

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

Intro

Stefania works in the Municipality of Udine, being of the communities active throughout the Xploit process.

In this personal testimony she explains how she experienced working in the project - around the WHO motto *Think globally, act locally*.

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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



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.

