

Xploit in Iasi ROMANIA

March 2012



Intro

The Xploit meeting Iasi was a milestone event.

The meeting took place in the reflection period between the two big action phases and delivered guidelines to the community focuses in Action Phase 2.

This document offers strong insight into the dynamics of the Xploit project...

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 in Iasi

The European Xploit project visited Iasi in Romania in March 2012. The visit included a partner meeting as well as a number of community activities in which dialogues were established between the Xploit partners and professionals and organisations from the Iasi community.



The role of the partner meeting

The Iasi partner meeting was extremely important, as it included a reflection on the first Action Phase in the project. It therefore also included the establishment of the relation between the first and the second action phase.

In the Action Phase 1 many resources were used to establish local Xploit teams and local networks, as well as on training, inspiration and guidance both locally and at transnational level.

The focus of the local activities were to identify community needs and interest in lifelong learning, identify and exploit useful European resources to meet these needs - and thereby to establish new infrastructures of learning community collaboration in the communities.

Such activities and initiatives are extremely challenging to communities. Most of the communities could not build on any kind of lifelong learning infrastructures to facilitate and drive the exploitation of lifelong learning resources.

Swansea is an exception, as this community has more than 20 years of learning community experience. Therefore this partner assumed a special role in the Action Phase 1.

See the report from the Xploit Swansea visit on www.xploit-eu.com

The role of the Iasi partner meeting was to evaluate the community activities in Action Phase 1 and to set out the overall aims of the community activities in Action Phase 2.

The evaluation activities revealed a number of challenges, described in Holger Bienzle's evaluation report and summary, but the general situation is this:

- the communities were forced to focus many resources on local networking and on developing a strong understanding of the community's needs and interest, and on establishing local activities linked to the Xploit project, whereby a more systematic reflection on the infrastructures created was not possible; one might say: the Action Phase 1 created infrastructures, but did not describe them

The key to the design of Action Phase 2 was therefore to take the infrastructure activities to a higher level, a level of systematic approaches, description and reflection.

At the same time the role of the partner meeting was to take the first steps towards and understanding of, how to organise the final outcomes, and to find out what roles the communities should play in these outcomes.



Quality assurance and evaluation Action Phase 1

The Xploit QA and evaluation partner, Holger Bienzle, asked the partners to prepare some evaluation documents prior to the partner meeting, and to prepare to explain their community activities in Action Phase 1 at the meeting in Iasi.

Holger Bienzle based this evaluation on the *most significant change method*.

From the coordinator point of view the following results of the evaluation activities are extremely important:

- Many activities have been developed in the communities, but a more precise link to the exploitation of European resources is needed
- Many promising networks have been created in Action Phase 1, but we need to produce more systematic reflections on the networking in support of the final outcomes
- Steps are taken towards what we call a learning community, but we need to reflect more on the mechanism put in play, the infrastructures established and the how to link the steps taken to criteria for learning communities
- A number of useful reports from the communities have been produced, but we need to focus strongly on documentation activities in the remaining part of the project, especially to document direct and indirect Xploit impact

A number of valuable recommendations for Action Phase 2 can be extracted from the evaluation.

HOLGER BIENZLE OWN WORDS SUMMARY OF ACTION PHASE 1

All partners have been very committed to identifying and starting to implement approaches at disseminating and exploiting EU project results which best fit the specific contexts of their respective local learning communities.

As anticipated, the substantial differences concerning the degree to which the local learning community is developed were mirrored in the Xploit Action Phase 1 activities.

In several cases Xploit partners had to start from scratch, i.e. with defining, or making first efforts to establish the learning community themselves. In Iasi, to give just one example, there were good reasons to confine the community to (some of) the learning providers and local authorities willing to cooperate rather than unrealistically targeting the whole big city which has not really developed functioning learning city structures yet. To initiate this process the Xploit project works as a catalyst.

Consequently, it became evident that dissemination and sustainable exploitation of EU project results in local learning communities often requires a two-step approach. First, the mentality of stakeholders with regard to cooperation instead of

competition needs to be developed. This involves not only the establishment of learning community structures but also the gradual building of trust. This can be time-consuming, is in many cases already a considerable achievement in itself and more than a big task for a single project "Action Phase" to tackle. It is only on such a base that in a second step, the introduction of concrete EU project products and their integration / into educational practice can be attempted.

On the other hand, the integration of EU project results into highly advanced learning communities, can pose a challenge, too. In such cases, e.g. Swansea, it needs to be carefully reflected how project results can fit in and generate additional value, instead of merely duplicating what has been done before.

In between these two ends of a development scale, experiences in the other learning communities in Udine, Salt and Nagykovácsi, demonstrate that EU project results and indeed EU projects themselves can provide fruitful impulses on emerging learning community, mobilize support and decision-makers, and reinforce cooperation of local stakeholders.

While the evaluator acknowledges and values the implementing partners' dedication and enthusiasm to develop their local learning communities, he emphasizes the need to focus on the integration of EU products in these communities in Action Phase 2. After all, Xploit receives EU funding for developing a transferable model for community-based dissemination and exploitation models, the development of local learning communities or the promotion of participation in EU funding programmes among local stakeholders is not an end in itself. The term "transferable model" needs to be highlighted here, which requires as a pre-condition vivid, inspiring, or "journalistic" documentation of the activities implemented. This is what the MSC-based evaluation is trying to ensure.



Action Phase 2 - the double mission

The partner meeting in Iasi reformulated the overarching Xploit mission:

By identifying community lifelong learning needs and interests the communities should develop a capacity to identify and exploit useful European resources to meet these needs and interests - and thereby take important and sustainable steps towards creating new lifelong learning infrastructures of community collaboration with the perspective of becoming a learning community.

In this context, infrastructures means permanent lifelong learning networks of collaborating organisations able to capture and implement relevant European resources.

The Xploit learning community approach builds on a bottom up approach: concrete lifelong learning collaboration, at all community levels, creates the needed future learning community infrastructures. This approach includes the collaboration of the local authorities, but the infrastructures are not depending on the leadership of the local authorities.

The simplified version of the Xploit mission might therefore be described as: lifelong learning activities to meet community needs + the development of new and sustainable learning community infrastructures.

In Action Phase 1 there was a strong focus on the first part of this simplified mission.

But along the Action Phase 1 activities, basic partnerships, networks and collaborations have been created in the partner communities.

Therefore Action Phase 2 has the following overall mission:

TO CONTINUE AND EXPAND THE LIFELONG LEARNING
ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITIES DOCUMENTING HOW
EUROPEN RESOURCES PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THIS
+
FURTHER DEVELOP AND MORE SYSTEMATICALLY DESCRIBE
THE NEW INFRASTRUCTURES CREATED FROM THESE
ACTIVITIES AND HOW THEY ARE STEPS TOWARDS LEARNING
COMMUNITIES
=
QUALIFIED PRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT FINAL OUTCOMES

Apart from this clear Action Phase 2 perspective, a number of *key challenges* were produced during the constructive partner dialogues, also reflecting that a learning community project should assimilate emerging tendencies in the European Community:

- To start focusing in the remaining part of the project on transferable models of learning communities
- To focus strongly on the mentality of sharing and collaborating in the communities
- To include entrepreneurship initiatives in the community activities, especially for at risk youth and adults
- To take the capacities of experienced learning communities to other European communities
- To link more systematically to the private sector in the learning communities

The Xploit communities are strongly encouraged to take these challenges into consideration in Action Phase 2, and to produce useful input and documentation on these issues in support of the final outcomes.



Emerging profiles of the learning communities - a final outcomes organizational principle?

One of the most constructive dialogues at the partner meeting in Iasi, also somewhat unexpected, was the emerging interest in profiling the Xploit communities. This profiling interest is based on a realistic and divers learning community approach: even though all learning communities should meet some common criteria and build on a strong consensus as to lifelong learning, each and every learning community is most likely to be different from other learning communities in several respects, such as different focuses, different lifelong learning approaches, different social and economic conditions, etc.

So, at the lasi meeting the partnership started to approach such a profiling of the Xploit learning communities.

This profiling immediately proved useful to the future organization of the project's final outcomes. The project's learning community material might very well be presented as to such profile headlines, and the communities might very well serve as an example of such a learning community dimension.

The community profiling should not only be linked to the content of the activities (for example a strong interest in lifelong learning for elderly), but to the infrastructures created: how they were created, how the collaboration works in the community, how the community's needs and interest are taking into consideration at a systematic level and, for example, how the citizens are involved in the learning community.

It is, therefore of great importance to the project that the communities reflect on and qualify their profile in Action Phase 2, and that they are able to document their profile.

A first draft of learning community profiles in Xploit resulted in the following list:

COMMUNITY PLATFORM

Example

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

EU RESOURCES EXPLOITATION

Example

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

MENTALITY

Example

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

VOLUNTEERING

Example

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.

JOINING FORCES

Example

A learning community can be driven by a strong collaboration between the strongest and most dedicated players in the community - or by organizations from different sectors who have never collaborated at community level.

CREATING NEW SPACES FOR LEARNING

Example

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.

SMALLER COMMUNITIES APPROACH

Example

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.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Example

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.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Example

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.

The Xploit communities are expected to be examples within several categories, and new categories are expected to emerge during the second action phase. It is also expected that these profiles, dimensions or categories will link closely to the *Learning Community Criteria* to be developed.



The communities in Action Phase 2

Along the preparatory work for the lasi meeting and during the meeting itself, the project took steps to identify and profile the Xploit communities and their key focuses in Action Phase 2.

In this section the coordinator offers some key words on the different community profile in Action Phase 2 (and in the production of the final outcomes as well). We will link these key words to dimensions listed above.

The communities are asked to briefly describe their Action Phase 2 profile, taking into account the lasi debates, in their own words.



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UDINE COMMUNITY COORDINATOR KEYWORDS FOR ACTION PHASE 2

- Continue to develop the ideas of open public spaces for learning
- Reflect on what happens in the open spaces, who meets, who learns, how are the learning different from other forms of learning
- Document the open space learning
- Perspectives of open space learning, for example the interaction between physical spaces and digital spaces
- How are open spaces for learning contributing to new lifelong learning infrastructures of learning in the community?
- How are the new open spaces linked to Europe?
- How are the collaborative infrastructures developed in general in the community? Who takes part, what are the perspectives? Document and describe...
- How is the private sector involved, how could it be involved?
- How is the community on its way to becoming a learning city? How is this linked to Europe?
- *To sketch at the end of Action Phase 2: Udine before, during and after Xploit*

HOLGER BINZLE UDINE EVALUATION

Proposed motto: **Creating new public spaces for learning**

In Udine there is considerable political support and already a high activity level of stakeholders to develop the city into a learning community. The Italian project partners do not only initiate and implement numerous local learning activities, but

accompany them with international networking and conferencing events organised to provide inspiration and a forum for exchanging good practice. From a thematic point of view, health education, ICT competence for all, up-skilling of labour-market relevant competencies and game-based learning are high on the agenda to meet local educational needs.

Learning activities need locations where they can place and reach as many learners as possible, where potential adult learners can be found instead of waiting for them to come to learning institutions.

Two exceptionally interesting new public places of learning have been created in Udine:

A so-called 'Health Pyramid' has been established at a local supermarket. It is a permanent information service offering consumers information, health tests and health education. In this context products from health-related EU projects have been integrated and thus fully exploited.

The second unconventional places of learning are Community gardens which have been created for urban horticulture, cultivating land for food production or for relaxation and recreation. In this environment people informally learn about gardening, again using EU project products.

This Udine approach of making EU project results visible used in innovative public places of learning constitutes an extremely interesting and effective model for dissemination and exploitation of EU project results which can be recommended for transfer.

Desirable clarifications:

- Please review ratings "before-after" for mistakes
- Highlight the two public places in the implementation report and develop them into a full concept describing the educational strategy and the place and function of EU products in this context.
- Add testimonials of learners/ learning providers

UDINE COMMUNITY "MOTO" OWN WORDS



 **NAGYKOVÁCSI HU**

NAGYKOVÁCSI COMMUNITY COORDINATOR KEYWORDS FOR ACTION PHASE 2

- Around what platform, missions or perspectives are the collaborating institutions in the community organized?
- Why are these players collaborating and what other institutions might be involved?
- What is the nature of the entrepreneurship activities in the community, and how are they contributing to the establishment of new collaborative infrastructures?
- Describe and document entrepreneurial activities
- How are entrepreneurial activities contributing to lifelong learning in the community? Can they function as catalysts, drivers of lifelong learning?
- How are the collaborative infrastructures linked to European cooperation?
- How are new collaborative infrastructures developed in the community, and how are they linked to the entrepreneurial initiatives?
- How are the entrepreneurial initiatives linked to Europe?
- To what extent are private organizations involved in the initiatives?
- Perspective: how could the community function as a satellite learning community towards the big city Budapest, or communities in Budapest?
- *To sketch at the end of Action Phase 2: Nagykovácsi before, during and after Xploit*

HOLGER BINZLE NAGYKOVÁCSI EVALUATION

Proposed motto: **Creating local platforms for community development**

Having changed the original plan, instead of being a “mirroring” partner as part of the quality assurance, Nagykovácsi has become an implementing partner now. There has been consensus in the partnership that Nagykovácsi provides interesting additional aspects to the two Xploit Action Phases:

- The setting of a small town as implementing partner, where the relevant stakeholders know each other well
- Trebag’s considerable experience in EU project dissemination
- Valuable experience in community -based learning to share
- The example of a private company as motor of community-based EU project dissemination

The only difference to the other local learning communities lies in the fact that no political partner is involved as official Xploit project partner, but the Nagykovácsi municipality has proved to be very supportive of the project activities.

Nagykovácsi focused on two themes identified as particularly relevant for the local community: health and entrepreneurship education.

As far as entrepreneurship education is concerned, Trebag started a set of new activities around a “playground for entrepreneurs”, an informal space for learning about entrepreneurship skills, introducing stakeholders to EU cooperation, and including sharing EU project results.

In the health- related line of activities Trebag disseminated project results at a municipality Day of Sports and cooperated actively with the local sports association: Trebag involved them as partner in an EU project first, and now they become applicant of another.

The Nagykovácsi approach is characterised by trying to create common - face-to face and virtual - networking platforms for hitherto isolated community development activities and thus making them more effective:

New local networking framework are emerging: the afore-mentioned “playground for entrepreneurs”, a “well-being living lab”, an “innovation lodge”, as well as an internet platform putting these things together virtually. A pivotal role in developing the learning community is to be the involvement of stakeholders in European projects, and Trebag is providing information and support to local actors to get engaged in European cooperation.

Desirable clarifications:

- Describe more concisely the concepts “playground for entrepreneurs”, “well-being living lab”, “innovation lodge” and the role the dissemination of EU project results play in these concepts
- Several EU project results disseminated are mentioned. How and to whom exactly? How is this dissemination related to the concepts mentioned above?
- The three pieces of evidence from stakeholders of changes brought about in the first Action Phase seem appropriate if they highlight the added value of the new structures for community networking and sharing and if they are examples of individual and/or organisational learning.

Recommendation for Action Phase 2

- Stronger focus on implementation of project results (after focus on participation in EU projects)

NAGYKOVÁCSI COMMUNITY “MOTO” OWN WORDS



SALT CATALONIA ES

SALT CATALONIA COMMUNITY COORDINATOR KEYWORDS FOR ACTION PHASE 2

- Continue the strong focus on youth
- Describe and document the strong direct involvement and participation of the young people and what this means to a learning community
- How can the strong focus on youth link to the needs of other groups of citizens and how can the youth focus be a driver or catalyst for such initiatives?

- Describe and document the new infrastructures and networks developed to meet the needs of the young people
- What kinds of organizations are involved in the new Salt collaboration? To what extent are private enterprises involved, and how could they be?
- What roles are the public authorities playing, what roles should they be playing?
- What are the perspectives of the new infrastructures created? How can these structures be further developed in support of a learning community?
- How are the Salt initiatives linked to Europe and to the exploitation of European resources? The lifelong learning program, the EU Social Fund?
- Perspective: how could the Salt collaborative infrastructures be exploited by other communities in Catalonia? Are such initiatives taken?
- Could the new networks in Salt play with developing a vision for *Salt - Laboratory of Inclusion*?
- *To sketch at the end of Action Phase 2: Salt before, during and after Xploit*

HOLGER BINZLE SALT CATALONIA EVALUATION

Proposed motto: **Joining forces: EU projects as engines of change**

According to the Catalan partner there are many individual education and networking activities by stakeholders in Salt which try to solve the most pressing social and educational challenges the community faces: an overwhelming amount of new immigration, degradation of neighbourhoods, and high level of unemployment on the one hand, and lack of vocational training opportunities and strategies for school to deal with uncoordinated pupil entrance, high percentage of non-mother tongue children and high drop-out rates.

So far, coordination of the various local initiatives was lacking. The most significant change Xploit and another EU-funded project, LABlearning, have brought about, is the "motor team". This steering group consists of the major education institutions and authorities in the community and started to work together in the two projects and beyond. The involvement in Xploit and continued support of the municipality of Salt has been crucial in joining forces. Several local initiatives, "Youth Task Force" and planned European projects have been first results of this new coalition. A systematic "education plan" for Salt is the mid-term goal.

Desirable clarifications:

- The examples selected for documentation prove that networking of stakeholders has been taken place.
- In addition, it would be desirable to interview 2-3 stakeholders of these networking activities to hear in their own words how has their educational practice benefited (and is expected to benefit) from this joining of forces.

Recommendation for Action Phase 2

- The first Action Phase was mainly devoted to bring stakeholders together and to involve them in EU project activities. As a focus of Action Phase 2 a plan should be elaborated how to use this emerging coalition for the dissemination and mainstreaming of EU project results suitable to meet the challenges Salt faces

SALT CATALONIA COMMUNITY "MOTO" OWN WORDS



IASI RO

IASI COMMUNITY COORDINATOR KEYWORDS FOR ACTION PHASE 2

- We strongly recommend to continue to focus on new collaboration infrastructures in the Iasi educational sector, and perhaps even to focus on a strong group of stakeholders in this sector
- How can the new network take initiatives to work on mentality? Towards innovation, towards Europe?

- How can the new network take steps from networking to practical experiments or initiatives within the field of lifelong learning? Should there be a strong focus on certain groups of citizens? Youth, adults?
- How can the network strategically exploit the combination of European lifelong learning programs (innovation) and the structural funds (large scale implementation)?
- Describe the involvement of the public authorities in the new collaborative infrastructures
- How can the new infrastructures be made sustainable? How can the sustainability be linked to European cooperation?
- What short-term and long-term opportunities are there for the new educational network to link to other sectors? How could it be done?
- Describe and document the initiatives to support and sustain the new educational networks
- *To sketch at the end of Action Phase 2: lasi before, during and after Xploit*

HOLGER BINZLE IASI EVALUATION

Proposed motto: **From competing to sharing - changing of mentalities**

According to the Romanian partners, integrating EU project products in the local community poses a huge challenge: Adult learning provision is not very developed in lasi, so they say, and the few providers compete with each other instead of cooperating. There are no established structures for exchange and development of coherent joint strategies at local level.

In this particular context Xploit Action Phase 1 set out to start creating a professional culture among education stakeholders which is characterised by sharing and cooperation rather than holding back information and resources and competing. It is evident that such a change of mentality cannot happen from today to tomorrow but needs time to evolve gradually. Giving away something without asking an immediate return is a first step towards building trust, an indispensable precondition for developing a local learning community.

The Romanian partners have started this transformation process in Action Phase1:

They created two freely accessible internet tools:

A Resource Centre with information on education in lasi, and a database of learning resources developed by local education institutions in national and EU projects. Other institutions have started to contribute to this database.

Through this mapping and sharing activity information about EU projects and results have been circulated in the local education community.

Another promising sign of change is the level of interest in the Xploit project meeting in lasi demonstrated by the local municipality, university and other stakeholders. This momentum from EU project activities needs to be exploited in the future.

Desirable clarifications:

- Use the lasi Xploit visits to record testimonials of local stakeholder on the emerging change of mentality
- Translation into English of parts of the resource database would be useful for demonstration purposes beyond lasi
- List the EU project resources disseminated in the database

Recommendation for Action Phase 2

- Concrete aims for the second Action Phase need to be defined to build on the first steps of changing mentalities
- Additional support offers (training, consultancy for education colleagues) could be a second step, after the mapping and sharing of available resources which have already taken place

SWANSEA COMMUNITY COORDINATOR KEYWORDS FOR ACTION PHASE 2

- Considering the long-standing learning community tradition in Swansea and Wales, describe and document new steps that can be valuable to the Xploit project
- Describe and document initiatives on retaining young people through entrepreneurship and how this is linked to a reinforced labor market approach
- Stories about how young people reacts to the entrepreneurial experience, how they are involved and how they work are most welcome
- To what extend will these initiatives be supported by incubators, and how are private enterprises involved in these incubators?
- Reflections on how a reinforced labor market approach and the involvement of private players change or further develop the learning community infrastructures
- How can the involvement of private enterprises be linked to other lifelong learning needs and interests?
- How is or can youth entrepreneurship be linked to European cooperation?
- How can a learning community work on the possible differences in mentality in the public and private sectors?
- Reflection: how are new initiatives and innovation needed to sustain and uphold the dynamics of a learning community?
- General strategic reflection: how can experienced learning communities, such as Swansea and the Swansea region make themselves useful as models for other European communities?
- *To sketch at the end of Action Phase 2: What are the roles of an experienced learning community in European cooperation, such as the Xploit project?*

HOLGER BINZLE SWANSEA EVALUATION

Proposed motto: **Taking the learning region to the next level: involving the business world**

Swansea has a longstanding history of developing and implementing a learning community, or learning partnership, of local stakeholders.

Activities of the Swansea partners in Action Phase 1 were focused on two areas:

1. Involvement of Swansea City Football Club into the Adult Learners Week. The popularity of the Premiere League club could boost the interest in learning. Educational activities could include programmes for developing football supporters archiving skills in order to establish a Swans football archive. The club's support of such activities, however, is still pending.
2. University of Wales Swansea is building an Entrepreneurship Academy for future entrepreneurs. Students and alumni can learn how to set up a business. Close cooperation with local businesses as sponsors and mentors is envisaged. EU project results (on entrepreneurship issues) could be integrated.

Desirable clarifications:

- The role of EU project product in these two lines of local activities is not altogether clear yet and needs further thought. How exactly can EU project results be instrumental in taking an already fully developed learning region to the next level?
- An alternative way to go would be a retrospective one. The Xploit project and other emerging learning communities could perhaps profit from an account how EU projects helped to bring local stakeholders together and develop the learning region.
- A more detailed feedback is not possible at this stage for lack of an Action Phase Implementation Report.



The X^Q activities in Action Phase 2

Most communities cannot be expected to have competencies and experience to take the exploitation of European resources to a systematic level, or to be able to use European cooperation as incubators of learning communities...

Therefore the Xploit project has offered local and transnational training, inspiration and dialogues to the community partners, including training of what in the project is called lifelong learning guides or learning community guides.

This offer still stands in Action Phase 2.

The coordinator will flexibly exploit the project budget to meet such community needs. A financial solution will be developed in each individual case.

The focus in Action Phase 2 is on local support and training activities, as the needs of the communities are very different, as can be seen from the various profiles discussed in lasi.

In Action Phase 2 the community partners are expected to take more systematic steps in the fields of exploitation of European resources and in support of the sustainability and further development of the new learning community infrastructures.

These are not simple tasks, and therefore local training, support and dialogues might be needed.

The initiatives to establish such local Xploit events should be taken by the community partners, not by the coordinator.

Let us give a few examples of what such local X^Q activities from April to November 2012 might look like:

- Xploit resources organize a 1 or 2 days training and inspiration workshop in the community for a group of key players in the community
- Xploit resources organize a 1 or 2 days intensive training and inspiration workshop in the community for 2 or 3 key players working as learning community guides in their community
- Xploit resources organize an open workshop or more open workshops for organizations interested in contributing to the development of a learning community
- Xploit resources organize sessions for policy-makers, public authorities or local authority staff to discuss the development of learning city and a more systematic approach to European cooperation
- A small group of key players in the community visit the coordinator institution in Denmark and participate in different sessions on European cooperation and learning communities

Of course, it is possible to make all sorts of combinations of these examples.



The key challenge: documentation and the journalistic approach

The lasi meeting revealed that many, many good initiatives are taken in the Xploit communities - see *Impact* below.

However, a clear weakness was identified in the Xploit project. This weakness is shared by the vast majority of European projects.

The name of the weakness is *documentation*.

What does *documentation* mean?

It does NOT mean long reports or cascades of questionnaires. We are not talking about bureaucratic documentation, not at all.

We are talking about storytelling, making activities and initiatives visible, reporting interesting events in creative ways.

The problem is: if you don't tell the story, nobody knows!

European partners are usually not very good at this. We must change this mentality and we must do it within the Xploit project, not after.

What kind of local stories might be told in the Xploit project? Let's give some examples:

- ✚ European activities linked to Xploit
- ✚ New initiatives in the community linked to Xploit
- ✚ Meetings between community stakeholders addressing community challenges linked to Xploit, European cooperation or learning communities
- ✚ Concrete activities involving groups of citizens linked to lifelong learning and Xploit
- ✚ Activities and initiatives resulting from the presence of Xploit in the community
- ✚ Meetings and dialogues with key players in the community, such as policy-makers and important organizations
- ✚ Ideas and plans for the community linked to the Xploit mission
- ✚ Descriptions of changes in the community linked to the Xploit mission and to learning communities
- ✚ Creative reports from conferences, seminars and workshops in the field of lifelong learning and learning communities

Such documentation activities are of special importance to a project like Xploit addressing somewhat broad and "abstract" realities, very different from a concrete Leonardo project producing a handbook.

The more complicated the project, the more we need concrete storytelling to make the project visible and alive.

What is extremely important is to document the Xploit activities and impact from the point of view of citizens, community players and stakeholders.

Descriptions produced by Xploit partners should be balanced against storytelling through which we hear the voices of the community: the team of young people, the teacher, the mayor, the unemployed adult, etc.

Like in the courtroom, we need to call witnesses: how did I or we benefit from Xploit?

We all need to include a journalistic dimension in our European work. We need to ask ourselves the following questions whenever stepping onto the European scene, locally or transnational:

Is this an interesting event for Xploit?

Should the other partners and the Xploit audience know about this?

Would it be useful to others?

Could I tell a small story about this?

Who of the involved people might I include?

How could I tell the story in an interesting way?

Actually, there are in reality not so many ways of telling simple stories, unless you wish to use all sorts of advanced media tools not available to or within reach of most of us. What we can do is:

- ✚ Produce a Word document combining text and photos or other graphics
- ✚ Produce a Power Point in which the visual elements are the dominant
- ✚ Produce a video to be edited by local resources or by the project's media resources
- ✚ Produce a slideshow for the website
- ✚ Produce audio interviews accompanied by photos for the website

There are other creative options, and they will be most welcome!!, but these are the most simple and useful.

It is recommended to use simple media tools, and then focus on a creative way of telling the story.



Xploit Global

One of the tasks not yet addressed in a systematic way in the Xploit project is the Advisory Board.

The project has focused the resources on the local communities in Action Phase 1.

In project is, however, expected to establish dialogues with external experts on learning communities to allow critical reflections on the Xploit initiatives.

The idea was to establish a small Advisory Board at European level, but we failed to do that in the first half of the project.

Later it was discussed to establish local Advisory Boards, but few learning community experts are available at local level, except in Swansea.

But in fact the external dialogues at expert level have taken place throughout the entire project! Not in a systematic way, though, but in an informal way. These dialogues are taking place at global level, not at European level.

Let us briefly identify these informal expert dialogues:

- Xploit is in dialogue with expert European resources on learning communities, such as the EuroLocal project
- Xploit is in an ongoing dialogue with the national Israeli Learning Cities initiatives
- Xploit is in ongoing dialogue with the global Pascal Observatory initiatives on learning cities, representing learning cities initiatives in 5 continents

These informal dialogues have been of great value to the project, and the project coordinator tries to circulate as much of the dialogues as possible in the partnership and in the communities.

Further dialogues with the Pascal initiatives are planned and will be carried out in 2012, for example in Denmark in July, and Xploit is increasingly involved in European and global conferences and dialogues on learning cities.

However, the project has an obligation to address the external expert dialogues at a more systematic level, also to profile the Xploit learning communities' approaches against other approaches.

This more systematic approach must be carried out in Action Phase 2 and especially in the transition period from Action Phase 2 to the production of the final outcomes. The final outcomes must be critically reviewed by external expertise.

How can we do that?

We will choose to meet this challenge by linking the critical reviews to an invitation from the National Association of Local Authorities in Israel.

The Xploit coordinator has been asked to form a national advisory board by this association in support of the establishment of a number of learning cities in Israel - guided by the lessons learned from the first Israeli learning city, Modi'in.

Please refer to the document Xploit in Israel on www.xploit-eu.com.

The Xploit coordinator will do this in collaboration with Pascal's Peter Kearns from Australia and one or two not yet identified expert resources.

This means that the Xploit coordinator will take part in systematic reflections on learning cities from spring 2012, and that these reflections will involve learning cities experts at global level.

This initiative is considered perfect to the Xploit project, and will replace the original advisory board idea at European level.

The activities in the Israeli Advisory Board will without any doubt offer all the needed dialogues on the Xploit project's lifelong learning and learning communities' approaches.

Furthermore, this activity will be documented in two solid ways:

- By the activities in the Israeli Advisory Board itself
- By the final Xploit learning communities conference for policy-makers in March 2013



The final full partner meeting in Hungary

The last full partner meeting in the project will be held in Nagykovácsi Hungary November 2012. When we say the last full meeting, it is because we expect to have a partner session in connection with the final conference in Udine Italy in March 2013. The meeting in Nagykovácsi is extremely important, as it will take place in the transition phase between the last action phase and the phase in which the project will produce its final outcomes.

But the event is also important, as it can be foreseen that the partners will engage in many interesting community activities in Nagykovácsi, especially linked to entrepreneurship initiatives and the creation of a community platform.

Thus, the key focuses in Nagykovácsi should be:

1. Taking the project to the production of the final outcomes
2. The final Xploit conference for policy-makers
3. The future of Xploit

The Nagykovácsi partner will set the dates for this event as soon as possible.



The two step Xploit international dissemination conferences for policy-makers

The final Xploit dissemination and networking event will be taken to a higher level than foreseen in the application.

Xploit is expected to work at policy-maker level, and this mission will be accomplished by a two-step final dissemination conference addressing policy-makers with an interest in learning communities and the systematic exploitation of European resources.

The project has decided not to approach policy-makers until clear ideas, outcomes and results could be presented. Policy-makers are under great pressure across Europe and to engage them you need clear ideas and documented accomplishments and strong strategic visions.

Xploit expect to be able to present precisely that at the two-step final conference for policy-makers.

The two-step model looks like this:

1. In September 2012 a preparatory study visit will be organized in Udine Italy by the Xploit educational partner. This event will prepare a) the final conference in March 2012, and b) the future of Xploit to be discussed in Nagykovácsi in November 2012.
2. In March 2013 the project will organize a learning communities' conference for policy-makers in Udine Italy, organized by the two Xploit partners in Udine. The conference will invite policy-makers from the Xploit communities, policy-makers from interested communities across Europe, as well as learning cities experts at European and global level.

This two-step model is regarded a powerful climax in the "first" Xploit project.

The Udine partners will set the dates and take the necessary steps as soon as possible. It is important that the first step in September 2012 contributes strongly to the preparation of the big conference in March 2013.



Xploit impact - a special comment

We all wish to document the Xploit impact!

The coordinator, the EACEA, the partners, the Commission, etc., all wish to document the impact of the project on the local communities.

This is a big challenge to a so-called meta-level project: meta-level meaning activities not merely concerned with a concrete output, but concerned with communication, infrastructures and networking.

From what we hear across the participating communities, and also from our external network partners, a very large part of the Xploit impact is what we could call: indirect.

Many partners and collaborators state: this is happening because Xploit is in the community, not because Xploit directly organized this or that, but because it is present in the community, giving rise to all sorts of debates and initiatives, and bringing organizations together for the first time.

This great indirect impact is difficult to document and describe!

The direct Xploit impact can be described, like a local workshop for example. But when it comes about indirect impact, things are more complicated.

Actually we believe that the indirect Xploit impact on the communities might account for more than half or even more of the total project impact.

Therefore we need, in Action Phase 2, to take the indirect impact very seriously.

We need to document and describe it.

What kinds of indirect impact are we referring to? Examples are:

- Questions raised in the community about learning needs
- New forms of collaborations established
- European projects and other projects start to be coordinated
- European cooperation is put on the agenda, also in the local authorities
- New competences are developed in many different organizations
- New initiatives created, based on Xploit inspiration
- A new mentality addressing long-term learning community challenges emerge
- New creative ways of finding solutions are developed
- Etc.

This great indirect impact is also about exploitation of European resources. It is about exploitation of the Xploit project!

The project needs to focus on the documentation and understanding of this indirect impact in Action Phase 2.

The following measures support this:

- The strong focus on describing and documenting the new emerging infrastructures of collaboration
- The strong focus on storytelling, including the voices of the community
- The strong dialogues with external experts

The coordinator would like to encourage all partners and collaborating organizations to reflect on and describe the indirect impact of the Xploit project on the communities.

We would also like our quality assurance partner to include this aspect in future evaluation activities. Our quality assurance partner is free to give the partners and communities small tasks along the project in support of documenting the indirect project impact...!



The lasi community activities 1 - past

The lasi community is indeed facing many challenges, due to its history and present situations.

The city is quite big and with many resources, but no clear strategies have been developed on lifelong learning, European involvement or the ideas of learning communities.

Many young people and graduates leave the city and the country to study or work in other European countries, and one might talk about a certain brain drain in lasi.

Due to its history, it has been difficult to promote openness, the sharing of resources and collaborating on new initiatives.

However, there are many educational resources in the city, from kindergarten to several universities. Non-formal adult learning is, of course, not so popular, as it is not directly linked to an income.

Due to the economic situation, most people are very focused on certificates opening up to job and income opportunities.

Some educations and educational authorities have been and are engaged in European cooperation, a few of them are actually quite experienced.

Seen from a learning community point of view, the city is too big and there are too many challenges to address.

QA top-down approach to a learning community is not likely and would probably not produce the needed changes in participation and mentality.

Therefore the Xploit partners in lasi chose another way.



The lasi community activities 2 - present

The Xploit partners in lasi decided, after a long reflection period, to work with a small community than the city at large.

They defined their target community as the lasi educational sector, with a strong focus on organizations demonstrating a will to collaboration and change.

This approach is a blended bottom-up and top-down approach in the sense that it includes normal educational institutions and their staff, but that it also directly addresses the management level of the organizations and the educational responsible in the municipality.

The choice of the educational sector is not accidental. It seems quite obvious that change and innovation must come from the educational world in lasi, perhaps with some participation from cultural institutions as well.

So, besides implementing a number of European resources, the lasi partners identified a smaller community for the Xploit activities.

This is very much in line with most lifelong learning and European cooperation traditions, by the way.

In the first action phase the lasi partners have been working in these infrastructures. Some of the key challenges have been:

- To raise an interest in collaboration and change among educational and public authority stakeholders
- To promote a mentality of sharing and contributing
- To point to concrete activities that might benefit the participating stakeholders

- To link this to European cooperation
- To develop and interest in more systematic approaches to collaboration and change
- To open up to a number of open debates on learning, pedagogy, didactics and innovation

The knowledge of the difficult situation of the community was however balanced during the Xploit visit by dialogues with people and organizations, including policy-makers and educational responsible, with a strong and open interest in taking new educational initiatives in lasi - and link such initiatives to European cooperation.

It was clear to the Xploit partners that the educational community in lasi includes many very competent and visionary players, including policy-makers in the educational fields.

The many dialogues, from kindergartens to universities and policy-makers, definitely gave rise to optimism: open and interested people exist and represent all levels in the educational community from kindergarten teachers to educational managers.

They all seem to share the same basic interest: taking new positive educational steps and collaborate with European resources.

This group of people, and of course we only met a few of them, are already beyond the mentalities of self-protection and destructive forms of competition, and are willing to share new ideas and collaborate in new initiatives.

Please also refer to the lasi partners own words below



The lasi community activities 3 - future

So, the constructive resources are there.

And the will to use European resources is clear and open. The economic and social situation in lasi calls for a very precise approach to the European funding resources: programs such as the lifelong learning programs should be used to create change and innovation, and the European Social Fund should be used to implement such approaches at large scale.

The new lasi networks should pay much attention to this very precise and focused use of European resources:

- Exploiting existing European learning resources instead of inventing everything from scratch
- Addressing the lifelong learning and similar programs in a very focused way: producing innovation and new initiatives to meet the most urgent and important challenges to learning in the community
- To implement such innovations and measures at large scale through the Social Fund resources

All this point in the same direction, and this might very well be the key challenge to the Xploit partners in lasi in Action Phase 2 and far beyond:

How can the group of interested educational stakeholders be organized in a sustainable and solid way to allow such systematic approaches to the exploitation of European resources?

Even though the educational community in lasi is much smaller than the city at large, the lasi educational sector is very big, consisting of hundreds of institutions at all levels.

This fact calls for a new round of identifying the Xploit target community in lasi: within the educational sector in lasi, it might be considered to focus on a limited number of educations from different educational levels, and make sure that this group of core players are well consolidated and can work effectively together.

This does not mean that the new educational network should not take into consideration the lasi educational sector at large. The sector at large is well suited for dissemination and inspiration, but not for systematic approaches to change and innovation.

From the Xploit point of view the challenges of the Xploit partners in lasi in the second action phase and beyond therefore might look like this:

- To bring together a limited number of educational stakeholders from different educational levels, strongly and openly supported by the educational authorities, in a permanent network
- To develop a platform for this network, including funding, European cooperation and community initiatives
- To develop strong reflections on opportunities, limitations, strengths and weaknesses in the lasi educational communities to avoid over-ambitious initiatives and disappointed stakeholders
- To balance this platform against educational policies at local, national and European levels
- To promote a strong centre of openness, collaboration and contributing in the lasi educational communities
- To take steps to discuss the networks involvement in inspiring learning communities dialogues at local, European and global level
- To discuss strategies and approaches to the exploitation of different forms of European resources at systematic level
- To establish ongoing collaboration with similar communities in an limited number of European communities
- To promote non-formal learning opportunities for people at risk of exclusion, including young drop-outs

It goes without saying that these challenges go far beyond the Xploit project. Therefore the lasi network might contribute to the very important debate at the Xploit partner meeting in Hungary in November: what is the future of Xploit? How can the new “learning communities” be supported after Xploit? How could the lasi network contribute to this?

To sum up, the overarching challenges to the Xploit lasi partners in the new lasi network *within* the Xploit project period might be described like this:

- ✚ Develop the capacity in the new network to identify, capture and exploit available European resources at systematic level to meet community learning needs
- ✚ Work systematically with strengthening the new infrastructures and discuss how to describe them and sustain them
- ✚ Reflect on the future of the new network beyond Xploit and contributing to the future of Xploit





Explore and exploit the Iasi documentation videos on www.xploit-eu.com