



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Although they might not think of themselves in this way, the Royds is a learning community. They are teaching themselves the art of self-government. *Learning communities: the secret to their success* - Martin Yarnit, 2001

## A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

The time has now come to try new ways of bringing people out of poverty and promoting growth and well-being not only *for*, but also *with* citizens. *Social Innovation in EU, 2010*

# Towards Learning Communities

## *A compendium*

Lessons learned from three years of Exploitation and Learning Communities practice in five European countries.

*Read all about it...  
... explore it...*

[www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu)



Significantly, the Community Learning Champions initiative reflects the understanding that real change happens when the people themselves are in the driving seat; not the professionals, not the service managers, not the policy-makers, not the politicians.

*Community Learning Champions  
- 2011 Report*

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*Thanks to Peter Gray for proof-reading!*



Local learning centers and partnership are yet to be built into a coherent lifelong learning policy. Despite the numerous partnership and network initiatives of recent years, they remain occasional, interest-driven and short-lived. Policy development and local implementation are still lacking. *The European Association for the Education of Adults, 2006*



XPLOIT  
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## A GUIDE TO THE GUIDE



Dear Reader.

*What will you find in this Compendium?*

You will find a mosaic of texts about what we learned in the Xploit project throughout more than 3 years - from 2009-2013.

The project was created to contribute to more sustainable exploitation of the mountains of qualified European learning and social resources, produced by the European funding measures.

However, we learned that sustainable exploitation depends on the capacity of the receiving institutions and communities, and in most cases this capacity is not in place.

Therefore the project became still more focused on how the receiving communities could develop the capacity to identify, capture and exploit learning and social innovation. In short: how the communities could develop into learning communities, offering the needed infrastructures of collaboration and communication to ensure sustainable take-up of such innovation.

The Xploit project is based on clear bottom-up approaches to exploitation and learning communities, and this is why you will not find a step-by-step instruction on how to establish a learning community in this Compendium - or elsewhere in the Xploit outcomes.

This simply means that there are very many ways to develop into a learning community - and no matter how you embark on such a quest, it will take a lot of time.

Most community traditions and routines and mentalities will need to change.

So, in this Compendium you will find a mosaic of approaches to learning communities, because this represents the realities. You will not find an abstract and synthesized model to implement in your community, but you will find a lot of experience, learning and guidance based on different community practice and based on different forms of experience and approaches.

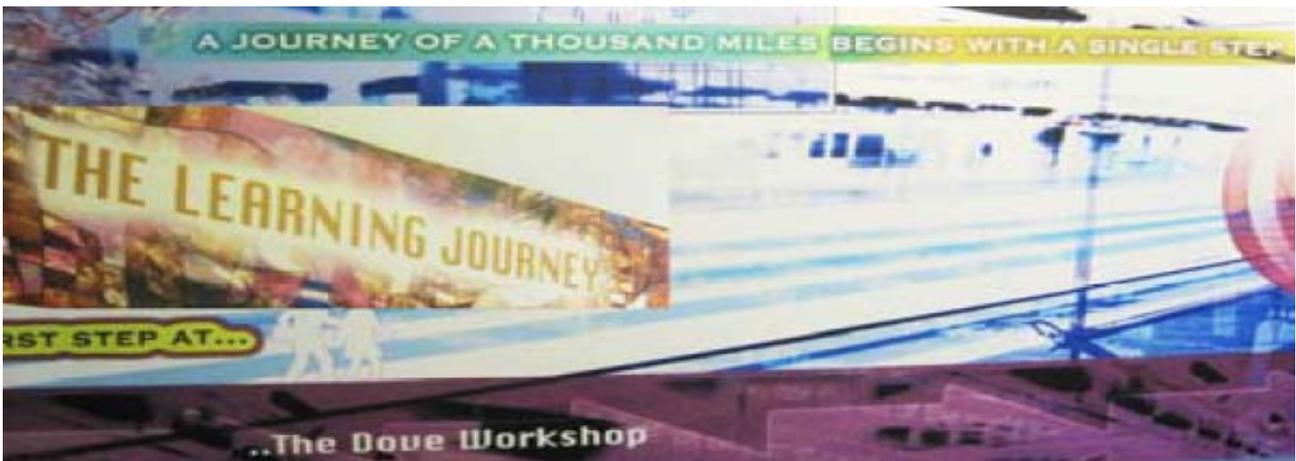
*In fact, implementing a Learning Community Model would be a contradiction in terms, as a learning community precisely needs to learn how to be a learning community.*

The Compendium is not linear: you can pick out sections or text and read them independently, if you like. And you can explore much more material on [www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu).

You are therefore invited to work with the Compendium and the [learningcommunities.eu](http://learningcommunities.eu) in parallel - and to scan and explore the Compendium and identify what you might wish to study further.

We wish you inspiration and good luck with your learning community!

*Jan Gejel*  
Xploit Coordinator



### What will you find in this paper?



- ▶ Contextualising Xploit
- ▶ Introductions to exploitation and learning communities
- ▶ Guides to learning communities
- ▶ Policy recommendations
- ▶ Direct links to the rich community material on the Xploit website
- ▶ How can Xploit be of assistance?

### What will you find on [www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu)?

- ▶ Rich and user-friendly material from the Xploit communities, including visual material
- ▶ All Xploit products freely available
- ▶ Inspiration on learning communities
- ▶ Information about the project and the partners
- ▶ Information about the Xploit conference



## OPENING UP THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

We have been talking about learning cities for over 20 years. Some people link a learning city to things like lifelong learning, health, climate, environment or social innovation - or to democracy and active citizenship...

Much rhetoric can be deployed in attempting to define what a learning city is.

We prefer a very pragmatic approach, trying to set up some basic criteria and expectations for a learning city.

At the same time we prefer the word *community*, as it is more flexible and point towards *structures* rather than *content*: learning community structures can be developed and practiced at many different levels, such as a (poor or rich) city, a region, a transnational region, etc. - but also at the level of a part of a city, a partnership or innovative collaboration covering certain themes or challenges.

What's important to us is that a learning community is *a community that learns*.

The learning community is not defined by the amount of lifelong learning activity taking place, but by how the community as a community is learning.

A community with a lot of lifelong learning might be called *a community of learning*, but is not necessarily *a learning community*.

In other words, it is about how a community (a city, a part of a city, a partnership) develops infrastructures of communication and collaboration capacity to *manage needs, change and challenges* important to the community and its organisations and citizens.

This *infrastructural communication and collaboration capacity building* is crucial to the essence of a learning community:

- ~ How are initiatives taken?
- ~ Who is communicating about emerging needs or opportunities?
- ~ To what extent are different sectors collaborating, a college, a bank and a sport club?
- ~ How are groups of citizens involved in finding new ways to solve their problems?
- ~ How are talent and innovation and creativity welcomed and supported?
- ~ What kinds of partnerships are created outside the public sector?
- ~ To what extent can partnerships and groups of citizens act independently?
- ~ How is policy created?
- ~ How is trust built between the collaborators and between authorities and citizens?
- ~ What organisations and groups of citizens are involved in entrepreneurship?
- ~ How are the community's inclusion principles and infrastructures working in practice?
- ~ How is a community mentality encouraged, developed and sustained?

A learning community is a community that dynamically practices, tests, challenges and critically discusses such infrastructures of communication and collaboration continually, and at a systemic level. This is how the learning community is learning.

A city with a lot of education institutions is not by definition a learning community...

A city with a strong focus on health is not by definition a learning community...

A city actively promoting green innovation is not by definition a learning community...

A city engaging in the rhetoric of learning cities is not by definition a learning community...

A learning community can be expected to address such matters in a serious way, but this is not what *makes it* a learning community.

The Common Criteria tries to unpack expectations linked to this understanding of a learning community - and is prepared to learn from practice and experience.

## OPENING UP SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT INTEGRATING EU PROJECT RESULTS INTO LOCAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Holger Bienzle, *Xploit Quality Manager*



### The key weakness of generations of EU funding programmes

For more than 15 years I have been involved in European education projects in different roles: as programme manager at a national agency, as consultant to the European Commission, as assessor of project proposals and reports, as application writer, coordinator, partner, evaluator and disseminator of transnational projects.

From the first minute on European cooperation ground (and veterans assured me it had been like this even before!) it was critically stated in numerous meetings and conferences that EU projects produce valuable and useful results, but - alas! - they somehow do not find their way to the people for whom they have been designed: educators and learners in the specific education sector addressed. At the end of each EU programme period the mantra was repeated that in the coming generation of funding programmes improvements of the dissemination and exploitation aspects would need to have top priority.



### What has not worked so far

And efforts to increase the impact of EU projects have indeed been made.

At EU programme level new and sometimes strange concepts were coined, hyped and eventually abandoned again: for example "valorisation", a word coming from French financial language was imported into EU programme English with a completely new meaning, i.e. "the process of disseminating and exploiting project outcomes to meet user needs, with the ultimate aim of integrating and using them in training systems and practices at local, regional, national and European level" ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/new/valorisation/what\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/new/valorisation/what_en.html)). Now the magic word is "exploitation", not in the sense of "treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work" as the Oxford dictionary suggests, but consisting of "mainstreaming and multiplication", as the LLP glossary reveals ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/glossary\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/glossary_en.html)).

Dissemination and exploitation task forces, expert working groups, and even specific programme management units at European Commission level were created, worked and produced reports and recommendations which were then forgotten again.

Specific types of projects dedicated to dissemination, financed by specific sub-programmes on dissemination and exploitation (like the present LLP Key Activity 4, which thankfully funded the Xploit project!) produced project product databases, guidance publications, studies, internet platforms and different formats of dissemination conferences...

Useful and well-meant as these efforts undoubtedly have been, they have achieved but little in increasing the spread and uptake of results developed by EU projects. One key reason for this perpetuated shortcoming is something they all have in common: Their starting point is the project product, which they try to market to potential target groups: "Look what great things we have produced, don't you want to try them out?"



### Xploit - a new approach

The Xploit project, while being one of the afore-mentioned initiatives, took a distinctly different approach from most other dissemination improvement activities. Instead of trying to "sell" EU products to potential target groups, it had a thorough look at the local realities first: So-called "Communities profiles", compiled after intense communication with local stakeholders - learners, educators, political decision-makers - describe in detail local learning needs, actors, development plans and perspectives, irrespective whether the local context is a full-fledged learning city with a strong record of joint development efforts, or a community where education actors only reluctantly learn to start to work together for the common good instead of competing fiercely for scarce public education funds and private customers. It is on the basis of this thorough local analysis that the Xploit learning communities searched for suitable EU project products which could reinforce the local development processes.

An important part of the approach was also to identify local actors in education institutions and administration who could be trained and supported as facilitators or local "Exploitation guides". Thus, instead of simply throwing EU project products into an education market, local integration processes are carefully planned and actively supported. The process of identifying, adapting and integration EU project results itself becomes a learning experience for the communities involved. Capacity is built which enables local actors to reiterate such product exploitation processes on other occasions.



## Key messages from Xploit

- › European project results can be effectively integrated if there is a clear picture of local needs.
- › European project results can be door-openers for local cooperation of education stakeholders.
- › European project results can be incubators of change if they serve the wider purpose of learning community development.
- › European project results can (only) have an impact if local decision-makers help to create fertile environments.
- › European project results cannot find their way into local communities by themselves - they need local community planning, capacity building of exploitation facilitators, and intensive support during the phase of integration.



## Wishes for the future

Again, we are at the doorstep of a new generation of EU funding programmes in education, and again, the improvement of funded project's dissemination and exploitation of results is at stake.

To be more successful in the future, the perspective of spreading and using EU project results must be needs-driven - i.e. based on a thorough analysis of local education needs - not provision-driven - oriented at marketing EU- project products.

Consequently dissemination and exploitation of project results should not be made the sole responsibility of the funded projects, which have hitherto been haunted by the funding programme with the obligation to develop and implement individual dissemination plans, exploitation strategies and to meet artificially construed impact indicators.

Successful exploitation needs a wider context than the micro-perspective of a project. It needs strong structural support from the EU funding programme on the one hand, but also from national, regional and, above all, local policy makers and education stakeholders. It is them who need to provide the indispensable framework conditions, integration and follow-up actions which can create the real value of project results for local communities.

But unfortunately financing such „accompanying measures“ is by far less popular than funding projects themselves. In public opinion, supporting exploitation actions are often misinterpreted as unnecessary bureaucracy and administration instead of

giving money directly to project beneficiaries. In reality, however, these measures are crucial for making project results visible and bringing them to the people who can make use of them.

Instead of the present “projectitis”, i.e. the strive for funding as many projects as the budget available allows to, exploitation strategies at European and local level are needed which include careful analysis of local needs, joint efforts of local stakeholders, thorough integration planning, training and capacity building of local stakeholders, and supported integration of EU project results into local development policies. Taxpayers’ money will be well invested if a substantial part of EU programme funds and local education budgets are spent on such activities to fully exploit the potential of EU project results.



*In medias res*



## CONTEXTUALIZATIONS

### The Xploit background and mission

The idea of the Xploit project was born in 2008 and emerged from the needs of European lifelong learning networks to make European initiatives more sustainable.

This need coincided with the establishment of exploitation priorities in the Lifelong Learning Program's Transversal action, inviting stakeholders to create projects demonstrating how European learning resources could be exploited and sustained in more systematic and efficient ways.

So, a double need was the driver of the Xploit initiative:

- ~ The European Commission's fair demand for more "value for money" in connection with the many lifelong learning projects, whose results almost always vanished in the thin air after the termination of the projects
- ~ The frustration in many communities across Europe linked to the fact that it was very difficult to sustain, further develop and exploit the lifelong learning resources developed in the community, especially after the funding ended

Xploit was the convergence of these needs, and we might even say that the Xploit project represented a much stronger focus on the usefulness of lifelong learning innovation.

The challenge was not about dissemination. Dissemination and exploitation are two very different activities: dissemination is quite "easy" as it addresses the challenge of letting as many relevant target groups across Europe know about the project as possible. The many online facilities have made this activity even more "easy".

But dissemination is also extremely superficial: it almost never leads to exploitation of the developed resources, and most people today are overwhelmed with information about all sorts of things in their mailboxes and online forums.

A lesson learned is therefore: excessive information about projects and initiatives often leads to inflation and out-hollowing of the communicated content and transforms into "noise".

However interesting the dissemination of a project might be, and however much it might satisfy the formal reporting requirements of a project, it almost never leads to exploitation.

Exploitation is a very different matter, in fact a most complicated matter. Exploitation can only be carried out as a long process through which real change is taking place. Exploiting a European project about ICT and adult education means changing one's normal practice, and it often means changing the practice and the mentality of the institution, teachers and adults involved.

All this, because exploitation does not mean *knowing about* (which is dissemination), but *implementing in practice*.

*A critical voice might state: European stakeholders knows about many things, but they are not implementing these things in practice: lots of knowledge, little practice.*

Of course the Commission and the EACEA were most concerned about this: billions of euros invested in innovative projects, but very little sustainable impact. And so were the communities: the needs were clear and identifiable, the knowledge of the resources available to meet these needs also more or less available, but in most cases this did not lead to a new and sustained practice; on the contrary it often led to yet another project...

This was, then, the Xploit mission: to try to develop, along with other Transversal initiatives, methods, approaches and practices with the capacity to exploit and sustain and valorise the many European lifelong learning resources, produced by the European projects and based on European co-funding.

One might call this mission a *mission impossible*, as it is unlikely that one more European project is able to change the exploitability of a thousand others!

Nevertheless, the Xploit set out to address this challenge and to involve a number of communities across Europe in the quest for sustainable exploitation infrastructures.



### What are exploitation and learning communities about?

How did the project understand “exploitation” of European lifelong learning resources?

The project interpreted “exploitation” in a very simple and direct way: the fact that a new learning resource is used in practice by people and institutions not participating in the project.

However, it soon became clear that it was much more complicated. Exploitation of European learning resources, funded by or linked to the funding of the European Commission could be exploited in many different ways and at different levels, such as for instance:

- ~ Used by other people in the same institution
- ~ Used by professionals or institutions in the community of the participating partners
- ~ Used by institutions at regional or national levels
- ~ Used by people or institutions in other than the participating countries
- ~ Used by other sectors than the participating
- ~ Used by stakeholders to create professionals informal networks at local, national or European level
- ~ Used by stakeholders to take further steps in the subject-area addressed, for example a new project
- ~ Used to qualify professionals to address European funding
- ~ Used to create new synergies in the institution, in the community
- ~ Used to create policy changes in the subject area addressed
- ~ Used to create partnerships and new forms of collaboration
- ~ Etc., etc.

Obviously the list of aspects in exploitation could be much longer, which made the challenge all the more complicated.

This complexity called for a very systematic approach in the Xploit project: which were, then, the key factors in the exploitation scenarios?

The analysis of the exploitation scenarios revealed many common structures, of which the most important seems to be:

*Exploitation is always about a sender and a receiver.* Or, if you like: about a producer and a user. It's all about the production of innovation and offering this innovation to other people, institutions and countries.

This sounds extremely simple and uncomplicated. We produce a new learning resource - and you start to use it.

*Why is this process so complicated?*

Here we need to make a distinction between *coincidental exploitation* and *systematic exploitation*.

Coincidental exploitation means that a new single learning resource might be exploited in another institution or community for a number of reasons. The reason for this is not so interesting, what is interesting is that this exploitation is a stand-alone incident that does not represent further interests in exploitation, sustainability or European collaboration. This can also be called exploitation at non-systematic level.

It happens all the time, but it does not change the basic challenge of developing sustainable exploitation structures: *how can an institution or a community exploit useful resources in a more systematic way, not only today, but also in the future?*

This is, then, the systematic approach the exploitation: how can it be made intentional, systematic and qualified; how can it lead to an ongoing uptake of innovation and new opportunities?

This was the question the Xploit project had to face.

Turning back to the sender-receiver approach, it was clear that the big challenges were linked to the receivers, not to the senders. Of course the "sending" or delivery of a resource involves many complicated structures, such as usability, transparency, attractiveness, relevance, and many other quite challenging parameters, but these challenges can be dealt with and are dealt with at European level. In fact, an entire army of quality assurance elements are put in place in European projects to ensure the quality and usability of the outcomes.

No, the problems were clearly linked to the receivers: what does it take to "receive" lifelong learning innovation? - In your team, in your institution, in your community, in your sector, in your country? What does it take?

More than three years of hard work produced this general lesson learned: *it takes a lot!!*

Exploitation does not happen in isolation.

Exploitation is not about replacing a textbook with a video. The European lifelong learning innovations are, of course, more complicated and wide-ranging; if not, they would not have been granted in the first place.

This means that the innovations often involve and affect a structure, a community of stakeholders in the community, in the city, in the sector.

What's more, they often involve the local or regional authorities as well.

In case we are talking about a series or a mosaic of innovations, running in parallel or in synergy, it become crystal clear that many stakeholders and practices are affected at the same time.

Some innovations call for new employees, political decisions, organizational changes, dramatically changed practices or new forms of collaborations between teachers, institutions or sector, and such actions are not easy to carry out, especially not when more actions must be taken simultaneously to accomplish or support the change.

Whereas the sender can be clearly defined by a small partnership and a project, the receiving structures are extremely complicated and call for the involvement of many individuals, institutions and stakeholders, including public authorities.

All this became clear in the Xploit project from the initial analysis and discussions, and it also became very clear why the Transversal action called for new *infrastructures of collaboration* in support of sustainable exploitation activities.

This is precisely where the term *learning community* appeared on the Xploit scene: *systematic, sustainable and qualified exploitation of European lifelong learning resources can only take place if the receiving structures are prepared to identify, capture and implement such resources.*

The name of this preparedness is a *learning community*.

In this context a learning community is a community systematically creating the needed infrastructures of communication and collaboration between community

players to identify, capture and implement relevant European lifelong learning innovations.

Such infrastructures are most complicated and are non-existent in most European communities. Even in communities where such infrastructures are in place, the dynamics of such processes can be very demanding to the different players. Political, economic and demographical changes can be major threats to such young and fragile infrastructures.

These infrastructures involve policy-makers, authorities, labour market organisations, social service providers, active citizens, educations, cultural institutions, etc., etc.

Some bilateral collaboration is in place in some communities, but more wide-ranging and systematic collaboration structures are not.

At the same time Europe as well as global forums started to put a lot of focus on learning cities, sustainable cities, green cities, and eco-cities and so on. This increased interest coincided with the Xploit analysis and experience, which is far from accidental. In fact, the increasing interest in learning cities and the Xploit focus on learning communities are no doubt rooted in the same needs and insights.

In times of economic set-backs, such interests become even more visible: with fewer resources we cannot afford not to exploit available innovation, especially in the field of lifelong learning.



#### **The aim of this paper**

The aim of this paper, the flagship outcome of the Xploit project, is to communicate as clearly as possible, what we learned about exploitation and learning communities in the three project years - interacting closely with the project's practicing communities and with European and global learning cities forums.

The aim is to qualify the field of exploitation of European innovation resources and to transform lessons learned into useful guidance for communities wishing to exploit and link to European lifelong learning innovation.

The aim is also to contribute considerably to the debates of and development of learning communities across Europe.

Learning communities and cities can, at a super-structural level, be seen as the response to globalization: whereas hundreds of years were dominated by the focus on nations, the focus is now shifting towards and interaction and balance between the community/city and the global scene.

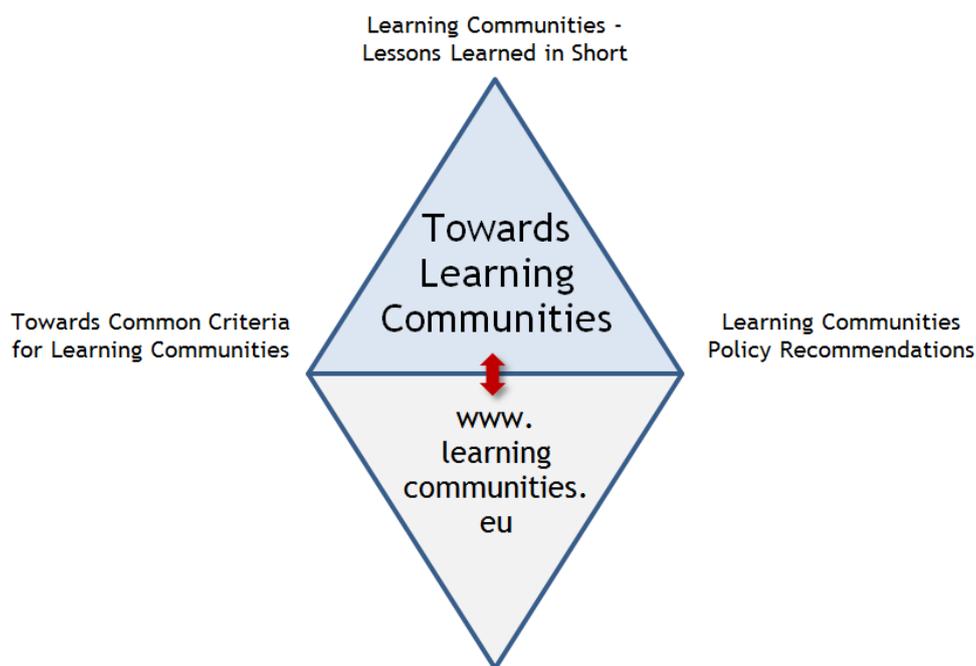
*Thus the world becomes more local and global at the same time!*

Most communities are, however, not at all ready for such changes.

The aim of this paper is also to be an organizer of the Xploit outcomes:

*Towards Learning Communities* is capturing and communicating the major findings of the project, and is at the same time the knowledge background to *Learning Communities - Lessons Learned in Short* and *Learning Communities Policy Recommendations, Towards Common Criteria for Learning Communities*, and is backed up by the re-organized project website [www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu), offering a wide range of documentation to which this paper will refer.

This can be illustrated as follows:



The Xploit debates and practices revealed a number of extremely important parameters running through all attempts to address the challenges of systematic exploitation and learning communities, and these parameters will also permeate this paper and its different sections:

- ~ What are the conditions for moving from exploitation to learning communities?
- ~ What are the roles of the public authorities in learning communities?
- ~ What are the roles of cross-sector partnerships in learning communities?
- ~ What competences do community players need?
- ~ What are the conditions for sustainable collaboration?
- ~ What does infrastructures that work mean?

Xploit has put a lot of concern in the design of this paper: what should be the organizing principle? How should the paper be structured? What should be the rationale of the paper?

To understand how this paper is structured, we wish to explain how it is not structured:

- ~ It is not an academic paper, offering long theoretical analysis of exploitation and learning communities
- ~ It is not a scientific paper, offering quantitative statistics on exploitation and learning communities
- ~ It is not merely a paper summarizing practical experience, but a paper synthesizing and organizing lessons learned from the Xploit community practice and including global debates on learning cities
- ~ It is not a learning communities handbook, as clear instructions on how to develop learning communities are neither possible nor useful

What is it, then?

It is a paper organized around a number of different learning community approaches, drawn from practical experience and linked to general debates. In short, we have learned that learning communities are always developed through specific drivers: certain challenges and opportunities specific to a community and towards which many community players are focused.

This driver or these drivers can be regarded the starting point, the incubator and the catalyst of a community working towards what can be called learning community infrastructures of communication and collaboration.

This approach partly emerged from the many community debates in the project, partly from the systematic evaluation efforts of the project's quality assurance expert, Mr Holger Bienzle.

This means that the paper presents and discussed different ways of developing learning communities, following a general introduction to the key challenges of learning communities, and followed by small guidance sections for communities interested in taking steps towards learning communities.

The paper does not claim that the learning communities' approaches offer a complete list of possible approaches, far from that.

However, the presented approaches are both horizontally relevant, as they reflect the history of Xploit and other communities, and vertically relevant, as they represent typical drivers towards learning communities.

The guiding parts, following these community approaches, extract common guidelines for any learning community, no matter the nature of the driver or drivers involved.

The project is very much aware that learning communities and the debates on learning communities are dynamic organisms subject to constant change and that universal guidance on learning communities should be regarded a contradiction in terms *par excellence*.

Learning communities are always on the way, in the process, subject to changes and imperfect structures - if not, the learning communities would have stopped learning.

What we do insist on, however, is that the new interaction between local and global pushing the national into the background, will be a very important matter for many years to come, and that these challenges will be extremely demanding for most communities.

Why is Xploit talking about *learning communities* and not *learning cities*?

There are no scientific or political reasons, but we would like to justify the choice through the project's quality assurance studies: referring to the Xploit product *Towards Common Criteria for Learning Communities*, we need to take into consideration that many quality criteria for learning communities point towards such qualities as

- ~ Closeness to decisions and planning
- ~ Direct involvement
- ~ Bottom-up initiatives
- ~ Ability to change rapidly
- ~ Directly addressing needs and opportunities
- ~ Etc.

These criteria cannot always be met in big structures such as big cities.

This does not mean that big cities cannot be learning cities, but it does mean that major cities or geographical areas will depend on the existence of high quality learning communities.

Learning cities should therefore be seen as quite different structures than learning communities: the nature of learning cities will be to effectively manage sub-structures of learning communities and to include such learning communities in the political and cultural life of bigger cities.

The quality of the interaction between different forms of learning communities and bigger cities at large is no doubt one of the most important challenges to learning cities.

Learning cities should, then, be discussed within a totally different discourse, a political discourse, than learning communities.

*The Xploit project, as well as its outcomes, is exclusively concerned with learning communities.*

Furthermore learning communities do not have to be defined geographically. A learning community can take on many different forms and shapes, such as:

- ~ A small or medium sized city
- ~ A part of a bigger city, for example a suburb or a migrant community
- ~ A group of smaller cities
- ~ A specific sector
- ~ A group of community stakeholders
- ~ Different drivers or topics in a community addressed by new partnerships
- ~ A well-defined local or regional partnership
- ~ A network collaborating around a strong community centre

In all cases, the interesting thing is not the celebration of a learning community, but the joining of forces in a community on the quest to expand and qualify the learning community structures.

Learning communities are living organisms interacting with other living organisms.

This paper and the different sections in this paper is backed up by and constantly link to the [www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu) - the re-organized website offering a well-structured selection of the most guidable project outcomes, including a variety of concrete good practices from the Xploit communities: Udine IT, Nagykovácsi HU, Iasi RO, Salt Catalonia ES and Swansea Wales UK.

[www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu)



## INTRODUCTION TO EXPLOITATION AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES

### The European exploitation interests

For many years the European Commission has supported innovative lifelong learning projects financially. Different program periods and actions have been launched within the last 15 or more years.

Thousands and thousands of lifelong learning projects and partnerships have been and are still being created - and probably will continue to be created within the upcoming *Erasmus for All* from 2014-20.

More and more financial resources have been injected into various formal and non-formal educational settings across Europe, and resources will increasingly continue to be deployed, as educational innovation is one of Europe's strongest assets for future global competition and growth.

The numerous projects and other activities have been very successful in creating a sense of European citizenship in the member states. This is a reality and can neither be disputed, nor underestimated.

However, the impact of the many initiatives has mostly been limited to the participating organisations and people, and not always in a sustainable way.

It is fair to say that a very large proportion of these initiatives have vanished into thin air after the funding ended and the projects were terminated.

This suggests that even the participating organisations have not always been able to sustain the innovations that they have developed.

Dissemination and exploitation, *telling about* and *using in practice* have always been important elements of European projects.

Exploitation is, of course, the most important of these activities, as it addresses the challenge of making the created resources useful to other people, organisations and countries, than the ones participating in the project.

The Commission's funding should be regarded investments: a group of partners join forces, receives European co-funding, and take on the role of pioneers developing innovation. Part of the project is about making the produced innovation useful to and used by people outside the partnership.

So, the Commission obviously would like some return on investment: the partners are not funded to improve the performance of their own organisations, but are funded to produce innovation useful to other organisations.

This is the agenda for European Commission funding, but it has never happened.

Very few European funded innovations in education have been exploited by other organisations than the participating partners.

In the Lifelong Learning Program 2007-13 this challenge was addressed directly for the first time - through the Transversal Action KA4 Exploitation.

Xploit was funded by this action in 2009.

The KA4 Exploitation invited stakeholders to develop models and practices for infrastructures able to receive and exploit European lifelong learning resources.

As this point learning communities was not a focus in Europe, and that is probably why the term never appeared in the programs or in the calls - or because learning communities were linked to the Active Citizens' programs and actions.

Bottom line was, however, that the Transversal KA4 demonstrated a strong interest in getting much more out of the investments in educational innovation: new structures should be developed and tested to increase the exploitation of European innovation projects.

It goes without saying that the financial crisis put even more pressure on exploitation: with fewer resources, cutting public spending, innovative resources for learning should be exploited to the max!

And, of course, this happened - or did it?

No. it did not.

The financial crisis did not increase the interest in exploiting European learning resources, perhaps even the reverse.

Surprising as this may be, it helps us to identify one of the core problems in exploitation and in the KA4 Action.



### **From exploitation to learning communities**

The renewed interest in exploitation at first aimed to create such infrastructures in the communities that would enable the community to find and exploit such learning resources. How could infrastructures be created that would allow the communities to go through the exploitation process with a successful outcome: freely available innovation now put into practice in our community...?

The idea was rather instrumental: how are such instruments created in the communities?

This instrumental approach quickly proved useless. The exploitation of European learning resources was so complex and demanding that this approach needed to be

re-formulated, taking into consideration especially the following challenges and obstacles:

- ~ Exploitation is a complex process and many conditions must be in place to accomplish the relevant tasks
- ~ Exploitation involves many and different stakeholders in a community
- ~ Exploitation very often involves local authorities, who are not prepared to carry out such European innovation
- ~ Qualified needs and opportunities' analysis must be carried out to identify relevant resources to exploit
- ~ A minimum infrastructure for communication and collaboration must be in place in the community
- ~ Community resources, including public staff, must be qualified to conduct such processes
- ~ A mentality of collaboration for mutual benefit must be present in the community and balanced against traditional competitiveness
- ~ Leaders and managers must be able to perform and act at a certain strategic level
- ~ Both formal and informal mentalities of sharing and contributing must be visible in the community
- ~ Cross-sector collaboration should be possible
- ~ Innovation in education should be linked to wider benefits of learning
- ~ The community should be very supportive towards bottom-up initiatives and active citizens
- ~ Political changes and elections should not overrule meeting the strategic needs of the community
- ~ The community should take a strong interest in European cooperation
- ~ Etc., etc.

This long and serious list of challenges and obstacles, which only presents some of the possible examples, is what exploitation of European lifelong learning resources is up against!

Obviously, these challenges and the efforts to meet them far exceed the limited potential of an instrumental approach to exploitation.

In the future the scenarios will be even more dramatic, as learning activities are increasingly seen as closely linked to the community.

Conclusion: serious and sustainable exploitation must be linked to the community at large and to community interests and capacity.

All this took the Xploit project and the partner communities on a journey from exploitation to learning communities.

Without a strong learning communities agenda it would not be possible to change the low levels of lifelong learning exploitation across Europe.

In other words: exploitation should be embedded in a strong and strategic learning communities approach, and exploitation and European cooperation should be an important and natural part of such learning communities.



**A common framework for understand learning communities**

In parallel, an increasing focus on *cities* emerged, in Europe and at global level. Not nations but cities created different forms of city profiles and joined networks of

similar cities: learning cities, eco-cities, healthy cities, green cities, smart cities, etc.

It is not the ambition of Xploit to interact with or compete with these global trends, but to apply a more pragmatic approach: how can communities develop strong infrastructures of communication and collaboration and meet the needs of the citizens and the challenges of globalization? How can communities develop sustainable steps towards becoming a learning community?

A few surprises:

- ~ A healthy city is not automatically a learning community
- ~ An ecological city is not automatically a learning community
- ~ A learning community is not necessarily a healthy city
- ~ A learning community is not necessarily an ecological or a smart city
- ~ A learning community is not about learning!

It is a threat to the true values of a learning community to draw upon ambitious City X rhetoric. Therefore clear quality criteria must be in place, and the Xploit offers a contribution to such a quality framework.

A learning community is not about learning, we said. Why is that?

More precisely we can say: a lot of education does not make a learning community, as this education simply might be very traditional and in no way contribute to new infrastructures of collaboration.

A learning community is not about education, learning or training. It is not about individuals learning, but about organisations' and institutions' community learning.

A learning community is a community that learns; learns to collaborate, learns to innovate, learns to include, learns to trust in people, learns to adopt new ways, learns to change, learns to open up, learns to interact with different people and cultures - and learns to take up, capture, welcome and EXPLOIT innovative resources available etc.

The community is involved in a joint learning process, not individuals. A learning community is very much about... mentality.

A community or a city might be a member of a smart city network, and still not be a learning community.

Learning communities can be described through very different discourses, just as all other things. In a political discourse, for example, you might say that a learning community is replacing the traditional representative democracies, or that the public authorities should enter community partnerships and act as a partner among other partners, including active citizens.

A clear-cut definition of a learning community is not possible and not attractive.

Learning communities are and should be very different. The Xploit contributions to the understanding of learning communities are being disseminated along with the project's products and resources. Together these resources present a coherent way of looking at learning communities.

Having said this, we strongly believe that it is possible and useful and even necessary to create a common understanding of the key values of learning communities.

*This is why it is very important to develop and discuss common criteria for learning communities.*



### How to work with the different approaches?

After this initial contextualization of the Xploit project and our understanding of exploitation and learning communities (PART ONE), the paper offers a special approach to what we have learned during the more than three project years:

~ PART TWO - We strongly believe that, in real life learning communities, initiatives will, and should indeed set out from, a certain *pre-existing* structure, interest, aspiration, resource or collaboration in the community. We therefore present, firstly, a number of such *drivers* (or engines) towards a learning community; the examples are linked to our practical experience in the Xploit and other communities across Europe, but it is important to acknowledge that they are only examples, and that other communities might apply other drivers or driving forces.

WE NEED A MISSION

~ PART THREE - Secondly, we present typical what we call learning communities accompanying measures; these accompanying measures are structural measures often created in the community in support of the new communication and collaboration infrastructures initiated by the "driver" or "drivers"

WE NEED TO ORGANIZE THE MISSION IN SUSTAINED STRUCTURES

In PART FOUR we offer some guidance and critical challenges:

WHAT CAN YOU DO IN YOUR COMMUNITY - AND WHAT SHOULD YOU BE AWARE OF?

[www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu)



## LEARNING COMMUNITY DRIVERS

### INTRO

*Special needs, resources, and strong needs for change or refocusing can be drivers in the development of a learning community.*

Whereas a *learning city* or a *smart city* might be established top-down by political declaration and thus be a part of a political agenda, a learning community is likely to be established step by step and based on a special focus, a special need, a special interest or a special occasion (such as a new partnership in the community or the participation in European projects) addressed by one or more organisations or groups of citizens in the community.

Thus learning cities and learning communities are not alternatives, as they operate at different levels and in different contexts, but more like complementary movements.

Learning communities are by definition initiated bottom-up and include community players at practice level, working closely with groups of citizens in different circumstances.

This means that learning communities are developed through long processes of communication and collaboration in the communities, often starting with a small team of community players and then widening the circles to embrace larger parts of the community.

Learning communities are very much linked to the history and experience of a community and to the special characteristics of that community.

The nature of learning communities is at the same time their strength and weakness: strong because based on experience and practice, weak because of the considerable time invested in the development and the many stakeholders involved.

So, most learning communities will be initiated from a special focus, a special need or a special interest. This is what we call a "driver" of the learning community, but terms like engine, hub, incubator or catalyst are useful to create a sense of what is meant.

Such drivers can be very different - from a European project being implemented in a community to addressing a special social need among elderly. A driver can be simple or complex (linking a number of drivers together).

Obviously, the number of potential drivers is endless. However, some drivers are more typical than others, and the most important thing is not to focus on the driver itself, but how the driver "drives" the community forward, step by step approaching what can be called an emerging learning community.

In this section we present and briefly describe some typical drivers and how they might drive forward an emerging learning community. To some of the drivers we attach a case from the Xploit communities. These texts are written by the communities themselves and refer to a rich and interesting community material on [www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu).

*In support of your learning community interest, you might wish to simulate such a driver scenario yourself - to be able to design your actions and to anticipate threats and opportunities.*

However different the drivers and the communities might be, there are a number of challenges that all emerging and operating learning communities should be especially aware of. The most important are:

- ⇒ The role of public authorities in learning communities
- ⇒ The role of cross-sector partnerships in learning communities
- ⇒ The quality and authenticity of involvement and inclusion in learning communities
- ⇒ To what extent real impact and change is produced
- ⇒ The competences of community players
- ⇒ Sustainability of the partnerships
- ⇒ The ongoing creation of new infrastructures that work
- ⇒ Necessary funding



## COMMUNITY PLATFORMS

*A learning community can be driven by working to include all important organizations and sectors in a community platform.*

Community players can take an initiative to establish a common platform or forum for interested organisations and groups of citizens, often focusing on a limited number of needs or interests - or to promote an innovative profile for the community.

Most likely several work processes would precede such initiatives, including debates among a small number of community players.

The idea of this joint forum is to mobilize the organisations in the community and offer an alternative infrastructure to the more traditional communication and collaboration channels, but also to contribute to a new mentality of cross-sector collaboration driven by the interests of the organisations.

It is important that such platforms and initiatives are focused on and sustained by a limited number of initiatives and activities, and as such they are not replacing or doubling the political agenda of the community.



- This community approach might be facing some typical threats, such as
- ~ Difficulties in creating a common understanding between sectors
  - ~ Difficulties in agreeing on a common focus
  - ~ Weakening motivation if the network is not backed-up by concrete actions and results
  - ~ Problems with including different groups of citizens, as the platform has been established prior to their involvement, and as such a platform might be dominated by organisations and their agendas



- On the other hand, this approach can deliver results rather quickly because
- ~ The platform immediately offers new infrastructures of communication and collaboration, thus reaching out to many different parts of the community
  - ~ Cross-sector collaboration is included at an early stage
  - ~ Major players are likely to participate from the beginning
  - ~ The local authorities are likely to take an interest and to offer support, if the platform is attractive to major stakeholders in the community

## SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

New initiatives must be taken to sustain the interest of the organisation.

The platform should link to and include groups of citizens as much as possible.

## CASE - NAGYKOVÁCSI HUNGARY

Learn [MORE](#) about the Nagykovácsi case:  
[www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu)



### FROM COMPETING TO SHARING - CHANGING OF MENTALITIES

*A learning community can be driven by encouraging a mentality of collaboration and sharing and openness as to new community initiatives.*

A mentality shift can be the driver or catalyst of an emerging learning community. In some sectors, countries and environments a community mentality is more or less absent.

There can be many reasons for this:

- ~ Historical reasons (sharing was never promoted)
- ~ Cultural reasons (in this culture sharing is not on the agenda)
- ~ Business models reasons (primitive competition mentality, "the cake")
- ~ Psychological reasons (we don't trust each other)
- ~ Political reasons (if you share, you will lose power)

Sometimes local players find it hopeless to build up new collaborations in such contexts. Instead they might decide to address the negative mentality directly and use this strategy as a driver for an emerging learning community.

The idea is that the very process of changing mentalities creates the new collaborative infrastructures. Obviously, the mentality change process can be very slow and demanding, and often only few stakeholders are involved at the beginning. Often the first steps will be taken in sectors or sub-communities in which mentality shifts are more likely.

One of the important tasks is to demonstrate in practice that the change matters that new initiatives can grow from the changed mentality, or that new orientations offer benefits both at organizational and personal levels.



Changed mentality can be a very demanding way to achieve learning communities and many set-backs can be expected:

- ~ It is difficult to convince many stakeholders when no concrete benefit is in sight
- ~ Old mentalities die slowly
- ~ Semi-interested stakeholders might lose interest on the way
- ~ It is not easy to sustain the interests of stakeholders at this "discussion level"
- ~ Sometimes initial successes in sub-communities are road blocked from wider collaboration in the community



A number of measures can be taken in support of sustained mentality changes:

- ~ The mentality shifts should be linked to the professional work of interested stakeholders
- ~ Mentality shift processes should, when possible, be linked to for example concrete European projects demonstrating the value and benefits of open and sharing mentalities
- ~ Pioneers from other sectors should be linked to the mentality change processes at an early stage

- ~ Mentality changes should be promoted as providing improved work and life perspectives for involved citizens and professionals

#### SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Accept that mentality changes take time, and act accordingly, for instance by working in parallel initiatives.

Make sure that people involved benefits personally from the mentality shift.

### CASE - IASI ROMANIA *Steps towards a learning community*



*Irina (standing) at the partner meeting in Iasi*

The IASI EDU community structures already existed when the Xploit project started, including the part responsible for the exploitation of European resources. What the Xploit project did was to back up their functionality, making sure they worked properly serving the community's best interests, keeping them active and updated and supporting their growth into a network of partners, motivated by the same wish to contribute to the development of the community.

The key word for the period in which the Xploit project was running is growth. As a pretext, the project has brought to the same "table" professionals and institutions working disparately in EU cooperation (or not being involved in it at all), pupils and parents, teachers and representatives of NGOs.

It was among the first initiatives to promote the idea of sharing resources, making them available and at hand at local level.

It was and it is not easy to have people and institutions working together when they "compete" with each other in the community, but the Xploit project was a good opportunity to start working together, making connections work and have people talking about what and how they could do to improve cooperation at both local and EU level, how to open up new horizons for those not involved.

It is difficult to pronounce on the impact of the project since it created a web-like construction. The results are to be more visible in time. However, at local level the partnership tried to measure the extent to which the information circulates and to which the results are consistent with the expectations. The results of the questionnaires applied for this purpose showed us that the members of the community who answered it considered the network functional, useful and they were willing to contribute to it. But, in the same time, the questionnaires revealed that there are still many steps to be taken towards the point where we could speak about our city as a "learning city".

We realised along the way that we needed to share the results of our work because it helps us go further, seek for more and try to find new ways of increasing quality and quantity of EU projects and cooperation.

We could, at this moment, talk about premises for the next steps into involving the rest of the community in the process of working together, openly, at the community level.



*Jan Gejel at an Xploit community meeting in Iasi*

We are positive that the future community initiatives and perspectives are alive and on-going. Most of the project results will continue working after the project is over because of two reasons: they exist and they are needed. It can be comparable with a one-way road. The community will continue its way to development with a deep understanding that working in isolation within a Europe that is working together will never be a solution. So far, our experiment with the European 'taste' in our EDU community has been a great success for those who have tried it and quite accessible for those who haven't. Supporting and linking local community initiatives, and then exploiting them so that most of its members are aware of the benefits, also seems to be a good source of inspiration and motivation.



*Irina in action at an Xploit community meeting in Iasi (first one from top right)*

The exploitation, being the key word of the entire project, was, of course our focus point. The tools we used in Iasi EDU community were:

The Xploit project local web- site, with two different sections: Database of results from EU projects, available in our community, to be disseminated at the community level and a Resource Centre with information about our city, places and institutions of interest for visitors but also for our members;

Two exploitation events were organized by the County School Inspectorate of Iasi (ISJ), where representatives from the majority of schools took part in:

- The yahoo group entitled "proiecteisi", a group to which all the educational institutions at pre-university level in the county of Iasi are linked, and through which the most important information about EU projects circulates within the community;
- Presentations of the project made on several occasions at both local and EU level, in partner meetings and when presenting the institutional portfolio of European activities and partnerships.

We consider the infrastructure strong enough to support itself since most of it existed when the project started. However, the volume as well as the quality of the work to be done is very much dependent on the policy guidance made by the local authorities.

Since important things take time and changing mentality and way of work cannot be done in 2 or 3 years at a community level, it will take us some more years of experimenting and developing local projects. This will shape the infrastructure the Xploit project defined so well so far.



Xploit listening in lasi... - Enara, Orna, Mary-Ann (right to left)

Learn [MORE](#) about the lasi case:  
[www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu)



## VOLUNTEERING

*A learning community can be driven by a strong focus on exploiting and valorizing community resources for volunteering, such as young people, unemployed and elderly - governed by suitable ethical and social principles.*

Many emerging learning communities use volunteering as a driver of change. Such initiatives are often taken by groups of active citizens, such as retired persons, unemployed, migrants or citizens with strong social values.

As a genuine bottom-up strategy the volunteering approach can be very strong and include more and more citizens, even reaching out to so-called hard-to-reach citizens.

All involved persons and organisations need to feel that the activities and ideas are based on their needs and interests.

Such volunteering, especially when it includes many different groups of citizens can be one of the most solid and sustainable ways to a learning community; and often it is possible to obtain the necessary funding from public or private organisation, as volunteering is likely to be regarded very sympathetically.

The challenge for such volunteering drivers is to take the next steps, to approach professional organisations and to include public authorities and private stakeholders in the partnership.



Though offering solid learning community perspectives, possible threats to success may include the following:

- ~ If isolated from professional organisations, such volunteering initiatives might not be able to take further steps towards the learning community
- ~ Volunteering can develop into a "Call" and a "Cause" and some volunteers so not wish to link this kind of work to professional organisations, especially not private ones
- ~ The outlook from small volunteer initiatives can be very limited



Simple actions can help overcome these threats:

- ~ It is wise to link volunteer initiatives in the community to interested and reliable professional organisations (an education, a cultural institution, an NGO) from the early stages - for future communication, collaboration and a wider outlook
- ~ Key volunteers should participate in community activities to open the doors to further steps

- ~ Along the way, it is possible to balance volunteering against professionalism and thus benefitting both the volunteers and the progression of the initiatives
- ~ Teams of volunteers should integrate training and inspiration in their activities

#### SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

As a community driver, volunteering should not be isolated from professionalism.

Balancing mechanisms between sustained volunteering and professionalism should be created throughout the development process, and volunteering should be promoted as highly valuable to the learning community.

Volunteering should not replace professionalism, but should add to the stock of social capital.



#### JOINING FORCES: EU PROJECTS AS ENGINES OF CHANGE

*A learning community can be driven by a systematic collaboration between relevant partners in the community to identify and exploit European lifelong learning resources.*

This approach can be extremely powerful and it is often used as a co-driver in many communities. Participation in one or more European projects by an institution in the community often requires contact with a diverse range of community partners, for instance parents, social organisations, local government, etc.

Project participation may even include infrastructure such as focus groups or local networks as an integrated part of project implementation, and in this way the project automatically gives rise to new collaboration opportunities.

Such European projects can be exploited further and create more networking, and can therefore be strong drivers towards the establishment of independent and sustainable networks.

If possible, European participation should be expanded to include new initiatives in other fields of work, or lead to mobility for staff, citizens or learners.

Furthermore, increasing interest in European initiatives could lead to more focused identification of useful European resources that might be exploited in the community.

Of course, successful EU application initiatives may replace direct participation in projects.

Many emerging learning communities will be able to identify such drivers at the beginning of the process.



Some threats should be taken seriously, though:

- ~ It can be problematic that the initiative is promoted from outside the community, by European consortia or other external bodies
- ~ Sometimes community processes stop when the EU funding ends
- ~ The new infrastructures should develop into structures independent of European funding: European initiatives are drivers, not permanent financial sources



But the EU project driver offers much potential:

- ~ It offers inherently interesting collaborations with other European communities
- ~ It includes institutions and people at practice level
- ~ It justifies new contacts and invitations to different organisations in the community
- ~ The local networking activities can be co-financed by the Commission for two or three years

~ A successful participation in a European initiative often leads to more participation

#### SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The European participation should be shared widely and openly in the community. It is important from the beginning of the learning community process to acknowledge that the EU funding can support community initiatives, but that they are not designed to finance community operations on a wider scale.

### CASE - SALT-CATALONIA SPAIN *Joining Forces*



When the project was presented to the Municipality of Salt in 2010 the community had a very different political color, than it has now. Three years ago the community faced many challenges and with the Global crisis those challenges have grown. This difficult situation is causing large and rapid changes at community level. These changes affect ways of working with and for the community.

Salt has always been a community linked to migration. The city was created in the 1960s for migrants from the south of Spain and over the last 15 years, the community has faced the impact of three waves of migration, amounting to around 30,000 individuals from over 79 nationalities.

This unique situation makes management of the community difficult and has led to the creation of many individual education and networking activities by stakeholders trying to solve the most pressing social and educational challenges.

Against this background, the Salt community could be characterised as an open minded society with citizens accustomed to change, integration, and coexistence but without major long term strategies to provide sustainable solutions to challenges.

In the beginning, the Xploit project was used as a starting point to describe the community and its resources. Salt was a community with a multitude of local initiatives trying to provide quick solutions for increasing problems and needs. A community without a sustainability mentality. We could regard Salt as a pool of initiatives, networks, resources, entities, Institutions and authorities...working with the best intentions, but without strategic and sustainable plans, and consequently losing many opportunities, resources and funding possibilities.

This was a community where a lack of resources, including human and economic resources, made it difficult to find solutions, and where human factors in particular made it very complicated to cope, because we are talking about fatigue and the feeling of impotence in the face of enormous challenges. In other words, this was a society heavily dependent on public authorities with a strong conviction that public policy statements are the best way to provide funding and solutions.



Taking into account the background of Salt, one could therefore say that after all these years the community should have taken advantage and be ahead, in front of other communities where migration changes arrived later and more slowly, but that is not the case for Salt.

For these reasons, when the Xploit project arrived in Salt, the connections, mentality and plans to work at European level and for a learning community, didn't exist. Perhaps there were some isolated European projects and the intention to be a learning community, but they were not linked to new and sustainable ways to build the community.

European and other kinds of private resources were treated as potential solutions, but still with a long way to go: Joining forces yes, but carefully and slowly.

In Salt, taking into account all that has been said above, the process has also been a long one, because during the period of the Xploit project, the tools and human resources have altered several times due to political changes.

*Non-political stability makes a difference when describing a community work process, especially if the community is not capable of working independently.*

Given the characteristics of Salt, especially in the beginning, it was decided that the most efficient way of working within the Xploit process was to be realistic, to be aware of the resources available and also knowing that creating this awareness could mean a step back for the rhythm of the project.



Therefore, the process of "field work" was begun, a work of research and exploration based on:

- The elaboration of the community profile, describing the resources and the most urgent priorities of the community.
- The elaboration of the "Training map", to describe all educational resources, formal, non-formal and informal, in the community.
- The elaboration of the "market map" to link the trainings and potential job offers.
- The elaboration of the total budget required to roll out all described in the maps.

The goal was also to use the results obtained at a political level, to make the politicians aware of the resources and the budget spent for the community every year without sustainable results, to make them aware of the urgent need to consider their various roles and to obtain their support and consensus for the elaboration of a sustainable community work plan.

*(All documents were presented to politicians, but we never got an answer).*



Reached that point and without the strong support of the public authorities, it was necessary for the Xploit team to make some decisions about the next steps about the team and about the need to be focused on priorities for the community.

Step by step and with support and guidance the most significant change Xploit have brought is the creation of the "motor team", a community work team. The project has been crucial in joining forces from different Institutions, private and public, representing the community to create the Joining forces for Youth network.

In view of the seriousness of the situation, to face the constant increase of drop out youth, the **Joining forces for Youth** agreed that one of the main priorities to work in the community was the young people who have not been graduated, to create new opportunities for them. Being well aware of the need to offer strong and attractive opportunities to empower them, and to develop and re-motivate their interest in education and labour market.

To emphasize that Salt have been experiencing a lack of opportunities, not of wills. If learning projects are not successful due to the many closed doors, there are no places, no jobs, and no real options...the consequence is collective frustration, non-confidence, and finally dropping out.



*The description of the final impact in the community of Salt could be summarized through two different readings:*

**IN the process:**

- Acquiring of important information revealing the community gaps.
- The understanding of new ways to proceed.
- The creation of a strong network: **Joining forces for Youth** and its attempts to consolidate in a formal network: the last year of Xploit the network is working on the idea to change in a formal network.
- The understanding to provide sustainable solutions to the needs of the community is necessary to incorporate also the private sector: the real Joining forces.
- The increasing interest of the **Joining forces for Youth** network to bring to the community the exchange of experiences between communities across Europe to raise awareness, stimulate the motivation and learning from other models.

- The understanding to work at European level is necessary some kind of learning.
- From 2011 the Municipality is partner in a new European project: LABlearning.
- The increasing learning from some members of the **Joining Forces for Youth** network, enabling them to be the next future community guides.

**BUT...:**

- The need for politicians to be involved in decision-making produces a lot of talking, no further action and a lot of frustration amongst participants.
- The community processes stop when the funding ends.
- The lack of competences of the community players to be at European level.
- The lack of human resources.
- To sustain the interest and motivation in the network is a hard work.
- The need of funding to maintain the network: the volunteering doesn't work, is not sustainable.

*After the Xploit experience in Salt, we are convinced that each community has its own process and about the difficulty of working on general theories; each case should be based on its own reality.*



- > The work done with the Xploit project has given the **Joining Forces for Youth** network a closer approach to the European dimension and different ways of working to address local needs for solutions to diverse problems.
- > The involvement and strong collaboration of the network ensures its sustainability and its willingness to continue working.
- > Cooperation between institutions in **Joining Forces for Youth** supports our conviction that Joining Forces is the only way to create sustainable proposals.
- > Increasing consciousness of the importance of involving private enterprises and sponsors in community networks as resources for sustainable long-term solutions.
- > The influence of Xploit and LABlearning project experiences have been taken into account and used by the Municipality in the writing of the new Local Youth Plan 2012-2015, providing a European Perspective: this influence denotes the beginning of new ways of thinking and working.
- > In the last European Call -2013- the Municipality was a partner in 3 new applications.
- > A basis for new ways of working at community level has been established.

Institutions-members of the Joining Forces for Youth:  
 Municipality of Salt  
 ERAM College  
 Casal dels Infants  
 Fundació Ser.gi

Institute Vallvera

During the last year and half the Xploit project has been invited in several dissemination events to explain the European experience and implementing work in the community of Salt.

The aims of the Xploit project and its work in the community have been communicated to several private and public institutions with the aim of involving them in the Joining Forces network and its aims.

- The development of new community initiatives not linked to existing projects but inspired by the European way of working
- The strong involvement of diverse Institutions in the **Joining Forces for Youth** network and the work done with them
- The desire of the network to continuing working for the community and to involve in it more new institutions
- Working with the **Joining forces for Youth** to further disseminate the **NEW WAYS** of working in the community and for the community



## CREATING NEW PUBLIC SPACES FOR LEARNING

*A learning community can be driven by strong initiatives to create new physical and digital spaces for learning in the community, spaces that often facilitates intergenerational meetings.*

Although learning communities are not directly about citizens' learning, learning opportunities can be a strong driver for emerging learning communities.

Such a driver might be based on innovative ideas of learning, such as:

- ~ Offering learning opportunities outside the formal education system
- ~ Offering learning outside the traditional classroom
- ~ Offering learning for all citizens
- ~ Offering more non-formal and informal learning to citizen's
- ~ Developing creative settings and frameworks for learning

A special version of such learning innovation in the community is the idea of allowing learning to happen openly, visibly and in public spaces.

Such initiatives require strong collaboration between many stakeholders in the community, for instance educations, public authorities, health centres and subject-professionals, and therefore these initiatives produce a wide range of networking opportunities that could be cultivated into sustained learning community infrastructures.

At the same time the open spaces learning initiatives by definition reach out to all kinds of citizens (from children to elderly), and in certain cases it is indeed possible to include interested citizens in more sustained community activities.



The challenges and possible threats to such open spaces initiatives are:

- ~ They are deeply dependent on public authorities and their sustained dedication, as they "own" the public spaces

- ~ Activities with high visibility do not automatically lead to creation of new collaboration infrastructures, as the activities might be regarded as ad hoc initiatives by some stakeholders
- ~ Meeting all kinds of citizens does not automatically lead to enrollment of these citizens in sustained community activities



However, the open spaces approach offers much potential, if:

- ~ Shared community ownership to public spaces is possible and can be further developed
- ~ The ad hoc collaboration can be given sustainable perspectives and lead to permanent infrastructures of collaboration and communication
- ~ The activities succeeds in organizing interested groups of citizens and the involved organisations are able to facilitate their further community involvement

#### SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It is urgent for the public authorities to consider their multiple roles in such collaborations and to sustain their credibility for future collaboration and initiatives.

It is important to link the open spaces activities to further collaborative perspectives.

### CASE - UDINE ITALY

#### *Steps towards a learning community*



The picture we got of Udine at the beginning of the Xploit project was that of a dynamic community facing the many different challenges that inevitably arise when a city belongs to a Region at the border with two other countries. Some sort of European esprit and multicultural atmosphere has always been perceived in this community and in the entire Region Friuli Venezia Giulia. Probably that is why there has been a very rich tradition of LLL activities and adult vocational education opportunities, as well as cultural initiatives and events.

Special attention in Udine has been paid to raising awareness within the community about the following core themes: health literacy and promotion of healthy lifestyles, use of ICT tools and technology, knowledge on local heritage (arts, culture, history and nature), "sense of belonging" and civic awareness, "learning by playing", through the use of game as a mean for education and integration in a multicultural society. Moreover, there has been a strong political commitment and interest in promoting the community empowerment and in offering learning opportunities to make citizens more competent and actively involved in the community life.

Yet, at the time when the Xploit project was presented in our community, still there were very few and quite weak links between local projects and activities and the many projects and possibilities available at a European level. Therefore, there were no solid infrastructures which could systematically address the need to better coordinate the offer of learning opportunities within the community and the need to create a link between local and European resources.

For this reason we thought that the connection between these resources was inevitably the starting point for our commitment to move Udine towards being a learning community. The Community Profile highlighted a massive number of local initiatives and community stakeholders engaged in many important social and cultural projects, but it was also evident that there was no outreach towards European supporting actions. A few initiatives, such as twinning agreements or formal EU networks, were active, but there was no dialogue with European experiences. The need for a common vision and co-ordination was therefore one of the main starting points in the Xploit project.



First of all the Xploit project gave rise to a consultative process with local stakeholders, aimed at gathering and analyzing the needs and opportunities for learning within the community and at identifying the relevant existing resources to be exploited at both local and European level. Local learning needs have been thoroughly investigated through targeted interviews with the local stakeholders, who included politicians, people from the public and private sectors, voluntary associations, and organizations working with minorities or special needs groups.

Then we tried to activate some specific drivers towards which many community players were focused and political commitment already confirmed. For example health promotion, healthy ageing, learning by playing, sustainable development, energy efficiency, social cohesion, volunteering, were all so relevant concepts that could act as catalysts for the community.

Within this framework the European co-operation and innovation could take root with the Xploit project trying to exploit, sustain and valorize the many European lifelong learning resources produced by the European projects and based on European co-funding.

This process was facilitated by the introduction of community guides who have helped to start a process of re-organising local resources and integrating them with European resources. The role of the guides has improved the ongoing development of projects and activities at a local level and has brought together key stakeholders and operators in the community to work on different projects, by exchanging information and procedures, by sharing spaces and also by involving decision makers. Moreover, they have strengthened and stabilised connections between the political and the educational partners, and have acted as collectors of ideas from stakeholders to create a solid network, whose needs could then be reported to decision-makers, leading to more effective programmes.



In this way many already completed or ongoing European projects started to be shared within a wider audience and the community started to benefit from them in a

more sustainable way; last but not least the European added value has facilitated the circulation and better understanding of the concept of Learning City among citizens, stakeholders and - very important - decision makers. It is worth mentioning the twinning between the multidisciplinary centre of Modi'in in Israel and Università delle LiberEtà in Udine. This event started a process of dialogues and co-operation not only among the two educational centres, but also between the Mayors of the two cities who are now working to organize a twinning between the two communities. If we consider that Modi'in has been recognized as an innovative Learning City, it becomes clear that Udine could greatly benefit from this close co-operation in its process of becoming a Learning City as well.



The most significant result achieved at the end of the Xploit project has been the changing of community perspectives, which now includes not only the restricted local dimension but also the wider panorama of European values. This change of perspective has also increased awareness of the process of Udine becoming a Learning City, which does not only mean offering a huge quantity of lifelong learning activities but also means constantly learning: learning to collaborate, learning to innovate, learning to adopt new ways, to change, to open up, to interact and to welcome, capture and exploit innovative resources.

During the Xploit project the community has learned the benefits and difficulties of starting new collaborations, of involving politicians and decision-makers, of working with many different stakeholders, of developing or maintaining a mentality of mutual learning and sharing and contributing.

The many and varied experiences of starting up local projects and linking them to European projects have involved the help of many different cultural, social and educational centres and associations of the city. The learning guides have contributed to this aim, by monitoring the process, and also by being directly involved in some of the actions, with a significant impact on stakeholders, operators and managers of the different institutions and associations in the city.

When thinking of the overall impact of the Xploit project, it is also worth mentioning the increased awareness of 'places of learning'. All the stakeholders involved in Xploit have understood the importance of creating opportunities for learning everywhere and on a variety of themes. Not only schools or educational institutions, but also open spaces in the city (for example city gardens, and walking paths), or public spaces within the city boundaries, even the so called "non-places" such as supermarkets or stations, could be ideal sites for building a network of people and getting them to learn together.



The Xploit experience has been important in order to somehow bring local projects at a European level and EU resources within the community and to consequently

demonstrate that there are many similarities and common objectives, sometimes even very similar actions that have been or could be implemented in the future. This has been useful in bringing the European dimension closer and making it more understandable for the community, thus raising the community's will to engage in concrete, fruitful interaction with the EU and to benefit from EU co-funding. Moreover, the will to better organise, implement and monitor potential cultural and educational opportunities in the city, avoiding isolated and temporary actions, has become stronger, especially from a political point of view.

A strong collaboration has begun between the two main actors of the Xploit project, namely the Municipality of Udine and Università delle LiberEtà, who are now systematically working together. This is combined with substantial involvement of local associations and city departments and close attention to every new EU resource (projects, networks, learning activities or materials, events, etc.) currently available or forthcoming, which could be linked on a regular basis to local projects or initiatives, thus taking them to a more sustainable and exploitable level. Whatever the theme of future initiatives in our city, the overall leitmotiv will be to create new opportunities for learning, in the spirit of remaking Udine as a learning community. This idea of 'learning community' will be developed through a variety of learning opportunities, aimed not only at individual enrichment and lifelong learning but above all at collective enrichment of the community as a whole. In this sense, learning opportunities for all can promote interactions and relationships, can be shared and can include intercultural and intergenerational exchange, as well as providing new European inputs and developing innovative answers to community needs and challenges.



Key elements for the exploitation have been the implementation of new opportunities for learning in public and open spaces, including also the interaction of physical spaces and digital spaces and a new way of learning as a result of bottom-up initiatives and participative training. This could be the starting point for a future participative planning and design of new learning opportunities in and for the community.

These processes have taken place with a constant connection with the European dimension through the exploitation of old and new EU projects in the community.

Some examples:

EU resource HEALTH BOX: promotion of healthy lifestyles through social marketing at: Health Pyramid - Public Schools - Department of Nursing Sciences (State University)- community as a whole

EU resource NatursAll: creation of City Gardens projects and locations

EU resource Outdoor ICT: creation of public itineraries available on the net and implementation of Walking Groups

EU resource Media Playing Communities: implementation of Ludoteca (Game Library) and dissemination in local kindergartens and primary schools

EU resource MENTA 50+: development of the project CamminaMenti - Minds in Movement involving various associations and promoting brain training for the elderly

EU resource FROG, following the routes of greenness and Covenant of Mayors: implementation of City gardens and new programs in the city regarding the environment and climatic changes.

All these initiatives will be supported by an overall political strategy, a systematic approach and a consequent planning of resources for the community.



The Municipality of Udine and Università delle LiberEtà have much appreciated the results of the Xploit project, both as regards their reinforced collaboration and because of the participative process activated within the community and which has been very much appreciated by community members and all stakeholders involved. This is important because this information network connects services and collates the community's learning needs.

At the end of the Xploit project we can say that more wide-ranging and systematic collaboration structures should be pursued but some valid infrastructures of communication and exploitation have been set up and have prepared the ground for expanding and qualifying the learning community opportunities and future initiatives. These infrastructures involve policy-makers, authorities, social service providers, voluntary associations, active citizens, cultural institutions, private organizations, etc.

Another important issue is the implementation of new spaces for learning: the reinforcement of infrastructures of communication and collaboration should take into account this important need. The city as a whole should be a place for learning and should create learning opportunities from a cultural, educational, environmental, civic and social point of view.

Still, much work has to be done and more stakeholders must be connected to the network to guarantee sustainability in the future. We can say, however, that Udine is on the way to become a Learning City. Much interest exists in EU programs, networks and activities, which could help Udine in achieving this goal and in nurturing the city as a living, learning organism.



Learn [MORE](#) about the Udine case:  
[www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu) - direct links



#### SUB-COMMUNITY APPROACH

*A learning community can be driven by focusing on a special neighborhood, a specific sector or a special group of learners - with the perspective of widening the*

*activities to the entire community at a later stage, or to function as a satellite for the larger community.*

The sub-community approach is a genuine bottom-up approach, offering strong empowerment and involvement perspectives.

In many cases the first learning community steps are taken, not at community or city level, but at very local level: a neighborhood initiative, a migrant initiative, a sport initiative, or a small group of stakeholders carrying out highly focused activities to meet the needs of a specific group of citizens (e.g. people with disabilities, or young drop-outs).

This sub-community is by definition highly focused on its mission, but along the way new perspectives emerge: using the activity or the sub-community itself to address the community at large, or to create a new network around the initiative.

In special cases suburbs to big cities or satellite communities act as such sub-communities, as it is often not possible to address a metropolis at large.

In these cases both top-down and bottom-up approaches are needed to create learning communities or a learning city.

The challenge to such sub-communities is, of course, the "sub": how do we get from "sub" to community?



The most important challenges to the "sub" approach might be:

- ~ To widen the scope of the initial mission and take the mission to a community level
- ~ To adjust the mentality from "super-local" to "community"
- ~ To maintain local values when going to community level
- ~ To link to similar sub-communities in the community, if possible
- ~ To establish the needed funding



However, the sub-approach contains many valuable assets to learning communities:

- ~ A high level of direct involvement and inclusion
- ~ A high degree of freedom in designing initiatives
- ~ Transparency in all structures and initiatives
- ~ Highly visible impact and change, linked directly to needs and interests
- ~ Possibly a good balance of volunteering and professionalism

#### SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintaining strong learning community values when addressing the community at large  
To take the limited original mission to a community level in a qualified way



#### NEW PARTNERSHIPS APPROACH - TAKING THE LEARNING COMMUNITY / REGION TO THE NEXT LEVEL: INVOLVING THE BUSINESS WORLD

*A learning community can be driven by the establishment of new strategic partnerships between key stakeholders in the community, often involving the local or regional authorities as an active partner. Such new partnerships will often include both private and public stakeholders.*

The new partnership driver is first of all relevant to communities already in the process towards a learning community, and to communities highly dominated by for example public educations.

Most learning community journeys start in the educational or social sector - addressing needs linked to adult education, unemployed youth, and activities for seniors, etc.

Most initiatives are taken by educators, NGO's or public authority youth or social work departments, sometimes in cooperation with each other.

These initial educational and social drivers are highly valuable and can have a considerable and lasting impact on the needs addressed. If successful, such partnerships can develop into strong consortia, addressing important community needs.

At some point, however, it becomes clear that the action radius of such consortia might be limited. Other drivers are needed; new steps are called for; especially when policy introduces innovation fields such as technology, entrepreneurship and cross-sector partnering.

The biggest challenge is normally not including the cultural sector or the sport sector in learning partnerships; the major challenge is more likely to be the inclusion of the private sector, including enterprises and the financial sector. Public-private partnerships at community level are still very rare, not because of resistance in the private sector, but because a common language and understanding was never created at community level.

It is well-known that public-private partnerships are possible in research, but also well-known that a partnership between a kindergarten, an insurance company and a sport club is less likely.

Using new cross-sector partnerships as a driver for learning communities is therefore a big challenge, as it requires mentality shifts in all sectors.



Many threats should be taken into account when establishing cross-sector partnerships:

- ~ A mutual understanding of community missions cannot be taken for granted
- ~ The mentalities in the different sectors are very different
- ~ Many learning community initiatives are regarded public responsibilities by the private sector
- ~ The private sector is trained to look for clear impact and results, which is not often the case in for example empowerment initiatives
- ~ The participation of the private sector should not be reduced to charity or sponsorships
- ~ If carried out at high level, such partnering might overlook the basic values and principles of learning communities



If the cross-sector driver approach is successful, the new partnerships are very promising:

- ~ Cross-sector partnerships ensure a full spectrum approach to learning communities
- ~ Learning communities will be forced to focus more strongly on the creation of community economies
- ~ Entrepreneurship and innovation will be more successful when backed-up by cross-sector partnerships
- ~ The private sector will learn more about and appreciate the side benefits of community initiatives, including economic benefits
- ~ It will be possible at community level to create new balancers between competition and collaboration
- ~ The cross-sector partnerships might offer a very strong learning community infrastructures, heavily benefitting the public authorities as well

#### SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The participation of the private sector should never be reduced to charity and sponsorships  
Cross-sector partnerships should be exploited to the max, for example to create new economies in the community

### CASE - SWANSEA WALES UK Learning Partnerships



There are two distinct strands: From the 1980's : A history of community development that works from the bottom up - as personified by the long established community centers that have transformed their communities - e.g. Dove workshop & Glynneath. Strong women who wanted to enrich their communities. Education providers & local government (the municipality) tapped into European funding on and spread it out to the centers in the form of ICT labs, free training etc. Education providers, formal & informal had begun to work together to as the Swansea Learning Partnership to make the best use of limited resources.

As a result of Welsh Devolution the Welsh Assembly Government has taken a strategic view of European funding & has used EU funding to develop national structures and networks to apply the funding more consistently across Wales. The South West Wales Regional Learning Partnership combines education and regeneration strategies. West Wales and the Valleys area have a GDP per head of about 70% of the European average.

The XPLOIT project has run during what is widely considered in the UK to be the most difficult period, economically, since the 1930s. Within all spheres of education in Wales there has been a change of direction due to economic pressures. The focus has been on employability and digital inclusion. Part of Swansea University's response has been to develop a very successful Employability Academy that has invited local business into the University to work together with academics to develop the entrepreneurial skills & attitudes in students that will enable them to survive and prosper in a period of change.



Entrepreneurship- Swansea University is developing an e-zone and reviewing the curriculum for all learners, including part time and adults, to ensure that they all develop entrepreneurial skills. The University is working in a regional hub to develop entrepreneurship in education- partners are other local Universities and Colleges (Gower College Swansea, Swansea Metropolitan University, Neath Port Talbot

College, Coleg Sir Gar and Ceredigion College). The students (including post-graduates, undergraduates, part time and FE) are setting up an enterprise society. The more vocational of DACE's Adult Education courses are popular as even the retired are seeking to develop money-making skills such as selling online, making photo presentations or designing websites. DACE has started to work with the government job-centers, as many unemployed lack the digital skills needed to access job applications online.

City & County of Swansea have been putting on free events for Silver Surfers, so that they can engage online with the tax office, the local authority and the job centers (the most economic medium for running these services)

A Change of policy to reflect economic cuts has led to a decision by City & County of Swansea not to participate in projects involving European Travel for its staff.

A closer relationship between Swansea University & City & County of Swansea.

A realisation by the centres that they have to get involved in European projects directly themselves.

A richer fund of ideas for developing learning activities from seeing first-hand the work of partner projects, including the vast resources of materials included in the EuroLocal & Pascal projects.



Judith Porch, our community guide has encouraged partnership between The Graigfelen community, involving the schoolchildren, and ART Across the City a project for the local children to create a mural. Graigfelen children have also set up and run a café, completing food hygiene courses and learning some basic business skills in the process.

<http://www.itv.com/news/wales/update/2013-02-15/craigfelen-primary-school-pupils-open-cafe-in-swanea/> as part of "Enterprise in the Valleys" project  
<http://enterpriseinthevalleys.co.uk/media/gallery/>

The DOVE workshop and Glyneath Training Centre are both working with partner organisations to develop more business links

The involvement of employers in education is a big change and it will continue to develop and help learning to take place in a more complete environment that reflects everyday life more closely. The recognition of entrepreneurial attitude as a valuable life skill in times of change is vital when the government support and benefits are shrinking.

There is a huge co-operative project between the University & City & County of Swansea to develop & make accessible the history of Swansea - the old port and the industrial area called the Hafod. The Copperopolis project to develop the huge riverside site where metal works showing that Swansea has been a *global town* since the 1870's importing copper from Australia, South America, & Cuba.



Communities First, the Welsh government's Community Focussed flagship programme to regenerate the most deprived communities in Wales has undergone a realignment in April 2012,

The new strategic priorities are:

- Prosperous Communities (Economic).
- Learning Communities (Education and Skills).
- Healthier Communities (Health).

In practical terms they have been regrouped, focusing on larger areas than previously, now called clusters, to try and make its program more effective

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/regeneration/communitiesfirst/?lang=en>

Communities First Partnership priorities need to be properly supported and their aims and objectives better integrated into Local Authority strategic plans and vice versa. Opportunities to link the Communities First Programme into local and national health agendas (for example, through Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategies and Public Health Strategic Frameworks) were seen as essential. Similarly, links to Local Service Boards (LSB) were seen as critical to delivering the strategic priorities, and ensuring that shared objectives are taken forward. Others commented on the importance of integrating Communities First with Community Plans and individual programs such as Families First.

Joined-up delivery was felt to be essential with a need to look at how different programs can work together at the local and national level "to best effect".



Visits to community centers as part of the partner meeting are the best possible introduction of the European dimension for isolated community centers. These visits were followed up by continuous work with Community Groups using any XPLOIT ideas & resources wherever possible.

Jean Preece & Judith Porch are both part of the NIACE supported Adult learners Week Committee & disseminate to other partners at those meetings. Adult learners' week is the clearest manifestation of a Learning Community in the process of being created.

This year we are trying in various community centers to show the richness of local community activity with the presence of belly dancing, craft tasters, IT, vegetable growing, local history, Swansea City Football Club community activity, as well as the usual opportunities to use IT and sample lectures.

Dissemination via SWWRLP & other networks - Judith James who represents Swansea University on many boards & networks has spoken about the project wherever the opportunity has arisen (documented on work sheets)

Judith James & Jean Preece attended a community award event, supported by our local Danish hero, where the local paper has created a range of awards for those active in the community. We include this for our Danish partner! We use every opportunity to disseminate our work.



Joining up separate networks, encouraging all groups in the community to see themselves as part of a whole learning community, formal and informal. There's a growing recognition, partly driven by economic pressures, but also a continuation of the original motivation of those pioneer community centers in the 80's who wanted to create a better community - who saw that the more connections in the network, the more we co-operate, the more productive it is for the community.

This joined -up attitude includes business and entrepreneurialism in the educational mix, which previously had been excluded. The Welsh government has promoted the joined up government in an attempt to encourage a small country, the size of Wales, to punch above its weight.

Learn [MORE](#) about the Swansea case:  
[www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu) - direct links



## ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INITIATIVE APPROACH

*A learning community can be driven by a strong focus on entrepreneurship for different groups of citizens, especially if the community needs to create new market and job opportunities. The private sector should be directly involved in such initiatives.*

A new and interesting driver of emerging learning communities is the entrepreneurship approach.

This driver might be attractive to public, cultural as well as private stakeholders, because it includes labour market orientation, development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and calls for a high level of creativity and mixed professional teams.

The entrepreneurial driver can bring together many different organisations in the community, especially when the community faces high levels of youth unemployment and entire sectors closing, not to mention systematic public staff cuts.

Moreover, this approach is fresh and new, often brings visible impact, and contains many motivators for different organisations.

However, the entrepreneurial driver is not likely to be successful in the quest for learning communities, if the traditional definition of entrepreneurship is applied, being the establishment of new product or service based companies.

The modern European definition is far more powerful in the context of learning communities: entrepreneurship means entrepreneurial competences and mentality, and is about including the creation of innovation from idea to product in all community activities, including education from kindergarten to later life learning.

In this context innovation is needed and promoted everywhere: in energy, in social life, in education, in technology - and even in the form of community based innovation.

In this sense, the entrepreneurial driver can be very powerful in creating new learning community infrastructure and community dynamics.



As a relatively new and innovative driver, entrepreneurship is likely to cause certain threats to learning community initiatives:

- ~ If the traditional definition is dominating, this driver will add little to the development of learning communities
- ~ Populist approaches to entrepreneurship should be avoided: selling ice-cream in front of the kindergarten is not entrepreneurship
- ~ Entrepreneurship should be linked to innovative didactics and empowerment of at risk and non-academic citizens



If, on the contrary, entrepreneurship is re-interpreted in the context of a learning community, it offers a wide range of opportunities, such as:

- ~ Offering citizens real-life projects and initiatives
- ~ Offering at risk citizens new opportunities for learning and work
- ~ Bringing education and learning closer to the world of work and economy
- ~ Empowering the community to create new businesses and address new markets, for example through the creative use of technology
- ~ Offering all kinds of educational and social projects to be stronger linked to the community

#### SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Entrepreneurship should be re-interpreted as a driver for learning communities

Entrepreneurship should be exploited to the max in the communities, including building new dynamic infrastructures

### **SPECIAL CASE STUDY: ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR MIGRANT WOMEN AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES** *The Catania Study Visit*

In 2011 the EU LeCiM project offered grants to a group of people who might benefit from taking part in different local LeCiM events.

As coordinator of the Xploit project on learning communities and the exploitation of European lifelong learning resources, I was offered to participate in the events in Catania in September 2011.

The overarching theme of the activities in Catania was *entrepreneurship for migrant women*, including discussing transfer of good practice from a number of projects in Berlin to the different Catania communities.

The Catania events included round table debates and plenum presentations as well as visits to migrant communities.

The discussions clearly included a large number of stakeholders and organisations in Catania, from migrant NGO's, social care organisations and political stakeholders at all levels.

The topic of learning communities was not addressed directly, but most of the debates and challenges were and are extremely relevant to the establishment of learning communities, no matter how one might decide to define such structures and environments.

Instead of simply listing chronologically the events and activities, I prefer to offer 10 learning texts, linking the Catania experience to the challenges of learning communities. In this way this small "report" might contribute to further reflections on the many challenges addressed during the Catania events.

The learning texts are structured as a statement on what I experienced, combined with open questions and accompanied by an invitation to contribute to the reflections. This combination I call *learning perspectives*.

This small report focuses on the Catania community, as the study visit aimed to offer impressions of how this community is meeting the migrant inclusion challenges. But it would be of immense interest to the Xploit project as well as to many European learning communities to learn from and be inspired by the Berlin entrepreneurship initiatives! Such inspiration would be very welcome indeed...!



### THE CATANIA COMMUNITY

The community has recently been challenged with new waves of migration, especially from Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

These migration movements are expected to continue for a very long time.

The Catania community is not a particularly resourceful community, and is suffering from unemployment and social challenges like many other European communities.

To an outsider, like me, the community demonstrated at all levels a clear will and dedication to engage in these challenges, to work with the problems and to establish new collaboration structures to do so.

The debates demonstrated both political will, a strong dedication from a variety of organisations, as well as attitudes and values supporting and facilitating the self-empowerment and self-organisation of the different groups of migrants, in this case migrant women.

The atmosphere was clearly expressing a lot of respect for the migrants and a will to look for constructive opportunities for the different groups of migrants.

The overall impression was a community on the move, a community willing to learn from others and a community willing to work hard to meet the many challenges, also with relatively few resources.

*To what extent are the migrant activities linked to the development of a learning community?*

*How are the new collaboration structures made sustainable?*

*How are the different resources in the community, also including formal education, mobilized to help meeting the migration challenges?*

*How are the community and the Municipality working to be able to exploit and use available European learning resources?*



## MIGRANT WOMEN

The Catania debates focused on the group of migrant women in the communities involved, in particular migrant woman in Berlin and in Catania.

Migrant women are in this context defined as all kinds of migrant women: new arrivals as well as second generation women, women with substantial academic educations and women with very little or no education, women from all kinds of cultural backgrounds, including religious backgrounds.

It was quite obvious that there are great differences between well-educated woman in Berlin and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa with no educational background at all.

Both cities host a great variety of migrant woman with very different backgrounds.

Long and serious debates were focused on to what extent the Berlin experience and the Berlin models were relevant to the Catania community.

One of the problems in the Catania debates was the exclusive focus on gender: we discussed all kinds of migrant women as if they could be grouped like this.

When empowering migrants, and supporting the self-empowerment of migrants, it is extremely important to employ more parameters to be able to reach the different groups of migrants and meet their specific needs.

Key parameters would be: age, language resources, educational background, social status, self-learning resources, social and family conditions, etc.

No matter if the key focus is educational or entrepreneurial or social networking, it is very important to meet the real needs of the women.

It is obvious that migrant women, as well as women in general in the society, have a lot in common and the perspectives of self-empowerment is extremely strong and relevant for all migrant women, but many initiatives might suffer from a lack of sensibility to the different groups of women's needs, if the initiatives address "women in general".

*What kind of migrant women and women in general were participating in the Berlin entrepreneurship initiatives?*

*What migrant groups of women are and will be involved in the Catania entrepreneurship initiatives?*

*How can entrepreneurship be addressed differently as to the specific profiles of the migrant women?*

*What kind of pre-conditions might be identified to allow different groups of migrant women to be involved in and benefit from entrepreneurship initiatives?*



## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The idea of focusing on entrepreneurship for migrant women in LeCiM is extremely powerful and relevant!

In this context, the dialogues between the Berlin, Catania and other initiatives are very important, and it will be very important also to describe this experience and to produce strong documentation of the initiatives in the LeCiM project, as this experience could be great importance and inspiration to other European communities.

Entrepreneurship for migrant women are linked to some of the most important European policies, such as women's rights to live self-sustained lives, identifying and acknowledging migrants' prior work and learning experience, identifying migrant

women's specific needs, building on the women's talents and resources as well as opening the labour markets to migrants.

As many European labour markets are shrinking and public sectors are cut, the relevance of entrepreneurship is stronger than ever. Also, the idea of having your own small business is well in line with many of the migrant families' cultural backgrounds, and migrant women's entrepreneurship is indeed likely to offer a greater diversity in the European communities.

On the other hand, entrepreneurship can be extremely complicated - especially for migrants! It includes language resources, knowledge about the legal system and the financial sector, tax regulations, as well as a diversity of other skills.

Many migrant businesses have been unsuccessful due to the many requirements for entrepreneurship in the modern society.

The support systems for migrant women will therefore have to be very strong and sustained. The Berlin experiences revealed that it has taken years to set up such systems and that the training of migrant women for entrepreneurship might last up to 10 or 12 months, followed by periods of mentoring.

The Berlin experience also shows that many strong community players must work together to make this happen and to make the provisions sustainable.

*How can the local authorities help simplifying the pathways to successful entrepreneurship for migrant women?*

*How can the local authorities help set up educational, social and financial support systems for migrant entrepreneurs?*

*What kind of "entrepreneurship training" is needed for different kinds of migrant women (referring to the parameters above)?*

*How can new infrastructures of collaboration between different stakeholders in the community support migrant women's entrepreneurship?*



## EMPOWERMENT

Both the Berlin and Catania evidence showed a great dedication among stakeholders to support the migrant women's self-empowerment.

In both communities the idea was and is to set up support systems and frameworks, and allow the groups of migrant women to manage the training, facilitation and mentoring themselves. This is extremely important to the success of the migrant women's initiatives: without self-empowerment, there can be no successful entrepreneurship.

But what is equally important is, of course, the quality of the support systems set up. Migrant entrepreneurs cannot empower themselves without sufficient frameworks, such as housing support, easy access to fair credit, ongoing mentoring, etc., etc.

Therefore successful migrant entrepreneurship can be defined as a combination of *strong public and private frameworking* and *providing space for self-empowerment*.

It seemed as some of the Berlin initiatives demonstrated such a balance, and it also seems like the public authorities in Catania share these values and principles.

To an outsider, the Catania community seems like a powerful place to experiment with sustainable migrant women entrepreneurship. Perhaps the Catania community is, in this respect, somewhat influenced by the old Sicilian traditions for

entrepreneurship and the strong civil interest in a labour market with a large number of small businesses governed by a personal responsibility approach. Perhaps Catania for this reason might be a good entrepreneurship laboratory and inspiration to other European communities more focused on employment in large enterprises and public organisations.

A culture of entrepreneurship and personal engagement combined with strong self-empowerment frameworks might be a cocktail full of perspectives, also for young people.

*How can LeCiM describe the frameworking and support systems practiced by the local authorities in Catania? How can these principles be discussed and made visible? How can different stakeholders from different sectors support such empowerment initiatives in the community?*

*Might such frameworking and empowerment initiatives work well for other people in the community, such as unemployed young people and drop-outs?*



## POLITICAL SUPPORT

One of the lessons learned from Catania is that successful entrepreneurship and migrant women's inclusion is unthinkable without strong and open political support. Political support in this context means: clear public policy statements from local and regional authorities combined with direct frameworking actions such as housing, facilitation of access to technology, fair credit and networking, and the mobilizing of useful community resources (educations, enterprises, cultural institutions and NGO's).

A special challenge to public authorities is the simplification of the legal regulations governing the field of entrepreneurship.

The political support in Catania was clearly demonstrated during the events: politicians at all levels participated actively in the debates and showed a great respect for the other organisations involved in the initiatives.

No doubt, a community like Catania might benefit heavily in the future from supporting such active citizenship initiatives. And, whether the community can be described as "poor" or "rich", the behaviour and actions of the political governments has a great direct and indirect impact on the success and sustainability of such initiatives.

*What self-understandings is the political support building on? What kind of roles should the local and regional governments play in such initiatives? How can the political bodies help mobilize other relevant stakeholders in support of migrant women's entrepreneurship?*

*How might such support activities be regarded joint actions independent of the political colour of different governments?*



## NEW INFRASTRUCTURES

As can be seen from the photo above, many different stakeholders and people participated in the LeCiM event in Catania.

From a learning community perspective it is extremely interesting to experience a variety of organisations and people joining the mission of supporting migrant women in their effort to become self-sustained.

Political bodies, private and public institutions as well as NGO's participated in the LeCiM debates, signalling that this is a "cause" that calls for collaboration between many stakeholders in the community.

During the debates it also was clear that concrete plans are being made and carried out as to establish a community centre to be put at the disposal of migrant women and other citizen groups. *This is not just an important political action in itself, but it also symbolized the emergence of new infrastructures of cooperation in the community linked to inclusion and lifelong learning.*

Few learning communities are successfully established by top-down declarations. Most successful learning communities grow from practical initiatives, involving more and more stakeholders and then finally giving rise to new, formal or informal, cooperation structures in the community.

It seems like the many inclusion initiatives in Catania could be a perfect mobilizing hub for a higher level approach to a learning community, based on active citizens and the involvement of a great variety of local institutions. This would allow the community to act more efficiently on other challenges, such as youth unemployment and the re-activation of elderly.

*From the Xploit project perspective Catania is a most interesting laboratory, and we would very much like to include the community in future learning cities initiatives.*

*Would it be possible to establish a balance between the highly self-regulated Southern Italy community of Catania and a more systematic development of the community into a learning city?*

*What role would the authorities and key community stakeholders play?*

*How would the community benefit from developing such permanent lifelong learning infrastructures?*



## EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

An activity level like the one in Catania might give rise to expanded European and international activities in the community.

There are several justifications for this:

- the Catania community has a lot to offer other European communities on issues like inclusion, entrepreneurship, community cooperation, etc.; such laboratory experiences might be invested in strong and useful European cooperation projects
  - Catania is, like many other cities, not a rich community with all sorts of available resources; therefore the community might benefit more systematically from European lifelong learning funding, as well as from available European resources on inclusion, migration and learning
  - Catania would be a perfect partner for migration, inclusion and participation innovation, and also a perfect partner for mobility and exchange visits
- It is easy to imagine how both Catania and Europe would benefit from such interactions.

*To what extent might the inclusion initiatives be developed into more systematic exploitation of European funding and resources?*

*Would it be possible to establish an international office in the community at high level?*

*To what extent might community players and active citizens, for example migrant women, be directly involved in such activities?*



## NEW TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA

All kinds of learning and entrepreneurship activities in the future will involve a lot of technology, ICT and media.

It is especially extremely important that entrepreneurs of all kinds master the creative use of technology - in support of their business.

It is, from the perspective of learning communities, therefore extremely important and even urgent that all citizens, including migrant women independent of educational background, develop strong media skills.

Media and technology skills, especially for creative purposes, should be deeply integrated in all sort of entrepreneurial activities.

*To what extent is the mastering of technology, including creative and communication technologies, included in the empowerment of migrant women?*

*In what ways are media and technology used to support the women's businesses?*

*How can different technology initiatives be set up in support of entrepreneurship and other learning community activities?*

*How could the future Community Centre be used for this?*



## EXPLOITATION

Who can learn what from Catania and the entrepreneurial initiatives?

A lot of European communities can learn from and be inspired by the Catania initiatives, also communities that consider themselves "highly developed", such as many Northern European communities.

Therefore we have established a dialogue between migrant women in Catania and in Catalonia Spain. We hope this dialogue will lead to new strong bottom-up initiatives, such as mobility and European cooperation.

The value of a community initiative cannot be measured simply as "how many computers does the community have?" It is also about different kinds of approaches to migrants, to women, to entrepreneurship - and to learning and inclusion.

The Catania community has a lot to offer in these respects. Catania is a very Southern European self-regulated community - just look at the traffic! In the city of Girona in Catalonia there are 100 times more traffic lights than in Catania, and Catania has double the number of citizens than Girona...

Self-regulation might be good or bad. I will not be the judge of that. But self-regulation is a very important background to entrepreneurship, especially to entrepreneurship mentality, and many Central and Northern European communities might be highly inspired by this entrepreneurial mentality.

Perhaps this is needed in the very systematically regulated (some say "over-regulated") Central and Northern communities.

*How do the Catania stakeholders regard their own inspiration roles? How can the Catania community interact with European communities in need of such inspiration? How can European cooperation and mutual exchange help sustaining the Catania inclusion activities?*

*How can self-regulation be re-valued and its positive aspects made visible?*



## NEW INITIATIVES

I did not experience the Catania initiatives as perfect or streamlined!

And I did not expect to. Inclusion is never streamlined or straightforward.

But I experienced a lot of mobilizing around migrant women's opportunities in life, I experienced many different people taking part, including the migrants themselves, and I experienced a community... *with great opportunities to develop into a learning community, benefitting the citizens as well as the economy.*

The Catania initiatives as well as the LeCiM initiatives in general are of great interest to the Xploit project, to the learning community perspectives and to future European cooperation initiatives.

Several European initiatives should be built on the Catania, Berlin and LeCiM activities, some of them might be joined activities with projects like Xploit.

It is very important that future European initiatives include the groups of citizens themselves, in our case the migrant entrepreneurs.

*Possible future European initiatives that might help sustain and further develop the LeCiM project might be:*

*- Training and empowerment of people in the communities to facilitate migrant entrepreneurship and mentor entrepreneurs*

- *EU website for good practice on migrant women entrepreneurship, including migrant women's own stories*
- *How to link bottom-up inclusion initiatives to the development of learning communities and new lifelong learning infrastructures?*



## LEARNING COMMUNITIES ACCOMPANYING MEASURES

### *Approaches to learning cities and communities*

#### INTRO

This small section offers what is called *learning community accompanying measures*. What does that mean?

The term accompanying measures should be understood in the context of the *learning community drivers*.

Once again it is important to make clear that Xploit and this paper is not addressing what is called learning cities, smart cities, etc., but exclusively *learning communities*.

Most learning communities are initiated by drivers: specific actions, projects, initiatives or focuses in the community that comes to play the role of *lever* to the development of learning communities, whether this was initially intended or emerged along the way.

*At certain points in the development of a learning community, such drivers might reach their limits: the driver cannot push the development of the community forward anymore. Or: the driver can do so, but only if accompanying measures are installed. Accompanying measures are not drivers or alternatives to drivers, but measures to take the learning community process to a higher level.*

The accompanying measures are quite different from the drivers. The drivers are by nature slow horizontal social processes, whereas the accompanying measures are more quickly installed and represent vertical actions, such as funding measures, formalizing structures, installing new resource structures in the community or changing policy - all this in support of the progression of the learning community initiative, but by other methods.

Another kind of accompanying measures can be resources employed to offer critical reflections or to qualify the learning community structures.

Of course, the list of such accompanying measures is endless, and in this context we limit ourselves to briefly presenting the most typical ones.

Having worked with these brief examples, you will be perfectly able to imagine different accompanying measures yourself.

*The challenge is, of course, to link the right drivers and community contexts to the right accompanying measures.*



## THE SYSTEMIC APPROACH

The systematic approach is often a top-down approach, initiated by policy-making, at local or regional level, and including policy frameworks, strategic planning and implementation measures.

At some point the development of a learning community requires the installation of formal structures in support of further development and the sustainability of the created infrastructures.

At this point the independent infrastructures link directly to the local government or to a consortia led by the local government.

The infrastructures need support, in the form of resources, formalizations or systematizations, to go to a higher level.

What are the typical accompanying measures in the systemic approach?

- ~ A formal consortia might be established to govern and take further the learning community interests, perhaps including the legal right to perform financial transactions
- ~ The learning community initiative is included in the local government annual budget
- ~ A consortium of strong stakeholders wish to co-finance the learning community activities and take them further
- ~ The learning community initiative needs permanent physical or technological facilities, such as a flexible community centre
- ~ The local government or a consortium of strong stakeholders decide to employ one or more staff members to focus on the further development of the learning community initiative
- ~ A formal agreement between stakeholders in the learning community initiative is established, obligating the different stakeholders to different support measures
- ~ A strong private company decides to invest a considerable amount of sponsor-money in the further development of the initiative

Such initiatives are typical for systemic measures, and there are obviously many different forms of systemic interventions.

What are the opportunities, challenges and obstacles in the *Systemic* approach?



- ~ The basic values and principles of the learning community initiative should be kept intact
- ~ The roles of the local government might change along such steps
- ~ The systemic approach might threaten direct participation and involvement
- ~ Systemic measures might put pressure on the independent structures and on the control structures
- ~ Local groups of citizens and small organisations might be lost amidst such changes



- ~ Systemic measures might offer the learning community initiative stability, resources and recognition
- ~ Systemic measures might enable the community to reach out to many new citizens and to address challenges that were previously impossible for the initiative to work with
- ~ Systemic measures might offer more strategic perspectives to the learning community initiative
- ~ Systemic measures might enable the initiative to put more quality into the activities

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## THE QUALITY CRITERIA APPROACH

The quality criteria approach is a critical approach to developing energetic debates among community stakeholders to develop value-based learning community initiatives.

The Quality Criteria accompanying measures are highly relevant and valuable to any learning community initiative.

At a certain point, or due to certain difficulties, the learning community stakeholders agree to take time out and organize open debates on what happened and what should happen in the initiative.

Such open reflections need tools, and the Quality Criteria tool is precisely designed for this purpose: to guide a qualified evaluation of the qualities, threats and opportunities of learning communities and learning community initiatives.

This measure will allow the learning community initiative to assess own performance, to critically address actions and decisions and to formulate useful lessons learned for future action.

Some learning community initiatives might decide to include such open debates and evaluations as an annual activity, and to involve professional evaluators to support this activity.

What are the opportunities, challenges and obstacles in the *Quality Criteria* approach?



- ~ The evaluation activities might be too academic and lose clarity and transparency
- ~ Some stakeholders might not wish to participate in such an open evaluation
- ~ The evaluation activity is not kept simple and straight-forward
- ~ The evaluation is used as alibi for continuing problematic practices



- ~ A professional evaluator could ensure the quality of the open evaluation and produce clear and useful conclusions
- ~ The evaluation is an opportunity to address un-spoken or not yet addressed problems and challenges
- ~ The evaluation is an opportunity to re-evaluate the basic principles and values of learning communities and to critically review these principles and values
- ~ The evaluation could be used to offer guidelines for future actions

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## THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

The partnership approach links learning community initiatives to the creation of different forms of innovative partnerships, based on common interests, such as cross-sector partnerships, public-private partnerships, educational partnerships, etc.

At some point a learning community initiative might have reached its limits. Progression depends on the creation of new partnerships opening the doors to the further development of the initiative.

The creation of such new partnership might take the initiative to another level and might at the same time change focuses, work methods and participation.

Especially in cases where new cross-sector or public-private partnerships are created, a number of elements are likely to be either challenged or changed.

Change should not be a threat to learning communities, rather opportunities, but participating organisations and citizens need time to work through such changes.

The new partnerships might indeed open up new and valuable perspectives to the learning community, but for some partners they might also represent a threat, especially if powerful organisations are introduced.

What are the opportunities, challenges and obstacles in the *Partnership* approach?



- ~ Are changes due to new partnerships prepared and discussed among participating organisations and citizens? Is the rationale of the new partnerships clear and transparent?
- ~ Do new partners or new partnership structures present a threat to local organisations and citizens?
- ~ Has a reasonable consensus as to the new steps been established in the community?
- ~ Will the new partnering impact the basic principles of the learning community initiative?



- ~ The new partnerships can open new doors for the learning community initiative and this should be appreciated
- ~ New partnerships can add new dimension to ongoing activities and initiatives
- ~ New partnerships can offer more resources and more quality
- ~ New partnerships can inject new energy in learning community initiatives and offer new and fresh mentality
- ~ New partnerships might enable the learning community to emulate the performance of well-established initiatives.

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## THE GLOBAL APPROACH

The global approach is based on the global debates on learning cities (UNESCO, UNITED NATIONS, PASCAL, etc.), healthy cities and sustainable cities and is often linked to high-level policy visions at national, regional or even local city level.

Some communities in the process of developing learning community collaboration find it, at some point, attractive to link to global trends, such as learning cities or healthy cities.

Such initiatives usually come from the local or regional decision-makers, often at top level. The aim is to promote the city or region and to benefit from joining relevant global networks.

Such initiatives apparently take the community or city to a higher level, but this depends on the extent to which the initiative represents a consensus among community partners and how much it penetrates the community.

The linking to global trends can include conferences, events and celebrations which might bring new energy into the learning community initiative and partnerships, but again it depends on to what extent such events include organisations and citizens involved in the learning community activities.

What are the opportunities, challenges and obstacles in the *Global* approach?



- ~ The global interest might not represent a need in the community, but merely expresses the political promotion of the city
- ~ In some cases the global focus changes the local government's focus on the local community
- ~ In some cases the global interest produces a big gap between the local community (the reality) and the global ambitions (the dream)
- ~ The community players might not feel ownership of high-level political initiatives
- ~ In some cases, the global interest participates in the populist rhetoric, and may thus damage the integrity and reliability of the community
- ~ Global networking might be used as a short-cut to success, avoiding the hard work of local community development



- ~ The global initiative can inspire an interest in taking the local initiatives further amongst some stakeholders, and can offer new energy and inspiration to the community at large
- ~ Citizens and organisation can acquire new experience and competences if involved in such global networks
- ~ Global interest can lead to new and interesting partnerships with other communities at global level
- ~ Global initiatives can link directly to accomplishments and strong initiatives in the local community, for example in the field of citizens' health
- ~ Global activities might offer new forms of motivation to partners and citizens in the learning community initiative
- ~ Global interest might act as lever for new initiatives in the community

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## THE NETWORKING APPROACH

The networking approach is perhaps the most typical: more or less spontaneous networks emerge from different "occasions", such a project, a European collaboration or a local initiative.

Networking is a strong and necessary driver and engine in many learning community initiatives.

This form of networking can be named *primary* networking. However, at certain points the learning community initiative needs new energy, new partnerships and new perspectives - in short: needs to be taken to a higher level.

If the learning community partnership is relatively weak, it might not be able to form new partnerships, for example with the private sector, or it might not be able to establish the kind of partnerships that would lead to a significant strengthening of the learning community initiative.

In such cases, the community partnership is likely to continue the primary networking at the same level, and this is what we call *secondary* networking.

Networking is mostly useful to learning communities, but in this case it represents a lack of opportunities to create what is really needed: qualitatively different partnerships.

The secondary networking simply attracts more organisations at the same level, which often lead to further frustration.

When such accompanying measures are applied, it is time for the initiative to reflect on its situation and to review its work methods.

What are the opportunities, challenges and obstacles in the *Systematic* approach?



- ~ Secondary networking might simply attract the same type of organisations, thus multiplying the lack of opportunities
- ~ Secondary networking might be an alibi for, and cover up the lack of, real partnership opportunities
- ~ Secondary networking - and networking in general - is not partnership creation
- ~ Ongoing networking at the same level can be suicidal and lead to mission failure
- ~ Ongoing networking at the same level can degenerate into poor justifications for including some organisations



- ~ Secondary networking might bring new partners and new opportunities, even if they are at the same level
- ~ Secondary networking might bring in additional resources
- ~ Secondary networking might offer new and fresh eyes on the learning community initiative, sometimes resulting in useful evaluations and critical debates
- ~ Secondary networking might, in a few cases, result in involving so many new organisations that the initiative's action radius is considerably increased

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## GUIDING, CHALLENGING AND POLICY

### A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LEARNING COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

*What can you do, if you are a community player, an institution or working in the local government - and you wish to take steps towards a learning community?  
Which are the different steps you can take, where can you find support and inspiration - and what should you pay special attention to?*



Perhaps you are aware that present community initiatives are not solving some of the real problems in the community?  
Perhaps you know that there might be interesting resources available from local or European projects that could be useful?  
Perhaps you see the need for new initiatives in the community - for youth, elderly or for the community at large?  
Perhaps you would like to work for a new and more open and innovative mentality in the community?



*Perhaps other things - and perhaps you would like to contribute to such steps in the community, offering more perspectives than individual projects and initiatives?*



If so, what can you do?



One thing for sure, you cannot work alone.  
And on the other hand, you cannot expect such changes to take place quickly and smoothly. It will be a long process, and you must start to take the right steps, not the wrong ones.  
If you think you can do nothing, you are wrong. You can. And you will learn a lot and add new perspectives to your own work and life. It's worth it.



What are your ideas - why are you reacting?

Maybe you should try to describe for yourself what you see as important challenges in the community, and perhaps even start to think about what changes or innovations could be made.

Then you need support. You need to discuss your ideas with a small team of colleagues, friends or people you know would be interested. It could also be from other cities or countries, if you happen to know such people in your network or through your job.

*Which are my own resources? Who do I know? Who could I talk to?*



Let's say you are able to form such a small team. Take your time and discuss your ideas carefully, and try to find some more information on the issues at stake; from your community, from European networks, or whatever.

*Try to establish a good consensus in the team and try to qualify your ideas and visions.*



Next, you will depend on your team and their resources and networks: you should try to find out a couple of things about your community:

- ~ Are there any special focuses in your community? What are they about? Are these focuses useful to your plan?
- ~ Are there any networks in the community to address? Or organisations that would be interested in talking about your ideas and plans? Are these networks or institutions useful to you?

In this work you need the support of your team, as you might need to put some work in these "explorations".

*Who are my allies? Who can I turn to? Are there useful focuses in the community?*

Of course, you should use such forums, if they already exist. You would need to address them and discuss your initiatives with them.

In case such forums do not exist in your community, you need to create them!

You need to take your initiative and your team to an organisational level - you need dialogues with organisations or networks in your community.

*Create a forum or address a forum.*



Now, if such resources do not exist, you and your team will have to go through some reflections: if you look at your ideas or plans, or your "driver", who might be the stakeholders in your community? Who might develop an interest in your ideas and in your "driver"?

Say, for example, your driver is mobilization of retired citizens. Who are the stakeholders in this case? Who might have an interest in this? Who works with the retired citizens? Who would benefit from the mobilization?

*Identify relevant stakeholders and organisations to address.*

In most cases your mission is possible, but it might take some work and some time.

In some cases, your mission fails. Nobody seems to be interested. If this happens, you might need to develop a different approach: expand or qualify your "drivers" to widen the scope of stakeholders and organisations to address.

But if your mission is successful, you might - after some dialogues - be able to arrange some sessions in which these different stakeholders participate: perhaps a community centre, perhaps the social department in the local government, perhaps an NGO working with elderly, etc.

*Hold on to your new network and make them work!*



In fact, you have now taken the small team to an organisational level - now you have a team of stakeholders and interested people.

You need so discuss your initiative with this group of stakeholders - and to take into account their interests as well. Maybe you initiative is a wake-up call for some of the stakeholders - and now they spot an opportunity to change something...

After some debates, you might ask: should we include other resources from the community? What about the retired citizens themselves? How could they be included? What about private stakeholders, or cultural ones? You need to discuss this openly with your new network.

*Qualify and widen your network.*



This is where many initiatives stop!

A lot of talking, no further action; and a lot of frustration...

Which are the next steps?

If the idea is to make changes in the community - by addressing one or more important challenges in the community, you need to start thinking about concrete action. Drivers, engines, incubators and catalysts only work properly through practical actions, never through endless meetings and conferences.

*You need to take action.*



This is a challenge. You would like to start a pioneer initiative, a project, an experiment or a similar action, and you do not have the resources. From now on you need resources to take the next steps. You need to define these practical steps. You need consensus among the people in your new network.

Then, the question: where do we find the needed resources to start our project?

*Resources are the key to the next steps.*



Resources often mean work power - or: money.

From this point there are many ways, and many different ways. Here are a few of them, perhaps the most typical:

- ~ Are there available funds in the local or regional government? Search and learn! And include the people you approach in your network, if possible!
- ~ Are there private funding sources available in your community - social responsibility programs? Search and learn! And include the people you approach in your network, if possible!
- ~ Are there useful programs from your national government? Search and learn! And include the people you approach in your network, if possible!
- ~ Can you find useful resources from European initiatives and exploit them? Search and learn! And include the people you approach in your network, if possible!
- ~ Are you able to make some research about available European funding? Search and learn! And include the people you approach in your network, if possible!

*Fundraising is needed and important!*



All this might take some time, and you need to include your team and your new network in the efforts. In many cases you also need to contact people or institutions who have experiences in this kind of fundraising. You should use your new network and contacts to identify and approach these experienced resources.

Two things are very important in this process:

- ~ You must sustain the interest and motivation in your network; you can do this by including them and by demonstrating that there is a strong progression in your initiative
- ~ You must be willing to qualify yourself and your team: you might need to learn new things along the way and to face challenges, you never thought you would be concerned with

*Learning and motivating*



Let's change the scene: let's assume you are successful and that you are ready to start a solid project for retired citizens in your community.

How are you going to use this project to take further steps towards changing your community? Towards a new mentality? Towards new forms of communication and collaboration in your community? Towards a learning community?

*The project as a driver*



Let us take a look at what you have accomplished now:

- ~ You have created a project platform with different stakeholders, be that a local, national or European one, and this platform can be exploited for many important initiatives
- ~ You have along the way created a team and a community network, perhaps including public authorities, NGO's, educations and perhaps even labour market partners; and in case of a European project you also now have a European partnerships with networks of their own
- ~ Through your project you are now able to act in your community
- ~ You have new competences, skills and contacts
- ~ You are in direct contact with citizens and organisations that can be used for further initiatives

*You have created new resources*



Let's say your project will last for two years. How can you take steps towards a learning community in these two years - based on your project?



You can do very many things, but to take the new steps you might need to form a very qualified team of resources wishing to work in your direction, and representing different interests, sectors and stakeholders in the community.

You might also wish to exploit project contacts or European contacts to help you take these new steps. Once again, you might choose to identify learning community resources at national or European level and invite those to collaborate with you. If so, you need to make clear how they will benefit from this new collaboration.

*Qualify your learning communities' steps.*



How can you, then, with your new resources and in close collaboration with your qualified team take useful learning communities steps?

Here you have some open opportunities:

- ⇒ Make sure that your project is well-known in your community
- ⇒ Include other people and organisations in the implementation of your project: widen your community network

- ⇒ Make sure that your project is followed-up by new initiatives in the community
- ⇒ Link the project activities to other citizens that might benefit from the activities (what can retired citizens do for the community?)
- ⇒ Try to promote the establishment or wider use of a community centre through your project
- ⇒ Try to create cross-sector partnerships along the project
- ⇒ In strong projects new emerging challenges are often identified; use the project to pursue these challenges
- ⇒ Link your activities to similar or neighbouring initiatives in the community or in communities in your region
- ⇒ Reflect on the possibility of adding a European dimension to your project
- ⇒ If working at European level: identify further common interests among the partners and their communities
- ⇒ If possible, link your community to the partner communities

*Exploit your new resources*



You are now on the way: you are contributing to new partnerships and infrastructures in your community, and if you use your new resources well, you are certainly able to add new steps and dimensions to your efforts.

*At this point you don't need more guidance, 'because you know what to do...!*

Nevertheless there are many challenges and obstacles on the way.

In the next text we will try to identify some of the most important difficulties and warn against a number of typical dead-ends.



Of course, the small scenario above could look very differently; there are numerous such scenarios, but the basic principles are still the same: how to progress from the idea of exploitation and a learning community to put it into practice, step by step... Often the scenarios will be linked to the above described "drivers" and accompanying measures.

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## SERIOUS CHALLENGES TO EXPLOITATION AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES

*Which are the most important lessons learned when working towards a learning community? We list and briefly describe roadblocks and how to avoid them or manage them.*

There are numerous threats to quality exploitation and to learning communities, as they are up against old and traditional structures of policy-making, power structures and powerful interests that do not take community needs into consideration.

Policy changes, useful resources are taken by others, crises and setbacks disturb well-functioning partnerships and the global world changes rapidly.

There is no life insurance for learning communities.

Furthermore, learning communities are living organisms that must change along with their surrounding realities, and are dependent on the interest and dedication of real people.

Most of these threats are beyond our control and we need to accept that. It is part of the game.

However, and this is of course very important and many lessons have been learned here, learning communities can do a lot to avoid such threats, and so can the key players and stakeholders involved.

Learning communities can be designed and formed in many different ways, and not all of them are sustainable, as they do not respect the basic principles of and criteria for learning communities.

In this text we describe some of the most typical threats and how to deal with them proactively.

Before doing so, let us list some key words about how to sustain those fragile structures called learning communities:

- ⇒ Allow and promote critical and open reflections on the learning community from all players involved and take the critical approaches seriously
- ⇒ Promote a living organism mentality: a learning community is always on the road, dealing with setbacks and problems, and on the quest for new ways
- ⇒ Avoid excessive and false rhetoric about the learning community: state the problems openly and invite debates
- ⇒ Include new visions and perspectives and take up challenges incurred from the surrounding economic, demographic and social worlds
- ⇒ Constantly promote an inclusive approach; the community is for all
- ⇒ Interact with and be inspired by other communities, national as well as European and global
- ⇒ Never give up on creative initiatives

Let us now describe some of the most typical threats to learning communities and to communities taking steps towards a learning community.

The descriptions are primarily based on practical experience from the Xploit and other European communities, with which the project has collaborated, including the national learning cities initiative in Israel.

The descriptions are also inspired by the global contributions from learning cities experts such as Peter Kearns (Pascal) and Norman Longworth (EU).

The Xploit contributions have been checked against the global debates.

The Xploit and collaborating communities are very different and from very different parts of Europe, which means that the lessons learned are based on a variety of cultures, traditions and mentalities (Denmark, Spain, Romania, UK, Hungary, Italy and Israel), and furthermore including many different kinds of organisations, from educations to local governments and private organisations.

Now, which are the most important threats to emerging learning communities - and how can we deal with the threats proactively?

### The roles of public authorities



One of the most important threats to learning communities is the continuation of traditional public authority roles. In learning communities the local government should assume a partner role in the community partnerships and networks. The local government is still the local government, but in the community practice the local decision-makers and administrative should learn to play another role: partnering up with other stakeholders and active citizens and working for the community at large, especially promoting inclusion and involvement of institutions, groups of citizens and small organisations, including NGO's.

The role of the local government in the community partnerships is not a political role, but a parallel community structure in which joint values and principles rules.

It is indeed a big challenge for the local decision-makers and administration to learn to play this double role: the political, based on a political program, and the community-based, governed by joint values and principles.

One of the most important contributions for local governments in learning community networks is to offer open frameworks, spaces and platforms for free citizen initiatives, not controlled by the political agendas.



To avoid such obstacles, the learning partnerships and networks should discuss the roles of public authorities openly, and should hold such dialogues on a number of occasions. Decision-makers should seek dialogues with experienced colleagues in other European communities and learn from them. Medium level managers and administrative staff should be offered training and inspiration to allow changes in mentality and perspectives.

### Representative or direct democracy



In the political life representative democracy rules: we vote and the politicians and their administration work on the basis of political programs.

The idea of learning communities and local partnerships is on the contrary to promote direct democracy: the learning community promotes and supports initiatives not directly linked to political programs or political agendas, but emerging from the needs and interests of groups of citizens or groups of institutions.

This bottom-up approach supplements the traditional representative democracy. The aim of such approaches is the mobilization and activation of groups of citizens and the promotion of creativity and initiative.



Open community dialogues on direct democracy should be organized and form part of everyday community life. Policy-makers and administrations might need training and inspiration, as this approach calls for a shift of mentality in many local governments. A strong opportunity could be dialogues between emerging learning

communities and local governments from different countries, or more focused activities such as study visits, twinning cities, etc.

#### Cross-sector failures



Many learning communities and partnerships are working well, but within a limited number of sectors, such as the educational and social sectors, occasionally also the energy or health sectors. The private sector, including the financial sector, is often absent from these partnerships, and very often the cultural and sport sectors are also absent. This significantly weakens the actions of learning partnerships, as it reduces the available resources, and as the learning community does not enter fully into the community at large.

In times where closer links between the world of learning and the world of work and a stronger focus on entrepreneurship are needed, the absence of the private sector is even more problematic.



An ongoing learning process must be included in emerging learning communities, to allow the public, social and educational sectors to learn to work with private enterprises, and to allow private enterprises to develop a new mentality towards their community. Sometimes the world of sports can mediate between these traditionally very separate sectors.

The aim of such collaborations is to develop a mutual understanding of the common benefits of learning communities and a common language to use when discussing them.

#### Lack of competences



To work in learning communities partnerships require a set of competences which in most cases must be developed as an integrated dimension of the community processes. Most staff in the public sector is not trained to work with learning community challenges, neither with European cooperation or for instance entrepreneurship. On the other hand most private players are not trained to work with the wider benefits of learning or to imagine how young people or retired citizens might be a resource to innovation or industry.

Both sectors' managements and staff need what might be called transversal learning community competences, and this competence gap should be seriously addressed along the learning community activities.



Public sector management and staff, as well as private players, should engage in reflections on the new world order, and especially how local and global processes are now closely linked together, producing many threats, but also offering hitherto unseen opportunities at local community level.

Such training and inspiration activities are not taken seriously in most emerging learning communities, and this might in fact limit the actions and perspectives and impact of the learning communities tremendously.

The training of learning community guides would be a strong resource for organizing such training and inspiration activities, integrated into the normal working lives of the employers and employees in question.

#### Amateurism and volunteering



Volunteering works well in the sub-structures of learning communities, such as community centres and youth clubs, and also in the initial phases of the emerging

learning community. Furthermore volunteering is a very important resource for learning communities in general, especially taking into account the upcoming demographic changes.

However, amateurism and volunteering does not work when establish sustainable infrastructures of collaboration in learning communities. It takes professionals to organize volunteering, so to speak. Without professional community workers the full roll-out of learning community potentials will not happen. The key partners in learning partnerships, including public authorities, should dedicate themselves to train staff to carry out important learning community tasks, at strategic as well as practical levels. A learning community will not, for example, be able to exploit European resources and European funding, if qualified staff is not available.



In dedicated learning communities the key partners will agree to train certain staff members to carry out learning communities tasks both at strategic and practical levels. This does not mean that staff members need to work full time on learning community tasks. These tasks might very well be integrated in upcoming job profiles, including entrepreneurship, European cooperation and innovation. Still it is recommendable to take into consideration the training of specific learning community staff in the major partnering organisations, including especially the local government. Claiming that the communities cannot afford such training and such staff members is a contradiction in terms, as the aim of the learning community resources precisely is to attract, create and exploit relevant resources.

#### Learning community cultures



One of the most important long-term challenges is often forgotten, namely the creation of learning community cultures. The real impact and sustainability of learning community initiatives is very much linked to the visibility and presence of the learning community in everyday life and among all kinds of citizens. In one of the Xploit learning communities, for example, the partnership decided to be visible in the local supermarkets. Such visibility and the creation of learning community cultures are often regarded inefficient or simply not necessary. The short-term pay-off is not clear from such activities, and therefore they are often given low if any priority.



This problem should be addressed openly in the community debates and forums aiming to promote a more strategic approach to learning community cultures. Often few resources are available for such activities, and once again this would change if a number of staff members in the major stakeholder organisations, including public authorities, would appoint specially trained staff to carry out learning community activities, including the creation of learning community cultures.

#### Traditional mentality



No doubt the worst threat to emerging learning communities does not come from economic crisis or set-backs, but from traditional mentalities penetrating potential major stakeholder organisations. Mentality changes take time, often a long time, and emerging learning communities should address this at a very early stage. Statements such as: this is not my obligation, I am not trained for that, I don't have the time, it doesn't matter anyway, it's always the same, I cannot work with these people, etc., are testimonies of the traditional mentalities. It takes a long time and a lot of dedicated work to change this, but it is extremely important to any emerging learning community.



It is not easy to address the problems of traditional mentalities. In most communities such mentalities have been built up through decades and centuries and in some cases the social realities justify and support such mentalities.

Training measures are not always a useful answer, as mentality is too deeply rooted to be changed through training measures.

This is a field calling for much creativity for dedicated learning community players!

One of the most creative and sustainable directions is to grant staff members the freedom to co-create elements in the learning communities and experience the satisfaction of this freedom, thus offering them a sense of dedicated and responsibility, but also personal benefits.

### Political changes



Experience shows that political changes in the local government can be a serious threat to learning community structures, even to well-established learning communities and partnerships. The more dependent the learning community partnerships are on the local authorities the more dramatic the changes.

Political changes can affect funding, mentality, interest, dedication and values within a few weeks. Best case, the learning community will experience set-backs, worst case years of community work will be lost.

The biggest impact of political changes occurs in cases where the political stakeholders have not been able to play different roles in governmental and community contexts.



Independent learning community infrastructures are the only answer to this threat. Sound community structures and collaboration should build on the capacity of the local government to partner up with other stakeholders in the community activities not importing the political agendas in the partnerships.

Lessons learned are that the learning community partnerships and infrastructures should be as independent of the local government as possible. If this is done successfully, it will at the same time contribute to the general sustainability of community initiatives.

It is very important to establish open discussions on the independency of the community partnerships from the early phases of a learning community to avoid misunderstandings in case of political crisis or elections. Not all local governments can be expected to accept and support such agreements. Many local governments apply the principle of: if we pay, we must control.

### The quality of the partnerships



It is not easy to form learning partnerships in order to join forces towards a learning community. A lot of mentality work is often needed to include the different sectors, as community partnerships are not traditionally a priority in organisations.

Often this causes biases and imbalances in the initial partnerships, which often include only educational and social organisations, and occasionally also a representative from the local administration. Such partnerships can be efficient in the initial phases, but they will soon lose momentum.

The absence of many private and cultural stakeholders in learning partnerships represents a considerable weakness, limiting the scope and perspectives of these partnerships.



The emerging learning partnership should discuss from the beginning how to include the different sectors in re-thinking what community means. The partnership

must learn how to explain the mission and how the different sector players will benefit from the partnering.

Any kind of charity approach should be avoided: private organisations, such as enterprises, banks and insurance companies, should join on the basis of mutual benefits, not based on social charity.

It can be highly recommended to work for a series of sessions in which the different sectors explain their interests in learning communities, and through which it might be possible to establish a common language.

### Strategic dedication



A special obstacle can be caused by potential stakeholders' lack of strategic dedication. This means that the stakeholders take an interest in forming the learning partnerships and addressing important needs in the community, but are not able to see the strategic perspectives in building sustainable community infrastructures.

Most stakeholders can be expected to act like this: they are focused and dedicated as to concrete community initiatives, and they offer useful resources, but they are not interested in or able to see the values of new infrastructures relatively independent on to concrete community initiatives. Such stakeholders might lose interest, if the concrete community initiatives are not well within their organisational agenda.



There is no simple solution to such problems, except integrating open debates on the wider benefits of strategic partnerships and infrastructures in the concrete community activities. Once again, it is important to address such topics openly from the early stages of the new collaborative structures.

### Real inclusion - real impact



From time to time we see partnerships, even cross-sector partnerships, working well and slowly making their way towards becoming a learning community. However, at the same time it seems that the infrastructures and new collaborations have little real impact: nothing seems to change, and citizens do not really seem to be included, albeit that they participate in some activities.

Such scenarios are rather typical for some communities: the partnerships and initiatives seem to function well and meet community needs, yet real impact and real inclusion are missing.



Such scenarios indicate that organisations or partnerships are acting on behalf of the citizens, instead of involving them. Needs are addressed, activities are relevant and the collaboration seems smooth and fluent. What is missing here is a deeper understanding of learning communities: participation is not involvement, and activities do not automatically mean impact.

In these cases, critical input is needed in the community: the values and principles of the learning community should be openly debated, with the aim of reconsidering alibi-like practices, or excuses, in the community and of working for more real inclusion and real impact.

### Traditional cake mentality



Almost all sectors are now more or less competitive or acting competitively, as the public sector increasingly employs market-based models from the private sector.

Like it or not, this change causes many potential stakeholders to protect their activities, even social and educational institutions. The traditional and outdated 'cake' mentality in the private sector is thus imported into non-private sectors such as educational and social institutions.

The traditional cake mentality goes like this: there is only a fixed and limited marked and income opportunity (the cake), and therefore it is our mission to get as big a piece as possible. Obviously, such mentalities are not useful to learning communities, but we increasingly see non-private institutions behave like this, even if the globalized economy is pretty much the exact opposite of the cake model.



The cake mentality can be deeply rooted in many also non-private organisations. This means that sharing, openness and collaboration is not on the agenda, whereas self-protection and primitive competition is definitely on the agenda. Such mentalities can be very difficult to change, and the only option is open and constructive debates on the dynamics of the globalized economy's eco-structures: yes, the Chinese are "stealing" our factories, but at the same time China produces many millions of new consumers demanding quality products and services from your European community!

#### Youth



In some communities it seems difficult to include young people in the learning community initiatives, and especially the non-academic and disengaged groups of young people. The involved stakeholders are not able to change this, and the learning community progresses without significant involvement of the new generations.



A learning community trying to involve groups of young people is a problematic scenario: it is problematic to establish learning community structures and then try to involve young people. One of the basic criteria for learning communities is inclusion, and this means that young people and their interests should be a major concern from the very first steps of any new initiative. In fact, we might even insist that groups of young people should be key players in the establishment of learning community initiatives.

Therefore learning communities that are unable to involve and attract different groups of youth should openly re-think their approaches, and reflect on the quality of their initiatives and how to reorganize their partnerships.

It is important to involve youth groups directly in community initiatives, rather than accepting that youth is merely represented by, for instance, educators or social partners.

#### Network sustainability



Often we see network partners lose interest after some time and leave the learning community initiatives. This might be caused by internal difficulties or changed agenda, but is also might be cause by a static partnership.

Often learning partnerships become part of the everyday routines, once the first exciting steps have been taken. Such partnerships lose their dynamics and are not able to sustain the motivation of the partners.



It is crucial to new learning communities' structures to maintain a dynamic collaboration and feed innovation and new missions into the partnerships. However, this is not an easy task, as new feeds must be interesting, relevant and attractive.

Especially when the networks are based on volunteering, the energy slowly fades away, leaving only the everyday routines.

Therefore such networks and learning partnerships need dedicated and qualified people, perhaps even in the form of learning community guides, responsible for the constant feeding-in of new community initiatives to sustain the dynamics and motivation of the partners.

Without such dynamic feeds, a partnership might slowly degenerate into a traditional collaboration.

### Physical spaces



Some learning community initiatives overestimate the potentials of digital networks and underestimate the importance of physical spaces in the community, where people meet and carry out different forms of community activities.

Relying on digital spaces alone is at one hand naïve, and on the other it might prove more excluding than including for many citizens.



Balancing digital and physical spaces is one of the very interesting challenges of learning communities. Much can be accomplished if creative interactions between these spaces are established and further developed.

To this end, however, it is important, in the early stages of new community networks, to discuss what physical spaces could be made available for community activities, to function as living hubs for emerging learning communities.

Obviously, both local authorities and powerful private organisations play a crucial role in providing such physical spaces.

### Personalization



Very often only a few people from key stakeholders are involved in the learning community initiatives and even in the case where learning community guides are employed excessive personalization can pose a serious threat to the sustainability of the developed partnerships and initiatives.

The problem is that in cases where very few persons are deeply involved in the activities these persons learn a lot and develop valuable and often irreplaceable competences, networks and resources.

Should the community lose such persons it would represent a considerable set-back.



This is a dilemma. On one hand, we promote the training and employment of professionals when the initiatives have reached a certain level, and we appreciate the constant learning of these people, but on the other hand, excessive personalization represents a serious threat to the sustainability of initiatives.

The solution is obviously not to avoid the involvement of professionals, nor is it to stop them from learning, but rather, it is to ensure that as many people as possible from different organisations are either fully or partially involved in the majority of activities, and that these teams also develop the same new competences.

Furthermore, the professionals in question should share and make transparent their competence development as much as possible.

### Financial dead-ends



The financing of learning community structures and partnerships is always a threat to learning communities. Often the first steps are taken with volunteer resources from participating organisations, and sometimes this model is continued

into later stages. This can cause serious problems for the new infrastructures, as they are then totally dependent on the goodwill of individuals and institutions. Should these persons and institutions withdraw, the network will collapse.



There are two basic principles governing the financing of community networks: the first is that without financing the network will ultimately stop working, the second is that the networks should not depend on public funding from the local budgets.

This leaves, however, a number of creative funding opportunities, of which we will mention the most typical:

- ~ The participating organisations practice co-funding
- ~ The network of partners might decide to form a private organisation, legally allowed to make financial transactions
- ~ The network establishes private sponsorships from powerful local or regional companies, banks or insurance companies, or even from strong sport clubs or cultural institutions
- ~ The network offer services to the community and is paid accordingly
- ~ The network applies for national or European funding to support its first steps

#### Populist rhetoric



One of the general threats to learning communities is the threat of populist rhetoric. Globalization offers many opportunities, but also many problems: popular trends are disseminated rapidly across all continents, and some policy-makers are tempted to empower political agendas with new and trendy community slogans, such as learning city, healthy city, smart city and so forth.

Such rhetorical inflations can endanger the trust of citizens and organisations in the mission of a learning community and make it very difficult to include important organisations and groups of citizens.



Firstly, such scenarios once again confirm that learning community infrastructures should be independent of the local political agenda. Secondly, such scenarios also call for critical debate in the community, and a community mentality opposed to cheap rhetoric. In cases like this, critical voices and strong discussion forums are invaluable to the sustainability and credibility of learning communities.

[www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu)



## PERSPECTIVES FOR EUROPE 2020

### What are the future plans for Xploit?

The European Commission is constantly increasing the funding available for innovation in education, research, health and different forms of partnerships.

At the same time, other forms of innovation are increasingly connected to the wider community: user-driven innovation, target group inclusion, cross-sector partnering, bringing education closer to the world of work, entrepreneurship, etc.

These big trends call for more targeted exploitation and much more sustainable community infrastructures.

They call for communities empowered to identify, capture and implement available innovations and resources, and to readily participate in the creation of further innovations and resources.

Europe 2020 should take important steps towards creating and supporting such communities, cities and regions, and Xploit would like to contribute to such initiatives.

Not taking a project like Xploit further would be contradicting everything we have learnt.

The problem is not if, but how, the Xploit project should be taken further - and how we can join in with movements and initiatives having a similar mission.

The Xploit conference in Catalonia Spain in spring 2013 was a milestone in the creation of such a future network.

### How can we build sustainable learning communities and learning community networks within Europe 2020?

How can we promote and support the establishment of such learning communities across Europe in the 2014-20 program period? How can we create a European network or networks to support communities wishing to participate?

One of the ideas of Xploit and in this paper is that a community should link directly to Europe: not being represented by the region or by the national government, but link directly to other European communities and to the Commission's policy and funding programs.

Such emerging learning communities should grow within different forms of transnational European networks, linking directly communities from different parts of Europe to each other and promoting the direct involvement of citizens.

The question is, though: is this a European mission, or a national one?

For Xploit it is definitely a European mission, as such communities are carrying out European policies and should be regarded "European communities".

Here we have a parallel to the infrastructures of learning communities:

- ⇒ At the learning community level organisations and groups of citizens are collaborating directly and forming a parallel infrastructure independent of the local government
- ⇒ At European level such learning communities are collaborating directly and forming parallel infrastructures independent of the national governments

Such a parallel infrastructure is not replacing the infrastructures of national, regional or local governments, but is creating network infrastructures of direct

involvement of citizens and organisations going beyond the outdated systems of representative democracy.

Such networks or sub-networks of direct involvement can be expected to be powerful hubs for exploitation of European educational and social innovation, as these networks are prepared to identify, capture and implement European innovation resources.

Such networks are already being created across Europe and in different shapes and forms - from twinning cities to city networks focused on for instance ecology or art. However, only few communities are involved in such initiatives and the creation of learning communities and networks is not systematically supported.

#### **Recommendations for European policy**

Creating learning communities and their European networks is a European mission, not a national one.

Such communities and cities should link directly to Europe.

However, learning communities and their European networks are not supported systematically by the European Commission, and in Europe 2020 this discourse is absent.

Nevertheless a considerable number of European policies, strategies and practices are pointing towards such a systematic support and the creation of a European agenda for learning communities in Europe:

- ⇒ The European exploitation and valorisation strategies
- ⇒ The promotion of communities of innovation
- ⇒ Bringing education closer to the world of work
- ⇒ The promotion of sustainable infrastructures for the take-up of innovation
- ⇒ Promoting entrepreneurial mentality in all sectors
- ⇒ Creating Knowledge Partnerships
- ⇒ Promoting active citizenship, direct involvement and inclusion
- ⇒ Promoting transnational cross-sector partnerships and networks

Just to mention a few.

*Such approaches could converge into a European transversal agenda for learning communities and the first pilot steps could be taken in the 2014-20 program period, paving the way for more systematic and powerful support measures in the 2020-? program period.*

## The 10 policy recommendations for the European Commission

**ESTABLISH A EUROPEAN AGENDA 2014-20 FOR LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND THEIR EUROPEAN NETWORKS**

**ESTABLISH INITIAL PILOT SUPPORT MEASURES 2014-20 FOR SUCH COMMUNITIES AND THEIR EUROPEAN NETWORKS**

**MAINTAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF INCLUDE THIRD COUNTRY COMMUNITIES IN THE EUROPEAN INITIATIVES**

**WIDEN THE SCOPE OF THE EUROPEAN INITIATIVES' EXPLOITATION MEASURES TO INCLUDE LEARNING COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES**

**INTEGRATE LEARNING COMMUNITIES PERSPECTIVES IN EXISTING ACTIONS WHERE APPROPRIATE, SUCH AS ERASMUS FOR ALL, HORIZON 2020, ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP MEASURES AND SIMILAR ACTIONS**

**LAUNCH A EUROPEAN SUPPORT STUDY ON THE WIDER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE**

**LAUNCH A EUROPEAN FUNDING SUPPORT STUDY ON THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT IMPACTS OF LINKING EXPLOITATION TO LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND THEIR EUROPEAN NETWORKS**

**ESTABLISH AN ANNUAL MEETING PLACE FOR EUROPEAN LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

**PROMOTE LEARNING COMMUNITY AND DIRECT INVOLVEMENT MENTALITY AMONG LOCAL POLICY-MAKERS**

**ESTABLISH A KNOWLEDGE HUB IN EUROPE FOR MONITORING, ANALYSING AND INTERACTING WITH LEARNING CITIES AND SIMILAR CONSTRUCTIONS AT GLOBAL LEVEL**

**- IN CONSULTANCY WITH GLOBAL LEARNING CITIES EXPERTS**

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## TOWARDS COMMON CRITERIA FOR LEARNING COMMUNITIES

### Appetizer



*Centro Social Autogestionado*

### **La Tabacalera de Lavapiés**

*latabacalera.net*

How they see quality in community work at La Tabacalera – an old tobacco factory transformed into a strong community center in a Madrid suburb:

[<http://latabacalera.net>]

#### **YES**

Equity

Encouraging the creation of cultural and social wealth

Horizontalism and cooperation

Criticism and transparency

Direct

Review and experimentalism

#### **NO**

External financing and conditioning

Profit

Leadership and individualism

Self- complacency and concealment

Delegation

Conservatism

LOCAL people  
Working  
TOGETHER  
To bring about  
CHANGE



## Introduction

We need common guidelines to set-up, discuss and evaluate what is now across the world called learning communities and learning cities.

Learning communities and cities, their needs and ambitions, are very complicated and very different.

This is why we need a common language, a set of common criteria, allowing us to define, discuss and reflect on what learning communities and cities are really about, and what they are not about.

The fact that learning communities are and should be very different, does not mean that there are no shared values and principles.

In this context *learning community* simply means a small or mid-sized city, a part of a city or a region: a geographical part of a city, a special community of citizens, a sector, a partnership, etc.

Bigger *learning cities* and also regions consist in a number of learning communities linked together at city level. A special interest should be paid to *how* bigger learning cities are linking together learning communities.

This goes, however beyond the ambition of this contribution. This contribution only concerns generic criteria for both learning cities and communities.

In general our approach to what learning cities and communities are in theory is very un-dogmatic, flexible and un-dramatic. Our mission is the common language based on common criteria.

The criteria should never be connected to specific content or topics, such as for example health or energy, but exclusively to how the community functions, operates and collaborate, or in short: to the "learning" capacity building of the city and its citizens.

A learning community can be rich or poor and have many or few resources. It could be a metropolis or a village.

The point is HOW the resources are used, HOW the organizations collaborate, HOW citizens' needs are met at a given resource level - in short, HOW infrastructures are set up and operate to ensure that the community is a *learning* community.

A learning city must therefore be evaluated in relative and not in absolute terms: evaluating the community performance against available and potential resources.

*The criteria below are simply placed in alphabetic order and consist in short statements.*



## BALANCES



The learning community or city does not produce excessive rhetoric around itself. Learning and innovation ambitions are always balanced against the realities of the community, including economic and social realities.

When resources do not allow community missions to be completed, the key stakeholders make dilemmas and balance needs transparent and encourage the citizens and organizations to find alternative solutions.

## CHANGE



Change is regarded as the rule and not the exception in the community and the community works to develop a strong capacity to link changes to opportunities of innovation.

Change and change management, individually and collectively, is being included in all sorts of learning and training activities.

The community and the key stakeholders are concerned to ensure that challenges and problems are turned into meaningful opportunities for change.

## DIVERSITY



The learning community do not encourage one size fits all. The community and the partnerships are aware that different people and organizations need different solutions.

Diversity is therefore regarded a potential resource that should be exploited and unfolded, not an obstacle.

The term diversity covers in the community culture, race, policy as well as different ways of living, working and learning.

## DYNAMICS



The learning community promotes a dynamic atmosphere: things are possible, things can be debated, and initiatives can be taken at all levels of the community.

The key stakeholders openly acknowledge that resources are always limited and that not everything is possible, but demonstrate the dynamics of the community by constantly encouraging and supporting initiatives and innovation.

The community supports a dynamic climate by encouraging strong cross-sector initiatives and

partnerships, allowing the encounter of learning and policy, business and art, culture and administration.

## INCLUSION



The learning community demonstrates in its practice an awareness of groups of citizens with strong inclusion needs.

Inclusion is designed according to the real needs of the different groups of citizens, taking into account gender, cultural background and learning resources.

Inclusion is not seen as charity, but as a serious and important challenge to the community.

All key sectors and stakeholders in the community demonstrate responsibility and accountability with regard to inclusion strategies and actions.

Inclusion actions are taken in open collaboration with the citizens to be included.

## INFRASTRUCTURES



Core infrastructures of collaboration are in place in the community to identify the learning and employment needs of all groups of citizens.

The infrastructures are constantly being maintained and further developed.

The infrastructures of lifelong learning links directly to groups of citizens.

The infrastructures seek to be cross-sectorial, especially bridging between the public, social and private sectors.

The infrastructures are able to identify needs, form partnerships, capture existing resources and raise new resources, and to take concrete action.

The infrastructures highly influence the atmosphere of communication, information and dialogue in the community.

The infrastructures make themselves and their initiatives visible in the community.

## INNOVATION

The learning community regards innovation as an ongoing and integrated activity within all major fields of community activity, from technological innovation to innovative learning spaces and social innovation.



Innovation is regarded one of the most important incubators of cross-sector partnerships.

The community has a strong focus on children's and young people's innovative capacity, and nurtures such capacities from a very early stage of life.

Innovation is not only about the practices of higher education or private enterprise. The community invites all groups of citizens to participate in innovative activities.

The community works to encourage an innovate mentality among all community stakeholders.

## LEARNING



The learning community encourages communities of learning!

The community infrastructures ensure a permanent and systematic approach to the citizens' learning and employment needs.

The infrastructures increase their capacity to identify new learning challenges and to take concrete steps to meet them.

All sorts of learning in the community - from excellence to first-step-inclusion, from formal to non-formal and informal learning - are seen as valuable and enriching to the community.

The community demonstrates a capacity and will to turn a variety of community activities into learning events.

The key stakeholders work to provide new and interesting spaces for learning.

The community works to provide a variety of learning opportunities linked to the needs of diverse groups of citizens.

Learning is regarded a field of constant change and innovation in the community.

The citizens' learning interests and capacity is regarded the most valuable resource in the community.

## NEEDS



The lifelong learning infrastructures and partnerships are able to identify unmet and emerging learning needs among the citizens and in the organizations.

The needs and the steps taken are seen in a lifelong learning perspective.

Needs are regularly discussed with the citizens who have them.

The infrastructures work to take concrete initiatives to meet learning needs, in collaboration with the citizens who have the needs and the organization who can offer new opportunities.

The community acknowledges that needs can be very different and should be addressed in very different ways.

## OPPORTUNITIES



The community works, based on the resources available, to provide useful and meaningful learning and employment opportunities to as many citizens as possible.

The opportunities offered are mainly designed through dialogues with the relevant citizens and organizations.

The key stakeholders in the community demonstrate an awareness of the fact that their citizens, including talented youth and adults, must have spaces, platforms and frameworks to be able to learn and unfold. The community works to offer a diversity of spaces for learning, both physical and digital.

## OUTREACH



The community and partnerships reach out to citizens and organizations not engaged in lifelong learning.

The community is aware that special measures and initiatives are needed to reach disengaged and disadvantaged citizens and organizations.

The outreach is practiced in an open and inviting way, not in a moralistic way.

## PARTICIPATION



The community seeks to engage as many groups of citizens in lifelong learning, cultural and social activities as possible.

The participation is direct and meaningful.

Participation strategies put a special emphasis on participation of citizens at risk or citizens with special (learning) needs.

Participation is not experienced by the citizens as simulation, but as meaningful activities that can make a difference to themselves and others.

Participation is practiced both in formal and

non-formal contexts.

## PARTNERSHIPS



The community establishes partnerships between organizations from relevant sectors, public authorities and active citizens.

Partnerships are seen as one of the major tools to meet the many lifelong learning and employment challenges.

Partnerships between public and private stakeholders are in particular encouraged and supported in the community.

Partnerships linking directly to the citizens are in particular encouraged and supported in the community.

Non-traditional partnerships offering added value and innovative approaches to the learning community is highly welcomed and celebrated.

Partnerships are governed by the ethics of mutual interests, mutual understanding and mutual benefits.

## PENETRATION



The learning community and its infrastructures acknowledge that the values and principles of the learning community can penetrate the entire community.

The community is aware that not all citizens and organizations need to be active on the learning and employment scene, but that the learning community principles should be visible and practiced in all corners of the community - from the Mayor's office to homes for the elderly.

The community practices the 3-dimensional penetration approach:

Horizontal - the learning activities reaches a high proportion of citizens and organizations.

Vertical - learning activities connect many levels of the community.

Depths - Learning spaces allow citizens to be deeply engaged in different forms of learning.

## POLICY-MAKING



Policy-making takes into account the long-term needs of the citizens.

Policy-making links to active citizens.

Policy-making provides independent and flexible frameworks for citizens' and organizations' initiatives and active

participation.

Policy-making encourages initiatives and innovation.

Policy-making encourages a mentality of sharing, openness and transparency.

Policy-making actively supports the maintenance and further development of collaborative infrastructures, including cross-sectorial.

## REFLECTION



The community and the partnerships know that no learning community will ever be perfect, and they allow and encourage critical reflection on the performance and achievements of the learning community.

The key stakeholders are aware of their special responsibilities as public authorities or large organizations and they therefore pay special attention to open and critical dialogues on their performance.

The community sometimes invites experts or experienced learning cities' resources to engage in critical dialogues.

The community encourages citizens' and professionals' mobility to other cities and countries to deepen their critical reflection.

## SHARING



Although functioning within the framework of the open market, the community and its partnerships practice a mentality of sharing.

The basic approach in the community is that sharing and competing need to be balanced to create a dynamic economy.

The community practices open collaborating with other cities in the country and puts a strong focus on international collaborating.

Local and global sharing is strong values in the community and is promoted both at policy, organizational and citizen level.

The sharing mentality includes organizations' and citizens' physical mobility to other cities, regions and countries.

## TALENT

The community provides interesting and challenging opportunities for talented youth and adults.



Talented youth and adults are encouraged to pursue their talents and unfold them within the community.

The infrastructures and partnerships work to provide incubators for talents and innovative clusters to enable new ideas to reach the market and produce new jobs and enterprises.

Incubating talent is seen in the community as key to the community's future economic and social success.

The community celebrates a variety of different talents, from technology to painting, and not only talent that can be short-term linked to the market.

## TRANSPARENCY



Policy-making, partnerships and collaboration is transparent to the citizens.

The different agendas of the participating organizations are visible to the participating partners and to the citizens.

The general transparency in the community supports coherence, trust and liability.

## VALUE CODES



Certain value codes embraces the learning community, but are also openly debated among stakeholders and citizens, such as gender equality, human rights, respect for nature and fighting prejudice.

The value codes are not moralistic mantras for the community but a set of values debated among people in the community.

The learning community is openly value based, not on certain eternal values, but in the way that the community encourages value discussions and acknowledge values as important elements in the community.

## VISIBILITY



The community makes lifelong learning opportunities and activities visible to the citizens - from kindergarten to the hospital and the shopping center.

The communication is inviting and encouraging, not moralistic.

The visibility focuses to a high degree on the citizens' own storytelling

## HOW CAN XPLOIT AND THE PARTNERS BE OF ASSISTANCE?



### What are your needs and interests?

If you wish to take learning communities initiatives in your community, or prepare such steps within a group of partners, you are welcome to establish a dialogue with the Xploit project and its partners.

In preparation for such a dialogue we invite you to describe your ideas and your community needs and interests briefly:

- ~ A few words about the community
- ~ A few words about special needs, interests and possible resources in your community
- ~ A few words about you, your organisation and possible partners
- ~ A few words about your ideas

Then Xploit resources will guide you through the dialogue.



### What can the project and the partners offer?

Most dialogues start as informal dialogues aiming to find a mutual understanding of the needs, interests and resources of your community.

Then, you or your community might wish to establish a more formal collaboration with the Xploit resources. There are many ways to establish a formal collaboration, and the collaboration should be designed by the Xploit partner involved and the community involved in each special case.



### What kind of services can Xploit and the partners offer?

Let's list the most typical ones:

#### ⇒CONSULTANCY

Xploit and its partners can offer highly qualified consultancy to communities or partnerships wishing to take steps towards a learning community on short-term or long-term basis

#### ⇒DIRECT INVOLVEMENT

Xploit and its partners can offer to be direct involved in the team or network taking steps towards a learning community - or in planning how to prepare such steps

#### ⇒INSPIRATION

Xploit and its partners can offer to organize or participate in a series of workshops in the community aiming to inspire different stakeholders

#### ⇒TRAINING

Xploit and its partners can offer to organize or participate in the training of community teams, public staff or managers aiming to empower them to be able to design, plan and put into action steps towards a learning community

#### ⇒DECISION-MAKERS

Xploit and its partners can offer to establish dialogues with decision-makers in the community to encourage policy support for emerging learning community initiatives

#### ⇒FUNDING

Xploit and its partners can offer guidance and counselling on the funding of learning community initiatives - at local and European levels

#### ⇒PARTNERING

Xploit and its partners can offer your community counselling on future collaboration with other communities in a joint mission



#### How do you get in contact?

You are free to contact any Xploit resource you might wish to dialogue with. If the contacted Xploit resource is not able to offer the services, the resource will guide you towards other Xploit resources.

You are welcome to contact the following Xploit resources:



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Orna Mager

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The funding period is over - but Xploit is still here!



## APPENDIX 1

# THE LEARNING COMMUNITY - IN FLASH

We have been talking about learning cities for over 20 years. Some people link a learning city to things like lifelong learning, health, climate, environment or social innovation - or to democracy and active citizenship...

Much rhetoric can be unfolded in the attempt to define what a learning city is.

We prefer a very pragmatic approach, trying to set up some basic criteria and expectations for a learning city.

At the same time we prefer the word *community*, as it is more flexible and point towards *structures* rather than *content*: learning community structures can be developed and practiced at many different levels, such as a (poor or rich) city, a region, a transnational region, etc. - but also at the level of a part of a city, a partnership or innovative collaboration covering certain themes or challenges.



What's important to us is that a learning community is *a community that learns*.

The learning community is not defined by the amount of lifelong learning activities, but by how the community as a community is learning.

A community with a lot of lifelong learning might be called *a community of learning*, but is not necessarily *a learning community*.

In other words, it is about how a community (a city, a part of a city, a partnership) develops infrastructures of communication and collaboration capacity to *manage needs, change and challenges* important to the community and its organisations and citizens.

This *infrastructural communication and collaboration capacity building* is crucial to the essence of a learning community:

- ⇒ How are initiatives taken?
- ⇒ Who is communicating about emerging needs or opportunities?
- ⇒ To what extent are different sectors collaborating, a college, a bank and a sport club?
- ⇒ How are groups of citizens involved in finding new ways to solve their problems?
- ⇒ How are talent and innovation and creativity welcomed and supported?
- ⇒ What kinds of partnerships are created outside the public authorities?

- ⇒ To what extent can partnerships and groups of citizens act independently?
- ⇒ How is policy created?
- ⇒ How is trust built between the collaborators and between authorities and citizens?
- ⇒ What organisations and groups of citizens are involved in entrepreneurship?
- ⇒ How are the community's inclusion principles and infrastructures working in practice?
- ⇒ How is a community mentality encouraged, developed and sustained?

A learning community is a community that dynamically practices, tests, challenges and critically discusses such infrastructures of communication and collaboration permanently and at a systematic level. This is how the learning community is learning.

A city with a lot of education institutions is not by definition a learning community...  
A city with a strong focus on health is not by definition a learning community...  
A city actively promoting green innovation is not by definition a learning community...  
A city engaging in the rhetoric of learning cities is not by definition a learning community...

A learning community can be expected to address such matters in a serious way, but this is not what *makes it* a learning community.

The Common Criteria tries to unfold expectations linked to this understanding of a learning community - and is prepared to learn from practice and experience.

## XPLOIT AND LEARNING CITIES IN ISRAEL



### Background

The city of Modi'in was declared the first learning city in Israel in 2008.

Prior to this declaration was a period of exposure, research and familiarity with the model as it exists around the world. Through studying articles, research and practical models in diverse cities, the decision to declare Modi'in a learning city, even prior to practical experience with the subject, was a method of advancing awareness of the model as a successful global brand that should be assimilated in local authorities in Israel. Thus such a declaration was accompanied by a media campaign and by many organizations and key persons such as members of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament), government ministries, the academe, the Israeli Union of Local Authorities (IULA), the Ministry of Education, the National Economic Council in the Prime Minister's Office, Adult Education Associations in Israel, members of the media, public figures and the Modi'in Local Authority.

The key perception of a learning city, that recognizes the importance of learning as a main motivating force for future growth, and the stability and success of the residents, was accepted enthusiastically and with the agreement of the decision makers and policy makers in Israel and in Modi'in. In 2011, IULA published a circular from the CEO to all heads of authorities in Israel recommending adopting the model and joining the network of learning cities, with the accompaniment of Dr. Orna Mager, who developed the model in Israel.



### Modi'in and Exploit

"We trace the route, the direction while walking"

The familiarity and the first encounter with Xploit opened for me, for the city of Modi'in, and for Israel a new window of opportunity to learn to set the direction and the path of the "learning city" in Israel. The questions at the outset were many, such as, what is a learning city? What makes a city, a local authority, a learning city? What is its added value? What are the principles and the criteria common to learning cities? What are the dimensions and the parameters for measuring success, or lack of success? What are the dimensions of such association? The output? What are the

directions of activity: Top down or Bottom up? And so on. The meetings with the Exploit partners honed the meaning and added value of the process, the method we are learning and establishing together, while comparing and mutually learning from the different places.

For myself, as the developer of the model in Israel, and in Modi'in as a key pilot project, Xploit affords a significant platform for understanding the nature of the processes, and the possibility of copying and adapting the common principles, that we refined together, to the local Israeli profile.

During the years of shared activity we, in Modi'in, learned to position the process of shared inquiry and investigation common to Life Long Learning (LLL) and its contribution to the community, as a key and significant process in converting the city to a learning city.

The meaningful change that began with my, and our, perception as a local authority was first, "How to think city rather than municipality": how to expand the Municipality's point of view in order to provide the best answer to the needs and lacks of the citizens and the communities in the city.

The global changes and the new challenges of modern society (such as a rise in unemployment, environmental problems, changes in patterns of employment demographic changes, technology, social and economic disparity and so on) demand change in patterns of thought and management in order to adapt the individual, the citizen, and the systems themselves to the global changes.

A city that adopts innovation, creativity, an updated attitude and relevance in order to cope with the challenges of globalization should produce a growth engine from within, by creating identification of the residents with the place, and to strengthen local solidarity as a basis for urban renewal.



On the basis of the Exploit insights, we first led a process of change in the perceptions regarding adult education in Modi'in, which included:

- › A transition from a paradigm of adult education to LLL
- › A transition from the perception of the local authorities as creating and providing services and learning programs to a partnership, cooperating and generating learning in the city together with the residents and pooling processes in the city
- › A transition from the residents' perception of the citizen as a passive consumer of services to an active resident, who takes responsibility and plays an active part in the processes

The learning city works to motivate the processes of active citizenship, serving as a welcoming public space for a diverse population, and mainly serves and best exploits the existing resources in the city, in order to improve the public space and the

network of the services to adapt them to the citizens' needs - this is the principle of sustainability.

This is a leading principle in all the EU projects in general and in the Xploit project in particular .

As the mayor of Cortivia, Brazil, says:

"There is no more noble effort than the attempt to hold onto a shared dream when a city takes upon itself the task to improve the quality of its life, when it respects all those living nearby, when it respects the environment, when it plans for the next generation - then the residents share the responsibility to realize this goal. This common purpose is the only way to hold onto that common dream."

Indeed, we learn how to make the dream a reality.

How to convert the city from a authority that promises to an authority that actually executes its promises, in other words, an authority in which the quality of life of the citizens is based on the responsible use of existing resources, while renewing their abilities, together with striving for development and promotion for all the residents now and in the future.



The main principles we have noted as guiding principles for the learning city are:

- › Positioning the local authority as a geographic entity that harnesses and pools all the resources in all sectors there, in order to promote the personal potential of the individual, the economic development of the region, and the social resilience of the community.
  
- › Adopting a lifelong learning policy by:
  - Locating disparities and taking steps to reduce them
  - Assuring accessibility and availability for the entire population
  - Increasing the number of programs for advancing the learning
  - Converting the institutions to institutions that advance lifelong learning
  - Nurturing local culture, the heritage, and the landscape as environmental and social resources
  - Promoting access to information and knowledge
  - Involving industrial factors and local businesses in urban activity
  - Encouraging and supporting learning initiatives, strengthening the connection between the urban system and industry and local businesses
  - Defining strategy that manifests the lifelong learning perception as a lever for improvement and growth
  - Recruiting interested parties to the subject, and their commitment to promoting the policy through signing a treaty
  - Progress on an annual subject, as a lever for assimilating the new agenda
  - Strengthening the broad connection of the subject through joining the international network
  - Creating an infrastructure for the ongoing involvement of the residents in the subject

- › A flexible planning process that is adapted to the unique attributes of each local authority, while considering the shared principles such as
  - Public Commitment to lifelong learning - the authority must recognize the importance of the process and to reflect its centrality in types of planning, development and management in the authority
  - Generality - the program must consider all aspects of the authority's and the community's activity
  - Involvement of the public and the stakeholders - a process that necessitates transparency, cooperation and active involvement of representatives of the community and of other stakeholders
  - Applicability - motivating the process through consolidating a basket of projects and application mechanisms, and their inclusion in the work plan and in annual budgeting.



## XPLOIT LEARNING COMMUNITY PROFILE TOOL



### INTRODUCTION

This Learning Community Profile is extremely important. It will provide the communities and the project with crucial material, on which the following phases will be built, and at the same time working with this task is the key to the local Xploit organization: *the participating persons and organisations will build up their cooperation through concrete work with high relevance to the community.*

Some cities or regions might have been involved in such a systematic view on the lifelong learning situation in their city or region, others have not.

It is, though, important that all the involved communities follow this guide and the perspectives built in this guide.

Often such analyses mostly consist in statistical data, and such information is not important in the Xploit project. The Xploit project is more concerned with identification and description of lifelong learning resources and potentials, and with descriptions of the nature of different forms of learning needs and interests in the community.

What does the word *community* mean in this context?

It could mean a city, a city county, a region, but it could also mean a part of a city, a suburb, or even for example a migrant community.

It is important to clearly define what kind of community the partners will involve on the Xploit scene. If the partners choose to work with a very large community (like a region or a city county), then the Learning Community Profile might be developed at two levels: a general profile for the community at large, and then a more specific profile for a sub-community in this large community. A part of the Xploit work could, then, focus on this sub-community.

The guide is divided into different sections, inviting the producers to describe different dimensions of the lifelong learning situation in the community.

It is important to see the development of the profile as the key to organize the Xploit team and network in the community: *the development of the profile should be the tool to invite persons and organisations to participate at different levels, of course.*

The local Xploit team should work on an ongoing basis, whereas the local Xploit Network should meet at milestones, perhaps each or every second month, depending on the roles allocated to this network.

The guide is not designed as a questionnaire, as the project is looking for quality, descriptive and analytic material, not unemployment numbers.

Thus the partners are invited to produce free text. The coordinator strongly recommends the partners to deliver quality work, as the profile will be an important element throughout the entire project duration.

In the Time-out reflection phases the project will invite the partners to review and further develop their lifelong learning profiles.

The basic concept in Xploit is the confrontation of two fields:

**The lifelong learning challenges in a community on one hand, and exploiting innovative European learning resources to meet these challenges on the other. This confrontation provides the project with energy in the action phases, and the analysis and synthesis of these activities will lead to the final outcomes.**

Xploit is not about big conferences, but about getting deep into the community's lifelong learning scenarios and work with these scenarios

Therefore it is crucial to develop the community profile in depths, as this will allow the community and the project to better identify what kind of European learning resources might be relevant.

The guide is divided into sections, each of which provides the partners with a group of questions. The guide aims to cover most aspects of the community profile in this way.

The project will be able to use the results to draw up clear lifelong learning needs, interests and visions for each of the communities involved, and furthermore compare the learning resources and needs scenarios at European level.

It is important to make clear that the guide is not only focusing on lifelong learning needs, but also on the interests of the community in different kinds of lifelong learning, and, last but not least, in any kind of vision being promoted at different levels in the community. Perhaps some communities even have an official lifelong learning policy or strategy.

But the guide is also a tool for promoting the Xploit project in the community - and for inviting persons and organisation to participate. It is easier to ask for people's contribution, if the partners can refer to clear tasks, perspectives and benefits.

*So, in principle, people and organisations from the community should be gathered round this guide and build up their collaboration working with the challenges presented by the guide.*



# Learning Community Profile



## Lifelong learning experiences

*What kind of significant lifelong learning activities have been designed and implemented in the community since 2000 - what challenges did they address and who were the target groups?*

text

*Please describe lifelong learning activities of special importance to the Xploit project, and what kind of resources these activities produced in your community*

text

*Please describe to what extent lifelong learning activities have related to European scenarios*

text

*Please describe ongoing or planned major lifelong learning initiatives in the community (aims, target groups, resources involved, European level)*

text

*How would the Xploit team summarize the lifelong learning experience in your community?*

text



## Lifelong learning stakeholders

*What kind of organisations or resources are responsible for / engaged in innovative learning initiatives in the community?*

text

*Please describe potential or emerging power centres for innovative lifelong learning in the community*

text

*What organisations have a strong interest in lifelong learning innovation in your community?*

text

*Please describe resources for lifelong learning of special interest to the Xploit project (organisations, activities, projects)*

text

*In summary: which are the most important lifelong learning stakeholders in your community, and how do the Xploit team intend to collaborate with them?*

text



## Lifelong learning policies, interests and visions

*Please describe major initiatives to create lifelong learning policies in your community*

text

*How would the Xploit team describe the general interest in innovative lifelong learning in your community?*

text

*Has any lifelong learning strategy been formulated for the community?*

text

*Please describe major stakeholders in your community with strong interests in learning innovation*

*Are lifelong learning visions for future initiatives being developed in the community?*

*How would the Xploit team describe the interest in the community in interacting with European scenes and resources? Which resources and initiatives could the Xploit project relate to? Why?*



#### **Social and educational needs**

*Please describe the major social challenges in your community*

*Please describe the major educational challenges in your community*

*Which social and educational needs would the Xploit team consider the most important to the Xploit project?*

*Which social and educational challenges does the Xploit team find most relevant to the capturing of European lifelong learning resources (the team's first ideas...)?*

*Please describe social and educational challenges not in any way (or in a very weak way) met by appropriate initiatives in the community*

*How would the Xploit team summarize the most important social and educational needs in the community? Could they be met by the capturing of European learning resources?*

text



### **Disadvantaged groups of citizens**

*Please describe the most important groups of disadvantaged citizens in your community*

text

*Please identify disadvantaged groups for whom no social or learning initiatives have been taken*

text

*Please describe the diversity of disadvantaged groups (age, gender, cultural background)*

text

*Which of these groups would the Xploit team find most relevant to the Xploit project and the exploitation of European learning resources?*

text

*Would it be possible for the local Xploit team and network to approach the most relevant groups? How? Through which organisations?*

text

*Please describe groups of citizens not included in the group of disadvantaged citizens, but who nevertheless should be approached with innovative initiatives (referring to possible community innovation policies)*

text

*Please describe to what extent the (planned or established) local Xploit Network could give access to the groups identified as the most important/relevant?*

text



### **Social-economic situation**

*Please briefly summarize the community's socio-economic situation and major challenges*

text

*Can closing sectors and labour markets be identified? How does this produce or affect groups of disadvantaged citizens?*

text

*Can emerging sectors be identified? What might be the relevance of these sectors for disadvantaged citizens?*

text

*Future forecast: which are the most needed skills and competences in the future in your community? Are initiatives being taken to meet these challenges?*

text

*Are their specific challenges for children, young people, adults or elderly (natives or migrants, men or women) in the future scenarios of your community?*

text

*How would the Xploit team describe the initiative profile of the authorities in relation to these future challenges?*

text

*Please summarize in a few words the socio-economic situation of your community? What will the Xploit team recommend to focus on during the project?*

text

*Please describe to what extent the (planned or established) local Xploit Network "covers" the identified present and future scenarios*

text



Summary: Community SWOT

*Please summarize the community strengths*

text

*Please summarize the community weaknesses*

text

*Please summarize the community opportunities*

text

*Please summarize the community threats*

text



## LEARNING COMMUNITY GUIDES



### WHY LIFELONG LEARNING GUIDES

We all know from experience that if a new initiative, a new structure or a new dimension is not backed-up by the proper resources, little will happen.

Both at institutional and community level it is a fact of life, and especially a fact of European life, that concrete persons must be appointed to maintain and further develop initiatives.

This is even truer when it comes about complicated processes as addressed in Xploit, in which many people and organisations are expected to participate. Even if large institutions, authorities and qualified people are involved, it does not mean that anything will happen in the community reality.

When a community aims to become a learning community and work systematically with lifelong learning, many people can be expected to be involved, also people with European, project or educational competences. But none of these individuals are actually employed to carry out learning community tasks. They are simply involved, collaborating with other community resources.

*What is needed is a community resources directly appointed to and responsible for carrying out the many different tasks related to learning communities.*

Such a resource is not only needed in Xploit, but also in the learning communities to be.

Appointing and training lifelong learning guides is the most sustainable and efficient way of ensuring that the communities progress, reach their aims and uphold continuity in the work.



### WHAT IS A LEARNING COMMUNITY GUIDE

A learning community guide is a professional in the community who links a number of different structures together, not linked together automatically, to support the systematic awareness of, focus on and development of lifelong learning in a community striving to be a learning community.

This person, or these persons, link together policy and practice, European lifelong learning initiatives and local institutions, different kinds of organisations in the community and available resources. Thus this person is a qualified networker and person who knows lifelong learning and the needs of the citizens.

Besides being a networker, this person coordinates lifelong learning initiatives and activities, initiates new and relevant projects and brings together the resources needed, including local, national and European funding.

In the Xploit context this person links together learning needs in the community and available European lifelong learning resources, and she is in the position to bring together the needed groups of collaborators to support and carry out the identified projects and activities.

Let us list some of the most important tasks for a learning community guide:

- Networking between the policy level and institutions and groups of citizens working with lifelong learning
- Monitoring European lifelong learning policies and funding opportunities
- Identifying strong European lifelong learning resources, based on community needs and interests
- Facilitating community resources and stakeholders working with lifelong learning
- Identifying special needs among citizens in the community and making this knowledge available to the authorities and the educational stakeholders
- Building small networks of people with special skills useful to lifelong learning, like media people, people with cultural or language skills, people with empowerment skills
- Exchanging knowledge and experience with other lifelong learning “guides” in other communities, domestic and European



#### WHO MIGHT BE A LEARNING COMMUNITY GUIDE

Actually a community should be able to afford a full time lifelong learning guide, but in many cases the guide would be an employee in the city administration, in an educational institution or in an NGO.

The person could be contracted part time for carrying out the guide tasks.

A community with lower level ambitions might contract a person for half time work, while a more ambitious community might contract one or even two full time guides.

The employment might be financed by the local government or by a consortium of organisations, all benefitting from the many new lifelong learning activities and European funding.

In fact, the key role of the guide(s) could soon lead to a situation in which this guide or these guides would produce much more value for the community that represented by their own salaries.

Learning community guides should therefore be considered sound investments, both from an economic and social point of view.

*It is, of course, very important that the learning community guide is formally and legally contracted to carry out learning community guidance in the community.*

Of course many different people are involved in becoming a learning community, but it is not the primary concern of these people to carry out such tasks, it is a side-line occupation for them. They have lots of other tasks they need to attend to.



### WHAT COMPETENCES DOES THE GUIDE NEED

A person who would like to become a learning community guide in the community should possess some basic qualifications that cannot be developed through different kinds of guide training.

These requirements will certainly limit the number of people who might be considered for such a task.

Learning communities are different, and actually they should be, as people's needs are different, and lifelong learning is also different. Therefore the tasks and roles of lifelong learning guides will also be different, as will their requested competence profile.

Nevertheless it is possible to list a number of qualifications that such a person will need to possess to manage this work and to for instance be able to participate in the guide training:

- A mature person with some life experience
- Strong values allowing the person to work with all kinds of people and their needs
- Networking skills and enjoying networking
- Strong general language competences, including English
- Experienced in using modern communication technology
- Knowledge about and a strong interest in learning about lifelong learning in general, including the European policies and initiatives
- Ability to communicate with and collaborate with all levels in the community
- A strong entrepreneurship spirit for taking new initiatives
- A strong interest in being a lifelong learner herself

These skills could be considered *entry skills* for entering training or development processes leading to the requested guide competences. In other words:

Entre skills + training or development = learning community guide competence profile.

The training or development might for instance be represented by the Xploit training offer, but can also be obtained elsewhere, of course.



### HOW WILL THE GUIDES BE TRAINED

We expect to train and inspire 1 or 2 people from each of the community partners, and the other communities are also invited to send a person to join the training events.

The final number of participants is therefore expected to be between 10 and 20.

The training and inspiration will be based on the above described entry profile. For example it will not be realistic to give participants ICT competences during the training days.

The overall aim of the training activities is:

**To empower the participants to guide the community towards a systematic approach to lifelong learning and help the community become a learning community**

The guide training approach is linked to a two-step training model, not only aiming to develop competences among the guides, but also to produce useful material for the communities and for further training initiatives.

Keywords for the first-step training

- Only for local guides
- Small preliminary material delivered by the provider
- A lot of focus on empowering the guides to work in the community
- Guides participate in producing more material for the next training step, based on discussions of their needs
- Strong focus on establishing a good guide teamwork among the guides

Keywords for the second-step training

- For local guides and specially invited guides from other communities
- A large material available, being planned and produced in the first step training
- Strong focus on contributions to the community practice

The didactic principles in the training activities could be outlined like this:

- The participants will prepare themselves before the course, guided by the provider; background papers should be read before the course, not in the course
- The trainers will act as guides to empower the participants to act independently and in teams: the training guide will be to the participants what the community guide will be to the community
- The participants will be *producing* knowledge, not passively *receiving* knowledge
- The participants will work in small teams to allow the further qualification of their team skills
- The training activities will produce concrete results to the communities, not just offer discussions
- The participants will be challenged by the training guides all along the process

Now, what will be the content of the training and inspiration? What themes and topics will the training days work with?

It is important to understand that the thematic focus of the training will be a combination, a linking together, of two elements: 1) the needs and interests of the participants being important to the activities and to the adjustment of the topics, 2) the formal responsibility of the professional guide role to ensure a certain level of understanding and orientation.

In the weeks prior to the actual training event, the provider will invite the guides to a brief online dialogue on needs and interests. This will help the provider plan the final line of topics and activities.

However it is indeed possible to list a number of topics that the guides need to work with during the training. In the modern competence language of Europe, we are not interested in listing the number and names of the papers to read, but interested in the *learning outcomes*:



What must the guides be able to do as a result of this training?

So, what must the participants be able to do as a result of the training?

*They must be able to*

- Act independently in the community, take new and relevant initiatives and help provide the need framework for the initiatives
- Identify learning needs among groups of citizens, with a strong focus on disadvantaged citizens, and formulate these needs in the community, as well as support actions to meet these needs
- Help implementing the community's lifelong learning policies and further develop these
- Contact relevant organisations, stakeholders and individuals to help build collaboration around the identified needs and initiatives
- Support learning practitioners in providing relevant lifelong learning opportunities for people in need of basic and further skills
- Analyse how different kinds of initiatives can be financed through local funding, consortium funding, national or European funding
- Help the key players in the community to further develop the community into a learning community or city
- Build a relevant and useful European contact net of learning communities and help the local community in exploiting such a network
- Help the community and the key players in lifelong learning to identify and exploit useful European learning resources
- Monitor and analyse the development of the European lifelong learning policies and make this knowledge useful to the community
- Help community players to develop new initiatives and projects and provide guidance on project development and project management
- Use the acquired knowledge and experience to peer train other colleagues in the community

These topics are valid no matter if the guide is full time employed or only works with these tasks one or two days a week. The different contracting levels will, of course, determine the extent to which the guide can provide results to the community.

*It is, however, of the utmost importance to understand that the learning community guide is not expected to carry out all these tasks herself, but expected to guide the community towards carrying out these activities and towards addressing the needs in question.*

*Example:* the guide is not expected to be a player in the empowerment of elderly to use ICT, but the guide is expected to guide the players towards useful knowledge about, how this could be done, and to discuss the overall framing of this activity with the people involved.



## LEARNING COMMUNITY GUIDES - TRAINING

### INTRODUCTION



The community guides can be defined in many ways: a special resource, a specific job, a mosaic of competences acquired by people working in the public administration, etc.

*The most important is that that the community has at its disposal human resources directly working with the community's lifelong learning needs and how to meet these needs.*

This work is quite demanding, and people engaged in this work are expected to develop such competences throughout many years, as many of the work tasks are very much related to experience and networking skills, which cannot be acquired in a short period of time.

The overall aim of the guide training is:

To empower the participants to be able to guide the community towards a systematic approach to lifelong learning and help the community become a learning community

### WHAT IS A LIFELONG LEARNING GUIDE

- Networking between the policy level and institutions and groups of citizens working with lifelong learning
- Monitoring European lifelong learning policies and funding opportunities
- Identifying strong European lifelong learning resources, based on community needs and interests
- Facilitating community resources and stakeholders working with lifelong learning
- Identifying special needs among citizens in the community and making this knowledge available to the authorities and the educational stakeholders
- Building small networks of people with special skills useful to lifelong learning, like media people, people with cultural or language skills, people with empowerment skills
- Exchanging knowledge and experience with other lifelong learning "guides" in other communities, domestic and European

## WHAT COULD BE THE GUIDE PROFILE

- A mature person with some life experience
- Strong values allowing the person to work with all kinds of people and their needs
- Networking skills and enjoying networking
- Strong general language competences, including English
- Experienced in using modern communication technology
- Knowledge about and a strong interest in learning about lifelong learning in general, including the European policies and initiatives
- Ability to communicate with and collaborate with all levels in the community
- A strong entrepreneurship spirit for taking new initiatives
- A strong interest in being a lifelong learner herself

## TRAINING PRINCIPLES

- The participants will prepare themselves before the course, guided by the coordinator; background papers should be read before the course, not in the course
- The trainers will act as guides to empower the participants to act independently and in teams: the training guide will be to the participants what the community guide will be to the community
- The participants will be *producing* knowledge, not passively *receiving* knowledge
- The participants will work in small teams to allow the further qualification of their team skills
- The training activities will produce concrete results to the project, not just offer discussions
- The participants will be challenged by the training guides all along the process

## GUIDE LONG-TERM OUTCOME COMPETENCES

- Act independently in the community, take new and relevant initiatives and help provide the needed framework for the initiatives
- Identify learning needs among groups of citizens, with a strong focus on disadvantaged citizens, and formulate these needs in the community, as well as support actions to meet these needs
- Help implementing the community's lifelong learning policies and further develop these
- Contact relevant organisations, stakeholders and individuals to help build collaboration around the identified needs and initiatives
- Support learning practitioners in providing relevant lifelong learning opportunities for people in need of basic and further skills
- Analyse how different kinds of initiatives can be financed through local funding, consortium funding, national or European funding
- Help the key players in the community to further develop the community into a learning community or city
- Build a relevant and useful European contact net of learning communities and help the local community in exploiting such a network
- Help the community and the key players in lifelong learning identify and exploit useful European learning resources
- Monitor and analyse the development of the European lifelong learning policies and make this knowledge useful to the community
- Help community players to develop new initiatives and projects and provide guidance on project development and project management
- Use the acquired knowledge and experience to peer train other colleagues in the community



The group is expected to count around 15 participants, including possible additional local colleagues, from very different contexts across Europe.

The training will include a lot of practical work and a lot of independent work through which the participants can start developing the competences needed.

The training days must be prepared carefully by simple but important online dialogues. The training days will build on and depend on such preparations.

The training will be based on problem based and exploratory principles: the participants learn by being invited to define, elaborate on and produce solutions to challenges in their own communities.

Thus the training will avoid the traditional deductive method: first we learn what to do and then we go do it...

The training will be based on practical community challenges, and will combine theory and practice flexibly throughout the work days.

The training must also be taking into consideration that these days are a first step in a long process: the training days will be followed up along the community practice, and a step-two training will be offered later on, also inviting external participants.

[Preparatory scenario: the participants have worked on community profiles and the questions and answers in these profiles, as well as key lifelong learning challenges and texts before the training; participants have introduced themselves online]

Morning sessions: 09.00-13.00

Afternoon sessions: 14.00-17.00

Additional sessions: Special requests for dialogues with the training mentors in the evening



## WORK PROGRAM

### Day 1 (full day)

#### *Morning sessions*

- Introduction
- Participants are asked, individually or in country teams, to identify the 3 most important challenges to education and training among disadvantaged citizens in their community from 2010 to 2020
- The participants discuss the results in plenum
- The training group identifies the challenges common to most communities and discusses the reasons and background to these challenges
- The participants are invited to explain how the community has met these challenges, and to join an evaluation of the main community initiatives

### *Afternoon sessions*

Input from training mentors 1:

- How does the European Commission approach the learning challenges for disadvantaged citizens? What policies, what visions? What programs and funding?

Discussion

Input from training mentors 2:

- How can we find and use European learning resources to meet our needs?

Search methods, network methods, community methods

- "Go search relevant resources to meet the most important challenge identified during the morning sessions"

### *Additional sessions*

Special requests for dialogues with the training mentors in the evening - needs, interests...?



## Day 2 (full day)

### *Morning sessions*

- Participants present the resources identified

Critical discussion on search methods and identified resources

Input from training mentors 3:

- How can European learning resources be used in the community?

Introduction to different exploitation methods

- Joint discussion on identifying the main obstacles to use European learning resources in the community

- The discussion produces a list of obstacles to lifelong learning in the communities

Open questions on: how are these obstacles overcome? How can we work with them?

### *Afternoon sessions*

Theme: practical work in the community

- The participants explain how they will approach the community, when trying to implement useful learning resources for disadvantaged groups of citizens

Discussion: what kind of networking methods can the guides apply?

Input from training mentors 4:

- Inspiration: how can the communities create their own resources to meet lifelong learning challenges?

- How will the group of lifelong learning guides work in the Xploit project?

- Preparing next day's productions

### *Additional sessions*

Special requests for dialogues with the training mentors in the evening - needs, interests...?

## Day 3 (½ day)

### *Morning session*

- Producing material for the project, the communities and the second step guide training

Participants produce small materials based on the discussions during the work days. The material will be integrated in the project website.

The themes of the material will be discussed with the participants, but examples of small production might be:

- What are the most important challenges to lifelong learning in the communities? Why?
- In what ways are the communities addressing these challenges? Critical reflections?
- Do the European policies and resources address these challenges?
- How can the communities exploit relevant European resources?
- What are the roles of lifelong learning guides in the community?
- What are the obstacles to exploiting European learning resources in the communities? How can they be overcome? What can local networking do?
- What are the most important training needs of lifelong learning guides?

The participants will produce this material individually, in small teams or in country groups.

The material could be text documents, text interviews, text + photo montages, video interviews, or other creative forms of presentation.

The participants will start the productions during the morning sessions. Some might be finalized on location, while others might be finalized after the training days.

*PS! Part of the training period might be done as split sessions, as the discussions might reveal different interests and needs among the participants.*

*It is, though, expected that the preparatory dialogues will make such diverging interests visible.*

## TRAINING MATERIAL



As the guides are going to act in both the realities of the community and the European programmes, it is important that we work with live material. This means that the most important material is knowledge about the communities (the Community Profiles), the knowledge and experience of the participants, and the papers on lifelong learning and accompanying programmes, as well as the European quality and qualifications instruments, from the Commission.

Thus the training days will work with 3 different forms of material:

1. The training material provided by the training mentors and introduced during the preparatory phase
2. Material established during the training days, such as material about useful European learning resources
3. Material resulting from the training days and produced by the participants themselves

All this material will be placed in a special guide training section in the website. This section should develop into a small resource centre for lifelong learning guides throughout the project.

The preparatory material will be available on the website during the preparatory dialogues. The coordinator and the training mentors will provide short and easy-to-read version of relevant papers, as the participants should not be burdened with heavy Commission papers.

*NB!*

*The host partner should ensure access to computers, printers, internet and normal software during the training days. Technical assistance should be within reach. Technical shortcomings should not influence the participants' work during the training days.*

*The coordinator will bring photo and video equipment to the training location.*



## PREPARATION

Proper preparation is key to a productive and useful training. Proper preparations can double the outcomes of the training.

Therefore the training mentors will approach the participants around 2 months before the training days.

The participants will be introduced to the agenda and its topics and challenges, but first of all the preparations are about the participants.

They will be invited to:

- present themselves to the group
  - explain their training expectations, needs and interest
  - briefly explain about lifelong learning and learning needs in their communities
- The training mentors will introduce some of the training topics, and from time to time the mentors will challenge the participants with small problems to work on.

The preparations will be carried out by simple mail lists, as most participants are not willing to start learning to use a complicated platform. The dialogues will be realistic and take into consideration the participants working life.

The training mentors might decide to summarize part of the dialogues and use it in the project.



## AND THEN, WHAT...?

Lifelong learning and learning community competences take years to develop.

Therefore it is most crucial to the communities to allow and support a qualified follow-up to the training days.

A discussion of this is included in the training sessions.

The training concept includes at a later stage a second round of lifelong learning guide training. This time the community should invite colleagues from outside the community to participate, along with the community's own guides.

This means that the second training will take the activities to a higher level: from guide activities to facilitating learning communities.

The second training event will be based on two sources:

1. The experience from the community practice with a special focus on the roles of the guides

## 2. The material produced by the participants in the first step training

The material produced will be confronted with the practical experience from the communities, and the invited participants will learn from this, as well as from the already trained guides. The participants from the first training days will therefore add a new role to their profile: they will contribute to the learning of the invited colleagues and learn through the role as “mentors”.

To make this happen, the communities must ensure a continued collaboration and dialogue in the guide group, even if most likely online. The contact between the community guides is crucial to the success of the second training event, but also to the success of the learning community at large.



## TRAINING SCENARIOS FOR LEARNING COMMUNITY GUIDES



### HOW TO USE

These fictive or real scenarios will help the guides to address community challenges in a systematic way.

The guides will go through the entire process of analysing situations, define actions, initiate collaboration, etc.

The scenarios can be used by the guides as written training, or they can be used by teams and groups in workshops.

The scenarios are not aiming to be instructions, but to help lifelong learning guides develop a creative, collaborative and networking mentality.

A possible extension is to ask a guide to create a scenario and to ask another to work it through.

Such scenarios might be fictive, but they might as well address real challenges in the community. This also means that the community can create scenarios to simulate a new project or initiative.

Either way, they will help guides develop systematic approach to acting in the community.

You might also use the guide as a logbook, in which you note what happens along the way. Later on, you might sum up the notes and organize the texts...



TRAINING SCENARIO **1** - migrant women

Many migrant women are isolated in their homes caring for children or elderly. They need to join the community and learn useful things. Some of the husbands are unemployed. But it can be complicated due to cultural traditions.

*How will you approach this challenge?*



TRAINING SCENARIO **2** - elderly

The community has few resources so solve the many social and employment problems. The increasing number of elderly in the community might be a resource for different initiatives.

*How will you approach this challenge?*



TRAINING SCENARIO **3** - young drop-outs

An increasing number of (still younger) young people are not doing well in the school system. They drop-out, learn very little and prefer the life in the streets after school. The school system itself does not seem to be able to address this challenge efficiently.

*How will you approach this challenge?*



TRAINING SCENARIO **4** - unemployed adults

Many of the community's work places are lost, as production industries move to the far east, or to other emerging economies. Many people between 30 and 50 are therefore unemployed. No new sectors or industries in sight...

*How will you approach this challenge?*



TRAINING SCENARIO **5** - young talents

The community doesn't seem to be able to hold on to their young talents. The young talents move to bigger cities to study or work, or even to another country. Valuable resources are lost in this way and it makes the community "imbalanced".

*How will you approach this challenge?*



**You can create your own training or test scenarios...!!**



*first step*



# Initial preparations *identifying*

## *Question*

Is this challenge something you can deal with in your position and in the community? Can you do something about it in a realistic way?

## *Type of activity*

Analysing the type of challenge and community capability

## *Your answer*

text

## *Question*

At what level do you need to act? Personal, institutional, local authority? Who can help you decide this?

## *Type of activity*

Level of intervention

## *Your answer*

text

## *Question*

Are there community resources that might be able to offer knowledge or experience in this field? How will you contact them? How can you use them?

## *Type of activity*

Knowledge and experience available

## *Your answer*

text

<i>Question</i>
Is there anybody in the community working with this problem? Who are they? How will you approach them? For what?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Community practices in the field
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
Which authorities are responsible for this area? Should you have a dialogue with them? And then, what?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Linking to community stakeholders
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
The people with these needs might be isolated from each other; can they be approached as a group? Where might they be approached? Can you approach them at an early stage, or should you wait?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Access to the target group
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
What kinds of organisations might be interested in working with this problem in your community? How will you find out? What can they offer?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Identifying possible collaborative partners
<i>Your answer</i>
text

*Question*

*How will you summarize the first steps you have taken? What is the status? What do you have, what do you miss? What kind of decision will this lead you towards?*

*Type of activity*

Milestone summary and decisions

*Your answer*

text



*second step*



# Community approach *capturing*

*Question*

Now, it is time to act, what do you plan to do? Will you start acting alone, or establish a small team? Who should, if yes, be in that team, and why?

*Type of activity*

Taking action

*Your answer*

text

*Question*

Do you need to clear the plans with the authorities? Why? To what extent are you depending on the authorities? How does that influence your actions?

*Type of activity*

Clearing your actions

*Your answer*

text

*Question*

At what level will you start acting? A small informal team? A strong team with all key players? Will you include authorities?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Action platform
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
Having found your direction, what will you ask people to do? Discussions, planning? Dialogues with the target groups?
<i>Type of activity</i>
First actions
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
At what stage will you analyse the people's needs <i>in depths</i> ? At what stage will you start developing solutions or initiatives?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Developing initiatives
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
How will you find resources for developing your plans and ideas? What kind of resources do you have access to? Local, national, European?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Identifying development resources
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
Do you need to develop the initiatives yourself, or in the community? What if

there are strong resources available that you might use? Local, national or European? How will you find out?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Identifying possible resources
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
If you find useful resources: how can you analyse them and adjust them to your community? Who will help you? The people having developed the resources? Other people in your networks, local, national or European?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Capturing resources
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
If you are <u>not</u> able to find available resources, what will you do? Will you start developing the resources yourself, or will the team, the community? How?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Creating resources
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
How have you addressed the financial aspects? Can you develop your initiatives and implement them with existing financial resources? From where and whom? How will you find out?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Financial analysis
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>

If you need additional financial resources, what will you do? How will you find out what kind of funding to go for - local or regional authority, private funds, European funding? Who can guide you?

*Type of activity*

Identifying funding needs and resources

*Your answer*

text

*Question*

Do you need to develop applications? At what level? Are you able to? Is the team? Do you have support? Who can support your application work?

*Type of activity*

Considering application approach

*Your answer*

text



*third step*



# The project and the community *learning community*

*Question*

*A little evaluation...*

If a community environment, infrastructure or platform for lifelong learning or a learning community exists, how have you interacted with this along the way?

*Type of activity*

Interacting with community lifelong learning infrastructure

*Your answer*

text

<i>Question</i>
If your community does not have such infrastructures, how could your initiatives contribute to such structures? How could the contacts you have made and your team contribute?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Building lifelong learning collaboration
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
Have you identified people and resources who might be interested in a more permanent collaboration on lifelong learning challenges? In your community? In your region, in Europe? How will you further develop the collaboration?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Lifelong learning networks
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
When working in your project, how are you including the target group in the activities? To what extent are you doing this, and succeeding? What is the effect of involving the target group in all activities?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Involving the users
<i>Your answer</i>
text
<i>Question</i>
How can your project or initiative be used in other contexts? By whom? Who do you need to collaborate with to make this happen?
<i>Type of activity</i>
Exploitation
<i>Your answer</i>
text



fourth step



# Who will know and learn? *Documenting, reflecting..?*

*Question*

**Late in the project you get tired. Maybe even exhausted...  
But, did you remember to document your activities along the way? How did you do that? Did you involve the target group?**

*Type of activity*

Documentation

*Your answer*

text

*Question*

**After the project you should take some time to think about what happened. What did you learn along the way? How will you use your new competences? For yourself, for the community?**

*Type of activity*

Self-reflection

*Your answer*

text

*Question*

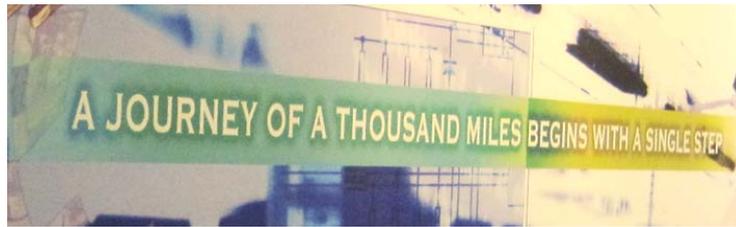
**How will you exploit your experience and practice to contribute to the lifelong learning environment in your community?**

*Type of activity*

Link to learning community

*Your answer*

text



### *So, time out...*

Maybe you think that we left out some really important questions? Well, if so, why not produce some questions yourself or add a few questions that suit your needs? It's an open tool. You might even create some scenarios to be used by you and your colleagues. Or to train colleagues or partners... This small scenario tool might even be used for documenting your activities.



*Question*

[Your own question]

*Type of activity*

?

*Your answer*

text

*Question*

[Your own question]

*Type of activity*

?

*Your answer*

text

*Question*

[Your own question]
<i>Type of activity</i>
?
<i>Your answer</i>
text



## XPLOIT HAND-OUTS

Available in many languages on [www.learningcommunities.eu](http://www.learningcommunities.eu)

**A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP**

## XPLOIT - OUTCOMES OF 3 YEARS WORK

The Xploit Transversal project set out to explore how European project and funding resources might be more efficiently exploited across member states and communities - and to produce guidelines for how the communities could use such solutions.

*How could communities or networks or partnerships identify, capture and exploit such resources to meet their needs and interests?*

Through practical approaches to the needs and interests of the involved communities it soon became clear that most communities do not have suitable infrastructures to exploit such resources.

Along the many community activities it also became clear that solid exploitation is linked to the community at large, to the networks, the partnerships and to stakeholder mentality. This is how Xploit entered the learning community landscape...



From that moment the project's efforts linked closely exploitation of EU resources to the development of learning community infrastructures in the participating communities. Continued and still more qualified community activity and new initiatives offering the project European and global dialogues led the project to extensive knowledge and experience production in the field of exploitation and learning communities, including learning a lot from the experienced Swansea learning partnerships.

*At the end of the project, Xploit is therefore able to offer a compendium of learning community guidance, learning community guides training principles, common criteria for learning communities and much more.*

At the same time the project partners offer post-project consultancy to communities wishing to take systematic steps towards becoming a learning community.

A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

## XPLOIT - A LEARNING COMMUNITY

*How did Xploit start to talk about learning communities?*

The Xploit mission was to explore how communities across Europe could identify, capture and exploit available European project and funding resources matching the needs and interest of the community.

The practical investigations and community networking made it very clear that sustainable *exploitation is not likely to be successful as isolated initiatives or actions.*

Therefore Xploit, along with many other European and global players on the learning cities scene, was encouraged to focus on how communities could be able to exploit and benefit from European lifelong learning and other resources, freely available.

The focus became communities' *capacity* to uptake useful EU resources; it shifted towards the existence of community infrastructures of collaboration and communication.



Xploit immersed into deep practical studies and initiatives aiming to explore what infrastructures should be developed and be in place to allow the community and its organisations to benefit from such resources - and how such infrastructures might be developed, and in different ways. No one-size-fits-all for developing into a learning community! Xploit found a variety of (*bottom-up*) drivers towards such a dynamic community, accompanied by different forms of (*top-down*) approaches to the very idea of a learning city or community.

This is why Xploit offers a mosaic of different resources: the idea of a learning community must be developed and conceived from different perspectives and always on the basis of the needs and interests of the community in question.

The Xploit project offers different practice based approaches to a learning community, along with guidance, including *consultancy*, resources in support of community initiatives.

**A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP**

## XPLOIT - CHANGINGS ROLES...

Sustainable exploitation of available resources and learning communities is about networking, partnering and new forms of cooperation in the community.

*The traditional roles of community stakeholders must change.* The well-defined roles of public authorities, of private enterprises, educations, cultural institutions and NGO's, developed through the industrial society and maintained even in the midst of today's globalization, are not useful to bring about the needed innovations in learning communities.

Globalization and the changing realities of economy, lifelong learning, social inequalities, shrinking labor markets and new generations not finding directions call for new ways of addressing and solving problems of all kinds in the communities: integration, work, climate change and rapidly changing educational needs. The Xploit project learned that these traditional roles, not the economy, should be considered the major obstacle to innovation and learning communities.



Public authorities should re-think their roles in the community, opening up to sharing responsibilities with the private, social and educational sectors, and offer groups of active citizens the space and resources to create social and economic innovation in the community.

Public authorities should partner up with private enterprises, themselves re-thinking the roles of private business in the community, and with all sorts of institutions to create new patterns of cooperation and to form new solid infrastructures of communication between the different sectors.

Educations and cultural institutions should widen their missions to include contributing systematically to the creation of new partnerships, joining forces to meet the needs of the community. And: new partnerships should encourage, support and offer resources to all sorts of groups of active citizens, replacing control measures with trust and open mindsets.

**A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP**

## XPLOIT - COMMUNITY INNOVATION

*Innovation Union* is the ambitious title of one of the Commission's 2014-20 strategic initiatives.

This does not mean innovation at transnational or national level only, but foremost innovation in the everyday practice of local communities and institutions.

In fact, the Commission in the upcoming Erasmus for All encourages entrepreneurship competences (the practical activity leading to innovation) at all educational levels, including non-formal and informal learning scenarios.

This approach includes at least two major inter-linked challenges: the development of entrepreneurial cultures, also locally, and the valorization of the results of the entrepreneurial initiatives.

The Xploit project found, through 3 years of community work across Europe, that both challenges point to the same kind of initiatives in our communities: a *dynamic learning community*.



### *Why is that?*

First of all entrepreneurial cultures cannot be developed and unfolded successfully in isolated environments, as it requires the collaboration of a variety of stakeholders in the community. If infrastructures of collaboration and communication are not in place in the community, governed by a mutual platform of entrepreneurial mentality, few entrepreneurial initiatives will see the daylight.

Furthermore, the very same infrastructures are needed to uptake, capture, cultivate and exploit innovation produced in other communities across Europe.

This is why Xploit offers a variety of guidance material to help develop such community infrastructures: public authorities, educations, private enterprises, cultural institutions and NGO's joining forces to create what might rightfully be called a learning community.



**A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP**

## XPLOIT - LEARNING COMMUNITY GUIDES

Developing into a learning community - to be able to identify learning, social and innovation needs and capture and produce answers to those need? Yes, but.

*Who will do this? Who will take the initiatives? Who is able to take the lead and facilitate such initiatives for many years?*

One of the major findings and challenges of the Xploit project was that learning communities initiatives, and at the same time sustainable European engagement and exploitation, is totally dependent *on competent and qualified resources in the community.*

Nobody is trained for this in the communities. Nobody. The people working in these fields are trained to do other things, and they try to the best of their ability to pick up the needed competences on the flight - often giving up halfway or burning out...

This is why the Xploit project started to focus on...



*... the training of learning community guides!*

Obviously, such resources could bear other names, such as lifelong learning guides, etc. The point is, however, that such resources are needed in each and every community, striving to develop long-term infrastructures of collaboration and communication in their community - and joining forces in innovative and creative partnerships.

Often, the idea of training and appointing such community workers is a result of the first steps of partnering and networking: the involved stakeholders realize that the mission is impossible without qualified community resources, focusing systematically on such community initiatives and developing strong learning community competences and experience, including European cooperation.

*Xploit offers various approaches to the training of such learning community guides...*



A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

## XPLOIT - EXPLOITATION... AND BEYOND

The Xploit project set out to develop sustainable ways of exploitation of European learning and social resources - projects, products and funding measures. What is *exploitation* in the European language? Exploitation is much more than dissemination. Dissemination is spreading the news - large scale, quantitatively, letting people know, raise awareness... Exploitation means basically identifying, capturing and implementing available learning or social resources, produced in other communities or countries, in other sectors or in other contexts, but useful if adjusted to new realities.

In short, exploitation means not only knowing about or being interested in, but *directly using in practice*, and in other contexts than the one in which the resources were produced. Exploitation can include horizontal (from one institution to another) as well as vertical (taking to a strategic level, for example) initiatives.



Exploitation is, nevertheless, a demanding and complicated process, especially when talking about exploiting European resources: language, matching needs with resources available, adjusting to new realities - and very often it calls for new forms of collaboration between several stakeholders.

*On one hand exploitation is highly needed to produce value for money; on the other hand genuine exploitation is not likely to happen very often...*

This dilemma has haunted European funding and cooperation for many years, inviting the Commission to focus more and more on exploitation activities.

However, the Xploit project found that the most, and perhaps only, way to ensure sustainable exploitation is when proper and dynamic infrastructures of collaboration and communication is in place in the receiving environments, in other words in the communities, in and as *learning communities*.

A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP

## XPLOIT - WHAT XPLOIT OFFERS

The Xploit project, funded by the European Commission, has immersed into the challenges of exploitation of European learning and social resources and the development of learning communities for more than 3 years.

The results are offered in the form of a brand new website - learningcommunities.eu - presenting the Xploit experience in different forms, including a variety of practice based guidance material for European communities in need of change.

One might ask, however: "Yes, this is useful, but how can my community interact in more practical ways with the Xploit resources?"

The question is good and justified. Long-term development of learning communities and strategic European cooperation requires more than reading and learning from others.

The Xploit partners are aware of this, in fact very aware, and this is why the project offers...



...a number of *opportunities to interact with the Xploit resources* - also after the formal termination of the project in spring 2013.

Most Xploit partners will continue to work with learning communities challenges and European support for such activities in new partnerships, projects and networks, including global networks, and therefore Xploit partners will be continuously available to communities across Europe on the quest for learning community dynamics.

On learningcommunities.eu the project presents a variety of interactive opportunities, such as direct collaboration, project development, networking, consultancy on different terms and first of all initial dialogues on the needs and interests of the community in question. In fact, Xploit partners can act as "learning community guides", and peer mentor and train community resources to take over these roles themselves.

## XPLOIT - Personal Testimony



"I am growing professionally and personally"

Interview with Maribel Pena, Responsible for the Youth Department in the Municipality of Salt Catalonia ES



My involvement in Xploit begins attending the conference that took place during the Xploit partner meeting in Salt Catalonia and also being involved in the needs analysis work for the community profile. The involvement was stronger when it was established that **youth** were a priority of the Salt community.



I am a social educator and I always thought that the community work should be based on the learning community concept; I really believe in the learning cities concept, involving the **whole community** in the processes. I started working on these ideas in my College days.



When I started to work in Xploit, my first feeling was that it was too much for me; that I was not be able to work at European level, mainly because my English; I didn't speak **English** and it was a big problem. I was getting more involved ...at the beginning the only thing I was able to see was - more work... I had my daily in the Municipality work plus the Xploit work. I think one of the first things you must be able to see when you work at European level is that you are **not there for the money**; you cannot find the motivation in the money you can get from Europe, because it does not compensate.



Slowly I discovered I can work at that level, I am more or less capable, and that means I can work on different kind of projects. Europe gives you the possibility to work at other level of projects, it gives you **another perspective**, for example you are more focused in the community networking, it helps you to understand what it means to work in Europe, to be involved with other networks, European networks, and basically it is the perfect tool to generate synergies. Working at European level **opens up the mind...**



Of course we are in Europe, I mean Spain-Catalonia, but when you are working at this level you really realize you are in Europe, it gets another value, more real... For example the community work you have been doing for years gets another **dimension**. It is also important for the people you are working with and the participants, for example the youth involved in the EU LABlearning project, when they knew and met people from Europe, real people, then they really realize what they are doing is **important**, superior. By that I mean: it is particularly important when others feel they are protagonists and the same for the community in general. It's really important for you to know and have the possibility to share with other European communities. It brings you **closer to Europe**.



As I said, I always thought I would not be able to do it, and it's true I can, but of course I didn't do it alone. I am **growing** professionally and personally. I'm learning English because now I can see the need; I need to be able to **communicate** with others in Europe, my European colleagues. Now, I feel more empowered to do it. As you know in Spain, although it is changing with the young people, the English level is low.



I think it is possible to work in Salt for a learning community, but I also think that it's **very difficult** because you need a big network; actually you need people believing in that concept, believing in the networking concept.

One of the advantages of the crisis is that the crisis is forcing us - everybody - to network, *but still...*

When you believe in networking, you work with people who want to follow you.



About Xploit, one of the things that hooked me was the language, "**the tongue**" of the project. I saw it was the same language I use in my daily work: transversality, networking.

Of course that language is difficult to understand for the people of the Municipality, not because the Municipality of Salt is special, but because it's difficult for all the public administrations, they don't understand...



*Obstacles in my work?*

- Lack of **continuity**: Resources are not stable, and I mean both financial and human resources. Continuity in the work is very difficult. Many people are involved in short periods, and this is very tiring because you are always, or at least you feel you are always, at the same point.

- Salt receives many resources but they are not well managed. I miss a direction. Being clear on objectives, to have a **vision**, a strategic plan for the city: what they want to be in 10 years? Where does Salt want to be in 10 years? Not having directions makes your work harder.

- I think it is difficult, but maybe not impossible. For example in Catalonia, Generalitat de Catalunya designed the Youth Plan 2020, and at least it's **a step**...



*Why I am still here?*

Because despite many things I realize that I can **do things for others**, in my case, for the young people, and I can get some results.



*If Salt as a community learning is possible?*

What should we do to make it possible? Well, I think we are on the way and first of all we must strengthen the network.

What is more difficult? My free time hobby, **climbing mountains**, or my work? (A BIG SMILE), I think it's similar.

In fact, I think climbing mountains makes you stronger, of course yes, and maybe yes, maybe it also gives you another perspective of things...

**I love my work** and that motivates me every day. I like it because it is a **public job**, I'm working for the youth and I like to do that and create things for them.



Yes, if it's decided to do more European projects, initiatives, for the community **I would like to be there...**

[March 2013 - Interview: JG / MM – Translation: MM – Photo: JG – Thanks to Marybel!]

## XPLOIT - Personal Testimony



“Think globally,  
act locally”

Personal words from Stefania Pascut, working for the Healthy Cities Programme of WHO in the Municipality of Udine Italy, and very active in the Xploit project



I was firstly involved in Xploit when the project was taking its first steps in our city, not at the very beginning since I did not participate in the kick-off meeting, but only a little step further when the point was what to do to make this project a concrete experience of our city, an experience of our community and for our community.

I must admit my first thought was how I could manage to make a good work for this project which seemed to me so far away from my usual tasks, which have to deal with health promotion and prevention activities, participative processes and community empowerment.

I work for the Healthy Cities Programme of the World Health Organisation and Xploit had little to do with this. I imagined instead that specific competences on lifelong learning and a detailed knowledge regarding what the city had to offer in terms of cultural and opportunities were actually needed.



The final goal of Xploit and the way we would have achieved it were not so clear to me at the beginning. What I would have been able to understand only some time later was that *the real goal was the way itself, the “process”*. I was positively surprised to see that my daily work was not so far away from what I was requested to do in the Xploit project that meant to activate and stimulate my community to make individuals more aware of their city, their health, their opportunities, their capacities to learn throughout their life. The basic principles of Xploit have been the same I have ever applied to my daily work, i.e. networking, transversality, Intersectorial partnerships, a holistic view of the individual at the centre of services and opportunities for a better quality of life.

That is why I became so passionate in Xploit and in its participative processes within the community.



I think I will try to make these processes of community participation and exploitation as sustainable and effective as I can in the future. I am convinced that there are increasingly numerous resources and experiences at a European and international level from which our city could learn and probably there are also some good practices that we could share with other countries and communities. The approach of learning during the whole life course of an individual could be adopted in the most different fields and topics. We have applied it to health promotion, mental training, environment, ICT, etc, but it can be applied to social cohesion, cultural activities, social services and so on. I hope also in the future we will be able to benefit from other European and international resources within the local community through an operational, structured and monitored involvement of the training resources available in our territory.



Although I was used to work with people and to carry out projects and activities at the local level, I encountered the same great difficulty as ever, that was to create a common vision and shared objectives among stakeholders coming from different institutions, associations and organizations, with different points of view and different, sometimes contrasting, interests and missions. Another difficult point was to involve people on issues and topics that are unusual for their everyday life such as health, lifelong learning, games, as well as making the European panorama enter the micro world they are used to.

Nevertheless, it was surprising the reaction of people who felt really involved in the activities and part of their community. They have very much appreciated some activities such as for example the pilot project "Move your minds... minds on the move". Many of them had the opportunity to discover places in the city that they were not used to go to, such as the 'game library', the district libraries, even the squares and green areas of the city. Others had the opportunity to discover a new way of learning, 'learning by playing', in a funny and relaxing way.



What I have understood from the Xploit experience is that, although our first purpose may be simply learning, the results we can obtain could go much beyond the pure learning. Learning could be the way, the way to be part of a group, to be part of a community. This is what I have in mind when I think to work in order to make my community a learning community; a community that continuously stimulates learning from a cultural, economic, political, social point of view in order to improve the quality of life.

A community that encourages learning not as an end to itself but as a way to improve, teach and share. I would say a community that fosters learning as a mutual learning that allows people to be open to diversity, integration, sustainable and supportive growth.



I am sure the way towards a learning community as the way towards a healthy city is not an easy one, but I also think it is not a final status but a *way of thinking*, working and running the city. One of the main challenges will be to overcome the time of crisis we are going through, that is not only an economic crisis but also a social and cultural crisis. However, it could also be the occasion to reinforce networks and relationships and benefit more from learning opportunities and from formal and informal resources: these could bring a great added value to our daily work.

According to my opinion, another big challenge may be from a political point of view to give real value to the community, to valorize the contribution of experiences of solidarity and volunteerism that are often forgotten but are essential within a community. What I hope I could do in this direction is to encourage projects and initiatives able to support and empower the community.



I would like to finally add the motto that has always inspired the WHO Healthy Cities Movement since I think it could definitely be applied also to Learning Cities. It says: "*Think globally, act locally*". It is a very inspiring principle since it intends to combine together the local and the European or, in general, international dimensions.

As the Mayor of Udine in one of his interviews highlighted, in every sector of our society and daily work we cannot avoid applying this principle, should we talk about medicine, psychology, health, environment, mathematics or lifelong learning as a whole. Our task is that of a bridge between these two dimensions: having the opportunity to exchange knowledge, tools, best practices in an easy way also thanks to new technologies and then share all this heritage with communities is the very big challenge of all what may, and I hope will, come after Xploit.

## XPLOIT - Personal Testimony



"Don't dream it.  
Do it"

Personal words from Irina Stanciu, who works for FEG, an educational institution located in Iasi, Romania, and who was engaged in the discussions on the planning of the Xploit project from the beginning.

I work for FEG, an educational institution located in Iasi, Romania, being responsible for the Program Department.



I was involved in Xploit ever since it was designed, as a natural further step of City Learning Net, so I was quite excited to work with it. When it started I thought I knew well what it was about, but the truth is that during the last 3 years I've found out a lot of information about our community and I discovered a lot of ideas and initiatives that could be put in practice to improve our lives and work.

The community I work in is a very specific one, an educational network of various types of schools, professionals and inspectors, a live community in our city and county, Iasi. To be more specific Iasi EDU community is an educational one, comprising all institutions involved in pre-university education. They are coordinated by our "political" partner in the project - The County School Inspectorate of Iasi.

Personally, it was my first experience as to working with public institutions and I discovered interested and very committed people to the idea of developing the community, by contributing with their own expertise and knowledge.



From the technical point of view the project was a difficult one, not only because it was something new, but because this time we had to share and not to compete with each other. Did we manage to change things? Yes, to some extent. But we are still quite far from working as one engine. Changing people's mentality is very difficult. We started by finding out what was needed in our community or what could be improved in terms of communication, sharing EU resources and events organized in partnership with the large public. Communication among our members was ensured in a centralized way but very encouraging at the same time. Most institutions used a yahoo group- proiecte.jsj to read the news, share information and find out more about projects and events.

During the project lifetime we applied a questionnaire in an attempt to measure the efficiency of the group as a communication channel and not only. The results that came back showed a large availability to put information, resources and personal experiences in common as well as willingness to participate in EU cooperation activities. It also presented the interest of the community members in the idea of "learning communities". Too little has been said so far on this issue, mainly due to the past years' loading - both politically and socially. But we are positive about the road we have taken.



Along the way, we also discovered that our colleagues in the community needed a more local approach to the results of EU projects. There are many data bases with resources from EU projects but none of them is available in the national language, nor are they at hand, when it comes about personal contacts or further information and materials. That is why we created our own data base with examples of projects that can be appreciated as examples of good practices. We are decided to take it further, even after the project has ended.

The most important result, visible so far, is the amount of activities organized together within the community. It has taken various forms and names, such as : The national festival of your chances, The week of Adult education, the National contests: Made for Europe and European School Award, destined to recognize the quality and quantity of EU cooperation activities run in schools and the list could go on.



Schools, kindergartens and NGOs are more and more willing to share resources, to assume their social role, as pillars of community and open up towards the community.

What's happening now within the community is motivating and encouraging. I personally believe that in the next few years schools and teachers will represent one

of the most important assets in lasi community, because once we have learnt to work together, the benefits will come back in a more evident way and in an extended number.



[April 2013 – Edited by Jan Gejel – thanks to Irina!]

## XPLOIT - Personal Testimony



“Time spent preparing and reflecting is equally, if not more important than the time spent doing the tasks...”

Personal words from Judith Porch from the **City & County of Swansea**, involved in numerous community projects and activities in and round Swansea.



I was thrilled when Judith James and Jean Preece approached my Service Manager to say that they would like me to participate in the Xploit Project with them – especially as we had worked extremely well together on previous local European Funded projects. Since the start of the Xploit Project many changes have taken place at the City & County of Swansea one of which is that the Lifelong Learning Service and Employment Training Service have merged to form the Lifelong Learning and Employment Training Service (LLETS).

At the start of the Xploit project I did not know what to expect but I hoped that I would be able to bring some creative ideas and knowledge of how our longstanding partnership working across Swansea was developed.

Unfortunately almost as soon as the project began recession hit the UK and this had a knock on effect upon all Council Services. As a forward thinking Council Swansea had always supported and encouraged their staff to be involved with European projects knowing the huge benefits that this type of work can bring. However with the council facing huge cuts to its budget it had to make the difficult decision to restrict international travel. With this as the backdrop I attended our first meeting in Aarhus.



After that initial meeting I decided to focus my Xploit work with the group at Graigfelen. This involved organizing a road show utilizing many parts of our Service e.g. Employment Training (Construction skills and Hair & Beauty), Family Learning and

Lifelong Learning (Jewelry and Needlecraft). As a result of this consultation work I was able to offer a taster programme to gauge demand.

The group has grown in confidence over the years and has recently been able to apply for funding in order to continue the courses which they found most beneficial.

I felt that I had a great deal of experience of working with community groups and on European Funded Projects but I had never been in charge of my part of a project before.

This has been a steep learning curve for me and whilst I had excellent support from everyone in Xploit and particularly Judith and Jean at Dace I have found it challenging.



I have learnt that within a three year project you do not have to rush headlong into it and that you need to work in a different manner to how you work in your everyday job. I have also learnt that time spent preparing and reflecting are equally, if not more important than the time spent doing the tasks.

I will certainly aim to have a much longer term strategy in my development work in the future especially as I am about to become involved with a large scale project (very close to the Liberty Stadium) called CU@Swansea based on the development of the Hafod & Morfa Copperworks Site. This is very exciting because the site is currently derelict and is in the process of being cleared. It is hoped that the site will eventually have World Heritage Site status. For the history of the works please watch the attached clip.

<http://www.welshcopper.org.uk/en/copper-news.htm?id=21#.UWVva3zMpHU0.email>



Plans for the future include

- Restored buildings form part of a vibrant, multi-purpose hub for work, education, leisure, commercial activity and tourism which celebrates the past and looks to the future.
- The site's heritage is preserved and proudly displayed with interpretation trails and a living history laboratory providing opportunities for more visitors to learn about Swansea's leading role in the industrial revolution and development of the global economy.
- A site that breathes life back into the area, and builds creatively on the proud industrial past.

Included in the plans are incubator units linking with a Digital Centre run by Swansea University (this puts me in mind of the centre we visited at Nagykovácsi) along with an Education Centre which I will be closely involved with. There are also plans to encourage our engineering students to recreate a working model of the Musgrave

uniflow steam engine which was used at the works from 1910 until its closure in the 1980s.

A huge re-organisation of the way that Community First is funded and set up meant that for a long time there was uncertainty relating to staff jobs. The areas within Swansea have now completely changed reducing from 10 areas to 5 larger areas with new relationships having to be rebuilt.

Another impact on me personally has been that due to the necessity for reducing the head count at the Local Authority my colleague has taken early retirement reducing our Community Education Development Officer numbers by one third. Obviously this has had a big effect on my current workload.

LLETS has worked extremely well with the LILL Group (Leisure In Later Life) who are a driving force in the community at Graigfelen and have developed a programme of classes at the centre in partnership with DACE and the Community First Officer. The resources which they learn to create are being sold at the local craft fayre in order to make the activities sustainable.



It will be beneficial to work with the whole community including families when we develop the mosaic at the centre with the aim of encouraging new community members to begin to participate in activities which could lead to learning.

There have been sweeping changes to the UK benefit system not only in the amount of benefit that people can claim but also in the way that they claim it – which now has to be done online.

LLETS have plans in place to provide free IT classes in areas with high unemployment in order to help people to gain the skills they will need in order to complete the forms necessary to claim their benefits.

I have enjoyed being part of the Xploit team and meeting and making new friends.



*Judith Porch Drawing 2011*