

SEEEPHI External Evaluation Committee Report

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Introduction

It has been our distinct pleasure and a fulfilling experience to externally evaluate the European Erasmus-Plus SEEEPHI project over the last 3 years. While we were assigned the role of external evaluators, our ongoing assessment and input into the project, working closely with the PI, Prof Nadav Davidovich and with Coordinating effort led by Robert Otok and ASPHER, enabled us to function in a hybrid form working together with the internal evaluation team.

In our experience, one of the main benefits of external-internal hybrid evaluation was the ability to build trust and relationships with ASPHER leadership and project PI while sitting at the table with the SEEEPHI leadership team throughout the project. We were included right from the project start which allowed our ongoing evaluation to be integrated into implementation and informed the project Work Package leads from the schools of Public Health along the way. This was a rare treat and intellectually very fulfilling. This hybrid function encouraged and was highly involved in better facilitated learning within the SEEEPHI program working closely with ASPHER in helping to publish 6 peer reviewed papers, present the project results to international bodies which was received very favorably and especially in the planned follow-up planned efforts in Israel and Europe.

The outcomes of this project may seem to have political implications and so we undertook our evaluation considering these sensitivities. Realizing the scrutiny of the SEEEPHI results, potential high levels of political and academic interest, we were sensitive and ensured the project's findings and reporting were freed of undo bias.

1. Were the intended project outcomes met?

Overall, the project was a huge success. The project's quality, complexity and ambitious goals, had a clear Logic Model which laid out each goal and objective and aligned the intended outputs and outcomes. The SEEEPHI PI and WP team used the SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based) make the evaluation much easier. The SEEEPHI logic model offered a representation of the overall project that aligned with the outputs and outcomes with inputs to demonstrate each step of the project. The planned outputs in direct results and products are clear from careful review of the final report from the WP leaders and can

easily be tracked numerically. The Outcomes, on the other hand, a key outcome in the project, will help to facilitate changes in the culture and relationships between head of schools of public health in Israel and was seen in improved trust, attitudes, behavior, and new collaborative skills, which we believe is one of the most important longer-term impacts of this project.

The SEEEPHI project Objectives were clearly articulated and achieved in a thorough manner and keeping well within the schedule given the extraordinary and serious challenges (a 4 month delay in WP4 with reasonable justification, see below). From a formative evaluation, the ongoing reports and interim report to the EU demonstrated that the investigators were deeply involved in conducting the project in a careful and deliberate manner and with a well thought out risk management plan to deal with external contingencies while the project is in progress. The summative evaluation makes clear the proposed objectives were met and much work is proposed and will take place after the project is complete.

2. What worked well and what could be improved within the project (were the methods effective, significance for the research field)?

There was an effective grant evaluation plan which laid out the goals and objectives of the project along with the steps that were taken to track the project results. This external and internal effective grant evaluation plan helped the PI and WP leaders determine in a comprehensive manner the intended outputs and outcomes. The plan offered ongoing feedback to project leaders and enabled ASPHER as the coordinator, and the PI, to see what worked well and what didn't and helped them improve the project coordination and communication in real time as well as set the stage for SEEEPHI ambitious future work.

We were impressed with the robust organizational and careful timeline capacity management by ASPHER management in helping ensure the project stayed on target, schedule and budget. The evaluation process ran smoothly, and each team member had clearly defined responsibilities.

The project PI and ASPHER management were open to our fresh and critical input in all phases of the project.

The serious challenges/ risks to the project manifested almost from the project start with the COVID19 global pandemic which impacted all SEEEPHI members and working plans and lasted for 2/3 of the project, to be closely followed on war hostilities that broke out on Oct 7th 2023, with ongoing wars in/around Israel through the latter year of the project.

The WP teams across the project appropriately addressed challenges and came together to tackle the ambitious project plans. The preparatory work was conducted on time (WP1 WP2, WP3). We saw very good collaboration between the Israeli teams and the European counter parts as they negotiated the constraints imposed on them.

The scientific/academic outcomes are remarkable. The WP's were well connected and coordination between the research groups was smooth. The remarkable collaboration can be seen in 7 papers (6 published and 1 under review). This abundant output, remarkable for an Erasmus Plus project, points to the whole impact which is greater than the sum of its parts.

The project reflects the context and distinct nature of Israeli PH education- yet the methodological robustness makes the tools built applicable and generalizable to other countries.

The significance for the research field, is notably, that this project led by ASPHER strengthened academic ties with key European institutions and is expected to lead to much collaborative research projects and to Israeli research students selecting European institutes for their training and collaborative research. This is a slow and important change from historical where Israeli academia was strongly connected to the US academia.

The nature of this project clearly reflects the context and distinct nature of the Israeli medical and public health education systems- yet the methodological robustness, and active support from other European partners, made sure the tools built are applicable and externally generalizable to other countries.

A key aspect of the project focused on Public Health Schools leadership with most Deans/ Directors of Israeli schools/programs were directly involved throughout the project including participating in active site visits and in sharing key lessons and opportunities. This was a good example of knowledge transfer that can serve as a proof-of- concept for future collaborative and peer to peer learning collaborative activities of ASPHER

While all Israeli public health programs undergo periodical evaluation by the Israeli Higher Education Authority, SEEPEHI offered something different - an opportunity for an internal cross-institutional sharing and transparent examination of PH training—including highlighting areas of core strengths but also areas in which there remain implementation gaps.

Areas for improvement-increased visibility of the project results and lessons

We were surprised by the late introduction and an overall lack of novel educational and digital technologies given the overall strong digital strengths in the Israeli market.

The final report while captures all the key work that was done, could benefit from a comprehensive overall education and public health policy discussion. This would greatly help raise the visibility of the project findings and policy implications. We are delighted that the project leaders are in advanced stages of drafting 2 detailed editorials and reviews, one for the Israeli Journal of Public Policy (Professor Avi Israeli) and the other for the European Journal of Public Health (Professor Peter Allebeck) and have received serious interest and support from these journal's editors. Such a discussion will be of vital interest in helping to translate the project's findings and local adaption to established standards in the international and European public health and education research communities.

Finally, the ASPHER Executive Board have had preliminary discussions with Dorli Kahr-Gottlieb, Secretary General at European Health Forum Gastein, regarding planning a health policy panel for the 2025 fall meeting that focuses on key lessons from the SEEPEHI project for improving EU public health training and learning.