

STUDY CIRCLES

Laboratorio transfrontaliero di sviluppo delle risorse umane e delle reti di cooperazione per la valorizzazione delle risorse del territorio

čezmejna laboratorij za razvoj človeških virov in mrež sodelovanja za ovrednotenje znanja in virov na območju.

Brief outline of project goals and activities

<http://www.study-circles.eu/>

This short presentation is meant to outline the main activities and challenges of the cross-border project "Study Circles – cross border laboratory for the development of human resources and cooperation networks promoting local resources" financed by the European territorial cooperation Programme Italy Slovenia 2007-2013, Axis 2 - Increase competitiveness and development of a knowledge-based society. www.study-circles.eu

The project develops in a cross-border environment the "study circle" learning methodology which is used in non formal adult education and widely recognized for its being very inclusive, supportive of active participation of the learner and community oriented, and applies it in the context of local development initiatives.

The project, which is implemented by educational and training institutions/organisations together with local development agencies/institutions, covers the following areas: Eastern Veneto, Torre and Natisone Valleys, Collio and Carso in Friuli Venezia Giulia, on the Italian side, Upper Soča Valley, Municipality of Kanal, Collio and hilly area around Nova Gorica on the Slovenian side.

The local context and development priorities

Development strategy and goals

Local development strategies in the project areas are based on sustainable rural development and include promotion of a sustainable agriculture, typical local products, preservation of natural environment, enhancement of local cultural and historical heritage, crafts revitalization, where awareness of local knowledge and identity is the key to upgrade the tourism offer and territorial marketing initiatives.

highlighted needs:

- fostering of innovation and new knowledge,
- enhancement of local traditional knowledge, as an instance in the promotion of local products and environment or reintroduction of endangered crafts
- strengthening of cooperation and social relations at community level
- networking local actors and initiatives

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Specificities and strengths of the study circle methodology in relation to the highlighted issues

- Demand driven approach
- It is inclusive, accessible, doesn't need heavy infrastructure
- It promotes an active, participatory approach to knowledge elaboration and exchange
- The learning environment is characterised by freedom of decision, stimulating creative solutions and innovation
- The learning process is related to personal commitment and direct experience of concrete issues
- It enhances the different types of knowledge, scientific, traditional, indigenous knowledge
- It promotes the community, widespread dimension of knowledge supporting network creation
- It helps to strengthen local identity and relations
- Action goal: Educational gains are preferably concrete outputs to share at community level

OUR PATH

The reference models of the project

In the present project our approach draws on the good practices of Slovenia (national system and Region Toscana (regional LLL integrated system articulated at local micro-level) due to the presence in the working team of the experts of Andragoški center Slovenije and Unesco Chair for human development and culture of peace of the University of Florence. The model we are building though is bound to have its own specificities due to local environment, the cross-border dimension, and existing national and local regulatory frameworks.

The project challenge

Through the implementation of the project pilot activities it is meant to build the prototype of a cross-border study circle system integrated into the local lifelong learning system and geared to meet local development needs and priorities.

In order to do so, the project partnership is defining through direct experience and network building sustainable ways to carry out needs investigation, inducement of learning demand, SC planning, management, monitoring & evaluation activities and they do so enhancing existing tools, competences, but also building new ones..

The Project concrete outputs:

- Definition of the set of competences of the professional profile of SC mentor in the cross-border area (20 people trained through classroom training and direct practice).

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- A certified training programme for SC mentors including e-learning
- A system of consulting tables at local micro-level where intermediary organisations i.e. municipalities and their associations, entrepreneurs and workers organisations, consortia, tourist promotion associations, civil society organisations define priority needs, identify target groups and organise local promotion services/activities .
- 10 pilot study circles, 4 of which at cross-border level
- A cross-border network of local contact points to be based and connected
- A theoretical model and handbook for planning and running a cross-border Study Circle system.

Pilot study circles implementation

Pilot SC have addressed different target groups, employed and unemployed, professional and amateurs, entrepreneurs, citizens.

A study circle may involve a group of 8-15 people and has a duration of 40 hours (12-15 meetings); it is guided by a mentor as facilitator of the learning process which is based on knowledge exchange, participatory action research also through involvement of specific expertise when needed.

We highlight through the following examples of pilot SCs some of the main issues dealt with in the framework of our project and the elements of opportunity created.

SC: "Landa carsica, opportunities and constraints"

Contents

The SC concerned the management of high nature value farmland in the Krast area enhancing farmers' roles in the preservation of local environment through sustainable, multifunctional agriculture, eco-tourism, landscape maintenance techniques, promotion of new income generating activities.

Goals

Knowledge of regulatory provisions concerning Natura 2000 sites and incentives for farmers promoting biodiversity protection

Analysis of opportunities connected with local sustainable development and efficient use of resources as added value

Creation of a prototype of tourist product and analysing market requirements and promotion strategies

Output

Swot analysis of the group presenting itself to local institutions as stakeholder in the consulting process for local planning.

Web page presenting the farms, the Karst land and products including tourism facilities to experience it based on sustainability issues.

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Network creation

The group managed to obtain a financing through the local Chamber of Commerce and is now following a procedure to evolve into an enterprise network.

SC "Park Food" - Eastern Veneto

Main contents

Enhancement of minor products with a clear local identity (product and land) involving both local producers, restaurants, selling points. The initiative develops a previous project where about 50 local quality products were identified (Tipinet) involving some 350 producers in the cross-border area, 200 in Veneto.

The study circle was meant to help producers to analyse problems and opportunities, to share a new vision of sustainable quality food, respectful of the environment and biodiversity and to communicate this vision.

Goals

Definition of new quality criteria
To start new productions as additional sources of income
To define a sales strategy and communication tool

Output

Code of ethics
Joint Communication tool (newsletter)
Statute of the group

Cross border SCs "Embraced by the hills" and "Along the paths of Krivapete"

Contents

Promotion of an integrated tourism offer.
Upgrading and innovation of marketing and communication strategies, strengthening local identity, increase of knowledge about local events, resources etc
Promotion of new tourist products networking hosting structures, local producers, associations promoting local land, culture, traditions and history, tourist operators

Goals

To promote mutual knowledge concerning existing tourist offer, local attractions, initiatives and so on.
To find new ideas to promote the cross-border area jointly
To make research for and elaborate joint itineraries
To develop new communication tools

Output

Cross border itineraries and map

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Cross border and local SCs “ Biovagando” “Fruits form the emperors’ garden” and more..

Contents

The initiatives intend to promote vegetable gardens and organic horticulture, but also orchard cultivations (also enhancing local varieties) as income generating activities as well as sources of subsistence at community level in general.

At entrepreneurial level an important issue concerns the promotion of local typical products through networking of producers and common branding of the product.

Goals

To exchange and acquire new knowledge concerning plants, vegetal species traditionally grown or spontaneously growing locally

To exchange and acquire new knowledge concerning cultivation techniques both traditional and organic

To elaborate new ways of using /proposing/transforming such products increasing life quality and the knowledge of local environment

To promote network initiatives among local producers

Output

Communication tools to promote the knowledge acquired and elaborated

Awareness raising events at community level

Network creation

A network of entrepreneurs is being built involving producers of a local typical vegetable.

Crossborder and local SC “Our local heritage” and “Textile Crafts”

Contents

Revitalization of local vocations and crafts as an opportunity to promote new entrepreneurial initiatives.

Highlithing local cultural and ethnological heritage and the importance of its preservation, promoting mutual knowledge and joint initiatives at cross-border level.

Goals

To increase mutual knowledge

To identify common needs

To enhance local land, research local arts and history as a common source of inspiration for new artefacts to produce also jointly.

To propose innovative artefacts prototypes

To experiences new approaches to get to the market and communicate products

Output

Exhibitions of original artefacts

On line catalogues of products and joint presentation using ICT tools

Joint participation to local events , marketplaces

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