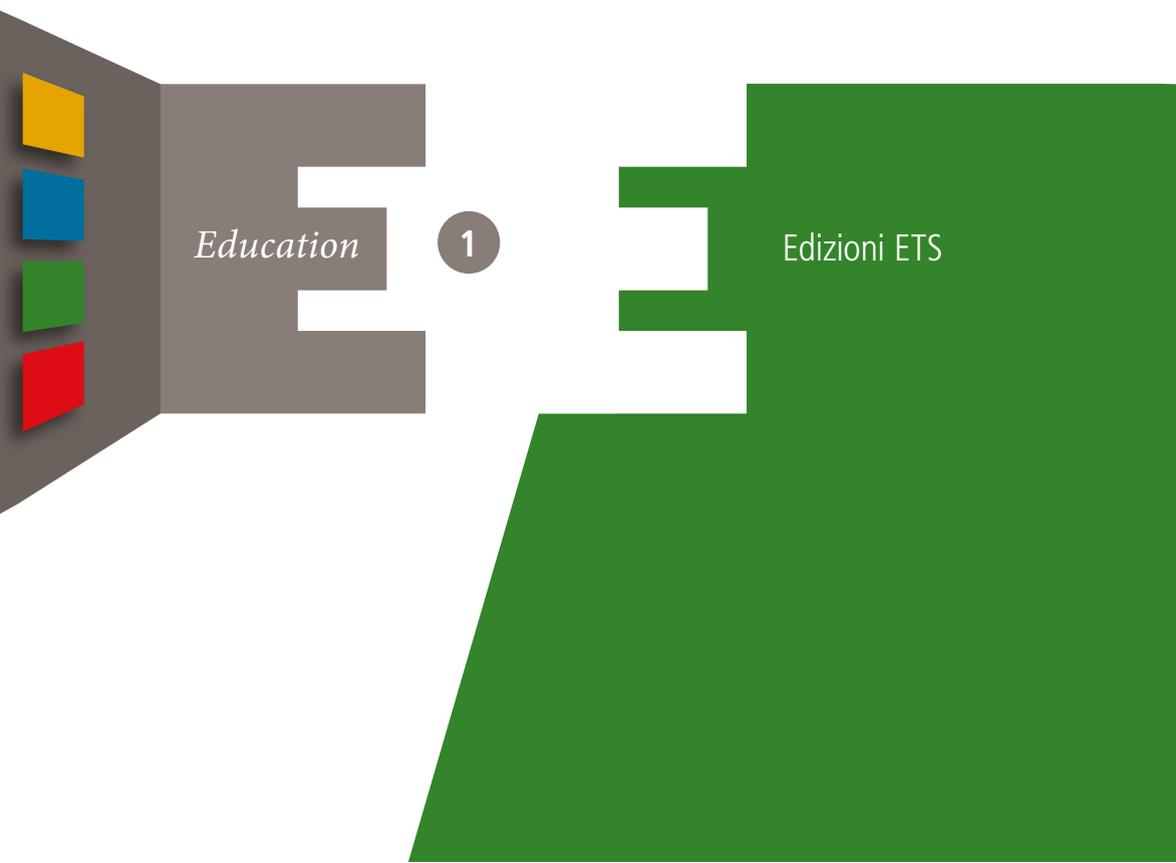


# Lifelong learning devices for sustainable local development

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

N. Bogataj, G. Del Gobbo Eds.



# Education

1

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edited by Giovanna Del Gobbo and Nevenka Bogataj



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REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA  
SLUŽBA VLADE REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE ZA RAZVOJ  
IN EVROPSKO KOHEZIJSKO POLITIKO

## 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](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.

## INTRODUCTION

In his publication *Five Minds for the Future*, Howard (Gardner Gardner, 2006) questions on what mindset is necessary to meet today's challenges in order to manage the future. Among the multiple intelligences that have to be developed for the future, Gardner selects the disciplinary, concise, creative, respectful and ethical intelligences or minds, which are considered as the basis of cognitive processes and human initiative: the first three are directly related to the forms of knowledge, the last two are fundamental for our relationships with others. In particular, according to Gardner, the ethical mind makes us able to think about the nature of the individual's actions and the needs and aspirations of the society in which he lives. According to the author, the ethical mind gives meaning to our work and sets a goal that transcends our selfish interests and operates to improve the destiny of all of us. Gardner says that each person can adopt an ethical attitude in trying to understand what is his or her role as a worker or as a citizen of a given region, state or planet. Therefore, the ethical mind refers to a collective dimension and a political knowledge in the full significance of the term. Gardner not only defines lifelong learning as the opportunity to cultivate the five minds, which are necessary for the future, but as far as the ethical mind is concerned, he emphasizes the fundamental role of the institutions<sup>1</sup> and the importance of the community as an informal learning space for the continuous use of this form of intelligence through processes

<sup>1</sup> Gardner writes about the "quality of institutions" as a fundamental element for the development of the ethical mind (ibid., page 138).

of active citizenship<sup>2</sup>.

The ethical mind needs contexts, which can strengthen it through exercise: these reinforcements are both vertical and horizontal, and obviously needs to give importance to the social fabric and the network of institutions. It recognizes the importance of the local community: Gardner says that every citizen should believe that his community should possess certain characteristics that the individual can be proud of, and the citizen needs to personally act in person in order for the ideal community to come true. This ethical attitude is based on commitment, action and participation: engagement, action and participation require a system that allows them to exist, but, at the same time, these are actions that fuel the lifelong learning system itself.

In this perspective, the lifelong learning system no longer equals to the whole of the education, vocational training or adult education, but it can be carried out also as informal learning implemented in life and work contexts, and it recognizes the territory (in its various characterizations) and the local community (in its different organizational forms) as learning spaces.

It is a sort of ecological approach to learning that sees the living environment as a set of resources that need to be enhanced and as a context, in which operate in order to improve living conditions.

Only with such ecological definition of the lifelong learning system it is possible to generate socio-cultural changes, which are related to a specific conception of “sustainable human development”. The purposes of the socio-economic growth and “progress”, as evidenced by Martha Nussbaum, are feasible if, among other factors, exist opportunities for «setting up a situation or an environment, in which people are individually and collectively able to fully develop their potential and have a reasonable chance to lead a productive and creative life tailored to their needs and interests.» (Alessandrini, 2014: 24).

According to Amartya Sen, the interpretation of the lifelong learning system as an opportunity<sup>3</sup>, is at the same time the end and the means of development. As Sen puts it:

The ability to solve ancient problems (inherited from the past, such as inequality and poverty) and new ones (such as environmental degradation or overcrowding)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., page 151.

<sup>3</sup> It should be emphasized that the term “opportunity” refers to circumstances that affect the life of every person and help to determine the connections to the complex entity of social, political, cultural and economic liberties.

primarily depends on the ability to enhance the various institutions, which oversee the different, but interrelated liberties. The market, the state, the media, political parties, schools, non-governmental organizations, all are involved - in different, but complementary ways - in the enrichment of our liberties and thus in the future improvement of everybody's life. In this sense, our future will largely depend on the successful enlargement of our liberties, which will be achieved by enhancing the various institutions that support and promote our human capabilities. In this, I believe, lies the most important indicator for our future. (Sen, 2002: 249)

If we analyse the capacity of the institutions to organize and support multiple “learning environments”, we should urgently identify new tools for developing the skills, which are needed to build “communities capable of future”<sup>4</sup> and increase the dynamicity of the “heritage communities” as recently defined by the Faro Convention<sup>5</sup>.

These considerations are even more important within the current international economic and social crisis: a phase in which emerges a strong need to identify alternative ways of interpreting the local, regional, national and international development. One cannot postpone the need to define new operational approaches to the development, find innovative ways of participation and institutional responses, which can enhance the potential of the territories and communities, define and test effective pedagogical tools, and new ways to interpret learning.

As the term “crisis” suggests, we should pay attention to the possible turning points. The word crisis now seems inflated, it has lost significance down to the point that is being used to designate an almost permanent state of things: economic crisis, crisis of values and culture. Paradoxically, this perception of continuity and duration, is accompanied by an idea of crisis as a “transient and correctable” illness or momentary dysfunction that will disappear or will be compensated. The term crisis cannot be used as opposed to “normality”: in this sense, in order to overcome the crisis, we should restore the previous balance. With no intent of proposing a conceptual definition, we can jointly affirm that the crisis triggers social changes and is necessarily connoted as a process, which encompasses

<sup>4</sup> This definition has been used by Marcello Buiatti in the foreword to the conference *Seminario di Educazione ambientale per gli insegnanti delle scuole toscane*, held in Florence in 2003. See also Benassai F. (edited by), *Conoscere per comprendere, comprendere per cambiare* Arpat, Litografia I.P., Florence, 2003, page 17.

<sup>5</sup> The Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (the Faro Convention) was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 13 October 2005. It entered into force on 1 June 2011.

incompatible situations that are also due to an accentuation of the innovations, which are usually carried by social crises. The concept of crisis mixes the intention to innovate and the risk that such innovations could increase incompatibilities – in terms of values, actions, rules - which could also advocate the collapse of the social system. According to this approach, innovations possess the ability to alter the existing structure, to explain the origin of the crisis and to envisage new balances: within itself the crisis carries innovation. (Colloca, 2010: 19-39)

It should also be considered that a very significant issue on the global contemporary scene is innovation and the willingness to innovate of individuals, organizations, formal and informal social configurations and governmental bodies. The local economic systems are called to find new tools and new methodological approaches that can foster internal change and external economic, cultural, political and social interactions. The growing pressure of transnational flows of ideas and knowledge requires new forms of governance, new ways of negotiation. The inclusion or exclusion from these flows can determine the evolution or involution of the territories, as these are already disjoining into new economic and social configurations. The proneness to innovate seems to be necessary in order to enable the growth of the human potential and the full development of the cohesion.

In today's historical phase we can identify the favourable elements that enable innovation processes, which can foresee new forms of sustainable development based on the value of knowledge and learning, which can define open models of lifelong learning systems that can produce and transfer innovation. More importance is given to Adult Learning and Education (ALE) taken as a whole to embrace not only technical and instrumental knowledge and vocational skills but the cultural, social, and also political dimensions oriented towards a critical interpretation and management of the complex world we live in, including citizens' participation in the process of local change (Lima, Guimarães, 2011: 9).

The recognition of the centrality of adult learning and education for local development and for setting up of ethically intelligent, inclusive and responsible communities, is the basis of the *Study Circles – cross border laboratory for the development of human resources and cooperation networks promoting local resources* project, financed by the European territorial cooperation Programme Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013, Axis 2 - Increase competitiveness and development of a knowledge-based society.

The Slovenian study circles model has been revised and renovated in order to be used in the cross-border area as a tool to address the local

development problems by developing a network of education and training agencies and institutions, local development agencies and institutions of Slovenia, Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia led by ENFAP FVG.

The project develops in a cross-border environment the “study circle” training 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.

This publication completes the set of publications that have been produced within the project: *Collective learning in the cross-border area*, a manual for the training of study circles tutors, and *Guidelines for setting up a study circles cross-border system*. The publication’s aim is to consider the different levels of sustainability of the project and the study circle model.

This publication addresses the issue of overall pedagogical sustainability by identifying the Participatory Action Research approach as the reference methodology for managing study circles (Paolo Orefice), but also by relating the “methodological sustainability” to the participatory techniques, tools and methods for managing study circles, with special reference to the use of social games as a moment of methodological innovation in the cross-border study circles (Patricija Rejec). This publication also deals with educational sustainability by identifying the cross-border area as an opportunity, resource and added value in a cross-cultural development perspective (Mateja Pelikan), but also with the educational sustainability of a training tool that encourages and supports local innovative processes (Giovanna Del Gobbo).

Even the issue of “institutional sustainability” is analysed by stressing the importance of partnership networks as a guarantee for the development of actions (Elena Slanisca) and so is also the issue of “social sustainability” by referring to collaborative work and workflows as a learning space for territorial stakeholders (Glenda Galeotti). The study circle is finally identified as a tool for managing sustainable transformation and participation to change (Nevenka Bogataj).

The volume ends with a critical presentation of the implemented study circles and a first evaluation of the project in terms of local and cross-border policies.

Giovanna Del Gobbo



## Part I

The Study Circles approach:  
theoretical and system insights

## CHAPTER 1

# THE PEDAGOGICAL MODEL OF SUSTAINABLE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH<sup>16</sup>

Paolo Orefice

### *Abstract*

The contribution is focused on theoretical and methodological pedagogical models at the bases of study circle. The aim is to underline those SC components required to contribute to the creation of an endogenous and sustainable local community, based on equity, solidarity, and the well-being of the territory and its inhabitants of today and tomorrow: this is *the education of citizens to the democracy of emancipated intelligence*. The sustainability of SC consists in the possibility of learning process to interact with the context and the contents of knowledge, with personal feeling and thinking to interpret and to transform in the same time the subject and the context. One of the study circles educational methodologies that supports and implements the theory of complex knowledge in order to ensure sustainable development is the Participatory Action Research. The phases and the integrated flow of PAR are defined in the context of SC.

Il contributo sviluppa a livello teorico e metodologico il modello del

<sup>1</sup> For further information please refer to the publications of the author, which report about theoretical studies, research, and educational interventions for local development in Italy and abroad. In particular, reference is made to the following volumes: *I domini conosciuti. Origine, natura e sviluppo dei saperi dell' homo sapiens sapiens*, Roma, Carocci, 2001; *La formazione di specie. Per la liberazione del potenziale di conoscenza del sentire e del pensare*, Milano, Guerini, 2003; *La Ricerca Azione Partecipativa. Teorie e pratiche*, Napoli, Liguori, vol. 2, 2006; *Pedagogia scientifica. Un approccio complesso al cambiamento formativo*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 2009; (a cura con) R.S. Granera, G. Del Gobbo, *Potenziale umano e patrimonio territoriale. Per uno sviluppo sostenibile tra saperi locali e saperi globali*, Napoli, Liguori, 2010; *Pedagogia sociale*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2011; (edited by) A. Carullo, S. Calaprice, *Le professioni educative e formative: dalla domanda sociale alla risposta legislativa*, Padova, Cedam, 2011. These and other publications on the relationship between education and development are based on the author's early books, such as *La Comunità educativa: teoria e prassi*, Napoli, Ferraro, 1975; *La programmazione educativa nel sistema del decentramento*, Napoli, Ferraro, 1981 (in collaboration with Teresa Russo Agrusti, Vincenzo Sarracino and other members of the Mo.Ter. Research Group).

circoli di studio. L'obiettivo è quello di metterne in luce gli elementi a supporto dello sviluppo endogeno e sostenibile di comunità in base a principi di equità, solidarietà, benessere del territorio e dei suoi abitanti odierni e futuri: questa è *l'educazione dei cittadini alla democrazia dell'intelligenza emancipata*. Sostenibilità nei circoli di studio consiste nella possibilità di far interagire nel processo di apprendimento contesto e contenuti della conoscenza con sentimenti e punti di vista personali in modo da interpretare e trasformare contestualmente soggetto e contesto. Una delle metodologie educative del circolo di studio a supporto della conoscenza complessa per lo sviluppo sostenibile è la Ricerca Azione Partecipativa. Le fasi e il flusso della RAP vengono di seguito illustrate nel contesto del circolo di studio.

Članek se osredotoča na teoretske in metodološke pedagoške modele študijskih krožkov, da bi poudaril tiste njihove sestavine, ki prispevajo k oblikovanju endogene in trajnostne lokalne skupnosti, temelječena pravičnosti, solidarnosti in blaginji sedanjih in jutrišnjih prebivalcev določenega ozemlja: gre za izobraževanje državljanov za demokracijo emancipirane inteligence. Trajnost ŠK je zagotovljena, če posameznik znanje integrira s kontekstom, vsebino opa interpretira z osebnim občutkom in razmišljanjem o preoblikovanju subjekta in konteksta. Ena od izobraževalnih metodologij ŠK, ki podpira in izvaja teorijo kompleksnega znanja ter omogoča trajnostni razvoj, je Participativno akcijsko raziskovanje (PAR), ki ga v okviru ŠK predstavljamo integriranega po fazah te metodologije.

### 1.1. *The sustainability of the study circles' strategy for local development*

In the field of educational systems study circles (SC) fall within the domain of non-formal education and, in particular, non-formal adult education.

Although they are internationally renowned and positioned between formal and informal education, they are not used in Italy, except for some local areas in the Tuscany region and within this cross-border project, and this makes them less visible and even less recognizable on theoretical, methodological, institutional and professional level.

The Italian situation is even worse, because non-formal education is not adequately recognized in our country, nor is part of a national or regional Lifelong Learning educational strategy. Yet the question of education is

becoming increasingly urgent in the processes of extensive social, cultural and educational impoverishment.

Hence comes the need for decision makers to avoid partial and short-sighted actions in favor of SC, which may increase confusion about their nature and opportunities, even more in today's generalized crisis and financial cuts. There is only one antidote to this serious and widespread weakness: the adoption of a SC development strategy, which is sustainable in theoretical, methodological, political and legislative terms.

Obviously, a single theoretical and methodological model alone is not enough to ensure the sustainability of the SC system, even assuming that it is based on a consistent and effective pattern in high-quality non-formal education. Likewise, a structural, managerial, professional, political, regulatory and economic model alone does not ensure the sustainability of non-formal education, but it downgrades into a fruitless and unnecessary apparatus that eventually wears out and destroys itself.

In both cases, a study circles can be described in a publication, tested on the ground, supported by "one-off" favorable local and regional policies, which can turn it into a flagship. But if the SC does not consolidate and power or "feed" itself, that is, if it does not become a sustainable system in theory and practice, it does not offer the indispensable contribution to the development of education in our country and does not meet the increasing and urgent educational needs of the population, that formal education is no longer able to meet.

There is a further inescapable condition that influences the SC system approach, which is specific to their position within non-formal education: since SC are directly linked with the daily needs of the population and its contexts, they are called to offer their educational contribution to the development of the local society and territory, by contrasting, curtailing and draining antithetical forms of development. Their educational provision cannot escape or ignore this imperative nor it can alienate into a decontextualized and extraneous education, or even into a conditioning and deviant pseudo-education. Since it defends and promotes the human condition, it cannot but have a positive impact on the processes of antropisation that day after day threaten the inhabitants of a given territory.

The sustainability of the SC non-formal educational system is intertwined with the sustainability of the overall local development. This may be considered as a plus, but also as an exciting challenge for all the actors involved in the SC that contribute to the sustainability of education: the SC network system feeds itself and feeds the network system of local development.

The elements of sustainability of the SC system have been adopted by

the cross-border project and should be further strengthened, disseminated and transferred through the network of institutions and bodies from the municipal and regional level to the national and transnational one.

In the following paragraphs we will highlight some strengths of the SC system strategy for adult education in Europe: in addition to those already used in the European project, we will introduce several others in order to integrate local and regional SC into the Italian and Slovenian local development strategies within the Europe 2020 framework.

In terms of political, regulatory, institutional and administrative sustainability, the SC local system is regulated in terms of regional decentralization and local autonomy, thus overcoming the separation and hierarchy of the educational, training and non-formal systems, while recognizing their autonomy.

- At international level the SC non-formal educational system for local development refers to the strategies of the UN's Millennium Goals (2000), to the UN's Annual Reports for Development, to the UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (since 1949 in Elsinore to 2009 in Belém), to the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) proclaimed by UNESCO.

- At European level, the fundamental significance of non-formal and informal education, is based on the Lifelong Learning strategy as defined in the Lifelong Education Report of the Council of Europe in 1970, the Education and lifelong learning memorandum of the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 and the Europe 2020 initiative for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, which has been adopted by the European Council in 2010.

As regards the training and the profession of the SC tutor, the following elements have to be mentioned:

- within the current European three-leveled university education (Italian Law no. 128/2013 and Italian Decree no. 104/2013) it has been established a three-year degree in Educational Sciences (Class of degree 19, formerly 18) within the professional line that also includes the Pedagogist (LM 50 Planning and management of educational services, LM 57 Science of adult education and lifelong learning and LM 85 Educational Science);

- the Tutor is part of the 6<sup>th</sup> level of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) - the Pedagogist in the 7<sup>th</sup> -, which has been implemented by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, University and Research (ISFOL Report, Rome, December 2012);

- the profession of Tutor (and Pedagogist) has been established with the

Italian Law no. 4/2013 governing unregulated professions;

- the Draft Law no. 2656/2014 “Discipline of the professions of tutor and pedagogue”, to which the writer has contributed together with SIPED and several other national associations of tutor and pedagogues, determines that the Tutor with a degree in Educational Science is the only professional figure empowered to carry out professional activities in the field of non-formal education, due to the obvious specific qualification required for those who work professionally on the development of educational processes from childhood to adulthood in a variety of contexts, educational services and problematic situations.

Moreover, the Italian legislation has recently adopted the European directives on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and on non-formal education network systems:

- the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and the national skills certification system is regulated by the Italian Decree no. 13/2013, which follows the Italian Law no. 92/2012 “A growth-oriented reform of the labor market”;

- several ministerial regulations for identifying and validating the skills by enhancing the personal knowledge of citizens (as in the SC) are currently being drafted;

- with this purpose, in Italy there are several interinstitutional and interassociative territorial networks for lifelong learning, of which the SC system has to be part of.

Therefore, the SC cross-border project has achieved a composite sustainability and found an innovative solution for the European Society of Knowledge, i.e. the SC cross-border system, which refers to the sustainable development of the Friulian-Slovenian society and has demonstrated that the lands of education to hatred and resentment have become lands of education to common development and prosperity.

### *1.2. Pedagogical models test the sustainability of SC non-formal education for local development*

The following paragraphs will focus on the theoretical and methodological pedagogical models in the field of education, which have been inherited from the past, are predominant in the present and projected into the future. We will try to identify those SC components, are required

to contribute to the creation of an endogenous and sustainable local community, based on equity, solidarity, and the well-being of the territory and its inhabitants of today and tomorrow: this is the *education of citizens to the democracy of emancipated intelligence*.

By briefly analysing such pedagogical-educational models it is quite easy to identify some paradigmatic changes in educational practices that can be divided into three main categories: the centrality of contents external to the subjects; the centrality of the subject in relation to the contents; the centrality of the subject-contexts-contents relationship. The chosen theoretical model influences the choice of the methodological model, which is adopted in the SC non-formal education.

The first model, which is antithetical to the nature of the SC, since they originate from the contents expressed by the citizens, should be discarded, but also taken into account, because it may be part, although inadvertently, of a SC organized as a “course” rather than a “path” of study.

The second model, which is compatible with the nature of SC, refers to the central role of learning in content management. This second model overturns the position of the first one and establishes practices of Lifelong Learning, which have revolutionized the school-centered pedagogy by introducing the concept of “pedagogy of the seasons of life”.

The third model, which can be considered as a variant and an evolution of the second, highlights the process of knowledge creation, which occurs in the relationship between material and immaterial knowledge, subjective and objective knowledge, people’s and contexts knowledge, which are natural, social, cultural. By overcoming the content-subject dualism, this model becomes a paradigm of scientific pedagogy that creates a *sustainable educational methodology for sustainable local development*.

### 1.2.1 *The “C” model: the contents to be transmitted*

The first and most established traditional model is based on the absolute centrality of the pre-built contents. This model is part of transmissive pedagogies that find its legitimacy in closed societies and cultures, which tend to totally preserve the existing and the power structures they convey. In our country, as is commonly known, pedagogical idealism was coupled with a politically and institutionally authoritarian society it was well reflected in the teaching of contents that were rigidly consistent and functional to it, at all levels of education: in formal education, through the teacher-officer, who was an expression of and acted as guarantor of the program’s content, and through the student, who the more he learned these contents, the “better”

he was considered to be; in non-formal education, through the educators and their pupils, acting as transmitters and assimilators in leisure activities, sports, social and cultural activities, which conveyed the ideological contents of the regime; in informal education, through the parents and all other information, social and cultural channels of indoctrination and socialization of young and old citizens, and of obedience to the same standardized and untouchable contents.

The explicitly or implicitly assumed content-based pedagogical model, regardless of the differences among the subjects, changed with the appearance and the establishment of the new subject-based educational and pedagogical model, as a result of the legitimization of activism pedagogy in the changed context of the reconstruction of the Italian Republic: where society and school did not recognize themselves in the new educational model based on rational criticism and active democracy, the old model has continued to fuel - until today - an education to dependent conformism and social discrimination. We know the reasons why this happened: the post-compulsory education, from secondary school to university, has never been subjected to comprehensive reform strategies, which should have tackled several issues, such as obsolete contents and methods, or cultural, educational and professional training. Only some technical and procedural aspects have been changed, but with no real impact on education itself. And adult informal education did not refuse such an approach.

Due to this disputed, but persistent model, non-formal education in Italy has not been yet duly recognized and implemented, and informal adult education has not really yet detached from it. Both are still at the mercy of the unfinished and pseudo-values of the imperfect republic.

Hence the disappearance of strong educational strategies, which are a characteristic of full democracy and the lack of political, regulatory and professional support to permanent education and Lifelong Learning. As mentioned at the beginning, these are the educational guidelines that from the 1970<sup>s</sup> onwards have been adopted by the Council of Europe and the European Union for the education of European citizens. These guidelines mark the transition to the next model of pedagogical strategies and educational systems.

### 1.2.2 *The “S” model: the subjects of learning*

In Italy, this second pedagogical and didactical approach appeared, as already mentioned, as a result of the debate on the centrality of the child in all forms of education. It was a tough issue among Catholic, secular

and communist pedagogies during the years of post-war reconstruction of the nascent Republic. The dividing line referred exactly on how contents should be related to the interests of children, starting from the international movement of community teachers and educators and New School educationalists, in particular Dewey.

Apart from the total pedagogical spontaneity approach in children education, which in the '60s and '70s extended also to the students of secondary schools and universities, who demanded the right to self-study, the scientific, cultural, political and institutional contexts of those years gave central importance to the processes of “meaningful learning” in young and adult education: the school of teaching was being transformed into a school of learning. This change, which has to be understood according to the theories of several great pedagogues and psychologists, such as Piaget, Vigotsky and Bruner, was enthusiastically welcomed by the new historical context, which tended to extend the interests and rights to socially and economically disadvantaged classes, whose diversity, well expressed by the structures and dynamics of learning processes, was to be understood by pedagogical and educational processes based on personalized and socialized teaching, which could ensure equal opportunities: the psychopedagogical and socio-pedagogical theories and educational strategies and policies converged towards an educational and teaching democracy, whose aim was to achieve substantive democracy.

The legacy of open schools and counter-schools, where even the adults of the declining suburbs were involved, the recognition of the right to education for workers laid down by the “150 hours” model, the birth of the regions and local governments, but also the unprecedented turmoil in adult and lifelong education in some academic institutions and associations, incorporated in a single pedagogical principle the various expressions and forms of teaching, non-formal and informal education, all respectful of personal, social and cultural diversities.

European countries' aim was to create the *Learning Society* in the Anglo-Saxon contexts, the *Cité Educative* in Francophone countries and the *Ciudad Educativa* in the Spanish autonomous regional communities. In our country, there were numerous debates, conferences and researches on territorial pedagogy for the development of marginal local populations. Among the pioneers of the local learning communities in different European countries we should mention, among others, W.K. Richmond, T. Husen, P. Lengrand and R. Laporta. Subsequent generations of educationalists owe them a lot as researchers and educationalists in the field of lifelong learning for the inhabitants of a given country, district, city.

This second model, which we can define as territorial pedagogy, erases the separations between school, extracurricular and adult education, because from any perspective, including formal, non-formal and informal education, the educational activity is focused on the same learning process of young people and adults. This pedagogical model is based on two interconnected pillars: Lifelong Learning and territory. The first pillar underlines the centrality of the subjects, since every human being has the ability to learn, and therefore every educational activity should address its methods and objectives to this aspect. The second pillar addresses the centrality of contents, which are necessarily part of every educational activity, but are no longer an alternative to the subjects, as it was in the previous fundamentally dualistic model: the contents are “local” in the sense that originate from particular experiences “learned” by the people in real and virtual places in which they live, and are carriers of individual and collective problems that should be solved in order to live with dignity.

The adoption of the local approach does not mean that the contents are limited to “specific” issues, but that it opens up to “general” contents offered by formal and non-formal education in the form of predisciplinary and disciplinary learning. It must be recognized, however, that at the level of “external content” the learning model hardly overcomes the vision of the two entities: even Piaget’s epistemology, which explains the process of learning, keeps the learning subject and the learning object separated.

### *1.2.3 The “S-C-K” model: the subjects-contexts-knowledge tripolar relationship*

Free and scientific research has always marked the progress made in discovering man and the world that surrounds him. This is also true in the field of education: from researching the monolithic thinking of exclusively philosophical pedagogy, when it tried to recognize and reconstruct by itself the system “man” within the system “world”, to researching the multiple thought of pedagogy that brings the sciences of man back to its origin in order to reassemble them in its disciplinary structure that captures and uses the contributions to understand where the origin and development of human education come from and how the anthropization process of our species can be supported and enriched.

In recent decades, neurobiological researches on the evolution of living species and psycho-anthropological researches on individual and cultural learning dynamic, contributed to evolve the cognitive mind theories to

the wider spectrum of constructivism. It was understood that learning theories alone do not solve the dualism between the learning process and the contents to be learned, since they lack the unique key that generates them, holds them together and makes them proceed interconnected: in a word, builds them.

The moment we recognized that the learning process corresponds to our personal “formative process”, which is in the domain of institutional education, undoubtedly represented a paradigm shift from the traditional model of direct passage (without mediation) of contents from one subject to another.

The complex theory of knowledge maintains the interdependency between contents and method in the creation of meanings, with which we interpret and move in the world: reality is not the same for all human beings and, we add, for all living beings. The contents of reality vary depending on the form of knowledge that explores them; equally, knowledge also varies depending on the form of the content with which it comes into contact.

Knowledge, or to rather say it empirically, human competences are not only rational, nor are the expression of an unchanging rationality across the planet we inhabit: contrary to the stereotype that persists even among scholars, reason and rationality do not express the only kind of knowledge worthy of the name, which is represented by abstract and conscious thinking.

There is a second way of learning, which generates other forms of meanings of reality, that have come down to us thanks to 3.5 billion years of evolution of living species on Earth: since the protozoa, in order to establish itself, life had the need to create interpretative meanings of the contexts from which it nourished, multiplied and defended itself. With the evolution of invertebrates and vertebrates and of gradually more elaborate forms of life and more complex cells and neural systems, the creation of interpretative forms of life contexts began articulating and specializing through the contact of the senses with the environment: senses began sending electrical and biochemical information to the central nervous system, that returned them to the body in terms of senso-motorial knowledge in order to move closer or away from the source of information in the environment, depending on the feelings of pleasure or displeasure.

A similar process, although more sophisticated, took place in the living species that were gradually evolving into more complex vertebrates, where the protection and bone articulation of the skull, vertebrae and their nerve cells, has allowed the selection of increasingly elaborate nervous systems that through senso-motorial information could access more intense and

functional cognitive forms: biochemical and electrical information were no longer generating only sensations, but also emotions, whose struggle for life and the defence of it was immediate and unconscious, since it was driven by uncontrollable desire or fear. The living species from which we phylogenetically descend and from which we have evolved into our species *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*, have conveyed us the first two cognitive domains of senses and emotions, which we can summarize with the term “knowledge of the feeling” (in this broadest sense, we can also call them cognitive, since they are mental constructs, and exclude the awareness of the symbolic reason).

In the most evolved primates and hominids species, in the recent millions of years a third cognitive domain appeared: the intangible meanings of symbolic, value-driven, aware and conscious abstraction. This domain generated human history with its civilizations and cultures, where the need of feeling is accompanied by the free choice of reason (to which the hegemonic modern western civilization has attributed the sole right to be called knowledge).

When processing senso-motorial, emotional and rational meanings disappears not only the duality subject/object or subject/content, but also knowledge/action: they are interfaced in the creation of knowledge that generates material products (we can define them as material or tangible knowledge) and, conversely, intangible products (or intangible knowledge): senses, emotions and ideas unify the potential of human knowledge that moves between contents (or meanings) and subject, mediated by contexts or reality.

Therefore, knowledge consists of processed meanings that we create in relation to reality through our senses, emotions and ideas: these meanings correspond to the knowledge of feeling and thinking. The reason stems from feeling and is powered by feeling, on which it creates rational meanings; the feeling that derives from the senses and emotions is expressed without the control of reason, which then leads them to consciousness.

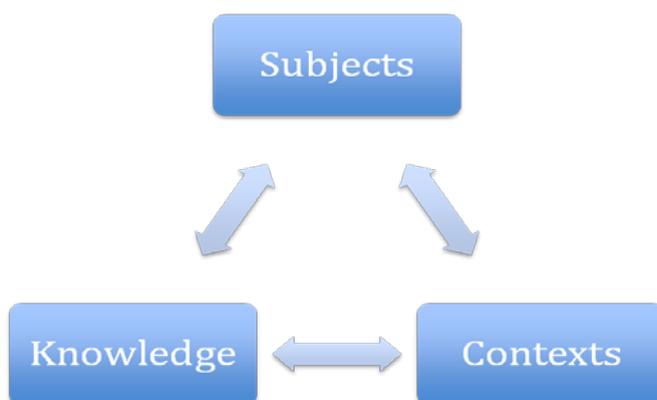
When processing senso-motorial, emotional and rational meanings disappears not only the duality subject/object or subject/content, but also knowledge/action is involved: these three cognitive domains are interfaced in the creation and operability of knowledge, since meanings are interpretations of reality understood as context and, therefore, knowledge is not separated from the external contents, but represents its cognitive formalization. If we define processed knowledge as “text” (the knowledge produced by the integrated mind of the three domains) and “context” as the sign to be processed (which is present in reality and, as such, is a content external to the mind), the con-text is with the text and the text is

in the con-text.

In this reciprocal context-text relationship, i.e. “sign-meaning” relationship, the processing movement of feeling and thinking feeds itself and nourishes the movement of the action felt and thought: the knowledge produced by the double movement of interpretation and transformation of knowledge remain “immaterial meanings” of the mind or minds that generated them or communicate them through the language of the senses, emotions and ideas (immaterial knowledge) or become “material meanings” because they are transcribed from immaterial meanings to the works of human action. The relationship between these material and immaterial products of human knowledge allows the mental potential of feeling and thinking to expand without borders and, thus, generate increasingly elaborate transformative meanings of reality/context.

Senses, emotions, ideas unify the knowledge potential of human beings that interprets and transforms the world.

Therefore, we can affirm that the formative process of every man and woman creates the personal knowledge that interprets and operates in the world: this formative model is expressed by the three-way relationship between subjects (processing know-how/knowledge/meanings), contexts (sources of contents/knowledge/signs that need to be interpreted) and knowledge (meanings/ contents that are produced in the contexts). This process can be defined as the S-C-K triangle (Subjects-Contexts-Knowledge):



*The personal training process: the tripolar model* (P. Orefice, 2015)

We can therefore assert that the indivisible knowledge of feeling and thinking summarizes the complex potential of human education and educational environment, to whatever degree of formality it is carried out: formal, in educational institutions (as well as in the professional and technical ones); non-formal, in not institutionalized educational bodies; informal, along the paths of life.

With this third model of complex pedagogy education is fully entitled to access the creation of material and non material knowledge of the citizens and the territory they inhabit. The educational activity is called to follow, enhance and enrich the educational process of knowledge creation in the given contexts (material and non material knowledge) and its use (knowledge involved in development).

Even study circles, if they want to converse and contribute to the sustainable development of people and natural, social and cultural environment, have a challenging educational work to accomplish. For this purpose, the third model, rather than the second, offers a sustainable pedagogy: more than learning, it consists of building by interacting with the context and the contents of knowledge and personal feeling and thinking that interprets and transforms the subject and the context, which correspond to the local approach to the inhabited environment/territory.

The overcoming of dualism in the educational process is also demonstrated by the most challenging issues in the creation of disciplinary knowledge: their contents become personal meanings if recognized in the contexts, thus generating personal knowledge, which becomes relevant if uses those meanings to act: the act uses immaterial knowledge and transforms reality into material knowledge.

And this is the keystone that combines education and territory into one process (or context, environment, etc.): education creates the immaterial knowledge for the material development of the territory and, vice versa, the territory returns to education its material knowledge as contents/signs to be interpreted or reinterpreted as immaterial meanings. The cycle of construction/deconstruction/ reconstruction of immaterial-material knowledge of human development and its context is replicated along an endless spiral.

### *1.3. From the theoretical model to the methodological model of study circles' non-formal education*

#### *1.3.1. The relationship between theory and methodology in the complex educational model*

There are therefore no distinct pedagogical theories for each type of education (formal, non-formal and informal) because each of them involves the same formative process, according to the tripolar theory of the construction of knowledge of feeling and thinking and this has been already scientifically demonstrated by the learning model. Therefore, the methodology of educational activities, in order to effectively operate on the personal formative process should be consistent with that theory: evenmore, it must descend from it and, at the same time, put it to the test. Indeed, like pedagogical theory, also the educational methodological approach must be congenial to human nature, to any person, social group or cultural context it refers to.

Pedagogical theory and educational methodology in the field of human knowledge feeling and thinking are the two sides of the same coin: theory, in order to formulate the pedagogical aim of its purposes and objectives, is based on what they are, how they originate and how the knowledge of the senses, emotions and ideas are built in human life. Methodology, on the other hand, accompanies the individual in creating and managing his knowledge of feeling and thinking by freeing its potential, in order to achieve the objectives of pedagogical planning.

Study circles constitute a particularly incisive and potentially fruitful educational field, provided that they choose the most appropriate theoretical and methodological educational model for the “iuxta natura” creation of the meanings of feeling and of thinking. In this case, in addition to being an exemplary solution for non-formal education, they can also be adopted in formal education.

Thus, non-formal education has a great educational impact and can improve individuals and their contexts for endogenous and sustainable, inclusive and equitable local development. The main beneficiaries are the citizens, who demand to be formed, because educational activities derive from their problems that reflect the unsolved problems of local development.

### 1.3.2. *The Participatory Action Research methodological flow*

One of the study circles educational methodologies that supports and implements the theory of complex knowledge in order to ensure sustainable development is the Participatory Action Research. (PAR)

RESEARCH Logic and dynamics of thinking	ACTION Logic and dynamics of acting	PARTICIPATION Logic and dynamics of feeling	SUBJECT'S KNOWLEDGE (in/out)
Problem	Activation	Sensibilization	Previous knowledge
Analysis	Recognitive action	Involvement	Previous knowledge  Disciplinary knowledge
Hypothesis	Forecasted action	Affection	Disciplinary knowledge + Previous knowledge
Verification	Implementing action	Satisfaction	New disciplinary knowledge of the subject
Evaluation	Improving action	Taking in charge	Integrated knowledge of the subject

PAR which initially originated from Action Research and later differentiated from it, especially by emphasizing its participatory component, which significantly changes also the research and action components. In our case, the PAR adopts the analytical thinking of reason along with the feeling of the senses and emotions through action.

At this stage, we have to demonstrate that the adoption of the PAR methodology within the study circles practices is a transposition of the third pedagogical model, as an educational methodology, which is consistent to the natural creation of the intangible meanings.

In educational activities the PAR approach contributes to recover,

readjust, defend and strengthen the natural sensorimotor-emotional-rational cognitive potential of the individuals in training.

Before presenting the individual components of the PAR approach, we will illustrate its methodology flow according to the Cartesian coordinates: *Methodological flow of the Participatory Action Research*. The flow proceeds in an integrated manner: the logic and the dynamics of both coordinates affect one another not only in the phase-to-phase path, but on the entire PAR path. It should be stressed that within the PAR path the correspondence between Cartesian coordinates depends on the group that uses it: the three domains can intersect in different ways, but the consistency of the study circles method guarantees the flexibility of its use and its success, provided that the study circles tutor possesses and manages it with professional competence.

#### *1.4. PAR phases in the methodological aspects of knowledge and action*

As in any type of adult education, the study circle is based on the demand for education as a starting point for non-formal educational activities.

In this regard, the technical solutions vary according to the different organizational and management approaches of the study circles, which can be divided into two types: alternative or complementary, as in the case of the Tuscan project and the Italy-Slovenia cross-border project. In the first case, the citizen addresses the public or private body that manages the study circle; in the second case it is the “demand solicitor” acting as a “street educator” who meets the citizens (on the street, at leisure centers, at shopping centers, on online social forums, etc.) to explain them what a study circle is, what it does, which benefits it offers and how the applications and the proposed topics should be submitted. There is also an intermediate solution, where citizens submit the application, which they have collected from one the many booths placed on the streets or in local agencies, and formulate their proposed topic or adhere to the one proposed in the brochures. Regardless of the organizational choice one adopts, priority attention should be paid to the citizen.

The attention to the question of education, which raises awareness and engages citizens in the SC, allows to highlight the problems of the citizens themselves. The contents proposed by the participants have to be “designed” from their points of view.

At this level the PAR, through its mentor, explicates the status of the staff training process: through the tutor’s facilitating and mediation skills,

the SC work favours the natural educational process and realigns it, if necessary, to the creation of additional expert knowledge.

#### 1.4.1. Phase 1: *sensible problem*

The PAR sets this process in motion by integrating the following elements:

- the investigative process of rational thought (expressed by the “R” = thinking-related research method),
- the intuitive process of sensorimotor-emotional feeling (expressed by “P” = feeling-related method of participation),
- the operational process of action (expressed by “A” = R- and P-related action method).

The three processes, which have been hereby separated in order to be controlled, managed and assessed within the PAR’s implementation phases, in the daily functioning of our triple cognitive potential evolve together.

The investigative process originates from a lack of knowledge. The unknown information becomes significant for our reason when two cognitive domains of feeling turn on thus making it affect us directly, we feel it as our own. The unknowable becomes “our problem”, its does not leave us indifferent, it makes us sensitive, we want to clarify and resolve it. The process sets in motion the method of action, as a constituent part of our desire to know.

The first phase of the PAR, which also becomes the first educational work to be done in a SC, consists of focusing on the *sensible problem* by the group of participants: usually, people tend to gather in the form of a SC because of a common interest for a “topic” than for a precise and detailed problem to “study”.

It is the task of the professional tutor (or mentor, facilitator, ...) to lead the participants in reaching this first stage of the PAR, which reinforces their motivation, makes them “move” and binds them to the activities of the SC.

In summary, we hereby describe the first phase of the PAR as applied to the SC:

RESEARCH Logic and dynamics of thinking	ACTION Logic and dynamics of acting	PARTICIPATION Logic and dynamics of feeling	SUBJECT’S KNOWLEDGE (in/out)
Problem	Activation	Sensibilization	Previous knowledge

Through the study circle's tutor the PAR is aimed at every activity: by personalizing and socializing the topic and the problem in terms of rational, but even more emotional, feeling, it activates the individual and the group to work individually and with others.

Right from the start, the PAR is a means of education for active citizenship through the direct participation of citizens, their expectations and problems. Not surprisingly, the PAR is a good practice of responsible and smart democracy because it works on the investment of cognitive potential.

#### *1.4.2. Phase 2: involving analysis*

In the PAR process the transition from the problem to its exploration happens naturally due to the synergy of three processes:

- analytical thinking, which by nature tends to disassemble a given problem by analysing how it is made and which are its constituent parts,
- sensible thinking is not extraneous to the analysis and, therefore, tends to introduce those factors or variables that directly affect the sensitive subjectivity,
- active thinking moves from rational and emotional analysis and operationalizes the problem research through recognitive action.

From this triple processes the PAR expands and strengthens itself: the problem exploration process integrates with the coordinated action of the group and leads to the empirical analysis of the problem. The subjective knowledge of the sensitive reason maps the recognizable aspects by using the participants' knowledge: the subjective involvement tends to emphasize more the reasons of personal emotions than the reasons of objective thinking, which is rationally neutral.

The non-formal study circle's tutor should adhere to the PAR's methodological flow in order to foster in the participants the re-appropriation and full use of the three domains. In this regard, the real educational gain of each participant is represented also by the reacquisition or strengthening of the mental competence of sensitive thinking and by the recovery of the potential of the three domains that only the education of the complex mind of feeling and thinking can defend and guarantee.

There is an additional non-formal professional role of the tutor, who collaborated with the SC group. It has been already mentioned that his first technical and methodological function is to join the learning process of the participants as it appears but, at the same time, he leads the participants in reaching the full cognitive potential of the three domains.

This raises the need for enhancing and expanding the mind potential and to accompany the subject in the creation of gradually more extensive meanings.

Technically speaking, at this stage of the PAR, the empirical analysis of the participants continues in order to enrich the analysis carried out with the prior knowledge, so that it can then formulate deeper and more adequate solutions to the problem.

This means that one or more experts on the aspects of the problem faced by the group are invited to offer their input by answering and dialoguing with the group. This is not a lesson, otherwise we would fall under formal education, which would be misleading and out of context. The role of the expert in the SC is reversed, since he does not offer contents, but listens to the analysis made by the group and offers additional and more specific inputs to formulate explanations and interconnected actions, which may eradicate the problem from the roots. In the next phases, the expert or experts are invited to collaborate as “facilitators” in the creation of in-depth meanings by the SC participants.

RESEARCH Logic and dynamics of thinking	ACTION Logic and dynamics of acting	PARTICIPATION Logic and dynamics of feeling	SUBJECT'S KNOWLEDGE (in/out)
Analysis	Recognitive action	Involvement	Previous knowledge Disciplinary knowledge

In several cases the tutor represents the link between the materials processed by the group and the support materials of the experts. This is a qualified extension of his facilitating function, of the relationship between the group's prior knowledge and the additional technical knowledge: from here on, the group proceeds in a more systematic way by carrying out a real “study”.

It becomes increasingly clear how the PAR stimulates the education of the intellectually and emotionally emancipated, proactive and resilient citizens, and gives visibility to the creation of the complex knowledge society through the expansion of the study circles in the local areas.

In summary, we hereby describe the methodological framework of the second phase of the PAR:

### 1.4.3. Phase 3: *intriguing hypothesis*

Rationally, the analysis of the constituents of the problem in terms of empirical knowledge and related technical knowledge requires further processing: the hypothetical explanation. Also in this case the tutor has to accompany the process from the problem analysis to the draft of the possible explanation: the research of the *hypothesis* becomes *intriguing*. The domain of feeling increases the motivation to find the solution and pushes the domain of thinking to formulate one or more viable solutions.

It should be stressed that the PAR process, even if it corresponds to the natural endowment of our mind, it is not automatically deployed due to biological, social and cultural necessity. It is a possible process because it is an element of our mental potential. In order to be possible has to be educated: education in its different forms can make it real. Professionals in the field of education have the tools to turn a possibility into reality by working with young people or adults in the educational process of knowledge creation. In our case this happens by adopting the PAR methodology.

RESEARCH Logic and dynamics of thinking	ACTION Logic and dynamics of acting	PARTICIPATION Logic and dynamics of feeling	SUBJECT'S KNOWLEDGE (in/out)
Hypothesis	Forecasted action	Affection	Disciplinary knowledge + Previous knowledge

When formulating one or more hypothetical solutions for a given problem, the PAR becomes for the SC tutor and participants a valuable theoretical and methodological guide, which facilitates “studying” within the “circle”.

This confirms the same assumptions of the “Theory of the three domains” of human knowledge: the game of “feeling and thinking” opens up the human potential and the history of each of us. Education is an opportunity for playing well the game of life, but it does not guarantee the victory.

At this stage the SC group is urged to obtain one or more plausible explanations from the analysis outputs, to interpret this stage as an element of his own investigative-participatory process, to support it with the necessary actions in order to understand and formulate the given hypotheses.

In summary, these are the three logical and dynamical processes of the third phase of the PAR.

#### 1.4.4. Phase 4: *evaluation suspense*

By now, the PAR methodological process based of the theory of the three domains of knowledge should be outlined.

When evaluating the hypothesis the time factor depends on the nature of the analysed problem. The PAR's educational objective is to acquire or strengthen skills (if PAR is used in scientific contexts it leads to scientific results). When used within a study circle, PAR will open a new path and foster empathetic thinking that will lead the participants even after the conclusion of the SC. In this context the PAR should light the fuse of the complex mind.

It should not be forgotten that our decision-making processes based on the evaluation of certain interpretations of real-life facts, events and situations, are logical-emotional and relate to sensitive reasoning, which cannot be encompassed within flat time frames: within the PAR the logic of thinking, feeling and acting replicates many times within the same phase.

The tutor should know how to manage the PAR processes that intertwine in different times and contents within a study circle: he should be able to grasp, take into the account and manage the complex PAR phase. The tutor works with the group, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, for example if he is called upon to solve study problems and refocus the group or he manages the group's impasse alone in order not to block it functioning.

Even at this stage the dynamic integration of the three logics implements the PAR methodology within the SC, thus fuelling and strengthening in the participants the use and mastery of rationally well-ordered and emotionally motivating thinking that guides the evaluation of the solutions to the problem.

The group is focused on turning backwards the logic of the previous phase and thereby sets the grounds for the transition to the next phase logic that completes the PAR: the hypothesis has created the possible solution of the problem, while the evaluation checks whether that solution is viable or not.

The achieved level of participation, although it experiments the *evaluation suspense*, finally resolves the problem by finding the intellectually and emotionally right solution.

RESEARCH Logic and dynamics of thinking	ACTION Logic and dynamics of acting	PARTICIPATION Logic and dynamics of feeling	SUBJECT'S KNOWLEDGE (in/out)
Verification	Implementing action	Satisfaction	New disciplinary knowledge of the subject

All the work that the group has done to find and evaluate the solution proves that each participant has once again used, this time in a more sophisticated way, his own knowledge potential in order to become an active citizen, who has now encompassed his previous knowledge into new expert knowledge.

The logic and the horizontal dynamics of this phase are presented below.

#### *1.4.5. Phase 5: the effort for improving the evaluation*

The last phase is the culmination of the whole PAR process: active and participatory research had define a problem in order to clarify and resolve it. Now it is called upon to evaluate whether the a viable solution has been reached.

The final evaluation carefully reviews the process that led to the result. If the hypothesis is confirmed, but there have been some errors in the PAR process, that confirmation is lacking. If, conversely, the assessment from the problem formulation to the hypothesis evaluation is given the green light, then it is reasonably confirmed that the solution of the problem is the one that has been hypothesized. If, on the contrary, the hypothesis is not confirmed, one should record the issues that have to be reviewed. In both cases, one recognizes the positive effect of this experience that has an educational importance in itself, because the participants have fully expressed their cognitive potential and enriched their knowledge. The prior knowledge possessed before entering the SC and the additional knowledge acquired within the SC have merged in new and more advanced knowledge and skills.

By finding a solution to the problem, regardless of its more or less objective reliability, participants have broadened their minds and have made it more flexible: now it contextualizes the mistakes (and the successes) within a broader, progressive and perfectible process of knowledge and action: ultimately, the evaluation is an effort for improving thinking,

feeling and acting. Those, who have experienced the SC, want to take care of their minds and behaviour and resolve the issued of integrated local development: the PAR approach results into turning LLL and Knowledge Building into a personal need for the creation of advanced, sustainable, inclusive and equitable knowledge society.

RESEARCH Logic and dynamics of thinking	ACTION Logic and dynamics of acting	PARTICIPATION Logic and dynamics of feeling	SUBJECT'S KNOWLEDGE (in/out)
Evaluation	Improving action	Taking in charge	Integrated knowledge of the subject

In reaching the end of this brief presentation of the PAR approach within the SC, it should be stressed that the PAR must be understood as a reference methodology and not as a strict technical sequence, because it does not constrain the timing and the technical modalities of the problem solution. The SC timing and implementation modalities may vary according to the contents and the tools of the SC: for example, the evaluation process may be very short if it compares already processed data, or more ponderous if it consists of giving scores to the acquired knowledge and skills, which have to be certified with standardized protocols.

Moreover, the same five-stages cycle can be completed during one SC or can be reproduced multiple times within the same SC. The PAR methodology has to be co-managed by the tutor and the participants in order to create a good synergic connection between the SC process and its contents.

But the value of a SC is based on a deeper reason: by socializing and jointly managing the PAR flow, the tutor and the group raise their awareness about the educational importance of the study circle in creating more advanced personal knowledge among the intellectually and responsibly pro-active citizens, which allows them to effectively resolve personal and common problems according to the theoretical and practical model of the PAR.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NETWORK, LOCALLY EMBEDDED, EDUCATIONAL MODEL

Elena Slanisca

### *Abstract*

The article traces the main project stages from the point of view of the institutional sustainability of the study circles system based upon: complementary partner roles, local embeddedness and representativeness, harmonization with respect to national, regional and local LLL regulatory provisions in full compliance with Europe 2020 strategic priorities for a smart, sustainable, inclusive growth. An important element of sustainability lies in the study circle system itself which is based upon network development at different levels:

1. functional networks between partners managing the learning system,
2. network of local actors highlighting training needs and
3. sectoral and intersectoral networks among study circles participants aiming to enhance local knowledge in the context of local development initiatives.

It's the study circle itself as a typically non formal, self-directed, action oriented learning environment to support networking through capacity building and the development of both personal and collective competencies.

L'articolo ripercorre le tappe dell'azione di progetto dal punto di vista della sostenibilità istituzionale del sistema circoli di studio, sostenibilità fortemente ricercata e che è data: dal ruolo dei partner stessi grazie alle reciproche complementarità, dalla rappresentatività dei soggetti coinvolti nella rete Circoli di studio rispetto al radicamento nei territori, dall'armonizzazione rispetto ai più recenti disposti normativi in materia di LLL verificata attraverso il coinvolgimento delle istituzioni competenti in materia e dalla piena aderenza alle priorità strategiche dell'Europa 2020 per una crescita intelligente, sostenibile e inclusiva.

Un elemento di sostenibilità importante è dato dal modello stesso di apprendimento che nel sistema circoli di studio è basato sullo sviluppo di reti ai diversi livelli:

1. reti funzionali tra partner di progetto per la gestione degli interventi,
  2. reti di attori locali per l'analisi dei bisogni formativi e la promozione delle iniziative,
  3. reti settoriali o intersettoriali fra i partecipanti ai circoli di studio per la valorizzazione dei saperi locali in chiave di sviluppo.
- È lo stesso concetto di “circolo” quale ambiente di apprendimento tipicamente non formale, flessibile, auto-diretto, orientato all'azione a sostenere e finalizzare il lavoro di rete attraverso il capacity building e lo sviluppo di competenze collettive oltre che individuali.

Prispevek spremlja ključne faze projekta s stališča institucionalne trajnosti študijskih krožkov, na katerih sloni sistem: komplementarnost partnerskih vlog, vpetost v lokalno življenje in reprezentativnost, usklajenost z nacionalnim, regionalnim in lokalnim pravnim urejanjem spodbud VŽU in polna usklajenost s strateškimi prioriteta Evrope 2020 za pametno, trajnostno in vključujočo rast.

V sistemu študijskih krožkov, ki temelji na razvoju mrež, so pomemben element trajnosti

1. funkcionalne mreže med partnerji, ki sistem upravljajo,
2. mreža lokalnih akterjev, ki izpostavljajo učne potrebe in
3. sektorske in med-sektorske mreže med udeleženci študijskih krožkov za krepitev lokalnega znanja v kontekstu lokalnih razvojnih pobud.

Študijski krožek je sam po sebi tipično neformalno, samo-uravnavano in v akcijo usmerjeno učno okolje za podporo mreženju s krepitvijo kapacitet in razvoja tako osebnih kot kolektivnih kompetenc.

### *2.1. The study circles model for local development*

The study circles formative methodology is recognized at European level as an innovative way of learning that can improve the quality of people's lives and fully promote citizenship rights by stimulating a proactive participation.

This methodology is fully in line with the strategic priorities set out by the Europe 2020 Programme and the development of key competences for lifelong learning, which encompass personal achievement, social inclusion and employability.

The Italian-Slovenian *Study Circles* cross-border project has tested this methodology as a tool to promote spread knowledge and enhance the area's

resources in connection with local development initiatives, which have mainly involved rural areas, by promoting dialogue between cultures and the development of cross-border networks of knowledge in relation to the following topics: sustainable agriculture, promotion of local products, protection and enhancement of natural, historical and cultural heritage, revitalization of traditional crafts, recovery of local knowledge and identity values as key elements for the qualification of territorial tourism and marketing.

This type of contextualization allows to unfold the full potential of a formative methodology that originates from non-formal adult education and emphasizes active, experiential and collective learning that is strongly linked to the local territory.

A study circle adapted to the needs of local development can be promoted by a training or local development agency, but its DNA is represented by the alliance between both types of agencies, which may thus complementary enhance their skills in order to perform the following system activities: analysis of training needs, planning of initiatives, organization of educational activities and training of mentors/tutors as facilitators in the learning process.

This has been the main challenge of the Study Circles project, whose vision and proposals are outlined in the *Guidelines for setting up the cross-border study circles system* and in the agreements for its management which, by appropriately enhancing the roles of the different partners, propose a series of actions designed to guarantee the sustainability and continuity of the system itself.

## 2.2. *The approach*

The Study Circles project is an example of a bottom-up learning model based on the practical needs of the territories, which has been set up within the European Territorial Cooperation Programme and includes the following innovative elements:

- the creation of a common cross-border adult learning model (horizontal networks) in two contiguous and highly homogeneous territories in terms of geomorphological and socio-environmental characteristics, albeit their regulatory systems differ;
- the integration of the study circles formative methodology with the territorial development planning tools (vertical networks) by promoting a cross-border coordinated education and setting up a system of alliances for its future management.

In the following chapters we will see how public and private horizontal

and vertical networks constantly and dynamically intersect at different stages of the implementation of the study circles model by combining “top” and “bottom” levels in order to broaden basic knowledge.

### *2.3. The sustainability achieved by the partners' cross-border network*

The Study Circles project partnership, which has managed the tested model, was composed by Italian adult training and educational institutions, local action groups and provinces, and by a Slovenian development agency and adult education institutions. We can therefore affirm that the partnership building method has been absolutely mirrored on the Slovenian and Italian side, although in these two countries there are two different systems of adult education.

If we consider that the project's challenge was not only to test a formative methodology, but also to integrate it as an innovative element into the Italian and Slovenian lifelong learning systems, it was necessary to involve the representatives of LLL systems, which are subsidiary to local, regional and national systems.

At Slovenian national level the involvement was more direct due to the presence of a ministry-based partner (ACS), which coordinates different adult education projects, including the national study circles system.

At national level there are several elements of differentiation between the two countries, since Slovenia has already adopted a national legislation in the field of adult education, whereas Italy has only recently filled this gap by adopting the Law no. 92/2012, which was followed by the Decree for the certification of non-formal and informal competences (January and February 2013), the Joint conference agreements on lifelong guidance (December 2013) and the Decree on regional networks for lifelong learning (July 2014).

These differences were considered to be overcome and in any case temporary when reference was made to the European membership and the gradual alignment of the member states to the *Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*.

From the early stages of project development, we have consciously worked in order to ensure the institutional sustainability of the pilot initiative at the Italian level by involving the Central Directorate for Training and Education of Friuli Venezia Giulia Region and the Italian Ministry of Education through its Permanent Territorial Centre for Adult Education in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

At local territorial level the municipalities, business associations and

civil society associations have been involved directly since the planning phase and according to the “Guidelines for the implementation of an adult education system - Document of the State-Regions Conference, March 2000”. In this regard, particular attention has been paid to the analysis of educational needs, the promotion among potential participants and the dissemination of study circles’ results and products within the communities. Together with other local economic and social institutions and associations the municipalities have been actively included in the cross-border study circles system.

In Slovenia, which has already permanently included non-formal education and study circles into its adult education system, the study circles model was already coordinated before the implementation of the Study Circles project, since it was already adopted by a national coordinating organisation (ACS), which cooperated with local and sub-regional training agencies, associations, development agencies and municipalities.

It has to be underlined that the above mentioned differences did not represent an insurmountable obstacle in terms of activities planning.

In summary, it can be said that the sustainability of the study circles model for local development goes beyond the managing organisations (educational and development agencies), since it embraces both local political programming authorities and stakeholders, be they public or private institutions or expression of the civil society.

#### *2.4. The development phase: a network-based educational model*

By applying the territorial integrated education system logic, the project has set up a network-based study circles system that ensures the coherent and effective implementation of the measures at different levels:

- functional networks between partners for the provision of services related to study circles activities;
- networks of local actors for the stimulation and detection of the demand, and the promotion and dissemination of knowledge;
- networks of study circles participants, at both sectorial and intersectorial level, that promote the process of educational enhancement of territorial knowledge.

These horizontal networks become vertical when the institutions involved in identifying and analysing priority themes interact with and compare the proposals and demands of the territory.

It should be emphasized that the tested networks are dynamic networks that can adapt to different contexts and requirements according to the

strategic priorities, which can in turn stimulate new needs.

It is therefore interesting to analyse in-depth the various network types and the sustainability of a network-based educational model.

#### *2.4.1. The partners' network as a model for managing the study circles system in symbiosis with the territory*

Where have we started?

It should be underlined that a central role within the project partnership was played by the collaboration between the adult education institution and the local development agency. This collaboration represents the core element of the partnership and has been reproduced in every project area involved. In those areas, where there were no Local Action Groups, the Province was included.

From which needs or expectations did the project originate?

Firstly, from the need to offer a flexible and highly personalized educational supply, which should reflect the needs of the territory and be more focused on demand rather than offer.

If the training institution's supply was too rigid and not in line with the expressed needs, the local development agency acknowledged the lack of adequate adult education opportunities in often decentralized areas. Moreover, if the social capital was not activated, important infrastructure investments and projects aimed at local and cross-border development were considered to have a very limited or even zero impact.

Initially, the project's sustainability was determined when the partners agreed to promote lifelong learning networks in support of local development and to integrate non-formal adult education into the lifelong learning system.

How was this objective achieved?

It was achieved by working in close symbiosis with local organisations in order to determine the needs of the territory and by combining the initiatives identified on both sides of the border in order to develop real cross-border networks.

Based on these assumptions, the core elements of the study circles system, namely the training of operators, the analysis of the needs, the induction of the demand for education and the management of the pilot study circles have been designed to produce lasting results.

With this project we have tested on-site the effectiveness of the participatory approach for the detection of educational needs related to

the strategic themes for local development by involving local stakeholders, identifying target groups and subsequently determining the study circles formative activities.

Which skills have been deployed?

The implementation of the activities did not require the creation of new structures or functions by the participating institutions, but rather the expansion and networking of the existing ones.

However, as regards the expansion of functions of the partner organizations, a substantial innovation on the Italian side was represented by the study circles tutor/mentor acting as a facilitator of active learning. Both the theoretical and practical training of mentors, which has been skilfully managed by Slovenian partners, has characterized the project throughout its implementation.

As regards the sustainability of this kind of tutor/mentor we should ask ourselves: where is appropriate to place him? Within the educational institution or the local development agency?

While it is true that the study circle tutor is preferably a result of the educational sector, it is also true that the specificity of the study circle for local development requires a knowledge of the area, programming tools and issues related to development strategies. If the tutor operates as a facilitator, it is clear that he needs to integrate the skills related to the management of learning processes in adulthood.

The project partners, with their own specific characteristics in terms of economic revitalization, management of educational activities for adults and training of operators, have confirmed to be able to manage this service (study circles) as a network with the skills acquired by their operators. These skills should be upgraded in the future (see also the University collaboration agreement for the implementation of research and training projects aimed at developing innovative experts/facilitators in the field of non-formal and informal learning in social and working settings).

As regards the above mentioned process, we have to stress the importance of the agreement between ENFAP FVG (educational institution) and GAL Torre Natisone (local development agency) that represents the core agreement of the system, as evidenced by the common interest in developing actions also according to the cross-border agreements for the management of study circles within the system actions designed to promote the area.

This territorial agreement, which is supported by a network of municipalities and local associations, is of great importance because it shaped the project according to the regional strategic priorities and makes it transferable to other

contexts. It is therefore fully in line with the new regional planning documents related to the European Structural Funds, in particular with the Priority 10: “Enhancing access to lifelong learning, upgrading the skills and competences of the workforce and increasing the labour market relevance of education and training systems: sustainable, smart and inclusive growth.”

In this agreement, which emphasizes the complementary skills and roles of the two organizations, study circles are considered to be highly interesting for the following priorities:

- rebuilding a sense of community, in particular with regards to the most marginal geographical areas and also in terms of self-organization for achieving the essential services standard;
- promotion of the territorial organization, including the cross-border one, in terms of tourist activities, by integrating and networking products for a more effective promotion;
- creation of networks and supply chains between operators in order to protect the authenticity, the growth of local companies and micro-companies, the on-site production processes in order to preserve the added value created on the spot;
- promotion of knowledge transfer within networks aimed at bringing the research and training sector with businesses according to the needs for business innovation.

The agreement can be applied through an integrated territorial development approach based on the implementation of Structural Funds (ESF, ERDF...) in less developed areas. In such environments study circles can be used to integrate local development strategies.\*

#### 2.4.2. *Territorial networks and supply and demand matching for the local establishment of the system*

*«Participation in training is not achieved by attempting to influence and sensitise the individual, but by collaborating with various social groups, starting from the local ones, with a collective effort, which involves the various live forces of the environment. Demand evolves from an initial question, whatever this question is, and by proposing actions that stimulate the need for further efforts towards new experiences. It is in this context that adult education has to be developed.*

*Cultural and basic knowledge gain a more central role and combine themselves as pre-vocational elements, which are able to connect culture with know-how and life and work contexts. Adult education therefore becomes an important resource for local development and recovery of the social identity of a given territory.»* (this is an excerpt from the State-Regions Conference Document, March 2000: The reorganization and enhancement of adult lifelong learning).

## What is the importance of territorial networks?

The strength of territorial networks developed within the project at local and micro-local level for the creation of the study circles system is exemplified by the opportunity to meet the demand for education/professional orientation at all levels, to promote active citizenship and encourage community-based development.

This is a key element of every study circle for local development: on the one hand there is the need to ensure training activities, which enhance local development projects by upgrading specific skills, identity and collaborative processes, on the other the need to start processes for stimulating the demand for education in the wider context of lifelong learning, as a prerequisite for the development of a knowledge-based society, to which all individuals can participate and contribute.

Local actors involved in the working groups have contributed to identify the needs and target groups of participants according to the identified priorities, and in some cases they participated themselves to the pilot study circles and were later involved in the dissemination of the results/products. In doing so, in many cases they have offered their facilities and personnel to carry out the activities.

In the cross-border study circles system the creation of the intermediaries' network is strategic not only for planning and managing the various initiatives, but also for sharing the results, since the study circles learning model is a model of collective learning that aims at the common good.

Its tools are the participatory working groups and territorial information desks hosted at municipal premises, mostly libraries, which also serve as a collector of the new proposals for self-learning.

During the project's implementation, working groups have been promoted both locally and across borders and have paved the way for the launch of the pilot study circles. Stimulating the demand for training has been a very delicate phase and had to be prepared carefully, since it was decisive for the success of the learning activities.

«We should emphasize the importance of the process shaped by local action groups, which was based on territorial strategic planning and the identification and sharing of issues and scenarios within the network, of which the working groups are an expression and an aggregator of other organisations (entrepreneurs, citizens, operators) and represent a sort of pre-incubator of circles» stated VeGAL's director G. Pegoraro.

The cross-border network of information desks can be a great tool for disseminating the study circles learning experiences and for gathering new ideas.

The working groups and information desks can be also easily overlapped or joined with existing facilities/services, thus highlighting the “flexibility” of the study circles infrastructure.

### 2.4.3. *The educational role of the study circles network*

By testing the project we have determined that a study circle can create networks of knowledge and collaborative relationships, which can stimulate the development of economic activities according to the resources and history of a given area, the enhancement of local specialties in agriculture and crafts, the creation of an integrated tourist offer and the promotion of innovative territory-based business approaches.

We have found that within study circles, due to the involvement of the stakeholders, we can remove some weaknesses, such as poor collaboration and integration between operators and institutions and lack of openness to innovation, by promoting a sense of belonging to the community and collaborative processes that support local development actions.

Within the study circles network the development of individual skills/abilities can be summarized with the term *capacity-building*, which consists of meta-abilities and skills that are used to diagnose problems, propose solutions and creatively apply the knowledge by valuing a given potential, whether individual or collective, and turning a good into something useful and usable. This is also a cornerstone of LLL.\* (see *Project Forward: The way forward to Lisbon 2010: A reference model to support the implementation of LLL systems*).

In this regard the dynamics of cooperation and the development of collective skills amplify the result of individual action.

But a study circle goes beyond that: it is an open system, based on inclusion, interdependence and alliance aimed at reaching common goals, without neglecting responsibility and trust.

For this reason the study circles model can lead the development of spontaneous networks that may, once the education activities are over, evolve into more formalized networks (company networks), new business initiatives, community projects or may even promote specific training needs.

In this regard it is interesting to note the concept of study circles as a weak network expressed by P. Federighi in his publication “Transfer of innovation and study circles” (Federighi, Boffo, 2009: 16-35). Federighi writes:

«The network building process, which includes the networks with weak ties, represents a task for the educational activity. The innovative study circle is characterized precisely by its ability to relate subjects belonging to different networks with strong ties, which are bearers of knowledge that is relevant for not

included subjects, who are interested into exchanging it. The latter refers to the concept of soft innovation that means doing something new or different by putting it into practice and adapting it to an organization/community.»

### *2.5. An example of shaping implemented with the project*

An example of how the study circles collective learning model, which actually connects local networks, study circles managing bodies and action-oriented learning networks, can be applied, is represented by the cross-border network agreements for the promotion of educational initiatives aimed at enhancing tourism. These agreements were signed within the Study Circles project by the project partners, who operate in different areas along the border, and some local tourist operators.

These agreements are a product of the project and contribute to create a collaborative system between institutions/organizations that promote local territory and tourism, training agencies, individual operators and citizens, who can participate to the creation and organization of the offer.

According to these agreements, the themes of interest are identified within the local/regional strategic priorities by the cross-border network, which plans the activities and promotes the participation of different stakeholders. At study circle level, thanks to the contributions of the experts working for local organizations, participants can analyse the context starting from individual situations, they can study the market, new types of products or communication tools, strengthen their knowledge and mutual cooperation in order to create new cross-border tourist products that enrich the local supply. The cross-border study circles and the system of relationships developed by them may play an important role in the joint enhancement of the territory and in increasing its attractiveness. The study circles network products can be later conveyed by operators and experts by carrying out appropriate promotion and marketing actions via the same network that promoted them.

### *2.6. Conclusions*

In today's scenario of profound social and economic transformation, study circles become a training tool for expanding and enhancing the knowledge and skills of the individual, but also to update the personal characteristics, which are useful for life, including the ability to adapt and the spirit of innovation that are essential for every professional activity.

Moreover, as a tool for finding solutions to local problems, study circles

can help the community to recognize the value of its knowledge by sharing it and to promote the identification of possible economic effects of the same. This gives visibility to the community in micro-local contexts, even in the marginal and peripherals ones.

In the following paragraph we present the vision expressed by the Director of GAL Torre Natisone Guglielmo Favi:

«Study circles are a need for education that is created when there is a problem to be solved, since everyone has some knowledge that can serve others. Through the study circles network and its knowledge, resources become a product (capability approach). They create a relational capital, promote connections and prevent the risk of fragmentation. This is the vision of the interdependence of the agents of change: everyone grows within a process. In order to bring the territory to the market, organization is needed (collective skills).»

This means that the study circles model is not conceived as an adult education model on its own, but as a tool that interacts with other instruments within a system designed to promote the development of the individual or community, and is within this logic that study circles make the most out of their potential.

With the development of cross-border study circles for local development we have tried to give substance and sustainability to this kind of vision that is grounded in the principles of LLL.

How can we preserve its characteristics?

We believe that the study circles model for local development should maintain its identity as a non-formal educational tool, which alone can safeguard the specificities of the territory and local knowledge, and promote participation starting from the expressed needs and the free definition of learning objectives, programs, etc.

Of essential importance are also the complementarity of roles and the synergy between the educational agency, which plans, manages and monitors the educational action, and the development agency, which manages the territorial animation activities. This objective has to be achieved in order to prevent the flattening of the study circle's educational action and its role as a laboratory for sharing, creating and collectively transforming knowledge.

## CHAPTER 3

# COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THROUGH STUDY CIRCLES

Nevenka Bogataj

### *Abstract*

A local community as a social entity changes through time. Changes are the consequence of external, as well as internal factors, e.g. creativity of the community. Intentional empowerment of the internal elements of the local community presents a challenge for the educational framework, as most of it has recently been performed in the form of unified mandatory basic formal schooling and its continuation at higher levels. Schooling is intended for individuals belonging to the younger generation who are at least for a certain period of time excluded from the local community life. Group adult learning is different, as it includes more generations. It is based on local features, happening and delivering the results of learning to the local community. Study circles, as a form of group and community learning, were tested on both sides of the state border between Italy and Slovenia. The results are interpreted from the perspective of their role for the local development empowerment in order to justify them as an educational tool based on voluntary participation of more generations at the same time. Quantitative data of pilot cases is interpreted in the light of sustainable changes of the local community.

Una comunità locale in quanto entità sociale cambia nel tempo. I cambiamenti sono la conseguenza di fattori sia esterni che interni, vedi ad esempio la capacità creativa di una comunità. La responsabilizzazione consapevole degli elementi interni della comunità locale rappresenta una sfida per l'ambito educativo in quanto essa è stata per lo più delegata all'educazione scolastica formale di base e dei cicli superiori. L'istruzione riguarda peraltro le generazioni più giovani che, per un certo periodo di tempo, sono escluse dalla vita della comunità locale.

L'apprendimento nei gruppi di adulti è diverso in quanto include più generazioni. Esso si basa sulle caratteristiche del territorio divulgando i risultati alla comunità locale. I circoli di studio come forma di apprendimento di gruppo e di comunità sono stati sperimentati su entrambi i lati del confine italo-sloveno. I risultati vengono qui interpretati in base al loro ruolo nel

processo di empowerment per lo sviluppo locale al fine di accreditarli come strumento educativo basato sulla partecipazione volontaria e contestuale di diverse generazioni. I dati quantitativi delle azioni pilota sono letti alla luce dei cambiamenti sostenibili operati nella comunità locale.

Lokalna skupnost kot socialna entiteta se v času spreminja. Spremembe povzročajo poleg zunanjih dejavnikov tudi notranji dejavniki npr. ustvarjalnost skupnosti. Načrtno spodbujanje notranjih dejavnikov lokalne skupnosti ostaja večinoma izziv prihodnosti izobraževanja, saj danes večina izobraževanja poteka v obliki enotnega obveznega osnovnega formalnega šolanja in nadaljevanja na višjih ravneh. Šolanje je namenjeno posameznikom mlajše generacije, ki so lahko vsaj določeno obdobje izločeni iz življenja svoje lokalne skupnosti.

Skupinsko učenje odraslih je drugačno, ker vključuje več generacij, izhaja iz lokalnih posebnosti, tja vrača svoje rezultate ter v celoti poteka lokalno. Ena od oblik skupinskega in skupnostnega učenja odraslih so študijski krožki, ki smo jih preizkusili na obeh straneh državne meje med Italijo in Slovenijo. Rezultate interpretiramo z vidika njihove vloge za spodbujanje lokalnega razvoja, s ciljem, da jih utemeljimo kot izobraževalno orodje, ki temelji na prostovoljni participaciji več generacij hkrati. Kvantitativne podatke konkretnih primerov interpretiramo v luči trajnosti sprememb lokalne skupnosti.

### *3.1. Introduction*

Our message targets the local community as a social entity and not as the administrative unit, which is also used as a term in Slovenia (municipality). Rural areas all over Europe consist of communities, which are easier to delineate from the surrounding than the urban areas. The smallness of hamlets or a group of hamlets enables us to easily compare them with communities. This is particularly true of the Alpine area<sup>7</sup> – a part of the project under examination in this article, where a part of the cross-border study circles took place. However, the definition of a community considers its function, rather than its size. This perspective is considered in the

<sup>7</sup> Southern, lowland project areas represent lowlands, as well as urban areas, which made the comparison interesting, regardless of the fact that this was not the aim of our analysis.

examination of the study circles in the cross-border area, developed in the study circles project as a part of *Cross-border laboratory of human resources development and cooperation networks*.

Any community undergoes changes over time and local communities are no exception. Changes are the result of external and internal reasons. Acceptance, resistance, and adaptation are features which enable a community to react to changes in the environment, which is why it can also fall apart when pressure is too strong. An assumption of this analysis is that we want/need to keep communities and their developmental breakthrough.

One of the possibilities for a breakthrough is education. Past centuries are mostly characterised by oral and internal learning of local communities, while schooling has only been accessible to selected individuals. Today, basic formal education is the foundation of any state. A number of positive developmental consequences on education are not analysed here. But we may see that local community education has remained marginalised, except when its participants mobilised their own knowledge to enhance (or misuse) the local community development. Although states and the European Union support agriculture and rural areas, they are still facing the downfall of communities. Which strong points can then communities build on in order to develop? Their particularities lie in their seldom mobilised experiential knowledge and internal relationships, which have been developed over centuries.

Most of the attention and European investments are given to formal education; consequently, the first priority is given to the younger generation. Adult education, which is crucial due to its role of developmental decision-making, is marginalized despite the fact that most agree that the humanistic role of education is most successfully gained through non-formal adult education programs. One of the latter is study circles. Slovenian educational system incorporated study circles according to the Scandinavian model during the period of independence. Technological improvements of training and monitoring did not change the core of the programme. Its first upgrade, which included new topics, was introduced in the above mentioned cross-border project. Particular needs of communities living along the state border of Slovenia and Italy were addressed by study circles as a stimulation/empowerment tool for their development. The aim of this paper is the presentation of this experience and its enhancement in theoretical discourse. We also try to identify those elements of cross-border study circles, which sustainability of the local community is based on.

### *3.2. Conceptual frame: conceptualization of the community and its sustainability*

Literature on community definition is vast, taking into consideration motives for its establishment and functioning, as well as individual reasons for finding and maintaining common ground. Traditional blood relation, accompanied by land affiliation and their symbols are the points emphasized by Tönnies (1999), while other authors underline additional perspectives, e.g. safety provision (North, 1991), limitations of individuals (Ostrom, 2005) or their liberation (Bromley, 2006). Finding of Berger and Luckmann (1999/1995), claiming social reality is a construct of the community (see also Jeriček, 2004), seems to be crucial for the recent understanding and interpretation of the community. Once a relatively closed community, dependent on natural resources, has now developed into an open, mobile and technologically equipped one. The twentieth century was characterized by the national state evolution, which, consecutively, regulated the society and in some periods even intentionally suppressed other organizational layers or exchanged them with the new ones, which had a substantial impact on the internal structure, functioning and needs of the existing, traditional ones. However, the functional elements of the community at any level, including the local one, were defined by Etzioni (1996) as: 1. supportive relationship network, 2. shared past and consequently shared norms, 3. responsiveness to the needs of members.

Some local communities in the project area vanished due to the emigration in the periods of poverty, war or undemocratic regimes. Others survived and adapted to oscillation. Various processes of adaptation took place; therefore, we can speak of the sustainability of local communities. In some cases they seem to be relatively more sustainable compared to the states which in the project area have changed seven times in the period of a century (Bogataj, Krče, 2014). Based on our assumption it is rational and reasonable to identify and support elements of sustainable functioning of the (local) community. The primary purpose of the project was to meet local communities, scan their needs and invest into their response through education according to the principles of non-formal learning.

Study circles as a developmental tool: there are several reasons why study circles should be considered as a developmental tool, all shared among partners. Strategically, they were selected due to their basic principles (demand-driven approach, active participation, direct communication, local embeddedness, experiential learning, and democratic procedures). Our second assumption is that that they contribute to the economic development

through the empowerment of horizontal and vertical relationships, represented by the following elements: 1. active participation of all levels incorporated, 2. knowledge/skills flow and 3. innovative initiatives, solutions (Federighi and Boffo, 2009). These elements presumably contribute to the sustainability of the local community, an issue which was also addressed in action research and particularly in the evaluation process. From the operational point of view, the successful project implementation meant positive evaluation of these elements; in other words, an active response to the project based educational offer.

A new cross-border model has been developed and linked with local practices (e.g. mentors training, pilot study circles activity, final events organization etc.). A study circle can promote any type of issue/topic, however, the present project suggested promoting traditional and new knowledge concerning crafts, agriculture, environment protection, tourism and all types of initiatives leading to the sustainable use and enhancement of local resources on the basis of the participatory and cooperative approach (e.g. intergenerational learning, networking, etc.).

### *3.3. Methodological considerations*

The study circles project in the context of *Cross-border laboratory for the development of human resources and cooperation networks promoting local resources* extended over the period of time from December 2011 to December 2014, and was led by ENFAP, Gorizia, Italy and was precisely documented also on [www.study-circles.eu](http://www.study-circles.eu). Its research was based on action research. It was comprised of 6 meetings of Technical Scientific Committee and accompanied by regular internal communication between its members (representatives of ENFAP, University of Florence, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, Soča Valley Development Centre (Posoški razvojni center) and LUNG).

Action research was based on the following assessment tools:

- personal attendance at (some) events and practices (minutes available in project documentation),
- active participation in project group meetings (minutes available in project documentation),
- regular communication between project partners (documented by notes),
- and extensive project documentation, some of which has already been published (the professional profile of SC mentor competences according to EQF system (Bogataj et al., 2013), the presentation of cross-border study circles experience in the context of adult education perspective (Gobbo et

al., 2014) and Guidelines for SC mentors (Galeotti et al., 2014).

Observations took place in all phases of study circles functioning, i.e. in the process of mentors training, local round tables, cross-border consulting tables and on the website, as well as in the initiation of study circles, its development and final action. Logically, the basic observation unit was a study circle (further referred to as SC), which is defined as a small group of people (6-12 participants) with a shared interest, who meet regularly in order to learn from each other (peer learning), and whose goal is to produce a publicly accessible result (a local event, an edition of a leaflet, a map, a brochure, etc.) Each SC is led by a mentor. The project also tested the doubling or tripling of mentors in a SC in the event of potential linguistic or other problems. The reports on the pilot cross-border practices and evaluations, internal (Nova Gorica, 25. 2. 2014, Novo mesto, 12. 6. 2014) and external (Gorizia, 11. 12. 2014), were provided.

### 3.4. Results

#### 3.4.1. General characterization of the area and observation of some local particularities

The area along the border between Italy and Slovenia is characterized by the Alpine character in the north and the Mediterranean in the south. The northern rural part is characterized by scarce population, while the southern urban areas are densely populated. In general, three main areas are in charge of the implementation of study circles, namely one Slovenian (1) and two Italian (2 and 3):

- Goriška statistical region, represented by 6 municipalities, including the town of Gorica;

- Friuli Venezia Giulia (Furlanija Julijska Krajina), Torre and Natisone valleys (consisting of 17 municipalities) and the Collio and Karst area in the province of Gorizia (consisting of 13 municipalities 12 listed at page 31 of "*L'Apprendimento collettivo: l'esempio dei circoli di studio sul confine italo-sloveno*").

- Eastern Veneto, representing 20 municipalities (22 listed at page 32 "*L'Apprendimento collettivo: l'esempio dei circoli di studio sul confine italo-sloveno*").

It is of no surprise that the area, being the crossroad of three large language groups, has undergone the process of several moves of the border line through history. A long period of stability extended only in the time of The Republic of Venice and from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on.

The past century brought relatively frequent political and economic cuts, causing market re-orientations, followed by the periods of institutional consolidation (Bogataj, Krče, 2014). This period has erased some local communities and initiated adaptations to all types of changes (political, economic, market). The recent lack of employment opportunities and the aging of population are counterbalanced with more political balance and the opening of diverse markets regardless the national border. Slovenia and Italy are the EU members, and therefore share its policy, including the support for rural areas, characterized by poor educational infrastructure. The economic crisis of the last decade has led neighboring urban centres, once employment locations, to a difficult situation, which resulted in the increase of the importance of local production alternatives at any level. Comparative advantages are thus not only provided by the recent EU membership, equal democratic frame and stepwise welfare equalization, but also by common adult educational goals.

SCs have only been available as an educational programme on the Slovenian side continuously since the 1990s by various providers. Innovation in the spreading of this model into Italy is seen in its non-individual form, “a learning environment development” (Gorizia, 11. 12. 2014), and economic goals, not having been promoted in Slovenia until now.

#### *3.4.2. Pilot SCs experience*

Thirteen SCs were successfully finished. Their documentation (reports) and products (the identity card, photo documentation, a leaflet, a brochure, online presentations, etc.) were analysed with particular attention to four cross-border practices (Table 1). Out of 149 participants attending SCs, they were mostly men (62%, 92), Italian citizens (82 %, 123), belonging to the age class over 55 (39%, 58) and with a relatively good educational level (57%, 85). The rest comprised of 36% (53) of those between 30 and 44, 27% (41) of those between 45-54 and 6% (9) of those between 18 and 29 years of age. A variety of job statuses were identified, out of which self-employed entrepreneurs (micro-companies) (39%, 58) prevailed, followed by the retired (22%, 33), employees (18%, 27), unemployed (11%, 17), and students (2%, 3).

One of the characteristics of the pilot SCs is their variety. It is expressed in terms of: 1. physical settings (SCs took place in local facilities, in a form

of some organized field excursions; location was frequently changed); 2. a variety of participants (in SCs 2 and 3 participants were heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, education, and status, but SC4 was gender homogenous); 3. multilingualism a strong point, also a challenge in all SCs.

Taking all these points into consideration, the development of cohesion is inevitable. Indeed, internal cohesion development took place, undergoing the phases of team development (formation, clarification, norming) in most pilot cases, what is more, in one also a mature team developed (Cepin, 2003). Voluntary participation contributed to the absence of competitive logic and stimulated cooperation. The initial energy of pilot cases was mostly invested into the internal process, and thus they reported on the development of ties. For example, SC1 gradually turned initial distrust (in the expected classical course) into a lively activity. Despite the fact that participants knew each other, this did not automatically cultivate positive attitude. The activation of generally passive participants, which was more the case on one side of the border, was reported in three out of four cases. SC2 only slowly accepted the self-organization principle, but at the same it is important to note that very ambitious goals were set. SC3 proved to be enthusiastic and motivated, while SC4 faced serious initial difficulties due to the misunderstandings of the financial and other roles of SCs.

External cohesion development proved to be a less easy task as reported by SCs (SC1 reported on intensive mentor's effort to gain initial contact with the municipalities, NGOs and public bodies; while SC2 was actively involved in local events and designed its own website, while SC3 achieved most local events and institutions, whereas SC4 only started activities in this respect. The training course discussion elaborated the gap between local needs and public provision on both sides of the border. Overall passivity and weak connectivity is reported for Slovenia in the e-learning environment (the chapter *Local network characteristics*). It is attributed to the presumably dominant offer provision and absent demand analysis.

Barriers mentioned are all of communicative character, but seldom is a language itself reported to be an obstacle. Instead other reasons are cited, e.g. poor clarification of goals or roles of participants and low initial understanding, low external recognition, etc. In all four cases, problems were addressed and the experience of pilot SCs was overall positively evaluated despite individual difficulties. Partly this success is attributed to the relatively similar aims of SCs (SC1 aimed at revival of old orchards, SC2 at preservation of their traditional knowledge and skills, SC3 at tourist development and local area promotion and SC4 at new development ideas

search based on further cooperation). Evolution of a homogeneous goal seems a positive result itself.

### 3.4.3. Linking pilot examples with community definition

The following three main elements of community definition were observed: the relationship between members, the orientation of SCs into the past/future, and the responsiveness of a mentor/participants to the needs of members. Results are presented in Table 1.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>SC1</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>SC2</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>SC3</i> <sup>3</sup>	<i>SC4</i> <sup>4</sup>
Number of mentors	4	3	4	3→2
(Supportive) relationship	o/+	o/+	+	o/+
Shared past/future & norms	+	+	+	+
Responsiveness to members	+ <sub>m</sub>	+ <sub>m</sub>	+ <sub>m</sub>	+ <sub>m</sub>

*The evaluation of the cross-border pilot cases from the community definition perspective*<sup>1</sup>

Pilot SCs as suggested by the original model were performed in the local environments. Their general orientation was “the local development”, which produced ideas about problems and eventual solutions. Some motivation may have been generated by the fact that all results would remain at the local level. Internal cohesion development represents the first criteria - the evolution of internal ties. Creativity is needed to cope with the issue and develop the agreement on goals, eventually achieved in a small group by learning. When positive outcomes emerge - regardless how small - a positive spiral starts. Two elements are essential in this respect: time (the evolution of ties) and the role of the mentor(s), not analysed here. When mentors enable demand-driven learning (not only participants' inclinations) and provide response, internal cohesion evolves.

1 Legend: + yes, 0 neutral, m – imposed by mentor, <sup>1</sup>Fruit from the emperor's gardens: let's revive fruit production, <sup>2</sup>Our heritage: hand-made art and local crafts, <sup>3</sup>Embraced by the hills, <sup>4</sup>Along the path of the Krivopetnice.

Communication, therefore, has a primary role. The presence of mediators, e.g. more mentors, which is a particularity of this project, may produce a negative effect (e.g. translator in the case of SC4 or the media in the local environment, as told by the mentors in the e-learning process), as they slow down the process. However, when mentors were indeed local inhabitants, they were a part of the local social network and so this barrier was not so significant, as the intergenerational ties are usually inclusive, regardless of their attributes. Four out of five cross-border practices were intergenerational. It is reasonable to expect that a similar to the Slovenian one would evolve in the cross-border area<sup>21</sup>. A short citing clearly defines such a situation by stating that “*communication, mutual understanding and integration proceeded more rapidly when direct communication was available (SC3)*”. This contributes to the confirming of the second criteria of the community (shared past/future), as well as the third criteria of the community (the responsiveness of members). Namely, the first one due to the similar aims, identified in all four cases analysed, and the direct citing of intergenerational transmittance of the needs and goals. The second one (responsiveness) is attributed to the mentors. These elements of local embedding may be confirmed, which is why any further generalisation of SCs perspective to the whole (micro)local community is still to be evolved.

### 3.5. Discussion and conclusions

The study circles methodology is recognised as innovative. Its inclusiveness (of diverse participants, goals, and final outcomes) and non-individual approach at the same time mean adaptability and creative response to diverse individual and group (community) needs. As mentors are trained to respond, communication begins. As its content is not judged or evaluated, but oriented only towards a common goal, safety, as well as room for motivation and active participation is provided. Activation of participants and local communities was observed. Evidence on the development of the inter-cultural competence (bilingualism evolution) also means adaptation from the static individual/local community into an active (learning) one, and in this way one of the main outcomes of cross-border SCs may be understood. In this respect, we have found that only few, but crucial (basic) conditions have to be fulfilled:

<sup>2</sup> An evaluation of 1660 SC from the period 2007-2014 informs us that 62% are characterised by two generations, additional 21% consist of three generations and only 17% of one generation.

- the freedom of learning according to a self-defined topic, pace and location;
- an organized and mentor-led process of common goal definition and further process until the final public event.

However, in organizational terms several questions emerge: What is the optimal relationship between an organization and hired mentors? Which measures are needed to build a lasting system after a positive project experience? Is social networking one of their roles? SCs are a rational and structured form of adult learning, linking training with education. Our cases confirm their role of stimulation and empowerment, so we may conclude that SCs are a stimulation/empowerment tool (for participants and stakeholders). However, generalization to the local community is difficult despite clear evidence of this link, as our sample was small and only one performance was provided. We refuse the instrumentalisation of (any) educational form, as gaining trust seems essential in adult education. What is more, to continuously reflect positive practice into an educational tool, time is needed (to build trust).

Elements which sustainability (of the local community) is based on link our outcomes with the assumptions (active participation at all levels, the flow of knowledge/skills and innovative initiatives). Our evidence show several characteristics which may be considered active, flow-like and new, compared to schooling. Namely, new topics were selected (e.g. local identity, local particularities), SCs were attended by the participants who are seldom included in formal programmes (e.g. housewives, the retired, employed). Intergenerational links emerged as well as knowledge flow was created after the internal cohesion establishment, and the empowerment took place. Less external support than in Slovenian practice is interpreted as lack of continuity.

Not only have the Slovenian examples provided the conclusion that SCs are an educational tool. Also cross-border pilot experience, precisely structured in advance and monitored from diverse perspectives, widely confirms their educational role leading to the provision of material outputs and higher adaptive capacity of local people.

Local communities were historically dependent on (limited) local natural resources and regulated internal relations by adaptation to resources availability and external "world". This process, still present, calls for establishment and maintenance of common goals. Care for the competences of their provision goes beyond team work. Education, evolving from the external to the more internal elements of the local community, may crucially contribute to the keeping of the norm of

cooperation (instead of competition) and the overcoming of prejudice, lack of both - communication and locally based initiatives. It may also provide inclusion of the marginalized target groups, the less promoted fields of action and the new forms of learning. If the previous two centuries enabled welfare development, the 21<sup>st</sup> century calls for adaptation to new levels of social organization (the EU, global), which does not marginalize local communities but does exactly the opposite – revives them through the management of heterogeneity. Study circles prove to be an efficient tool in this respect.

## CHAPTER 4

# STUDY CIRCLES AND INNOVATION

Giovanna Del Gobbo

### *Abstract*

The paper analyses the study circle model, not only as a training tool for adult education, but as a project, which puts together different subjects in the creation of educational responses that are consistent with the needs of local development. The article describes how the Study Circle project has tested the study circle methodology as a space for innovating the territorial educational system by training local players. In this respect, it has expressed its sustainability in terms of developed skills and activated educational modes. The project contributed to the capacity development processes in support of social innovation, where the term refers to the development of new solutions in terms of tools, products, services and models that meet old and new social and educational needs more effectively than the existing alternatives while, at the same time, promoting alliances between sectors and people and creating new relationships and partnerships.

Il contributo analizza il modello del circolo di studio, non solo come dispositivo formativo di educazione degli adulti, ma nel suo essere azione progettuale in grado di mettere insieme soggetti diversi per la costruzione di risposte formative coerenti con i bisogni di sviluppo locale. Il contributo evidenzia come il progetto "Study Circle", attraverso la sperimentazione del dispositivo del Circolo di Studio, si è configurato come spazio di innovazione del sistema educativo territoriale attraverso la formazione degli attori coinvolti esprimendo in tal senso la sua sostenibilità in termini di capacità sviluppate e modalità educative attivate. Il progetto ha offerto un contributo a processi di capacity development a sostegno dell'innovazione sociale, intendendo per innovazione sociale lo sviluppo di nuove soluzioni in termini di dispositivi, prodotti, servizi e modelli che soddisfano vecchi e nuovi bisogni sociali ed educativi in modo più efficace delle alternative esistenti e che allo stesso tempo, privilegiando le alleanze tra settori e persone, creano nuove relazioni e nuove collaborazioni.

Prispevek analizira model ŠK ne le kot model usposabljanja v izobraževanju

odraslih, temveč tudi kot projekt povezovanja subjektov za ustvarjanje izobraževalnih odzivov, ki izvirajo iz potreb po lokalnem razvoju. Članek opisuje testiranje metodologije študijskih krožkov z vidika njene primernosti za prostorske inovacije oz. za teritorialni sistem usposabljanja lokalnih deležnikov. S tega vidika izraža trajnost v smislu razvoja veščin in izobraževalnih načinov. Projekt je prispeval k povečanju razvojne kapacitete in k podpori družbenim inovacijam z razvojem novih rešitev za orodja, izdelke in storitve in modele, ki povezujejo stare in nove družbene in izobraževalne potrebe bolj učinkovito kot obstoječe alternative. Ob tem je promoviral tudi povezave med sektorji in ljudmi ter oblikoval nove odnose in partnerstva.

#### *4.1. Introduction*

Interdependency between a democratic, inclusive, sustainable development and the enhancement and exploitation of local knowledge and local resources has been widely debated and acknowledged by the international community over the recent years. Moreover, several decades of international debates about the inter-links between “environment”, “sustainability” and “development” have contributed to the emergence of the concept of sustainable human development as the process allowing to the people to enlarge their own tally of choices but non only. From the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of human development became a broad and comprehensive concept. As we found in the Human Development Report of 1992 :

Human development is concerned both with developing human capabilities and with using them productively [ ] Human development also means development for people, including the creation of economic opportunities for all. And it means development by people, requiring participatory approaches [ ] It covers all human choices in all societies at all stages of development [ ] The concept of human development does not start with any predetermined model. It draws its inspiration from the long-term goals of a society. It weaves development around people, not people around development.<sup>12</sup>

This definition highlights the relationship between learning, labour, governance, social inclusion and emphasizes the endogenous component of development as people-centred process.

All human communities, at all levels, are considered as leading actors of their development, through the different forms of organization.

The identification of the autonomy of development of the individual and collective subject is necessarily in line with the establishment of a democratic society meaning that it could be recognised, and that it could be possible start from the right to take part and contribute to the cultural, social, economic community life.

It means that local capabilities have to be detected, capitalised and developed and that democratic and participatory governance models are at the base of people centred development.

In this conceptual frame it is also necessary to consider as the concept of sustainability has become the dominant issue in the beginning of this century, with impact not only on reflection about our planet, but as essential interpretive category for the evaluation of the implications of any intervention not only in a environmental perspective and not only in the economic field, but also ethical, political, and educational ones.

Connecting local development with categories as capability, learning, knowledge and sustainability, implies the necessity to be also able to turn into effective operational educational practices in a perspective of innovation (Del Gobbo, Bogataj, Slanisca, 2012).

«Innovation has the characteristic of being the product of participatory processes and may be interpreted as the highest part of the training system, the one that ensures a change-related training (Federighi, 2006).»

#### *4.2. Sustainable learning as a keystone for development*

Which actions allow individuals and communities to take an active and central role as *transforming subjects*, not only capable of adapting to new tasks that the economic, social and cultural changes demand, but primarily of forming, through the *necessary tools to build, guide and direct* the “*transformative*” process of their actions?

What makes education sustainable and which type of sustainability are we talking about?

We have to focus on the concepts of sustainability of knowledge and educational sustainability.

From a conceptual point of view, when we talk about sustainable “knowledge” we refer to the skills that enables us to overcome a “deterministic” conception, in which the phenomena follow a linear (and therefore predictable) causality to reach a logic of co-evolution and co-determination that turns uncertainty (and the precautionary principle) into an inescapable element of the choices. This leads to supporting a “systemic” conception of knowledge that focuses on the relationship between the parts

and the whole, and a method that tends to highlight the links, connections and interdependencies (Morin, 2000). Sustainable knowledge enables us to understand how individuals are necessarily the expression of a community, of a complex system that includes subjects and life contexts.

When speaking of sustainable education we pay attention to the methodologies that promote the development of the skills, which are necessary for a responsible and inclusive community. Sustainable education recognizes the centrality of the participant in the educational process, his history, knowledge, emotions, expectations and interests.

Education is sustainable if it can develop a critical approach to the problems or the ability to take independent and responsible attitudes and behaviour and the ability to look to the future by acting consciously. In this sense a sustainable educational action adopts methodologies that promote participation, which are able to enhance the individual and collective potential, take into the account the diversity of needs and interests, capture the unexpected elements and promote true researching based on legitimate questions to find feasible and flexible hypotheses (Benassai, 2003; Malavasi, 2010; Birbis, 20014).

This way of interpreting the sustainability of educational activities is consistent with the concept of human development and with the need to base the development on the growth of individuals' and communities' skills by recognizing its central role in the management of learning processes.

The issue of capacity development can also help to better explain the holistic approach to learning. Capacity development is a much wider concept that extends beyond technical training and know how, including leadership, as the catalyst of societal transformations, institutions, as complex systems of policies, norms, ethics and values, and social capital as actor in any country's socio-economic development: the concept has to be conceived in its complexity and entirety.

A recent definition of "capacity development" by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) is very clear in this respect: «The process by which people, organizations and society systematically stimulate and develop their capability over time to achieve social and economic goals, including through improvement of knowledge, skills, systems, and institutions - within a wider social and cultural enabling environment.» (UNISDR, 2011: 4).

The following OECD definition is also interesting and relevant with the context: «*Capacity* is understood as the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully [...] *Capacity development* is understood as the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time.» (OECD , 2006: 12). The OECD document also

identifies «three analytical levels on which capacity development objectives may need to be pursued: 1) individual, 2) organisational, and 3) the enabling environment.» (OECD , 2006: 13). The OECD document underlines as «these levels are interdependent. This approach entails a concern with the wider political economy of change, but continues to treat capacity development as a distinct challenge and entry point for intervention apart from wider efforts to build [...] or promote good governance [...] Capacity development is necessarily an endogenous process of change.»<sup>2</sup>

Capacity development affects all levels of society and is supported in a variety of contexts: the maintenance and development of one's learning ability is ensured by the educational quality of contexts and organizations. The enabling environment is a wider society within which individuals and organizations function.

In order to maintain one's skills and abilities it is important to gain constant access to training and educational services.

It is necessary to combine capacity development with the local education system. A local education and learning system needs to be conceived as an investment in local human capabilities. Such a system though cannot be based on the model of formal education, but must be centred on the concept of lifelong lifewide learning: it is through a variety of education, vocational training, no formal education and continuous education measures, also including informal and embedded contests, that the education system fully accomplishes its mission that is to support individual and community learning process. It is important to recognize the significance of every space that may have a learning value for facilitating capacity building in terms of values, social and cultural skills (Del Gobbo, 2007; Del Gobbo, 2012), which are necessary to mobilize projects and turn them into concrete, identifiable and observable actions, i.e. turn "knowledge into action".

Capacity development therefore needs articulated and quality contexts, which can meet the needs for improvement expressed by a given community.

The outcome of individual and social investment in education is determined by the possibility for the subject to meet new educational and innovation needs, by becoming himself a player in the innovation processes.

Innovation processes are also characterized by the participation that ensures that each of the players of innovation is given the opportunity to relate and communicate: in order to innovate, all the subjects need interaction networks that are primarily dynamic networks for mutual

<sup>2</sup> The OECD document certainly refers to development programs in international cooperation, but these principles are transferable and functional to the development of local capacities too.

learning. In this sense, innovation is defined as an activity, which is essentially based on the operation of the networks. (Federighi, 2006)

Network learning requires firstly the access to the network, but it also means that the same activated innovation processes have to be managed and followed by the educational methods of the classic tripartite system of adult education (formal, non-formal, informal). Moreover, they have to identify in innovation (that is being implemented by the networks) a separate component, which is related, but not identical to the traditional system. The transition to the innovative action is favoured through the construction and organization of innovative tools that support the innovative initiative and proposals.

This implies that the system of local learning can indeed offer such tools and, at the same time, is able to improve and innovate itself in order to adequately meet the needs for creating and transforming the social and economic-production system.

Innovation depends primarily on the consistent evolution of innovative processes in the economic, political, administrative, research and training systems: the education system has to be able to produce and absorb innovation from the constructive interaction with others systems.

Among the training and educational tools, which are known to produce more innovation, we definitely have to mention embedded learning.

Embedded learning is a non-formal training activity that is adopted to find meaningful solutions to certain work-related learning problems. This means that one of the purposes of embedded learning is the ability to provide consistent and relevant answers, in terms of educational processes, starting from the identification of the innovation and development problems within a given production system.

«Embedded learning which leads to innovation takes the form of actions which support the specific cognitive processes already present in work activity, in the various phases of creating solutions, process management, evaluation of results and personal development, transfer of acquired knowledge to collaborators, and the further growth of personal skills through.» (Federighi, 2013: 56).

Traditionally, the concept of embedded learning applies to training at the workplace, companies and production plants. It may be interesting to apply it, albeit with some caution, even within a system of local training services that need to find innovative and sustainable solutions to problems of local development.

### 4.3. *The Study Circle project and innovation in the lifelong learning system*

The Study Circles project *Cross-border laboratory for the development of human resources and cooperation networks promoting local resources* represented a space for testing innovative models of adult learning and education where non-formal, informal and embedded learning constantly interacted and strengthened. It is precisely this combination that has highlighted and enhanced the level of innovation as an additional field of the local lifelong learning system.

	Non-formal	Informal	Embedded
Local community	Study circle		
Mentor	Short training courses		SC practices Coordination actions and assessment of SC
Education and training agencies and institutions		Partnership	Project management of SC
Local development agencies		Partnership	Project management of SC
Local public institutions		Partnership	Project management of SC Local networks
Institutional stakeholders		Public seminars	Local networks
Policy makers		Public seminars	Planning measures

The project identified the study circle model not only as a training tool for adult education, but also as a tool that can support the local system of services for adult education, which consists of a network of education and training agencies and institutions, local development agencies and institutions of Slovenia, Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

Therefore, we can determine the innovative value of both the study circles implemented in the cross-border area, and the learning opportunities offered by the project during the construction of the overall system, by considering the activated processes as a learning and innovation opportunity for the different subjects involved.

We can consider the two levels separately. In this paper we focus mainly on the second aspect.

#### *4.4. Creating the study circle cross-border system*

The study circle, considered as a set of levels, functions and activities necessary for its implementation, has been configured as a project space with a strong educational value, effective in terms of capacity development of different subjects, who are called to work together for creating and educational activities that are consistent with the needs identified in the cross-border area. In this sense, the project has produced innovation as it introduced innovative elements in the Slovenian system, created a system that did not previously exist in the cross-border area and introduced into the Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto regions a network working model and a educational tool for adult education that did not exist yet.

The Cross-border System for Study Circle (CSCS) consists of specific elements and relationships between these same elements or system levels.

Based on its individual elements and the relationships they have with each other, the SC cross-border system can be defined as a complex network that has developed different types of networks: formal networks for managing the system, working groups and info-points networks, networks supporting the political-institutional level, informal networks for spreading the knowledge and the results of the activities implemented within the study circles.

This complex system is therefore based on the logic of cooperation, both at local and cross-border level, which represents an element that ensures continuity and sustainability for the actions carried out. The learning component within the network has been highlighted by the type of the players involved (education, companies, institutions) in order to identify the priorities of local and regional development in the cross-border area according to a bottom-up process. In summary, the SC cross-border system can be defined as a set of networks of different local players, who are connected to each other at different levels and united in achieving the common goal of implementing non-formal educational activities for local development.

The educational systems, the institutions and the labor bodies of the Italian and Slovenian areas collaborated and interacted in a project, which has been configured as a laboratory for creating new knowledge. By continuing to perform its own tasks and duties and by offering its own resources, each level has analysed, with the support of experts, the potential and the significance of the work done and has learned to change it by direct experience.

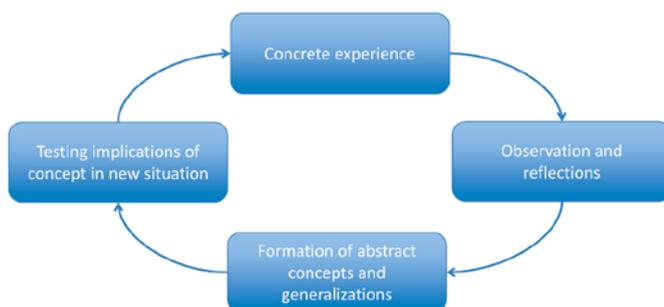
As stated by Mezirow:

«To make meaning means to make sense of an experience; we make an interpretation of it. When we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision making or action,

then making meaning becomes learning. We learn differently when we are learning to perform than when we are learning to understand what is being communicated to us. Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built. [...] Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action. What we perceive and fail to perceive and what we think and fail to think are powerfully influenced by habits of expectation that constitute our frame of reference, that is, a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences. It is not possible to understand the nature of adult learning or education without taking into account the cardinal role played by these habits in making meaning.» (Mezirow, 1990: 1).

In this sense we can speak of embedded learning: training was achieved through the working activities implemented by the project and, at the same time, it was supported by introducing learning-oriented processes.

Some features of this learning experience may be referred to the experiential learning model that Kolb defines as the *Lewinian model of action Research and Laboratory training* (Kolb, 1984: 21)



The project activities, which have been defined as important and significant by the participants, have represented the motivation for the subsequent activities aimed at analysing and evaluating the experience in order to identify the guidelines for future actions and for solving problems by developing a different “theory of action” to be applied to subsequent activities, which have to be carried out to test the validity of the acquired skills.

The project activities not only led to the improvement of the study circles system (which could be possible only in the Slovenian area), but also to the transformation of the existing working principles and models in order to acquire new tested models (specifically, the study circles in the

cross-border area) and determine how these may be transferred to different contexts (e.g. the Italian area).

On the methodological level much importance has been given to research action based on confrontation, dialogue and communication between different systems and points of view.

The configuration of the study circle, intended as an educational model that involves and is characterized by dialogue, community, interaction and participation, has permeated every aspect of the project: from the working groups, which have been introduced for inducing and promoting demand, to the partnership coordination meetings and the events for the presentation and dissemination of the results.

The players involved in the different phases were able to represent both the supply and the demand for education:

- on the one hand the training/education players (training agencies, schools, universities) offered systematized knowledge for education management, but also the need to consolidate their own capability to detect the needs, to connect education and territorial vocations, to identify alternative ways of adult learning for knowledge transfer;

- public institutions (such as local institutions) worked on both fronts as they were called to interpret the demand for education, and define the governance model of the cross-border area;

- the economic system, which consists of companies, local action groups and Slovenian development agencies, has been directly involved in the implementation of the study circle system and represented the demand for training and innovation of the production system and territorial vocations.

Given the particular model of the study circle, we can affirm that also the participants, who attended the SC, represented the direct demand for learning and offered their own knowledge in manufacturing practices that have enriched the local community.

The same players involved in the project (tutors, entrepreneurs, institutional managers and representatives of the training agencies) have always played an active role in the learning process and constantly promoted innovation.

The study circle model, as project action, acted like a tool bringing together different subjects at different levels, creating new opportunities to get in touch, communicate and use one's own competences and peculiarities to produce innovation through social networks.

In this sense it is interesting to assess the territorial network learning processes and the ones that have been activated by the study circles. The embedded learning oriented model was aimed at achieving the objectives of knowledge management which referred to the identification of different

organizational models of lifelong learning in the cross-border area and to the need to transfer and absorb innovation, in particular on the Italian side. In these cases, the evaluation's primary task was to verify the achievement of the expected results and impacts on the organization model<sup>3</sup>. However, the effectiveness of embedded learning has to be determined according to the tested and developed solutions in the learning process: an element that can initially evaluate the achieved results is the real correspondence between the local developmental problems that have been detected by the network players, the implemented study circles and the achieved results.

The needs have been initially identified by the local and cross-border working groups, which highlighted several priorities that have been later analysed and which led to the development of concrete actions within the circles, which have carried out an additional analysis of the territorial problems and formulated several solutions:

Area	Identified needs
Conservation of biodiversity in important natural areas - Nature 2000 network	Ability to enhance networking of businesses engaged in biodiversity protection, by applying a responsible management of the territory and coherent marketing strategies;
Promotion of an integrated tourism offer	Ability to provide a dynamic hospitality offer and to promote collaboration among producers, restaurant owners, hospitality managers and associations, aimed at creating network products and services
Revitalization of traditional craft for the implementation of new business and marketing opportunities	Ability to promote quality and excellence, and to develop new products and product marketing strategies based on traditional and new knowledge through intergenerational learning and enhancement of local specificities.
Enhancement of typical products	Ability to invest in the quality of the local product and to create alliances to communicate its quality and to raise the consumer's awareness concerning the product's identity.
Green economy	Ability to enhance networking among businesses, to support their development by promoting a strategic vision of the marketplace, better relations with institutions and funding opportunities.

<sup>3</sup> For an initial evaluation of the project's impact please refer to Chapter 7.

According to these needs several study circles have been activated in the following fields:

Fields of action	Results
Territorial marketing based on network tourist products	Creation and testing of local thematic routes Development of linguistic and ICT basic skills
Self-employment connected to the vocations of the territory	Discovering other craftsmen, identification of common needs, implementation of joint products, joint website ( <a href="http://www.soca-natisone.eu">www.soca-natisone.eu</a> ), attending local events both in Italy and Slovenia Projects for business activities, expansion of networks of entrepreneurs; Creation of a joint catalogue of products Creation of local food chains
Active citizenship	Building relationships between cross-border producers for joint actions Creation of blogs for sharing documentary resources
Promotion of micro-businesses networks	Initiating procedures for the creation of a consortium of producers “Food park” brand development as a certification of typical local products Creation of business networks for sustainable development

In accordance with the principles of endogenous development, the different players, who originated the SC system, have assessed the possibility of enhancing the territorial human potential and understand how, in order to generate innovation, it is necessary to start with transferring the knowledge of the players operating in a given area. The innovative solutions are born and develop in contexts that enhance the possessed knowledge and skills by critically interpreting them, also by referring to other not local or expert knowledge.

#### 4.5. Conclusions

Through the reconsideration of the educational potential of the spaces for planning, managing and evaluating educational activities, the project has effectively enabled the players involved in the creation and testing of the cross-border system to develop skills in order to:

1. contribute to create a common vision in knowledge-intensive territories by constantly researching and identifying ideas and initiatives that drive innovation and improvement and promote, encourage and document their expression and implementation;
2. develop the ability to learn within the innovation network by specializing and refining the techniques of awareness building, problem framing, problem solving, resource finding and alliance building within the network itself;
3. to support the construction of a collective identity related specifically to the promotion of citizens' active and democratic participation in a common and shared project of society;
4. to supply the training needs of the economic system assuring at the same time social inclusion and empowerment;
5. to support social cohesion policies;
6. to support the awareness about regulation of consumption, stressing relationship between production and consumption that aim to protect the environment and safeguard the rational consumption of natural resources and exploitation of cultural resources (Lima, Guimarães, 2011; Bélanger, Federighi, 2000).

These capabilities can support social innovation as a tool for developing new products, services and models that meet old and new social and educational needs more efficiently than the existing alternatives and, at the same time, promote alliances between sectors and people and create new relationships and new partnerships (Murray, 2010).

But these are also skills that have led to a different vision of the local training system by re-evaluating the meaning of non-formal adult education and of informal and embedded learning spaces. The mentor's training is also a recognition of the need of having specific professional profiles to give continuity to the experience.

Even if we move on the policy side, the project has allowed to test new forms of policy transfer through bottom-up processes. With the partnership with Slovenia and in view of the specific cross-border context the project has allowed to make a comparison between two realities: in Slovenia, the policies for adult education have been the drive and also the direction traditionally taken by adult education activities, such as study circles; in the Friuli Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto regions, the lack of specific educational policies for non-formal adult education has allowed to test completely new sustainability-based alternatives that could have an impact on the policies themselves through a process of enhancement and consideration of the political value of the tested actions.

## 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 Programme<sup>4</sup>, 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 CTP<sup>5</sup>), 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

<sup>4</sup> Programme for Cross-Border Cooperation Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013

<sup>5</sup> 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.

development<sup>6</sup>.

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 development<sup>7</sup>. 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 potential<sup>8</sup>.

### *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 -

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

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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 players<sup>9</sup>.

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 inclusion<sup>10</sup>.

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

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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 levels<sup>11</sup>.

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.

<sup>11</sup> 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 system<sup>12</sup>. 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

<sup>12</sup> 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 Group<sup>13</sup>. 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

<sup>13</sup> 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 arose<sup>14</sup>. 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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 codified<sup>15</sup>, 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 framework<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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 activities<sup>17</sup>. 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*<sup>18</sup>, where citizens, companies, training agencies, civil

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

<sup>18</sup> 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 model<sup>19</sup> going through its three levels, each having one or more referents: political and strategic issues, management and delivery of training services<sup>20</sup>. 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 activities<sup>21</sup>.

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.

<sup>19</sup> 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)

<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> Del Gobbo G., *Suggerimenti per attivazione dei circoli di studio in Friuli Venezia Giulia*, [www.studycircle.it](http://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 achieved<sup>22</sup>. 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.

<sup>22</sup> 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.



## Part II

From the experience  
towards Best Practices

## CHAPTER 6

# ANALYSIS OF PILOT STUDY CIRCLES AND THEIR MULTIDIMENSIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Glenda Galeotti

### *Abstract*

Taking into account the five dimensions of sustainability: social, ecological, economic, educational and institutional, the paper presents a critical overview of non-formal education activities implemented by the Study Circles project. Once defined the above mentioned dimensions on the basis of the international organizations' official documents, activities and products of the pilot study circle are accordingly analyzed. The main goal is to show how the implemented non formal adult education initiatives have contributed to the spreading of a culture of sustainability in local communities as well as to the fine tuning of the declarations of intent with local action plans and projects. The article includes a summary sheet for each study circle showing through keywords the main features and elements of sustainability.

Questo contributo propone una lettura critica delle attività dei diversi circoli di studio realizzati dal progetto Study Circle, a partire da cinque dimensioni della sostenibilità. Una volta definite queste dimensioni, attraverso il supporto dei documenti di organismi internazionali, le stesse sono state utilizzate per effettuare un'analisi delle attività e dei prodotti dei circoli di studio pilota. L'obiettivo principale è di evidenziare come le attività di educazione non formale degli adulti abbiano contribuito alla diffusione della cultura della sostenibilità presso le comunità locali, all'integrazione del livello delle dichiarazioni di intenti con quello dei piani d'azione e dei progetti locali. L'articolo si chiude con una scheda riassuntiva, in cui per ogni circolo di studio vengono riportate le caratteristiche principali, compresi i loro elementi di sostenibilità attraverso delle parole chiave.

Upoštevanje petih dimenzij trajnosti: družbene, ekološke, ekonomske, izobraževalne in institucionalne, omogoča kritičen pregled neformalne izobraževalne dejavnosti projekta Študijski krožki. Omenjene dimenzije so opredeljene skladno z uradnimi dokumenti mednarodnih organizacij ter so

uporabljene za analizo dejavnosti in izdelkov pilotnih študijskih krožkov. Ključni cilj pri tem je bil pokazati prispevek izobraževanja odraslih k uveljavljanju kulture trajnosti v lokalnih skupnostih s povezovanjem deklaracij, akcijskih načrtov in lokalnih projektov. Članek vsebuje povzetek poročila vseh študijskih krožkov s ključnimi besedami, ki nakazujejo ključne značilnosti in elemente trajnosti.

## 6.1. Introduction

The Study Circle project can be further critically interpreted by analysing the learning activities, which have been carried out within the twelve study circles, i.e. by adopting the five dimensions of sustainability: educational, social, institutional, ecological and economic. Firstly, we have to briefly define what sustainability means and how it encompasses each of the five above mentioned dimensions. For this purpose we will examine the now fairly consistent available literature, which focuses especially on the studies on sustainable development and environmental assessment. Later on, we will use these same criteria to examine the documents produced by the project<sup>1</sup>. On these basis we have drawn up the present article, which focuses on the sustainability of study circles' activities in order to detect how the five dimensions have been applied.

The term *sustainability* draws up a plurality of fields and meanings, but the current and shared definition of sustainable development derives from the so-called Brundtland Report, where the term refers to the development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own<sup>224</sup>. Subsequently, the concept of sustainability has been expanded to take a multi-faceted character: alongside the classic and now accepted concept of environmental sustainability, it has been associated with economic and social sustainability. In other words sustainability involves, in its broadest sense, the development's ability to support the joint reproduction of natural, economic and human/social capital<sup>325</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> We specifically refer to the monitoring project's documents and data and the tutors' reports on the implemented educational activities.

<sup>2</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), *Our Common Future*, 1987, <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf> (retrieved on 30/01/2015).

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, emphasized the strong social dimension of sustainable development, in particular, the interdependence

In 2001, UNESCO added to the three dimensions of sustainability a new one (educational), thus broadening the concept of sustainable development by highlighting the importance of cultural diversity, which is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature: «Cultural diversity is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.»<sup>426</sup> Cultural diversity becomes the fourth pillar of sustainable development, alongside the traditional balance of the “three E’s”: an economic development compatible with social equity and ecosystems, which ensures the environmental balance. A further step refers to the introduction of the institutional dimension of sustainability, understood as the ability to ensure to the citizens the conditions of stability, democracy, participation, information, justice<sup>527</sup>.

By using these five dimensions for evaluating the activities and products of the twelve pilot study circles of the Study Circle project, we have underlined their contribution to the implementation of local actions and decision-making processes based on the principles of sustainable development, the dissemination of the sustainability culture in the local communities, the integration between declarations of intent and action plans or local projects.

## 6.2. *Economic and social sustainability: between innovation, tradition and inclusion*

The scope of the economic *sustainability* of the SC educational activities can be determined by analysing two fundamental aspects, which refer to:

- the ability to produce and maintain, within a given territory, the maximum

of economic, social and environmental capitals in defining development initiatives that are respectful of future generations. Economic capital is represented by all things created by individuals, human/social capital consists of all individuals of a given society and knowledge at their disposal, while natural capital is composed by the natural environment and resources, which are available to members of a given society that transform them into economic capital.

<sup>4</sup> Reference is made to Articles 1 and 3 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001. Already the Rio Conference in 1992 had identified the need to relate educational problems with those of sustainability (social, economic, political, environmental, existential). The UN General Assembly has also proclaimed the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) for the period 2005 to 2014 and entrusted UNESCO to coordinate and promote the activities of the Decade. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/resources.html?utm\\_source=OldRedirect&utm\\_medium=redirect&utm\\_content=dsd&utm\\_campaign=OldRedirect](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/resources.html?utm_source=OldRedirect&utm_medium=redirect&utm_content=dsd&utm_campaign=OldRedirect); <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-sustainable-development> (retrieved on 30/01/2015).

<sup>5</sup> The introduction of this dimension of sustainability is to be attributed to Agenda 21, a wide and varied action plan set down at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

added value by effectively combining resources in order to enhance the specificity of the products and services of a given territorial system;

- the evaluation of the relevance, efficiency and feasibility of the activities in terms of costs/benefits and opportunities to extend the educational services after the conclusion of the project.

As regards the first point it should be noted that 10 out of 12 implemented study circles focused on the enhancement of local resources in economic terms, especially by setting up business networks, promoting forms of self-employment based on local vocations and products, and implementing local marketing activities, which referred to cross-border tourism services. The products that were created by the participants of each study circle demonstrate that the activities were oriented towards the acquisition of skills (enhancement of human capital) in order to create an added value by effectively combining them with natural and social resources. The ultimate goal was to preserve the specificity of the territorial system.

The products of the educational activities can be divided into the following groups: new products and/or services that the companies involved may offer (e.g. cross-border tourist routes, local food and wine, research and development of textiles by experimenting with new techniques and local and eco-sustainable materials), new tools for qualifying the existing services and products, both in terms of marketing (logos, websites, business cards, catalogues), and business collaboration (statutes, shared and standardized specifications, etc.). A significantly interesting issue was the establishment of business networks that integrate different sectors in order to promote the territory and open up spaces for innovating the production and delivery of services.

Many participants were entrepreneurs that have found in the study circles an opportunity for improving and qualifying their business, especially by upgrading their skills, collaborating with other companies and finding new business spaces.

As for the continuation of the training offer after the conclusion of the project, we will highlight several elements that connect this sustainability dimension with the institutional one. It is important to stress that the positive assessment of the Study Circle project and its effect on the establishment of a lifelong learning territorial system for the enhancement of local expertise has garnered the interest of several institutions that decided to include this type of training in their 2013-2020 programmes<sup>628</sup>. The same applies to the

<sup>6</sup> This refers to the planning of training activities in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region and GAL's activities. For the evaluation of the Study Circle project activities, see chapter

ability of the tested SC to generate income and employment. In this regard a follow-up evaluation after the end of the project will be necessary<sup>729</sup>.

Alongside the implementation of the Study Circle project we have defined, mainly with the Italian partners, the functions of the SC support structure. This process has laid the foundation for the establishment of the Cross-border system that, when fully operational, should ensure the continuity and sustainability of the services, reduce the set up costs of each circle and streamline the phase management process by adopting standardized tools and operating flows, which may be replicated in other projects in the field of non-formal education (such as the preparation in advance of the monitoring indicators or databases of experts and mentors). This structure, which is the result of the collaborative networks established and strengthened by the Study Circle project, will ensure the continuity of the information and demand solicitation activities through the info-points and working groups.

In general terms, social *sustainability* is the ability to ensure a fair distribution, by distinct social groups and by gender, of the opportunities for safety, health and education, in order to affect the conditions of human well-being. This dimension takes the concept of sustainable development on an ethical and political level, which implies an equality of rights: horizontal, which guarantees access to opportunities for individual and collective development by all social and cultural groups; vertical, which ensures that the same opportunities are accessible and guaranteed also for future generations. This is feasible only if there is a clear political will that constitutes and inspires strategic guidelines for development planning.

Within an adult education territorial system, such as the one proposed by the Study Circle project, social sustainability can be expressed as the ability of individuals to actively participate in the opportunities it offers and the acceptance of the issues of the local communities in all phases of training activities' creation and implementation: from the definition of the needs for training and local development, planning of training activities, to the dissemination of the obtained results in terms of positive impacts on the welfare of local communities involved.

This dimension derives from two distinct levels: the first referring to the project as a whole and the second referring to specific training activities. The social sustainability of the overall project is expressed primarily through the networks of relationships and collaboration of the

<sup>7</sup> For further information about this topic see the chapter on project evaluation in this publication.

stakeholders, promoters and participants, whose aim is to achieve shared project goals and stability<sup>81</sup>.

For its intrinsic characteristics the SC educational model allows to decentralize the training offer towards geographically more remote territories and communities and more marginalized social groups. Since it focuses on the demand for training, this type of training activity can induce, support, accompany and direct the needs for training towards higher levels of qualification, starting from those stakeholders, who have the most difficulties in accessing education and training opportunities, integrating with the knowledge-based society, and who need to acquire new basic skills to keep up with economic and social progress.

The Study Circle project's training activities intentionally involved the most vulnerable segments of the population which cannot keep up with the current transformations of the society and the labour market. The activities were equally distributed between men and women. Almost all of the participants had a secondary school degree; many of them were unemployed and saw in the project an opportunity for qualifying their skills in order to find a new job, including forms of self-entrepreneurship; there were also senior and retired citizens, who joined the initiatives aimed at bringing back local traditions and knowledge and at promoting their social inclusion. (See Chapter 3)

One of the Study Circles project' aim was to ensure a positive impact of the knowledge acquired by the participants on their communities, so we have paid special attention to the promotion of the products and the documentation of the activities. To the educational objectives of each study circle several "promotional objectives" were added, which referred to both the socio-cultural animation of the local community aimed at raising awareness for bringing back and disseminating traditional knowledge and local products, and the economic enhancement of knowledge and natural, cultural and historical heritage and products (local thematic tours, participation in trade fairs, adoption of multimedia tools for products' promotion and marketing).

In short, social sustainability is based on social inclusion and cooperation, participation and sharing of decisions concerning the local community. Its main objective is to highlight the sense of belonging to a given territory and to stimulate the rational management of natural resources by enhancing the environmental and cultural heritage for the development and inclusion of all its members.

<sup>8</sup> For further information about this dimension of social sustainability see the chapter 2 and 4 in this publication.

Social sustainability is tightly connected with *institutional sustainability*, i.e. the ability to ensure conditions of stability, democracy and justice through the project's activities. This dimension of sustainability derives from three basic needs:

- increase the citizens' participation and decision making about the future development of a given area<sup>9</sup>;
- collaborate with institutions that are legitimate to regulate the access to common environmental resources, their exploitation and protection;
- create opportunities for consultation between networks of operators/micro-enterprises and different institutional players in order to draw up shared strategies and actions for local development.

Local authorities have been involved in order to ensure the stability of the Study Circle project's activities as well as in the activities' and products' planning, dissemination and communication stages. In some cases the same local authorities have provided their own experts and experiences in order to define with the participants shared strategies for the sustainable development of their communities.

### 6.3. *Educational sustainability: SC educational contents and methodologies*

As it has been already mentioned, UNESCO primarily defines *educational sustainability* as the need for all educational activities to respect and enhance local knowledge, as this represents the rich cultural heritage of the local communities, which is «a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify [...] as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions»<sup>10</sup>. This element is expressed by the content covered by the various study circles and by the pedagogical and methodological approaches adopted in educational activities. The Study Circle project's activities can be also interpreted as a means of strengthening heritage communities, i.e. «a group of people, who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future

<sup>9</sup> Many study circles took this direction, in particular the SC on biomasses aimed at defining a bottom-up proposal for the promotion of local biomass production chains. The SC focused on an in-depth analysis of the supply chain, its weaknesses and development opportunities based on local management and the new Regional Rural Development Plan. See Chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> Art. 1 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (also known as Faro Convention): [http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/UfficioStudi/documents/1362477547947\\_Convenzione\\_di\\_Faro.pdf](http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/UfficioStudi/documents/1362477547947_Convenzione_di_Faro.pdf) (retrieved on 30/01/2015).

generations»<sup>114</sup>. This represents the bond between cultural heritage and values, which has a strong social value and represents the constituent element of a democratic and cohesive society, where individuals and communities create and constantly reaffirm, through a shared cultural heritage, a civic sense of belonging and responsibility. Not surprisingly, the same Faro Convention defines the “common heritage of Europe” as «all forms of cultural heritage in Europe which together constitute a shared source of remembrance, understanding, identity, cohesion and creativity» and «the ideals, principles and values [...] which foster the development of a peaceful and stable society, founded on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law»<sup>125</sup>. Also the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Report, published during the 69<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly on 25 September 2014, states that the use of cultural values and culturally sensitive approaches can mediate and improve development outcomes and provide adequate space for new opportunities in terms of education, gender equality, women empowerment and environmental sustainability<sup>136</sup>.

From a pedagogical perspective, the very nature of the study circle as a training tool based on the training needs of a given territory and its learners with their history, knowledge, emotions, expectations and interests, defines the learner as the main protagonist of his knowledge. The educational activities are therefore focused on the learning process that develops through peer to peer relationships between participants, the contribution of experts and the tutor’s mediation with the local context. From this perspective, the educational activities are aimed at developing critical-reflective attitudes, dynamic qualities and the ability to act, and must necessarily take into account the specific local needs in order to implement diversified and flexible processes and integrate methods, skills, subjects and disciplines.

The creation of flexible educational processes is based on the interaction with and between the participants, which is carried out through listening, mutual learning, discussion and collaboration. These activities result in precise methodological choices that guide the individual and collective training process, promote interconnections between teaching and learning results, which have to be consistent with the proposed change by considering the environmental and socio-cultural context.

According to these methodological assumptions, each circle and

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem

<sup>12</sup> Art. 3 of the Faro Convention, 2005

<sup>13</sup> Un Agenda Beyond 2015 <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/beyond2015-overview.shtml> (retrieved on 30/01/2015).

its tutor spent some time on the analysis and research of specific issues and interests raised by the participants. In this regard it was of utmost importance to involve experts and institutional representatives, identify good practices and gain the support of the local stakeholders' networks, which were applied according to the Participatory Action Research methodology. Special emphasis was given to the practical acquisition of technical, professional, entrepreneurial and managerial skills, which were mostly acquired through workshops and final products.

In summary, while respecting the specificity of each SC group, the training courses required an independent and responsible approach by the participants, who were asked to collectively analyse the development or cognitive issues by avoiding predefined or default solutions and by integrating different knowledge/perspectives/skills to appropriate and multiple methodologies.

By testing the study circles methodology we have identified several other elements that refer to educational sustainability:

- each study circle detected some additional training needs among the participants that may be addressed in additional activities of non-formal education or study circles;
- SC non-formal education activities should be integrated with other formal and non-formal educational activities (e.g. the study circle with high-school students).

Finally, we would like to address the territorial system for non-formal adult education implemented by the Study Circle project. Its specific educational activities became the sustainability element of the system itself and of other local initiatives. By upgrading local skills, including the organizational skills of the local players, we have generated a virtuous circle that promotes the implementation and success of other initiatives connected to the project, e.g. the study circles that have been established within the Eastern Veneto Food Park cross-border project aimed at surveying 44 traditional agricultural products and about 200 agricultural companies. This study circle analysed the feasibility of a bottom-up implemented Food Park by addressing its weaknesses and opportunities in terms of new marketing and promotion approaches, while the "Rosa di Gorizia" study circle originated from another Italian-Slovenian cross-border project (called Heritaste) aimed at developing local agricultural products.

Another important element were the project's collaboration and partnership networks as spaces for informal learning where participants co-defined the necessary skills, adult education methodologies, training

systems and their territorial sustainability<sup>147</sup>. This resulted in upgrading the skills of the participants and mentors of the training and local development agencies involved in the project. With this sort of peer-to-peer training we have set the ground for achieving an important strategic element of cross-border development, i.e. the skills and spaces for programming and implementing shared local development projects.

#### *6.4. Ecological and knowledge sustainability: biodiversity and local culture*

In this paragraph, we will address ecological sustainability. Generally, the term refers to the capacity of ecosystems to maintain their essential functions and processes in long-term (means in history and future). Conservation of stocks of resources goes hand in hand with the creation and distribution of wealth, what was defined on the basis of renewable resources management as a weak sustainability definition<sup>15</sup>.

Complex knowledge on balancing and distributing welfare from renewable resources is considered “sustainable” if it enables full functioning and reproduction of ecosystems in long-term. Knowledge as well as ecosystems, is constantly undergoing several selection and evolution processes, represents generations of creative thought and action within a given community /society and the way it addresses ever-changing conditions and problems.

The Study Circle project focused its educational activity on a balanced man-nature relationship by enhancing local knowledge and ecological practices and promoting environmentally sustainable lifestyles in the communities involved. One example of such an approach are the integrated cross-border tourist services that include nature trails. Another such example is the “Bio wandering among skills and flavours” study circle, where food and local women cultures have been the object of training activities aimed at professionally qualifying the female participants by transforming the women’s ancient wisdom into new business opportunities in terms of sustainable agriculture and preservation of biodiversity.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 4 and 5.

<sup>15</sup> See Pearce, D., Atkinson, G.D., (1993). Capital theory and the measurement of sustainable development: an indicator of "weak sustainability", *Ecological Economics*, Elsevier, vol. 8(2), pages 103-108, October. The strong version of ecological sustainability requires compliance with constraints on the ability of the ecosystem to perform their environment basic functions. At this level of sustainability, it believes that natural capital should be safeguarded through appropriate measures to protect non-renewable resources and to ensure the reproducibility of renewables or extremely preserved. See. Constance R. 1991, *Ecological economics: The science and management of sustainability*. Columbia University Press, New York.

Project activities were not limited to raising awareness about ecological issues, but they demonstrated how green economy models and sustainable development principles can be applied to local development. In this regard we should mention the Green Economy study circle, where several building professionals (entrepreneurs, designers, suppliers of materials) have collaborated in order to establish a network for addressing studies on green building and identifying a strategy for energy saving restructuring.

The ecological relationship between nature and culture is based on sustainable knowledge that refers to complex thinking (Morin, 1993; Bocchi, Ceruti, 1985) which exceeds interdisciplinary separation and questions the life and development models by systemically interpreting reality.

In educational terms, this results in interdisciplinary and value-laden learning aimed at developing knowledge, skills and attitudes that can foster creativity and innovation, but also in forecasting the long-term effects of the activities carried out with a responsible approach towards future generations.

Therefore, ecological sustainability refers to the knowledge expressed by the study circles, which focuses on local knowledge and expertise in order to analyse the knowledge and learning processes, the way in which we interpret the world, for comparison and testing of innovative solutions that support multiple perspectives and different interests and needs.

Each study circle was mainly focused on upgrading the participants' skills for local development in terms of socio-cultural inclusion, protection of local tangible and intangible resources, and their economic enhancement on the basis of green economy models and sustainable development principles, which were applied to the various sectors (agriculture, food and wine, tourism, crafts, etc.).

By analysing the Study Circle project experience we have referred its activities to the field of Education for Sustainable Development as it has been recently defined by the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD<sup>168</sup>. The overall goal of the GAP is to generate and scale up action in all levels and areas of education and learning to accelerate progress towards sustainable development in function of the so-called UN Development Agenda beyond 2015. The programme's specific objectives are: to reorient education and learning so that everyone has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development and make a difference; to strengthen education

<sup>16</sup> For further information about the GAP Programme see also: <http://www.unesco.org/new/es/unesco-world-conference-on-esd-2014/esd-after-2014/global-action-programme/> <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002243/224368e.pdf>  
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco-world-conference-on-esd-2014/esd-after-2014/desd-final-report/> (retrieved on 31/01/2015)

and learning in all agendas, programmes and activities that promote sustainable development.

The Study Circle project fully supports not only the specific objectives of the program, but it also focuses on three out of five priority areas: encouraging local communities and municipal authorities to develop community-based ESD programmes; integrating sustainability practices into education and training environments; increasing the capacity of educators and trainers<sup>179</sup>.

Education for Sustainable Development is not an isolated project, but rather a series of guiding principles and values such as justice, equity, tolerance, sufficiency and responsibility on which the learning process is based. As it happened for the Study Circle project, ESD may also play a role in acquiring new skills, which are necessary to improve employability and inclusion, since these skills are to be achieved by enhancing experience and promoting personal action and motivation.

### 6.5. Pilot study circles in brief

EMBRACED BY THE HILLS	ALONG THE PATHS OF THE KRIVAPETE
<p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Collio/Brda region</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> ENFAP FVG and Ljudska univerza Nova Gorica</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> territorial marketing, cross-border tourism products</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 15 participants, 7 men and 8 women, both Italian and Slovenian; heterogeneous class as regards age, education and work.</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> thematic map of the Collio/Brda region</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> cross-border tourism integration, inter-institutional network, dissemination and enhancement of local knowledge, promotion of sustainable lifestyles (nature trails)</p>	<p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Upper Soča Valley, Natisone and Torre Valleys</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> Posoški razvojni center and Torre Natisone Gal</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> territorial marketing, cross-border tourism products</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 12 participants, mostly employed and unemployed women, of various ages, high-school diploma</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> 2 cross-border routes and a blog</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> cross-border tourism integration; cross-border territorial marketing, inclusion of unemployed women; Italian and Slovenian network; development of basic linguistic and ICT skills.</p>

9 The other two priorities are: Advancing policy and Empowering and mobilizing youth.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OUR HERITAGE CRAFTS AND HAND-MADE OBJECTS</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Upper Soča Valley, Natisone and Torre Valleys <i>Managing bodies:</i> Posoški razvojni center and Torre Natisone Gal</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> self-employment based on local resources <i>Type of participants:</i> 10 craftsmen from the Upper Soča Valley, Natisone and Torre Valleys, mostly retired, aged 55+, high-school diploma.</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> Logo, business cards, website: <a href="http://www.socanatisone.eu">www.socanatisone.eu</a> <i>Sustainability in key words:</i> tools for the handicrafts' marketing, collaborative networks of craftsmen, active aging, enhancement of traditional knowledge, also intergenerational; network of local stakeholders.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BIOWANDERING AMONG SKILLS AND FLAVOURS</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Karst region <i>Managing bodies:</i> Isis "Brignoli Einaudi Marconi" of Gradisca d'Isonzo in collaboration with ENFAP FVG</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> self-employment based on local resources <i>Type of participants:</i> heterogeneous group of 11 participants, 9 women and 2 men all fond of bio-food and products</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> printed booklet on local recipes and products <i>Sustainability in key words:</i> local female cultures; professional qualification and retraining of women; sustainable agriculture and preservation of rural biodiversity; new business opportunities, inter-associative networking; new training courses.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FRUITS FROM THE EMPEROR'S GARDEN</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Levpa (Municipality of Kanal) <i>Managing bodies:</i> LUNG – Ljudska univerza Nova Gorica and ENFAP FVG</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> active citizenship <i>Type of participants:</i> 10 Italian and Slovenian participants, mostly retired, aged 55+</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> Guide on fruit cultivation <i>Sustainability in key words:</i> recovery of traditional economic activity, active aging, enhancement of local knowledge in the field of fruit cultivation, recovery of traditional orchards.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FRUIT AND VEGETABLES CULTIVATION</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Collio region <i>Managing bodies:</i> ENFAP FVG</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> active citizenship <i>Type of participants:</i> 15 participants, mostly retired men, active in local associations</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> Photo diary <i>Sustainability in key words:</i> integration with municipal gardens and social orchards; dissemination of the acquired skills, recovery of traditional orchards.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ROSE OF GORIZIA</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Gorizia region</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> Istituto agrario Brignoli – Gradisca d’Isonzo</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> promotion of micro-businesses networks</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 15 farmers growing the red chicory Rose of Gorizia</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> Drafting of a Statute of a consortium of agricultural producers; drafting of red chicory production rules</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> setting up the conditions for the establishment of a farmers’ consortium; integration with an existing project; enhancement of local typical products.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BIOWANDERING AMONG SKILLS AND FLAVOURS</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Eastern Veneto</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> Vegal – Gal Venezia orientale</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> entrepreneurship and enhancement of local resources</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 8 restaurant managers, young, mostly professionally trained, specialised in local cuisine</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> feasibility of a new local products chain grown according to traceability principles; creation of a logo that identifies restaurants using local products</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> promotion of local quality food and wine; enhancement of knowledge concerning food and wine heritage; service differentiation; traceability of the local supply chain.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SUSTAINABLE TEXTILE PATHS</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Collio region</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> ENFAP FVG</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> self-employment based on local resources</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 11 women of various ages, origin and skills</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> On-line and printed catalogue of the analysed prototypes, market survey, exhibition of prototype studies</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> integration between tradition and innovation in textiles; enhancement of local knowledge; experimenting with new sustainable textile techniques and local materials; new consumer culture; female entrepreneurship; research and development of products.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FOOD PARK</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Eastern Veneto</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> Donneuropee F&amp;M and Vegal – Gal Venezia orientale</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> promotion of micro-businesses networks</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 15 local farmers</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> Code of ethics; draft statute of the association; newsletter</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> bottom-up enhancement of the Food Park; new product sales strategy; biodiversity protection and associative promotion of local products; responsibility towards consumers on product quality; integration with previous project; business networking; rural biodiversity conservation.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BIOMASSES</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Torre and Natisone Valleys</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> GAL Torre-Natisone</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> promotion of business networks</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 13 participants representing different types of stakeholders: local and regional administrators, entrepreneurs and their associations</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> Data and technical documents analysis, investigation of models of process management in the local wood biomass drafting the project-fiche “Conversion to post carbon energy systems through distributed energy networks based on the supply chain of local forest wood biomass”</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> forest management, biomass production chain; inter-institutional network; research approach; bottom-up programming.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GREEN ECONOMY</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Eastern Veneto</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> Vegal – Gal Venezia orientale</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> promotion of business networks</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 9 building contractors, 3 designers and 1 supplier of various ages with high education level (diploma or degree)</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> studies on sustainable building, definition of a building specification model which may become a unitary reference for the territory.</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> strategic vision concerning the green building market and relationship with the institutions; strategy for energy savings building renovation; search for new business opportunities.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KARST LAND: CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p><i>Area of implementation:</i> Karst region</p> <p><i>Managing bodies:</i> ENFAP FVG in collaboration with CTP Eda Isis “Brignoli Einaudi Marconi” of Gradisca d’Isonzo</p> <p><i>Area of experimentation:</i> promotion of micro-businesses networks</p> <p><i>Type of participants:</i> 11 participants, local farmers interested in biodiversity protection and sustainable tourism</p> <p><i>Products/Outputs:</i> SWOT analysis and proposals for the public administration, promotional web page: <a href="http://carsonature.wordpress.com">http://carsonature.wordpress.com</a>, business network</p> <p><i>Sustainability in key words:</i> protection of cultural and natural biodiversity, research on sustainable economic exploitation of the territory; network strategy for effective promotion; network of local stakeholders.</p>	

## CHAPTER 7

# ELEMENTS FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT: COLLECTIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES TOWARDS A CROSS-BORDER LIFE-LONG LEARNING SYSTEM FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Giovanna Del Gobbo, Elena Slanisca, Nevenka Bogataj

### *Abstract:*

By focusing on the project's main objective and its context, the article analyses the aspects related to the impact assessment of the project's activities and takes into the account, in a broader context, both the desired effects and the global ones. The analysis emphasizes the size of the induced change and of social impact, which are represented by the effects on individuals and local communities.

Also several models for measuring the social added value are being considered, since they are more relevant to the peculiarities of the collective learning proposed by the study circles for local development.

These models have been developed and applied within international policies and actions for sustainable development (see UNDP) that focus on the involvement of various stakeholders at different levels and analyse several dimensions such as collective impact, social return on investment, sustainability reporting, results-based management and life-cycle approach, which emphasize the sense of responsibility, confidence-building and mutual learning through analysis.

Each of these models is then compared to the monitoring and evaluation tools and the contexts, in which they have been proposed during the Study Circles project.

Then the first impacts on the Slovenian and Italian contexts are presented: sustainability and applicability of the model tested in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, and the system's evolution in Slovenia, where the connection with local development, territorial vocations and entrepreneurship becomes a perspective, which needs to be highlighted and enhanced within the system. Moreover, the article underlines the importance of the cross-border connection through the agreements that have been promoted by the project.

Some final thoughts concerns the elements of social innovation, which have been promoted by the study circles in terms of relationships and processes, while specific attention is given to more marginal territories and border areas, in order to rediscover the elements of mutual interest, which may represent an effective tool for self-organization and communication, which should be enhanced in the European scenario.

A partire dalla focalizzazione dell'obiettivo di fondo del progetto e del suo contesto di svolgimento, l'articolo approfondisce gli aspetti legati alla valutazione di impatto delle azioni di progetto prendendo in considerazione sia gli effetti desiderati che quelli globali, di contesto allargato. Particolare rilievo assume nell'analisi di impatto la dimensione del cambiamento indotto e dell'impatto sociale, rappresentato dagli effetti sui soggetti e sulle comunità locali.

Vengono presi in considerazione alcuni modelli di misurazione del valore sociale aggiunto individuati in quanto maggiormente calzanti rispetto alla specificità dell'apprendimento collettivo dei circoli di studio per lo sviluppo locale.

Si tratta di modelli sviluppati e applicati nel contesto internazionale di politiche e azioni per lo sviluppo sostenibile (vedi UNDP) che portano grande attenzione al coinvolgimento dei diversi portatori di interesse ai diversi livelli analizzando dimensioni quali l'impatto collettivo, il ritorno sociale dell'investimento, il reporting di sostenibilità, il results based management life-cycle approach, che maggiormente enfatizzano il senso di responsabilità, la costruzione della fiducia, la dimensione dell'apprendimento reciproco attraverso l'analisi.

Ciascuno di questi modelli è raffrontato agli strumenti di monitoraggio e valutazione e ai contesti in cui essi sono stati proposti nel corso dello svolgimento del progetto Study Circles.

Con riferimento ai contesti italiano e sloveno, vengono quindi illustrate le prime evidenze di impatto: rispetto alla sostenibilità e applicabilità del modello sperimentato per quanto riguarda il contesto italiano, del Friuli Venezia Giulia in particolare che si sta attivando al riguardo, di evoluzione del sistema per quanto riguarda il contesto sloveno dove il collegamento con lo sviluppo locale, le vocazioni del territorio, l'imprenditorialità diventano prospettiva da evidenziare e valorizzare nel sistema; viene inoltre evidenziata trasversalmente la dimensione di collegamento transfrontaliero attraverso il sistema di accordi promosso dal progetto.

Una riflessione conclusiva riguarda gli elementi di innovazione sociale stimolati dai circoli di studio anche in termini relazionali e di processo con attenzione specifica ai territori più marginali, con una focalizzazione

rispetto alle aree di confine e alla riscoperta degli elementi di interesse comune, dove essi possono rappresentare un efficace strumento di auto-organizzazione e comunicazione da valorizzare nello scenario europeo.

Prispevek analizira projektne dejavnosti, ki se nanašajo na učinke v širšem smislu, pri tem pa upošteva tako zaželene kot globalne učinke z vidika ciljev projekta in njegovega konteksta. Analiza poudarja dimenzije povzročenih sprememb in družbeni vpliv, ki ga predstavljajo učinki na posameznika in lokalne skupnosti.

Upoštevali smo več modelov merjenja dodane družbene vrednosti, da bi upoštevali posebnosti učenja v skupini, ki je študijske krožke, ki se ukvarjajo z lokalnim razvojem, značilno. Ti modeli so bili razviti in uporabljeni v okviru mednarodnih politik in akcij za trajnostni razvoj (glej UNDP) osredotočenih na vključevanje različnih deležnikov na več ravneh. Modeli analizirajo več dimenzij npr. skupnostni vpliv, povratne učinke vlaganj, poročanje o trajnosti, upravljanje na podlagi rezultatov spremljanja in perspektivo »življenjskega cikla« - vsi namreč poudarjajo odgovornost, izgradnjo zaupanja in vzajemno učenje.

Vsakod teh modelov je nato primerjanz orodji in konteksti projekta Študijski krožki.

Predstavljeni so prvi vplivi na slovenske in italijanske kontekste: trajnost in uporabnost modela, testiranega v Furlaniji Julijski krajini, in razvijajočega se sistema v Sloveniji, kjer je povezava z lokalnim razvojem, teritorialnimi poklici in podjetništvom že postala obetavna, kar je potrebno poudariti in tudi sistemsko uveljaviti.. Še več, članek poudarja in širi pomen čezmejne povezave z dogovori, kijih je omogočil projekt.

Nekaj zaključnih misli je namenjenih elementom socialnih inovacij oz. novosti, ki so jih uveljavili študijski krožki. Gre predvsem za odnose in procese ter pozornost obrobnosti območja in obmejnih območij nasploh, da bi obnovili elemente vzajemnega zanimanja ter jih okrepili kot učinkovito orodje za samo-organizacijo in komunikacijo, ki naj bi se okrepila tudi v evropskem scenariju.

## *7.1. Introduction*

Over the past three years the Study Circles project has had an impact on several levels of the lifelong learning system for local development: systemic, institutional, operational, economic and in terms of policies.

The project's core challenge has been the creation of opportunities for collective learning in the cross-border area and the promotion of innovation processes within local lifelong learning systems, which could ensure the development of the skills that are needed for the local endogenous and sustainable development.

The ultimate goal, along with the testing of the study circles' adult education method applied in Slovenia, was to test the learning models, which may enhance and innovate the local heritage of knowledge.

Europe is characterized by numerous boundaries that besides their primary function (i.e. to separate) also join countries and people. The CBC projects are designed to overcome this separation and training is undoubtedly the best opportunity to pursue this objective, while the similar geographical and cultural characteristics between the countries are undoubtedly an advantage.

In most cases in Europe, also in the Study Circle project's area, these rural areas are characterized by less infrastructure and a different stratification of the population, whose pace is different from the one of those, who live in the cities. Given their traditional association with the land, the inhabitants of these areas have a lot of experience in dealing with the local natural resources. However, the use of these competences is not taken for granted and the local know-how is devalued, if not lost, at least in terms of value for solving the developments problems as they are seen by the inhabitants of these marginal areas. In this regard the project's aim was to facilitate the identification, promotion and dissemination of local knowledge and its use in the development processes.

This was the broader objective that, after the project, will represent the framework for identifying the information needed for the initial impact assessment of the project.

### *7.2. Which type of impact assessment?*

The concept of impact expresses the extent to which an effect depends on the object of the analysis, in our case the Study Circle project's activities. The term "effect" refers to the (positive and negative) changes that have an intrinsic value. The effects can be social, environmental or economic (CESE, 2013, p. 9) and assessed at short, medium or long term. In the Study Circles project we have mainly assessed the social impact, i.e. the effects on the individuals and communities involved.

It has to be considered that measuring the project's impact does not only mean to evaluate the desired effects, but also the global one (both the

expected and unexpected ones) and their impact, i.e. the effect's ability to transform the context or at least introduce potentially transformative elements or a more holistic perspective that considers the repercussions in the social, institutional and educational fields.

In order to measure the social impact we had to choose the type of impact to be considered and the methodologies to be used.

There are various methods to determine the social added value, to define the created social value or to plan, measure and evaluate social objectives.

Among the "impact framework", a model that expresses the characteristics relevant to the Study Circle project is the Collective Impact.

## The 5 Conditions of Collective Impact



*Retrieved from the United Way of Northern California website  
(<http://www.norcalunitedway.org/community-impact-0>)*

Collective Impact happens when a core group of people or organizations come together around a shared goal with a common set of strategies and metrics. No individual agendas. No duplication. Everyone bringing their strengths to the table to solve a social issue that cannot be solved alone.

Collective Impact holds great promise for communities to create sustainable solutions. However, to do this well, leaders will need to build

trust, coordinate their approaches, and engage community members in new ways. Leaders will need to be more collaborative, inclusive, asset-based, committed to learn, and accountable to implement this approach effectively (Schmitz, 2001).

Another interesting model is *Social return on investment* (SROI), used by any entity to evaluate impact on stakeholders, identify ways to improve performance, and enhance the performance of investments (Millar, Hall, 2012). This method is based on several principles that are used to determine the non economic effect of an action:

1. Involve stakeholders (i.e. everyone who has a 'stake' or an interest in the subject of the SROI)
2. Understand what changes (for those stakeholders)
3. Value what matters (also known as the 'monetisation principle' - see below)
4. Only include what is material
5. Do not over-claim
6. Be transparent
7. Verify the result

As regards the first point it has to be considered that one of the prerequisites of a validated method for measuring the social effect in the European context is the involvement of the stakeholders, i.e. social enterprises, users, policy makers and funders, as well as, where appropriate, public authorities and social partners. This involvement-based approach results in confidence building that leads to a shared understanding of the desired impact.

In the Study Circles project this approach was expressed at two levels: within the partnership, with the evaluation sessions of the project's effects, and externally through the involvement of various stakeholders. The seminars for the presentation of the results, which have been organised at different stages of implementation, and the final seminar have always been set so as to ensure the involvement of the stakeholders in order to measure the impact at different stages of the project (short-term), but also to ensure, by sharing intermediate results, medium and long term effects.

The shared vision of the expected impact within the partnership resulted in signing several memoranda of understanding and agreements aimed at ensuring the future sustainability of the tested activities, which will continue through the collaboration between the institutions involved. We have achieved mutual trust that has enabled us to share future scenarios for the development of the project activities.

The same kind of trust has been registered among the study circles' participants and has led to the development of business micro-networks. Although it has come as an unexpected effect, it was absolutely practical and evidence-based (for example the statute of a new consortium of producers).

Among the methods that have been used to determine the social added value there was the Global Reporting Index, a framework of criteria and indicators that has been developed on a multi-stakeholder approach in order to provide a reference for the impact assessment and reporting of sustainable development actions.

«Sustainability Reporting involves measuring, reporting and accountability towards both internal and external stakeholders, in relation to the organization's performance in achieving the objective of sustainable development. The term 'sustainability reporting' has a wider meaning and is synonymous with other expressions used to illustrate the economic, environmental and social impact.»<sup>1</sup>

When we consider the impact assessment related to sustainable development processes, we also have to consider the evaluation models proposed by agencies and programs for development cooperation. One example is the UNDP Evaluation Policy.

The assumption is that the impact assessment still appears traditionally flattened on a technical dimension (formal or bureaucratic) that isn't able to assume learning connotation and a physiognomy that explicit research component, however implicit in the more innovative definition of assessment. Evaluation Policy UNDP (2011), which considers the assessment as

«Judgement made of the relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of development efforts, based on agreed criteria and benchmarks among key partners and stakeholders. It involves a rigorous, systematic and objective process in the design, analysis and interpretation of information to answer specific questions. It provides assessments of what works and why, highlights intended and unintended results, and provides strategic lessons to guide decision-makers and inform stakeholders.»<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the problematic nature of measuring effects of a project and especially the difficulty of defining appropriate indicators of impact, has always urged international reflection on the necessary methodological rigor

1 *Linee guida per il reporting di sostenibilità*, 2011, page 3.

2 <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/policy.htm#ii> (last retrieved on 15 January 2014), page 9.

in the evaluation process, hence the adoption by the UNDP results-based management since 1999, which was followed in 2002 by the introduction of outcome-level evaluations.

The change in perspective has highlighted the training component and research component of assessment: «For results-based management to be successful, organizations need to develop and nurture a culture of results where enquiry, evidence and learning are considered essential to good management.»<sup>3</sup>

There are many elements that characterize the shift from a traditional to evaluation evidence based, with significant implications in terms of knowledge and skills of the operators at various levels and a strong involvement of the partnership.

Prospective cultural changes in UNDP		
<i>Today</i>		<i>Tomorrow</i>
<i>Project driven</i>	®	<i>Policy driven</i>
<i>Process orientation</i>	®	<i>Results orientation</i>
<i>Low level specialized expertise</i>	®	<i>Clear competency profile</i>
<i>Low knowledge-based capacity</i>	®	<i>Innovative and information technology networked capacity</i>
<i>Risk aversion</i>	®	<i>Risk taking</i>
<i>Introverted, sceptical of partnerships</i>	®	<i>Outward looking, partnerships oriented</i>
<i>Cumbersome decision making</i>	®	<i>Flexible and real-time decision making</i>
<i>Bureaucratic culture</i>	®	<i>Merit-rewarding and initiative-driven culture</i>
<i>Weak management accountability</i>	®	<i>Responsive leadership management</i>

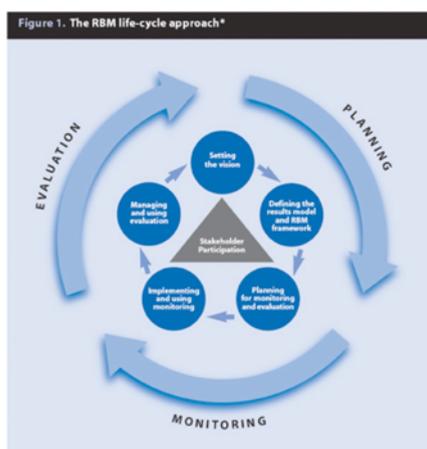
Source: UNDP, *Evaluation of results-based management in UNDP*, 2007, page 13.

All these aspects, which are to be found in the Study Circles project, have characterized in particular the activities of the project's Scientific and Technical Committee, which has also produced consistent evidence for the process' traceability.

In the international context, the model of Policy Evaluation of UNDP has been and still is an interesting reference for setting actions of evaluation in projects aimed at developing learning organizations (partnerships ) and the individuals involved. (Del Gobbo, 2014)

Key features in implementation versus outcome monitoring		
Elements of Implementation Monitoring (Traditionally used for projects)		Elements of Outcome Monitoring (Used for a range of interventions and strategies)
Description of the problem or situation before the intervention	®	Baseline data to describe the problem or situation before the intervention
Benchmarks for activities and immediate outputs	®	Indicators for outcomes
Data collection on inputs, activities and immediate outputs	®	Data collection on outputs and how/whether they contribute towards achievement of outcomes. More focus on perceptions of change among stakeholders and more focus on 'soft' assistance
Systematic reporting on provision of inputs, etc.	®	Systematic reporting with more qualitative and quantitative information on the progress of outcomes
Directly linked to a discrete intervention (or series of interventions)	®	Done in conjunction with strategic partners
Designed to provide information on administrative, implementation and management issues as opposed to broader development effectiveness issues	®	Captures information on success or failure of UNDP partnership strategy in achieving desired outcomes

Setting the evaluation in terms of Results Based Management (RBM) means considering not only systems and tools to plan, monitor and evaluate the results of development. It rather means effective measures to promote a culture of results orientation and to ensure that people are responsible for both the results achieved by their actions and behaviours, and the raising of their knowledge, as highlighted in the model of RBM life-cycle approach .



The Technical and Scientific Committee activity and the stakeholders' involvement in the seminars have always been conceived as public happenings, with a Community involvement. All relevant actors for the project (stakeholders) including project partners and external subjects were enabled to detect, diagnose, plan, according to their mission and role.

This participatory evaluation pattern made it possible to promote a hermeneutic effort shared by all the actors involved in the project that could be supported, precisely through the same evaluation, strengthening both the social dimension (empowerment) and the cognitive (learning) level.

The measurement of the impact in terms of learning is obviously implicit in any project that involves training activities, but it is less obvious that learning is considered as a direct effect of the project, which may change the context itself.

If we consider the outputs only in terms of quantity (e.g. the number of people, who participated to the training activities for the study circle's mentor), we may not measure the real impact of the activity. It is therefore important to acknowledge that in order to measure the social impact we have to move from the simple measurement of the outputs to the measurement of the real impact or accomplished transformation, in order to grasp the real added value of the project's effects. In this sense, the mutual learning networks generated by the working groups during the phase for inducing and promoting the demand for study circles have a value that goes beyond the meetings held, the minutes drawn up or the participants, who have attended these meetings.

This added value is not always easily referred to measurable results, but is determined by the value that direct and indirect beneficiaries attribute to the activities. To measure the creation of value does not necessarily mean obtaining figures or measurable data (egg. the number of stakeholders involved and divided by clusters; the number of activated study circles and the number of participants), but it also requires to be measured through the narration of information-rich "stories" as seen from the beneficiaries' perspective.

In that sense is significant also the participants' experience and the value the project has had for them:

«The study circle has given me greater strength in making and communicating my product clearly, as well as the ability to predict events before they happen.»

«The ability to interact with others, through creativity for achieving a common goal, the proof that collaboration is the key element that involves and offers the chance to get involved, to transform and to evolve; the hope in the collaboration and the creation of groups where you can nurture and share your interests and passions; the stimulus to grow.»

In this regard also the considerations relating to the value of well-being that the project has generated become relevant, and greater importance is given to the working environment or the communication dynamics (see Chapter 4)

Also important is what we might call the evidence of the result achieved in terms of the effect or further medium and long term impact potential.

Hence the possibility to detect or to predict possible transformations related to the project and that will continue after the project itself.

### *7.3. Evidence of social impact in Italy and in the cross-border area*

The project developed and modelled a cross-border study circles system that is supported by a network of local players (stakeholders) and a system of agreements designed to ensure the sustainability and development of its activities, such as the training of mentors, meeting local needs and demands, management of the educational circles. Particularly important are the following agreements:

- the Agreement on cultural and scientific cooperation between the Department of Education and Psychology of the University of Florence and the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage of the University of Venice, the ENFAP FVG Regional Committee and Andragoški center Slovenije for the implementation of research and training projects is aimed at developing innovative experts/facilitators of non-formal and informal learning in social and working settings while promoting the internationalization of research and the local presence in different Italian contexts together with other Study Circle's project partners;

- the cross-border agreements on tourism network in the area of Gorizia, Collio, Torre and Natisone Valleys and Upper Soča Valley, i.e. cross-border cooperation for creating tourism products that express the local knowledge, promote sustainable tourism and the development of networks;

- the Agreement on the cross-border info-point network for the promotion of the study circles (15 info-points of which 12 are located in municipal premises) in order to promote the training model and meet the demand;

- the Agreement between ENFAP FVG and Torre Natisone Gal as a tool for collaboration between an educational agency and a development agency, which represents the founding model for applying the study circles system in regional and local contexts.

Although the protocols mainly refer to the impact, i.e. the measurement of the project's effect on the organizational and operational dimension of educational activities, it is interesting to note that the project has also had a significant impact on educational and development policies at regional level.

As regards, in fact, the Friuli Venezia Giulia region on the Italian side, an important element for the impact assessment of the study circle educational model has been its integration into the regional local development policies (integrated approach to territorial development).

In adherence to the National Strategy for the Inland Areas, the 2014-2020 ROP ESF Programme has included some areas with a falling population, territorial problems and geomorphological barriers, into the Integrated Territorial Investment scheme, which is defined for funding local development activities based on the following objectives:

- protection of the territory and local communities,
- enhancement of natural and cultural resources and sustainable tourism,
- energy efficiency and local renewable energy chain,
- consolidation and development of productive activities by promoting innovation, both as regards production processes and market access, by combining a top-down and bottom-up approach for a more efficient use of EU funds.

In such a context the study circle model is fully functional, since «its approach is divided into several territorial, industry or business policies that demonstrate the strong commitment to consultation and involvement of the stakeholders and potential recipients.»

In the document “Regular planning of operations in 2015” the Operational Programme of the European Social Fund 2014-2020 has envisaged the training of mentors in order to develop and disseminate the study circle model throughout the region, with particular reference to the Strategy for the development of the internal and mountain areas provided by the ROP ESF Programme.

By testing the Study Circles project and the proposed model through the networks and agreements may lead the way to the application of the regional strategy by foreshadowing forms of participatory governance for local development and development of territorial education systems.

The agreement between the ENFAP FVG Regional Committee and Torre Natisone Gal, which represents a model for the collaboration between an educational agency, a local development agency, 8 municipalities and 6 associations/consortia, makes the Rural Development Plan – ROP ESF easily feasible by applying the non-formal educational model of the study

circles on the basis of the priorities identified at local level.

The project may have a potential impact on Italian national policies too, but this potential has to be considered also for the added value that it can generate.

The study circle's educational model, which has been tested in the Study Circles project has, in fact, a number of features that could transform it into a reference model for regionally applying the territorial lifelong learning networks as set out in the Italian law no. 92/2012 and referred to by the State-Region Conference on 10 July 2014. The State-Region Agreement defines the involvement of institutional, economic, social and associative bodies in order to organically connect education, training and employment services with the strategies for economic growth, access to employment and welfare reform by enhancing formal, non-formal and informal individual activities within a personal, civic, social and employment perspective.

#### *7.4. Impact on system and institutional level in Slovenia*

Contextual frame of the system and institutional level in Slovenia is characterised by insecurity due to financial recession. Reconsideration of state institutional organisation including the frame of adult education took place in the period of the project. Relatively frequent exchange of the highest authorities of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, constant cuts of the budget and therefore priority was given to yearly budget basis – instead on strategic orientation into developmental issues (e.g. innovation). All these represented a barrier for clear recognition of project results on the system and institutional level. Below we also argument another barrier, an established practice which continues to be interpreted through initial arguments, while new and innovative roles spread relatively slowly at the system level than in practice.

However, there are indications and insights into project impact e.g. information flow in terms of materials provided to policy makers and attendance of Slovenian decision makers at project meetings (Gorizia, 2014 and 2015). They all speak in favour of positive impact. Lack of back information or proof of use of these materials limits overall conclusions. Material background and procedures to cover costs seem to be an important system perspective, particularly focused to. This means that all elements of the project financial structure were treated with particular care. An overall evaluation of the project on the system level therefore judges not only its

direct and indirect results through the lens of content of the project, its contribution to the development of Slovenian study circles network and evolution of cross-border cooperation, but also its financial flow and its organization. The first year difficulties and delays brought some doubts. Later, the period of learning enabled large partnership, cross-border and bilingual communication and nested organizational scheme (two levels of control) to function and even more results were provided than expected. Even if this is not yet fully recognized on the system level, it provides not only motivation but also initial agreements to provide sustainability of cross-border cooperation.

As Slovenian study circles network in nineties started with an accent on monitoring of implementation, a cross-border project not only confirmed initial approach but also contributed to its substantial upgrade in terms of even more theoretical base and system framing. This is by all means new for Slovenian decision makers, and not explored or used in detail yet. The same goes for the accent of local perspective. However, a chance to use project results on the system level and its rich bibliography may soon be given in the frame of expected re-consideration of Adult Education Law. However, strong competition with other initiatives, projects and international experience does not provide success in advance.

At the moment professional interpretation of cross-border project results is provided in line with path dependency conceptualization (Heinmiller, 2009). This means that partner institutions, engaged in application procedure were engaged more and deeply than those, informed only (e.g. at the initial or final mass events, Karavana Bovec, 2013 and Novo mesto, 2014, final conference in Gorizia, 2015). Frequent operational communication seem to be crucial in this respect as it enables a process of reflective evaluations bringing new insights, ideas and other kinds of innovation, particularly enforced by cross-border and international frame. In this respect irresponsible partners, the first and the latest pilots provided to be particularly simulative as we tried to find parallels in Slovenian practice and explanation to respond in line with “responsive leadership management” in “initiative-driven culture” (see table 1, second column, UNDP, 2007), subconsciously incorporated into management of Slovenian study circle network. The other element we estimate as a key one for project practice but also for sustainability of pilots implemented is people engaged in the project. Just like Slovenian experience show, there was:

- some (but not much) dropout among mentors mainly due to personal difficulties in maintaining the initial commitment
- diverse background interest of institutional managers (with impact on mentors and indirectly recognized at mass events already mentioned)

- initial field distrust on the new form and its ground.

Only dedicated, trained and personally interested individuals can successfully step over these obstacles and overcome occasional and eventual negative constellations. In practice this means that for example 1. the leading responsible person at ENFAP did not resign after initial stops of project application procedures and later of partnership coordination difficulties, 2. that Technical Scientific Committee successfully overcome information and contextual gaps in framing system proposal and 3. that mentors coped with implementation of a new form in new territories and eventual institutional lack of support. It is not only clear goal and other characteristics of the project which enabled success but above all particular individuals, able to cope with uncertainties and eventual initial barriers or misunderstandings. Even if there were criteria for their selection and despite competencies, already described (Bogataj, Del Gobbo, Slaniska, 2012), these characteristics can only be confirmed after practical engagement in study circles. For Slovenia cross-border project experience widely confirm the accent on mentors as individuals with particular qualities. Additionally a need for more grounded system approach was identified, supported with the project results. Strategic framing of evaluation into new elements may therefore take into consideration that study circle mentors are able of risk taking and of partnership orientation (at any level). This is a precondition for this form of learning, linked with vocational practice. And this may be regarded a new perspective and pathway, worth testing in the future.

In this respect a leading partner role was crucial, providing a system approach all the time, testing study circles in diverse frames and – essentially – from the very beginning providing link with local vocations. This was very new for Slovenian policy makes. Even more, at the moment we cannot clearly conclude that a project message of linking study circles with vocational education was really and properly understood. This issue is not discussed here in detail but after two decades of practice Slovenian study circles are (presumably) still more understood in their initial learning role with social and cultural dimensions (participation, cohesion, heritage etc.), which is considered well but not enough as new roles are already documented (Bogataj et al., 2013). Slovenian Adult Education Institute does not evaluate this presumption negatively but more as a positive evolution of the Slovenian practice and important if not innovative message of the project. There are practical proofs for this conclusion. Soon after the project started, Slovenian national coordination initiated the first call to the practice to provide case descriptions on the basis of one of one criterion – study circles contributing to the local development and providing elements

of entrepreneurship. Unexpectedly eighteen cases were provided in a month (Bogataj et al., 2013), so - after promoting project results in 2014 - this accent continues at the national meeting in 2015. We can therefore conclude that a project brought an impact of addressing new perspective, addressed to all levels - system, organizational and practical as well.

Where to seek for *innovation* in terms of new organizational, institutional, technological, and product innovations or at least incremental innovations across these domains? Most of these aspects seem not to be really addressed in Slovenia, except of broadening of institutional partnership into international cooperation, which seems particularly and more valuable when in the neighborhood than elsewhere. As innovation has not been measured directly and our reflection on the issue has partly been provided above, further thoughts may go to locally embedded broadening of insight into territorial situation. Social innovations - we claim that study circles may be regarded social innovation - satisfy collective aspirations. By opening a discourse on this issue - and adult education seems to be more than appropriate place for this - the question of "which are they" is raised and addressed to broad public. It seems very important when public is addressed and not only decision makers (at any level). This enables innovations and identification of needs in certain territorial community at certain moment. Due to relatively marginal geographical situation of the area for both States, vocational issues may gain priority. And indeed they did. Our future focus might therefore not address only different aspects of innovation but more innovation in relational terms, between actors (institutions, mentors, participants, cross-border events) in an innovation processes (e.g. reflected in final results of cross-border study circles). Project results indicate that rural developmental context may have other characteristics, not well studied or understood, than urban one. For example a list of final results shows that "urban" SCs more usually select services production e.g. recreational topics, while "non-urban" ones were more inclined to "production on the basis of natural resources" (wood, food). What is innovative here is attention to relation to natural resources for both types of SCs. This also indicates tradition of collective action, typical for the area and also cited on the final conference as a motivation through the link to past times. This means that path dependency may be recognised also at the practical level.

According the authors own experience with Slovenian study circles, historical facts or processes - seldom present in top-down adult education offer - may be a crystalline core, looked for by inhabitants of local territories.

As they have micro-local specifics but also cross-border common traces, this finding may be regarded innovation, worth to support. It seems that people need reflection of past experience as avoidance of its negative side has not been found not proper approach. Last but not least the area, regardless border, shares an interesting but still not widely recognized or supported institution of Commons, which has much in common with study circles (Gatto, Bogataj, 2015). Commons as an original territorial form of collective self-organization have been through the history, namely in the period of transition to modern nation state, usually transferred into municipalities. However, even in small communities, equalization of micro-local organization with local administration may be a challenging issue not addressed here. However, principles of study circles, not originated from Commons but pretty similar to the functioning of study circles, may become further argument for their support and system incorporation. Last but not least there are EU states having particular legislative frame for Study circles (Sweden, after Eurydice) and understanding of study circles as social innovation along European state borders may be an interesting future challenge of the project team. This means also that cross border project based practice of study circles not only opened space for more communication and common development of adult education linked to vocational activities (e.g. tourism development, orchard raising, entrepreneurship development etc.) but it can also be at least hypothesised that *collectives are social innovators*, particularly in remote rural areas as there is no alternative ones.

## CHAPTER 8

# CROSS-BORDER STUDY CIRCLES AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

Mateja Pelikan

### *Abstract*

While illustrating the main features of the cross-border area and its population, the article reports about the challenge of cross-border study circles through the direct experience of a bilingual mentor who analyses their impact in terms of intercultural dialogue and fostering of new relations across physical and mental border also highlighting both organizational and communication aspects.

L'articolo illustra le caratteristiche dell'area transfrontaliera e della sua popolazione descrivendo la sfida dei circoli di studio transfrontalieri attraverso l'esperienza diretta di un mentor bilingue. Viene preso in considerazione l'impatto in termini di dialogo interculturale e sviluppo di nuove relazioni attraverso un confine non solo fisico, ma anche mentale, evidenziando alcuni aspetti inerenti l'organizzazione e la comunicazione nei circoli.

Prispevek ilustrira ključne značilnosti čezmejnega območja in populacije ter poroča o izzivu čezmejnih krožkov, ki ga je predstavljala neposredna izkušnja z dvojezičnim mentorjem. Slednji analizira vpliv študijskih krožkov z vidika medkulturnega dialoga in spodbujanja novih odnosov prek fizičnih in mentalnih meja tudi z vidika organizacije in komunikacije.

### *8.1. Introduction*

Everything we do remains and affects our future. Nothing is done in vain, as unfortunately some in today's global economic crisis and distrust in local and state institutions often think. And since what we do remains and becomes permanent, we should make a conscious decision to get rid of selfishness, greed and passivity and divert ourselves to generosity,

responsibility, integration and well-being of communities - in short, to active citizenship. But this does not happen overnight, small steps are needed to achieve this and it all starts with the individual. An individual, who demonstrates sincere willingness and initiative, who communicates and wants to change things to good, will contribute to the development and sustainability of a community. In order to achieve this, he/she needs knowledge, skills and competences acquired through formal education and informal forms of education, such as study circles.

My personal experience with study circles began with the STUDY CIRCLES project, where I have worked for a short time as coordinator of one of the project partners and I have been involved in an intensive study circles' mentor training program. Training included also practical activities, namely the study circle's management, and at this point my experience became special and interesting. I have led two cross-border study circles and worked as an interpreter at a third one. So I had the opportunity to be trained specifically in the role of mentor, to observe the dynamics within the group and understand the importance of the circle for the involved individuals and communities.

However, as this study circles were not as those, which have been known in Slovenia for more than twenty years, and they were unknown in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region as a method of non-formal education, and since they were pilot (experimental) cross-border study circles, we, the mentors, coordinators, actors in local communities and institutions, have often waded into unknown waters. On the following pages I will present selected examples of pilot study circles, a description of the geographical area where the circles were implemented, an interpretation and several thoughts on the importance of cross-border study circles and lifelong learning.

But first I would like to pose a thesis, which relates to the title of the article, namely: Cross-border study circles contribute to the development of local communities. So I would like to analyze, if cross-border study circles may represent an opportunity and a resource for development. Or if its participants and achieved results contribute to the sustainable development of local communities. What is the significance and the role of intercultural competences in this context?

## *8.2. Area of implementation*

In order to understand the need for education, selected themes and implementation of study circles, it is necessary to describe the area where the

pilot circles have been implemented. Cross-border study circles, which are presented below, were held in the border area between Italy and Slovenia: on the Slovenian side the area encompassed Posočje and Brda, on the Italian side it included the Natisone and Torre valleys and the Collio area. The area of implementation ended somewhere in the middle of the border, near an old and a new city - Gorizia and Nova Gorica. This is a geographically very diverse area, which includes hills, mountains and rivers in its northern part, and lower hills and valleys in its southern part. This is an area that does not leave a visitor indifferent. In addition to its outstanding natural heritage, it features an important cultural heritage too. The area and the local inhabitants have been strongly marked by geopolitical boundaries. Today, we understand the border as something that separates and, at the same time, as something that unites and connects. The limit, which has not always been as one can see it today, has separated two major linguistic groups - Slavic and Romance, two nations - Slovenians and Italians, two identities... But this limit has thankfully blurred, so that cultures, identities, languages, thoughts and desires are mixed and intertwined.

If we briefly focus on the economic development and other demographic characteristics of the said area, the latter can be divided into two parts. The first (northernmost) part comprises the Soča, Natisone and Torre valleys. It is characterized by a high rate of depopulation, abandonment



*Picture 1:* Definition of the area of origin of the participants to the »Along the path of the Krivopetnice« study circle

of agricultural and forestry industries, administrative fragmentation into many municipalities, poor transport infrastructure, scattered and isolated settlements. For all that, economic and social development is more difficult. But the Soča valley has achieved a very good use of natural resource, i.e. the Soča river and the Alps, for the development of sports tourism, which guarantees the population's development and survival. On the Italian side lives the Slovenian national minority, which has retained the Slovenian language, whereas on the Slovenian side there is no Italian national minority and a very small percentage of the population speaks fluent Italian. In the past, these populations did collaborate and mix, but to a lower extent due to the geographical features and political systems that separated them.

The second, southernmost part consists mainly of the Slovenian Brda and Italian Collio region and surrounding urban centers, Gorizia and Nova Gorica. This area has a better transport infrastructure, a booming wine industry, as this is one of the best wine-growing areas in Europe. In recent years, due to the decreased industry production and the global economic crisis, it has recorded a high unemployment rate. The population is aging, young people (especially those with a higher level of education) move to major urban centers or even abroad. Here, too, lives the Slovenian national minority in Italy, and on the Slovenian side, the knowledge of the Italian language is high. In the past, the inhabitants of rural areas used to go to urban centers, which were mostly Italian or German, to sell crops and products and to buy certain products, which could not be found in their hometowns. At the time of the Iron Curtain smuggling was very popular and the populations mixed and interacted.

Moreover, these two areas were divided into two umbrella organization that monitored the implementation of pilot circles: the Soča Valley Development Centre and the local action group GAL Torre Natisone in the north, and the educational institution Ljudska univerza Nova Gorica and ENFAP FVG in the south.

### *8.3. Selected examples of cross-border study circles*

In this publication it has already been described what a study circle is and how it works. Therefore, I will not devote particular attention to these aspects. The next chapter will mainly focus on selected examples of pilot study circles, their implementation, special features, importance and interpretation. Since the selected cross-border study circles were experimental, the mentors, project partners and participants have tried for

the first time to carry out such forms of education across the Slovenian-Italian border. Prior to the study circles' implementation, we have defined the educational needs and ideas in the local environment, described non-formal education to local actors and institutions and invited local people to attend these circles. So for us, mentors in training, came the time to put into practice all the knowledge we have gained by attending the workshops and reading the literature.

The STUDY CIRCLES project consisted of the following four cross-border study circles, which were carried out in 2013 and 2014<sup>4</sup>:

- a) **“Fruit from the emperor’s gardens: let’s revive fruit production”**: the participants tested their newly acquired skills in an abandoned orchard. The circle’s main idea was to revive old orchards that in the recent past flourished in the whole area of Gorizia and Posočje, as well as to raise awareness of the local people about its economic, natural and social significance.
- b) **“Our heritage: hand-made art and local crafts”**: the circle was attended by artisans and craftsmen, who wished to preserve their traditional knowledge and skills. The circle’s aim was to bring together artisans and craftsmen from both sides of the border in order to enhance their social and economic ties.
- c) **“Embraced by the hills”**: the circle’s aim was to develop tourism and promote the local area, therefore participants created a tourist map with five itineraries for different target groups of tourists.
- d) **“Along the path of the Krivopetnice”**: the circle’s red thread was tourism, along with the search for new development ideas and further cooperation.

In order to present the selected examples, I will focus only on two cross-border study circles, namely those dedicated to local tourism development: “Embraced by the hills” and “Along the path of the Krivopetnice.” It is because of their common themes that the analysis and interpretation will be more clear.

In the analysis I decided to take into account the factors that are summarized in the table below:

4 The study circles description, activities and pictures are published on the STUDY CIRCLES project’s official website at the following address: [www.study-circles.eu](http://www.study-circles.eu).

	1. <i>Cross-border study circle</i> <i>«Embraced by the hills»</i>	2. <i>Cross-border study circle</i> <i>«Along the paths of the Krivapete»</i>
<i>Area of implementation</i>	Goriška area – Slovenian Brda and Italian Collio	Soča, Torre and Natisone valleys
<i>Period of implementation</i>	January–April 2014	January–April 2014
<i>Initial framework</i>	This area is an interesting mix of three European cultures - Slavic, Romance and Germanic, and therefore has a rich cultural and historical heritage and outstanding natural attractions. Residents of this cross-border areas feel that this area is becoming increasingly unified, common to all, borderless. Especially since 2004, when Slovenia joined the European Union, and since 2007, when the border was eliminated. For all these features, tourism development is considered to be good, but according to the circle's participants is sometimes lacking (cross-border) connections, information is poor, promotion is often limited by national borders. Therefore, the participants decided to create a product that would unite the tourist points of interest on both the Italian and Slovenian side and would connect and promote the common tourist area along the Slovenian-Italian border.	Along with agriculture and industry, tourism is one of the most important industries for the inhabitants of the Soča valley. Well aware of this fact are also the inhabitants of the Natisone and Torre valleys. That tourism is still developing it is demonstrated by the increasingly richer tourist offer and the number of guests, who visit the valleys. Starting from their own experience as tourists and tourism providers the circle's participants assessed that the knowledge of the neighbouring country's tourist offer is inadequate. Tourists are not interested by national (or municipal) boundaries, but by natural, cultural and historical attractions, opportunities for physical activity and the like. The main theme of the cross-border pilot study circle was tourism, along with the search for new development ideas and further cooperation.
<i>Participants</i>	The circles was attended by 15 participants: 7 men and 8 women from Slovenia and Italy. As for age, education and status the group's structure was very heterogeneous. Interestingly, not all participants worked in the field of tourism: for some it represented the main or complementary activity, while others joined the circle with a sincere desire and willingness to contribute to the (tourist) development of the local area.	The circle was attended by 10 participants from Slovenia and Italy. The group was mostly composed of women of different ages and levels of education. Some of them worked as TSPs (tourist guide, food providers, hotels and similar services), while others as representatives of local tourist associations.

<i>Other people attending</i>	The circle was managed by four female mentors. One expert in tourist map creation was invited to attend a meeting.	The circle was managed by a female mentor. Due to linguistic reasons, an interpreter attended every meeting. Representatives of several local tourism associations were invited to attend the meetings.
<i>Expected goals</i>	Creation of a tourist map <sup>1</sup> representing and promoting the common tourist area along the Slovenian-Italian border. The map suggests five itineraries for different groups of tourists (cyclists, families, nature lovers, groups, history lovers).	Participants organised two cross-border trips/tourist itineraries and presented them on their blog <sup>2</sup> , where tourist providers and their offers are described too.
<i>Implementation</i>	Participants met 13 times, alternately on the Slovenian and Italian side. At the beginning they selected and presented the attractions of their narrow local environment and then decided what and how should be included in the product.	The meetings were alternately held on the Slovenian and Italian side. Two meetings were held in the form of study trips to discover the cross-border area, its inhabitants and peculiarities.
<i>Results and outputs</i>	The result is a bilingual tourist map of the thematic itineraries covering the area of Brda, Kanal ob Soči, Gorizia and Nova Gorica. The group presented the new tourist product at the event »Brda and wine« and sent a copy to tourist information centers, various tourist services providers, social networks and local institutions. The map was initially written in Slovene and Italian, but immediately came up the need to translate it into English and German too.	The activities resulted in a program of tourist itineraries (excursions), a blog, where tourist services providers are presented, new contacts and further professional cooperation. Participants also discovered new forms of web promotion and tourist product design and creation, and gained new communication and ICT skills that they will use in their own work.

The basic study circle's method of work is based on dialogue and this certainly applies to cross-border study circles too (communication between participants, between mentors and participants, between participants and the local community, etc.). The main peculiarity of cross-border study circles is multilingualism: the participants come from two ethnic communities and speak two (or more) different languages. Participants also do not differ from each other only by age, sex, level of education, status, interests, needs, etc., but also in terms of the language they speak and the culture from which they come. And how can dialogue take place in a cross-border study circle?

The participants of the above-described cross-border study circles came from Slovenian and Italian national communities. A peculiarity of any border area are minority language communities living in a foreign country.

As regards our project, such communities are the Slovenians living in Italy, who are bilingual and speak and preserve the Slovenian language or its colloquial or dialectal variants. In the selected study circles the primary means of communication was not only one language, but two - Slovene and Italian, but not all participants and mentors were bilingual. Of course we are not always referring to the level of bilingualism provided by the European reference scale (CEFR), but to acquiring a foreign/second language (oral and/or written) to the extent that allows a more or less successful communication. Thus, the level of knowledge of a second language within the groups varied a lot, from complete control of both languages to knowledge of only one language and, of course, to an intermediate stage. When we talk about cross-border study circles we refer to the so-called intercultural dialogue. From personal experience I can confirm that the mentor plays a very important and at the same time challenging role in establishing intercultural dialogue. Experts in the field of lifelong education affirm that the dialogue within a study circle is successful when all participants are equal. The mentor's task is to set the conditions for successful dialogue. In what way he/she creates such conditions? In practice, this meant that all communication (oral, written, electronic) was bilingual: from the first invitation to the final report, all meetings were held bilingually, which required additional time for the mentor, a participant or a third party (i.e. an interpreter) to consecutively translate what was being said. In order to create favorable conditions, the knowledge of another language is not enough, since due to cultural differences between participants and the various political impacts of the recent past, as well as the different characters of the participants themselves, it is important that the mentor is respectful and tolerant, open to cultural differences and traditions, flexible and capable of empathy, and last but not least aware of his/her own cultural identity. All these intercultural skills are not only important for the mentor. The mentor's tasks include - and this is one of the educational objectives of cross-border study circles - the promotion and strengthening of intercultural competences among the participants. In practice, the mentor also played the role of "educator" and mediator, as in the group some disagreement and examples of intolerance also appeared.

At first sight, the role of the mentor may seem easier, if an interpreter assist him/her. But according to my experience I can only partially confirm this assumption. In the first group, the tasks of the tutor and of the translator were carried out by the same person (later on, participants took on the role of interpreters themselves), while in the second group there were always two persons - the tutor and the translator. In the first case, communication, mutual understanding and integration proceeded rapidly, so that the group soon moved on to the next phase, namely the practical work: analysis of the

area, definition of one or more targets, etc. In the second group, mutual understanding and trust-building proceeded more slowly, so the next phase started a little late. I should add that the reason for this is not only to be sought in the presence of a third party, but also in the natural, cultural and historical contexts of the area, which affect the behavioral characteristics of its population.



*Picture 2: Presenting and testing the new tourist product of the »Embraced by the hills« study circle*

#### 8.4. *Conclusions*

Some educational methods, such as cross-border study circles, can influence and change negative behavioral patterns. Individuals, who attend these circles, have the will and desire to influence the development of both themselves as individuals as well as the environment in which they live. The goal set and achieved by the circle contributes primarily to personal growth of the individuals involved, and then to the local environment. A peculiarity of cross-border study circles is represented also by the interaction of two different nationalities, languages and cultures, which were in the recent past strictly separated by the Iron Curtain. Although the physical borders between the two countries have been abolished nearly fifteen years ago, some forms of intolerance can still be traced in the population. Cross-border study circles promote intercultural dialogue and thus contribute to breaking down mental boundaries. Due to the global crisis and the distrust in local and state institutions, there is also some passivity among the population. Study circles break this passivity and encourage individuals to become and remain active citizens. Every act that we perform, no matter how small or worthless it may seem in our eyes, produces an impact on the events around us. In order to make the world in which we live better, we must act responsibly, positively, with willingness, initiatives and integration. We need to become better than we think we are.

## CHAPTER 9

# PROJECT BASED LEARNING IN STUDY CIRCLES AND FIELD WORK TOOLS

Patricija Rejec

### *Abstract*

Learning projects are present in different learning programmes for adults where knowledge is mostly directed to solving complex issues. This article on the selected cases of concrete learning projects and subprojects represents the process from the basic idea of study circle, its development and design to implementation. It describes and explains the role of the mentor in this process and introduces examples of methods and social games that can be used during the process of the study circle for strengthening of group membership, motivation and relaxing atmosphere.

L'apprendimento basato su progetti è presente all'interno dei programmi di educazione degli adulti nei casi in cui la conoscenza è volta alla soluzione di problemi complessi. Prendendo in esame alcuni casi selezionati di apprendimento per progetti l'articolo descrive il processo di apprendimento nel circolo di studio, dall'idea di origine al suo sviluppo e realizzazione. Viene inoltre illustrato il ruolo del mentor nel processo portando esempi concreti su metodologie e giochi di gruppo che possono essere utilizzati nel percorso del circolo per rafforzare l'appartenenza al gruppo, la motivazione e per creare un clima di lavoro piacevole.

Prispevek predstavlja izbrane primere učnih projektov in podprojektov izobraževanja odraslih ter proces od prve ideje študijskega krožka do zaključnega dogodka in njegove promocije. Opisana in pojasnjena je vloga mentorja v tem procesu, predstavljeni so primeri metod in družabnih iger uporabnih za okrepitev skupinske pripadnosti, motivacije in sproščenega vzdušja v ŠK.

### 9.1. *Project learning in study circles*

«If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.»

(A. De Saint Exupéry)

One of the first questions that any mentor raises during the planning process is certainly why would people want to be included in a study circle (SC)? Why should they participate, learn, share their knowledge, etc.?

We know from experience how important is that already in the process of assembling groups (as well as during the process of SC implementation) a mentor should identify the participants' inclinations. By doing so, he can consider the approaches, which will stimulate their curiosity and enhance their internal self-motivation with the external one. Since study circles arise from the needs of the local environment and of the participants, they are thematically related to the participants' daily lives as a result of their different life roles, desires, needs, etc. with which they identify themselves. All of them share the need to improve their current situation. Most of the times, participants have many ideas and suggestions, which have to be carried out too. It is the task of a mentor to guide them in designing content, learning materials, action plans, etc. and especially in managing them within the available time. When selecting individual learning projects, it is important that the mentor pays attention to defining realistic goals that can be achieved by the participants. In order to achieve them, the group starts from its skills, from the knowledge of the different individuals involved in the SC, learning materials, experts and institutions with whom they participate in the implementation of the planned projects. The mentor directs the professional and organizational aspects of this process, since he represents the link between the participants, the operating organization, the experts and other supportive organizations and individuals.

The SC contents are chosen by the participants themselves, who then define the individual learning projects with the support of the mentor. By adopting project learning the mentor creates a stimulating place to learn, research, network, exchange knowledge and experience, as well as for coping, clarification, coordination, etc. This makes it possible to upgrade the basic ideas and more deeply affects both participants and the group as well as the local environment.

Learning projects are present in different learning programmes for

adults where knowledge is mostly directed to solving complex issues. They are interdisciplinary linking general and also special knowledge: speaking, reading, and writing skills, use of the information technology, general awareness, social skills and interpersonal relations, and also cultivating the responsibility of independent learning and active citizenship.

## *9.2. Learning projects' creation based on selected examples of study circles implemented by the Soča valley development centre*

By analyzing selected cases, I will try to outline the relationship between basic idea, its development and the creation of individual learning projects, which were first carried out within the following study circles of the Soča Valley Development Centre: *Biological farming opportunities in the Upper Soča area*, *Organic farming as a development opportunity* and *Flowers with a taste*. Later, the Soča Valley Development Centre, due to the favorable response it received by the local environment on such topics, has transformed individual learning projects into a long-term non-formal education program for adults called *Rural challenges - produced and sold at home*, which has, together with several other projects, achieved some lasting effects in the local environment.

In the video *Stkane zgodbe* (Handmade stories) you can see three examples of such educational programs implemented by the Soča Valley Development Centre, including the one I am presenting in this paper. You may choose English subtitles. The videos are available at <http://llw.acs.si/learningparade/video2/>.

In order to easily understand the selected learning projects, it should be noted that SC participants decide for themselves whether they will all work together on the same subject at the same time or work in groups (from 3 to 4 participants) and divide the content of the learning project into subprojects. It is important that the mentor sets up a well-organized teamwork, successfully coordinates it and groups it together. It should not be forgotten that learning content results from the participants' initiatives and their prior background.

## 1. STARTING POINT

The main topics of the study circle:

- seeing opportunities for growing healthy, home-grown food in the rural area without using harmful products for eliminating pests,
- Seeing opportunities for marketing surpluses.

## 2. EXAMPLES OF THE LEARNING PROJECTS

### PROJECT 1 - MY GARDEN AS A HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM

a) The first subproject dealt with the importance of sustainable development of rural areas and the necessity to preserve fertility of the farm soil and land (composting and fertilizing). The importance of growing our own food in a way that does not harm the environment and people was highlighted, because doing so the grown food preserves all its valuable nutrients which a person needs to function normally. The participants had the chance to get acquainted with some eco and bio product labels.

b) The second subproject highlighted the importance of crop rotation and green manure in maintaining soil fertility and preserving the natural balance of the environment.

c) The third subproject dealt with old seed varieties as part of our natural and cultural heritage. It emphasized the importance of preserving local seed varieties (old varieties) and encouraged the participants to collect, produce and exchange local seed varieties.

d) In the fourth subproject the participants had the chance to learn about preventive food safety. Hazardous chemical substances can be replaced with natural and biological products and extracts, which successfully eliminate pests. Homemade products or more precisely herbal extracts for managing pests were presented. Moreover, the participants got to know plants which protect each other (good and bad neighbors, companion planting).

### PROJECT 2 - HERBS AND SPICES

a) First subproject focused on herbs and spices, which we grow in our home garden patch. The participants learned how to grow them and when they can be picked, how are they dried and stored so they do not lose their

beneficial values. We talked about the effects that certain herbs have on us, how they can be used in the kitchen and learned about different products.

b) Second subproject was dedicated to herbs that we find in nature. The participants learned how and when they are picked, how are they dried and stored so that they do not lose their beneficial values. We talked about the effects that certain herbs have on us and learned about different products (tea mixtures, tinctures, syrups, oils, ointments, creams, poultices and covers). The participants were acquainted with the herb gathering code and warned about the side effects of medical plants and adverse side effects in case of an overuse.

c) Third subproject was intended to get familiar with herbs and spices that grow in nature and in our garden patch, according to their growth period, and was implemented throughout the entire literacy programme.

#### PROJECT 3 - MARKETING OF SURPLUSES AND GIFTS FROM THE HOME KITCHEN

a) First subproject talked about harvest marketing, arrangements and sale (packaging made from natural materials, decorating with dry herbs, etc.).

b) Second subproject introduced a variety of options on how to make useful homemade gifts from our kitchen suitable for different occasions (birthdays, anniversaries, New Year's and surprise gifts, etc.)

#### PROJECT 4 - PROFESSIONAL EXCURSION

Organizing and visiting an example of good practice on ECO or Biodynamic Farm.

### *9.3. Development of project learning in the case of the project 1 - My garden as a healthy ecosystem*

#### *Description and argumentation of the project:*

Garden is our little ecosystem for which we are responsible. If we want it to be healthy and does not present a treat to the environment and to us, we have to make the next two decisions: -my garden patch will not put

up with phytopharmaceutical products for eliminating pests and diseases, and –artificial/synthetic fertilizers have no place in my garden patch. Upon making these decisions we have to set up a cultivation plan, so that we will have a healthy, bountiful harvest.

The project is composed of four subprojects – here we have to consider the background knowledge of the participants; because it influences the pace in which we progress.

### *Subprojects and realization of study circle meetings:*

#### *a) First subproject:*

##### *Farming methods*

The participants get acquainted with different farming methods: from conventional, integrated, and organic farming to biodynamic farming. With the help of documentaries on this topic (e.g. *We Feed the World, Food, Inc., Our Daily Bread*, etc.) they get to see the path of some crops (e.g. tomato, lettuce, corn, etc.) from the grower to the market shelves. The participants are informed that these types of documentaries can be borrowed for free at the library.

##### *Sustainable development of rural areas:*

The participants learn about different farming methods or ways of growing food in the local environment, and also have the chance to follow the path of food from the grower to the market shelves or stalls. They also learn about the local tradition of food growing.

To realize this goal, participants has the option to turn to the net of local farmers (e.g. visiting an organic farm, milk/meat farm, etc.) and processing facilities (e.g. visiting *Planika* dairy factory in Kobarid, and finally retailers (e.g. visiting a farm shop). They also get to know local marketplaces and the green stock exchange.

##### *Preserving soil fertility:*

The participants learn about the basic building blocks of healthy soil, how to correctly take a soil sample for the soil analysis (ph, phosphor, potassium, organic matter), and get to know different methods of fertilizing, form farmyard manure, compost to green manure. They also learn the correct way to compost.

### *Branding*

The participants get acquainted with their rights to information which they as consumers have. In this context they get to know different labels, brands, certificates and other signs on the packaging of different food and also textile and cosmetic products.

They have a great variety of materials – in printed and electronic form – which can use to present this content and which they will like to read. Together, choose the topics to read and exchange opinions on. A mentor can obtain a variety of materials on local tradition through Local Action Groups (LAS) for the development, who also publish these kinds of publications themselves. The collaboration can be interesting, educational, creative and useful at the same time.

### *b) Second subproject:*

#### *Crop rotation*

The participants are informed about the importance of crop rotation and are presented with the example of a four course crop rotation system and the crop rotation book, they learn about the demands of different plants and about bad and good neighbors.

The mentor can encourage the participants to adopt the crop rotation system and make a crop rotation book, in other words to put the written into practice (into their fields and garden patches). This is an ideal experiment for checking if what is written also works in practice – do not trust everything you read. The participants can discuss examples of good and bad practice in collaboration with a biodynamic society.

### *c) Third subproject:*

#### *Seeds*

The participants get to know different types of seeds: from hybrids and old varieties to genetically modified seeds. They are warned about what do they have to pay attention to when buying seeds. The importance of preserving old local varieties is also highlighted.

With this topic they can turn to action groups, which deal with similar topics (self-supply associations, ekoci action group, biodynamic societies, Institute for Sustainable Development, etc.).

The group can venture on the exciting path of discovering and collecting «live» seeds, which many housewives in rural areas still preserve. If the

practice of exchanging old varieties of seeds and seedling plants does not yet exist in your environment the study circle can organise an event of this kind.

#### d) Forth subproject:

##### *Preventive plant protection measures*

The participants are presented with natural biological products and extracts for eliminating pest. They also learn about plants that protest each other (good and bad neighbors, companion planting, etc.). They can realize this topic in collaboration with a biodynamic society.

The meetings are mostly realized using active working methods, cooperative learning and discovery learning. Aids which are used are different publications, handbooks, newspapers, e-materials, flyers, etc. Group also learn from external experts.

#### *9.4. The role of mentor in project learning*

In Slovenia study circle meetings are led by one mentor. Mentor's role is:

- to guide the learning process and to make sure that the content is implemented appropriately;
- to take care that the goals are reached (additionally motivating the participants);
- to use diverse methods to maintain a relaxing atmosphere within the group;
- to ensure that the learning process does not take place only in the classroom;
- to inform the participants about different options for taking part in different activities, societies, campaigns, etc., that the local area offers.

The mentor does not consider the participants only as a group but also as individuals who can express their own wishes and needs to do a specific individual work or participate in other activities which they can present to the rest of the group.

Each study circle is formed on the basis of an objective, which it seeks to realize during each meeting. The mentor plays a special role since it depends largely on how the group will grow and how it will meet the objectives set (how participants feel).

Make it happen mentor can use different social games for strengthening of group membership, motivation and relaxing atmosphere.

### *9.5. Selected examples of social games*

Social games play an important role in communication and interaction (exchange of information). They can be used separately for each phase of collective action. When playing social games the mentor has to realize what the game is intended for and what results can be achieved or encouraged. Therefore, after each game, an analysis has to be carried out. The aim of any game can only be achieved if participants talk with each other and exchange their opinions. By doing so, the participants explore the possibility of using the experience gained in everyday life, as the transfer of experience is the essence of social learning.

It is also assumed that the mentor knows the participants in the group and its characteristics (can choose the most appropriate game, since not every game is suitable for every group and ages), possess a good knowledge of group dynamics and processes, as well as individual processes taking place when playing, and is equally prepared to participate. It is highly desirable that the mentor tests the social games before playing them with the participants.

At the beginning we suggest that the participants get to know each other. The success of the further work in the study circle (setting objectives, effective communication, democratic attitude, etc.) does not depend only on formally knowing each other. The objectives of introductory games are:

- establish initial contact among the participants,
- get rid of the tension and fear of public speaking,
- prevent the formation of subgroups and create a group,
- express impressions and feelings as well as expectations of the group.

What is behind the name and surname of a person helps us discover the cognitive games, but in any group, which seeks to achieve some common goals, the participants must get to know each other very well - their desires, motivations, expectations, etc. Words are the only means by which participants can openly talk to each other and avoid covering up facts. The mentor can achieve this with projection games that allow the group to detect in a funny way their blind spots. These games are an upgrade of cognitive games.

### 9.5.1. Example of social games to be played at the first meeting of the study circle

#### *Let's get to know each other*

*Objective:* The participants get to know each other not only by name, but also by hobbies and expectations; they also train their memory and learn how to plan

*Materials:* cloud-shaped paper, pencils, adhesive tape  
*Length:* 45 – 60 minutes (depending on how large the group is)

*Implementation – Part 1:* All participants (including the mentor) are placed in a circle. The mentor presents the purpose of the game and how to implement it. The first participant says his name and surname and mimes his favorite hobby (e.g.: photography, skiing, etc.). The next participant repeats the name and mimes the hobby of the first participant. Only at this point he introduces himself by saying his name and surname and miming his hobby. This process is repeated for every participant. The last participant tries to repeat the names and mime the hobbies of all participants.

*Comment:* This game can be carried out in a short or long form, depending on the available time. The basic information can be extended by the mentor with additional activities. Personally, I love postcards, photos or images with a variety of themes (can be cut out from magazines), which are placed on the table. Each participant chooses his favourite image and, when presenting it, he explains to everyone else why he has chosen that particular subject. The mentor encourages the players and raises additional questions to encourage communication.

*Implementation – Part 2:* The mentor gives the participants cloud-shaped paper balloons on which they write the expectations, desires, interests, etc. they would like to implement in the study circle. Each participant describes what he has written and pastes the balloon as high as possible onto the wall (symbolic meaning: ideas are still high in the clouds, and in order to implement them lot's of steps will be needed). Such an approach enables the group to coordinate and develop ideas in the next phase, to plan project-based learning, to seek compromises, to evaluate the process and to have a clear picture of the extent to which the individual expectations, ideas, etc. have been implemented and how much the participants have contributed to this.

*Comment:* Even in the next phases, when the participants upgrade their skills, they can add new ideas to the first initiatives. However, the mentor must always keep in mind the time available for their implementation and the fact that participants decide how in-depth their learning will be. Personally, I carry out this "walk from the clouds to the earth" according to the following steps:

Step 1 - Clouds: a set of ideas, initiatives, expectations, etc.

Step 2 - Cloud selection: coordination of individual ideas and selection of project ideas

Step 3 - Learning projects: design of learning content, group and individual work, project-based learning

Step 4 - Action target: coordination and planning of the action target, project-based learning is still on-going

Step 5 - Achieving the action target: organization and implementation of the action target, project-based learning is still on-going

Step 6 - End of the study circle: final evaluation

In order for the group to function properly, the mentor has to develop the group dynamics and group affiliation. The mentor has to know on who he/she can rely in different situations, whom he/she will assign a specific task, and he/she has to allow the participation of all participants (nobody should feel being left out).

So study circles activities pass through various stages of development (ups, downs, motivation, absence of motivation, etc.). Due to this fact, there is also a risk that the group falls apart. Interaction games can be used as a preventive measure to avoid the described situation.

### *9.5.2. Example of game for social learning – pyramid of priorities*

*Objective:* With this game participants verify if their common goal is still coordinated, what are the group dynamics and if the set plans are in line with the expectations of the group or beyond its capabilities. In addition, the game encourages them to actively think about the problems under discussion with other participants.

*Materials:* A4 plain paper sheets, pencils and A1 paper sheets for group work, large colour markers

*Length:* approx. 60 minutes

*Implementation:* The mentor distributes the A4 paper sheets and the pencils among the participants. Each of them should independently consider what is the most important thing that the study circle should implement during the available time. Participants have 10 minutes for this activity. During this time, the mentor draws on a A1 paper sheet a pyramid (triangle). He also writes down his own priorities.

In the next step, participants are divided into small groups (3 to 4 participants) and they harmonize the priorities of each of them and write them down on the joint pyramid of priorities. They have 10 to 15 minutes for this activity.

During the last part of the game, guided by the constructive dialogue of the mentor, participants build a joint pyramid of priorities. This means that the mentor draws on the sketch pyramid, which he drew on the A1 sheet of paper, the coordinated priorities of every group. The priorities agreed by the majority of the participants are then written again below the widest part of the pyramid, which means that they will definitely be implemented. In the upper parts of the pyramid the mentor writes the priorities, which will be realized to the extent that time permits, or those, which will become the basis for a new study circle. For this activity participants have approximately 20 minutes.

*Comment:* This game is very useful for defining the final action target, because participants have a lot of ideas and suggestions on how the study circle should present the acquired knowledge to the local environment. In this way, they can refresh their ideas and put them into the right time and financial context.

At the end the mentor also examines how participants responded to this social game.

Mentor has to pay special attention to the final meeting (just like to the first one). He/she has to stress the importance of the work that has been done and provide for a positive parting of the participants.

### *9.5.3. Example of final game – a message to the group*

*Objective:* With this game participants reflect on their own progress and at the same time offer some feedback to other members of the study circle

*Materials:* A4 plain paper, pencils

*Length:* Depending on how large the group is: approximately 3 minutes per person for the first part and approximately 4 minutes per person for the second part.

*Implementation:* The group sits in a circle. The mentor distributes the paper and the pencils and encourages the participants to draw a mirror (which can be of any shape) over the entire sheet of paper and write their name on the mirror. Then, each participant gives his own sheet of paper to the participant, who is sitting on his left. At this point the mentor encourages participants to write a short note on the mirror of the person that gave it to them. The note should refer to the positive impressions they got from that person during the study circle. These leaves/mirrors then circulate from person to person until they are given back to their owner. Now each participant reads all the messages written by other participants.

The mentor then encourages participants to think about what skills, values, knowledge, etc. they have acquired during the study circle and which of these they will surely use in their life. When all participants confirm to be ready, they are encouraged by the mentor to say what they have thought, in loose order.

*Comment:* This game is also part of the study circle's final evaluation. If some participant is not satisfied with the study circle, he should talk about it with other participants.

## 9.6. Effects

Positive effects of these kinds of learning content on the local community in which they are implemented cannot be evaluated only from the economic point of view and have to be evaluated also from the sociological and environmental point of view. The study circle enabled the interested local citizens a free access to knowledge and consequently helped them built their self-worth, actively collaborate in the community in which they live and assume the responsibility to themselves and others (growing healthy food). Increasing the self-supply you are able to save the family budget or even earn with the sale of surpluses.

These kinds of study circles enable the participants to build connections and collaborations, facilitate the passing of knowledge down to younger

generations, and testing if this knowledge is still useful today. Moreover, they help connecting education with local development. They open questions on the attitude of people towards the environment and on what we can do to preserve the environment in which we work such, that ensures a healthy way of life to us and other species. Last but not least, they encourage a positive attitude towards lifelong learning.

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Patricija Rejec works for Posoški razvojni center as an organizer and coordinator of adult education. She is mentor of study circles and teacher in the lifelong learning programs for adults too. She has extensive experience in study circles in the Upper Soča region. Over the last 10 years she has carried out around 30 implementations of study circles.

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# Appendix



### 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.

*cross border laboratory for the development of human resources and cooperation networks promoting local resources*

*"financed by the European cross border cooperation Programme Italy Slovenia 2007-2013, Axis 2 - Increase competitiveness and development of a knowledge-based society"*

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

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

*The initiative was implemented by educational and training institutions/organisations together with local development agencies/institutions and covered 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 focus on the promotion of a sustainable agriculture, of typical local products, the preservation of natural environment, the enhancement of local cultural and historical heritage, crafts revitalization, where increased awareness of local knowledge and identity is the key to upgrade the tourism offer and territorial marketing initiatives.

##### Highlighted needs

- Closer relationship between education/training and local development
- Fostering of innovation and new knowledge
- Enhancement of local traditional knowledge concerning the promotion of local products and environment or the reintroduction of endangered crafts
- Strengthening of public-private cooperation for local development
- Networking education and training initiatives at cross-border level

*Progetto finanziato nell'ambito del Programma per la Cooperazione Transfrontaliera Italia-Slovenia 2007-2013, dal Fondo europeo di sviluppo regionale e dai fondi nazionali.  
Projekt sofinanciran v okviru Programa čezmejnega sodelovanja Slovenija-Italija 2007-2013 iz sredstev Evropskega sklada za regionalni razvoj in nacionalnih sredstev*



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IN EVROPSKO KOHEZIJSKO POLITIKO

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2007-2013  
cooperazione territoriale europea  
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*Specificities and strengths of the study circle methodology in relation to the highlighted issues*

- Demand driven approach
- Participatory approach through knowledge elaboration and exchange (peer to peer)
- Enhancement of social networks learning
- The learning environment is characterised by freedom of decision, fostering 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 community based learning
- It helps to strengthen local identity and relations
- Action goal: Educational gains are concrete outputs to share at community level

#### OUR PATH

##### The reference models of the project

The project drew on the good practices of Slovenia (national system) and Region Toscana (regional LLL integrated system articulated at local micro-level) through participation to 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 modelling action highlighted local specificities in terms of specific environment, cross-border dimension and existing national and local regulatory frameworks concerning LLL and adult education. A new, original product was consequently shaped.

##### The project challenge

The project partnership committed itself to identify sustainable ways to carry out needs investigation, inducement of learning demand, SC planning, management, monitoring & evaluation activities by enhancing existing tools, competences, but also building new ones.

The output is 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 .

##### The Project concrete outputs

- Definition of the set of competences of the professional profile of SC tutor/mentor in the cross-border area (20 licensed mentors)
- A certified training programme for SC mentors including classroom attendance and e-learning activities as well as practical training in pilot study circles

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- 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 .
- 11 pilot study circles, 4 of which at cross-border level
- A cross-border network of local contact points for information delivery and detection of specific training needs
- A handbook for planning and running a cross-border Study Circle system.
- 6 Cross-border network agreements to run the SC system
- A scientific publication for the dissemination of the project results at European level

#### Pilot study circles implementation

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

The main topics concerned crafts, agriculture, tourism, environment encompassing the enhancement and sustainable use of local resources through a bottom up approach. The following main issues are highlighted: promotion of micro businesses networks, entrepreneurship and local vocations, territorial marketing and rural tourism products, active citizenship.

List of pilot Study circles:

Embraced by the hills

Our heritage: crafts and home made objects

Fruits from the emperor's garden

Along the paths of the krivapete

Sustainable textile paths

Fruit and vegetables cultivation

Food Park

Karst Land, constraints and opportunities

Local Cuisine

Green economy

Biomasses: an opportunity for the Torre and Natisona Valleys

Some data: 149 participants joined pilot study circles, 60% men, with quite an even distribution among the different ages, except for a lower level of participation of the young (18-29) and a majority of people with upper secondary education. Most participants were entrepreneurs/self employed followed by employees and retired people and last by unemployed people. Pilot activities were carried out with the support of 20 mentors, 36 local experts , and 56 organisations /institutions were involved in the promotional/dissemination activities.

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Pilot Study Circles

**STUDY CIRCLES**  
 Laboratorio transfrontaliero di sviluppo delle risorse umane e delle reti di cooperazione per la valorizzazione delle risorse del territorio.  
 Crossborder laboratories for sharing knowledges within or among territories for sustainable energy in view of climate change



## “Fruits from the emperors’ garden - let’s revive fruit production” Kanal - Levpa

**Learning goals**  
To exchange and gain new knowledge concerning traditionally grown and new species, pruning and grafting techniques

**Promotional goals**  
Dissemination at community level through elaboration of printed material, meetings in schools

**Products**






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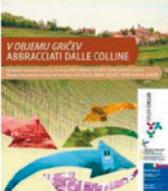
## “Embraced by the hills” - Collio/Brda

**Learning goals**  
To collect material and exchange knowledge about local cultural, historical attractions and natural sites  
To develop crossborder itineraries for diversified target groups

**Promotional goals**  
Preparation of the graphic design and content development of a tourist map

**Products**





<http://www.turismofvg.it/Gorizia-e-Collio>

**Pilot Study Circles**

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 Laboratorio transfrontaliero di sviluppo delle risorse umane e delle reti di cooperazione per la valorizzazione delle risorse del territorio.  
 Cooperare attraverso le risorse disponibili nelle reti di territorio per valorizzarle meglio in vista del futuro.



## “Our heritage, crafts and hand made objects” Natisone and Upper Soča Valleys

**Learning goals**  
 To research historical ethnological and cultural specificities of the cross-border area enhancing local heritage and cross-border integration  
 To identify and develop new products to sell



**Promotional goals**  
 Joint promotional initiatives and participation to local events



**Products**  
[www.soca-natisone.eu](http://www.soca-natisone.eu)



**Pilot Study Circles**

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## “Sustainable textile paths”, Capriva (GO) Collio

**Learning goals**  
 To improve the knowledge of the textile industry and its market trends  
 To gain new knowledge on sustainable textiles  
 To propose innovative artefacts prototypes  
 To learn about a product effective communication



**Promotional goals**  
 Elaboration of a printed and on-line catalogue of prototype studies  
 Organisation of an exhibition



**Products**  
[http://issuu.com/percorsitessiliecosostenibili/doc/spercorsi\\_tessili\\_def](http://issuu.com/percorsitessiliecosostenibili/doc/spercorsi_tessili_def)



Pilot Study Circles

**STUDY CIRCLES**  
 Laboratorio transfrontaliero di sviluppo della ricerca umana e delle reti di cooperazione per la valorizzazione delle risorse del territorio.  
 Comunque laboratorio di ricerca dovrebbe venir in modo soddisfacente da orientamento stesso in vista da obiettivi



### “Along the paths of the krivapete” Torre, Natisone and Upper Soča Valleys

**Learning goals**  
 To exchange knowledge about local cross-border tourist attractions  
 To exchange good practices concerning the tourist promotion of the territory and the elaboration of tourist products



**Promotional goals**  
 Preparation of 2 cross-border itineraries  
 Organisation of 2 study visits prepared by the SC participants




**Products**  
 Preparatory study for a blog to be promoted as a network of operators



Pilot Study Circles

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 Comunque laboratorio di ricerca dovrebbe venir in modo soddisfacente da orientamento stesso in vista da obiettivi



### “Karst land– constraints and opportunities”

**Learning goals**  
 To analyse the Karst specific environment  
 To deepen one’s knowledge on the main issues of karst land management as a protected area  
 To identify new promotional opportunities



**Promotional goals**  
 To analyse the opportunities to create a business network promoting local sustainable development as an added value  
 To develop a prototype of tourist/commercial product



**Products**  
 SWOT analysis paper for the local administration  
 web page : <http://carsonature.wordpress.com/>



Pilot Study Circles



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 Comunità laboratorij za razvoj človeških virov in mrež solidarnosti za razvrednotenje znanja in veščin na območju.



## “Biomasses: an opportunity for the Torre and Natisone Valleys”

*Learning goals*

- To exchange and acquire new knowledge concerning the activation of forest wood biomass plants suiting local specificities
- To improve knowledge of up to date technology in the field
- To search for funding opportunities

*Promotional goals*

- Organisation of a public meeting to share the results and raise local awareness on the subject

*Products*

- Project fiche “Conversion to post carbon energy systems through distributed energy networks based on the supply chain of local forest wood biomass”




Pilot Study Circles



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## “Fruit and vegetables cultivation – Cormons (GO) - Collio”




*Learning goals*

- To leverage and increase previous theoretical and practical knowledge
- To extend the implementation context from farmer’s land to home and community vegetable gardens

*Promotional goals*

- Organisation of local events also at crossborder level

*Product*

- photo diary

Pilot Study Circles



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 Comitato Internazionale di ricerca "Cooperazione" in modo partecipativo da promuovere progetti di valore nel territorio.



## “Park food” Eastern Veneto

*Learning goals*

- To identify traditional products and cultivated species having a potential economic impact
- To create the basket of products of the food park
- To develop the food park producers' network

*Promotional goals*

- To develop new tools suiting the promotional and selling strategies identified

*Products*

- Code of ethics for local products
- Newsletter
- Draft statute of the cultural association for the promotion of food culture



Pilot Study Circles



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## “Green economy in the building sector” Eastern Veneto

*Learning goals*

- To exchange and gain new knowledge on common interest issues: sustainable building, tender specifications and regulatory constraints
- To analyse the opportunities offered by business networking in terms of purchase of materials, avoidance of unfair competition

*Promotional goals*

- To promote a new shared vision suiting the market strategies identified

*Products*

- Video of the study circle activity



Pilot Study Circles



**STUDY CIRCLES**  
Laboratorio transfrontaliero di sviluppo delle risorse umane e delle reti di cooperazione per la valorizzazione delle risorse del territorio.  
Comunicare informazioni su ricerca, dibattito, video in modo multimedialmente coinvolgente attraverso il video in streaming.



## “Local cuisine” Eastern Veneto

*Learning goals*

To exchange knowledge concerning typical local products and food

To analyse the characteristics of quality cuisine and the criteria to identify and connote local cuisine

To analyse the difficulties to find high quality local products at market prices and the opportunities deriving from active collaboration between producers and restaurant owners



*Promotional goals*

To develop a shared strategic vision between local producers and restaurant owners in order to promote a km0 supply chain

*Products*

Video of the study circle activity

Pilot Study Circles



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Comunicare informazioni su ricerca, dibattito, video in modo multimedialmente coinvolgente attraverso il video in streaming.



## “Biowandering among skills and flavours” - Sagrado (GO) Karst


*Learning goals*

To exchange knowledge concerning local vegetable species and their properties

To compare cultivation techniques

To elaborate new dishes / recipes

*Promotional goals*

To create new menus based on local bioproducts to promote food and taste education

*Products*






## “Rose of Gorizia” – Gradisca d’Isonzo

### *Learning goals*

To gain new competences concerning trademarks for the promotion of agricultural products, and their use

To get to know how a consortium of producers operates

To exchange technical knowledge concerning the production of the red chicory type «Rose of Gorizia»



### *Promotional goals*

To analyse the pre-conditions for the creation of a red chicory producers' consortium

### *Products*

Draft statute of the consortium  
Draft regulations of the consortium

## 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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