



**International Academy of  
Experiential Education**

Final Report

Public Part

## Project information

### Project information

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# Executive Summary

Experiential education as a most effective method in adult education, especially for developing transversal competences (such as social, civic, cultural and intercultural competences and entrepreneurship) has been acknowledged by a number of adult education and training organizations across Europe and worldwide. It is used working with different groups of learners.

The educators and trainers who guide the process of experiential education need considerable professional preparation and background knowledge. The project partners' discussions in the project preparation stage and a deeper analysis of experiential education practices in the partners countries at the beginning of the project have proved that there is a lot of amateur experiential education happening and a clear need for deeper knowledge and experience that can be fulfilled by increasing adult educators' access to professional training courses on quality experiential education methodology.

In the communication "Adult learning: It is never too late to learn" the Commission urges "to ensure the quality of adult learning programmes: Member States must ensure that teaching methods and teaching staff are efficient and meet the needs of adult learners". Quality of adult education is a Grundtvig priority too. Thus our project responds to the key policy issues.

Responding to identified needs and priorities our project was aiming at producing the guiding principles and training materials for quality experiential education methodology courses and opening its valorization channels. During the the project

- we have done an overview of existing practices of adult experiential education in the partners' countries;
- we have prepared Principles for quality of experiential education, Structure of experiential education methodology course, a really rich Education materials pack;
- we have run a long term international training course for testing our methodology; via the 25 course participants and their individual projects (supervised by our trainers) we have reached more that 1100 adult educators and learners in experiential education in Europe;
- we worked with different sectors: youth non-formal education, adult non-formal education, high schools, universities, business organisations, social work and therapy (working with groups of people and individuals having eating disorders, mentally disabled people, social disadvantaged youngsters, children and adolescents with poor social skills and disorders, migrants, persons with cancer and their families, etc.); the participants valued the possibility to share very different experiences and work together;
- we have promoted and discussed our ideas in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Conferences of Experiential Educators in Europe and other conferences of adult educators;
- We have done a scientific phenomenological research on the process and results of a long term training course based on the quality principles that we share and promote;
- we have been creating materials and channels for dissemination and exploitation of the project results.

The project is being run by a partners consortium, which has been formed very carefully in order to ensure high quality of the project products, effective implementation of the project activities and a collaborative, intercultural atmosphere in the project processes. We work in different sectors, both formal and non-formal. We have wide experience in working with different groups of adult learners. We have been an informal network of organisations and experts from five countries who are concerned to improve experiential learning theory and practice for more than ten years. Working together in various constellations has given us a rich history of shared training and learning journeys. This encourages us to continue our discoveries and share our findings in adult education by increasing adult educators' access to professional training courses on experiential education methodology. The partnership includes *Outward Bound*, Belgium, *Kitokie projektai*, Lithuania; *Askorun ehf*, Iceland; *Kamaleonte*, Italy; *Vilnius Cooperative College*, Lithuania. An external evaluator of the project products is *Mark Taylor*.

More information about the project on [www.viaexperientia.net](http://www.viaexperientia.net)

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# 1. Project Objectives

**The aim of the project was the improvement of the content and delivery of adult education by increasing adult educators' access to professional training courses on quality experiential education methodology.**

Looking around we can find quite a number of definitions of experiential learning and education. At the beginning of this project we decided to produce a working description which we will test as we go along – so it is open to improvement!

We see experiential learning as a tool for social, personal and professional development. We use activities in the outdoors and nature as a main entry point to experience, always leaving the door open to other types of entry to experiential learning such as theatre, and creative arts.. Reflection is a key component in and activity of experiential learning – it needs to be learned and is used to produce change in future thought and behaviour; it helps go from experience to learning; and it works most effectively in “the here and now”. Experiential education is seen as the system which encompasses experiential learning.

Often when speaking of quality the mind is driven to the industrial system and the application of certain standards and rules in order to obtain a well made object or service. Quality of experiential education should not to be confused with that. Quality of experiential education can never be reduced to numbers. A set of Quality criteria in experiential education may be considered as a ‘translation’ of shared values formulated in terms that are more explicit and closer to the practice. When speaking about values we concentrate on the following:

- Respect of diversity
- Learning as a state of mind
- Accepting humans as unique and subjective
- Open for feed back
- Ready for change
- Understanding the changing nature of human being ”process thinking”
- Creativity
- Caring for people and loving
- Being aware that one remains always a learner
- Interculturally oriented
- Constructive, curious, humourous
- Giving priority to learning through discovery instead of learning through pure instruction and simulation.
- Having one's own facilitation style
- Respect of the environment

Quality criteria are open to on-going debate and participation.

**The objectives of the project are the following:**

**The first objective of the project is to develop (create and test) a professional course on quality experiential education methodology for adult educators and open it as a Grundtvig course for all adult educators in Europe.**

**The second objective of the project is to create a course where adult educators working in different sectors, - non-formal and formal; with different groups of learners, - youth, aged people, delinquents, migrants, etc, - can share their ideas on the experiential education methodology.**

**And the third focus of the project is collaboration of formal and non-formal education in implementing the course on experiential education methodology.**

When developing the course we have formulated its objectives in more details in order to explain the possible benefits of the course to the community of adult educators who have been invited to the course under the project and further repeated courses after the project is finished.

These objectives are the following:

- To empower participants to facilitate individual and group learning processes based on experiential learning principles
- To train participants in basic facilitation skills, such as, reflecting, active listening, mirroring, giving and receiving feedback, framing an activity.
- We will concentrate specifically on enabling participants to:
  - ❖ Use outdoor activities, bearing in mind that this is NOT a course for learning purely technical skills!
  - ❖ Analyse which stage the group and individuals have reached in their process;
  - ❖ Create a physically and emotionally safe learning environment even when dealing with tensions and conflicts in a group
  - ❖ Live with uncertainty and working chaos
- To familiarise the participants with experiential learning theory, history and current developments, plus exploring sources for further information and learning
- To encourage participants to take the conscious position of learners in the process
- To encourage creativity and the appropriate use of humour and fun
- To use the learning potential of diversity in multicultural groups
- To encourage participants to have their own perspective on the philosophical and theoretical backgrounds of experiential learning and to have a critical view on its application.
- To contribute to the development of a professional profile for experiential learning facilitators in Europe
- To document the training and provide educational materials useful also for others to use.

## **2. Project Approach**

**The key steps of the project are the following:**

### **1. Sensitising and Insight**

Partners' overviews of existing practices in partner countries, both in formal and non-formal education sectors, identification of common principles for quality of experiential learning, creation of the structure of an experiential learning methodology course.

### **2. Development of training material, its testing and elaboration**

The creation of training materials for the course on experiential training methodology through partners meetings, workshops, individual researches and writings.

Testing the course in a series of international and local seminars and project participants' individual projects.

Elaboration of the materials created after the testing of the course.

### **3. Valorisation (dissemination and exploitation of the project results)**

Dissemination actions through the project web site, articles in specialized newspapers or web sites, posters and flyers in the project partners' organisations and project participants organisations, Experiential Educators Europe Conferences (EEE) 2009, 2010.

Preparation of the plan for the exploitation of projects results based on the project partners and participants' products valorisation ideas, project participants' individual projects, registration of the created course as a Grundtvig course.

### **4. Quality assurance (quality plan)**

Careful planning of the project, which has started in the project application stage, is further carried out and is based on the previous activities results. Project implementation is set according to the planned schedule.

2 external evaluators, - one responsible for project process quality, the other responsible for products quality - monitor the project and provide feedbacks to the partnership.

### **5. Management of the project**

Planning and monitoring of projects activities, communication between projects partners and funding agency, problem-solving in time with the aim to assure:

- partnership collaboration during the project implementation process;
- effective planning and implementation of the activities in the project;
- efficient project finance management and reporting.

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

**The planned outputs of the project are the following:**

- Bases of principles and training materials for a quality experiential education course: overview of existing practices of adults' experiential learning in the partners' countries, common principles for quality of experiential learning, training materials pack.
- Channels for dissemination and exploitation of quality experiential education ideas raised within the project: internet site, course participants' individual projects and valorisation ideas, presentations of the project results in Experiential Educators Europe Conferences 2009, 2010, articles in specialised newspapers or news web pages about the project, publicity materials (posters, flyers).

During the project we created the bases of principles and training materials for a quality experiential education course: overview of existing practices of adults' experiential learning in the partners' countries, common principles for quality of experiential learning, training materials pack. The principles for quality of experiential learning and training materials pack were tested in a long term training course.

As it was indicated in the application, during the testing of the created course and its training materials adult educators have been involved. A group of 25 persons participated in the long term training course (September, 2009 – May, 2010). The course consisted of 10 days international course in Lithuania, 8 days of national meetings and participants individual training projects in different organisations.

The participants were from 5 countries – Italy, Belgium, Iceland, Latvia and Lithuania. They represented different sectors: youth non-formal education, adult non-formal education, high schools, universities, business organisations, social work and therapy (working with groups of people and individuals having eating disorders, mentally disabled people, social disadvantaged youngsters, children and adolescents with poor social skills and disorders, migrants, persons with cancer and their families, etc.).

As the course included participants' individual projects in different organisations around 1100 adult educators and learners in experiential education were involved in testing and elaboration of the training course and the materials created, and got acquainted with the developed methodology.

A number of dissemination actions were planned during the lifetime of the project: the creation of web site and publicising its address through the partners networks, in the dissemination events; placing on web site the products created in the project; providing articles in the specialized education newspapers or web sites about the products created; placing posters in the premises of the project partners organisations and project participants organisations; distributing flyers in the conferences and through project partner organisations and project participants' organisations. All the above things were done and even more than promised.

We expected the project website is visited 2000 times during the project lifetime. An internet site since its opening in April has been visited 5404 times by 2134 unique users from 74 countries. We promised the dissemination of project ideas in Experiential Educators Europe Conferences 2009, 2010 and share the project ideas with more than 200 educators there. We did workshops in the Experiential Educators Europe Conferences 2009, 2010 (reports in annex 5), moreover, we presented the project in 3 other conferences of adult educators. Mario D'Agostino presented the International Academy of Experiential Education project at the Outdoor Training conference organized by the Province of Lecce and held in Lecce (Italy)

in reference to the Leonardo Project Esprit to which almost 250 school teachers of the area have participated. Mario D'Agostino also lectured on Experiential Learning in Europe and disseminated the results of the International Academy of Experiential Education project at the second National Conference of Experiential Learning organized by the Italian Trainers' Association. Bjorn Vilhjálmsson presented the project in EOE 2010 Conference Encountering, Experiencing and Exploring Nature in Education on 22<sup>nd</sup>- 25<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

We promised 4 articles in newspapers or on webpages. We have 2 articles on other webpages: a press release about the project have been issued on the Baltic News Service on 22 April, 2009 and on the portal [www.formazione-esperienziale.it](http://www.formazione-esperienziale.it). And we have 3 articles on the project website. Via Experientia presentations have also been on the partners web sites. A few articles are on the way: one in Outward Bound Belgium newsletter ( spread = 120 non-for profit organizations and 111 companies ) (is going to be published in January 2011), another for Outward Bound International magazine with more than 4000 readers all over the world.

## 4. Partnerships

The partnership of the project has been formed very carefully in order to ensure high quality of the project products, effective implementation of the project activities and a collaborative, intercultural atmosphere in the project processes. We work in different sectors, both formal and non-formal. We have wide experience in working with different groups of adult learners. We have been an informal network of organisations and experts from five countries who are concerned to improve experiential learning theory and practice for more than ten years. Working together in various constellations has given us a rich history of shared training and learning journeys. This encourages us to continue our discoveries and share our findings in adult education by increasing adult educators' access to professional training courses on experiential education methodology.

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## 5. Plans for the Future

We believe that Academy does not end in November 2010!

We aim to continue:

- with developing novel approaches to experiential learning
- with extending our cooperation to further organisations in Europe and maybe beyond
- with the creation of a concrete academy for experiential education which will become a centre for experimentation and excellence!

We indicated adult educators firstly in the partner countries and then all around Europe as the target groups after the life time of the project. Following the pattern developed within the project we expect that long term target groups will involve participants from different sectors, - non-formal and formal; working with different groups of learners, - youth, aged people, delinquents, migrants, etc. Further collaboration of adult educators working in different sectors will be assured. The project aimed at the increase of adult educators' access to professional training courses on quality experiential education methodology. This aim continues to be valid after the project is finished.

**The partnership** has planned and is going to announce very soon the following events for the year 2011-2012:

- a self financed long term training course on the quality experiential education for adult educators in Europe, September, 2011- May, 2012 (according to the programme and patterns developed during the project);
- 2-3 short term courses of advanced level for experienced trainers of experiential education;
- an international festival of experiential education, 20-22 May, 2011, Sabaudia, Italy;
- a short term Grudtvig course on the quality experiential education for adult educators in Europe (the course details were discussed in the partners meeting September, 2010 and with the Lithuania national agency, the application to register the course will be submitted in January, 2011).

In addition to this we are working on a **book on the results of the Via Experientia training course**. The idea of the book was born during the final partners meetings in September and October 2010 after the scientific phenomenological research on the process and results of the long term training course of the project was finalised. **The research is an additional important product of the project which was not intended or indicated in the application**. The book will be based on the research results but it is not going to be a scientific book rather a practical one where the trainers of experiential education will share their experiences and insights.

Intellectual property rights of the project products belong to the whole partnership.

**The participants** of the project have planned a lot of projects in different organizations. They shared or plan to share their experience in the course with around **4370 adult** educators and learners in experiential education (see annex 10).

The participants are collaborating and sharing via e-mails and project website/alumni area. In addition to this the participants are organizing the alumni meeting 14-19 May, 2010, in Sabaudia, Italy.

**The project website** is active after the project is finished and the training materials on it are available.

## **6. Contribution to EU policies**

### **Contribution to the Objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme**

The project primarily contributed to the quality of life long learning. It responded to the need of increasing adult educators' access to professional training courses on quality experiential education methodology. The main aim of the project and its objectives indicated that the project was concentrated on the response to the need.

The European dimension was highlighted throughout the project:

Firstly, in the formation of the partnership: the partnership represents all regions of Europe: North – Island, South – Italy, East – Lithuania, West/Central – Belgium;

secondly, choosing the project results valorisation area: during the dissemination and exploitation of the results phases adult educators from all over Europe were reached;

thirdly, European policies on tuning learning throughout different sectors in different countries were addressed: issues of assessment, validation and accreditation of experience gained in the created course were discussed.

### **Contribution to the Specific Objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme**

The project responded to the objective encouraging to help provide adults with pathways to improving their knowledge and competences. On the bases of long and wide experience the partners of the project believe that experiential education is a powerful methodology to improve knowledge and competences of adults, especially transversal competences (such as learning to learn, social, civic, cultural and intercultural competences and entrepreneurship) which are among the agreed Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The partners confirm that today in the project partner's countries there is a lot of amateur experiential education cases and clear need for deeper knowledge and experience of the method. The implemented project provided wider access to professional training courses on quality experiential education methodology.

### **Contribution to the Operational Objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme**

The project responded to the operational objective to improve the quality and to increase the volume of cooperation between organisations involved in adult education throughout Europe. The partnership represented all regions of Europe: North – Island, South – Italy, East – Lithuania, West/Central – Belgium. A series of international and national seminars were inviting adult educators from different organisations in 4 partner countries to participate together, test the training materials, provide ideas for products elaboration, valorisation, initiate joint projects, run individual projects in their own organisations. The project spread discussions on project ideas in international Experiential Educators Europe Conferences.

### **Response to the 2008 Priorities of Grundtvig**

The project primarily contributed to the quality of life long learning. It responded to the need of increasing adult educators' access to professional training courses on quality experiential education methodology. The main aim of the project and its objectives indicated that the project was concentrated on the response to the need.

### **Adequacy to Lisbon Education & Training Progress Indicators**

(See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et\\_2010\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html))

The project contributes to the target: Open Learning Environment (Population aged 25-64 participating in education and training.)

During the project lifetime more than 1100 adult educators and learners were involved in the training courses directly and through the participants' individual projects. More than 300 educators were involved in discussions on project ideas during international conferences. Thousands of other have learned about the project ideas through the project website, articles, flyers.

**Contribution to the development of Lisbon Key Competences** (See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et\\_2010\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html))

The projects creates an environment favourable for the development of interpersonal, intercultural, social competences and civic competence

On the bases of a long and wide experience the partners of the project believe that experiential education is a powerful methodology to improve knowledge and competences of adults, especially transversal competences, - social, civic, cultural and intercultural competences, - which are among Lisbon key competences.

### **Response to LLP Horizontal policies**

The projects promoted the awareness of importance of cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe

The partnership assured cultural and language diversity in the project, partners represents all regions of Europe: North – Island, South – Italy, East – Lithuania, West/Central – Belgium. The project website and the training materials were produced in English and partners national languages Lithuanian, Italian, Icelandic, German, French, Dutch.

The course included short languages lessons, cultural and intercultural issues.

### **Complementarity with the policies of Culture programme**

As mentioned above experiential education is a powerful methodology to improve knowledge and competences of adults, especially transversal competences, -cultural and intercultural competences among them. The training course was providing the environment for the development of cultural and intercultural competences.

The training materials created was useful and adaptable in culture educators' activities.