

Personal report of the *Structured Educational Visit to schools and Training Seminar in Iceland*.

1. INTRODUCCION

This professional experience took place in Reykjavik, the Icelandic capital city, from 19th to 25th March, 2017.

The reason why this programme was implemented during the academic term is because the schools can show the vibrancy of their daily life. It was addressed for those teachers who are working at any educational level, from pre-school to adult education.

Before the mobility we were asked for giving information about our professional profile in order to arrange the organisation of different school visits according to it.

In addition, during the mobility all participants were engaged in seminars, study visits to places of natural, historical and cultural significance and reflective journaling, in order to discuss dissemination strategies for creating learning content and try to contribute as much as possible to the European dimension of the mobility.

2. ELABORATION

To start the elaboration of my report I would like to point out that Iceland as a country has nearly 380.000 inhabitants, that is to say, it has less inhabitants than the capital city of my homeland, Palma de Mallorca.

Having said that, the Icelandic educational system is valued for its autonomy and flexibility. Moreover, it tries to pursue the following **six pillars**:

1. Literacy.
2. Sustainability.
3. Health and welfare.
4. Democracy and human rights.
5. Equality.
6. Creativity.

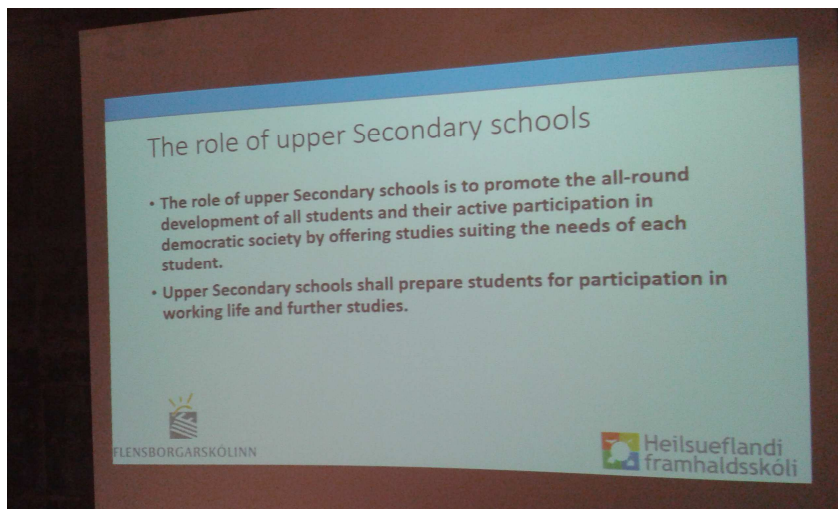
Source: <https://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/education-in-iceland>

Above all, the Icelandic culture gives importance to three words. They are as follows:

"handmade, homemade and headmade". It means that promoting local and traditional product based on nature with high emphasis on literature, painting, theatre and music

is its motto. No wonder, Reykjavik was the first non-English speaking city in the world to be named a UNESCO City of Literature in 2011.

Through visits to schools I could experience live and direct these six pillars in one way or another.



The first visit was to Fjölbrautaskólinn í Breiðholti. (www.fb.is) where we shared with the International Coordinator Ágústa Unnur Gunnarsdóttir our own professional experience.

This school offers Secondary and Vocational studies in the fields of Beauty therapy, Electricity, Nurse service/helpers and Art line in the paths of textile, painting-sculpture and innovation. Moreover, three different lines are on offer. They are:

- Academic.
- Fine art and textiles.
- Vocational and technical studies.

Any art expression, music and sports are considered to be cross-curricular subjects in any level.

Autonomy is also a reality. That means the principal can decide the staff they would like to work with. Apart from this, every term the school offers different subjects and timetable organisation to suit student needs with total autonomy and flexibility.

Moreover, at the beginning of each class students carry out three minutes of meditation, because mindfulness is proved to enhance students' well-being and commitment.

Since the collapse of the banking system in 2008 they introduced 'The porridge moment' for their students to ensure them a proper meal a day and then this well-worth practising was introduced all over schools in the country.



Façade of the first school visit



Queuing for the porridge moment.

The second visit was to Menntaskólinn i Kópavogur college (www.mk.is), a school that offers upper Secondary school and Vocational studies in the field of Tourism. It is considered to be three schools under one roof, because there are on offer:

- Junior College (academic subjects)
- Hospitality and culinary school.
- School of Tourism.

According to Ásdís Ó. Vatnsdal, the International Coordinator, its motto consists of breaking down barriers between the vocational and the academic.

In that school vocational studies are totally inclusive. even for those disabled students.

Socially speaking, vocational studies are considered to be addressed for those students who are not really good at the academic path. It rings a bell also in the case of Spanish educational system.

All subjects on offer are taught in Icelandic and vocational students are in charge of seeking the firms they are going to do their apprenticeship. This period lasts nearly a year. According to them, it is in process of changing because is considered to be too long.

This school was awarded in 2007 for supporting gender equality and awareness of social justice. "Equality week" is held every year, each time with a special theme focusing on current equality issues.

It is seen as a modern school on firm traditional ground where three words define them. They are Knowledge, Maturity and Development.



Façade of the second school visit

The third visit was to the Commercial College of Iceland -Verzlunaskóli Islands (www.verslo.is)

The school was founded in 1905. Since 1922 it has operated under the aegis of the Icelandic Chamber of Commerce.

The original objective was to give young people the opportunity of a basic commercial education. Nowadays their mission is to promote the competitiveness of Icelandic industry, both internally and internationally, by providing and furthering education in general and business education at secondary and tertiary levels in particular.

Their motto is Responsibility, well-being, respect and qualifications

The college facilities are co-funded by the Chamber of Commerce and the municipality and students bring their own laptops in classroom. Three foreign languages are taught, English, Danish and a choice among French, Spanish or German.

Practicing sports and developing social skills in school are paramount in a land where the weather is really changeable and not good at all.

An specific gym for teachers is also on offer in its facilities.

In this college I had the opportunity to exchange my professional experience with some students who were developing their own business plans in the same way my own upper vocational students are working with.

Questions, suggestions, ways of procedure and a collaborative working atmosphere were our strong points to deal with. Both of us, students and myself, shared the same working philosophy, bearing in mind creativity is a key factor for entrepreneurship, taking into account that entrepreneurship is when you act upon opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others. This value can be financial, cultural or social.

All of us agreed that tradition, innovation and technology can befriend according to their own ideas to develop their own services or products. Truth be told, they are cooperating with any non-profit organisation or charity to sell the products/services they are working with their own business plans. This step is yet to be done in the case of my upper vocational students.



Tradition and technology can befriend.



Façade of The Commercial College of Iceland



Icelandic long distance learning worldwide map.



With a group of students that developed a service with their Business Plan.



With two different groups of students who developed products in their Business Plans

After visiting these schools all participants, working colleagues from sixteen different European countries - Poland, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Estonia, Slovakia, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal, The Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Greece and Slovenia-exchanged and discussed a wide range of professional issues and expertise through a variety of presentations about educational themes.



In action with some colleagues from Poland and Estonia.

Places of natural, historical and cultural significance which were arranged by the organisation consisted of:

- A visit to the National Museum of Iceland. It provided and insight into the history of Iceland from the Dawn of Icelandic society (800-1000), Reign of Christian Chieftains (1000-1200), Under Norwegian Rule (1200-1400), Under Danish Rule (1400-1600), Absolutism (1600-1800), The Nation State and Development (1800-1900), to the Modern World (1900-2000) with the proclamation of The Republic of Iceland on 17th June 1944. The nation prospered during the 20th Century thanks to fishing and agriculture industries, The Marshall Plan, and diverse industries such as geothermal plants, hydroelectric power and tourism.



- A visit to the lava-scarred Reykjanes Peninsula. It is one of the world's major plate boundaries. They are continuously drifting apart with great forces under the gaping rifts. The lighthouse of Reykjanes and The Bridge between Continents, where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates connect the two masses in a stunning view of the impressive rift from the small footbridge over a major fissure between these active continental plates, which provide clear evidence of the presence of a diverging plate margin.

This bridge was built as a symbol for the connection between Europe and North America.

My reflexion when it comes to Spanish education system here would be to establish bridges of understanding between academic and vocational studies. Socially speaking they should be seen as complementary instead of substitutional. From my point of

view vocational teachers are working step by step to give the social recognition vocational studies definitely deserve



The Bridge between Continents. North American Plate on the right and Eurasian plate on the left.

- A visit to The Golden Circle Tour. Thingvellir national park, Gullfoss waterfall, Geysir hot spring area.

Visiting these overwhelming, breathtaking and astonishing natural landscapes one understand the concept of sustainability in its own context. This is the reason why Iceland welcomes visitors of being the land of renewable energy. According to the National Power company of Iceland, they generate all their electricity from renewable sources -falling water, the heat of the earth and the force of the wind-.

No wonder Iceland has taken an active role in sustainable development and commitment to the environment.



Hot spring



Hot spring and geothermal plant.



Gullfoss waterfall

A few facts about Iceland's natural water


Cold water. Comes directly from underground springs. It is pure and refreshing and perfectly suited for drinking. It meets all international standards for potable water.


Hot water. Geothermal water that comes from deep boreholes has a slight natural smell of sulphur. It is excellent for bathing and washing. Silver jewellery may tarnish if worn while bathing.

Caution: The hot water can be over 80°C hot (175°F)

Water in Iceland is a renewable natural pure source but do not waste it.

Conserve water - conserve energy

 **SAMORKA**
Samtök raforku-, hita- og vatnaveitna
Federation of Icelandic Energy & Waterworks

 **SAF**
The Icelandic Travel Industry Association

3. CONCLUSION

In the light of the result of this Erasmus+ Programme KA 103 addressed to upper vocational staff mobility I would like to point out that not only the knowledge from the school visits, but also the study visits and field projects have been really interesting and useful to implement with my own upper vocational students in the subject of Business Simulation.

Words such as creativity, sustainability, innovation, tradition, education in entrepreneurship at all levels of education system seem to become a key element in both education and industry. Bearing in mind there are no a perfect education system, the flexibility and autonomy of each school seem to be a key factor of students' success.

Iceland is an isolated country with a high standard of living and a high life expectancy where there is more gender equality than there is in many other countries. Despite the extreme forces of nature and a land with some of the world's most active volcanoes and home of the largest glaciers in Europe, they are considered to be the third happiest country in the world. As they say "Let the ball rolling".

The unemployment rate is very low and crime is minimal. Tourism industry become an important source of revenue as time goes by, apart from fishing and fish processing. It drew the attention the amount of cranes and buildings that are being built to solve the problem of visitor accommodation currently. It reminded me the Spanish real state bubble in 2008.

Their citizens are used to living temporarily abroad after finishing their secondary or tertiary education, at least in other Northern European countries such as Denmark, Norway or Finland, to come back to their own homeland with the word 'reputation' in their minds. According to the sayings of the Vikings 'Better weight than wisdom a traveller cannot carry'.

In addition, the sense of tradition is strong, family ties are close and the bond with nature is tight, but today's Icelandic society is both modern and progressive.

Geothermal energy, a much cleaner alternative to fossil fuels, is used to heat more than ninety percent of Iceland's buildings and most of the swimming pools. In fact, going to a swimming pool is not only a way of practicing sport, but also and more important than that, it is a way of socialising.

Personally speaking, it has been a challenging and rewarding professional and personal experience, not only for the Icelandic education system and landscapes that take your breath away, but also for their citizens' attitude to adversity, bearing in mind that this unforgettable professional experience has been partially financed thanks to European Union funds.



With some colleagues from different European countries.

Palma de Mallorca, March 2017

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