

ELYSE – European Learning for Youth in Social Enterprise

1st Transnational Meeting – 21-23 September 2015, Napoli, Italy



On 21 September the ELYSE project team joined together for our first meeting in the exciting city of Naples, Italy. We were travelling from the UK, Croatia, Portugal and Poland and for most of us it was a chance to meet each other and get to know each other for the first time. The three day meeting was hosted by Marco from our Naples-based partner, Project Ahead, and we met in the exciting new social venture space called FOQUS, an ex-convent within a deprived neighbourhood of Naples where the narrow streets are home to 10% of the children and women of Naples, and a lot of immigrants within Naples. FOQUS now hosts a school and several social ventures, and over the coming months will become home for many more, including a social incubator created by Project Ahead. It was great to be located within a building at the heart of the work of this inspiring organisation. It meant that as we presented our organisations to each other, and introduced the work we do with young people to each other, we had the accompaniment of the laughter of children at play, and the sounds of a youth orchestra to serenade us.

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The three days were extremely valuable from a project perspective, as a chance to plan the next year, agree on the research plan and clarify reporting responsibilities. However what was most exciting for me was the sharing of ideas as we learnt what each of the partner organisations does, and began to share our methods and key learnings with each other. These sparked some great discussions and started the learning and research journey. And the true inspiration was from the site visits to local social ventures that are creatively solving social problems.

One of these was a visit to the San Gennaro Catacombs. These are run by a social cooperative "La Paranza", composed of young people born in the local area, Rione Sanità, where there are very few opportunities for young people. The Catacombs show the beautiful unique history of the area, and La Paranza has grown from a group of three passionate young people volunteering to run tours and develop the site, to the current flourishing venture that employs 30 young people directly, and with 60,000 visitors coming each year. It was great to hear from our knowledgeable guide, who started the cooperative with his friends, the impact this venture was having on him and the community. These are the moments that really illustrate the value of socially entrepreneurial action, and the potential of young people to transform themselves and the community when given the right opportunities and support. I am looking forward to what we will learn over the coming year!



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