

” Fostering youth entrepreneurship and local development in rural areas through co-working and spaces reconversion

YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL



The project focuses on the promotion of co-working spaces/hubs as a concept to reconvert abandoned spaces and to promote entrepreneurship culture among young people.



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- CENTRO ITALIANO PER L'APPRENDIMENTO PERMANENTE (Italy)
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[HOMEPAGE](#)

INDEX

Introduction	page 4
Background	page 5
Slovenia	page 6
Italy	page 8
Greece	page 10
Spain	page 12
Latvia	page 14
Norway	page 16
Challenges and priorities	page 18
Follow up	page 19
New project proposals	page 20

Introduction

The IO6 represents one of the 6 intellectual outputs of the YOUTH RE-WORKING RURAL project. It could be an important milestone in promoting more focused research on the topic and a first step towards the implementation of joint activities and the development of a long-lasting strategic partnership of key education, governmental and relevant stakeholders.

It is issued from the research and training activities implemented during the project, namely:

- the research activity implemented in the framework of the IO 1 - The State of the Art and Map of Opportunities;
- the feedbacks of relevant experts and stakeholders (validation activity);

- the discussions held during the multiplier events;
- the evaluation by participants of the C1 activity;
- the evaluation by participants of the online training.

The research activity turned out to be relevant in order to identify country-specific trends, peculiarities and training needs, starting from which designing the training course.

The feedbacks of relevant experts and stakeholders were fundamental in order to finalise the first two intellectual outputs and select the key knowledge, skills and competences to design the training programme.

The discussions held during the multiplier events allowed the partnership to identify key challenges related to the reconversion of abandoned spaces, effective start and management of co-working & impact of co-working on local development and community.

The evaluation by participants of the C1 activity and of the online training turned out to be relevant in order to identify further ways of improvements and new areas to be explored.



Background

The project was inspired by similar experiences implemented in Europe such as “Coworking Digital Wallonia” and ‘Cowocat_Rural’, which aimed to boost the creation of employment and economic activity in rural areas and to promote the values of coworking and teleworking in the participating territories (Wallonia and Catalonia).

Rural areas in Europe are characterised by similar structural issues such as high unemployment rate, braindrain and depopulation, lack of job opportunities and more innovation.

The project focuses on the promotion of co-working spaces/hubs as a concept to reconvert abandoned spaces and to promote entrepreneurship culture among young people.

Co-working spaces can be the drivers for business development and innovation, by boosting talents potential and by creating synergies and networking opportunities among entrepreneurs and people able to fight against specific territorial challenges. They become local points of information and knowledge sharing and could activate rural areas by building social capital and creating new jobs (or opportunities for work) in local community. Finally, they could help the re-building and reviving old, abandoned places.

STATE OF THE ART AND CHALLENGES

Slovenia

Coworking expression in Slovenia is no longer a novelty. As times of financial crisis in 2008 took away hundreds of jobs and hopes, many found opportunity to serve themselves in various independent and entrepreneurial ways. The idea of shared offices, where you can rent a desk, an office or a meeting room and meet other entrepreneurs, seemed just fantastic and grew over the decade into a concept which create a new image of contemporary work in Slovenia.

In Slovenia existing coworking spaces are following two key concepts before establishing a coworking space: focus on shared offices and build friendly working community (network). In majority of cases this a way how to connect individuals. At the other hand, individuals are working in a common space with the aim of optimizing the cost of the premises and exchanging their views. The basic office infrastructure is available to the users, which most often includes a desk, a chair, high speed internet access, office supplies and the ability to print, scan.

All users are connected to a community of freelancers and creatives, who collaborates, exchanges experiences, connects with work collectives, etc. Coworking in Slovenia means something more than just sharing tables and spaces. Coworking is an important community first, coworking culture and philosophy are most often materialized as an open collaborative platform.



Katapult (Slovenia)

'It was great. I gained a lot of interesting information and made new acquaintances in a beautiful environment. An experience I would recommend to anyone.'



Jan Podobnik (Slovenia)

In the last decade many coworking spaces have been open and many of them, unfortunately, have been closed down. One of the reasons of such a growing trend is also the contribution of the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology to encouraging people to enter the entrepreneurial environment (self-employment government support, startup government support, etc.). The biggest role of the state was to encourage someone to decide to enter entrepreneurship with their own idea or knowledge, which will help them to survive in the long run and reduce the risk of that decision. The potential for the development of coworking culture on Slovenian territory was first identified by the Slovenia Coworking initiative, which was established by Luka Piškorič and Eva Matjaž in late 2011 in Ljubljana. They are running now Poligon, which is one of the oldest coworking space in Slovenia.

Partners from the Youth Re-Working Rural project have visited Poligon Creative Center, which is the largest coworking platform in Slovenia by space and community. Its coworking community has over 200 members. Its founders (Luka Piškorič, Marko Orel and Eva Perčič), as well as four communities that brought together various self-employed people in the creative industries. At the beginning was a kind of training ground for self-employed professionals and creative communities working

in the fields of creative economies, social entrepreneurship and culture. Today it attracts also other companies and wider public to cooperate with Poligon. Second project visit and great example of such a space is Katapult in Trbovlje, Slovenija, which was established in very rural area. That area was, historically speaking, mainly known as a coal mines region. Nowadays mines are shut down, and young people mostly fled to bigger cities out from the region. Katapult as a host of an entrepreneurial incubator and coworking space want to change the trend. They are offering attractive community in order to influence the future entrepreneurs. This is the reason why our multiplier event was organized there. And of-course we received great feedback after the presentation of the Youth Re Working project, as well they share their own experiences with us.

All the great visits we have had under Youth Re-Working Rural project and all the feedbacks received, resulted in a development of training course in Italy. The main aim of training course was to give co-worker start-upper certain knowledge on establishing and running a coworking space. The Slovenian participants loved it. They gained a lot of knowledge, interesting information and made new acquaintances in multicultural & international environment.

STATE OF THE ART AND CHALLENGES

Italy

The project Youth Re-working Rural has been challenging and inspiring at the same time: it challenged us to think out of the box and to come up with creative solutions for the C1 activity; it involved young people from each country that were able to think and grow new ideas together, proving that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; it allowed us as project partners to put ourselves in another's shoes and not only share points of view and experiences, but also take a step forward and use this expertise to imagine new scenarios for our county and our youth.

The core of the project is to promote rural areas as places of opportunities for young people who are willing to invest in themselves and their territory by re-converting abandoned buildings and transform them into co-working spaces.

We had the opportunity to test the very idea behind the whole project and we did this in Urbania. This has been the most interesting part of the project for us, being that the test was done not only in our town, but also in one of its most prestigious buildings.



Warehouse coworking factory (Italy)

”One of the most beautiful experiences was to engage different perspectives and apply them to the same objective: how to build a coworking space.”



Gianluca (Italy)

The building is from the XVII century and hasn't been used for a long time. Only recently it has been renovated and reconverted to host a temporary co-working. During the C1 activity, both the youth and the project partner were able to test the opportunities and the difficulties linked with the reuse of these spaces.

The most important aspect in terms of experience and logistic is to be able to live these spaces in their full potential: working, living, eating, and sleeping inside these places.

In fact, not only it has been an important experience in terms of education, but also for the management aspects. This part was examined in depth thanks to the visit

to the Co-working Warehouse Factory, which is based in Marotta. Here we were able to see how they reconverted an industrial abandoned building and talk to both the coworkers and the managers of the space. The founders shared their direct expertise about how to ideate, create, and run a coworking space for young people of this area. The main goal was to present and connect with real experiences that can influence and stimulate the participants to replicate what they learned in their countries.

STATE OF THE ART AND CHALLENGES

Greece

Currently, in Greece, there are few Coworking Spaces. The majority of them are located in Athens due to the large population. The project Youth – Re Working Rural gave us the opportunity to share the concept of the coworking in Larissa, a place surrounded by many rural areas.

Under the project framework, we implemented a coworking seminar in our city. People expressed great interest in attending this seminar. Totally, 70 persons attended. Most of them were students, who after the seminar contacted us and expressed their wiliness to attend the upcoming training activity in Italy. This was the first step to inform them about the coworking spaces, the benefits and challenges, and about the appropriate top skills that a new coworking manager must have in order to work in such a space. We pointed out and exchanged ideas about the abandoned places in Larissa that could be reconverted into coworking spaces. But, we came out with the result that even if there is the place, even if there is a great

team, another thing that is very important is the startup capital, which is difficult to be found in our city.

Unfortunately, in Larissa, we have just two places that promote the philosophy of the coworking. The first place is the Lido organization, where people can use the place for doing their homework, for organizing seminar and conferences, and for organizing cultural and artistic events. And the second place is the SB technologies, which is trying to become a coworking space. They have a place which is consisted of young people who work together, but at the moment the place isn't so big in order to, for example, people to come and use a desk just one day or organize meetings and seminars.



Lido Co-Working Space, Larissa (Greece)

”We learned how a great Co-Working Space can operate between people with different occupations. And how their ideas can work together. Also we enjoyed connecting with people from all over Europe. It was a great week full of experiences and opportunities of learning new things. ”



Costas and Athena (Greece)

During these two years of implementing the project, we developed great and useful materials that people can advise while trying to learn about coworking. The can use: 1) the “the state of the art and map of opportunities” to get know about what is the current situation of the concept in Europe and which places can be considered to be used for the building of a coworking space, 2) the “EQF for the coworking start-upper” to learn the most important skills and competences will might have in order to create or work in such a space, 3) the “Training programme” to experienced and get practice, 4) the “E-book for coworking management” to learn how they can establish and manage a coworking space, 5) the “Virtual Community” to check a hug list (500 data) of coworking spaces, accelerators, hubs, organizations, universities that exist in EU countries, and 6) the “Best Practices”, which is the present document, to learn from other experiences. All these useful tools and materials can be found on the project website: <https://youthreworking.eu/>.

During the training week in Italy, people learned in a very organized training schedule from how to recon-verted and redesign a place to how to manage and further develop it. The most important things that participants and coworking managers noted were:

- At the begging, when you start your own business, the startup capital came from your own savings and money that your family and friends give you as support.
- A space, or a business in general, after the first two years of establishment, can have profit (usually).
- The community in a space is one of the most important things, they can be the part of your team as well, but however is the people who make your space sustainable.
- Environment (the first impression) is the first thing that people can see in your space so try to have a friendly atmosphere and color design.
- Experience: spaces should offer to their people the experience and provide training in real-time.

Last but not least, knowledge without experience (practice) is half of the circle. In order to have a full circle, you will need both of them. Thanks to Youth-Reworking Rural project we have the great opportunity to visit these places, to talk with the people working there and use for a bit of time these places. This helped us to gain both knowledge and experience.

STATE OF THE ART AND CHALLENGES

Spain

Project Re-Working Rural had a great contribution in raising awareness on the concept of co-working as a real, feasible way to start and develop a business among young people in Extremadura.

Being this region populated by a number of rural areas, in most of the cases not well connected to the big urban centers, co-working becomes a powerful tool to promote the economic and social growth and, what it is even more critical, to retain young talents and fix the population.

From the feedback and experiences lived with the target groups involved in the different project phases and activities, Ecoanime realized that an effective communication and dissemination of the co-working concept among the local people (not only young people, but also entrepreneurs and other professionals) is one of the key factors for

the development of this innovative way of working and collaboration in Extremadura.

Fortunately, there are several ways and sources to arrange funding for entrepreneurial activities in Extremadura (mainly public funding). However, what usually local people need the most is knowledge, tools, mindset and successful references in order for them to get inspired, gain focus and stamina to start building their own path towards the creation and promotion of their business activities.

Readiness for working in a collaborative environment plays also a relevant role in this mix, once synergies at local level are fundamental in rural and disconnected areas.

In other words, Ecoanime understood that these target groups need to stay tuned and connected to the current trends, they need to know what determines the success or failure of a business, and they need to be aware about the different possibilities and opportunities when it comes to set up a business.

"It was a great opportunity to learn about the other participants and about myself. I learned new things about Europe and new ways of personal development. We found new ways of Human resources development, and the development of new spaces."



Alvaro (Spain)

What it is more important, they need to know that they are not alone and can rely on other professionals and companies to promote, complement and improve their businesses.

Summarizing, they need to understand that they can find support and build a win-win business relationship with other professionals and companies in order to reach their professional goals, and a co-working space can provide the perfect context to do so.

In the case of Extremadura, target groups that were directly involved in the project activities and outcomes were benefited in many different ways.

In particular, participants on C1 activity could know by firsthand how a co-working space works, as well as how an abandoned space can be renewed and exploited for a variety of purposes.

On a communicational and mindset perspective, they were able to, firstly, exchange experiences and perspectives with people with common interests but from other countries. Secondly, train, develop and improve their soft skills and abi-

lities as team players, as well as have access to a range of specific training and group activities on co-working, entrepreneurship and other related topics.

These positive outcomes have been also extended to all those target groups that have participated in remote activities such as the piloting of the online materials, analysis and research phases.

On a long term and at a regional level, milestones achieved during the project implementation will lay the foundations for a change of the mindset and a greater predisposition towards collaborative and innovative ways of working such as co-working.

STATE OF THE ART AND CHALLENGES

Latvia

The development of co-working spaces has gradually advanced in Latvia over the last few years. Co-working spaces are positively recognised and widely used in the capital city – Riga, moreover, the number of co-working spaces is increasing also in different regions of Latvia, often with the support of local municipalities.

The number of abandoned and vacant buildings is growing in Latvia, due to historical reasons, recent economic crisis and emigration wave. Therefore, it is important to keep the buildings, often of valuable historical and cultural heritage meaning, maintained until they find their purpose and use again.

One of the best practice story is the activities of association Free Riga. They are acting as an intermediate between the owners of the vacant buildings and the community or individuals with the need for a working space. The experience shows that the area around these buildings develop as the need for arranged infrastructure appears.



DarbaVieta, Riga

"I'm grateful for given opportunity to learn something new about enterprenuership in diverse group where people from all around Europe shared their thoughts and ideas. The event gave me opportunity not only to learn something new, but also to meet new people."



Jānis Daukšts

In rural areas co-working spaces can become an important part of local society. By building a community of doers, who seek for opportunities and are willing to invest their time and energy into development of the region. By becoming a community area for meetings, brainstorming, planning and realisation of local initiatives etc and by supporting new creative industries by helping them to understand and learn entrepreneurship, the start-up of their own business and encouraging them to work together.

To succesfully lead this type of co-working spaces it is importnat to have strong communication skills, project management, community leader competence, so we came together and developed useful materials and tools for future co-working startuppers, so they could learn more about entrepreneurship and coworking.

During the training week in Italy our participants were encouraged and stimulated to become entrepreneurs through setting up co-working spaces in currently abandoned spaces. They were able to develop necessary skills and competencies to not only start their own co-working space, but also how to manage them. Moreover, it was an oppurtunity for them to improve their skills, make connections, network and generate ideas to develop their own business.

STATE OF THE ART AND CHALLENGES

Norway

Sharing office facilities is not a new phenomenon in Norway, although organizing and conceptualizing it in a co-working space way is rather new. The initial research in Norway showed that the concept co-working space is rapidly growing in Norway, both as a business idea as well as from a bottom up perspective.

There are mainly two different ways of starting a co-working space. One is when investors are facilitating work spaces, they are hiring a “director” to organize the space and they have even different profiles for how they work. The other direction is when it is a bottom up initiative, this is when entrepreneurs are themselves initiating the co-working space development. The big difference between these approaches is the sense of belonging and ownership among the co-working partners/renters. Also, no matter in which way the co-working space was initiated, several of them do have a profile in entre-

preneurial direction, but mainly they are open for all kinds of entrepreneurs.

The research part of this Norwegian Youth Re-Working Rural project shows that leadership of the co-working space is crucial for its sustainability. In Norway our response was that knowledge and competence, among co-working space leaders, in how to lead and inspire people and groups is crucial. Additionally, awareness in how to run such a space in a human, entrepreneurial and economical way were defined as important parts of such a leaders needed skills.



Flow Coworking (Norway)

”Det er var inspirerende å møte unge
entreprenører fra hele Europa og i
fellesskap diskutere coworkingens
mange muligheter.”



Benjamin Frisvold (Norway)

In Norway, the Youth Re-Working Rural project got their deepest responses from Flow Co Working in Tromsø, as well as from Erlikpluss in Gratangen. Flow was initiated as a bottom up initiative, where local entrepreneurs used an abandoned beer brewery to facilitate entrepreneurial work space. Later an investor came and facilitated new spaces specially adapted for a co-working space. Erlikpluss in Gratangen is a design company facilitating for co-working in an abandoned school. Both these examples show how initiatives like this can be crucial for inspiring and developing local, regional and rural development. A co-working space is so much more than a work space. Therefore leadership of such facilities is crucial.

Useful feedback of how a co working space can be fruitful for rural development, was gathered at the Norwegian multiplier event, this was facilitated at Flow Co Working Space in Tromsø. Entrepreneurs and students gave feedback after the presentation of the Youth Re Working project, as well as sharing their own experiences. In general the feedback was clear about how initiating common inspiring arenas between entrepreneurs and research is important factors in rural development.

The projects research responses in each participating country, were the fundament when this Youth Re-Working Rural project developed a course in how to lead a co-working space. The Norwegian participants in this course gave quite good feedback, saying that they gathered a lot of useful knowledge as well as new insight in how to consciously focus on co-working space leadership, they highlighted the combination of soft skills and sustainable economy knowledge as useful.

The Norwegian participants in the developed Youth Re Working rural course in Italy, highlighted learning outcome of listening to experiences from other European countries.

Challenges and priorities

On the basis of the above countries experiences, we could identify some “key issues” that can be the starting point of further actions and the development of a long-lasting strategic partnership of key education, governmental and relevant stakeholders

In particular:

- while there is no need for co-working in most developed regions and cities, these structures are fundamental in less developed and rural areas, as these areas (smaller villages, places and suburbs) provide fewer opportunities for young people;
- co-working should be created through a bottom-up approach; therefore starting from the needs of (local) target groups and should be focused on specific sectors, depending from peculiarities of the region;
- while public co-working spaces are very successful, private ones seem not to work so well because of the price and other added obstacles; investments into space, high opening and maintenance costs that make high participation fee.

- co-working need to be spaces designed to work at a long term in an autonomous way, strategic vision and a sustainable business plan should be at the basis of each co-working activity;
- public authorities could favour the success of co-working by providing support to entrepreneurs, funding for spaces reconversion and reducing the bureaucratic burden.

Follow up

Levering on YOUTH RE-WORKING RURAL experience, partners commit themselves to further collaborate with each other and with other organisations on some of the above-mentioned open issues. Below some of

the actions which can be implemented in the next future to assure YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL sustainability as well as to improve and deepen cooperation among the participating organisations.

Sustainability of YOUTH RE- WORKING RURAL project
Inclusion of YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL training materials (Io 3 and Io 4...) within the training offer of partners
Transferability of YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL training materials to other relevant organisations (VET organisations, university, hubs, youth organisations, coworking, etc...)
Implementation of the "Training program for co-worker start-upper": partners could lever on the experience on C1 activity to create ad hoc short-term training courses
Joint private/public-funded research activity: partners could further analyse and study one or more YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL key findings and open issues
Creation of strategic partnership with co-workings spaces: partners could network with new and/or existing co-working spaces to start joint initiatives
Joint private/public-funded research activity: partners could further analyse and study one or more YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL key findings and open issues
Starting up a co-working business: partners could lever on the experience of the project to start a co-working activity

Apart from that, partners could exploit opportunities offered by the European Union. In particular, the EC supports youth entrepreneurship, hubs and cluster by:

- managing initiatives and programmes in these fields
- strengthening the evidence-base for policy making;

- helping identify best practices and policies.

Regarding funding, the afore mentioned topics as well as connected ones could be included in projects submitted under one or more EU Programmes (both directly managed by the European Commission as well as structural funds).

New project proposals		
Action	Call	Deadline
ERASMUS PLUS http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en		
Transferring YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL project in other EU countries	Erasmus Plus – Strategic partnership in the field of youth	February/ April/ October 2020
Transferring YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL project in third countries	Erasmus Plus – Capacity building in the field of youth	January/February 2020
Improving specific aspects/sectors of YOUTH RE WORKING RURAL project in the same EU countries	Erasmus Plus – Knowledge Alliance	February/ April/ October 2020
COSME https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cosme		
Calls for proposals related to entrepreneurship and clusters	Not yet available	To be foreseen in 2020 Work Programme



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