,



- **Discussing the content of the educational modules** (from left to right): Ms. Karolina Szabó (HUN), Ms. Mariann Petres (HUN), Ms. Kirsi Heikkinen (FIN), Ms. Eva Goutzamani (GRE) and Ms. Irini Kafousia (GRE)

etc). Possible themes in the educational content can include strategy; attaining a competitive advantage; competing in the global arena; entrepreneurship; and, managing the relationship with the client.

Eva Goutzamani
egoutz@aueb.gr

TRAINING FOR BUSINESS ADVISORS - A TWO-STEP FROM NORTH KARELIA, FINLAND!

The work in elaborating the training programme for business advisors (BAs) in North Karelia, Finland has been very intensive and inspiring. We have a team consisting of BAs from our region (Ms. Eija Lampio, Mr. Mika Hyttinen, Mr. Raimo Töllli) and teachers of North Karelia University of Applied Sciences (Ms. Liisa Westman, Ms. Merja Mononen, Ms. Ulla Asikainen). The team has developed the programme together and introduced the first draft of it in Hungary workshop.

Why training for BAs in Finland?

In Finland there is a demand for the training for BAs simply because at the moment the educational structure for BAs is fragile and heterogeneous. The training programme will be further education for the students having basic education and working experience.

For whom is the training aimed at?

In the first place the module called "junior" training will be aimed at the participants with university/university of applied sciences (or equal) degree and at least one year "suitable" working experience. The second module, called "senior" training will be offered to the participants having "Junior" training with working experience as a BA OR higher vocational education (college level) and 5 years (minimum) working experience as a BA.

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What kind of skills and knowledge will the training provide?

The main objectives of the programme will be to "coach" the BA to analyse and develop customer's business and to "coach" the customer to meet the challenges of the changing business environment.

For whom is the training aimed at?

In the first place the module called "junior" training will be aimed at the participants with university/university of applied sciences (or equal) degree and at least one year "suitable" working experience. The second module, called "senior" training will be offered to the participants having "Junior" training with working experience as a BA OR higher vocational education (college level) and 5 years (minimum) working experience as a BA.

How will we train the BAs?

Each of the training modules will last for one year. We concluded to use contact lessons and guided distance learning in virtual learning environment. It's very important to arrange the training as part-time studies, because the main target group will be the BAs in the working life. We'll utilize the experts of the different branches of the economy in addition of the teachers of universities of applied sciences as well as academic universities. The key factor is to combine the theory and practice in a customer-oriented way to meet the learning needs of the BAs.

What do we provide for the BAs?

The training will last approximately one year per module. The accurate contents of the programmes will be formulated later, but there will topics like entrepreneurship, from business plan to business operation, from business operation to action, economical analysis and development and exchange of ownership of the enterprise. There will some special modules in certain business branch with theme on market analysis and development. The business in Europe will introduced including an exchange period abroad.

How will be the participants guided during the studies?

The key element will be the PLP – process with a tutoring teacher together with the supervisor from the working place. The use of mentors (BAs or experienced entrepreneurs) will be a crucial part of the student supporting system.

How will the studies be evaluated?

We'll develop a evaluation system with scale from 0 (failed) to 5 (excellent). The evaluation is based on the assignments and case-studies the participants will complete during the programme. The participants themselves contribute to the evaluation by making self-evaluation in each module.

What did we learn?

The discussions we had with our international DEABATE –colleagues in Hungary seminar were constructive and encouraging. The two-step –model: A junior and a senior module was highly appreciated, but we got also some critical feedback. The main criticism we gained was on the length of the training. In the next phase we have consider in a very strict manner if we should combine the modules into one entity lasting for one year instead of two years.

The development work will carry on in an enthusiastic working atmosphere with the contribution of different experts. Our ambitious goal is to have a training programme for marketing during spring time 2007 and we will!

Ms. Merja Mononen
Lecturer
North Karelia University of Applied Sciences

Ms. Ulla Asikainen
Degree programme Director in Rural Industries
North Karelia University of Applied Sciences

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LATEST NEWS

4th International workshop on the topic "Establishment of a structure of information and knowledge resources for the European business advisory – development and exchange of innovative methodology of business advisory" has been organised between the 26-28th of October 2006 in Mosonmagyaróvár, Hungary at the premises of the University of West-Hungary.



• Workshop participants



• Workshop building

The main topics of the workshops focused on two project objectives: the establishment of the Association of Business Advisors and the e-portal as a virtual platform to support business advisors.

ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN BUSINESS ADVISORS

As SMEs both in advanced market and in transition economies find it harder than larger businesses to find and use the information and the advice they need, it is widely recognized that business advisory, counseling and information services are the most effective means of assisting entrepreneurs in improving the competitiveness of small businesses.

The answer of the **DEBATE** operation is to establish an Association of European Business Advisors in order to reflect the needs of the Business Advisors in Europe and provide the appropriate tools that will match the needs of the European Small and Medium Enterprises. **DEBATE** operation is the "vaulting horse" for the European's Business Advisors Association.

The **Association of European Business Advisors -A.E.B.A** will be established as non-profit organization, the contribution of its members will finance the association and the headquarters will reside in Finland. Objectives of the association:

- Establish a European Network of Business Advisors
- Support the positive professional image and status of the European Business Advisor, adding to the mutual trust
- Provide tools, guidelines and methodologies to its members in order to enhance the quality of the provided services especially to SMEs
- Support the educational structure for business advisory in Europe
- Promote the exchange of know-how between the members of the Association

Members: Members of the association will be Business Advisors, Business Advisory Agencies, Educational Institutes public or private.

Anticipated Timetable: By the end of January '07, the association memorandum will be completed under the Finnish Law. By the end of April '07 the first conference of the association will take place in Karlstad Sweden during the 5th Workshop of the **DEBATE** operation.

Contact Information: www.debatenet.info
Irimi Kafousia, ekafousia@nea.gr

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E-NETWORK - BUSINESS ADVISOR PORTAL

Another concrete instrument for the European Business Advisors and key result of the **DEBATE** operation is the **Business Advisor Portal**.

The Business Advisor Portal is a signpost to resources about Business Advisory (a live knowledge repository), an effective community support tool and the instrument that will keep alive the vision and objectives of the **DEBATE** operation for a European Network of Business Advisors. The Business Advisor Portal aims to:

- Offer advice to SMEs and European Business Advisors
- Facilitate the exchange and development of best practices/knowledge between the European Business Advisors
- Become the framework for communication and cooperation between Business Advisors within Europe

- Facilitate the access to information on behalf of small and medium enterprises using new technologies like the World Wide Web
- Disseminate the results of the **DEBATE** operation

Functionalities:

- Forum
- Newsletter
- Yellow Pages
- Virtual Folder of Best Practices
- Mailing Lists
- Calendar
- Poll / Surveys
- Assessment Tools

Anticipated Timetable: By the end of the year the beta version of the portal will be available in public. By the end of July '07 the Business Advisor Portal will be finalized.

Contact Information: www.debatenet.info
Irina Kafousia, ekafousia@nea.gr
Kostas Paraskevopoulos, paraskev@nea.gr

"Regional Coordinator Tuomo Tahvanainen and Project Manager Anthony Okuogume from the regional DEBATE project in Kainuu, Finland, represented the whole interregional DEBATE project in the Interreg III C forum in Lille, France 15-16 November.



During the two days meeting, in which all together approx. 200 representatives from 90 European regions met to discuss the experiences and outcomes of Interreg III C projects and the basis for fundings in the up-coming INTERREG IVC, there was wide interest among participants of the challenging objectives of the DEBATE project. The subject to strengthen the role of European business advisors was found most important in guaranteeing high quality services to SMEs around Europe in the future."

Mr. Tuomo Tahvanainen
Regional coordinator
tuomo.tahvanainen@kainuunetu.fi

COMING UP

Workshop in Karlstad, Sweden
April 26-27, 2007 (Thursday-Friday)

Topic of the Workshop: *"Establishment of a structure of information and knowledge resources for the European business advisory" development and exchange of innovative methodology of business advisory with a special emphasis on the facilitation of the internationalisation of SMEs.* Karlstad is situated in the region of Värmland in Sweden, from 310 km from Stockholm, 240 km from Gothenburg and 210 km from Oslo. The region has about 273500 inhabitants. Karlstad has about 82700 inhabitants in 1200 square kilometres.



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