

## The narratives – partners own stories on FEPIC

The stories you find here are written down by the partners as they were asked to tell a personal story, an illustration from the ongoing FEPIC work. Asking them to write a significant scene or episode from their work, they could choose either a success story or a difficulty in the work. Down below you can read the stories – enjoy.

### Experience from a company visit

*The visits to the companies in my country were surprisingly easy to organize. The ladies that we visited were more than happy to welcome us. When we contacted them first, they expressed their interest because they never heard about a project that dealt with female engineers, especially those in a leading position.*

*The first few visits went as we expected. We had an expectation towards the female leaders: we expected them to have a certain focus on emotions or human relations more than males when they lead a group of people. This was very true for the first few companies. Those ladies that we met there very clearly articulated that they treat their colleagues as human beings and the quality of human relations in their companies were at least as important as the quality of their work. We also found that those offices were richly decorated: nice pictures on the wall, flowers, nice carpet that matched with the wallpaper. In most of the cases, their rooms were almost like living rooms.*

*It was about the fourth or fifth company where we found something very different. The lady, leading a company which deals with software development, and also, selling computer parts and accessories, was at first sight completely different for us. “So, you are here”, she said when we entered their office. We went to a quite small room, where her desk was. The room had average furniture, and nothing particular that attracted attention. It was somewhere in the centre of the building, and while we were there, people kept on crossing the room because it had several doors leading to other parts of the building.*

*She looked like a strict leader. “Discipline is of high importance at this company”, she told. As her colleagues entered the room, their faces explained everything. She talked about her views on a good leader’s qualities, how to make decisions, how to handle conflicts, and we were having an increasing feeling of the impact of an autocratic person. This was different from what we had experienced in other companies, but, to a certain degree, we understood this lady’s way of thinking. However, there was a point in our interview, where we felt that it was really an exaggeration.*

*“I need to know about everything that happens in my company”, she said. We asked her, how she can know literally everything, especially if she travels a lot. “Cameras have been installed in all rooms of the office”, she answered. “So I can keep track of what is going on.” “You mean, security cameras?”, one girl asked. “Yes, also for security reasons, but this way I can also see what my employees do when I am not there”, she replied. “Internet, modern technology, you see.” We were shocked. “Also, each company car has a GPS based apparatus, so I can keep track of where my people are with the cars”, she added. “So I can travel anywhere, I just switch on my laptop and I can see everything”, she concluded.*

*“Jesus Christ”, one girl said, when we left the building. Later on, we discussed our experiences. This was the only place about which the girls said they wouldn’t be happy to work there. We were guessing why that lady was observing her colleagues. Bad experiences with former colleagues may have been a reason, as well as lack of confidence, as a personality quality of that lady, but we agreed that a certain level of confidence is definitely required in the relationship between a boss and a worker.*

*Nevertheless, the visits to the companies were very successful. The girls had had no experiences, not even ideas about the situation of female leaders at companies. It was very nice to see that most of the ladies at the companies created a warm and friendly atmosphere. The ladies also talked about their difficulties, especially those related to their acceptance as engineers in a male dominated profession. The girls appreciated those experiences, particularly because as engineers, they may also become leaders one day, and they had never received such training or preparation before.*

### **My story on FEPIC final meeting**

*It is the last partner meeting in the FEPIC project and it feels great to see how far we have come and what we have accomplished during our 1 ½ year into the project. However, even if a lot of work has been done, there is still a lot of work that lies ahead of us.*

*The timing of this final meeting is perfect. The framework is set, the training tool only needs some detailed work and soon the English version is complete. Next task we have the heavy workload of the translation part into our own native language as well as the exciting part of dissemination. With these two days in Tallinn we will decide upon the last details and final work we need to carry out.*

*Already the first evening when all partners arrived, it was easy to tell there was a special atmosphere. It was very nice to see everyone again and there was a lot of small talk regarding both the project and personal matters. After having worked together in FEPIC, as well as in other previous projects, this group of people knows each other well and that is probably why we have such a great partnership and teamwork.*

*The first day in Tallinn began with a wonderful conference consisting of young and inexperienced female students as well as experienced women entrepreneurs sharing their interests in the field of entrepreneurship. The experienced women are true role models for the students and I enjoyed watching the interaction between them. It feels like we really have achieved one of our goals, to inspire the female students into entrepreneurship.*

*When listening to the Estonian students' speech about their part and engagement in FEPIC, I understood that this project made a huge difference to them in their field of study and their view of entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship knowledge that FEPIC makes available opens up new possibilities for the students. Moreover, since they have taken part in the development of the tool-model, it is a tool made (partly) by the students for the students.*

*Later that day in the training tool workshop, this feeling of empowerment of the students was reinforced again. They really enjoyed the tool, the exercises, information, and videos, and they feel they can make use of it in their professional lives.*

*During the second day in Tallinn we had the partner meeting and discussed the translation, dissemination, and financial aspects of the project. It is three heavy "work packages" left, but even if I feel that this task is huge, it is the most fun part that is left. I am excited to see how successful and fruitful FEPIC will be. Most of all I am excited to host workshops and informational meetings for target groups as a dissemination medium for the project.*

*All in all I think we had two very productive days in Tallinn, with a nice conference and a great meeting. I left Tallinn with the feeling that all partners were very eager to continue their work, finish the translation and move on to the final part of dissemination of FEPIC – and make the tool available to students interested in entrepreneurship.*

*I believe that all partners are proud of our project, the final product, and the possibilities it can give students worldwide.*

### **New knowledge and exchanging of experiences**

*Working on FEPIC project, what does it change in my life? First of all, it was a great opportunity to develop knowledge about female problems at job market and female answers for that. But it wasn't the only one, I also discover many different points of view at innovative and creative education. Exchanging experiences with people from other countries was very interesting and helpful in analyzing the nature of e-education. Cooperating with my colleagues showed me that we're a very good working team. Meeting with students - future engineers, full of fantastic ideas, very well organized and getting their goals reminded me the importance of FEPIC project and e-training tool that we've prepared. Working on organizing meeting with female managers in the local area, taught me that there're many people interested in helping others to improve their skills, their way of working on different problems.*

*In my opinion the project was organized in a very professional way. Everyone knows the main points and what we want to reach. E-training tool will be helpful for studying people, looking for something more than pure theorv. I'm glad of taking part in FEPIC project.*

### **My FEPIC adventure**

*Only today I've realized that my adventure with FEPIC lasts nearly two years already. By joining the project I did not think, that it will enrich my life so much. The most important part of this project are the people, of course. Both those whom I've met here in my region, as well as those with whom I've met during numerous trips during this project. In Poland, we began with a search for students to the FEPIC focus group. The very qualifications told me a lot about the condition of today's youth, their ambitions, desires, projects. To the eliminations came dozens of young girls whose ambition is to work in the profession of engineer in such a difficult fields as biotechnology, construction, energy and so on. I think we chose the best ones, but a meeting with all these girls have resulted in a number of other projects that we initiated in my country. For example, every year we conduct a campaign entitled "Girls on the Politechnics" which successfully attracts increasing number of women every year. Girls from the eliminations to FEPIC worked well in this project by acting as a hosts on their faculties, which we have at our University more than 20. We follow this girls development in our university and keep our fingers crossed for them to have carried out their dreams.*

*However, subsequent trips to meetings with the project team, and they were: Sheffield, Bologna, Malta, Tallinn, except that it was wonderful sightseeing trips in a very short period of time, has shown me both the diversity and closeness of all the people living in Europe, creating from us proud nation called: Europeans. They were also a great opportunity to exchange information about the status of women in the different countries, which sometimes is easy, sometimes difficult. And the conclusions which I have from these discussions are that comparing to other countries, the situation of women in my country is not so much difficult. Theirs ambitions and perseverance are enough to make a career in the field, which they dream about. We have equal rights in my country, that really is evident in many areas of life and women are not forced to make difficult choices between family and career. This choice is always the individual decision, women are not subjected to any pressure, and the facilities such as nurseries and kindergartens are to help them to combine the role of mother and worker. An interesting theme of the project were also meetings with women leaders already working in companies and large corporations. These meetings also resulted with the interesting projects. We now have a permanent contact with those ladies by the career office at our university. It enriched with interesting jobs, internships and practice for students. Visits of our students to these companies will maybe result by the employment of one of them as an employee.*

*To make a summary of my story I wanted to emphasize a significant role of such projects in a united Europe, and I wish that there were more of those, not just those targeting women, but involving all male and female students. In my opinion the professional success of the individual person does not depend on gender, but the personal attributes, the presentation and the high self-esteem, both as a professional, but also more generally, in interpersonal contacts with others.*

### **FEPIC as an eye opener**

*The five day workshop on creativity and leadership held at the University of Bologna in April 2009 was quite an eye opener for me. I was invited to attend for the whole duration of the event and to deliver some sessions to the students on creativity and innovation. As a result I experienced the effect the workshops had on the girls and the manner in which they all absorbed the theoretical and practical information and how they emerged from the experience evidently having greatly benefited and matured as a result.*

*The girls were constantly very attentive and motivated during all the sessions which were delivered by a number of different people including myself. They participated actively and enthusiastically in all the workshops and their output was impressive.*

*At the end of the seminar they delivered presentations in groups which were structured in such a way so as to bring together girls from different countries (and to avoid having a majority of girls from one country in one group).*

*The presentations provided excellent evidence of the effect that the week's workshop had on the students. Each presentation was unique and, without doubt, effective and extremely original. Some of the quieter girls demonstrated amazing self confidence during the presentation which was also captured on video. Networking amongst the girls from the different FEPIC partner countries was clearly visible, as were the friendships which had been developed during the week in Bologna. There is no doubt that there was a great deal of improvement where the self development and maturity of each of the girls was concerned.*

*It is relevant to mention the social occasions which always serve an important purpose – that of allowing project participants (in this case both the girls and the trainers, plus some partners) to interact on a more informal basis. I was impressed with the girls' use of the concepts which they had learnt during the social events. On a number of occasions the girls would refer to the thinking tool which they had learnt by name, even during the social occasions.*

*A great deal of synergy was visible both during the formal workshops and during the social events. Motivation and a willingness for self development were constantly present. It was a privilege to be one of the actors participating in this event which was definitely life changing for all those who attended. Thanks to FEPIC I was very positively impressed.*

### **The Challenge of Engaging Students!**

*FEPIC as a project has brought a challenging opportunity for me – how to engage young students with a European project about leadership and creativity. Certainly in my country it seems to have been getting harder and harder to engage and enthuse students about opportunities that may involve some additional work for them! I was involved in the start of the project trying to recruit female students for the focus groups. I did this initially by going through student groups and also their lecturers to try and gain interest in working on the project. While the offer of a trip abroad did manage to hook student interest, once there was the realisation that they would also have to put in some work for the project, it was not so easy to keep them on board. I did this by trying to make sure they were aware of how they would need some practical experiences in order to compete in the world of work once they had graduated and to make them understand that they would need to stand out from other graduates because the labour market in my country is becoming more and more competitive. At the start of the FEPIC project in 2008 the economic situation in my country had only just started to get harder but as the project progressed the true extent and impact of the recession has become clearer to more of society. As a result, students are now less apathetic about getting involved in extra-curricular activities (such as European projects) and more aware that they need every competitive advantage if they are going to have any hope of entering the labour market. The FEPIC e learning tool will be useful for the students to get engaged in learning activities outside of their standard courses, but what I hope that working on FEPIC has taught the students more is the importance of seeing every opportunity for how you can make the most of it to help you develop both personally and professionally.*

### **FEPIC story ....no to shyness and yes to creativity!**

*as the students involvement in the project started true dialogue and was used as a tool for feedback on issues like our university International degree programs quality and teachers professionalism*

*The people of my country are too shy and modest but stubborn. As the new US Ambassador in my country mentioned yesterday during his curtsey visit my country has made tremendous progress in recent years. Our weakness, he mentioned is our skills in promotion and propaganda of our good practices. The companies are not well-known in the world but student and youth have gained excellent results in Europe on entrepreneurial contests and research events. A lot of innovative ideas have generated by students and youth. Entrepreneurship and creativity as tested in FEPIC project by our student group conclude that entrepreneurship is one of the core components of education and the only thing to reach these goals is to find the correct methods. On of our experts, expresses that the overall situation in my country - as in many new member states- is generally very weak. Usually non-business and technical studies include macro-and microeconomics courses. Sometimes, in addition, general courses are offered in accounting and innovation. However courses genuinely targeting entrepreneurship and business (start-up, business plan etc.) are lacking in almost all universities and all curricula. FEPIC story of involvement of our students shows again that good cases of teamwork, innovative learning and links to entrepreneurs add tremendous potential and quality to the learning process. The students opened up, they improved their presentation skills but also used their imagination which did not find outcome in regular studies. FEPIC students interviewed female leaders and both counterparts expressed positive outcome. It was enjoyable, creative and refreshing! Our shy society starts to be more creative.*

**“Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.”**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*FEPIC project work with female students gave me quite unusual new willing to do. Gender issues, female pushing innovative ideas and networking with female leaders made me think broader of our everyday work and life balance.*

*This project was actually the first “my own project”. I had some previous experiences in participating in projects, but not being an active member of the focus group of the project. Before starting with this project I thought mostly that discussions, arguing about gender equality or gender differences are just more like talks. I didn’t have very much interest in that topic before.... Because sometimes if one start to talk about gender issues, discrimination, career opportunities of it could be in most cases considered as “feministic talks”. But one can see that the situation is changing.... And the voice of females will be listened to.*

*The first step in this project was to collect information about the educational courses, training in creativity and leadership in female perspectives. Starting the search in internet I was more than sure that there will be quite a number of such courses. But the result was not that good at all, especially there was no leadership training courses which would have been targeted only for female managers/leaders. At the same time in Italy the number of similar courses were more than 30.*

*Actually this was the good starting point and driver to go on with this project and to start to pay more attention to this topic in my country. Surfing in internet brought me to many interesting articles about female entrepreneurs, managers, about their way of getting to that position, how to keep this position, how to be still a woman and at the same time a good manager.*

*Research has shown that the percentage of female entrepreneurs in my country still remains low in relation to that of male entrepreneurs and to the percentage of women in the population. The creative and entrepreneurial potential of women is source of economic growth and new jobs and should be encouraged. Research has shown as well that women face a number of difficulties in establishing and maintaining businesses. Although most of these difficulties are common to both genders, in many cases they tend to be more significant for female entrepreneurs. This is due to factors such as a poor business environment, the choice of business types and sectors, information gaps, lack of contacts and access to networking, gender discrimination and stereotypes, weak and inflexible supply of childcare facilities, difficulties in reconciling business and family obligations, as well as differences in the way women and men approach entrepreneurship*

*According to the data of the a labour survey, women outperformed men with regard to the majority of educational indicators: 19% of working age women had higher education, 30% had specialized secondary education, while among working age men 16% had higher education and 21% specialized secondary education. At the same time, one fifth of working age men and only a little over a tenth of women had elementary or basic education..*

*Therefore the importance of using the female resources for entrepreneurship and in turn for local development is important. Female entrepreneurs are important for local development in our region and equal opportunities for female entrepreneurs should be promoted.*

**How the project influenced me?**

*Participating in projects gives one self confidence and creative thinking which is one of the most important componants of the work and life balance.*

*I personally started to read more about the female and gender related issues and have also participated at several events to become more informed and experienced in the field. The last such seminar was end of August this year and the titel of the seminar was TO BE A WOMAN; TO BE A LEADER. TO BE BOTH.*

*I think that this FEPIC project and also the previous experiences in similar projects give us new knowledge*

- how to attract social partners;*
- how to contribute to local thematic networks on entrepreneurship and related topics (e.g. mentoring for entrepreneurs etc.)*
- how to participate in the European forum bringing together the local thematic networks from different countries and give feedback to project results as experts. I AM REALLY HAPPY TO BE A WOMAN 😊*

## **Female top managers willingly support young female students**

*When I had to organize the visit of the female students in Engineers to female managers I started “flying high”. I selected the most important companies in my region which had a woman as a CEO. I decided to try to interview them. My colleagues said: “You never will be able to get a meeting with them”. These persons are known as very busy and selective.*

*I wrote an e-mail describing the FEPIC aim and the added value that the personal interview had given to the female students who were coming with me.*

*Nobody of them refused the meeting.*

*All answered the questions about creativity and leadership and added comments about their personal experience. We had very interesting and emotional meetings.*

*I learned that females are willing to support each other; being of the same gender and with good purpose open doors that otherwise might be closed.*

*The positive attitude of these managers was confirmed later on when I invited them as a guest speaker to the annual celebration of the best female graduates in Engineer.*

*Female top managers are willing to support young female students!*

*Another result I got from FEPIC is at a more personal level. Everyday we read in the newspaper and hear through media about drugs and violence by young people. We read about a new generation who has no goals or values.*

*Working with my students Focus Group, so trustable and enthusiastic, showed me that there are also very good young people who may act positively for the future world.*

**Finally a big THANK YOU to all of the partners for sharing their stories with us!**