



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Xploit Study Visit Catania Italy The LECIM project

Intro

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The dialogues had great value to the learning communities debates...

Read more...



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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 Study Visit LeCiM Catania IT

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Intro

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.

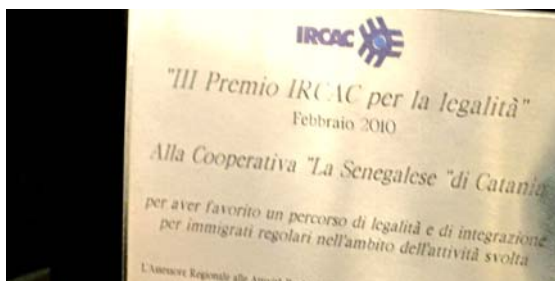
It is obvious that migrant women, as well as women in general in the society, have a lot in common and the perspectives of self-empowerment is extremely strong and relevant for all migrant women, but many initiatives might suffer from a lack of sensibility to the different groups of women's needs, if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

