Intergenerational Learning Circle for Community Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Collaborative learning and empowerment between generations

The “eScouts: Intergenerational circle for community service” project is a complex, multidimensional and comprehensive initiative aiming to develop an exchange of innovative intergenerational learning experiences between people older than 55 years old and young volunteers in six European Member State (Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, the UK). The project is supported by the KA3 ICT line of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) managed by the European Commission Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

The intergenerational learning cycle has mobilized 124 young facilitators and trainers of digital competences in a group of 355 seniors, a selected group of whom has acted, in the second half of the training cycle, as mentors of the youth in their access to the labour market and the challenges of adult life, completing in this way a cycle of learning, exchange and conviviality. This approach addresses a number of social, civic, employment, and educational interrelated issues using ICT as a catalyst for both the learning and the community empowering actions to be put in place.

At the same time, it promotes key-European values and lifelong learning skills: civic and social, digital, learning to learn, cultural awareness and expression, entrepreneurial (in the sense of the spirit of initiative). In general terms, the project is seen as highly innovatory and necessary, given the specific problems that both youths and the seniors experience in nowadays societies and considering the scarcity of educational/dialoguing activities addressed to both of them. Also due to forming in them key ICT and social and civic skills for their own sake and for the one of the communities they belong to. Skills that the project conceives as part of the larger curriculum of the “facilitator”, “e-Facilitators for social inclusion”, an emerging profile Europe-wide around which the core group of the consortium already started to work on in other LLP joint projects.

Objectives

Based on an analysis of the trans-national context, the eScouts project partners have sought to develop an innovative training solution, aimed at supporting the participating European countries in the common challenge for e-Inclusion. The project thus meets a growing demand, already identified within organizations, to promote the skills and training of ICT. The challenge was to build a comprehensive multi-target inter-generational blended learning/mentoring path to put in dialogue two social groups suffering different kinds of risk of exclusion: the Youths and the Seniors. Indeed, the fragmentation of contemporary societies and communities too often make it difficult to reach a satisfying intergenerational dialogue and creates separation and alienation from the history and the memory of the locations where people live and from the larger societies of belonging.
In particular, these are the objectives of eScouts:

- Develop the digital competences of seniors and facilitate the entrance of youths to the labour market and adult life;
- Improve other key competences for lifelong learning like digital, cultural, social or interpersonal, the ability to learning to learn, and a sense of initiative;
- Contribute to reduce alienation, social passivity and isolation in the two identified social groups (where it exists);
- Put forward an educational process and its related methodologies and tools, participative, reflective, bottom-up developed rather than formal and top-down;
- Build up a new learning community (supported by a Moddle platform) among blended spaces and environments such as telecentres, schools or civic centres.
- Design training modules for e-Facilitators of Social Inclusion, focused on development of key competences of users at risk for their empowerment in a Knowledge Society;
- Explore the existing situation in each country regarding comparable training offer and competences recognition, as well as the needed paths to improve the situation;

In conclusion, develop a framework for meeting and collaboration between generations where people is empowered by recognising their differences and encouraged to build positively on top of them.

**Context Analysis**

**European Context**

With the Riga Declaration "ICT for an inclusive society" (11 June 2006) the European Ministers set themselves the goal of making all public websites accessible by 2008. The aim was to halve, by 2010, the difference in the percentage that exists between the general use of the Internet and its use by disadvantaged groups. This Declaration re-affirms some fundamental concepts regarding access to and use of new technologies. Indeed, ICT influences GDP growth and productivity, helping to improve the quality of life and social participation. It is, therefore, necessary and important to give special attention to making it accessible to all groups of people, in particular the disabled and elderly people, who, for various reasons, are unable to take advantage of such resources. Policies for e-Inclusion, reiterated in Riga, have as their primary purpose the use of ICT aimed at greater social inclusion. This is especially relevant on 2012, the European year for active ageing and solidarity between generations.
In coherence with the project objectives, a cross-country context analysis was carried out to provide systemized information from the field (at local level) to facilitate a further realistic implementation of the pilot phase where the intergenerational exchange would take place. The first part of the cross-country context analysis is devoted to those Intermediaries who were identified as potential field actors by the project partners—the organizations that are active in the provision of social services to disadvantaged people, particularly to youngsters or elders, i.e. Local Stakeholder Organizations (LSO) which manifested an interest to participate in the Pilot activities and to further exploit the results of this project. The second part explores the needs and opinions of professionals or volunteers who are in direct contact with those target groups, the so-called Facilitators who group a range of socio-digital profiles. The third part reflect the voices of the final beneficiaries of the planned activity (i.e. the seniors and the youths), captured through a survey, which is analyzed comparatively across participating countries.

**Actions: ICT Learning, Internet and Community Service**

- Train **facilitators of intergenerational learning** in each country of the consortium to be the key actors and mediators of the two groups, providing them training and assessment, and customization of the content and method to the local needs.

- Train **youth** groups to become ICT teachers of the digital excluded seniors, under the umbrella and according to the “Community Service - Learning” approach. Youth from 16 years old joined the project, voluntarily, and from different types of organization: high schools, young organizations, volunteer organizations, etc.

- Train the **seniors** to become mentors for the youth (their previous teachers), providing life experience and perspective of values, adding specific focus on employability issues and using ICT to increase the impact of their voice.

**A new branded Methodology for Intergenerational Learning**

The **Intergenerational Learning in Blended Environments and Spaces (ILBES)** methodology is a new approach developed ad hoc for a learning cycle in which the youth supports senior people in ICT usage and, in return, seniors mentor youths in their efforts to access the labour market and to face the challenges of adult life, completing in this way a cycle of learning, exchange and conviviality. The teaching and mentoring are mediated by ICT means (social web applications) and Blended Environments and Spaces.
ILBES was developed as part of eScouts and is inspired in two proven learning methodologies which are combined for the first time: the Community Service Learning (CSL) methodology implemented by Fundación Esplai in its “Conecta Joven” network in Spain, and the Participatory and Appreciative Action and Reflection (PAAR) developed by Reflective Learning in the UK. The harmonization of these two methodologies was led by D-O-T with the collaboration of these two organizations plus the University of Dortmund and L’Apis.

Both methodologies aim to empower individuals to improve themselves and the community where they live; however, each one proceeds in a different way. While appreciate, imagine and design are central in PAAR, CSL starts by identifying and evaluating the needs of the environment (community), to further imagine solutions and design a tailored project, which is the first action of an CSL facilitator. In PAAR, instead, solutions are expected to be collaboratively built from the strengths of the participants. In order to design a learning methodology for a learning circle between seniors and youths, the CSL approach was taken as the project layer while PAAR a means to find solutions. In this way, the logics of problem-finding and problem-solving which sometimes can lead to a deficit-based thinking were complemented by strengths-based thinking, allowing a balance by helping to engage in a conversation about what people can do and wish to do, by identifying, using and developing their strengths, gifts and talents.

Facilitators of Intergenerational Learning

The core facilitators, the youths and the seniors involved in the project were selected at the beginning of the process, according to some general common criteria adapted to local needs. Fourteen core facilitators were selected to manage and coordinate the full training piloting process. Each partner selected their local training staff according to their needs and missions, showing a decisive investment on high qualified human resources in order to implement and coordinate the local experiences. According to facilitator’s evaluations, they were highly motivated and interested to achieve the project goals. Additionally, they had an excellent background in terms of educational and working experience: all of them had worked as trainers in the past, and thirteen also acted as facilitators in similar initiatives; lastly, the majority had taken care of youths or seniors, and participated to European projects.

e-Facilitators

The e-Facilitators have a crucial task, not only as teachers of ICT, but also as socio-cultural mediators. Partners are committed to its recognition as a professional profile of the XXI century across Europe, and conducted a comparative study of related professional profiles and available education opportunities in participating countries as part of eScouts. Indeed facilitators participating in eScouts play the most relevant role since they are involved in all the different stages of the training cycle and they act as a link and mediators of the whole process.
The Intergenerational Learning Cycle

The Intergenerational Learning Cycle was articulated in five learning modules:

- Module 1: Training of Facilitators (as Developers of Intergenerational Learning)
- Module 2: Facilitator-to-Youth training (as Digital Competence trainers)
- Module 3: Youth-to-Senior training (first intergenerational exchange)
- Module 4: Facilitator-to-Senior training (as mentors)
- Module 5: Senior-to-Youth mentoring (second intergenerational exchange)

Quality achievements and future prospects

An in-depth Quality Plan designed and led by L’A.P.I.S. enabled the full monitoring and evaluation of each training implementation step.
THE NOTION OF QUALITY: “to reach established objectives with regard to stakeholders needs and expectations”

EFFECTIVENESS:
Were the training activities led adequate to reach the project objectives?

PARTICIPATION:
Have the expected groups of Seniors and Youth taken part to the project?
How was the team working practice?

SATISFACTION:
Was the training experience satisfactory?

OUTPUTS:
N. of Facilitators / Youth Trainers / Mentors / Trainees
N. of modules / hours
N. of learning programme design / other training materials

LEARNING OUTCOMES OF
m2 m3 m4 m5
of both Trainers and Trainees

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AND LEARNING:
Was it enjoyable / effective / useful / meaningful?
Did it produce a change of attitude?

UTILITY:
Was the training useful for the following modules (in the project) / for similar experiences (future projects)?

POST-EVALUATION

UTILITY:
Was the training useful for the future / for the improvement of your personal / working life?

INPUTS:
“resources at the disposal of the project”.

ACTIVITIES:
“actions taken or work performed to convert inputs into outputs”

ACHIEVEMENTS/OUTPUTS:
“the product of a certain activity, made it possible by the grant of EC funds”.

RESULTS:
“the immediate benefits obtained by direct users”

OUTCOMES:
“actual impacts/benefits/changes for participants during or after your programme”

“what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.” [EQF; 2008]

IMPACTS:
“broader and longer term changes for economy and society as a whole”

As a result, it has been verified that the training was executed in 9 Regions of the 6 piloting Member States: Sofia and Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria; Berlin-Brandenburg, Germany; Marche and Toscana, Italy; Warsaw (Mazowia), Poland; Comunidad de Madrid, Spain; West Midlands and South West England; the UK. This has taken place accordingly to common methodological “skeleton” /base toolkits that have been adapted to the local needs, priorities, and missions.

The ILBES methodology, as based on certain ethical principles/practices and learning methods, as well as on (informal, comfortable) training settings that enhanced learning exchanges between the participants, has been very effective in giving value to the life and work experiences of the participants and to encourage sharing processes. It has also given proof to empower the large majority of the participants, with respect to their different roles and to the expected learning outcomes of the five envisaged modules.
For two emerging professional profiles – the “young facilitator developer of intergenerational dialogue” and the “senior mentor developer of intergenerational dialogue” – the bases, in terms of training programmes, methods, contents and materials, have been set. Motivational levels and satisfaction of the key-training actors have been kept high during the whole ILBES cycle.

An extraordinary impact of the ILBES has been that of generating a wish to continue the facilitation-training of the older adults through the ICT in the Youth; a longing for going ahead with the learning experience on the ICT-Internet world, as well as to go ahead to meet-exchange-and-share with the younger generations.

It is planned that the tested training design will be part of a certifiable curriculum for different target group (youngsters, seniors and the facilitators promoting e-Inclusion), to be exploited by the partner organizations and new stakeholders once the project ends. The contextualization of the learning program design has been a relevant aspect to assure the success of the initiative, but to make it scalable to further realities, guidelines and recommendations will be created in order to facilitate the process.

The partnership

The consortium consists of eight partners who have different but complementary expertise, work experiences and in different areas of influence nationally and internationally. The Consortium is an excellent blend of experience and skills related to education and learning with the two principle target groups, research and development, work with marginalized groups, communication and dissemination of culture.