Journeys - Empowerment through Exploration of Cultural Heritage

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The protection and sustainment of cultural and heritage identities is crucial to the wellbeing of any society. Without question, what we take to be 'cultural and heritage' imperatives is socially constructed and defined. They are not instinctive but borne from habits, behaviour, reaction and tendencies that individuals acquire, practice and 'pass-on'. How we preserve and pass on those cultural tendencies, and of course, its importance, is one of the main tenets underpinning the *Journeys* project.

The *Journeys* project sought to support the development of an inclusive society with cultural heritage as a shared source of knowledge, education and experiences, mediated through an exploration of learning and training opportunities across five countries involved in the partnership. The aim was to develop training and learning materials that could be used more widely across European partner organisations and institutions working with children and adults. The activities of the project included study visits, non-formal education and learning workshops, formal activities and instructions, sharing of good practice, development of learning materials and the piloting and testing of the digital media for the mapping and sharing of cultural heritage opportunities and insights.

The project involved five different organisations or agencies involved with formal and non-formal education settings across Europe with knowledge on those cultural communities that have links with migration patterns over centuries into Europe, and for whom, there are challenges around the impact and implication of integration on the preservation of their culture. Ubele, for example, through their seminal report, *A Place to Call Home* (2015), highlighted the need to engage young people in developing, preserving and sustaining African Diaspora cultural artifacts, places, spaces and stories. The ongoing youth work by Stichting Interlock, with Surinamese, Indonesian, and Antillean communities in Amsterdam, and the work around Gypsies and Roma communities in Romania, sitting alongside the academic research by Serap Kanay on the historical background of Turkish people of African Heritage, all provided a strong foundation for the project and the partnership. Furthermore, enriching the partnership were the work of the Istanbul Medinyet University (IMU), with their expertise in Tourism and heritage alongside research started by Bodi Svetloba on the Indo-Javanese communities in Slovenia, ensured a wide and diverse cultural backdrop to the learning journeys that were crucial to an understanding and awareness of the diverse range of cultures being explored. Together, the partnership covered a large group of communities that would not have been possible if they were to act in isolation.

What activities did we undertake?

We undertook four study visits and convened a multiplier event, which attracted 105 registrants, though 72 actually participated on the day. Thus:

- Study visits, covering non-formal/formal workshops, sharing activities and opportunities and acquisition of knowledge on local cultures and communities within respective countries as well as an understanding and appreciation of tourism and heritage.
- Development and testing of the toolkit, comprising activities and exercises, which explored understanding of culture and heritage.
- Development of a digital application which is linked to a map of where and what the cultural event or spaces are that captures ancient cultural heritage preservation and promotion of diasporic communities in the UK, Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey.

Key findings and impact: what are the implications for adult and lifelong learning?

First, the project attracted with sustained involvement the following, which added value to the outputs developed and indication of the cascading potential across formal and non-formal educational environments:

- Educators/lecturers based at the University who were one of the partners as well as from non-formal education sector (e.g. NGO);
- Youth leaders and workers from two of the partner organisations
- Community development and policy practitioner
- School and education advisors and teachers

Second, as a result of the cascading principles and local events and activities embodied in the approach, we were able to reach 300 participants, with the single highest participation coming from the Multiplier event (n=72) and local events in Romania (n=44). There were other sessions held locally across the partnership in between each transnational event, especially within school settings, community groups and university programmes.

Third, the overall rating of the programme by participants reflected a high degree of confidence: 75% indicating that the project had a 'great' impact on them while 25% indicated that the impact was 'immense' - overall, 100% of participants agreed that the project had had some impact on them. As one remarked: *"...we have a lot of beautiful memories from these Journeys, and I think the most important ones are the strong connections created during this programme."*

Fourth, participants were involved in new non-formal educational opportunities that broadened their perspectives, knowledge and understanding about the different cultures and communities that they engaged with: the Surinamese communities in Amsterdam, the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller community in Piatra Neamt, the African Caribbean communities

in London, the Afro-Turk communities in Istanbul and the African and migrant communities in Ljubljana. Specifically, participants reported:

- On the impact of engaging and learning different cultural activities (e.g. Romanian dancing and Rasta drumming in London)
- Better understanding of migratory patterns and those cultural and heritage features that identified groups with their ancestral background (e.g. Java-Indonesian migration into Surinam, The Netherlands and Slovenia; Africans into Turkey and Caribbean communities into London and the UK more widely).
- Valuing and appreciating different cultural art forms and different forms of expression, including fashion, language, belief systems, museums, theatres and concerts.

Fifth, the participants could see the need for cultural heritage and the importance of having that knowledge, which was brought home so clearly and vividly through the presentation of the Turkish team on heritage, culture and tourism on the first mobility in Amsterdam: *what is culture and heritage*? The response of one participant summed up clearly how the programme impacted on them and their organisation, and one which indicates potential implication for lifelong learning: *"[the] Impact was great, and we have the support of our county council, school Inspectorate, museums, cultural associations."* Another commented that: *"I was able to engage with colleagues on possibilities of ongoing engagement after the programme ends."* And still another offered a glimpse of how some aspects of learning could be developed back in their own country: *"The Museum of the Home - permanently based here – and the workshops enabled a better understanding of the decolonisation of the curriculum, the education environment and intercultural perspective aligned with other cultures etc…. It was an inspiration to Turkish colleague to want to establish a similar production."*

Finally, participants received a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) certificate alongside attendance certificates recognised by Erasmus as tools reflective of undertaking successful learning journeys. This 'certification' approach helps to solidify and recognise the journey that had been undertaken and, were it to form future developments within lifelong learning institutions, especially with adults on a culture and heritage course/module, would offer some form of accreditation for so doing. This can only reinforce the importance of such an approach. In the longer term, this would raise understanding and recognition of the value and importance of intercultural perspectives as part of maturing societies; embracing and acknowledging culture as an evolving and developmental process.

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Steagul international al rromilor
Câmpia verde, cerul senin, roata
- nomadismul