Growing steps
YiA_3.1_TRAINING AND NETWORKING
PUBLIC REPORT

Palermo, Italy
5th – 13th April 2014
Training course for youth workers and young entrepreneurs

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
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PUBLIC REPORT

Growing Steps

Action 3.1 - Cooperation with the Neighbouring Countries of the European Union

DG Education and Culture - Youth In Action Programme

Edited by CESIE

www.cesie.org

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The project, and this publication within it, was funded by the European Commission
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INTRODUCTION

Some months ago, when I knew I would have to coordinate a Training Course (TC), I felt excited and worried in the same time. Excited since coordinating a project is always a great experience and accountability, you are the boss (relating that project!) and the final responsible for all the activities and for the success (or not!) of the project. Worried since Growing Steps is a very big project, involving 22 Partners from Europe and Eastern Europe and Central Asia Countries and 40 participants from 17 different Countries.

At this moment, some months after the TC, coming back to the moments we spent together, I feel so lucky for the Growing Steps group, the people I met and the way we carried out the activities together as a “team”. I know the theme of the project is very important in present days and represents a challenge we have to face for a lasting, harmonious and equilibrate development of society, and I know it is difficult to analyse, deal with and investigate in few time. But together we were able to tackle our little challenge and improve our knowledge and competences regarding the entrepreneurship in rural areas, contributing to the success of the project.

I want to thank all you for your interest in the project, for joining the activities and for overcoming any problem we had to face during the time we spent in Baida.

A special thanks to the “Growing Steps Dream Team”: the trainers, Altino, Carmelo and Anastasiia for the work they did and their understanding and putting into practice all my requests and the great support they gave to me; and other CESIE’ support staff for being always ready to prepare all the stuff we needed and to actively participate!

Finally I feel Growing Steps raised our awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship for fostering rural development in isolated areas and tackle youth unemployment, giving us the competencies and tools for contributing and helping others in this challenge. The path is long, but we moved the first steps in the right direction!

Francesco Bisulca

Project coordinator

With the support of the Youth in Action programme of the European Union.
WHAT IS “GROWING STEPS”

Origins

The actual world economic situation is characterized by a financial crisis that affects the economies of most nations since 2008. This crisis led to high rates of unemployment, in particular among youngsters (the rate is more than the double than adults), who meet more difficulties than adults for finding a job. Moreover the projections for the future are not positive (see Global Employment Trends 2014, International Labour Organization). The European Commission is addressing this situation (in the EU-28 area the youth unemployment rate is 22.2%) with extraordinary measures, and in particular through the Youth Guarantee (http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079), a new approach which ensures all youngsters under 25 get a good-quality, concrete offer (job, traineeship, education) within 4 months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed.

In this context, young people in rural and isolated areas have to face additional difficulties: fewer opportunities both for formal and non-formal education since universities and other institutions are placed in cities, few job opportunities related to a small job market, infrastructural problems and difficulties of mobility (for more information see Village International, SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre, 2010).

The idea of organizing a TC in the rural development field arose from a double reflection:

- the recognition of this situation and in particular of the bad impact of leaving rural areas by young people who come to the cities seeking jobs opportunities. This situation leads to unemployment in cities and, in the same time, economic, cultural and social immobility in rural areas.

- the experience we gained in supporting entrepreneurship through the management and participation in several projects (above all in the framework of “Erasmus for young entrepreneurs” Programme) and the realization of many TCs in this field (Youth Spirit of Entrepreneurship for Employability-YouSEE; Speakers of Europe; Euromed at work for active citizenship – EWAC).

Considering the importance of the youth unemployment, the risk of marginalization of rural areas, the inclusion of youth unemployment and spirit of entrepreneurship among the annual priorities of Youth in Action Programme for 2013, the awareness of our competences in addressing these issues, we proposed the realization of Growing Steps, with the aim of fostering entrepreneurship and creativity in rural areas fighting economic inertia and geographically isolation.

The project

The TC Growing Steps took place in Baida, a neighbourhood of Palermo, in an amazing old convent with suitable working spaces and logistic stuff. The TC involved 40 participants from 17 European and Neighbouring Countries (Italy, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Greece, Lithuania, Poland,
Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine). It exploited the rich potential of creativity, entrepreneurship and innovative techniques for highlighting communal solidarity, self-confidence and self-reflection in the work with young people at risk or in situation of social exclusion and marginalisation in geographical and rural isolated areas. The TC also promoted the sharing of best practices in the field of youth work. We employed non-formal educational methods for training youth workers on how to work with target groups from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. The project also addressed the issue of stimulating young people’s spirit of creativity and initiative and the promotion of young people’s commitment to fostering social inclusion and solidarity. Growing Steps was a great occasion to meet and share experiences and gain new competences.

Objectives

- Providing skills in the area of youth entrepreneurship;
- Improving competences for supporting youngsters who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs);
- Arising awareness of the importance of rural development in tackling financial crisis issues, youth unemployment and stagnation of rural areas;
- Fostering active European citizenship through exploration of EU opportunities and participation in elections;
- Facilitating the exchange of experiences and good practices, and promoting cooperation in the field of youth employment in the EU and Eastern countries.

Working methods:

- energizers and ice-breaking activities
- group-building games
- working and focus groups
- organisations’ bazaar
- debates and oral presentations
- Open Space Technology and other networking methods.
## GROwING STEPS: THE WORK PROGRAMME AND METHODS USED

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With the support of the Youth in Action programme of the European Union.
LEARNING FLOW

The TC’s path can be divided, for ease of analysis, into three different moments: problems, tools and skills. Each moment identifies both the activities planned and carried out and the learning input and skills participants received, gained and improved.

The TC indeed could be represented as a flow, a continuum starting from the identification of the problems (why we are here), following with tools (instruments and information for fostering participants’ reflection and stimulating their creativity in order to face the problems) and concluding with skills (new competences acquired).

But skills don’t represent the final point of the learning flow since participants now have the competences for addressing youth unemployment, contributing to the rural development and awareness of the importance of being active in society. So they can experience what they learnt and identify other tools, improving other skills or use it for facing other problems. Furthermore, they can act as multipliers in their local communities, sharing their experience and knowledge, making the TC’s flow bigger and bigger.

We represented the learning path as an arrow, but it is an ideal arrow always in movement which takes vitality from our actions, efforts and contributions to the themes addressed by Growing Steps.

The first part of the TC refers to the specification of the problems we analysed during the project. A clear and detailed identification of the problem is the best way for finding suitable solutions and make participants aware of what expect them.

Presentation of the project, programme and objectives
Introduction and presentation of the Growing Steps project, its programme and objectives of the week, in a way that allows participants to freely give comments and suggestions, express doubts and feed-back.

**The “Clothes Line”**

Participants received post-it notes of different colours (green, yellow and pink). Each colour stands for a different feeling linked to the TC: motivations, concerns and expectations. They wrote their ideas and hung them in the working room, so that everyone had a chance to look at and know the point of view of the others.


**Europe and EECA hub**

After a brainstorming on European key concepts, participants were divided into groups in order to discuss about the following topics:
- Active European citizenship.
- Sense of European identity.
- Social inclusion of young people.
- EU & EECA relations.
- Social cohesion.
- Rural development.

They wrote and drawn their ideas in a flipchart paper. Each group presented its results to the plenary, and after that, trainers introduced and stimulated a debate about the 2014 European elections, using the simulation of elections and consequences.

**Introduction: NEETs**

The trainers give an explanation about the background of NEETs (persons who are "Not in Education, Employment, or Training") and some statistical data, asking for feedback from participants, who contributed with the data concerning their local and national contexts.

For more information visit: [http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/labourmarket/youth.htm](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/labourmarket/youth.htm)

**Mapping the situation of youth unemployment in Europe & EECA**

Participants presented their realities focusing on youth unemployment and rural areas. Using their researches and statistical data, they worked on an “action oriented” analysis about the factors causing youth unemployment, trying to distinguish factors they can influence on and they can’t influence on. They examined the situation from every point of view, focusing on the differences and similarities in each Country and the way they addressed the problem.

After writing on a flipchart paper, each group presented the results in front of the rest of participants.
Rural realities: common characteristics & differences

Through the “Shining Sun” method (we adapted the shining star method to the logo of Growing Steps) participants, divided into groups, discussed about differences and similarities of the realities they live in, drawing a sun and putting similarities in the centre and differences in the rays. Then, they present their “Suns” to the whole group, explaining the most interesting topics of their discussions.

For more information you can see: “Village International”, Salto Youth work Publication, page 16

World Café: in-depth analysis “Rural development – Youth unemployment”

Participants were divided into 6 groups, each one with an issue to debate. There was a leader that stays always in the same group, while the other members have to change every 5 minutes. Participants discussed about the connections between youth unemployment and rural development and reflected about rural entrepreneurship as a tool for economic growth and civic participation.

You can see here how to organise a World Café session:
http://www.theworldcafe.com/method.html

The second and biggest part of the TC is related to the instruments and methods for gaining competences and skills to face the identified problems. Through non formal activities participants learnt how to develop, share and communicate ideas and to achieve the fixed objectives.

Support methods for NEETs

Participants focused on how to use non-formal learning for creating better opportunities for youngsters of a NEET group as a tool for their self-development and involvement in education, employment and community life.

Trainers fostered reflection on unemployment, considering not only the related negative aspects, but also the positive ones. At this regard they analysed and identified pros and cons of unemployment fostering participants’ group reflection focusing in the role of job seeker and job creator.

Continuing the reflection, trainers explained The SWOT analysis method: reflection on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of NEET situation. Participants were divided in groups in order to reflect on all factors of unemployment, both positive and negative, discover unexpected opportunities and avoid causes of failure. They presented their results to the plenary and discussed about it.

Enforcing positive thinking and motivation

Presentation of creative and positive thinking. Considering youth unemployment (and other topics related to the TC) as challenges and not problems, with the purpose to understand how they can tackle the youth unemployment in this sense. For understanding the mechanism of the human brain and thinking process, trainers presented the Six Thinking Hats (Edward de Bono). A method based on six different coloured hats, which represent a way to create a map of thinking:

- White: Information
- Red: Feelings, Intuition
- Black: Risks, Difficulties and Problems
- Yellow: Benefits and Feasibility
- Green: New Ideas, Possibilities
- Blue: Managing the Thinking Process

You can read more about this method here: http://edwarddebonofoundation.com/

Discovering youth entrepreneurship in rural areas

Linked to the morning session of creating thinking, trainers presented some good practices of enterprises in rural areas and best practices of rural microfinance. Participants learned about marketing theory through non-formal activities and the importance of promoting entrepreneurial culture and development of rural start-ups.

Each participant wrote in post-it paper the challenges in this field and attached all together in a flipchart paper. After that, for experiencing what they learnt, participants worked in groups on a creative exercise to reflect on possible benefits of entrepreneurship on rural areas. The exercise is based on seven principles of a social enterprise plan:

1. The problems
2. Vision and Mission
3. Theory of change
4. The solution (Idea)
5. Social impact
6. The team
7. Financial summary

Participants created their own social enterprise plan writing it in a paper. Finally they presented the results to everyone

Info about social enterprise:
http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7523
Social entrepreneurship toolkit:
https://unltd.org.uk/socialentrepreneurshiptoolkit/

Responsibility of choice

Analysing interconnection between society, government and economy for raising participants’ awareness about the importance of being active in society, cooperative in

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business, explorer of own rights and duties in the role of European citizens and citizens in general.

Four squares: role play aiming at experimenting how to act in specific situations, being aware of who and what people are in society.

Participants were divided in two groups. Each one had a very big paper at its disposal. The activity consisted in drawing “building roads” dividing the space in four territories. In each group people played particular roles as builders and one of them was the representative who negotiates with the other group.

After activity one person had to explain to the whole group how was this experience, the teamwork, the problems to reach an agreement, etc.

**Rural start-up establishment**

Following the activities related to the social enterprise plan, participants reflected on opportunities for rural start-up establishment, skills and resources they need. This exercise was developed in accordance with the “Types of knowledge” method by Lundvall and Johnson. Participants developed their ideas into small working groups, paying attention on the importance of connecting knowledge and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, they set up their objectives on SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed).

Info regarding the learning economy at:
https://smartech.gatech.edu/bitstream/handle/1853/43152/BengtAkeLundvall_1.pdf

**Creating opportunities in the labour field in rural area**

Participants raised their awareness of key competences essential on labour market and ways of getting funds for their projects. They present the social plan enterprise plan they worked in the previous days to banks and private institutions (represented by trainers), dealing with key-points and questions they could face when asking for financing.

**Personal brand**

The groups were presented as learning “job clubs”, putting knowledge into practice on the topics of job seeking techniques, creating an individual plan for the desired job, writing a CV, a motivation letter, interview techniques, etc.

Participants got aware of the importance of being different as a tool for increasing success possibilities. They created in couple a personal brand with specific characteristics that could point out from others and drawn the attention of stakeholders.

Info about personal branding at:

**From my idea to project**

This session focused on communication, paying attention on relationships and not on (only) advertisement. It represented the conclusion of the second part of the learning path. Trainers explained some statistical data about this field and technical aspects and subjects of communication, in order to understand principles of a project writing process and with the support of the Youth in Action programme of the European Union.
stimulate creative thinking. In this way participants had clear the steps of project structure and got advices for good project writing to reach an innovative idea. After a brainstorming about communication, participants worked into groups according to the social enterprise plans they developed during the week. As the last step of the learning process, they worked on some tools (presentation, Power Point, video) to communicate their project ideas to be represented the next day in plenary.

**Presentation of the YiA programme and Erasmus+**

Oral presentation of YiA programme different actions and of the new Erasmus+ programme. Trainers explained the main points of the programme for the period 2014-2020. They quoted funding rules and budgets, the development of all previous programmes and actions before they became in Erasmus+, the requirements to apply for and application procedures and the new structure programme for 3 key Actions and mobility programmes. Participants were asked for a debate in order to answering questions and clarifying doubts.


**Train trust**

Participants experimented the method “Train trust” to understand better all the communicative process. They were able to experience more closely the terms to establish communication: sender, receiver and the information.

They were split in two groups each one composed a queue. Everyone was blindfolded except the last person of the “train”, who played the role of the driver.

Participants, without talking, moved around the place taking orders from the drivers of groups. The message passed from one to another from the end to the head of the train, who directed the movements on the basis of information received.

**Creative workshops**

Afternoon was dedicated to strengthen the group creative spirit and stimulate creation of new ideas for future projects in the field of rural development through three creative workshops.

The creative workshops proposed by the trainers to be developed were the following ones:

- **Mandala**: participants were divided into four tables in order to create a creative drawing. They were stimulated by soft and relaxing music and, through the resources at their disposal (papers, salt, felt-tip pens, plastic glasses) created an artistic work about the themes developed during the project.

- **Dream city**: participants were reunited in one group to build, from their perspective, an example of how will be their dream city. They had at their disposition different tools to use, such as balls, ropes, CD-ROMs, plastic glasses, bottles, etc.

- **Village of the future**: the last group of participants created collages. They reproduced their idea of village of the future in the coloured cardboards.
After the workshops, each group presented its work to the other ones, showing the results and a final discussion on creativity was held.

**From my idea to our idea**

Following the activity “From my idea to project” about communication, participants presented the final product of their social enterprise plans. They were stimulated to present in innovative way their ideas, putting into practice what they have learned. Participants carried out the advertisements of their products through video presentations of short films and also pictures and power point presentations.

**Evaluation**

Every day at the end of activities, participants were asked to evaluate the work developed and the way it was realized. The proposed tool was the “blob three”. It consists in a drawing with many puppets around a three with different feelings and behaviours. Each participant chose one of the puppets on the picture they considered most representative of their feelings and moods in relation to the activities carried out during the day and explain their choice.

You can see more examples at: T-Kit No. 10 “Educational Evaluation in Youth Work, p. 71: https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/training-kit-educational-evaluation-in-youth-work.754/

The last part refers to the reflection of the learning flow, with particular attention on gained skills, the ability to think about new projects and the possibility of their realisation, putting into practice what they learnt.

**Open Space Technology**

Participants had the opportunity to create their own project ideas and contribute to other project ideas with their experience and knowledge.

They thought, proposed and shared ideas, describing future project’s resources needed, activity, target group, outputs, outcomes and impact in a paper.

After that they showed to the rest of participants what they had written, the reasons, ideas, proposals, share their competences, etc. Participants invited each other to participate in own project and joined the ideas they liked, giving their availability and support to the projects development.

More info about Open Space Technology at http://www.kstoolkit.org/Open+Space

**Plans for follow-up. Conclusions**

Trainers finished the previous activity of Open Space Technology. On the basis of everything already debated, they asked to the participants for their own conclusions.
Afterwards it started a reflection on the follow-up plan by trainers and participants, sharing ideas on how to use new tools in future professional and social life.

**SOME FIGURES FOR SUMMARISING…**

My learning process—I learnt more about non-formal education, methods and methodologies

My learning process—I feel I developed/increased my intercultural skills and competences

―All the expectations have been successfully fulfilled. Sharing the experience with the participants from so many countries is a great possibility to bring back in our community at home.‖

―I got new experience and am motivated to participate in such trainings in future.‖

―I just want to mention that I am very happy that you give me this opportunity.‖

―I liked almost everything which were on the project—people, participants, trainers, workshops and surrounding, I felt myself absolutely comfortable with this and should say thank you for this.‖

My learning process—I learnt more about the EU ERASMUS+ programme and how to create new projects

With the support of the Youth in Action programme of the European Union.
Growing Steps subject and contents

‘The trainers were wonderful. They made it very easy for us to talk to them about anything. We worked when it was time to work. They had fun with us when it was time to party. They helped us with any problems we had during our stay. All of them were very friendly which is important to me.’

'I am very thankful for this chance and thank you once again. I wish you all the best in your work and personal life. BRAVO:)’

‘I learned to work better in a team; I learned how to express myself and my position in a better way during the group works.’

‘I improved my sense of initiative in various contexts, for example by taking the lead in some group activities, or by volunteering to do public presentations. The training course also gave me food for thoughts about potential initiatives to take and projects to develop.’

...after Growing Steps - When I return to my country I will put in practice the new learning I developed during the TC

Growing Steps approach and methodologies
CONCLUSION

At the end of this report, remembering the moments we spent together and the activities carried out, we feel to assure that Growing Steps was a success project. We set up some objectives and worked hard to achieve them, before, during and after the TC. During it we tried to create a relaxed atmosphere, fostering the participation in the actions, the sharing of experiences and best practices and the relationships among participants. Furthermore, through the use of non-formal learning methodologies, we allowed all participants to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas and contribute to the development of the project. In our opinion, this is the best way for the promotion of new projects and the creation of partnerships between the organisations involved.

During the “Open Space Technology”, in the last day, participants had the chance to promote their project ideas, express their strengths and their “know-how” and join the project ideas they liked, laying the basis for future collaborations. They organised themselves into working groups for discussing their ideas, the contributions of each one and the best way to develop their projects.

Growing Steps gave the opportunity to participants and partner organisations to increase their network of relationships, fostering the collaboration between Europe and Neighbouring Countries, contributing to a more inclusive European society and stronger European Union.

We made our best to achieve these important objectives making feel, at the same time, the participants at ease during the whole project, from the preparation to the follow up.