

# Setting up the social media in career counselling: the pilot testing of RECREATE social media

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**Abstract:**

Social media provides a set of tools which could collaborate for enhancing learning and teaching opportunities. RECREATE social media were set in the framework of the RECREATE project in order to facilitate communication and assist counsellors providing their services to their clients. Through the social media counsellors interact effectively with their clients by exchanging information and tips and also promoting the use of the developed tools for counsellors and clients (direct group) and job seekers of various background an especially those who belong to vulnerable groups and are in need of career advisory service (indirect group). Both counsellors and clients from the project's partner's country participated in the validation phase of the RECREATE social media.

**Keywords:** social media, counselling, career advisors, counellors clients, vulnerable groups

**Introduction:**

According to Social Media Bible<sup>1</sup>, social media is a new set of tools, new technology that allows more efficiently connecting and building relationships with customers and prospects. Social media sites can be valuable tools for collaborative learning<sup>2</sup>.

A recent research conducted by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) indicates that the high take up of social media applications outside formal educational settings provides new opportunities for innovating and modernising Education and Training institutions and for preparing learners for the 21st century<sup>3</sup>. The research

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<sup>1</sup> The social media bible: tactics, tools & strategies for business success, 3rd Edition, 2012, Lon Safko, Innovative Thinking, LLC, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

<sup>2</sup> Teaching, Learning, and Sharing: How Today's Higher Education Faculty Use Social Media, 2011, Babson

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Survey Research Group. Babson College, 231 Forest Street, Babson Park

<sup>3</sup> Learning 2.0 - The Impact of Social Media on Learning in Europe, 2010, European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Institute for Prospective Technological Studies,

demonstrates that social media can contribute to enhancing learning and teaching opportunities in Europe.

In a survey conducted in September 2014, the Pew Research Center finds that Facebook remains by far the most popular social media site thus other platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn saw significant increases over the past year in the proportion of online adults who now use their sites<sup>4</sup>.

RECREATE social media were developed in the framework of the European project "Recreate: Counselling Via Social Media", which is funded under the Erasmus+ programme and its consortium consist of 7 partners from 6 countries (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Romania) and it has been pilot tested by selected counsellors from the participating countries and the clients which they invited.

RECREATE social media were set-up in order to be the means through which will be provided the tools developed by the project's partner for career counsellors and their clients.

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Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

<sup>4</sup> Social Media Update 2014, 2015, Pew Research, Internet Project, M. Duggan N. Ellison, Pew Research Center

According to RECREATE project after the establishment of the RECREATE social media, a testing phase will follow and all the feedback would be collected and specific recommendations will be communicated to all the partners who will proceed with finalising during the closing phase of the social media actions.

The content of the RECREATE social media is inseparably tied with the RECREATE platform which hosts the developed tools and courses for the career counselors and their clients. The one gives information to the other and vice versa, and this make sure that information is shared among the members of the community created.

The social media used for the RECREATE project are:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Google+

The aim of creating social media accounts was to facilitate communication and assist the counselors into offering country specific information, when necessary, on training opportunities, job offers, opportunities for provision of voluntary services, and, of course, tips and guidelines on the use of the tools.

All partners of the project are responsible for their own language versions and the adapted material upload.

This article presents the finding of the RECREATE social media testing by selective counsellors and their clients (227 in total: 81 counsellors and 146 clients) who tested and evaluated the RECREATE social media.

### **Methodology:**

The content to be evaluated for the Social Media was the posts published in RECREATE social media accounts. Beside the information posted by the partners such as photos from the training courses, news, etc, six (6) topics were developed by each partner concerning the career counselling and uploaded in RECREATE social accounts translated in all the partners' languages.

The 6 topics developed were:

1. Discussion Tread: The New Call for Erasmus Plus was recently published: what's in it for Counsellors and Career Guidance Specialists?

Discussion Text: Check out the latest Guide for the Erasmus Plus Guide to see which actions are relevant for guidance and counselling professionals and organisations. The 2016 priorities provide plenty of opportunities to

promote innovation and facilitate exchange of best practices in the field of guidance:

[http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf)

The timing is right to start exchanging ideas and opportunities.....

*(Drafted by the Belgian Partner: IHF)*

2. Career advisors/ counsellors and their services via Internet – a real chance for their clients or unnecessary amenities?

*(Drafted by the Polish Partner: SIR)*

3. People make a career choice in many different ways. Why to make a decision is so difficult? How career advisors/counsellors can facilitate the clients' decision making process and promoting better career decisions?

*(Drafted by the Austrian Partner: BEST)*

4. - Would the RECREATE platform and set of tools for counselling support you to carry out part of your everyday activities in your job? Register and Check out the platform to give us your opinion!

- When dealing with people who belong to vulnerable groups do you think the use of online tools for

counselling will be useful so as to reach them effectively?

*(Drafted by the Cyprian Partner: ENOROS)*

5. Providing feedback, as a fundamental element in the process of career counseling, in the online world. Individualized interaction and engagement despite physical separation?

*(Drafted by the Greek Partner: BRAINSTORMING)*

6. How we integrate the transferable skills in values and interests system? From understanding them to assume and transform them in motivation. Working with customer "material" the outcomes can be obtained faster?

*(Drafted by the Romania Partner: CREFOP)*

Counsellors and clients, members of the RECREATE Social Media groups, were able to comment and share their opinion with the rest members of the groups.

For the testing phase of the social media, the partners designed two questionnaires in the framework of the Intellectual Output 02 "Interactive Tools for career advisors and counsellors" of the project. One questionnaire was for the counsellors and one for the clients.

Both questionnaires included the same section with the same set of questions regarding the social media.

The methodology for the pilot testing was consisted by two parts.

In the first part, the selective counsellors for participation in the training for the RECREATE platform and the offered tools were also informed about the designed social media. For this reason, a dedicated evaluation questionnaire was developed which included questions about the Career Tools, the Social Tools and the Social Media. The questionnaire was a mixture of binomial choices (choose if they are members of RECREATE social accounts or not) and of multiple choice questions with respect to the published posts (with 4 scales Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree):

In the second part, the trained counsellors asked some of their clients to register to the platform and informed them about the RECREATE social media as well. A dedicated evaluation questionnaire was developed for the clients, which included questions about the Career Tools, the Social Tools and the exactly same section for the Social Media as the questionnaire for counsellors.

The two questionnaires' design provides the opportunity to summarize the collected data

from the counsellors and the clients participated in the validation phase.

The evaluation questionnaire for the social media addressed to counsellors and the clients included the following sections:

*Binomial choices*

- I am member of RECREATE facebook group
- I am following RECREATE Twitter page
- I am member of RECREATE LinkedIn Group
- I am member of RECREATE Google+ community

*Multiple choices*

- The posts published in RECREATE social media were interesting
- The posts published in RECREATE social media were helpful
- The posts published in RECREATE social media were updated frequently
- The posts published in RECREATE social media caused me to want to comment / share
- The posts published in RECREATE social media raised my interest in career counseling
- The posts published in RECREATE social media caused me to become member of the respective platform

- I made new friends / contacts via RECREATE social media

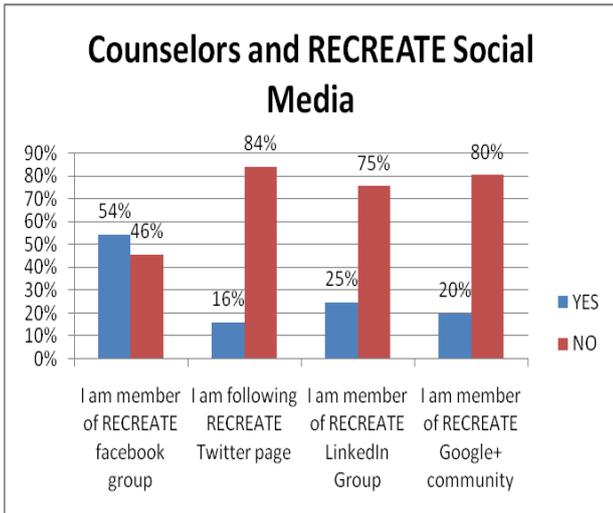
Taking into account the evaluated content, the results are divided into quantitative results selected by the questionnaires from the selected counsellors and their chosen clients and qualitative results collected from the feedback (answers and comments) given to the topics above.

The validation phase lasted six (6) months.

**Results:**

From the first phase of the pilot testing of the social media and its published posts by the selected counsellors, the quantitative results are presented below:

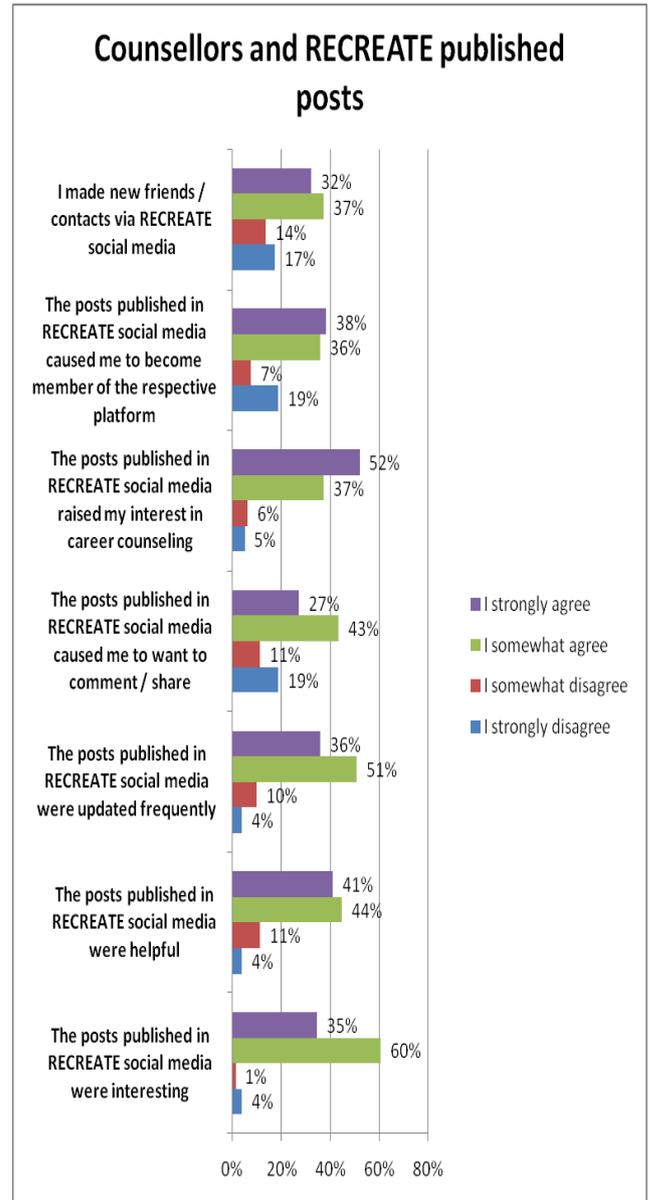
Regarding the binomial choices of the questionnaire in the section of the RECREATE social media, the following diagram shows the overall results, selected at the end of the testing phase from each partner, for the total 81 counsellors which participated in the evaluated phase:



Among the 81 counsellors which participated in the validation phase of the social media, 54% are members of the RECREATE Facebook group, 25% are members of the RECREATE LinkedIn group, 20% are members of the Google+ group community and 16% followers of the RECREATE Twitter page.

Regarding the multiple choices of the questionnaire in the section of the RECREATE social media, the following diagram shows the overall results, selected by the 81 counsellors:

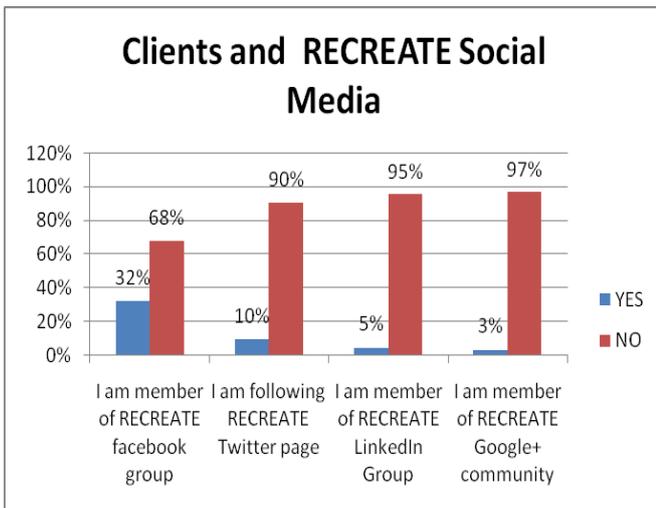
With respect to the published posts in the RECREATE social media, the findings of the validation are quite positive. The grand majority of counsellors evaluated the posts as quite positive (strongly agree) and positive (somewhat agree). The most negatives answers were given for making new friends/ contacts via social media and for causing them the feeling to comment or share.



From the second phase of the pilot testing of the Social Media and its published posts by the clients chosen by the selected counsellors, the quantitative results are presented below:

Regarding the binomial choices results of the questionnaire in the section of the RECREATE social media, the following diagram shows the overall results, selected at the end of the testing phase from each partner, for the total

146 clients which participated in the evaluated phase:

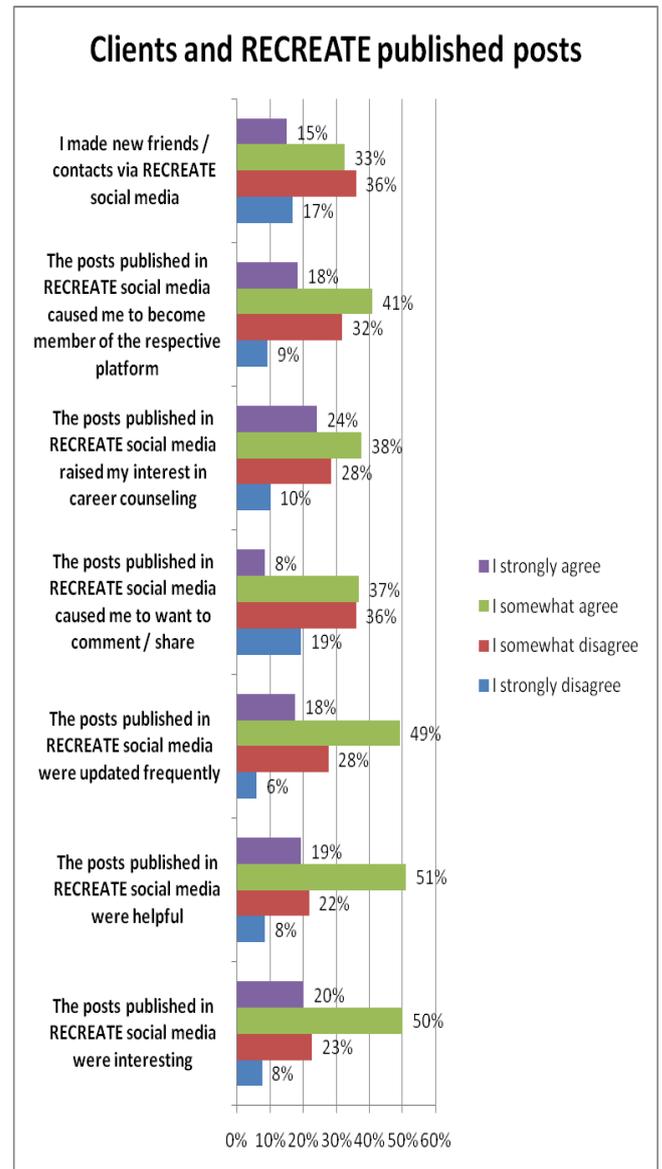


Among the 149 clients which participated in the validation phase of the social media, 32% are members of the RECREATE Facebook group, 10% are followers of the RECREATE Tiwttter page, 5% are members of the RECREATE LinkedIn group and 3% are members of the RECREATE Google+ community.

120 out of the 146 chosen clients answered the section with the multiple choices of the questionnaire for clients concerning the posts published in RECREATE social media. The results are presented in the following diagram.

The majority of the clients gave positive answers for the published post, as they found them interesting, helpful, and so raised their interest in career counselling and that caused them to become member of the respective platform. Although the posts were evaluated

interesting, clients did not receive the feeling to react to the posts by making a comment or a share. Also they disagree with the statement for making friends via RECREATE published posts, as counsellors did too.



With respect to the qualitative results received from the counsellors and the clients to the published posts in the RECREATE social media, a few feedback were collected from the developed posted topics. In particular,

#### *Topic No1.*

- There was not any feedback.

#### *Topic No2.*

- Career advisors/counsellors should be open and understanding. Only by getting the client very well the decision making process will be smooth and successful

#### *Topic No3.*

- Career advisors/ counsellors must primarily be very understanding and empathetic. Only a comprehensive knowledge of his client, calling it a sincere relationship will help to identify the best methods of work. Then the decision-making process will be much easier ...
- RECREATE platform's purpose is to facilitate the provision of advisory services, through the use of innovative online tools via social media.
- This form of cooperation on the line counselor - a job seeker can save a lot of valuable time, speeding up and clarifying the action of the latter.

#### *Topic No4.*

- RECREATE platform seems a useful tool in the daily activity of counsellors as it

can "reach" more quickly counselled persons, break barriers related to distance. Impediment: not all people in vulnerable groups have access to the Internet.

- There are some very good tools. Most vulnerable groups of people have a low level of knowledge of computer use and even if they do have low levels of education, which hampers online counselling. This platform fits people with at least secondary education. It is quite useful for this kind of people who may belong to vulnerable groups through the lack of access to jobs.
- Working with tools is particularly useful because it helps to save time when you want a quick result. Online counselling with tools is useful as long as the resources are consistent with the person, the referring primarily to the knowledge base.
- The platform is usable for access to the most diverse groups of people who need advice and gives the opportunity to interact with people who would otherwise be deprived of this opportunity.
- Recreate platform offers customers the opportunity to interact effectively with a professional counsellor, while

exploiting the opportunity to be simultaneously in the same place without relying on geographical barriers and shelter to have a session that does not involve exposure to the front.

- The use of the platform RECREATE, contributes to providing specialized tools to assist people from vulnerable groups with a view to finding a job.
- The platform is a combination of useful advisory tools that can be used from anywhere. It saves time and it is effective.
- RECREATE Platform largely preserves the anonymity which it is important to some users.

#### *Topic No5*

- There was not any feedback.

#### *Topic No6*

- There was not any feedback.

In addition, a new topic was posted on RECREATE LinkedIn group by a member “A platform for online career counselling sounds quite interesting. Is the market ready to reap the benefits of such a web service?” where the feedback received was:

- Depends, this kind of services need to be promoted much better. They are used much more in Australia, India and U.S. Discussing about counselling via social media the ethnic issues appeared.

#### **Conclusions:**

With respect to the qualitative results of the RECREATE social media collected by the participated counsellors during the validation phase, almost half of the counsellors are members of the RECREATE Facebook page, less are members of the LinkedIn group and Google+ and only a few are followers of the Twitter page. Regarding the evaluation of the posts published in RECREATE social media, counsellors evaluated them positively. The majority of the counsellors evaluated with “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” all the multiple choice questions. The highest positive percentage answered that the RECREATE published posts were interesting and they raised their interest in career counselling. The less positive percentage is detected in making new friends/ contacts via RECREATE social media and in not causing the feeling to comment / share despite evaluating them interesting at the same time.

With respect to the qualitative results of the RECREATE social media collected by the counsellors' clients during the validation phase, not many clients are members of the RECREATE social media as it is shown that less of the half of them are members of a RECREATE group. Among the clients which are members of the groups, most of them are members of the Facebook group, less are followers of the RECREATE Twitter page and members of the LinkedIn group and a few are members of the Google+ community. The aspects from the testing phase of the published posts present that the majority of the clients evaluated positively the statements of the questionnaire. In particular, the participated clients "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" in 5 out of 7 questions. Clients do not agree that they made new friends/ contacts via RECREATE social media and that they received the feeling to comment/ share, as counsellors did too.

From the feedback received from the published topics by both counsellors and clients, most answers and comments received in the Topic No4 which referred to RECREATE platform and the set of online tools especially for vulnerable groups. An option for collecting

much feedback might be caused by the fact that it was uploaded before the training course implemented in Vienna where social media were also presented. Another topic with less collected feedback is the topic for the career choices and how career advisors/ counsellors can facilitate the clients' decision making process and if counselling services via Internet is a real chance for their clients. No comments were received for the rest of the topics posted on RECREATE social media. Though there were some "like" buttons pressed on the posts uploaded on the RECREATE social accounts.

RECREATE project aims to promote counselling via social media and be used by counsellors and clients especially those who belong in vulnerable groups. Due to the project sustainability, social media content will be updated also tree years after the end of the RECREATE project.

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