

How did I experience working with Learning Communities in the Xploit?

Intro

Maribel Pena is responsible for the Youth Department in the Salt Municipality. In this interview she tells about how she experienced working in the Xploit project and in her community.

Maribel Pena Salt Catalonia ES



Contact

Maribel Pena - mpena@salt.cat



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



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**...