

Comparison of partner meetings.

How a student involved in the project saw them

4th meeting of partners in Soerendonk, The Netherlands

Since the last meeting in the Netherlands the development of the project took a turn for the less communication and attitudes started to change. The meeting in the Netherlands was prepared according to very welcoming standards at training centre HippoCampus in Soerendonk.

Knowing about all the struggles on LDV list before the partner meeting SH tried to organize a meeting where partners should have the chance to talk openly on equal level and without emotions, assumptions, secret attitudes and disturbing competition. Therefore SHP decided to start with a workshop before the meeting to set the positive mood and attitude towards each other. The best way to reach that seemed to do it with horse, something common and loved by all participants.

The Netherlands hosted the 4th partner meeting, therefore they hosted a workshop on Friday the 7th of October 2011. During this workshop the project partners got to see how SHP was working on a daily basis by a guided tour around the training centre. All the partners got to see the whole company and all of the horses. The partners could ask questions to the host and were clearly interested. Because the day was started with a good and light programme point people could relax from their way to the Netherlands. It was visible for the student that because of this tour the partners got more excited to enter the meeting the next day. Besides the tour the host took the time to explain to everybody how SHP was working by PowerPoint presentations and giving an overview of the training and the profile of the Equitherapist SHP-E(NL). The goal of the workshop and the presentation was to introduce the working methods of SHP and training Equitherapy(SHP) and the certification system for quality assurance. Initial discussion with other colleagues (from the countries: France, Poland, Slovakia, Belgium Germany) about the differences and similarities of training in the expectation of our organizations to develop the EU framework. At the end of the day the partners and the host made a lap around the table so everybody could evaluate the day and say what they thought of it. At the dinner after the meeting everybody got together in a very nice hotel. Ulrike Thiel gave a presentation of the Netherlands which everybody appreciated and everybody could laugh at the jokes. The atmosphere was very relaxed and people were mixed together and talking to each other.

The next day, Saturday the 8th of October, started with a theatrical piece by one of the students of Equitherapy SHP-E(NL) with the horse in the centre of the story. Accompanied by four younger girls the Equitherapy student portrayed the tail of gold about the colour gold which had a hard time making friends because of his difference between the other colours. This story reflects on the project partners and their communication because even if you are very different, there are always people who understand you. After this play the meeting started. The meeting was very well prepared by the host by talking everything over with the moderator who helped keeping the meeting on track. These preparations took a few nights of hard work but during the meeting it was clear to the student that without these preparations, the meeting would have gone a lot less smooth. Everybody was able to speak their minds at the beginning of the meeting so they would have a chance to talk about the points they want to talk about. There were possibilities and technical steps towards the progress. The emotional side of the partners got a chance to say what they want. People were prepared to make everything as comfortable as possible. When there was an evaluation round the coordinator even said that this was the turning point of the project and from now on the communication would go a lot better. There was a table setting with nameplates and there were no fights but a friendly atmosphere.

A schedule was made together including a time division so that if the discussion would get out of hand, the moderator could point out that the discussion was to elaborate for the meeting and insist on the partners to make a conclusion of this point.

The aim of the two days of meeting on Saturday and Sunday was to give an answer to the following questions:

- The coordinator asks for an inventory of what needs to be done
- All participants want to reach a global view for knowing where to go after this meeting.
- To know how to reach the tasks.
- Are we on the right track and where are we going.
- Evaluation seems important, what is the missing link to the product.
- How do we reach it?

The student experienced the day as a very progressive day in the project. To the student it was visible that through the work of the preparation and the help of the moderator no discussion could get side tracked and handled quickly. At the end of the day another evaluation was done to make sure everybody got a chance to explain their feelings.

The third day the student was not present at the meeting but from the notes and talking to and evaluating with other partners from the Dutch team she could make up that it was another day of good work and accomplishments. The coordinator of the project mentioned that this meeting could be considered as the turning point in this project and that from this point on communication and the way of working would improve.

Time between 4th and 5th meeting

After the 4th meeting everybody got back to their work in the project with a new and improved attitude. People were informed about the to-do-list the partners made together on the Saturday of the 4th meeting. The fact that the partners made the to-do-list together would mean that everybody got the chance to say what they needed someone else to do. All partners agreed on working as hard as possible to make the deadlines set on this meeting.

One of the points on the to-do-list of the working group Emotional PR was showing a draft of the brochure. The idea of this brochure was to inform people about the outcome of this project. Meaning; sharing the information that was gained during this project by showing the results of the study. In this way the different countries could compare their way of working together and learn how to improve their methods.

Yet some time after the 4th meeting the attitudes started changing again. Partners started to get easily agitated towards each other and not reacting to some of the problems.

5th partner meeting in Liege, Belgium

The meeting started on Friday the 27th of January 2012. The student was only present on the meeting on Saturday the 28th of January. When the student arrived the meeting had already started, but this was not a problem. The student quietly joined the rest of the project partners and started her note taking. During the coffee break the student got informed about the events which took place at the workshop the day before. Apparently one project member had taken an accidental fall of the back of one of the horses. The project member was unconscious for an unclear moment of time after which she regained conscious with pain in her back. The cause of the fall was that the horse bucked her off when she made contact with the horses back while mounting. Also there were a lot of distractions in the arena which could have spooked the horse. The horse was not wearing any gear except a head collar so the project member had nothing to hold on to. According to safety standards there were a

lot of things in the arena that put all of the project members in danger. First of all there was a herd of horses walking loose in inside the arena wearing nothing but head collars. The horses also turned out to be unknown to the person leading the workshop. The aim of the workshop was unclear, there was no explanation of the activities and goals only an introduction on a paper. Every member got to choose a horse which they were drawn to and build a relationship with this horse. Every team of member got to choose a handicap they wanted to try out. Because of the safety aspect the Dutch stakeholder resigned from mounting the horse. The Dutch stakeholder stayed on the ground while the Slovakian stakeholder was climbing the horse. The Dutch stakeholder requested for a therapy girth for the Slovakian stakeholder to have some grip while being on the horse but a therapy girth was not even present at the stable. When the Dutch stakeholder requested a saddle she heard a noise behind her at which point the Belgian partner fell off. The Dutch stakeholder rushed over to the accident to see if she could be of any help. She was being told that there was a doctor so her help was not needed. The psychologist leading the workshop took the head of the Belgian partner on her lap when she was still unconscious. This is a very unsafe idea. Also the dog of the psychologist which had no function in the workshop kept walking around between the horses and project members. When the accident was being handled everybody in the arena was told to go on as if nothing had happened. Seeing the situation going down like this the entire Dutch team decided to step aside in the arena and watch the rest of the workshop from the sideline. The Dutch team was told to leave the arena because it would have been a disturbing factor if they were not participating in the workshop. The fact that the psychologist thought that standing on the sideline of the workshop was more dangerous than unknown horses in an arena unsaddled, a dog walking around without having a function, people on the horses without protective headgear and taking care of an injury as if it was nothing, said enough about the practices which go on in this organization on a daily basis.

The Dutch team had evaluated for their selves and was shocked about the fact that no one seemed to have realized that the horses felt completely unsure and that during the workshop almost everything connected with quality standards was not taken into account. They hope this could be a good starting point to talk about the need of these standards if talking about professional and not professional work in AMAT. Unfortunately this did not happen. During the whole further meeting the communication was overshadowed by projections, emotions aggression and coping mechanism.

When the meeting started the student joined on the moment the project members were discussing the targets. There was clearly something negative dwelling in the atmosphere because nobody really looked happy or even glad to be there. During the meeting the points were handled according to how they were set by the coordinator of the project. The moderator had not been informed by the accident which happened the day before or even the planning to which the partners had to keep.

It was very clear that the Belgian partners spared every trouble to prepare the meeting well. The moderator had no idea what he had to do until SHP gave him the information. The fact that the accident happened was only expectable when something with risks like this is not prepared well. When there was no chance for evaluation it was very clear that the Belgian partners knew they were wrong. If something goes wrong and it is not your fault, you want to explain yourself. As soon as you know you are wrong, you will either react aggressive or avoid talking about it. In the hopes that the talk about the safety aspects of the folder would be handled, the link could be made to the accident of the previous day.

Also the students in the meeting were handled as if they knew nothing and had nothing to do with the project. The students got ignored and did not get a chance to do their story. When the stakeholder of the Netherlands left, this got only worse. In the meeting in the Netherlands this was completely different, the students were equal to the stakeholders and everybody got the chance to speak their mind.

At the end of the 5th meeting there was no clarity about the to-do-list. Nobody knew if everything was done and what needed to be done.