

SuReLa - Sustainability and Responsibility in Land use

Introduction

The UN proclaims with the **Decade for Education** for sustainable Development from 2005 to 2014 that education will help to develop widespread understanding of the interdependence and fragility of planetary life support systems. Europe has become a giant freewheeling experimental laboratory for rethinking human conditions and reconfiguring human institutions in the global era. (Jeremy Rifkin).

Across Europe, and the whole world, there is a renewed emphasis on making places where people want to live in a healthy environment. The Association Permaculture Austria is very interested to disseminate and participate our knowledge with learners in adult education and the universities. If we are building skills for sustainable living we have to expand the workforce to support and encourage especially young people, but also in adult education to increase the awareness of sustainable communities at all levels. Also to improve skills of learning for generic skills and create more cross-occupational learning opportunities.

Therefore within permaculture design courses we are fostering specific skills like ecological agriculture, solar architecture, appropriate technology and also generic skills - such as leadership, community engagement, project management, partnership working and effective communication - that underpin the technical and specialist expertise, helping people to overcome obstacles and leading to a greater understanding of how to make places truly sustainable.

Aims and objectives of the partnership

The aim of the Learning Partnership is to promote theoretical knowledge to the public about the responsible use of soil and land to co-operate in the development of measures against uncontrolled sealing and damage of soil and land.

The Partnership “Sustainability and Responsibility in Landuse” – SuReLa - is composed of various organizations and institutions, from different European countries, which are all aimed in education, especially in lifelong learning processes. Main partners are coming from diverse universities, which were participating an Erasmus/Socrates Intensive program “Responsible Use of Soil and Land and Regional Development” - IPSOIL, which was fostering specific actions and research for policy support, to integrate the ‘thematic strategy for soil protection’ from the DG Environment of the European Commission into an empowering dialogue on a regional basis.

New Partnership SuReLa is referring to previous outcomes of IPSOIL projects, which are prepared to be disseminated by suggested activities (workshops, seminars, lectures, etc.) to create awareness among the stakeholders in the region for a responsible use of soils and land and learning from each other. We want to address this knowledge to multipliers and adult learners with a simplified language conveying theoretical experiences and knowledge to different target groups.

The aim of the Learning Partnership is to promote the responsible use of natural resources, i.e. of soil by using the results of previous projects (i.e. IPSOIL I to III), simplifying the language of scientists, conveying experiences and knowledge to different target groups with the help of multipliers (“Learners” who are *teachers we want to educate*). For this we want to address

and mobilize as diverse and balanced groups of learners as possible, in relation to age, gender, education, occupation and income situation ...etc. as possible, in cooperation with organizations experienced in lifelong learning and the empowerment of stakeholders.

We want to bring together students and university staff members and practitioners in order to encourage efficient and multinational teaching of special topics, enable learners and teachers to work together to gain new perspectives on the topic being studied. These key challenges and opportunities for learners enables them, so that they are able to work together effectively, combining expertise, knowledge and experience to transform places into communities where people want to live and work, now and in the future. For example, the planner needs to interact with community groups, the farmer has to be able to work with those who'll be maintaining the infrastructure and the economist needs to consult also new experiences of soil scientist.

Based on knowledge, experience, and skills of the partners and accounting for the specific needs of the groups of learners the Learning Partnership will be aimed at interdisciplinary adult education related to regional issues focusing on empowerment, or the ability to control decisions having an impact on one's everyday life and consequently, on the sustainable use of natural resources, in particular multifunctional soil and land-use. We are accustomed to seeing teachers as lecturers and teaching a scholastic profession, each role insulated in its own way from everyday life. But the quality of interdisciplinary knowledge cannot be independent from the quality of interpersonal relations within the learning partnership. The pleasure of interacting inside the group may be determinant of the imagination and of the creativity that the group may be able to develop.

Nature and expertise of the organisation involved in the partnership

The Partnership “**SuReLa**“ will be composed of two types of institutions from different European countries, i.e. universities that have participated in the three years Erasmus/Socrates Intensive Program Responsible Use of Erasmus/Socrates Intensive Program “Responsible Use of Soil and Land and Regional Development” (IPSOIL I to III) an nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) cooperating with these universities.

The NGO **Permaculture Austria** is an Association with the aim to promote soil culture (Boden-Kultur) and human activities intending sustainable living and fostering an integrative ecological responsible lifestyle. Through practical design projects, courses, seminars, excursions, participants learn to work with wider communities and acquire ecological literacy. This Non governmental organisation has several educational centres all over Austria and is supporting interested clients with all kinds of educational material, books, videos etc. about permaculture.<http://permakultur.net/>

Permaculture is a holistic approach to landscape design and human culture. It is an attempt to integrate several disciplines, including biology, ecology, geography, agriculture, architecture, appropriate technology, gardening and community building. (Guy Baldwin / Cortez Island BC.

Permaculture design is a system of assembling conceptual, material and strategic components in a pattern which functions to benefit life in all its forms. It implies any form of design that minimizes environmentally destructive impacts by integrating itself with living processes to minimize resource depletion, preserve water cycles and respects species diversity. The

underlying philosophy is that we are a part of the natural environment and not separate from it, and that we must work with nature and its processes, rather than against it.

The coordinating organization is responsible for the project management within the Learning Partnership. It makes sure that targets are met and that all Partners meet their obligation. In addition it will collect and process general information from all participating partners and redistribute these to members of the Partnership, thus facilitating the organization of the project by communicating deadlines, important dates, events.. etc.

Participating organisations (educational facilities and NGOs) will organise and host particular meetings in their respective countries and be responsible for accommodation, seminar rooms, ...etc.

Within the Learning Partnership all partners will contribute with their expertise, knowledge and specific skills to the development of contents for the educational program.

Additionally, Academia Danubiana will be responsible for the dissemination of results and the technical support of a virtual learning environment, accessible to all participants and Learners.

Communication and cooperation between the participating organisations

Meetings, workshops and seminars will support direct contact and information exchange between the partners.

Making use of New Media, a virtual learning environment will be implemented on the server hosting Academia Danubiana. The open source solution Moodle offers a whole set of tools for online collaboration and data exchange. Static contents, upload areas and databases support the exchange of data, communication tools, such as forums for asynchronous communication as well as chats for real live communication will be maintained and moderated respectively by selected members of the Partnership.

Additional tools, such as messaging, VoIP and e-mail are widespread and state of the art tools used by all members of the Partnership.

Impacts

Learners and staff directly participating in activities of the partnership “**SuReLa**” benefit on various levels. The international, inter- and transdisciplinary experience will contribute to the improvement of communicative and organizational skills and facilitate personal contacts and relationships overcoming stereotypes (thus contributing to international understanding).

Elements of blended learning, i.e. seminars and workshops requiring physical attendance complemented by online contents and activities will require a high degree of discipline and self- organization by the participants but also allow for flexibility as everyone is allowed work at his or her pace within the timeframe agreed on by the partners. The acquired soft skills will comprise experiences in managing, coordinating projects, experiences in teaching, new insights in didactics and learning methods.

With respect to organizations and institutions the benefits will include international credit and reputation, new experiences on international platforms and new contacts, and a higher value of social capital (more experiences, up-to-date information, knowledge) among others.

Local communities (and learners) will receive state of the art scientific information related to the different practices of responsible use of natural resources and the implications on their daily lives presented in a comprehensive way. Information and knowledge enhances the degree of democratisation as it allows for the. Knowledge of options and the possible consequences of one's action as well as that of legal rights implies the empowerment of stakeholders in negotiation processes as well as in everyday community life and the arising opportunity for the ecologically sound and sustainable re-orientation of local and regional development.

Evaluation

For evaluating the success of the Learning Partnership it is a prerequisite to evaluate the attitudes of participants, learners and members of the communities involved. Qualitative as well as quantitative evaluation mechanisms will be implemented.

With regard to the quantitative aspect a set of measurable and representative criteria will be measured using standardised questionnaires for the preliminary assessment of the learners' ex-ante level of knowledge of issues described above (environmental issues, legal rights and responsibilities ...etc.). Their levels of knowledge upon completing the educational program will be assessed using an online test within the virtual learning environment.

Further aspects, such information on gender, occupation, age, level of education...and so forth will be included in the standardised preliminary questionnaire hosted by the virtual learning environment.

Every participant to the program, partners and learners will be asked to keep a diary during the program and to write an essay following each workshop in Neusiedl am See. These essays describe their feelings and perceptions during the program accounting for many of the qualitative aspects described in question C1.5., in particular their perception of others and of the program in general.

The possibility for anonymous (online) feed-back will deal with the aspects of coordination and the contents and processes within the seminars. These feed-backs will be accessible for learners and partners alike.

Additional aspects described that can be measured and do not need the development of new tools include: online activities (log-files) describing interest and the level of acceptance of tools and contents offered by the e-learning environment, practicability of outputs and result (upon implementation)

Dissemination and intercultural dialogue

For the internal dissemination of particular and final outputs between participating organizations and institutions the e-learning platform will be used featuring at least one database for the dissemination (download) of reports, papers and the like. The virtual learning environment also allows for the display of static contents, i.e. pdf-files.

Contact details of partners and learners registered for the virtual learning environment also allow for the distribution of files by e-mail if necessary.

For the exchange of further information and individual experiences topic related working forums will be created, accessible to all members of the Learning Partnership and registered learners. They will remain open throughout the project and can be used for the mutual support of learners and partners.

A comprehensive collection of the results can be downloaded by everyone interested from the webpage of Academia Danubiana for free complemented by additional information on the webpages of the participating institutions and organizations.

Additional ways for disseminating results and findings to other institutions, organisations and the local communities include local and regional media (news papers and TV stations), and with regard to the general public and thus the wider learning region community, press releases for national media as well as publications in print-media published by the institutes and organizations themselves (e.g. Permakultur).

Outside the project results and findings will further be distributed in presentations, lectures and seminars given by the members of the Learning Partnership contributing to the dissemination of information.

Various social events, such as international evenings allow for the intercultural dialogue and the exchange national habits, traditions, values by contributions of music and songs, national dishes and/or the display of traditional dresses and dances. It offers an opportunity to learn some common words from the different languages.

Specific activities

The Partnership “**SuReLa**” plans specific activities around actively involving adult learners throughout the Partnership.

First we need to create an interesting program and campaign for each meeting to gain a wide spectrum of learners and people from local communities. To promote our aims and goals we can make use of local media and flyers. Our common activities will be based on multilateral dialogue, motivation, games, competitions and practical work outdoors.

The contents of lectures and working packages for learners will be developed by the academic institution in cooperation with the participating organizations involved in adult education in a joint process. This combination allows for the communication of state-of-the-art methods and scientific findings to a non-scientific audience.

The e-learning platform (Moodle) is accessible to a high degree for the blind and visually impaired due to its encoding meeting w3c standards and national legislation (e.g. the Italian Legislation on Accessibility). Open issues have been fixed in the latest version released in March 2007 (Moodle version 1.8). The usability of the learning environment is also being improved continuously, the design of the interface does not discriminate between male and female users.

Facilities and rooms housing seminars, conferences and workshops hosted by the individual members of the Partnership have to be accessible by wheelchairs.