



QA 11



BREAKDOWN ^{OR} BREAKOUT

The 'Break Down, Break Out' project aims to demonstrate and document how new learning strategies for long-term unemployed can empower them to take action. These low qualified Europeans are hit the hardest from economic pressures and this process provides simple and practice based guidance.



[JG]

[May 2015]



THE ROMA EVENT

The Roma event was an important milestone in the *Break Down or Break Out* project.

With its wide range of activities from *meeting the community and its examples to complicated group and plenum reflections* it was designed to offer a bridge from the project's preparatory activities to implementing the project's innovative capacity building strategies.

The event included 5 days of work and involved more than 50 people, of which more than 35 people were from the partner countries.

This evaluation aims to deliver a few brief reflections and evaluations of to what extent the Roma event in fact accomplished its mission as a bridge from preparation to implementation, along with offering a few precise recommendations for special attention in the following phases.



ORGANISATION



Organizing meeting the community [All photos: JG]

First a comment on the organisation of the Roma event.

The rather complicated event and line of activities were very well prepared by a strong collaboration between the coordinator and the local host, *Fondazione Risorsa Donna*.

The event, the agenda and the activities were created along an open and participatory process in BaseCamp lasting several months and resulting in a balanced agenda between practical community exploration and reflective learning and dialogue.

It is not easy to organise such a mix of activities in a city like Roma, but the local partner did an excellent job, including very good accommodation and community planning that worked well.

Fondazione Risorsa Donna, its professionals and its volunteers should be given considerable credit for establishing a very good framework for the complicated activities, as well as for demonstrating a strong capacity to work with local people and communities.

In conclusion, the organisational framework for the Roma event was excellent, allowing the positive conclusion that this partner is able to handle even a high number of transnational participants.

On top of that, the local partner was able to organize considerable insight into various realities in and around Roma, including introducing very relevant examples of what the *Break Down or Break Out* project is about.



PROJECT PROGRESSION



The project is on its way to find its own directions

The mission of the Roma event was not a simple one.

At the heart of a very innovative and complicated project, the Roma event was expected to deliver a bridge from preparation to implementation.

The first phases of the project (until May 2015) were designed to create readiness among partners and trainers to address and work with the complicated project strategies for long-term unemployed adults, including creating support and interest in their local communities.

The following phase - from May 2015 and until September 2015 - is missioned to start the first practical trying out activities with participation of well-prepared trainers and small teams of long-term unemployed willing to take a chance and find new ways out of various dead-end situations.

The project's second year will build on lessons learned from this phase and take the capacity building among long-term unemployed to a more systematic and so-called "epic" level: making their way through the entire capacity building process helping the adults change their situation through taking action in their communities.

To offer such a "bridge" between preparation and implementation of the project's capacity building approaches, the Roma event offered two important resources for partners and especially for the participating trainers:

- > real-life examples from the Roma reality of people building up capacity to change their situation and to establish concrete activities benefiting themselves as well as their families and/or communities (role-models)
- > group and plenum based reflections and dialogues aimed to understand the project's capacity building approaches, to share possible approaches among trainers and to identify and discuss different challenges and possible obstacles in different partner communities and countries

The following sections briefly comment on to what extent this in fact happened along the Roma event.



TRANSMISSION

The Roma event clearly demonstrated the importance of what we call the "transmission" problem in open, explorative and innovate projects, such as Break Down or Break Out.

What is transmission about and why is it a problem?

In more top-down and instruction based projects transmission is not a problem, as most of the project implementation is already well-defined and not depending on further exploration or experimentation.

The transmission problem in more explorative projects consists in the fact that complicated and new methods and mentalities must be transmitted (and interpreted) along a long line of links in the project chain:

- › from application to project
- › from project to partners
- › from partners to trainers
- › from trainers to the target groups
- › ...and back again to the project!



This process is fragile and uncertain, as many “interpretations” can happen on the way, and as much project content can be lost or changed along the many transmission situations.

This problem is not well-reflected in most experimentative European projects.

As most projects need to rely on written material and online dialogues, the few occasions to bring people together for live dialogues are of course precious.

The Roma event demonstrated - as more or less foreseen - that this transmission process takes time and is extremely dependent on the capacity and dedication of each practice partner, in particular as to:

- › reading and working with the written material, guidelines and inspiration provided by the project, including translating key papers in needed
- › taking part in dialogues of understanding in the project’s online forums to clarify doubts and to help other partners
- › building understanding and readiness among trainers and key community collaborators, including through team meetings and dialogues



READINESS

The Roma event demonstrated that partners and trainers were very differently prepared for the upcoming practical phases and to understand and work with the project’s basic approaches.

Some partners and trainers had developed a quite good understanding of the project and its mission, while other partners and trainers were in the process of working towards such an understanding.

The Roma event therefore also played the role of a training event for partners and trainers as to the understanding and capturing of the project mission, its principles and its possible practical implementation.

For some partners and in particular for some trainers the project’s principles and work methods were quite new and this means that *they will need to catch up with the project approaches along the first trying out with the unemployed adults*, hopefully strongly supported by the project partners.

Even though the project is based on trainer capacity building along the trying out and taking action in the community, it is really important that trainers have a good and solid understanding of the project in their baggage when starting the practical work.



The fighter



SAME PROBLEMS BUT DIFFERENT MENTALITIES

As foreseen the Roma event revealed considerable differences in the interest and mentality of long-term unemployed across partner countries.

The mentality and attitudes among unemployed in Europe are very different, due to a variety of historic, economic and political factors that cannot be influenced by the project.

In some countries unemployed people demonstrate a lot of resistance towards initiatives that do not pay off immediately.

This was debated among the partners and trainers and the conclusion was that it is not within the scope of the project to change general mentality in partner countries, and it is not the mission of the project to “persuade” long-term unemployed to participate if they do not wish to.

The project has its own experimentative and limited mission, and only unemployed willing to take the change with the project should be invited to do so.

This means that “persuasion” should be replaced by “open and positive invitation”.



Practicing entrepreneurial mentality



FOCUS

When addressing such serious, global and complicated problems as long-term unemployment, project debates often generate a wide range of economic, political and social discussions, for example about the best ways to fight unemployment and to create new jobs.

As an Erasmus+ project is not missioned to solve unemployment, neither to find ways out of structural unemployment, but to focus strongly on the experimentation to undertake on behalf of the Commission, it is *extremely important to keep a strong focus on what the project should do and not do*.

In other words to help partners and trainers to keep in mind that we are on a special and well-defined mission from the European funders, and that our professional job is to carry out the mission best way possible.

Creative ideas on fighting unemployment in general, various debates on the economic, political and social factors linked to unemployment should therefore

be replaced by a strong and immersive focus on what the project should accomplish: trying out new ways of entrepreneurial action taking that might be useful to trainers and institutions working with long-term unemployed across Europe.

Project partners and trainers should therefore engage in a centripetal and not a centrifugal work process, strongly and increasingly focusing on the precise and limited mission of the project.

Interesting ideas going beyond the project mission might on the other hand be formulated as possible new European projects.



THE FOLLOWING PHASE



Meeting the community

The key question in this evaluation is therefore: *did the Roma event accomplish its mission? Did the Roma event serve as a bridge from preparation to practical implementation? Are the key players ready?*

There is no simple answer to this.

As an estimate it seems as 1/3 of partners and trainers are well prepared, another 1/3 medium prepared and 1/3 less prepared.

The following phase, described as slowly starting to try out the project approaches in practice with small teams of long-term unemployed and learning from this trying out, should therefore include

- › considerable partner support to trainers and coaches
- › exploiting the rich inspiration material provided by the project, including translating if needed
- › a strong project focus on the capacity building among trainers and community collaborators

This support should take place alongside working with the first small teams of unemployed and incorporate those practical activities.

Even though BaseCamp facilities for trainer dialogues will be set up, the project should be aware that this might not be sufficient to ensure the readiness of the project's trainer corps, as not all trainers are familiar with or like to dialogue through online forums - and written dialogues certainly challenge people with less English skills.

The project should therefore put in place a solid contact to practice partners and local trainer teams to ensure a good progression in the understanding of the project.

The following first OBAMA trying out is of course extremely important, and for several reasons:

- › it must produce useful lessons learned on which the subsequent more systematic practices can build
- › it must produce considerable experience and confidence among trainers
- › it must offer the project strong documentation of the work processes to learn from
- › it must create strong local platforms for the more in-depths OBAMA+ activities in the project's second year

- › it might identify a few unemployed adults that wish to go “all the way”, including serving as mentors for subsequent teams of adults in the second year or being drivers of the OBAMA+ teams



MEDIA



Collective listening and reflection

Along the Roma activities it was evidenced that the project has taken considerable, strong and well-reflected steps towards presenting the first version of the project web after summer 2015.

Lots of material is available and there is a considerable partner interest in co-creating the local sections of the website and in own partner languages.

The project is therefore going to focus on editing the material and ensuring partner contributions along the following months.

The design of the website, the planning and the partner dedication indicates that the project web is progressing well and that the website will benefit the project as well as local partners.

The Roma event was extensively recorded in words, photos and video and it is of great importance that project players make sure to review this material and make it useful to the project web as well as to local partners, for example through offering the material in BaseCamp.

It might include some heavy editing and reviewing, but it will be worthwhile.

The web launch should be accompanied by one or more Breaking News, including in local versions.





QA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FOLLOWING PHASE (First OBAMA May - September+ 2015)



In medias res

BREAKDOWN

BREAKOUT



PROJECT

- ⇒ Ensure that partners and trainers focus strongly on the project mission, avoiding sliding into general unemployment directions
- ⇒ Work closely with partners and trainers in need of further capacity building along the first trying out activities, including finding creative ways to deliver this support, such as local workshops with project participation if needed
- ⇒ Encourage open documentation and dialogue on lessons learned and emerging challenges along the first OBAMA
- ⇒ Pay attention to possible language obstacles to create the needed capacity building among trainers
- ⇒ Establish direct collaboration with the trainer teams to experience their needs directly

BREAKDOWN

BREAKOUT



PARTNERS

- ⇒ Support your trainers anyway possible, in particular along the first OBAMA trying out and through translation of material if needed
- ⇒ Make any support needs visible to the coordinator and to the project through BaseCamp or direct contacting
- ⇒ Ensure proper documentation, story-telling and communication of what is learned along the first OBAMA: problems, failures, challenges and positive experience
- ⇒ Try to make sure that the trainers engaged will be able to follow the project all along, not dropping out in the middle of the activities, and that the trainers benefit from the engagement
- ⇒ Prepare well for the time-out reflections following the first OBAMA trying out

BREAKDOWN

BREAKOUT



TRAINERS

- ⇒ Get in flow with the project's approaches and principles through working with the inspiration material made available and through participating in BaseCamp
- ⇒ Request proper support and resources from your local project partner

- ⇒ Take direct contact to the coordinator or through BaseCamp if you have doubts or needs
- ⇒ Interact with the trainers from other countries as much as possible
- ⇒ Try to be the drivers of the activities in your local community
- ⇒ Work with an open mind: accept and enjoy learning about the entrepreneurial approaches alongside the unemployed adults
- ⇒ Prepare well for the time-out reflections following the first OBAMA trying out



The corridors are dark and deep
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep

Robert Frost slightly adjusted