



PROVINCIA DI GENOVA

SOCRATES - GRUNDTVIG PROGRAMME

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STUDY CIRCLES IN ITALY – THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PROVINCE OF GENOA Valentina Ghio

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The Province of Genoa includes 67 Municipalities grouped in 15 districts.

There are 871,733 (more than eight hundred and seventy thousand) people living in the Province, 47% males and 53% females. Genoa is the most populated municipality with 601.338 (more than six hundred thousand) inhabitants.

Under the Italian law the Province is positioned between the Municipality and the Regional Government and is responsible for representing its communities, fostering their interests, promoting and coordinating their development.

It has competence in areas which include the protection of the soil and of the environment, roads and transports, the safeguard of flora and fauna, hunting and fishing in inland waterways, the protection of water resources, training and labour policies, cultural policies and secondary schools.

Since the last years the Province intends to take more and more the role of “Community of Communities” not only by providing support to the smallest Municipalities, but also by enhancing their value within a “global-local” approach. To provide the communities with all its expertise in an efficient, effective and coordinated manner, through the “Provincia Administration Network”.

The LMA Policies Area aims to increase the opportunities for contact between citizens, employment promotion services and job demands, facilitating the collaboration between the various institutions having common or complementary purposes
It provides for the implementation of schemes for counselling, education and training of individuals as well as assisting them in their search for employment.

Specifically, in accordance with the guidelines of the European Social Fund (ESF) and regional planning, the Employment Policies Area plans the allocation of resources and activities related to:

- Employment promotion and development (for example with the promotion of job experiences, and the general activities of Employment Public Services (vocational guidance, matching job supply and demand..in the territory of the Province we have 7 Employment Centres)
- Equal opportunities and social inclusion (policies to promotes activities for increasing women, immigrants and people with disability employment;
- Local and sector growth (i.g. local development plans in touristic or naval sector...)

The Province of Genoa promotes Study Circles with a view to support those citizens wishing to improve their skills and knowledge (on an on-going, lifelong basis.)

The choice to use this informal learning tool has become increasingly necessary to facilitate the access to educational paths tailored to citizens' specific requirements, capable of responding to different needs, and which are not necessarily targeted at employability. Therefore, this tool is aimed at both working adults and people who are unemployed – due to their age or because they choose to be, especially if resulting from the fact of being women.

So, the reasons of the start of study circle project were:

- Increasing adult population for whom traditional learning offers may be inappropriate
- Increasing needs to facilitate the access of both people who have a job and of those who are outside the labour market to educational individual pathways .

Also Through the SCATE Project, we have tried to define, in the best way possible, the good practices needed to carry out and disseminate the activities of Study Circles, thanks to the cooperation and exchange of ideas with Partners from three European Countries.

Why study circles in Genoa?

As the majority of European Countries, also Italy and Genoa in particular are faced with an ever increasing adult and senior population, for whom traditional learning provision, be it formal schooling, training or adult lifelong education are becoming inadequate. As a consequence, it is significantly difficult for these people, to re-enter education and thus to have access to adult lifelong education schemes.

In this context and for this reasons in 2004 Province of Genoa promoted circle studies:

- To support non formal and short training experiences
- To give an answer when training is:
 - Not available in the traditional educational system
 - Not accessible to citizens who are not in a position to reach the formal opportunities
 - Not easy to manage and organize according to the standard training methods.

Another important reasons was:

- *to stimulate the activation of local resources for the social and cultural development of local suburban community*

The Province of Genoa announced the first call in October 2004.

A year after Province of Genoa funded 59 study circles (29 informal groups: that means study circles submitted by single person)

Dealt topics during the experimental stage: creative writing, hobbies, civics, local traditions, traditional crafts, modern technologies, theatre, cooking...

The first edition involved 458 participants, whose 298 over 40, that was a priority age. The participants were 75% women and 25% men.

For the first edition Province of Genoa allocated funds for 150.000,00 € (one hundred and fifty thousand euros)

The second call started in October 2005 and contains 4 deadlines: Nov 05, Jan 06, Mar 06, May 06

For the first two deadlines the results are:

- 53 presented projects
- 37 approved
- 20 funded (whose 15 are priority circles) In the next slides I explain the meaning of priority criteria.

From the first to the second call we'll have a lot of changes, but What the second call maintains:

Also in the second call Study Circle maintains the characteristics of an educational tool for groups of adults voluntarily meeting for a common interest. It always consists of a fixed group of 5-15 adults, where:

- Participants take responsibility for their own learning process with the interaction to which all participants contribute.

- Study circle projects can be submitted by an Authority or an Association (as formal group), or by single person (as informal group)

What the second call changes:

After the experimental stage, the development of the new announcement and of the necessary rules to correctly set up and manage Circles, took into consideration many aspects which were deemed as critical, to simplify the bureaucratic and administrative procedures. The three main changes are:

- Introduction of priority criteria
- Reduction of fund for single circle
- Simpler bureaucratic and administrative procedures

The main beneficiaries are adults, over 40 years of age, who reside in or have chosen the Province of Genoa as their domicile, have a low education level and carry out the Circle activities in peripheral municipalities of the Province or in remote areas of the Municipality of Genoa.

Firstly the funds are targeted at projects having one or more priority. Non priority projects are funded with a ratio of 1 non pr. out of 3 priority.

The funding made available in the first announcement was 2,000 euros which dropped down to 1,000 euros in the second announcement. The funds are more limited as, indeed, what is awarded a higher score is the ability to plan Circles capable of showing that they carry out their activities also with even less resources.

In order to be accepted and started, the Study Circle project must be presented with the documents required by the call: the project registration form, a form to fill out listing the characteristics of the Circle, the indication of the person responsible for coordination the Circle – in the case of an informal group – or acting as legal representative – in the case of an Authority or of an Association promoting the Circle.

The project must contain the financial planning. At the end the circle presents the confirmation of the planning of the expenses. For this second call, the Province doesn't ask any receipt, but only a declaration of the sustained expenses and doesn't refund expenses through credit payment to individual bank accounts, but by a single voucher given to the circle's leader at the end of the process.

After the first evaluation stage of priority criteria (age, qualifications, geographical location), the second evaluation concerns the project's merit and contents.

The first part of this second evaluation is about the analysis of motivations and the Methodology and clarity of contents. Methodology and clarity of contents are important to understand the real meaning of a circle and the real aims. But the risk is that the topics chosen may overlap with those covered by adult education. So the third criteria of evaluation is the

- Characteristics and contributions of beneficiaries (max 15 p), to verify that participants take responsibility for their own learning process with the interaction to which all participants contribute. It's important to underline that external experts may be used within the circle only if capable of facilitating the group at its initial stage to start the learning process and at its final stage of conclusion and evaluation. The external expert can be present for 2 or 3 meeting maximum.
- Intergenerational nature of project (max 5 p) The evaluation favours the circle with participants of different ages to exchange knowledge between generations.
- Another element of positive evaluation consists in the willingness by Circles to freely exchange tools and knowledge with other Circles or making the knowledge acquired in previous experiences available to new Circles, thus creating a new, precious and spontaneous network of ideas, projects and resources. (max 5 p.)
- Presentations of the Circles activities to the community (max 5 p.) The evaluation favours the possibility of a public presentation of the results of the circle and an involvement of local institutions and associations.

- Economic needs (max 5 p.). As I said before the evaluation fosters the capability of carrying out circles with less resources.
- Equal opportunities (max 16 p.) women 50% at least, disable people 30%, migrants 30%. Particular attention is paid to the principle of gender equality, development of foreign migrants integration. The integration of people with a physical and/or sensory disability is also positively evaluated and supported with adequate information – An output of the Scate Project is the Handbook of accessibility in study circles
- Information Society (max 4 p.). It's about the use of Internet and new technologies to collect and exchange information

Publicity: how to reach priority beneficiaries

Generally the publicity process starts with the publication of the funding call by the Province. The main sources of publicity have been:

- Organization of informative meetings at local municipal office and at central desks
- distribution of information material at the desks of decentralised towns, in the major city libraries and inside the main means of transport. A specific dedicated section in the web site of the Province and of other institutions or agencies involved.
- A daily information activity by phone or over the counter provided by the circles promotion and support Agency identified by the funding Authority, the Province in this case.
- One of the options that could be considered is the setting up of information booths at fairs and cultural events, with the participation of some of the circle members during the event to give useful information to start a circle.

We want to present you a good example of a study circle. It's the circle "Wangari Maathai", the name of the woman from Kenya who received the nobel premium for Peace in 2004. The circle was composed of three italian women and nine from different African countries. This circle was promoted by an association who works with migrants and the aim was to know the different idea of women, the habits about job, marriage, children's education of the different african countries, the story of these women. It was a very interesting experience for these women, an occasion to speak about the richness of their personal story and not only about their problems. The output of the circle is a book which collects the description of the women's history. It was officially presented in public the last week.

For study circle project Province of Genoa has assigned the task of circle support agency to Job Centre. It support the Province of Genoa to promote and manage the study circle project, in particular it

- Promotes activities and technical assistance for the presentation of proposals
- Monitors of Study Circles during their activities: formal documents, periodical visits of a sample of Study circles, questionnaire for participants

Promotes periodical meetings with Study Circle representatives