

PRO BONO PILOTS IN PORTUGAL IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE BEESE PROJECT



This Project is co-funded by Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.
ID Number 2018-1-HU01-KA203-047732

INDEX

1. Introduction
2. Short-Term Pro Bono Pilot
 - a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary
 - b. Recruitment process and number of participants
 - c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)
 - d. Evaluation
 - e. Testimonies and Learnings
3. Mid-term Pro Bono Pilot
 - a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary
 - b. Recruitment process and number of participants
 - c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)
 - d. Evaluation
 - e. Testimonies and Learnings
4. Long-Term Pro Bono Pilot
 - a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary
 - b. Recruitment process and number of participants
 - c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)
 - d. Evaluation
 - e. Testimonies and Learnings
5. Conclusions

1. Introduction

With this report, the University of Porto (hereinafter, U.Porto) intends to present the three pilots it has developed, in the framework of the BEESE Pro Bono Project, throughout the years 2019-2020.

Overall, there is a significant background of volunteering in Portugal. Normally, the activities are, nevertheless, conducted by nonprofit organizations or other types of associations that gather volunteers in order to serve and tackle a specific cause – homelessness, people in financial needs, minorities, children, the elderly, etc.

There is still much to be done regarding pro bono and the relationship of volunteering with professional activity. As a university composed of different faculties, with different curricula, this project is of the utmost importance, since it helped us identify which faculties are at the forefront of implementing pro bono in the curricula and the ones in which such mainstreaming is harder, due to lack of time or means.

Since the BEESE project's kick-off was composed of three different programmes – each with different durations, we could involve students from different faculties, this way testing the resistance, outcomes, and incentives each have, to participate in pro bono projects. We could also achieve meaningful conclusions, as to the student's backgrounds and motivation, their previous experiences with volunteering, as well as their feedback on the project.

Similarly to our international partners, three pro bono pilot programmes were carried out by the U.Porto. They have all involved the participation of students (volunteers), teaching staff and business professionals (corporate mentors), as mentors/tutors, as well as three different NPOs, as the main or at least direct beneficiaries of the activities.

The pilots differentiate themselves by the time (total number of hours) spent by the students and their mentors in its preparation and execution.

The implementation of the pilot projects demanded a relationship of close articulation and cooperation between the university, the students, the corporate mentors, and the NPOs.

Each programme counted with the participation of different persons – students from different faculties, NPOs active in the various social fields and corporate mentors, which were carefully selected, according to the NPOs' needs (these, diagnosed during a meeting with the U.Porto and the NPO).

It is important to note that after the selection of each participant – NPO, students and corporate mentors, the U.Porto scheduled an in-person or zoom meeting, in order to present the scope of the project, get everybody in touch with each other and *break the ice* between the participants. We think that these meetings are one of the most fundamental pieces of the projects' execution and launching, since it allows the participants to be autonomous, this way avoiding that the U.Porto has necessarily to mediate the contacts between them.

Apart from this crucial point, it is also relevant to stress the role of corporate and academic mentors, who actually helped students achieve the project's goals, while also providing them with some important tips on the various domains – law, arts, informatics... With the help of their mentors, students from different ages were introduced to some professional activities, while also helping a NPO satisfy a need that, otherwise, it could only do, by paying for it.

In short, we think that the pilots clearly showed us that the triangle “students - mentors - NPOs” is of the utmost importance for the success of the project. For the university, as a promoter, it was gratifying to connect the dots, and put all this together.

As to the outcomes, we strongly believe that there is much to be done, regarding pro bono and its formal implementation in the academic curricula. Above all, the shortening of the degrees' length after the Bologna process and the lack of time to invest in pro bono activities renders the formal introduction of these programmes difficult.

In any case, we were able to find some opportunities that need to be carefully addressed, so as to study how to implement pro bono as a permanent option. Also, it is possible that, in the meanwhile, the U.Porto focuses on providing this opportunity, even if on an extra-curricular basis. Certainly, this will allow us to gather the attention of academic mentors, students, and other stakeholders, therefore enhancing and raising awareness on the importance and positive outcomes of pro bono projects and programmes.

Besides, the project equipped us with a better understanding of the student's motivations, their goals, their needs and, above all, what they value more in a project of this type. While acknowledging that some flexibility is needed, especially regarding the student's schedule, work overload and their other passions, we think that this may be a valid offer for them.

As to the U.Porto itself, the project is part of our mission, in the field of Social Responsibility. It was, therefore, extremely important to strengthen ties with corporate mentors with whom we have already worked with in the past, as well as to get to know others, this way opening doors for future collaboration.

2. Short-Term Pro Bono Pilot

This pilot included a 3-5 hours practical session (marathon), with a group of 5 student volunteers. It took place in Porto, between 17 April and 14 November 2020. For U.Porto it corresponded to the third and last pilot carried out and it was the most particularly affected by the pandemics caused by Covid-19.

We had to adapt ourselves, migrate the in-person contacts to the virtual scenario as well as make efforts to get in touch with everyone, so as to make this possible. It was a challenge, but a good one, since it provided us with the opportunity of testing the *virtual* model.



Participants in the pilot at "Associação Rumo à Vida"

a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary

The NPO we have chosen for this third project was an association called (in Portuguese) "**Rumo à Vida**".

Its mission is to provide citizens with disabilities with spaces and environments in which they are able to integrate themselves in a community, this way stimulating their individual well-being. In particular, the NPO tries to foster education and vocational training so as to the future integration of these people into working life. Also, it works, in order to make them aware of their rights and duties, preparing them for the assumption of responsibilities.

The NPO has two facilities - a special educational establishment and an occupational activities centre. In there, support is given to children and young people with special educational needs. Besides, different activities are developed for and with people with disabilities. Adapted sports and therapies are also examples of the activities and services provided.

As to the selection procedure, we have opted to maintain our procedure in the second and third programmes (better described below).

In particular, in the scope of the Rectory's Social Responsibility Unit, which is also dedicated to volunteering at the U.Porto, we have a list of volunteering organisations, social solidarity institutions, NPOs and other entities that we already worked with in the past. That was our first attempt. Nevertheless, in the meanwhile, and through a collaborator at the Rectory, we received a spontaneous expression of interest from the "Rumo à Vida", which had already heard about the BEESE Project.

The NPO's profile as well as the work it presented immediately caught our attention. As a consequence, we engaged in an informal conversation with the NPO and finally arranged a meeting with the association's coordination team.

The idea of that meeting was to diagnose the association's needs and to consider possible responses or solutions. It was also important for us to get to know its mission, vision, and values, as well as its history prospects for future work. We think that these types of meetings are of the utmost importance since the information gathered online is not enough in this respect.

After some discussion regarding the unfortunate circumstances during which the project was to be conducted, as well as the most pressing needs of the institution, we came to the conclusion that the focus of the intervention (ie., the students' work) would be to upgrade the institution's intranet system in order to remedy shortcomings and improve the communication and articulation between technicians/services.

b. Recruitment process and number of participants

For this project, we thought of students from the Faculty of Engineering and Sciences, given the knowledge needed in the field of informatics. In total, we had the participation of five students from the U.Porto (four from the Faculty of Sciences and one from the Faculty of Engineering).

As to the recruitment procedure and the students' selection, the Social Responsibility Unit of the Rectory formally contacted the faculties, in order to conduct the selection, according to the availability, interest and experience of the students. The student's participation and their integration in the project was relatively easy, indeed.

The planning and the implementation proved more difficult, however. And this was so, because of two types of constraints. First, the project involved the execution of specialised work, for which the students did not have the skills, nor the materials needed. Second, due to the pandemics, we had to delay the implementation of the project, since it was only possible to carry out at the premises of the NPO.

As to the other participants, we had the valuable collaboration of two mentors/tutors and local institutional partners: from the Faculty of Sciences of U.Porto, we had Paulo Ramos, Senior Computer Technician, and from the law firm, "Morais Leitão, Galvão Teles, Soares da Silva & Associados", we had Duarte Fonseca, Computer Technician.

As usual, they were selected by invitation, according to their areas and professional experience, following the diagnosis of the NPO's needs.

Both tutors/mentors were known by members of the U.Porto working group and recognised for their professional competence. The personal relationship between those mentors turned out to be quite positive, since their acceptance was almost immediate and their involvement during the pilot as well as the close monitoring of the students, greatly contributed to the success of the project.

Before the execution day, both mentors have kept in touch with the students, who were given the information needed to conduct the execution phase. No formal training was therefore needed or provided to students. Nevertheless, in all meetings, we have tried to raise awareness on the importance of the programme and its impact on improving the functioning of the institution's IT resources.

c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)

Due to the pandemics, we had to opt for alternative solutions, in order to promote communications between all the participants.

Given the lockdown, we scheduled zoom meetings, in which the mentors and the students could present themselves, get to know and better understand the NPO's needs, as well as get prepared for the pilot.

In this programme, the students did not nominate a team leader, which, in our opinion, was not necessary, since the group was homogeneous and committed to the project. U.Porto limited itself to a role of facilitator. It is curious to point out that, in this project in particular, both mentors and students took the initiative to chat between themselves.

It was also thanks to the mentors that we had the material needed for the execution day. In other words, in this project the mentors provided the NPO not only with their skills, but also with materials.

The pilot was carried out in-person, at the site of the NPO. For the scheduling, we had to reconcile the different availability while also considering the academic calendar and the timetables of the students and mentors.

The working group of U.Porto was constituted by Albino Oliveira, Maria Clara Martins, Paulo Demée (Rectory U.Porto) and Inês Neves (FDUP). The administrative and financial management is the responsibility of the International Relations Department of the Rectorate of the U.Porto.

d. Evaluation

The evaluation was addressed both to students, mentors/tutors and the technicians of the association.

In general, students were satisfied with their participation in the project, as well as the way they were integrated, the support provided, and the results achieved. The experience was valued as positive, both to their personal lives, and on a professional or vocational level, given the experience gained. Also, the possibility of *seeing* the results, immediately after the work was completed, rendered the project more attractive and rewarding.

As for the mentor/tutor from the Faculty of Sciences, the pilot project was said to provide him with a pedagogical experience with social value. This clearly raised the commitment and it was also a source of added satisfaction. The experience was enriching for both mentors, professionally and personally.

As regards the NPO, it was with great enthusiasm that it embraced the opportunity to host this experience and benefit from its specific benefits. Once the objectives had been achieved, the importance of this type of partnership was perceived as tremendously positive.

In general, it seemed that all participants understood the projects' meaning and goals, and they all valued its positive impacts, being open to new and similar experiences.

As to the follow-up, individual participants were given certificates of participation.

In addition, the programme and the project were published by the university media, this way enhancing the role of the institutional participants.

e. Testimonies and Learnings

We had quite positive opinions and suggestions from the different participants.

There is a consensus over the qualification of the project as a good practice, which will certainly be an incentive for the generalisation of pro bono projects within the university.

The challenge for the future is to allow students to exchange certificates for ECTS credits, this way linking the projects in which they participate to the curricula of the respective courses. Besides, we think that the participation of academic mentors is fundamental for the development of the pedagogical component. As to the professional experience, the collaboration of professionals from the different areas of knowledge is of paramount importance to the achievement of the project's goals.

As to the students, the project proved itself a valuable instrument for training, personal development, and the acquisition of professional experience.

Once again, we observe that social organisations are a fertile ground for the implementation of pro bono work. For universities, there is also a clear positive return, in terms of social responsibility.

3. Mid-term Pro Bono Pilot

This pilot, which included an 8-hour practical session with a group of 10 student volunteers, took place in Porto between 4 April and 20 May 2019. For the U.Porto it was the first pilot programme carried out.



Participants in the training session at the Rectory of U.Porto

a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary

For this programme, we have chosen to work with the NPO "**Mundo a Sorrir**". Its mission is to promote health and oral health as a universal right. It intervenes in the areas of Health, Oral Health and Healthy Lifestyles among socio-economic vulnerable populations in Portugal and Africa.

This NPO has been a partner of U.Porto in some volunteering projects in the past. Therefore, given our previous experience with the NPO and the proximity with its facilities, we thought that it would be good for a first project.

The selection procedure was speeded up, since we addressed a direct invitation, through the Social Responsibility Unit of the Rectorate of the U.Porto. After the proposal was sent and accepted, we organised a meeting, aimed at making a diagnosis of the NPO's needs.

In that meeting and afterwards, the objectives as well as the specific actions to be put in place were outlined.

The first meeting counted with the participation of the NPO's members of the Board.

In general, the NPO identified needs regarding the reformulation of its legal framework, internal reorganization and the development of a marketing strategy and correspondent tools.

b. Recruitment process and number of participants

The students that were invited to the project were all part of the Volunteering pool of the U.Porto and they had all experience in voluntary work.

Given the needs of the NPO, we sought the participation of students from Law and Management.

In total, five students joined and participated in the project (three from the Faculty of Law of the U.Porto, one from the Faculty of Economics and one from the University of Aveiro, who was also part of a youth volunteering organisation called U.DREAM).

As to the corporate partners, and mentors/tutors, we had the participation of Professor Juliana Coutinho, from the Faculty of Law, whose work was then followed by Professor Inês Neves, from the same Faculty. We could also count on the

participation of a lecturer from the Porto Business School and a lawyer from the law firm "Vieira de Almeida & Associados" (Dr. Isabel Gião Andrade). All of them with relevant experience in the field of pro bono work and social responsibility. We also had previous experiences with them, in the field of student employability.

The integration and preparation of the students was carried out through an extended meeting, followed by a training session at the Rectory of the U.Porto.

The planning was widely participated and collected various contributions. The implementation phase, which took place at the premises of "Vieira de Almeida & Associados", went beyond the period foreseen for the pilot, since it implied the writing of a guiding document capable of fulfilling the needs of the NPO.

Both students and mentors/tutors were actively involved, fully achieving the goals set for this project.

c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)

The students elected a team leader, which we found to be an interesting solution, since it allowed the facilitation of contacts between the group, which was actually diverse, and to facilitate contacts, given the diversity of the group.

The facilities and technical resources of the institutional partners were made available to students and actually used for face-to-face work.

As to the scheduling of the activities, we sought to reconcile the different availability of students and corporate mentors, particular attention being paid to the academic calendar and the timetables of both students and mentors.

The operation of the BEESE Project was supported by a working group made up of Albino Oliveira, Maria Clara Martins, Paulo Demée (Rectorate U.Porto) and Inês Neves (FDUP).

The administrative and financial management is the responsibility of the International Relations Department of the Rectorate of the U.Porto.

d. Evaluation

The evaluation, which was conducted by questionnaires, covered the various stakeholders in the pilot.

The students expressed their satisfaction with the participation in the project as well as with the results achieved. The integration process, the preparation of the work and the follow-up of the mentors/tutors were also highly appreciated. This experience was considered to be very rewarding, both on personal and professional levels.

The mentors could fully accompany this group of students, in a first and specific professional experience with social impact. This combination actually made the project more attractive and meaningful.

In the case of "Mundo a Sorrir", its expectations were highly exceeded, and the feedback was quite positive, not only regarding how the project was carried out, but given the final result, as well.

Since this was our first pilot, it became clear what benefits this type of partnership may bring to NPOs, as well as to the participants, who had all shown interest in participating in other projects.

Certificates were given to the individual participants. Besides, the project and the final outcomes were published in the university's media, enhancing the role of the institutional participants.

e. Testimonies and Learnings

We found that it might be difficult to conciliate agendas and promote the integration of students, when they come from different backgrounds, and have dissimilar incentives.

The introduction of competitive procedures, aimed at selecting not only students but institutional partners, as well could be interesting to help raise the quality level of the projects, while also adding some transparency and fairness to the selection. However, given the strict time framework we had, we considered that resorting to our contact list would be easier to manage.

Feedback from students and mentors/tutors was clearly positive.

The participants have stressed the importance of this type of voluntary work for their training, personal development, and professional insertion. However, formalising the recognition of these activities in the academic curricula should be considered. We think that the granting of ECTS credits is still a good stimulus for the students' engagement.

4. Long-Term Pro Bono Pilot

This pilot, which included a practical session of 15-20 hours, with a group of 5-8 student volunteers, took place in Porto between 15 November 2019 and 5 February 2020. For U.Porto it corresponded to the second pilot programme which was carried out in the framework of the project.



Participants in the marathon held at the atelier of the Eterogemeas publisher

a. Selection of the nonprofit beneficiary

The starting point of this pilot was different from the previous ones since the entity which was actually benefited by the project was the BEESE project itself and not a typical NPO or other association. The idea arose during our meeting in Budapest, where we reflected the need to give the project a new image, mainly given the need to begin the dissemination phase.



The design of the BEESE project's new *visual identity* required, from the outset, specialised graphic design work, which would cost us a lot.

Therefore, we arranged to make this the object of our long term project.

As an institutional partner, we had the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto, represented by Professor Luís Mendonça, a renowned designer and owner of Edições Eterogemeas. This publisher regularly produces works for the University.

This close contact with the Professor allowed us to begin the procedures, without further delay – all we did was a direct invitation with a proposal, aimed at creating the project's new visual identity.

b. Recruitment process and number of participants

Following a meeting of the working group of U.Porto with prof. Luís Mendonça, we presented the project and explained which steps were to be followed.

In this case, the diagnosis of the needs of the beneficiary was already made at the BEESE meeting in Budapest. More than just designing a new logo, it would be necessary to redesign other materials, such as letters, leaflets, Facebook page, etc. And that is why we speak of *visual identity*.

The pilot allowed us to test a model which we did not have the chance to test in the previous ones – make the student-volunteers work with an academic mentor. In other words, in this case the volunteers were all students of professor Luís Mendonça, which was great since the project was formally integrated in the activities of the Communication Design Course (while it was not part of the formal curricula).

This fortunate coincidence not only allowed us to take a step forward, regarding the introduction of pro bono in the academic curricula, but also helped us shorten the procedure and save some time, regarding the selection of the students.



We had 25 students involved in the programme, in total. They were then divided into three subgroups, which were responsible for designing three proposals that were going to compete with each other.

A session was then held at the premises of Edições Eterogemeas to present the students' work and choose the winning proposal.

The winning proposal was then validated by the international partners of the project, at the BEESE meeting in Paris.

There was no need to formally conduct a training session, since they were all students from the Faculty of Fine Arts, for whom the project was some sort of implementation of knowledge.

The planning, as well as the execution of the project was clearly facilitated by the fact that the academic mentor was their professor at the faculty.

After the pilot, some additional work was done by the students, in order to improve the selected proposal. Both the students and the mentor/tutor were fully involved, achieving all the objectives of this pilot.

c. Pro Bono Meeting(s)

The human resources which were mobilised for this project were all from U.Porto. The project was conducted at the facilities of Edições Eterogemeas and the Faculty of Fine Arts.

The fact that the tutor/mentor and the students belong to the same faculty (Faculty of Fine Arts) and, in particular, to the same area of studies (Communication Design), improved the interactions and the cohesion of the group.

The students did not elect a team leader.

The operation of the BEESE Project was supported by a working group made up of Albino Oliveira, Maria Clara Martins, Paulo Demée (Rectory U.Porto) and Inês Neves (FDUP).

The administrative and financial management was the responsibility of the International Relations Department of the Rectorate of the U.Porto.

d. Evaluation

Both students and mentor received a questionnaire, which they filled in.

The students indicated satisfaction with the opportunity to participate in the pilot and they all acknowledged that the winning proposal would significantly improve the visual identity of the BEESE Project.

For the mentor/tutor from the Faculty of Fine Arts - Edições Eterogemeas, the pilot allowed him to experience a pedagogical exercise with social value and specific application. This circumstance alone was stimulating and positively influenced the motivation and the involvement of the participants. The experience proved to be enriching both from a personal and professional point of view.

The importance of partnerships with this format and purpose was also demonstrated here. This was perceived by the students, who understood the meaning and value of these initiatives, being receptive to new experiences.

Individual participants were given certificates. The project was also covered by the university's media.

e. Testimonies and Learnings

Due to the creative component of this pilot, it was necessary to relax some deadlines in the execution of the project. This aspect should be considered in

future projects with an identical profile. We think that projects with a significant component of creativity may need to be considered from a different angle.

The opinions of the participants were frankly positive.

The project was also particularly interesting, since it introduced the students to something that is actually common practice in the Arts' sector – the launching of creative contests, that imply initiating work that one does not know if it is going to be selected.

The importance that this type of voluntary work can have in the training, personal development and professional insertion of students has become clear. Therefore, formalising the recognition of these activities in the academic pathway should, under certain conditions, be considered, and allow the granting of ECTS credits.

5. Conclusions

The implementation of the pilot projects by U.Porto provided us with valuable knowledge and allowed us to take a set of important conclusions. These three experiences will allow us to implement pro bono within the university, conscious of the challenges, particularities and problems that might arise.

In general, we have opted – in the three pilots – for an in-person contact. We have not conducted any selection procedure by contest or call for participation. We felt that, given our previous experience with some corporate and institutional partners, as well as a list of students that are part of our Volunteering pool, we could achieve great and easier results, by sending direct invitations, according to the NPO's needs. Even though we think it would be great to have experience launching contests, we believe that our procedure was conducted fairly, since we have tried to address different fields of studies, while also benefiting NPOs which are active in different social fields.

As to the pro bono meeting, we think that it is important to schedule different meetings in order for everyone to get in touch with each other and feel comfortable with having a say in the project's execution and dynamics. It is nevertheless of paramount importance to never forget that students, as well as corporate mentors, are doing this on a volunteering basis, and they all have personal and professional commitments. It is therefore important not to exaggerate the number of meetings, and, above all, set a clear agenda in advance in order to stress the importance of everyone's presence.

On the other hand, and with regards to the project's presentation, it is important to present clear information on the project's scope, time framework and possible outcomes. We think that the NPO needs to be aware of the fact that the work is going to be carried out by students and not by the corporate mentors. There is no obligation of results, therefore.

As to the participants' feedback, we had quite positive opinions on the project's scope, impact, and importance, from a professional and personal perspective. While for students, this may play a significant role as an introduction to the professional environment, for corporate mentors and the university, it is part of their social responsibility duties.

We are therefore certain of the value and enormous potential of this project. Nevertheless, introducing pro bono in the academic curricula will prove difficult and will not come without challenges. In particular, the granting of ECTS and the introduction of practical work in degrees whose duration has been strongly shortened after the Bologna process might prove quite difficult. We shall start with the courses which include a practical component.

In spite of these challenges, we feel that we are certainly better than when we started. And that proves to us the meaning of this project.