

This profile is part of the EU Study on Supporting School Innovation Across Europe. It presents one of the 24 schools in the study, giving an overview of the changes and experiences in that school. Find the rest of the materials from the study at:

www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation

Non-formal learning and entrepreneurship training in the Economics High School of Buzău



About our school

- ◆ **Location:** Buzău, Buzău County
- ◆ **Established:** 1922
- ◆ **Status:** Public school that provides upper secondary VET education for students of 14 to 19 years old
- ◆ **Number of pupils:** 1100 (in 2016)
- ◆ **Website:** <http://colegiuleconomic.rdsbz.ro/>
- ◆ **Contact person:** Dumitra Dumitraşcu



Why did we innovate?

The goals of the school are to develop professional skills for the students that would allow them to compete on the EU labour market, while at the same time being active citizens of a democratic society, aware of their rights and responsibilities. The school is a good illustration of how initial vocational education and training can embrace innovation in order to remain relevant in a changing labour market.

Moreover, the participation of the school in Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) and Erasmus+ projects has had a lasting impact on its innovative practices. Innovations benefited the most curricula on tourism and economics.



What were our innovations?

The following innovative practices have been implemented at the school:

- The 'Exercise company' is the most important innovation implemented at the school according to the staff. This practice supports students to go through all the steps of setting up a company, creating its administrative structure and running a company, therefore supporting students' entrepreneurship competences. Launched in 2008, it generated practices that are regarded very positively by the whole school community as well as by national authorities.
- The 'Different school' ('*Școala altfel*') programme (introduced in 2011) significantly changed the relationship between students and teachers, thanks to its flexibility. Coupled with the participation in trainings of non-formal education by the teaching staff and practices acquired within Erasmus+ projects, it helped to reshape the educational process at the school. Educational methods derived from non-formal education have become a permanent part of the educational process throughout the high school.
- Teachers have been involved in curricular innovation dedicated to their particular field of study (i.e. tourism and economics) while members of committees contributed to the renewal of the national curriculum. These committees are set up by the Ministry of Education and the National Centre for the Development of Vocational Education (CNDIPT) to draft the curriculum which is then discussed publicly.



What have we achieved?

Pupils

Students of the Economics High School of Buzău consider the school to be effective to attain relevant qualifications for the labour market, functioning both as an entry point for an active career or a bridge to higher education. This leads to higher motivation for learning, as well better acquisition of skills. According to students, innovative projects were the only way in which they developed skills to present information to others.

Graduates of the school considered that they were often in a better position to perform tasks that require both 'hard' and 'soft' skills than their counterparts from more prestigious high schools. This has contributed to the improved image of the school within the community in recent years.

Teachers

Teachers that offer project-based learning experiences coupled with techniques derived from non-formal education are more appreciated by students and more likely to generate engagement in learning.

Teachers have been involved in curricular innovation that is dedicated to their particular field of study (i.e. tourism and economics), with some of the sitting on the committees tasked with updating the national curriculum. These committees are set up by the Ministry and the CNDIPT with the task of drafting the curriculum.

School as a whole

In 2015 the school ranked fourth overall in the county in terms of academic results, which has been considered as a great achievement considering that it is a VET school recruiting three quarters of its students from rural areas.

The flexibility afforded by the '*Școala altfel*' Programme has been mentioned as a "game changer" in the relationship between students and teachers. Coupled with participation to trainings into non-

formal education by the teaching staff and practices acquired within the Erasmus+ projects, they have all reshaped the educational process.

Educational methods derived from non-formal education have become a constant part of the educational process throughout the high school. However, this does not mean that all students have been equally engaged into these practices, as some of those interviewed stating that they felt they were benefiting less than others.



The process of change: what helped us succeed?

School level

The teaching staff has referred to students as sources of inspiration and motivation to try out and apply new approaches. This has been a significant achievement, considering broad issues regarding students' motivation faced by many schools in the Romanian education system. A functioning motivational relationship between students and teachers has been the basis to engage into innovative practices.

Municipal level

As a VET high school, the Economics High School of Buzău has benefited from the support of local enterprises when planning and implementing some of its innovations. More comprehensive relations with enterprises would be beneficial, but this would require a better developed local economic sector.

National level

An NGO that has very close ties to high schools has developed several projects that targeted students of Economics High School of Buzău.

The labour market has been another key driving force for change, particularly in comparison with general high schools. Keeping close contacts with potential employers in order to arrange practical training for students was one way that the school used to successfully adapt to the requirements of the labour market.

Moreover, the eTwinning platform has been used as a stepping stone towards LLP and Erasmus+ projects, as well as a tool to disseminate their results. The school has implemented over a dozen of such small and cost-effective projects, which open the door towards larger initiatives.



The process of change: what limited us?

School level

School financial resources are limited to offering basic services, but external sources allowed some support for teachers that are willing to innovate.

Municipal level

The teaching staff considers that as a vocational school with very close ties to the local labour market and very specific corresponding fields of study at higher education level, it should have greater flexibility and more input in curricular design at the local level.

National level

Currently, the Economics High School of Buzău can attract and retain highly qualified teaching staff but it might become a challenge in near future considering the lack of attractiveness of the teaching profession for young graduates, which hinders the possibility of developing new approaches at schools.

Innovation enhances the school image but does not highly reward those that initiate and implement it. The application of new methods enforced conservative attitudes of some members of the teaching staff, unwilling to put more efforts for the same remuneration level.

Sustainability of change

Constant involvement in the eTwinning platform and in LLP/Erasmus+ projects for over a decade has brought sustainability to the innovations implemented at the school. The projects helped to acquire skills for teaching and administrative staff, receive constant feedback and validate teaching practices. For the foreseeable future, the school expects to continue this involvement, either as an applicant or as part of a consortium.

Civil society plays an important role in the development of educational innovations, but in recent years local NGOs have found it difficult to find resources for their projects. NGOs with which school has developed educational projects are likely to continue to be involved in the near future, but might reduce their support.

However, the school does not see itself in position to share innovations due to lack of training, financial issues, limited incentives and an inadequate framework for such efforts. A few years ago, the school has invited neighbouring schools to take part in the local and European projects it developed. These schools were fully engaged in the practices and were able to develop their own innovations. While this is an encouraging sign, the use of school consortia in the transfer of innovation has so far not been sufficient.

In conclusion, difficulties to sustain and mainstream innovation decreased teachers' motivation to promote new approaches. After several cycles of piloting new practices and switching to new initiatives teachers experienced fatigue and lack of motivation to continue.

What did we learn in the process? Key messages

The 'Exercise company' is the most important innovation implemented at the school, supporting students to go through all the steps of setting up a company, creating its administrative structure and running the company. It generated practices that are regarded very positively by the whole school community as well as by national authorities.

The school seeks to adapt innovations coming through formal channels and supporting pilot initiatives from within, but sees itself as lacking resources for a long-term approach to innovation.

Common meetings, projects and events for teaching and administrative staff from educational institutions with similar goals can help them exchange and adapt practices, and would help making schools less reliant on individual efforts for innovation.

Further reading

- **A full report** 'Supporting School Innovation across Europe' explores the conditions in the school education system that can enable or constrain positive change in schools.
- **12 case studies** explore the national approaches and individual school innovations. They include the perspectives of key national education experts and stakeholders who were interviewed and took part in workshops.
- **24 individual profiles** give a quick view of the changes and experiences in each school.

Available here:

www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation

- The school profiles also feature as part of the [European Toolkit for Schools](#), alongside a range of materials and many other inspiring examples of practice from European countries.

© European Union, 2018
All rights reserved.

This document has been prepared for the European Commission. However, it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

