SUPEER

SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION THROUGH PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

IO4

THE NETWORK PROGRAMME

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Network programme of the SUPEER project consists of developing and implementing a network/peer programme: "SUPEER peer co-creation and empowerment", which includes the pairing of local and migrant youth, a common networking programme and activities for intercultural exchange of experiences, cultural events, learning workshops, etc.

Through the SUPEER project's Network programme meetings, the aim is to empower young people by improving their intercultural knowledge and understanding of how culture influences the way we behave and respond to others. To create a safe space for youth to discuss and reflect on cross-cultural issues and for youth from minority backgrounds to meet locals and for both groups to have the courage to talk to Young people from other cultural backgrounds.

In order to realise the original IO4 programme, we started to disseminate the objectives of the agreed activities to various centres, such as vocational schools, institutes and organisations. We decided to present the project objectives and activities, by different types of schools, which have participated in other projects. These public schools host a large number of immigrant students, mostly from Latin American countries, and from Romania, but also from Asia, Morocco, Central Africa..., Most of these participants are between 17 and 25 years old.

The process of implementing the intercultural peer-to-peer programme for local youth and youth of immigrant origin faced some difficulties caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic. However, the young participants, driven by the desire to learn and discover new worlds, new cultures and new concepts fundamental to an inclusive, equitable and caring society, were able to adapt very well to the situation, participating in the programme, following the national pandemic contingency rules.

Through this document, we will review the objectives, the product, the activities carried out, and the lessons learned.

RECRUITMENT

The association has implemented different methods of recruiting participants for the activities, managing to spread the project to the target group, we collected the different selection/recruitment processes, the most optimal, and the means to reach a greater number of individuals. The covid situation has varied some methods, but the planning, and the results, have been carried out successfully.

-For the selection of participants, we had the following method in mind, which we managed to apply in part.

 We presented the project in the following ways:

Email, phone calls, publications in social networks.
Visiting organisations and centres and making a live presentation of the project.
In this way more participants and organisations were involved.
As for the selection, interviews were conducted, where aspects such as motivation took precedence. The interviews were conducted in person and online.

-Before the pandemic, local youth networks, youth groups (incorporating a diverse group of young people, including black and minority ethnic (BME) youth groups, faith-based youth groups, and LGBTQ youth groups) were approached. Also, through Youth Departments, such as Clavis, we contacted alumni and attempted to re-establish cooperation with local high schools, but with minimal response (due to the school closure management situation).

Youth workers

-A form has been designed for these groups to fill out as an expression of interest. Once completed, youth workers would have the opportunity to learn more about this project at an event. The idea was that while the youth workers were attending the event, they would be able to identify the youth they were working with to be recruited into this project.
Approximately 30 expressions of interest were received from youth groups and youth workers.

- University departments in charge of volunteering and social work were contacted. Unfortunately, this option was greatly affected due to the pandemic, as many classes were suspended or reduced, in most of the project partners' countries, although there was a lot of interest from departments before the lockdown.

The recruitment of participants, therefore, had several setbacks and difficulties caused by the uncertainty of the pandemic situation that prevented us from doing face-to-face activities for almost a year and a half. Nevertheless, in some periods the institutes were open with a mandatory formula of 75% of students in class and the other 25% following the classes through digital platforms. So, given this alternative solution, we took the opportunity and decided to spread the SUPEER intercultural peer-to-peer programme through our networks of school and teacher contacts, describing the project, its objectives, activities and results and presenting the opportunity to involve some students belonging to the target group of the programme, underlining the importance of acquiring intercultural skills and knowledge, working for an inclusive and intercultural society and involving students with different backgrounds with the aim of mutual integration and peer-to-peer support to live in today's society.

-Especially with regard to young people with a migrant background, it was important for us to also include role models in the selection of experts, i.e. people with a migrant background (1st/2nd generation) who have successfully integrated into the labour market and society.

- We chose to work with students and young people from various basic education projects. Of course, the participants were involved in this project on a voluntary basis; however, it is necessary to have a certain context (i.e., courses, classes, etc.) in which such a project can be presented and young people can be motivated to participate. Only through informal channels it is very difficult to get project participants; at least that was our case.

In the SUPEER project's Network programme meetings, our aim was to empower young people by improving their intercultural knowledge and understanding of how culture influences the way we behave and respond to each other. We wanted to create a safe space for youth to discuss and reflect on cross-cultural issues and for youth from minority backgrounds to meet locals and for both groups to have the courage to talk to youth from other cultural backgrounds. From October 2019 to February 2020, there were meetings with participants, but due to the blockage in March 2020, they were combined with online meetings.

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INSPIRATION

This section will include the methodologies and plans that have been applied, regardless of whether they have been carried out or not. In this way, different methods can be applied to carry out the different activities.

The SUPEER cultural programme was designed to meet the profile of the peers, who not only spoke a different language and had different cultural backgrounds, but also had different educational and social backgrounds. Therefore, it was clear from the outset that to promote integration and intercultural understanding and skill development among the peers it would be necessary to foster an objective and shared understanding of the culture, as well as a sense of affiliation to the multicultural network of the peers. To achieve this, the programme was designed in 3 stages, as follows:

1- The programme took as a starting point the introduction of the concept of culture through familiar and tangible cultural manifestations such as languages, food and music in different cultural groups and in different settings. The theme created a common ground for partners to present interesting manifestations of their own cultures and learn about other cultures. The theme also facilitated interesting discussions and dialogues among the peers and allowed them to get to know each other and feel comfortable in the group.

2- From the first topic, the programme moved on to introduce the conceptual manifestation of culture in norms, social duties, rights and roles in a cultural group. The objective here was to help peers appreciate that certain social norms and roles are appropriate for certain environments, and that they differ from one environment to another. Both migrant and local peers showed great interest in exploring different cultural norms and engaged in constructive and relevant dialogues and discussions such as rights, duties, and social and gender roles in different cultures.

3- The participants were then introduced to values as the core of culture. Through presentations and different activities, participants were guided to understand cultural values as an important part of one's cultural identity, as well as personal and human identity. The goal was to help peers appreciate that good values thrive in all cultures and in all environments. Both migrant and local peers showed great interest in the topic and engaged in constructive dialogues and discussions. In this process, the peers mentored each other in exploring their human, cultural and personal values and finding their shared values.

1- Youth exchanges
A youth exchange, carried out in Madrid on urban art has involved a group of selected young people. A total of 12 young people (5 migrants and 7 locals) were involved in the activities (Gymkhana around Madrid, icebreaker, thematic food...) was very

interesting as they got involved with young people from 8 other countries, who came to participate in the exchange. The result was very positive.

2- Games with Lego

An activity implemented was the realisation of some activities, designed to encourage the creativity of all, so, through many Lego figures, they had to create stories together, each participant created different figures, having to explain them to the rest. Together they created a little story with the characters they created. It was very interesting to see the young people supporting each other in a common project, very enriching for everyone. It was not really necessary to help them to integrate, they integrated by themselves, they even made telephone and social network contacts.

- Planning a guided tour of Madrid.

Twenty participants (8 migrants and 12 locals) were brought together to plan a guided tour of the city of Madrid. To do so, we gathered them in the city centre and gave them a tour of the historic centre. Afterwards, in a classroom workshop, they had to make a tour together. They had to research, distribute each stop, define a route, and do teamwork.

In a living library, participants do not borrow books, but borrow other people to talk to. The reader chooses a book from a list. The book is a person, an expert in a particular field. The reader then engages in a one-on-one conversation with the chosen book. The book tells its story, the reader asks questions. The clear and simple setting of a living library facilitates exchange, the transfer of information and knowledge, and knowledge of hitherto unknown fields of expertise and environments and other perspectives. It establishes a space for getting to know each other and brings people into contact who otherwise would not have met. It makes society more colourful, connected, open, unbiased and informed.

Participants, as well as experts from the fields of culture, theatre and adult education, were invited to take part in the "Living Library". Thus, on the one hand, participants who did not know each other were invited to exchange views in pairs or small groups, and on the other hand, they had the opportunity to talk to experts, role models, etc. from the fields of culture and education.

The format of the "Living Library" made it possible to include experts and multipliers, i.e. interesting interlocutors for the participants. At the same time, such an event gives us the opportunity to make the project known to interested parties, etc.

Especially with regard to young people with a migrant background, it was important for us to also include role models in the selection of experts, i.e. people with a migrant background (1st/2nd generation) who have successfully integrated into the Austrian labour market and society. In the specific case of our living library, the role models came from the field of culture and education, due to the peer-to-peer orientation of the project.

-Class meetings
Each meeting was devoted to a specific topic related to the main themes of Culture and Interculturality; Among them, topics such as active citizenship, social and cultural capital, peer learning and peer mentoring, youth empowerment, interculturality, multiculturality, intercultural communication, integration and inclusion, and more generally intercultural competences have been touched upon, with an approach focused on open and free dialogue, discussions and confrontations, debates and exchanges of ideas, visions and thoughts, all supported and followed by the trainer and the facilitator, aiming at conscious and critical learning of these new concepts.

In order to overcome the obstacles of social distance, while maintaining a high level of programme quality, and ensuring the active participation of each young person, each meeting was structured in the following way
1. Presentation phase - the topic(s) of the day were briefly introduced through   a general definition;
2. Discussion phase - direct and indirect questions, trick questions and images, short stories as support (newspaper news articles, current and past news, imaginary short stories, and other similar support) were used and given space for them to confront each other with the guidance of the facilitators, exchanging ideas, thoughts and personal vision of that particular topic. In this phase, the objective was not to arrive at a common and correct definition, but to make them reflect on the topic addressed in order to acquire new knowledge and at the same time to make their critical thinking develop in an open space free of judgments, where there are no right or wrong answers and questions;
3. Activity phase - this phase aimed to make the participants learn more about the topic with some fun activities, non-formal activities, short games, drawing exercises, pictures and videos, so as not to make the meetings' "normal school lessons" and instead make them have fun learning something new, respecting the social distancing and using a modified and adapted approach to the "learning by doing" situation.
4. Reflection phase: after having discussed the topic(s) and having put into practice the skills and knowledge that had just been presented, this phase aimed at arriving at a final, correct and common definition, followed and supported by practical, experiential and real examples in support of this definition, both from the participants and the facilitators.

5. Questions and tasks phase: at the end of each meeting, to support the work on the final products of the young participants, they were assigned a "task", each of which was intended for the creation of their final products, in order to give them a structure and a timetable to work on their products and, at the same time, to follow their work and answer all doubts, questions or even give them advice and help for it. The "homework" was briefly discussed and checked at the next meeting.

EVALUATION

These are the general results of the participants' evaluations, the most successful mechanisms and procedures carried out by the partners in relation to the evaluation of the target group.

At the end of the learning itinerary, we dedicated a moment of confrontation with the young participants, asking them what they thought of the whole intercultural peer-to-peer programme, what they had liked the most, what their feelings were, if they felt they had learned something new, and so on. What emerged from this final moment is that the young participants were very happy to have participated in such a programme, they underlined their appreciation for addressing issues and topics they were not aware of before; they liked learning what interculturality is and why it is so important to live in an intercultural society, learning about the differences and similarities between different cultures, learning more about their own culture and about the importance of mutual integration, experiencing non-formal activities that made them understand how deep and unknown the inner world of culture is; They also underlined their appreciation of the approach and methodology used, namely the fact that they had space to expose their ideas, thoughts and doubts and that there was a space for interaction within the group; they liked being able to use their voice to say their words and to be able to confront others on really interesting topics they did not know about. Finally, another important comment received from the young participants is that they liked working on the final product and that this helped them to better internalise the topics discussed by putting into practice what they have learned during the learning path.

The evaluation was therefore very positive on the part of the participants, who were enthusiastic to continue with the programme, which had to be interrupted due to the situation of the local/migrant community.

LESSONS LEARNED

We collected lessons learned from all partners, useful for the future implementation of intercultural peer-to-peer programs, at each stage of implementation, from recruitment, through actual implementation to final evaluation.

The Network's programme (IO4) is designed for activities between local and migrant youth, it is a product that requires presence.

But the outbreak of the pandemic brought other planned activities to a halt (joint guided tour, walks/coffee, leisure activities...).

This made us consider and reflect on how to successfully carry out the objectives set in extraordinary situations like this one.
These are difficult situations, but we must take advantage of our experience to encourage the participants.
This teaches us to create a "Plan B" to ensure the development of a structured and worked plan. As mentioned above, working to offer the same quality of activities, with good results, without having to condition attendance, would be a "Lesson Learned".
The development of different online meetings, with live activities, could bring us closer to the same objective raised in the programme.

The connection between the young people who have carried out the activities has been very enriching for us. Being able to work on the same common project with local organisations, schools or training centres has helped us to acquire cooperation skills.

At the organisational level, the contact between the different institutions to select participants has increased contacts and cooperation. Cooperation with institutions (i.e. schools, educational centres, course providers, etc.) facilitates the task of finding and motivating participants. The participants got involved in this project on a voluntary basis; however, it is necessary to have a certain context (i.e. courses, classes, etc.) in which such a project can be presented and motivate young people to participate. Through informal channels alone it is very difficult to get project participants; at least that was our case.
To work with youth in the project, it is important that the project facilitators have pedagogical, communicative and organisational skills. In general, the project did not pose major problems for the animators; they only had to attend to the framework, i.e., agreeing on meeting points, monitoring attendance, organising and structuring meetings together with the participants, suggesting and agreeing on cultural events.

The civic behaviour, together with the positive attitude of the participants, has raised our expectations regarding the quality results of the project. Participants maintained

contact through social networks, a connectivity that has been forged during the activities carried out.

From this experience, some useful tips and tricks can be used for the future implementation of intercultural peer-to-peer programmes, in each of their implementation phases, from recruitment, through the actual implementation, to the final evaluation, whether it is carried out face-to-face, online or even with a mixed online and face-to-face structure.

Personal and professional networks, such as school networks, teacher networks, as well as local, national or European platforms of teachers, educators and trainers, are useful means for the dissemination of activities, programmes, training courses and educational activities. Developing or joining these networks, or even using existing ones can be helpful, as these networks connect professionals working with the same target groups and thus, being able to present the opportunity to the target group, select or indicate potential interested participants, motivating them in a way adapted to the target group and underlining the results and benefits of participating in such activities, programmes or courses.

Another useful alternative is to use the network of contacts of young people who have already participated in previous similar projects, activities or programmes. In this way, the participants already know the organisation and the trainer(s), possibly trust the professionalism of the organisation and the good results derived from participating in such activities and programmes and, in case there is no interest on their part, they can continue to spread the word about the programme/activity/course to other peers, such as friends, colleagues, classmates.

In any case, whatever solution is adopted, what is critical to the successful recruitment of young participants is to motivate them by presenting the project but focusing on what they can gain from it, what results they can expect and how they can benefit from participating in it, both in their personal and professional world.

When organising a programme or course, the first thing to take into account is the target group, i.e. the age, cultural, social and educational background, and therefore tailoring everything to suit. This will help both in the execution itself and in the work and activities of each meeting, as well as in the final product.
The second important thing to keep in mind is the setting of the environment; the setting of the environment can make a big difference in the selection and delivery of some activities. There are very nice activities that can be done online but not in person and vice versa; therefore, before finalising the programs and activities, it is important to choose the environment in which the programme will take place.

Finally, during the implementation, especially with young people, it is advisable to have a trainer and a facilitator, especially in the case of large groups of participants. In this way, the trainer will have support in carrying out the activities and in managing the organisation of the activities, and at the same time, the young participants will have an additional figure who can guide them, giving support and help in their learning path. It is also advisable that both the animator and the trainer already have experience in carrying out activities with young people and with young people from different cultural backgrounds, in order to be able to deal with different values, traditions and habits and, already having intercultural competences, be able to solve or prevent any possible conflicts or misunderstandings and thus give high quality support to all participants ensuring a good final result.

In reference to the final product and for a case similar to what happened this year and last year due to the COVID 19 pandemic, when proposing options for the final product, I would propose digital alternatives, in case social contact is not possible.
The pairs or groups, could make a final digital product, such as a magazine, a short film, a documentary, diaries of a confinement as an immigrant ... etc..

CONCLUSION

The implementation process of the Intercultural peer-to-peer programme for young locals and young people with a migrant background dealt with some difficulties caused by the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the young participants, driven by a desire to learn and discover new worlds, new cultures and new concepts fundamental to an inclusive, equitable and united society, were able to adapt very well to the situation, participating in the programme with a mixed structure of face-to-face and online meetings, following the national pandemic contingency rules.

From this experience, some useful tips and tricks can be used for future implementation of intercultural peer-to-peer programme, in each of its implementation stages, from the recruitment, to the actual implementation up to the final evaluation, whether it takes place in person or online or even with a blended structure online and in person.

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