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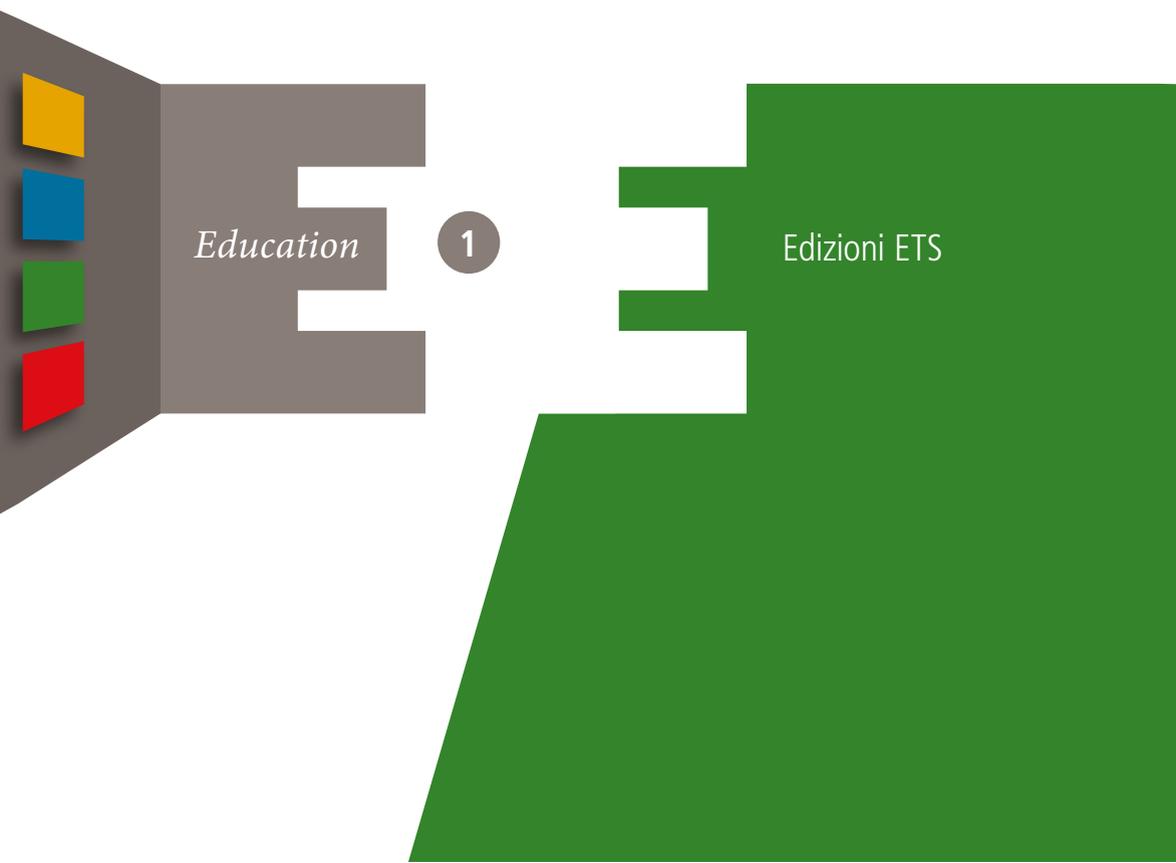
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Lifelong learning devices for sustainable local development

*The study circles experience
in the crossborder area Italy-Slovenia*

N. Bogataj, G. Del Gobbo Eds.



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Lifelong learning devices for sustainable local development

*The study circles experience
in the cross border area Italy-Slovenia*

edited by Giovanna Del Gobbo and Nevenka Bogataj



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IN EVROPSKO KOHEZIJSKO POLITIKO



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FOREWORD

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia considers international cooperation an important activity at the level of best practices evolution. This project and similar ones are a welcome learning enrichment from international cooperation and an opportunity for further development of own practices, models and system solutions.

Based on the conceptual framework of Scandinavian liberal education role model and learning in the local community, Slovenia then established its own study circle model in the nineties of the last century. Strategic development of adult education in the new state of Slovenia enabled the evolution of several concepts, models as a core of the adult education system solutions but also for the States' lifelong learning conceptualisation. This goes not only for the national education sector but also for the issues and links between sectors. Pilot projects and model later outgrew the experimental implementation limits and became national practices reaching diverse aims, target groups and levels of adults' inclusion in education.

The Slovenian study circles model is at the same time a method and tool for adult education, but also a lifelong learning incentive in the broadest sense. It stimulates community learning and democratizes relationship. The frame of local and individual needs and contexts gains importance here. At the system level these goals were achieved only due to the grounded professional and conceptual basis and relatively well trained staff-mentors. After more than two decades study circles prove to be a well broadcast seed and widely implemented practice from both individual results and benefits perspective and the development of local communities as learning entities perspective. However, it is still a challenge to enforce study circles in other sectors (of policy) to become a respected and effective developmental method/tool. We are convinced that a developmental role of adult education in Slovenia is also in innovation support, therefore developing such methods, approaches, tools and potentials to promote all forms of lifelong learning, adult learning in particular.

In the context of the strategic document Resolution on Master Plan of Adult Education in Slovenia 2013-2020, the study circles model is framed into the first priority «general adult education development» which supports the goals of key competences for 21st century. To realize righteousness and to achieve these goals it supports:

- Motivation programmes, new approaches, information and guidance for vulnerable groups in order to acquire basic skills and inclusion into education and training
- Education offer provision as close home as possible (ibid, p. 36; http://arhiv.acs.si/dokumenti/ReNPIO_2013%E2%80%932020.pdf).

This project and its development in Italy shows deployment of the model or working method for the strengthening of entrepreneurial competences of individuals, their integration into the local community and, last but not least, into society development, not only in economic terms. Transfer of the Slovenian model to Italy as a good practice is important for Slovenian practice and system level as well, due to its recognition abroad and as a chance of its further reflection in terms of development and practice. Additional project analysis of the Slovenian model for the needs of its appropriate and grounded transfer and test in particular cross-border environment provides important answers to future professional and system work. Therefore, from this perspective, this form of cooperation and integration reached its goal. Even more, study circles of this project are an excellent case showing how diverse adult education models and learning methods overcome all kinds of borders, objective and metaphorical, local, regional and national. New paths are opened, horizons are broadened, new ties are weaved, better ones, for individuals and communities.

On this occasion at the level of educational policy and Slovenian adult education in particular, we are thankful to all, who contributed to the project in terms of content or any other way, and thus contributed to its obvious results.

Ema Perme
Education Development Office at the Ministry
of Education, Science and Sport
of the Republic of Slovenia

The Cross-border human resources development and cooperation networks for the enhancement of local resources laboratory, created within the Italian-Slovenian cross-border cooperation programme, is not only a positive experience of how to use the study circles methodology, but it also verifies its feasibility in the context of economic development policies centered on the innovative potential of the territories and it reaffirms its validity and sustainability in an economic and social environment that has completely changed since the issue of study circles was tackled for the first time in this part of Europe.

In November 2001 the European Commission published the document *Creating the european lifelong learning area*, where in the introduction underlined that «the Feira European Council in June 2000 asked the Member States, the Council and the Commission, within their areas of competence, to identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all. This mandate confirms that lifelong learning is a key element of the Lisbon strategy to make Europe the most competitive and knowledge-based economy in the world.» The scenario in which lifelong learning policies were set was made up of a growing economic model which, in order to stabilize and accentuate the growth, needed to be redirected towards innovation (knowledge economy). In order to achieve this objective, it would have to focus on human resource development as a continuous process, throughout the course of life. From these assumptions arose

- the need for lifelong learning to cover "the whole range of formal, non-formal and informal learning",
- underline that the learning objectives included "active citizenship, personal fulfilment and social inclusion, as well as employment-related aspects",
- the importance of the "centrality of the learner, the importance of equal opportunities and the quality and relevance of learning opportunities."

This opened the way for integrated policies for education, training and employment and demand-centered educational policies, that is, on the needs and choices of the people, and not only on the offer. Policies that could not be delegated only to the responsibility and activities of public authorities, but they should engage in «local-level partnerships, which are essential for on-site strategies... the local authorities, schools, universities, other providers of learning opportunities and associated services, such as information and guidance services, research centers, enterprises (as part of their corporate social responsibility), local NGOs, for example, voluntary organizations and local groups, as well as representatives of particular groups of (potential) learners, and those who are responsible for equality between women and men.»

In this regard some useful experiences came in handy, such as those carried out in the US or Scandinavia or Britain, ie. the Individual Learning Account, Distance Learning and, in fact, study circles.

Tuscany, for example, was one of the regions that mostly followed this guidelines: from 2000 to 2004 677 study circles were set up, with a total of 4,900 students in the fields of art, history and culture, computer science, workshops, foreign languages, music and dance, psychology, medicine and social life, theater, cinema and fashion show. Less used, or in that first experience completely absent, were the issues most closely linked to employment and economic development.

Since then, both at European and local level, a lot, if not everything, has changed. This does not mean that the needs made in the early years of the previous decade have disappeared, but certainly the economic crisis has certainly changed the situation.

This change is demonstrated by the Tuscan experience, where:
 from 1998 to 2004 the employment rate rose from 57.1 to 63.7,
 the unemployment rate decreased from 7.8 to 5.2,
 the employment rate among women rose from 44.5 to 52.9,
 the female unemployment rate decreased from 12.3 to 7.3.

The following years, from 2008 onwards, were the years of the crisis.

These are some data referred to 2013:

- the unemployment rate, while still well below the national average, reached 8.7% (12.2% in Italy),
- there were almost 22,000 less employees and 65,000 more unemployed, totalling 150,000 units (the highest value in recent history),
- the effects of the crisis were felt in virtually every group of the population.

In Europe we have a similar trend, although the values may be more or less accentuated and therefore today, in an even more significant way than in the early years of the previous decade, we have to tackle a development problem that should enhance the economic and cultural characteristics of Europe and its territories. Sure, we are still talking about economy and the knowledge society, but even more defined in terms of innovation and innovation linked to the characteristics of the single areas: global and local at the same time.

This is also why we accentuate the fundamental elements of the educational strategies identified in the early years of the previous decade: lifelong learning, demand policies, work integration, on-site partnerships and so on.

The study circles were given with the opportunity to expand to such an extent as to include workplace issues (eg. the improvement of company organization and security) in order to enhance the economic and employment aspects. With this methodology young and adult populations were given the opportunity to improve, through the exchange and integration of knowledge, existing and perhaps unexpressed resources.

The Cross-border human resources development and cooperation networks for the enhancement of local resources laboratory, is a proof of such an approach in itself and for its repeatability.

Paolo Benesperi

Councillor of the Tuscany Region for Education, Training, Employment policies between 1990 and 2005, president of the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong learning between 2001 and 2005.

CHAPTER 5

CAPACITY BUILDING AND BOTTOM-UP PROCESS IN THE STUDY CIRCLE PROJECT

Glenda Galeotti

Abstract

The paper analyzes how local actors' networks implementing the SC system, that is managing organizations, local stakeholders and communities, act as a learning network. While highlighting the main elements affecting the relationship between education and development the analysis focuses on the definition of territorial system of adult education as implemented by the Study Circles project bottom-up approach. Through the pilot operations carried out in the crossborder area, the Study Circles project developed a process of "territorial capacity building" of the social capital where the strengthening of human capital goes in parallel with the development of the local system of adult education.

Questo contributo analizza come le reti di attori locali ai vari livelli, gestori del sistema, portatori di interesse e comunità locali, siano uno spazio di formazione degli stessi attori locali e delle comunità locali. Evidenziando i principali elementi del rapporto tra educazione e sviluppo, l'analisi conduce a definire il sistema territoriale di educazione degli adulti implementato dal progetto Study Circles come un processo bottom-up. A partire dalla sperimentazione realizzata nei territori, il progetto Study Circles ha messo in atto un processo di capacity building territoriale del capitale sociale in cui al rafforzamento del capitale umano corrisponde uno sviluppo del sistema locale di educazione degli adulti.

Prispevek analizira, kako omrežja lokalnih akterjev (vodilne organizacije, lokalni nosilci interesa in skupnosti), ki izvajajo sistem ŠK, delujejo kot učeno omrežje. Z izpostavljanjem glavnih elementov, ki vplivajo na odnos med izobraževanjem in razvojem, je opredeljen teritorialni sistem izobraževanja odraslih, ki se izvaja od spodaj navzgor in ga podpirajo študijski krožki. S pilotnimi projekti, ki se izvajajo na čezmejnem območju, je projekt ŠK omogočil »teritorialni razvoj sposobnosti«, kjer se krepí človeški kapital vzporedno z razvojem lokalnega sistema za izobraževanje odraslih.

5.1. Introduction

The *Study Circles* project, which falls under the European Territorial Cooperation Programme⁴, was mainly aimed at testing an educational action for local development, where local communities would play a leading role in strengthening their skills for finding sustainable solutions to the problems of the local context, as well as for innovating productive and entrepreneurial activities.

These assumptions led to the close relationship between education and local development, which has been developed in the Study Circle project through precise methodological and operational choices, which pursue not only training objectives, but also promotional ones. The first refer to what the Study Circles project's participants learn or could learn; the latter refer to the dissemination and sharing of the skills acquired outside the groups directly involved in training. Therefore, the knowledge acquired by the participants or the group influences also the wider community through the creation of local networks, whose function is to spread the acquired skills and knowledge and the created products.

Another innovative element of the cross-border study circles is their strong skills-oriented educational action that is implemented through many hours of practical activities and the creation of a product, an event or a publication. A third characteristic of the project, and thus of the cross-border system generated by it, is the type of non-formal educational and training organizations that manage it, such as Training Agencies, People's Universities and Provincial Centres for Adult Education (formerly known as CTP⁵), Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Local Development Agencies. These strongly characterized managing partners have defined the integration between education and local development at various levels of the cross-border system, by involving stakeholders from both sectors, by referring to political and strategic frameworks, and by granting access to various funding opportunities.

This demonstrates that the Study Circle project is strongly regionally-based and is aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the local production system, based on the strategy for the development of a *knowledge-based society* and territorial vocations, according to the logic of endogenous local

⁴ Programme for Cross-Border Cooperation Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013

⁵ With the Ministerial Act no. 36/2014 and the "Guidelines for the transition to the new system" and its attachments the provisions of the Presidential Decree no. 236/12 (Adult education reform and transformation of the Permanent Territorial Centres in Provincial Centres for Adult Education) were finally applied.

development⁶.

Based on these considerations, the paper focuses on how the stable networks of Italian and Slovenian stakeholders characterize the project: their contribution to the creation of a cross-border study circles system through a bottom up process; the strengthening of players skills at the different levels. The Study Circle learning environment is read as capacity building action, meaning by it the ability of social and organizational transformation. Capacity Building activities address human capital development while creating an environment that can trigger virtuous paths in terms of sustainable development⁷. They differ from traditional learning performed through training, because they impact on individual skills also involving organizational contexts and systems in which such skills are expressed, thus expanding the potential⁸.

5.1. Social capital, adult education and local development

The term “local development” is used to indicate a variety of cultural, scientific and political positions, as well as theoretical and methodological references, practices and experiences that may even be contradictory with each other. However, several authors agree that refers to different phenomena that are characterised by the presence, in a limited area, of a group of different players, who implement cooperative strategies to promote the development and enhancement of local resources (Triglia, 2005). These various definitions focus on an essential characteristic of local development: the involvement of the civil society in the definition of the objectives, tools and resources of those, who are involved in promoting the development of a specific territory (Barbieri, 2003). The purposes of this mobilization range from meeting basic needs to improving the economic future and the quality of life of local people by using local resources -

⁶ Garofoli G., *Modelli locali di sviluppo*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2010; Becattini G., *Modelli locali di sviluppo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1989

⁷ United Nations Development Programme, Supporting Capacity Building the UNDP approach, New York, 2011. Eade, D., *What is CapacityBuilding?*, in Capacity-Building, An Approach to People Centered Development, Oxfam Publications, Oxford, 1997, pp. 23-49. See also: Agenda 21, *Chapter 37: Creating Capacity for Sustainable Development*, Rio de Janeiro, 1992.

⁸ Coordinamento tecnico programma Empowerment (a cura di), *Dossier Capacity Building. L'evoluzione del concetto. Dalla cooperazione allo sviluppo alla modernizzazione delle PA europee*, Formez, Roma, 2006

[http://db.formez.it/FontiNor.nsf/EurFocusCapacity/812EC4A547B90084C12571A80036BA65/\\$file/Dossier%20CB%20evoluzione.pdf](http://db.formez.it/FontiNor.nsf/EurFocusCapacity/812EC4A547B90084C12571A80036BA65/$file/Dossier%20CB%20evoluzione.pdf)

natural, cultural, material, immaterial- with the aim of setting up a business-friendly environment.

One of the cornerstones of local development, which influences every other factor, is social capital, i.e. the relationship between local players, their skills and their willingness to cooperate and trust each other that are rooted in a certain shared culture (Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995; Coleman, 1990; Pasqui, 2003). Social capital is instrumentally and directly useful for defining territorial priorities and strategies, and its role in meeting the demand for high-quality and flexible production through cooperation is rapidly growing. Social capital can be differentiated according to its nature, scope, role, territory or type of local players involved. The latter are usually collective subjects with particular interests, and their level of involvement may vary according to their responsibility in the development process.

But social capital is not sufficient for local development, since human capital (knowledge) (Schultz, 1963; Becker, 1964) and physical capital (infrastructures, resources) are needed too. Social capital can positively influence the enhancement, growth and upgrading of human capital and physical capital, starting the cooperation between local players⁹.

Social and human capital are the key elements on which the Study Circle project has triggered innovation processes based on the movement of knowledge of local players in a certain area (Trigilia, 2008; Coleman, 1988). Innovative solutions originate and develop in those contexts, which can enhance the skills by critically interpreting how they meet development problems, also by referring to other non-local and expert skills. In short, we have to recognize and enhance local forms of expression of skills, in order to expand them and increase their dialogical capacity to meet local problems.

The measures for strengthening the capacity of local players to enhance the knowledge and human capital of a certain territory are aimed not only at gaining a competitive advantage in production specialization and innovation, but they are also an important tool of social inclusion¹⁰.

By applying the concepts of social and human capital to the Study

⁹ Robert Putnam differentiates these type of capital as follows: «Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense, social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.» Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, page 19.

¹⁰ This is stated in the Europe 2020 strategy, which aims to revive the European Union by making it smart, sustainable and inclusive. These three priorities are divided into targets for achieving high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

Circle project's activities we can point out some of its strategic elements, first and foremost the ability to determine how the project's activities have been aimed at strengthening social capital and at qualifying human capital. The willingness of the involved players to collaborate through stable and trustworthy relationships was aimed not only at sharing useful information or coordinating activities to achieve a common goal, but especially at integrating cognitive and socio-relational aspects.

Another significant aspect for the purposes of this paper is the possibility to analyse the effects produced by the Study Circle project's activities not only on its direct and indirect beneficiaries, but also on its promoters and stakeholders, as they are a part of the collaborative networks and operating flows aimed at establishing the cross-border model, thus becoming a learning space and opportunity themselves.

Therefore, the project can be seen as a "bottom-up" process, in which the local community and players implement adult education activities for territorial development, through public-private cooperation and joint definition of the regional and cross-border development priorities, which are then submitted to the relevant institutions. These same components prove to be of central importance in achieving the players' ability to act effectively together, on the basis of a shared project approach and consultations with local institutions, as an organizing principle of activities at all levels¹¹.

The strengthening of local actors' networks through formal and non formal actions is a "capacity building" action, since it qualifies their capacity to pursue a goal and contributes to the shaping of an organized system of non-formal adult education on a territorial basis.

¹¹ The paradigm of sustainability, which attempts to reconcile growth and equity in the context of intergenerational stability of resources, considers the development as a short and long term achievement of interrelated objectives of social, economic and environmental sustainability. In particular, social sustainability includes equity, empowerment, accessibility, participation, cultural identity and institutional stability. These variables focus on a socially equitable distribution of costs and benefits derived from the way in which man manages the environment; a way that has become more and more holistic (for the diversification and integration of human, socio-cultural and economic resources), different (for the enhancement of local identities and biodiversity), fractal (for achieving participatory and non-hierarchical organisational systems), evolutive (to support diversity, equity, democracy, the conservation of resources and a higher quality of life). Khan M. A. (1995), *Sustainable Development: The Key Concepts, Issues and Implications*, in "Sustainable Development", V. 3 no. 2.

5.2. Collaborative networks and informal learning within the Study Circle project

Two of the main results achieved by the Study Circle project are the establishment of stable networks between local players, communities and stakeholders for testing the study circles for local development, and the implementation of the Cross-border study circles system¹². As a whole, a study circle system is characterized by the relationships between the involved stakeholders and services delivery (Federighi, 2006).

At territorial level we can classify this complex network of relationships into the following groups:

- micro-networks, which consist of study circles that connect different types of organizations sharing the same approach to education and its development, results and effects;
- meso-networks of training activities support services (local stakeholders network and information offices);
- macro-networks at regional, cross-border and project level.

But, if we apply a classification model based on the type of relationship, these networks can be classified as:

- formal, which refer to how the project supporting networks and info-points are managed;
- informal and local for sharing the study circles' educational skills and results.

Both types of networks can offer support to the regional and cross-border political and institutional bodies.

Finally, Study Circles' networks can be classified also according to local development. In this case, they can be divided into:

- networks of players, who deal with local development;
- networks of experts in the field of development;
- networks of knowledge/products for local development.

As it has been previously mentioned, the networks' main purpose was to test the study circles for local development and establish a cross-border study circles system based on the collaboration between a number of local and cross-border players, which would ensure the continuity and sustainability of the implemented activities.

Therefore, it can be said that the Study Circle project's activities have been implemented through a networking model, where each player, body or stakeholder contributed to adequately solve the development problems

¹² For further information see the contribution by Elena Slanisca.

and needs expressed by the areas involved in order to utilize local resources and implement democratic planning processes. By actively involving local communities, we defined shared actions and policies, not by creating consensus on an already taken decision, but according to a shared vision of local development actions, which both mobilize the resources and their cognitive, innovative and creative potential in terms of human resources, information, know-how, ability to find innovative solutions to problems, and to find new planning and intervention alternatives.

This was basically the intent expressed by the project's management group, which implemented a widespread awareness-raising campaign in order to involve the potential beneficiaries, stakeholders and the community as a whole. And this same intent directed the complex network of relationships and partnerships, which were needed to meet the needs and to pursue the improvement of the society and especially its ability to act as a set of more or less formally organized individuals, whose aim is to create innovative social processes (Murray, Caulier, Grice, Mulgan, 2011).

Likewise, the cross-border system does not require new structures or functions by the participating institutions, but rather the expansion and networking of the existing ones: at the level of those, who are involved in the management of the system and local educational services, and of those institutions, which ensure the continuity and sustainability of the system itself. The mirrored conditions on both sides of the border, as well as the type of the organizations involved, were chosen taking into the account the Study Circle project's long-term results: its main goal was to set the conditions for the integration of the experimented educational model, which is typical of non-formal education, in a cross-border lifelong learning system based on local needs.

At this point we should underline the initial differences between the two areas involved: while in Slovenia a study circle structured non-formal adult education offer was already widespread, the Italian area involved did not know or use this educational methodology. Therefore, the Italian partners had to fully implement both the management system and the formative offer, while the Slovenian group began working according to its many years of experience. The Italian partners' risk was to replicate *tout court* and uncritically the Slovenian model on the Italian side without ensuring the needed sustainability, which only the acquisition of specific governance skills by the Italian organizations could ensure (Worldwatch Institute, 2014; Bologna, 2005; Hopwood, Mellor, O'Brien, 2005).

At the same time, this condition proved to be a training opportunity for

the project's staff, who needed to be specifically trained about the working methods of the territorial system of adult education. Moreover, while the Slovenian partners, unlike the Italian ones, could share their knowledge on study circle's educational methodologies, both groups expressed the need to deepen and upgrade their skills regarding the creation and management of the territorial educational system.

Gradually, the relationships between the partners' members became a sort of a training space, which was coordinated by the Scientific and Technical Committee (STC), which supervised the project activities, and expressed through the meetings of the Coordination Group¹³. These spontaneous and informal learning processes, based on active collaboration and exchange of knowledge, have been ensured by the dynamic participation to the project activities (Rogoff, 2003) and the participants' willingness to set the best conditions for testing and adapting the study circles cross-border system.

By defining the partners' collaboration networks as a place for informal education, we have identified those mechanisms that allow us to "explore and broaden the experience", as John Dewey described the training activities (Dewey, 1933).

Within the Technical and Scientific Committee, this form of education has been mainly carried out through a sort of "conversation" aimed at connecting ideas and people in order to build and nurture community-producing relationships (Jeff, Smith, 2011; Blyth, 2008; Jeff, Smith, 2005; Zeldin, 1999; Tramma, 2009). At the same time, this conversation stimulated a survey on the project activities that were being implemented, which were critically and reflectively interpreted in order to redefine the overall strategy, recalibrate the actions and manage the complexity that the project entailed (Orefice, 2006).

On the one hand this conversation represented a fundamental condition for establishing the community and stimulating forms of cooperation led by the democratic values and behaviors of the involved participants in the issues that affect them (Sennet, 2012); on the other hand, by adopting educational methods that foster the acquisition of new skills or the upgrading of the existing ones, it represented a tool for producing learning contents that contribute to improve the starting conditions. The informal learning contents acquired are the result of the analysis of situations that require a deeper understanding or a wider range of skills.

On this basis we can define the *Study Circles'* STC as a "learning community", i.e. an environment for cooperative research, inspired by

¹³ During the implementation of the project activities the Scientific and Technical Committee met four times per year.

pondering experiences and knowledge and by the mutual sharing of intellectual resources (Calvani, 20015; Brown, Campione, 1990).

Learning processes have been supported and facilitated by experts, who were also members of the STC, and whose task was to monitor the successful implementation of the activities and to strengthen the skills of other members, if new specific cognitive needs arose¹⁴. By adopting pondering elements we were able to overcome the limitations of natural learning, with the aim of developing self-critical skills and raise the awareness on the actions and practices, and to grasp the connections between relational, organizational and contextual variables that characterize the management of a territorial educational system with the aim of setting up an environment, which would transfer the performative competences that were expressed by the project activities to a level of reflexivity and co-building of skills that are necessary for defining the SC cross-border model. This would be achieved, in order to qualify the action itself, by connecting practical and experiential knowledge to declarative-propositional one. From this point of view, the SC cross-border model represents the operational and interpretive framework, where the activities carried out by each of the participating organizations, their role and competences gain significance. Its intrinsic value can be measured by determining its degree of transferability to other contexts.

In our case, the transition from the already acquired skills to declaratory-propositional ones occurred, therefore, through an educational intentionality aimed at developing increasingly more in-depth insights on how an adult education territorial system and its sustainability are built and managed, and by enriching the skills of the group with the Study Circles project's operational flows (Coluci, Colombo, Montali, 2008, pp. 82-84).

The knowledge thus generated is the result of the interactions between subjects, and the outcome of sharing and reflecting enhanced by intersubjectivity, which is transformed into a collective product, as the ability to structure and organize a territorial system and design the tools to implement the project activities.

¹⁴ The Scientific and Technical Committee was composed by Prof. Paolo Orefice, prof. Giovanna Del Gobbo and Mrs Glenda Galeotti, respectively Director, Coordinator and Researcher of the UNESCO Chair in Human Development and Culture of Peace at the University of Florence. Dr. Nevenka Bogataj-Andragoški center Slovenije/Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (ACS)

5.3. Training of Italian partners for setting up the Study circles cross-border system

As it has already been mentioned, while Slovenia's study circles educational offer had a decades-long history and its adult education support system was already partially codified¹⁵, there was no similar experience in the Italian border areas.

During the first year of operations, specific training needs were expressed by Italian partners, especially in the field of operating procedures aimed at pursuing the project's objectives and at implementing the Study circles cross-border system.

After analyzing the needs expressed by the members of the Italian organizations the project's experts team organized specific training sessions throughout the second year of activity, with the aim of strengthening the group skills and knowledge in the field of operational plans' definition and implementation, which led to the establishment of the Study circles cross-border system and its sustainability.

The purpose was also to avoid the risk to simply replicate the Slovenian model, which would result in transferring an efficient model into an environment with different political, administrative and cultural characteristics, and to offer the opportunity to take into account other success stories, like the Tuscan one.

The key issue was about the partners role in formalizing stable networks with stakeholders and other players, in order to establish local study circles' supporting systems and how to ensure the sustainability of this territorial system of adult education for local development through its political-strategic and institutional framework¹⁶.

¹⁵ In 1996, Slovenia had already enshrined the principles of adult educational activities with the Adult Education Act. Today, efforts are focused on changing the National Decree on Adult Education Standards and Norm, which includes the definition of "public network" for training. The recent Italian legislation has established the Networks for Lifelong Learning (Law no. 92 of 28.6.2012; Agreement on lifelong learning of 20.12.12; Agreement of 10.07.2014; "Strategic lines of intervention in the field of lifelong learning services and organization of territorial networks"), which represent the organizational modality of the lifelong learning system that integrates public and private educational, training and employment services of a given territory.

¹⁶ The training sessions with the members and mentors of the Italian organizations were organised and managed by Giovanna Del Gobbo and Glenda Galeotti. The three meetings with the members of the Italian organizations and mentors consisted of approximately 15 hours of training, whereas the other two meetings on the sustainability of the system consisted of 12 hours of training. The Study Circle project was aimed at activating local stakeholders network supporting the organisation of at testing 9 pilot study circles. At the end of the project 13 study circles were implemented. The working relationships between the project managers and the various organizations joining the local networks were formalized with several agreements.

Therefore, it was extremely important to jointly define the organizational structure and the operational flows of the delivery of educational activities, which is a set of sequentially codified and formalized operations that lead from an input (demand for training) to an output (implementation of study circles) in order to achieve certain outcomes (learning results).

The training course consisted of five meetings, three of which were attended only by the members of the Italian organizations, and two were extended to other components of the STC. According to the flow methodology of the Participatory Action Research (Orefice, 2006) the training process was structured as follows:

- Identification of the problem through the analysis of the state-of-the-art of the project activities carried out in order to determine the participants' training needs;
- Problem analysis and introduction of theoretical-methodological expert knowledge in order to interpret the project's activities in relation to the establishment of a territorial system for adult education;
- Definition of a solution for resolving the issues that were detected by adding the new knowledge that have been acquired in the previous steps;
- Evaluation of the identified solutions through the formalization of the territorial system for adult education model, of the roles and functions of the organizations involved and of the sustainability criteria of the model itself;
- Evaluation of the implemented training activities and the learning achieved by the participants.

The meetings were managed as if they were part of a study circle, and the participants had the opportunity to experiment first-hand the adopted training methodology and teaching methods. Therefore, the experts' team used active training methods aimed at uncovering the prior knowledge of the participants and building new knowledge with the contribution of the experts.

The first meeting focused on the issues that the participants had encountered on implementing the operational plan for setting up the cross border study circles system. Attention was paid to ensuring overall consistency and a smooth information flow between partners, in order to align the different perspective into a single and shared framework. The approach helped to detect unclear points and to bring out participants' knowledge. One of the issues concerned the different interpretation of the functions of the cross-border system's elements which made it necessary to clarify how these elements could be organised in order to implement the study circle activities.

From an operational perspective, some differences emerged concerning

local awareness raising activities related to the establishment of the local supporting networks where the two Local Action Groups relied mainly on their social stakeholders including local authorities, entrepreneurs' associations and other representative bodies, and organized preparatory bilateral meetings with each of these bodies to present the initiative whereas the Province of Gorizia, as a local authority, mapped existing networks, created a database of potential stakeholders organized by areas of competence, and consequently planned meetings.

The next step was aimed at clarifying the role and functions of the system elements and to highlight the importance of local networks coherently with local development priorities.

Local supporting networks activated through round tables guarantee the participation of the main local stakeholders and their contribution in terms of identification of the development priorities of a given area and of the training needs of potential beneficiaries.

In a complementary way info-points ensure the continuity and visibility of the needs' analysis, stimulation and collection of the training demand by the potential SC participants, and the initial orientation of the users, thus reaching the most marginalized segments of the local adult population, which are usually excluded from training.

The group work showed that both these support services needed to move towards a more structured approach to empower their capacity in identifying the priorities and target groups by involving the stakeholder's network.

The second meeting consisted of a lecture on the territorial model's sustainability to identify monitoring criteria of the experimented activities¹⁷. The training objective was to provide shared theoretical and methodological tools to interpret the products of project activities, in order to structure the territorial adult education system, ensure the integration between the Italian and Slovenian stakeholders, and analyze the entire process in terms of its sustainability.

As for the system's management we should emphasize that the created territorial system had acquired the characteristics of the *collaborative governance model*¹⁸, where citizens, companies, training agencies, civil

¹⁷ Giovanna Del Gobbo and Paolo Orefice held a lecture on the sustainability of the SC territorial system for all project partners.

¹⁸ It is based on the principle of horizontal subsidiarity, according to which everyone is a carrier of resources and skills that can be put in place according to the logic of shared administration in order to meet, along with the public administration, the problems and issues faced by a gradually more complex society, by ensuring a general interest that can be easily referred to the shared protection of those goods that refer to the whole community (Art. 118 of the Italian Constitution).

society organizations and public institutions are involved at various levels. Local supporting networks activated through round tables, where all these local players meet, represent the programming level, whose function is to identify the local development priorities. Italian and Slovenian partners act at management level, whereas European, national and regional institutions represent the deliberative level, which examines the proposals made by stakeholders on the basis of local needs. This collaborative grouping of local players was set up as a centre for community development, available for all the parties involved. Its task was to share the strategic guidelines of the project with the other components of the local community, thus promoting innovation through democratic processes.

These elements were discussed during the following two training sessions for the Italian partners: by analyzing its main components and functions, the participants learned how a SC territorial system is defined in terms of structure and organization.

During the third training session, the experts' team presented and analyzed a case study of the Tuscan study circles model¹⁹ going through its three levels, each having one or more referents: political and strategic issues, management and delivery of training services²⁰. At each level, the system supporting bodies have a function to perform in terms of delivery:

- induction and expression of the demand for training, users' advising and guidance, collection of the applications;
- matching supply and demand on the basis of the expressed requests in order to stimulate aggregation by identifying issues of common interest (also included are the SC preparatory activities and those for creating an educational project);
- assistance, monitoring, evaluation and dissemination of the study circles. These activities are aimed at assessing the correct implementation of the study circles, preventing dropouts, evaluating and developing the demand for training after the conclusion of the activities²¹.

The *Study Circles* project activities carried out in relation to the above mentioned phases were analysed developing hypotheses about the territorial model of the SC cross-border system.

¹⁹ For further information on the Tuscan study circles see: <http://www.regione.toscana.it/-/i-circoli-di-studio> <http://www.ideeinrete.info/ideeinrete/> <http://www.regione.toscana.it/-/l-esperienza-dei-circoli-di-studio-in-toscana> (retrieved on 28.02.2015)

²⁰ Federighi P., *Linee guida per i circoli di studio*. The most structured organizational model is the Swedish one, which is composed of four levels and four referents.

²¹ Del Gobbo G., *Suggerimenti per attivazione dei circoli di studio in Friuli Venezia Giulia*, www.studycircle.it

During the fourth training session, participants, divided into two sub-groups, had to indicate at what level of the territorial system (institutional, system management, support services, training activities) the actions planned for each of the steps listed above referred to and who was operationally responsible for implementing them. By this exercise participants simulated a real situation and they could measure the level of knowledge and understanding achieved²². The team work produced two hypotheses on the formalization of the territorial system: the first one highly centralized was based on overall management by regional coordinators; the second one appeared more decentralized towards territorial units composed by training agencies and agencies for local development. After discussing these issues, participants analyzed the characterizing aspects of the two proposals, and then defined a joint model agreed by all. An issue expressed by participants was the differentiation between the Tuscan SC model and the cross-border model under construction. It turned out that the latter was structured according to a bottom-up approach, based on concrete training intentions expressed by local development organizations that had identified study circles as a tool to qualify and upgrade skills of local communities. On the other hand, the Tuscan model showed a top-down approach deriving from a clear political and institutional intention to create a LLL system, which included non-formal adult education as stated in the Tuscany Regional Law no. 32/2002.

The fifth and last plenary session with the other members of the STC focused on sharing and evaluating the work done and the results achieved, with the intent of identifying the criteria, which are needed to ensure the sustainability of the cross-border system. The table below summarizes the training program described here.

²² The fourth meeting was organised about 10 months before the conclusion of the project, i.e. in a time, when many project activities had already been launched, including the first pilot study circles.

| Meeting | Methodological phase | Training Activities | Training object | Output |
|---------|---|---|--|--|
| 1 | Identification of the problem | Analysis of the state-of-the-art of the project activities carried out | To align the different perspectives on project activities into a consistent and shared framework | Participants' training needs |
| 2 | Problem analysis | Lecture on sustainability criteria of territorial model | Introduction of theoretical-methodological expert knowledge | Interpretation of project's activities in relation to the local system for adult education |
| 3 | Definition of a solution concerning detected issues | Presentation and analyses of a case study of the Tuscan study circles model | Understanding the main components and functions of a local adult education system | Definition of the SC system in terms of structure and organization. |
| 4 | Evaluation of the identified solutions | Teamwork | Self-evaluation of the knowledge achieved | Identification of roles and functions of the organizations involved in SC system |
| 5 | Evaluation of training activities | Presentation of activities / products in plenary STC session | To evaluate and share the learning achieved by the participants | First formalization of cross-border territorial system for adult education and its sustainability criteria |

5.4. Conclusions

As referred above, the most innovative aspects of the Study Circle project, which refer to the relationship between education and development, are to be found in some of the project's methodological and operational elements, such as:

- the pursuit of not only educational objectives, but also of “promotional” ones, which refer to the dissemination of knowledge through the establishment of local networks with the specific intent to produce a multiplier effect in the local community;
- a strong skills-oriented training action carried out through many hours of practical activities and workshops aimed at creating a product, event or publication;

- the type of the organizations involved in the management of the project (training agencies and local development agencies), which are integrated at various levels of the cross-border system (beneficiaries, stakeholders, political-strategic management).

By applying this method, the enhancement of territorial vocations in more marginalized areas, such as those included in the project, must necessarily be conveyed through actions for the development of the Knowledge-based Society and for increasing the competitiveness of the local production system.

In the Study Circles project, this strategy resulted in strengthening the social capital of the territories for upgrading the human capital and enhance the physical capital in order to trigger innovative processes based on the circulation and upgrading of knowledge and competences of the different players of a given territory.

In other words, the integration between the relational and learning aspects was not aimed at stimulating the circulation of the information needed for achieving the project's results, but it created learning communities at the various levels of the project itself: at micro-level (local communities) by setting up local networks for the dissemination of knowledge and products; at meso-level (local stakeholders' networks) and macro-level (the cross-border management group within the Technical and Scientific Committee).

The Study Circle project's model can be therefore defined as a system for widespread learning (Siemens, 2005), which supports and directs the study circles and encompasses specific training activities for the SC tutors, the info-point personnel and the members of the Italian organizations.

The project's final result is a common interpretive and operational framework for the SC cross-border model where the different players concur through their collaboration to the implementation of education and training strategies for local development whose concrete expression of sustainability are formalised network agreements. As a matter of fact, the success of capacity building efforts, is measured in terms of institutional and organizational sustainability the initiatives undertaken.

Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| ALE | Adult Learning and Education |
| CSCS | Cross-border System for Study Circle |
| CTP | Provincial Centres for Adult Education |
| DL | Distance Learning |
| EQF | European Qualification Framework |
| ERDF | European Regional Development Fund |
| ESF | European Social Fund |
| GAL/LAG | Local Action Groups |
| ILA | Individual Learning Account |
| LLL | Lifelong Lifewide Learning |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organization |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PAR | Participatory Action Research |
| SC | Study Circles |
| SIPED | Italian Pedagogic Society |
| STC | Scientific and Technical Committee |

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