SUMMARY REPORT FROM THE PRODUCTS' TESTING STAGE, AS PART OF THE PROJECT „MENTORING NEETs. GENERATIONAL INTELLIGENT MENTORING OF NEET YOUNG"

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„Mentoring NEETs. Innowacyjna forma doradztwa wspierająca aktywizację edukacyjną i zawodową młodzieży NEET" (POWR.04.03.00-00-0029/18

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Introduction

The report presents a summary of conclusions from products' testing stage (workshops with NEET young, In-depth Interviews with youth workers) carried out as part of the project *Mentoring for NEETs. Innovative form of personal advising supporting educational and employment activation of NEET youth* no. POWR.04.03.00-00-0029/18. The project is implemented by the company BD Center Ltd. in partnership with the Pedagogical University of Cracow, and Kaakkois – Suomen Ammattikorkeakoulu as part of the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014-2020, Priority Axis IV Social Innovations and Transnational Cooperation, Measure 4.3. Transnational Cooperation, co-financed by the European Union as part of the European Social Fund.

Mentoring NEETs project's objectives

The *Mentoring NEETs* project is carried out between 01.01.2019 and 30.11.2021. The project's objective 35 months is to create, and then to test and modify in a transnational public-private consortium new tools supporting inclusion and development of social competences useful (among others) on the labor market among Polish NEET youth (young people not in education, employment or training) and the implementation thereof by a minimum of 16 institutions working for NEET youth in Poland.

The following tools and instruments will be produced and implemented within the project:
- a model of individual and group NEET mentoring, based on solutions developed in Finland, including materials for mentors (framework programmes, training materials, etc.);
- the first in Poland platform on mentoring NEETs containing digital products from the project;
- e-learning courses for users – youth workers (including prospective NEET mentors);
- e-learning courses for prospective NEET mentors;
- tools for examining the effectiveness of NEET mentors among NEET young.

The stage of the project reported herein consisted in organizing of workshops with 60 NEET young people (*project's end-users*) moderated by NEET mentors and individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 70 people working with youth (*project's users)* in various institutions and organizations (public and private, non-governmental, support groups etc.), including prospective NEET mentors, who would be able to employ the project's products in their work with young people. Digital products' user experience tests were held to learn about participants' opinions on attractiveness, functionality, usability and novelty of products for possible modifications before implementing them in Poland, so as to adapt them to users' needs and experiences.

Target group for the project's outcomes

The target group of the project's outcomes are people 15-29 years old, not in employment, education, nor training (NEET) for a minimum of four weeks before joining the project (60 persons, including 36 women and 24 men). It will be possible to use the model of (individual and group) NEET mentoring elaborated throughout the project both: as an independent tools during working with young people belonging to the NEET category or as an additional instrument supporting various programs for NEET youth, including educational and/or labor market inclusion, as a tool for encouraging participation in the process of educational and/or labor market inclusion. The purpose of the mentoring during the early stage of the process of inclusion is to show the NEET youth that the program will be adapted to their needs and abilities and may present an interesting "adventure". Mentoring may also be used during further stages of the process of educational/labor market inclusion, possibly parallel to other programs for youth, to motivate young people to complete these programs and to prevent them from dropping out.

Workshops and IDIs participants

Participants of workshops were 60 NEET young from podkarpackie voivodeship in Poland. They were divided into 5 groups of 12 members. Young people participated in 16 group mentoring sessions (4 hours each) and individual sessions with their mentor. Group and individual mentoring sessions were also moderated by experienced NEET mentors. Each test subject was encouraged to participate in as many individual sessions as he/she needed (up to 16 sessions per individual). The aim of this part of the task was to test the whole model of mentoring and its main supporting tools: online platform (https://mentoringneets.pl/), e-learning courses for users (https://mentoringneets.pl/kursy-mneets/gurupcategs/view) and online diagnostic tool enabling to make an assessment of social competences of NEET youth (https://mentoringneets.pl/testy-kompetencji/wstepne-testy-kompetencji). During the workshops participants were asked to fill-out forms with their comments and suggestions on various aspects of the tested projects' products (attractiveness, usability, functionality). The form was the main tool to acquire respondents' comprehensive assessment. The group of 60 respondents was heterogenous. There were 82% of women and 18% of men. They differred in their education level. Almost half of them (46,7%) graduated from a college and one fourth (25%) were university graduates. 16,7% of respondents completed secondary school and 11,7% ended their education at the level of high junior school. Most of the respondents (75%) were inactive on the labour market, 15% of them were unemployed and unregistered at any Public Employment Office (PEO), 10% of respondents were unemployed and registered at PEO. Workshops with 60 NEET youth were carried out from December 19, 2019 up to July 29, 2020.

Participants of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) were 70 respondents (35 from the Podkarpackie Region and 35 from the Małopolskie Region), 18 years old and older, working with youth, including NEET, in various types of organizations, including prospective NEET mentors. The aim of the interviews was to test the projects' products by people who had an

experience of working with youth – possible further products' users. The participants were asked about their opinion on attractiveness, functionality and usability of the website, the e-learning courses and the online diagnostic tool. Participants differed in terms of their experience in working with youth and represented various professions. Due to IDI participants' diversity (in terms of their basic socio-economic characteristics such as: age, sex, professional background, place of residence, and in terms of the organization type they represented and the length of work with the target group) it was possible to obtain a variety of perspectives on the project's products. The most often represented were the following subgroups, each with different experiences and outlook on young people's problems:

- teachers and employees of educational institutions (including administrative staff);
- employees of (both public and private) employment and training agencies;
- educators (employees of non-governmental organizations and foundations);
- street-workers (working with both children and young adults, formally employed by both NGOs and public institutions).

The interviews were conducted between November 12, 2019 and November 27, 2019 in Krakow (Małopolskie Region) and between November 5, 2019 and January 29, 2020 in Rzeszów (Podkarpackie Region).

Perception of project's products

Website of the project (mentoringneets.pl)

Respondents were not univocal in their opinions on visual **attractiveness** of the website. Some respondents enjoyed the visual aspects of the website however most opinions were ambivalent. The design of the website was seen as 'ordinary' – neither bad nor exceptional. Respondents pointed a few shortcomings which – in their opinion - should be eliminated. These were:

- lack of consistency in the graphic design of the website,
- lack of regular structure of graphic elements on the website,
- inadequate graphic design with little reference to contemporary technical advancement and users' expectations.

Participants of the testing sessions did not have any difficulties with making use of the most common **functionalities** on the website. However, not all of them were seen as intuitive enough. Respondents were enthusiastic about the opportunity of audio presentation of the website content (courses) but sceptic about such functionalities as Helpdesk (Pomoc+). Moreover, some respondents pointed to functionalities which were not implemented on the website and were seen as important. Functionalities which they found the most needed were:

- contact form which would be a communication channel between users and administrators of the website,
- search engine enabling looking up the website for the key word or a phrase,
- search engine enabling looking up the Helpdesk (Pomoc+) for the key word or a phrase.

Functionalities which were pointed by respondents as not fully functional were:

- the option to log in/log out (too many personal details needed),
- Helpdesk (Pomoc+, too long and complex, difficult to search for a detailed information),
- Internal Navigation Aid for people with disabilities (not-standardized buttons implemented).

When it comes to **usability** of the platform, the respondents' opinions were divided into two groups. The NEET youth and individuals with little experience in working with young people were enthusiastic about the products, whereas youth workers with greater professional experience (experts) saw little advantage of the website for experienced NEET mentors. Among arguments that prove high level of usability of the website were such advantages as:

- the opportunity to make use of the tools and materials published on the website in individual and group mentoring sessions,
- the usefulness of the online diagnostic tool in mentor's work with a young person,
- approachability, clearness and conciseness of the website content.

The experts however pointed to few shortcomings which made the website not meet their expectations, such as:

- shallow (not in-depth) presentation of specific methods of working with NEET young,
- too little number of practical tools and materials published on the website which could be useful in sessions with NEET young,
- lack of new/innovative ideas and content for professionals/experts in working with youth,
- maladjustment of the website content to realities of NEET young in Poland, their perception patterns and experiences.

Online diagnostic tool

The main purpose of the tool is to make an assessment on 15 young person's social competences before and after his or her participation in mentoring sessions. Respondents' opinions on the **attractiveness** of the tool were ambivalent. Some respondents saw no need to make any changes in the product. However, both – NEET young and experts working with young people pointed some shortcomings that pose a question to what extant the product would be attractive to its users:

- too extensive content of the test of competences (over 140 questions altogether) which challenge NEET youth ability to focus,
- monotonous way of filling in the tests' online form,
- schematic and biased questions in the test (repeated questions, linguistic structure, and easy to be recognized "ideal type" of answers).

According to respondents, in terms of **functionality** the online diagnostic tool turned out to be the least functional product of all. Both – NEET young and experts working with young people – agreed the tool had to be modified to be really functional. The most often mentioned shortcomings of the tool were:

- inconvenient navigation panel,
- lack of feedback on progressing tests' completition,
- questionable necessity of account login before accessing tests and the need to provide detailed personal data,
- questions difficult to understand by NEET youth,
- unreadable graphic visualization of test's outcome (the level of competences).

Professionals working with youth suggested also the need for such solutions as an online repository enabling the user to download the test rapport in pdf file; automated transfer of the rapport into user's mailbox, and clear summary of the user's progress in developing his or her social competences.

The main obstacle reducing product **usability** was the lack of accurate interpretation of tests' results. The participants wanted to provide them a rapport with clear insight into their good and bad sides and applicable knowledge which of the competences needed to be worked on, and what were the main techniques to develop them to satisfactory level. Instead of such ideal the product generates – what participants called – "listing of statements" on user's potential behavioral patterns. Besides this observation, the experienced professionals expressed their doubt into relevance of the tool to make an accurate assessment of one's level of competences.

E-learning courses for users and NEET mentors

The e-learning courses were divided into two parts: (1) courses for users/youth workers including prospective NEET mentors (A1-A3) and (2) courses for NEET mentors (B1-B3). Their aim is, on the one hand to provide users with basic knowledge on the idea of NEET mentoring (1), on the other hand – to support NEET mentors' work with young people. For many respondents courses were exciting and **attractive** way of presenting new topics. However, both – NEET young and professionals working with youth – agreed there were some shortcoming which may discourage potential users, such as:

- constantly repeated parts of the course content,

- rough graphic design of the course module,
- linguistic mistakes and errors in text editing,
- static form of communication implemented in the course (no animations or films),
- unprofessional audio recording of the course content.

Many respondents appreciated well-structured and logical way of presenting course content, especially summaries of course modules and interactive exercises. Participants of workshops and IDIs appreciated: the audio **function** as perfect tool for blind people and the repository of pdf files (tools and materials for NEET mentors) which could be easily downloaded and printed. They did not find it difficult to navigate through the e-learning platform. However, respondents pointed out some shortcomings which decreased the level of functionality of the product and made it not as intuitive as it ought to be, such as:

- lack of clear information on particular courses (A1-A3, B1-B3) addressee,
- constraints in navigation (user flow),

The level of courses **usability** was perceived differently by NEET young and participants with rich and poor experience in working with youth. Most of NEET young participants saw the A1-A3 courses as professional, substantive and useful. Opinion on B1-B3 courses of respondents who had an extensive experience in working with young people was that they did not find the courses useful in their work. Respondents who had little professional experience in working with youth found the courses useful as the source of inspiration and repository of ready-made tools useful in their everyday work. The reasons why experienced professionals found the courses of little use in their own work were:

- shallow presentation of the main topic (lack of in-depth professional analysis),
- lack of referencing to resources which can be used for mentors' self-development (references),
- too theoretical approach, little practical illustration of the topics covered in the course,
- little number of ready-made tools and materials which could be used in everyday practice of NEET mentor,
- inadequate transposition of Finnish solutions to realities of working with NEET young in Poland.

Even if the experienced professionals did not find courses useful, they pointed to other categories of users which potentially would find them useful, such as: guidance counselor (at school or university), coach, instructors working for training companies and people of various occupations with no psychological/ pedagogical education.

Workshops' and IDIs' participants experienced also some technical difficulties in testing project's products. They were namely: (1) instability of the system (website did not open or was opening for a long time); (2) incompatibility of the products with all the most popular web

browsers (Safari, Edge, FireFox); (3) irresponsive design which limited fully functional access to products.

Preliminary recommendations on optimalization of the project's products

The testing process revealed many shortcomings which may need to be corrected to provide users with attractive, functional and usable products adopted to their needs. The author of the rapport made a list of 58 preliminary recommendations on the basis of testing stage findings.

Recommendations were divided into two groups: (1) general (all products) (2) specific (recommendations on particular product). Each recommendation consisted of five elements:

(1) problem – depiction of the problem stemming from the shortcoming/drawback,
(2) testing criteria – attractiveness, functionality or usability,
(3) addressee of the recommendation – graphic/UX designer, IT professional, content provider,
(4) recommendation,
(5) detailed depiction of implementation of the recommended solution.

As the adequate answer to the **general** shortcomings reported by respondents, the following corrective actions are recommended (general recommendations):

- modification of the products' script so that it could be used under the most popular web browsers (FireFox, Edge, Safari),
- optimalisation of the products' responsiveness so that it could be used on various mobile devices (smartphones, tablets);
- refinement of graphic design based on original projects (not ready-made templates).

Main recommendations on **website** optimalization include:

- refinement of graphic design (consistency),
- implementation of new functionalities: contact form, search form, and automatic translation of the website to English, French and Russian,
- modification of navigation on the website (intuitive buttons, user flow),
- adding extra content on the website (innovative, academic resources for expert NEET mentors, referencing, concise information on NEET young in Poland),
- modification of information architecture on the website (consistent dictionary, logical structure of the main website elements, adjustment of the website content to categories of users),
- adjustment of the website content to: (1) context of NEET young in Poland, (2) perception of NEET young (language, dynamic communication – animations, movies), (3) needs and expectations of NEET young.

Main recommendations on online **diagnostic tool** include:

- modification of the test's format (short, unique types of questions),
- optimalization of navigation panel (short user flow, no useless buttons and elements),
- optimalization of results' report (in-depth interpretation of results, clear visual representation of results),
- implementation of extra functionalities (pdf download of the report, automatic e-mail with the report, summary of user's progress in development of social competences),
- adjustment of tests' language to perception of NEET young,
- removal of logic and technical drawbacks in tests.

The main recommendations on **e-learning courses** include:

- removal of repeated parts of the content in all modules,
- refinement of graphic design (consistency, original illustrations, proper structure of graphic elements),
- implementation of dynamic forms of course presentation (movies, animations),
- change of the course content audio recording (professional actor),
- improvement of navigation (audio button, user flow),
- addition of extra content (academic resources for experts, bibliography and referencing, extra ready-made tools and materials for NEET mentors),
- adjustment of the courses to NEET young perception (language) and Polish context.

Final conclusion

Recommendations listed above stem from respondents' opinions and do not take into account validity of participants' suggestions, the available budget of their implementation nor the projects' framework. Therefore, the recommendations should be seen as **preliminary**. It is up to team of experts (from Poland and Finland) to decide which of the above recommendations should be implemented. The list of **final** recommendation will be made in the context of project's goal, budget and schedule.