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INNOVATION AND PUBLIC POLICY: CO-FUNDED PROJECTS BY THE EU ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

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Abstract

This thesis aims to examine innovation's role within a specific branch of EU public policy: education and training. The EU program taken into consideration is the Erasmus+ program, which supports education, training, youth, and sport. Under the umbrella of the Erasmus+, two European co-funded projects have been analyzed to investigate the innovative aspects found both in their theoretical and concrete implementation, especially in strengthening young people's employment. The thesis is articulated in three parts. The first part will be focalized on explaining what is considered innovation and its role in public policy. A theoretical review of European policies in support of youth policies has also been underlined since it is the second element for the analysis. Innovation and youth employment should be able to enhance each other and the Erasmus+ program is considered by this thesis a fruitful space to have this encounter.

The second part is going to present the Research Design and the Methodology used to investigate this topic.

Finally, in the core part of this thesis, the role of innovation in supporting youth employment through the education branch of European policies has been analyzed, grounding the investigation on two Erasmus+ co-funded projects.

INTRODUCTION

Innovation is a central aspect of the society in which we live today. Consequently, European Union has it as one of its priorities. Lately, European Union has understood the need to empower a specific kind of innovation that is not always conceptualized within it, but that has been revealed to be essential for the growth of the community: social innovation. This is the reason why the European Commission is allocating more funds to programs dedicated to social innovation. Erasmus+ program is one of them, which promotes social innovation by strengthening education and training. The Erasmus+ program budget for 2021-2027 is €26.2 billion, compared with €14.7 billion for 2014-2020.[1] This thesis set out to investigate the relationship between (social) innovation and public policy and how it helps promote youth employment; it accomplished this by analyzing two ongoing projects co-funded by Erasmus+.

The first chapter is devoted to a review of the literature. In the first subchapter, a brief historical recap was made, presenting how the concept of innovation has evolved throughout human history. It was then presented how innovation is the product of interrelated parts of society, emphasizing that innovation cannot be only related to technological or industrial innovation; today it is increasingly clear that innovation starts from people, from society, and it is essential to give importance to a specific type of innovation: social innovation. Moreover, it has been observed that the connection between public policy- and social innovation-making is parallel and similar.

The following subchapter focuses on reviewing European policies that contribute to social innovation, particularly looking to enhance youth employment. In addition, to improve European policies in this area is highlighted the need to involve the target group (youth) in the policy-

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[1] *The new Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027 has launched!* (2021, March 25). European Education and Culture Executive Agency. https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/new-erasmus-programme-2021-2027-has-launched-2021-03-25_en

making process and where to take inspiration to make them concrete is also mentioned.

This is followed by a presentation of the program that funds the projects selected for research: the Erasmus+ program and how it contributes to social innovation.

Next comes the research design and methodology. What is innovation in public policy? How is the innovation element implemented in EU co-funded projects? These are the questions the thesis sought to answer. What elements of innovation this work intends to examine and consider for its evaluation is explained. In addition, the methodology is explained. Two Erasmus+ co-funded projects were chosen as the objects of the research, and the methodology used is observational research, specifically in the form of participant observation supplemented by a self-completed questionnaire. I had the opportunity to directly observe what happens in the two chosen projects and to obtain opinions from the project managers of the two projects through their responses to the questionnaires. This way, the succeeding chapter listed the various relevant features of the two projects; it is useful to have a clearer picture of the two projects, their goals, and structures to better understand the responses collected from the questionnaires and reported in the same chapter. Finally, the interpretation of the results, strengths, and weaknesses of the study was presented.

Chapter I – Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Innovation and public policy

Innovation has always been a part of society. It happened by mistake that human beings discovered new things; these breakthroughs prompted them to start looking for something else, something new. This restless characteristic of the human soul has been the driving force behind innovation, but it cannot be said that the concept of innovation has always had a positive connotation[2]. Indeed, human beings can take time to adapt to novelty. Based on the earliest philosophical writings we have in heritage, it is interesting to see how policy implications have changed views. Indeed, innovation means bringing new things and changing the current rhythm, so it is not automatically welcomed by people. Bringing change to an established order can include a revolution and a power shift. Therefore, this concept has not always been considered positive in the past.

It is interesting to see, for example, how monarchists in the 17th and 18th centuries accused republicans, those we usually call conservatives, of being "innovators." Over the centuries, this word has been used instrumentally, becoming an effective tool for politicians, admitting different interpretations of the term: its connotation changed rapidly, in positive terms, when governments understood its potential value and power, both in political and economic terms.

In modern society, innovation is a central discourse, closely linked to the idea of what the future should look like[3]. Initially, an innovator was considered a heretic: innovation is private freedom, a private choice that leads to change with an evil purpose, not only in religious terms but also in political and social terms. Today, the concept of innovation reveals other nuances and is even more related to the near future. According to

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[2] Godin, B. (2015). Innovation: a conceptual history of an anonymous concept. *Project on the Intellectual History of Innovation*, 1-36.
[3] Koselleck, R. (2004). *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time*. Columbia University Press.

contemporary Western thought, initiative, entrepreneurship, and creativity are the three characteristics necessary to have innovation. Innovation differs from the change in its intentional character: it is the mixed result of strategy and investment starting from something that already exists, and recombining ideas into new practices. So, this concept is not about theory, but requires action that goes to include and influence the community:

"Innovation is not a single action but a process of interrelated parts. It is not just the discovery of new knowledge, not just the development of a new product, manufacturing technique, or service, nor the creation of a new market. Rather, it is *all* [my italics] these things: a process in which all of these creative acts, from research to service, are present, acting together in an integrated way toward a common goal."[4]

The end of World War II, for example, proposed a different representation of innovation by the ruling powers. World and European economies needed a boost to cope with the difficult situation created by the conflict. Technological innovation began to be seen as crucial to improving productivity, reducing time wastage, and generating a competitive effect in terms of innovation and economic growth among different countries. Therefore, during this period, governments began to introduce policies to push and regulate innovation.

Thus, innovation is part of society, influencing its facets and covering different spheres. It is a mistake to think of it only in technological terms, and it makes no sense to attribute a positive or negative connotation to it; it is a process that includes the idea, its development, and the later result. Its effect can be considered positive or negative; it is a subjective matter because it can affect people's lives in opposite ways. The same is true for public policy. Public opinion affects policy decisions (input

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[4] Morton, J. A. (1968). The innovation of innovation. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, (2), 57-65.

legitimacy), but policy decisions can also change public opinion (output legitimacy)[5]; it is the same process that innovation can trigger. Public policy is surrounded by many exogenous factors that influence agenda setting, but its internal processes throughout its development and the outputs it produces will impact its legitimacy. For this reason, the public policy takes many different forms and differs greatly in terms of time and space. Public policy is characterized by dynamism, and it is challenging to consider them a finished product once a policy decision has been made. The question of whether, and the processes through which, policy attitudes change during the stages of policy formulation and implementation have been less explored. In a sense, this thesis explores one of the factors that go into changing or influencing a policy, namely innovation.

Politicians work and produce public actions that go beyond the political system. Political issues and scandals are appealing to people, but what matters to citizens is the value of what the political system creates: the smooth functioning of the transportation system, for example, or whether good education is provided for their children, effective health care, ... Public policies operate in a variety of fields and address various concerns, while also crossing many aspects of politics. This thesis will analyze the strong relationship between public policy and innovation; they have something in common: both can aim to produce a change in response to problems. And both affect the lives of citizens.

Since this thesis is based on the analysis of a European policy that addresses social issues, we can narrow it down to the concept of social innovation. An interesting definition of social innovation is the one that defines the term "as a process encompassing the emergence and adoption of socially creative strategies that reconfigure social relations to actualize

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[5] Jagers, S. C., Matti, S., & Nordblom, K. (2020). The evolution of public policy attitudes: comparing the mechanisms of policy support across the stages of a policy cycle. *Journal of Public Policy*, *40*(3), 428-448.

a given social goal."[6] As just mentioned, social innovation is born from a need, and it formulates a creative and socially inclusive answer to let the community benefit from it. Social innovation is a process driven by two 'engines': an agentic engine and a structural engine. The agentic engine requires an entity that is pushed to work and develop a strategy. The structural engine is how the structure, in which the strategy plays, responds to it, affects it and how it is going to give shape to the strategy. These engines are, in their turn, generated by an important motor: creativity. Social innovation to support a public policy needs to address specific necessities, reshape already existing structures, and produce something which may improve the lives of the involved community. So, there is a panoply of possible definitions of social innovations which can support a social goal. And of course, the success of a public policy is not directly guaranteed just because it is driven by social innovation; even if the social innovation reaches its goal and leads its path, it is possible that it could fail to improve social conditions and/or would not be appreciated and valorized in the same way by all people directly or indirectly affected by its change production.

The goal of socially innovative public policy is to reconfigure a social practice, its rules, and the social relations that this practice implies. It goes to the root of the problem and seeks to stimulate a different upcoming process.

The process of creating and implementing a public policy is the same as the process of producing a social innovation: a) agenda setting (identification of a problem/emergency); b) policy formulation (search for a strategy); c) decision making (institutionalization of the strategy process); d) policy implementation (strategy implementation) f) policy evaluation (evaluation of social change).

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[6] Pue, K., Vandergeest, C., & Breznitz, D. (2015). Toward a theory of social innovation. *Innovation Policy Lab White Paper*, (2016-01).

The environment in which a public policy, potentially bringing innovation, will be implemented is relevant throughout its process. The institutional framework in which it takes place is even more significant. In the next section, I will focus on a specific institutional level: the European level. A general overview of the process that has led the European Union to produce public policies will be provided, specifically addressing a current concern of the community: youth unemployment.

1.2 European policies in support of youth employment

The environment in which policies are implemented and the actors who implement them influence their content and implementation. In this thesis we will focus on the area of the European Union, which acts in a democratic model; therefore, the priorities of public policies implemented in this context are more related to citizen participation, social cohesion, social integration, and progress. And they are multidimensional, covering different aspects and dimensions of people's lives.

Youth policies are a key element of this thesis and of Europe. We can begin with a definition from the Council of Europe:

"Youth policy is a strategy implemented by public authorities to provide young people with opportunities and experiences that support their successful integration into society and enable them to be active and responsible members of their societies, as well as agents of change." [7]

The institution that formulates and creates the policies is also relevant in terms of how they are implemented and the results of that implementation. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, one of the constitutional documents of the European Union, states in its

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[7] Council of Europe. (2015, January 21). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights.* CM/Rec(2015)3, Retrieved April 15, 2022 from https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c46f7

preamble that one of its essential objectives is the constant improvement of the living and working conditions of its citizens.[8] To achieve this goal, the EU is committed to setting minimum standards on labor laws implemented by EU countries at the national level particularly those concerning working conditions and 'employment, informing and consulting workers during this process. The EU intervenes through directives, leaving it up to countries to decide what ways and means they will adopt to achieve the goals. The European Commission must check whether the directives have been transposed into national laws, and if they are not, the Commission can initiate infringement proceedings. In this way, it seeks to ensure a clear framework of rights and duties for both the workplace and workers, promoting sustainable economic growth and broader cohesion between areas of the EU. [9] Indeed, the EU is more inclined to promote policies that open up opportunities and experiences for people.

It is essential that the EU harnesses the youth workforce and maximizes its potential and effectiveness to contribute to their benefit and that of European society at large, enabling older generations to achieve an adequate and deserved retirement.

In November 2021, 2.842 million young persons (under 25) were unemployed in the EU, of whom 2.313 million were in the euro area. In November 2021, the youth unemployment rate was 15.4 % in the EU. Compared with November 2020, youth unemployment decreased by 225 000 in the EU. [10] Building on these data, we can consider this group of youth "at risk," that is, a large group of youth from different backgrounds and life circumstances who are typically considered to have problems with employment, continuing education, the transition from

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[8] Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. (2012). In *Official Journal of the European Union.* Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT.

[9] *Labour law - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission.* (n.d.). Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=157

[10] *Unemployment statistics - Statistics Explained.* (n.d.). Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics

education to work, and social engagement.[11] As a result, 'at-risk' youth is seen as a threat to economic growth and the future success of society, and must therefore be directed into education, employment, or other economically recognizable forms of activity.[12]

Another premise is necessary before continuing with the general overview of EU policies on youth: it is useful to clarify what is meant by youth. Within the European Union's frameworks and documentation, there are different targets for referring to young people; in the most recent EU policies on youth employment, which we will analyze in this thesis, young people are considered to be those who are under 25 years of age; while, for example, in the Erasmus+ program, which will also be a key tool for the development of this thesis, young people are considered to be those between the ages of 13 and 30.[13] Regarding the lack of a common and specific age group, it has been said that it may enable the design of measures that provide opportunities for a wider range of individuals. [14]

It is first necessary to provide a general overview of social policies at the EU level, whose ambition was also to contribute to youth employment and empowerment. The opening one is Cohesion Policy. Cohesion Policy is a key instrument, officially born in 1988, to promote business competitiveness, job creation, economic growth, sustainable development, and improve the quality of life of European citizens. Cohesion Policy was born as a result of the improvement of the Regional Policy Reform. Since then, Cohesion Policy began to be considered a policy tool, not just an economic one, based on an integrated approach that responded to the need to include regional authorities in decision-

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[11] Mäkelä, K., Mertanen, K., & Brunila, K. (2021). Outreach youth work and employability in the ethos of vulnerability. *Power and Education*, *13*(2), 100-115.

[12] Forkby, T., & Kiilakoski, T. (2014). Building capacity in youth work: Perspectives and practice in youth clubs in Finland and Sweden. *Youth & Policy*, *112*(2014), 1-17.

[13] European Commission. (2022). *Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2022.* Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/erasmus-programme-guide-2022-version-2

[14] Bello, B. G. (2020). European youth policy and young people: so far, so close?. *Materiales de filosofia del derecho,* 2020/05.

making and implementation to reduce social disparities. The Maastricht Treaty introduced the Cohesion Fund intended for those Member States whose income was less than 90 percent of the EU average; In addition, special attention has been paid to employment and to the necessity of strengthening the labor market by changing policy objectives.[15]

As just mentioned, a turning point in favor of employment policies can be identified in the mid-1990s, when employment began to be perceived as an important concern that needed to be addressed and also had to respond to criticism of the EU being interested only in economic goals: The European Employment Strategy (EES) took shape in 1997 following the introduction of an employment chapter in the Maastricht Treaty and the Luxembourg Summit, along with the Open Method of Coordination-the so-called Luxembourg Process-which is an annual cycle of coordination and monitoring of national employment policies based on the commitment of member states to establish a set of common objectives and targets.[16] The Luxembourg process was followed by the first document that can be considered the starting point of the EU's youth policy efforts: the White Paper on Youth (WPY) of 2001.[17] The focus of this document was to provide them with autonomy and to achieve this objective, it expressed the need to include youth in other policies through participation, information, and voluntary activities. What has been criticized is that the benefit pursued through these actions was focused on a privileged part of society, youth which already was equipped with human, social, and economic capital. [18] However, we will see that, over the years, it has been increasing the will to better include people from

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[15] Brunazzo, M. (2016). The history and evolution of Cohesion policy. In *Handbook on Cohesion Policy in the EU* (pp. 17-35). Edward Elgar Publishing.

[16] Konle-Seidl, R., (2021). *Employment policy | Fact Sheets on the European Union.* European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/54/employment-policy.

[17] European Commission, c. (2001, November 21). *European Commission white paper - A new impetus for European youth.* COM /. 2001/0681, Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a3fb3071-785e-4e15-a2cd-51cb40a6c06b

[18] Bourdieu, P., & Richardson, J. G. (1986). Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. *The forms of capital*, 241, 258.

disadvantaged backgrounds. The first step may be represented by the European Youth Pact (EYP), which, as part of the Lisbon Strategy[19], aimed to invest in young people to combat unemployment, social exclusion, and poverty.

The Europe 2020 Strategy - the EU's 10-year policy to improve employment and smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth in the EU - was an important way to address the difficult crisis of 2008, especially in terms of unemployment in southern European countries. The initiatives under its umbrella are the following ones: The *Youth on the Move:* it promoted youth mobility and the facilitation of young people's access to the labor market. The other measure is *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs* aimed at creating a better match between education and employers; the third deals more with social inclusion and preventing early school dropout. The Strategy 2020 was inspired by the pilot phase of Erasmus among Entrepreneurs one of its goals was to implement a long-term program to have an exchange between aspiring entrepreneurs and host companies.

In 2011, another action was implemented: *The Youth Opportunities Initiative (YOI).* The initiative aimed to help young people find quality jobs by allocating part of the European Social Funds to actions such as Your First EURES Job; its scope was also to create a network among the third sector and vocational training actors to promote better conditions and apprenticeship contracts.

This was followed by the *Youth Employment Package (YEP),* a set of initiatives designed to ensure that young people under 25 are eligible for education or a job or apprenticeship within four months of leaving formal education or unemployment. The goal was thus to support NEETs; Greece, Spain, and Italy received the largest share of YEI, amounting to

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[19] Eurostat - Statistics Explained. (2013, January, 3). Glossary: Lisbon Strategy. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Lisbon_Strategy.

€3.4 billion.[20] The third is The Youth Guarantee (YG), which was inspired by positive results in the Nordic countries and Austria. It was based on the public employment service's obligation to secure employment or training. This measure proved to be ineffective for people facing various barriers and unreached by employment services at the European level. services at the European level. In addition, this measure required a substantial amount of money and effective coordination between employment institutions and other stakeholders, factors that constantly change from country to country. In 2014, the Quality Framework for Traineeships[21] was launched to ensure fair and regulated rules for work experience and increase the chances of trainers getting a job. The intention was to provide training and exchange opportunities for young people to open up their possibilities in terms of employment by promoting mobility between different EU countries.

The Council Resolution[22], which adopted the Youth Strategy 2010-2018, states that: t is vitally important to enable all young people, men, and women, to make the most of their potential. Special mention is made of the role that youth work can play in this area: "youth work can help deal with unemployment, school failure, and social exclusion, as well as provide leisure time. It can also increase skills and support the transition from youth to adulthood". (Par. 5 (Section "Further Agrees that") of Council Resolution of November 27, 2009).

Based on the Council Resolution of November 26, 2018, the EU Youth Strategy[23] it is now in action as the framework for youth policy

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[20] O'Reilly, J., Eichhorst, W., Gábos, A., Hadjivassiliou, K., Lain, D., Leschke, J., ... & Villa, P. (2015). Five characteristics of youth unemployment in Europe: Flexibility, education, migration, family legacies, and EU policy. *Sage Open*, *5*(1), 21582440155749620

[21] Council of the European Union. (2014, March, 10). Council Recommendation 2014/C 88/01 of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships. In *Official Journal of the European Union*. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014H0327(01)

[22] Council of the European Union. (2014, November, 27). Council Resolution 2009/C 311/01 of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018). 2009/C 311/01. In Official *Journal of the European Union*. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32009G1219(01)

[23] European Union. (n.d.). *EU Youth Strategy.* European Youth Portal. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en

cooperation for 2019-2027. It focuses on three main areas: engage, connect and empower. To achieve these pillars, 11 European Youth Goals have been identified. The coordinator of this strategy is the European Commission, which - in its Communication[24] - reported that the strategy will pay special attention to reaching out to all young people regardless of their background or social status. These goals are achieved through specific youth programs such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. The communication also states that: "more action is needed for EU youth policy and the Erasmus+ program to be truly inclusive." And again, "Erasmus+, one of the EU's most successful instruments, helps young people expand their horizons and build bridges across the continent and beyond."

Although it is not a European Union body, it is also worth mentioning the role that the Council of Europe plays in terms of youth policy development in Europe due to some of its innovative features in the field of youth policy. Since the core of the CoE is the promotion of human rights, the methodology the organization uses to develop youth policies is co-management, seeking to include and strengthen the participation of the people who make up youth organizations, creating learning, opportunities, and experiences for them. The CoE also aims to provide a kit of standards to national governments should strive for in developing national youth policies. The participation of young people in helping to create policy would produce a better result since they are the target group being addressed. Indeed, creating channels where young people can express their ideas is essential. The CoE's co-management system allows governments and representatives of youth organizations to make program decisions together.

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[24] European Commission. (2018, May, 22). *COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS. Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy*. COM(2018) 269 final. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0269

Another similar example is at the EU level: the Youth Dialogue[25], a space where young people of the EU can bring their opinions and discuss the different points of view that have emerged from these tables, potentially influencing national and EU policies. There is a pressing need to analyze the needs of the target group but also examples of good practices and, at the same time, involve the target population in the policy process. Definitely, an effective and concrete policy needs to be coordinated by a specific body that deals with the strategy and ensures that the plan is transparent and accountable through a continuous monitoring and evaluation process to make potential improvements and adjustments.

Building on the previous premise, based on the idea that it is crucial to involve the target group in the policy process, youth work animation can be identified as a potential concrete tool for the youth policy process that follows this philosophy. As the Council of Europe states, "Youth work is composed by a set of activities, mostly focus on social, environmental, cultural issues which aim to promote the participation of young people in the community, and at the same time, building their future pathway through non-formal, informal, peer-learning." The learning component may rise some issues, as it has been argued that not all youth workers have the same experience; non-formal learning and its modalities need to be prepared. Some researchers argue that experiential (and informal) learning is more inclusive, as each individual has their own experiences and can begin the learning process from them: learning is transformative; it is our experience of the world that is changed.[26]

The Council of Europe synthesized its youth policy in the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030[27], further strengthening the co-management system.

[25] European Union. (n.d.). *What is the EU Youth Dialogue?.* European Youth Portal. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://youth.europa.eu/get-involved/eu-youth-dialogue/what-eu-youth-dialogue_en

[26] Ord, J., Carletti, M., Morciano, D., Siurala, L., Dansac, C., Cooper, S., ... & Zentner, M. (2022). European youth work policy and young people's experience of open access youth work. *Journal of Social Policy*, *51*(2), 303-323.

[27] Council of Europe. (2020, January 22*). Council Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030 (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 22 January 2020 at the 1365th meeting*

The collaboration between the European Union and the Council of Europe is a good example of how important it is to join forces and collaborate to provide innovation and better welfare for citizens: both the European Union and the Council of Europe have placed youth work as the main tool in their policy development and have established a partnership in this field toward youth-oriented activities. Youth workers can access an online platform to have an exchange of practices, but also benefit from training and/or studies, research, and publications, ...[28]

To further strengthen the sense of belonging to Europe, it is crucial for European institutions to empower Europe's younger generations by showing them what they can achieve by actively participating in the policy-making process, benefiting from and being part of the innovation process.

1.3 Erasmus+ program and the innovation element

Erasmus+ is the EU's program to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe.[29] The Program was launched in 1987 as an exchange project for higher education students[30]; it began with the involvement of eleven countries, reaching today the participation of more than 200 countries. Supervision and implementation of the program are divided between the European Commission and agencies at the national level. Its initial objective was to strengthen mobility in Europe, following the fundamental principle of providing EU citizens with the right to the free transfer of capital, labor, and people, expressed in the Treaty of Rome[31] (1957), mobility being essential to deepen the feeling of European

of the Ministers' Deputies). CM/Res(2020)2*,* Retrieved April 20, 2022, from https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680998935

[28] Council of Europe; European Union. (n.d). *The EU-CoE youth partnership homepage.* Retrieved April 21, 2022, from https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership

[29] European Commission. (n.d.). *What is Erasmus+?* Retrieved April 21, 2022, from https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/what-is-erasmus

[30] European Commission. (2017, January 26). *From Erasmus to Erasmus+: a story of 30 years.* Retrieved April 22, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_17_83

[31] Treaty establishing the European Economic Community – Treaty of Rome. (1957, March, 25). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:11957E/TXT

integration. The process of European integration began with a strong economic connotation, and will now expand to a cultural aspect, which aims to build a stronger active European citizenship by providing all citizens with equal opportunities. "The general objective of the Program is to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional, and personal development of people in education, training, youth, and sport, in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs, and social cohesion, to driving innovation, and to strengthening European identity and active citizenship."[32]

The key aspects of the Program are therefore learning, training, innovation, mobility, and belonging to Europe.

By promoting youth mobility, young people are more likely to increase their networks, build alliances and gain more knowledge, expanding their opportunities in both personal and professional terms. Through mobility exchange, the youth can learn from the habits and practices of other countries and develop new skills, both hard and soft, that are likely to be more adaptable to the current labor market because of their international dimension.

European identity and strengthening European citizenship are two important objectives pursued by the Program. European citizenship is more related to the political aspect, defining membership in the European community, and encompassing the rights and duties of the individual within the European legal framework; European identity is the component that connects the individual and society. The interactions created by the drive for European integration have fostered the development of innovation. The Erasmus+ program represents an opportunity to strengthen identity by making the individual feel part of, and identify with, a European community. At the same time, it reflects its positive effects by connecting people from all over Europe, creating

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[32] European Commission. (2022). Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2022. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/erasmus-programme-guide-2022-version-2

networks and synergies, and allowing young people to have an exchange of ideas, traditions, and cultures that come together in a process of social innovation. Indeed, social innovation is an interactive process, and spatial proximity fosters knowledge exchange, knowledge spillovers, and innovation relationships.[33] But what is an innovation under the Erasmus+ Program? The first type of innovation that can be discussed is the internationalization of education and training. Higher education systems are pushing toward the internationalization of curricula to give them more quality and innovative aspects; there is also an aspect of internationalization in terms of recognition; the recognition of academic and professional qualifications at the supranational level is affecting the structure and content of curricula. This is the result of agreements between countries that do not interfere with national policies but, on the contrary, integrate the national basis with the international dimension. At the same time, the globalization of education and training allows nations to be better prepared to ride the wave of new market opportunities and develop new programs more in line with them, collaborating with actors such as businesses, shaping tailored curricula that take into account market needs and functional actions in response to them. Regarding market needs, it is important to mention another innovation brought by the digital component. If we look at the current Erasmus+ Program priorities included in the guide, digital transformation is second. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced this need even more; in the program, the digital component of education has been and is increasingly an aspect emphasized to bring better quality to education, expand access to education, and promote inclusion. Concretely, digital transformation is enabling youth organizations to expand their activities, such as offering nonformal learning activities on or through digital tools. This is an innovative aspect that we will explore

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[33] Tödtling, F., Lehner, P., & Kaufmann, A. (2009). Do different types of innovation rely on specific kinds of knowledge interactions?. *Technovation*, *29*(1), 59-71.

in detail in the development of this thesis. In fact, what this thesis aims to demonstrate is that innovation can also be found in EU programs such as Erasmus+, which are not directly focused on promoting innovation; during data collection, I observed that there is a large component of the literature that focuses on demonstrating how programs such as Horizon, directly related to research and innovation, have brought innovation and progress to the EU community. The progress and innovation that the Horizon program brings are easier to identify and measure since they are based on scientific and technological achievements, which are fundamental to advance[34]; but what I want to emphasize is that there is also another innovation path, within other EU programs, more related to social innovation, which is more difficult to ascertain and probably needs more time for its effects to be perceived.

The primary focus of this thesis will be to research how projects co-funded by the Erasmus+ program can be concrete examples of social innovation in education, with particular reference to the integration of digital tools and the exchange of best practices and activities among EU partner organizations.

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[34] European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, (2017). *Interim evaluation of Horizon 2020: Commission staff working document*. Publications Office. Retrieved April 26, 2022, from https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fad8c173-7e42-11e7-b5c6-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

Chapter II – Research Design & Methodology

2.1 Research design and research question

This chapter presents and further explains the concrete research objective of this thesis, namely, to investigate where to find elements of innovation in European projects co-funded by the Erasmus+ program.

In addition, the methodology and framework used to conduct the investigation are also explained in this chapter.

In the past, the element of innovation was sought and investigated because it represented, and still represents, a source of growth; therefore, the focus on innovation has mostly been related to the corporate, economic, and business world. What is changing is our perception of human capital, the value that humans bring to innovation in terms of productivity, broadening the spectrum and valuing new attributes such as personal characteristics, creativity, well-being, and connection with peers, ...[35]

But why should this be linked to public policy? Public policies provide opportunities to improve people's lives by supporting and facilitating their ability to shape innovative forms. Indeed, it has been seen that readiness for change profoundly influences the adoption or rejection of innovations. In public policymaking and, in this case, in European-funded projects, the involvement of citizens, who are perceived as important partners in developing and redesigning public services, is crucial.[36] Their participation can be conceptualized in three different contexts: a) citizens as co-implementers: implementation of public social activities that have been carried out by governments in the past; b) citizens as co-designers: involvement of citizens in designing the content and process of activities; and c) citizens as initiators: citizens as initiators of a new practice, a new

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[35] Lenihan, H., McGuirk, H., & Murphy, K. R. (2019). Driving innovation: Public policy and human capital. *Research Policy*, *48*(9), 103791.

[36] Voorberg, W. H., Bekkers, V. J., & Tummers, L. G. (2015). A systematic review of co-creation and co-production: Embarking on the social innovation journey. *Public management review*, *17*(9), 1333-1357.

activity. Participation is a value that needs to be spread and strengthened. It brings positive results and effects at both individual and societal levels. To make involvement more effective, it is important to investigate what factors contribute to citizen participation to address them and make them more accessible to all. Public or private entities, organizations, and entities must work on producing interesting activities and events to engage more and more people at all three levels. The goal of organizations is to make citizens aware of the means they have at their disposal. Involving citizens in design/production activities should be seen as a symbolic process that engages them more politically and democratically in decision-making. It also enables public policies to respond to specific and concrete needs, directly improving people's lives, achieving a more just and appropriate proportion and provision of money, and facilitating greater accountability and transparency.

The development of a European project hides many aspects to consider; first of all, it requires partners to have the ability to act as a single entity, while at the same time also aiming at the development of each of its entities. In terms of components, European projects, increasingly, require the exchange between specialists from different fields, which is essential for the progress of society.

This thesis focuses on public policies in education and training under the European Union's Erasmus+ program. Projects supported by the program have the clear potential to make a substantial contribution to the development of innovation in people's personal but also professional lives; the contribution of these projects in terms of innovation development is also potential within the specific organizations that design and implement them. According to the mid-term evaluation of the EC's Erasmus+ (2014-2020) program, published in 2018, the effectiveness of Erasmus+ is overall very positive.[37]. On the other hand, it has been noted

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[37] European Commission. (2018, January 1). *COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020).* ({COM(2018) 50 final}). Retrieved July 7, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/m-t_evaluatio_erasmus_swd_2018_40.pdf

that the results, identified as a form of innovation, have lacked a broader dissemination and spillover effect. One of the EU's main concerns is its poor ability to publicize its funding and project results, although, in the 2014-20 programming period, the dissemination and exploitation strategy has improved through the revision of specific indicators and a single platform that contains all project results in[38]. This is evidence of how innovation can bring positive effects and evolution, although the implementation of Erasmus+ co-funded projects is not always scientific and there is no one-size-fits-all way of doing things and achieving goals. However, elements of innovation can emerge at any time. But before focusing on the Erasmus+ program, it is important to delve into what it was and how innovation in public policy was conceptualized.

In the 1970s-1980s, the concept of competitive advantage was the director of public policy: the need for competition in innovation to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery. This model was focused on the delivery of manufactured products and the production of material results but was lacking in service delivery. The expected outcome was always identified with funding scientific research, something related to science that could be touched and physically useful. The OECD Oslo Manual[39] is the epitome of measuring business-based innovation.

But now things are changing, and education is beginning to be reevaluated and gain the proper value it brings; new skills and competencies are now required by the labor market, and it is considered crucial for the European Union to provide tools for its citizens to be able

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[38] European Commission. (n.d.). *Erasmus+ Projects*. Retrieved July 15, 2022, from https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects

[39] OECD Oslo Manual: First published in 1992, the Oslo Manual is the international reference guide for collecting and using data on innovation. In this fourth edition, the manual has been updated to take into account a broader range of innovation-related phenomena as well as the experience gained from recent rounds of innovation surveys in OECD countries and partner economies and organisations.
(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, & Statistical Office of the European Communities. (2018). *Oslo manual 2018: Guidelines for collecting, reporting and using data on innovation*. OECD publishing.)

to cope with this society. The environment in which we live provides us with a great deal of information every day that can be useful but also dangerous. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate what material and cognitive tools used by the Erasmus+ program bring the potential for innovation and benefit to European society. Projects under the Erasmus+ program have proven not to be the answer to a specific, scientific process. For this reason, the elements of innovation they produce are more difficult to pinpoint.

As this thesis grew out of a personal reflection on the role that European projects can play in young people's future, it primarily considers those aspects that will most influence our lives today and in the future. Interaction, as mentioned above, contributes to and makes innovation possible; internationalization of education is a step in this direction, but it is important to pursue an inclusive and equitable kind of internationalization. The internationalization of education seems to assume an elitist and exclusive version of education. The main misconception about internationalization is that we see it too much as a goal instead of a means to an end.[40] This is related to the idea of competition and reputation, which seems to be more important than quality, intensifying social stratification. Van der Wende sees the change in the internationalization process of education from cooperation to competition. The Bologna process[41] intended to make higher education more attractive but also more inclusive and equal. The problem is that intentions do not always match reality. There can be gaps between policy and practice. What should be achieved is the internationalization of learning outcomes, based on glocal knowledge that takes into account different perspectives and content from different realities, moving away

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[40] de Wit, H. (2019). Internationalization in Higher Education, a Critical Review. *SFU Educational Review*, *12*(3), 9–17. https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v12i3.1036.

[41] Bologna Process: is an intergovernmental higher education reform process that includes 49 European countries and a number of European organisations, including EUA. Its main purpose is to enhance the quality and recognition of European higher education systems and to improve the conditions for exchange and collaboration within Europe, as well as internationally. (European University Association (n.d.) *Bologna Process*. Retrieved July 15, 2022, from https://eua.eu/issues/10:bologna-process.html)

from the "Western" concept. The glocal approach should also be included in this reconceptualization. According to Patel and Lynch[42], "glocalized learning and teaching refer to the curricular consideration and pedagogical framing of local and global community connectedness concerning social responsibility, justice, and sustainability". What is needed is a more fluid conceptualization of society and education, combining different local aspects to provide a multi-sectoral and multidimensional methodology. As a matter of fact, Key Action 2, the one this thesis focuses on, entails the production of tangible results at the local, national and European levels. The first project output is usually a report resulting from the desk and/or field research to investigate what good or best practices exist in each of the partner countries involved. From this, a training program is usually developed based on the identified good practices and tools found in the previous phase of the project. The third is usually the pilot phase: to test the skills acquired through the training. Hence, we can see that in European-funded projects there is also a glocal perspective. The goal is to address the different peculiarities and bring positive, comprehensive, and inclusive transformation and innovation that integrates the best practices of the different realities involved. Erasmus+ projects help to develop a kind of intercultural competence in youth workers: they will be able to deal with conflict situations because they will have the opportunity to learn from where some cultural interactions take shape.

Another aspect is digitalization. As mentioned earlier, progressing in this direction is a key priority of the Erasmus+ program. However, people must be able to manage digital tools and, in this way, create, through their use, additional tools that can contribute to innovation. Digital innovation is often linked to its management, as it is essential to know practices, processes, and principles to achieve its effectiveness. Half of

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[42] Patel, F., & Lynch, H.M. (2013). Glocalization as an Alternative to Internationalization in Higher Education: Embedding Positive Glocal Learning Perspectives. *The International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 25*, 223-230.

the European education systems are currently reforming curricula related to digital competencies.[43] As a result, European Erasmus+ projects have also begun to push in this direction, providing education and training on how to manage these tools. During the pandemic, the need for broader and deeper awareness and competence in dealing with the digital world emerged. It has concretely limited the Program, and because of this, practitioners have had to rethink the way they work. Project managers had to discover new ways of communication and change the methodology of implementing activities, but without changing the goals and results of the projects. This was made possible by the exchange of best practices among partnerships during project implementation. In fact, partnerships are born for these exigencies: to fill the shortages of other partners and to activate a peer learning process. This is what leads to innovation and also to the sustainability of projects after their completion. According to the investigation of Erasmus+ projects on eLearning and related methodologies[44], during the program, 2014-20, Italy and Spain were the countries with the highest number of Erasmus+ projects related to eLearning. It is also interesting to see that the predominant topics of the projects considered (related to eLearning) in the research are: "New innovative curricula/educational methods/development of training courses" and "ICT - new technologies - digital competencies". The European Union has woven together the provision of a common digital skills framework for its citizens, which is DigComp, to help have a common digital language among citizens and guide them in using these skills for educational and training purposes. It is widely used in this context in the implementation of Erasmus+ projects, as it is a flexible and adaptable tool that can respond to local (or

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[43] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Bourgeois, A., Birch, P. & Davydovskaia, O. (2019). *Digital education at school in Europe*, Publications Office. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/339457

[44] Alonso de Castro, M. G., & García-Peñalvo, F. J. (2020, October). Overview of European educational projects on eLearning and related methodologies: Data from Erasmus+ Project Results Platform. In *Eighth International Conference on Technological Ecosystems for Enhancing Multiculturality* (pp. 291-298).

glocal) circumstances. It is useful to train trainers to make them able to transmit skills to end users in the target population. Digitization is also an asset in areas such as nonformal learning and e-learning, especially in terms of self-assessment tools[45]. We will see that it has been an essential tool for the development of the projects addressed by this thesis. The final aspect of innovation sought in this thesis is the use of non-formal education activities. According to the definition of the Council of Europe, nonformal learning occurs outside formal learning environments, but within some type of organizational structure. It arises from the learner's conscious decision to master a particular activity, skill, or area of knowledge and is thus the result of an intentional effort[46]. Another important meaning within this term, explained by UNESCO, is that it is often provided to ensure the right access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway structure.[47] Indeed, academic curricula are not always in line with the requirements of the labor market; today there is a growing demand for soft skills, and it is not so easy to acquire them through formal education pathways. There are aspects of life that can be acquired just through real-life situations. It is important to emphasize that nonformal learning cannot be limited to soft skills. This is also why it is becoming increasingly important to give recognition to skills acquired through this range of activities, which contribute to the efficiency of labor supply. Within Erasmus+ projects, the most widely used instrument is Youthpass. Youthpass is a European recognition instrument for identifying and documenting learning outcomes that are acquired in projects under the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps

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[45] Luomi Messerer, K. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update. *Thematic report: How digital forms of assessment and self-assessment might place a new challenge and opportunity for assessment methodologies*.

[46] Council of Europe. (n.d.). *Formal, non-formal and informal learning.* Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants (LIAM). Retrieved July 16, 2022, from https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning

[47] UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2012). International standard classification of education: ISCED 2011. *Comparative Social Research*, *30*.

programs[48]. The innovative aspect of this tool is that it allows project participants to reflect on what they have learned from project implementation, providing them with a section to report and describe their learning outcomes. However, it is a discussion on how to improve this recognition process to encourage participation and development of this skill set.

And last but not least, in terms of project sustainability, it is essential to provide recipients with an experience that is co-designed, adaptable, and innovative. For this reason, creativity is at the heart of non-formal activities. What is important to emphasize is that behind all these forms of innovation is an open process that relies on different actors, different sources, and cultures, bringing together different backgrounds and experiences.

It is now time to speak about the methodology utilized in this thesis. This thesis stems from a personal experience. The University of Padua allowed me to do an internship at Geinnova (https://www.geinnovacion.com), an SME in Zaragoza. It is a training center, specializing in the areas of entrepreneurship and leadership, e-learning, and the development of online learning platforms. The target audience is mainly professionals, both employees and job seekers. In 2020, Geinnova staff decided to establish an NGO, Instituto Ikigai (https://institutoikigai.org/en/home/), with a different, socially oriented goal. Indeed, the goal is to empower individuals, enabling them to find their own ikigai, their own way of life. The target audience is mainly young people and people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Geinnova currently[49] has twenty-nine projects approved under the Erasmus+ program, while Instituto Ikigai presently has fourteen European co-funded projects approved under the same program and one under the AMIF program. During this experience, I was able to learn

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[48] European Commission. (n.d.). *What is Youthpass?* .Retrieved September 21, 2022, from https://www.youthpass.eu/en/about-youthpass/about/
[49] On September 24th, 2022

concretely how European funds are allocated and to experience the tangible results achieved through their allocation in projects. This is a fairly new field, but one that is being studied and researched by many people, experts, and researchers. The literature review was crucial in choosing which aspect of this broad topic to focus on. In agreement with my thesis advisor, we decided to bring a topic to the research table that was in line with my current work, having the opportunity to directly access the projects selected for this research.

To prepare this thesis I selected two funded projects, one from each institution (Geinnova and Instituto Ikigai). The goal of these projects is the same: to empower youth workers; but we will see how they contribute differently to this goal, bringing in the innovation aspects mentioned. The names of the projects are CO-ART and Re-Cultural Heritage. The two projects are not yet finished. The former started in April 2021 and the latter in April 2022; therefore, the data will not be comprehensive but will be based on the first results obtained. Thus, after shaping the research question based on the concepts and theories included in the literature review, sampling was quite simple; the project managers of the two selected projects were asked to provide me with data by answering a questionnaire. This paper is thus the product of observational research, especially in the form of participant observation. "It is primarily associated with qualitative research and entails the relatively prolonged immersion of the observer in a social setting in which he or she seeks to observe the behavior of members of that setting (group, organization, community, etc.) and to elicit the meanings they attribute to their environment and behavior. Participant observers vary considerably in how much they participate in the social settings in which they locate themselves."[50] This methodology was supplemented with a self-completed questionnaire, surveying the subjective opinion of each project manager involved in the two projects. Because I am involved in the project, I acted

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[50] Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods.* Oxford university press.

as a participant observer: I am the colleague of the people who responded to the questionnaire, and I asked them directly to fill it out to help elaborate on my work. My approach was as neutral as possible, without specifying what particular aspects of innovation I considered, but at the same time I had ordinary interaction with them, and they were informed that I was looking for elements of innovation in public policy.

To collect data on the innovative features of these projects, I asked the responsible staff of each organization involved in the selected projects to fill out a questionnaire (one for each project) investigating how they perceive the element of innovation within the funded projects. Specifically, they were asked which elements they considered most innovative in the two respective projects, which aspects they rated least innovative, and whether or not they agreed that innovation plays a role in youth employment support projects and to explain their opinion. Participants were completely free to decide to answer the questionnaire and their answers were reported anonymously. In the next chapter, it will be possible to elaborate on the presentation and explanation of the two projects in their main parts, which is crucial to understand what I considered innovative within the selected projects. This first part will be followed by an analysis of what my fellow project leaders from other organizations have, in turn, considered innovative.

In general, the structure of the central part of the questionnaire involves two closed-ended questions to be rated on a 4-grade Likert scale: a score of 1 indicates the negative value of the item, while 4 indicates the maximum positive value. Therefore, the proposed items will have a maximum score of 4 points. The mean score was also calculated and reported in the analysis. The Likert scale, named after Rensis Likert, is a psychometric technique that responds to the need to transform an individual's subjectivity into an objective reality[51] and to capture

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[51] Joshi, A., Kale, S., Chandel, S., & Pal, D. K. (2015). Likert scale: Explored and explained. *British journal of applied science & technology*, 7(4), 396.

agreement or disagreement on a symmetrical scale of agreement-disagreement for a series of statements. In other words, it is a multiple indicator of a set of attitudes related to a particular area. The objective of the Likert scale is to measure the intensity of feelings toward the area in question.[52]

In the three open-ended questions, respondents are required to explain, in their own words, the reason for their answers.

Participants were given about two weeks to answer the questionnaire. A total of six responses were obtained for the CO-ART project and eight responses for the Re-Cultural Heritage project.

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[52] Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods.* Oxford university press.

Chapter III – Empirical analysis

3.1 Comparison between the role of innovation to support youth workers in terms of employment: what do we mean by innovation in the Erasmus+ Programme? Focus on empirical comparison between two projects funded by the Erasmus+ Programme.

This chapter first presents the two selected projects to provide useful elements for the subsequent analysis. In fact, after presenting all the structural aspects of the two projects, the results of the questionnaires administered to the project leaders are reported and discussed.

The Erasmus+ program includes three different key actions. KA1: Learning Mobility for Individuals; KA2: Cooperation among organizations and institutions; KA3: Support to policy development and cooperation and Jean Monnet Actions. This thesis is considering KA2 since the projects I will analyze fall under this key action.

As reported in the Erasmus+ Program 2022, this Key Action is expected to contribute positively to organizations, and the persons directly and indirectly involved in the activities, namely also youth workers.

Within the Erasmus+ Guide, under the explanation of KA2, there is an emphasis on innovative approaches, increasing the quality of activities, especially through digital means, increasing participation levels, and seeking tools for recognition, and validation of skills and qualifications.

Both the projects I chose for this analysis are based on the Cooperation Partnership call. Each partnership must comply with the detailed project activities, specified in each application form; in addition, each project includes project management activities, implementation activities, and sharing and promotion activities.

The first project is called CO-ART - Challenge-based Online tools to develop entrepreneurial and digital competencies among young ARTpreneurs. It was applied by a French organization called ANTIC - Agence locale des nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication. Instituto Ikigai is part of the project partners. In reality,

this project was submitted in 2020 for an additional call under KA2 Action: KA227 – Partnership for Creativity, launched in response to the Covid-19 emergency to help people working in the field of art and creativity. The project has a duration of 24 months: it started on April 1, 2021, and will end in March 2023, so it is roughly halfway through its implementation at the moment.

The other project I looked at is called Re-Cultural Heritage - Reviving of cultural heritage: Social and Economic Empowerment of Rural Areas. It was submitted by Fundación Santa María De Albarracín in 2021, officially starting on March 1, 2022, and will also last 24 months. Geinnova is a partner organization in the project.

Since the projects are still ongoing, the analysis will mainly focus on the aspects and data from the application form and the first concrete results.

3.2 Context and background to bring innovation

Both projects arose from a specific need: the lack of new skills in workers required by the current labor market, which has been hit by an unexpected situation. The projects analyzed aim to provide training to people working in a sector that has some difficulties in terms of employment: the cultural and creative sector.

The cultural and creative sector (CCS) is the area of employment where industries/companies/bodies harness creativity and culture to produce their results. For the European Parliament, creative industries are defined as "those industries that are based on cultural values, cultural diversity, individual and/or collective creativity, skills and talent with the potential to generate innovation, wealth and jobs through the creation of social and economic value, in particular from intellectual property".[53] The UNESCO define them as "those sectors of organized activity that have as their main objective the production or reproduction, the promotion,

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[53] Ehler, C., & Morgano, L. (2016). *Report on a Coherent EU Policy for Cultural and Creative Industries* (Report No. 2016/2072 (INI). European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2016-0357_EN.html.

distribution or commercialization of goods, services and activities of content derived from cultural, artistic or heritage origins."[54] The literature on the subject has focused on how this industry contributes to the economy; the scenarios proposed by Potts and Cunningham are welfare, competition, growth, and innovation; the interesting aspect for us is the last one, in fact, according to the authors, the CCS industry provides evolutionary services that lead to a change in the entire economic system.[55]

The Covid-19 pandemic broke out in 2020 and hit this professional stratum hard. It is important to consider that public investment in culture had already declined over the past decade and that this sector remains unstable and underregulated overall. However, the cultural and creative sectors were among the hardest affected by the pandemic, with more than 10 million jobs lost in 2020 alone.[56]. If we just look at the data of the tourism branch, statistics released by the "UN World Tourism Organization" indicate a 60% drop in international tourism, furthermore, the global travel industry has suffered losses between 840 billion and 1 billion EUR.[57]

The pandemic has shown that no country alone can protect and promote diversity within its territory and beyond. Culture and creativity are public goods that must be valued, cherished, and safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations. Its magnitude in economic terms is quite relevant: culture and creativity account for 3.1% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 6.2% of all employment. The European

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[54] Pessoa, J., Deloumeaux, L., & Ellis, S. (2009). *The 2009 Unesco Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS)*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

[55] Potts, J., & Cunningham, S. (2008). Four models of the creative industries. *International journal of cultural policy*, *14*(3), 233-247.

[56] UNESCO. (2022). *Re|shaping policies for creativity: addressing culture as a global public good*. Retrieved August 16, 2022, from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380474?2=null&queryId=a32b0026-6674-4fd9-89b9-8afa2d73d5b4

[57] *Travel during the coronavirus pandemic*. (n.d.). European Commission website. Retrieved August 26, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/travel-during-coronavirus-pandemic_en

Union must harness and support this sector: culture and creativity are part of the soul of the community, and it is what draws millions of tourists every year. Europe is the number one tourist destination in the world.

The New European Agenda for Culture, 2018, stressed before the pandemic that "cultural employment is an important entry point to the labor market" and the necessity for professionals in this sector to develop a mix of transversal and specialized skills.

The outbreak of the pandemic facilitated and accelerated this process, as the importance of this sector was highlighted and entrepreneurs in the sector realized the importance of evolving and installing new technologies and/or practices.

The European Commission has taken some measures to cope with this uncommon situation. First of all, providing CCS professionals with funding support through different financial instruments. But since the measures are taken at the national level and there is a difference among the Member States, the Commission draws upon some guidelines in the form of general principles, indicators, and recommendations. So, it means that is up to each member state to decide if to adopt them or not. What is interesting about this analysis are some actions to support the sustainable recovery of the cultural sectors.[58] In particular, technology was promoted to re-establish a connection with the public, especially through digital tools. In addition, it was emphasized that no one should be left behind and that access to culture and creativity should be given to all, using a glocal approach, working in close collaboration with local realities, and, at the same time, taking inspiration from best practices implemented in other countries. The last aspect I found relevant in this document is that it clarifies the need to invest in digital training and digital capacity building to increase related skills.

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[58] European Commission. (2021, June 29). *Communication on EU guidelines for the safe resumption of activities in the cultural and creative sectors - COVID-19*. C(2021) 4838 final. Culture and Creativity. Retrieved August 6, 2022, from https://culture.ec.europa.eu/document/communication-on-eu-guidelines-for-the-safe-resumption-of-activities-in-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-covid-19

Part of the strategy of the Commission is represented by also the special Call under the Erasmus+ Programme "Partnership for Creativity" launched in 2020 to "(…) encourage creativity and boost quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.[59], under which the project CO-ART was funded.

The Re-Cultural Heritage project, on the other hand, was submitted under the KA220 – ADU (Cooperation Partnership) whose main objective is to enable organizations to increase the quality and relevance of their activities, to develop and strengthen their partner networks, and to increase their capacity to work jointly transnationally, boosting the internationalization of their activities and through the exchange or development of new practices and methods, as well as the sharing and comparison of ideas. What is interesting is that, depending on the target, projects must be in line with several priorities, presented in the Program Guide.

The fact that the European Commission decided to increase the budget for the Erasmus+ program by almost 80% compared to the previous program period is a fact that draws attention; Covid-19 has played a significant role in delivering it, making inclusion a central theme for the evolution of society. Allocating funds to the most disadvantaged strata of society will ensure that more people will not hesitate to apply and feel they have a chance to make a real contribution.

Thus, on the one hand, we have a project focused on the empowerment of people working in the CCS sector, starting with their products and enabling them to take advantage of their tools; on the other hand, there is a project that aims to make tourism flourish again, starting with the cultural heritage that each country has in its territory and the people who live there. In both cases, it can be said that these projects will also

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[59] *Coronavirus response: Extraordinary Erasmus+ calls to support digital education readiness and creative skills.* (2020, August, 25). European Commission website. Retrieved August 27, 2022, from https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/news/coronavirus-response-extraordinary-erasmus-calls-to-support-digital-education-readiness-and-creative-skills-0

contribute to building the European Union's identity; they put people at the center, valuing their diversity and solidarity.

3.3 Priorities addressed by the projects

One of the mandatory requirements for obtaining a positive evaluation of the submitted project is to establish which priorities are addressed by the project: the horizontal ones and the vertical ones. Before continuing the analysis, it is important to specify these priorities and their value for Erasmus+ projects. The priorities applied for each area of Erasmus+ are inclusion and diversity, environment and combating climate change, digital transformation through the development of digital preparedness, resilience and capacity, common values, civic engagement, and participation.

In the current Program, sectoral priorities in youth education are linked to the motto of the EU Youth Strategy: engage, connect and empower young people. Indeed, the focus is on promoting active citizenship among young people so that they can, in turn, support their communities. Also important to this thesis is the mention of the importance of increasing innovation in youth work, particularly by finding ways to reach marginalized and disadvantaged people. This also includes developing strategies and recognizing informal and nonformal learning. An empowered youth is an asset to all of society, but to achieve this requires a study of needs and the current situation, starting with the field of research.

In the field of adult education, the focus is on promoting education and training for them in a flexible way that can provide opportunities for them to enhance their knowledge and have it recognized, starting with local centers, also helping them to create an attractive offer for this target audience by taking advantage of new technologies, innovations that also enable them to gain a sense of awareness about the situation they are experiencing and the possible obstacles they might find in the future.

"Skills Development and Inclusion through Creativity and the Arts" was selected as the most relevant horizontal priority for the CO-ART project. In the explication of the choice, the centrality of non-formal learning and digital youth work to acquire not only entrepreneurial and digital skills but, more importantly, to strengthen their creativity and innovation so that they can transform themselves into key actors to change the way creative products are managed, innovating it.

The two additional ones selected are "Promoting Quality, Innovation and Recognition of Youth Work" (youth sectoral) and "Innovative Practices in the Digital Age" (horizontal). About the sectoral one, it says that the project activities are designed to ensure a process of capacity building of youth workers and strengthen cooperation between young (artistic) entrepreneurs, cultural workers, and organizations. Finally, the other horizontals express the need to develop innovative tools to support youth in the sector, especially after the situation created by the pandemic. These tools will be used primarily to equip youth workers so that they, in turn, can transfer these skills and abilities to artists and other people working in the creative sector.

The Re-Cultural Heritage project is concerned with adult education and, as its most relevant horizontal priority, has chosen "Common Values, Civic Engagement, and Participation." In the explication of this priority, the centrality of formal and nonformal learning to disseminate intercultural competencies is also mentioned, providing opportunities for people to participate in public life and social and civic activity, especially since cultural heritage is part of national identity and, if promoted, helps the process of community building and memory of the entire European Union. Additional priorities are sectoral: "improving the skills of educators and adult education staff" and "developing future-oriented learning centers." The first reflects the desire to assess the prior experience and skills of adult learners, to develop better and more creative teaching approaches, and to strengthen the supportive role of adult education staff in inspiring, guiding, and advising learners in

difficult learning circumstances, i.e., to improve the professional skills of adults in the tourism and cultural sector. The other is related to the others: it reflects the attempt to support local learning spaces and encourage social inclusion and political participation. Indirectly, it contributes to reducing the depopulation of villages and involving people in the affected areas in creating spaces and realities that stimulate this sector and ensure a better position in the labor market.

In fact, "cultural heritage," "inclusion and promotion of equality and nondiscrimination," and "employability" were chosen as labels for the project's themes.

3.4 Needs and objectives of the projects

Based on the background explained above, the needs of the projects considered are similar and will be addressed with innovative methodologies that will be explained below.

The CO-ART project sees the urgent need for CCS workers to go digital and develop and acquire entrepreneurial skills so that their products can be sold better in the labor market and have a longer life. Nowadays it is essential to have good publicity, especially in digital environments, which is why a change in this direction is needed.

Another need stressed by the project is the lack of networks that can help move in this direction; the lack of connection between new and old business entities in this sector that can positively influence each other through an exchange of best practices; innovation is also the product of ideas coming together into something new, something that brings a new method to accomplish something different.

The last need found in the project description is obviously related to the previous ones and can also be considered the bridge between them: the need for new innovative ways to equip youth workers who in turn can transfer them and, in this way, support and assist entrepreneurs and CCS workers in developing entrepreneurial and digital skills.

From the needs, the objectives of the project are easy to detect: the desire to strengthen the quality of work carried out by youth workers through new innovative tools, to empower CCS professionals, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, by providing them with effective training. This training is to be developed through non-formal activities, which will be explained below. In addition, the goal of this project is also to enable them to build a network among this working sector, not only at the national level but also at the European level, which would imply, on the one hand, digital collaboration, i.e., indirectly, also the strengthening of these kinds of skills, on the other hand, it would ensure a longer life for this sector and its revitalization after the global pandemic.

To underscore this, the target groups of this project are firstly youth between 18 and 29 years old, unemployed and/or self-employed/free professionals in the CCS sector, and aspiring (arts) entrepreneurs exposed to the risk of exclusion due to the Covid-19 crisis and other social, economic or geographical obstacles; the second target group is Youth Workers and Trainers eager to acquire non-traditional tools and knowledge to support youth in developing entrepreneurial and digital skills.

The Re-cultural Heritage project was shaped by similar but different needs: the need to revitalize the cultural labor market since production in this sector has declined since the pandemic and many people preferred to look at other opportunities, as the perception was negative and demoralizing. This is also related to the depopulation of rural areas, perceived as lacking opportunities for workers, who prefer to move to urban areas. Another need stems from the lack of a unique feeling of being part of and having access to a common European cultural heritage, having gaps in its preservation since good practices are not always shared: some countries are more advanced than others, have implemented some technological innovations that can be spread across the continent simply by sharing them, which means having and/or starting to use tools that help this process. The adult project recipients

also need new inspiration and support; after the Covid pandemic, they have been touched by negative feelings, experiencing a personal lack of self-esteem. Therefore, they need education about the prosperity that cultural heritage offers to the European Union as a whole and its citizens at the same time. As already pointed out, it is necessary to train these people to make them better adapt to the new needs offered by the labor market. From these needs, the objectives that have been described are as follows: first and foremost, to facilitate the opening up of work to intersectoral cooperation and diversification of skills through training, ensuring higher qualifications and increasing the skills of adults in the social, tourism, and arts sectors; therefore, it is also important to focus on bridging the lack of job opportunities, especially in rural areas, which is pushing an entire generation to big cities or abroad; networking and exchanging best practices on these issues is also important for the project to have concrete and rapid effects, especially in finding solutions to deal with the new world shaped by the effects of Covid-19; last but not least, this project also seeks to enhance the sense of heritage and historical values, especially in rural areas where heritage is not seen as a source of wealth.

The project is designed for unemployed young adults (18-30 years old) who are the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and other social, economic, or geographic barriers; and for those adult workers who need to evolve professionally, especially at a time when knowledge is rapidly becoming obsolete, and contexts are changing with great ease. Indirectly, the partner organizations will also benefit from the project, increasing their knowledge of this essential asset for the European Union and considering both the results of the project and the partnership created to deepen the topic and collaborate on future opportunities.

3.5 Projects results

Project results are the tangible outcomes that a project will create within a given period. They are what people will be able to use and exploit in

their lives. They also represent the easiest way to detect certain aspects of innovations because of their concreteness. In the two projects considered, they have been called in two different ways, since they come from calls launched in two different years.

In the CO-ART project, they are called Intellectual Outputs; the project included three of them; the first Intellectual Output (IO1) is called CO-ART Online Escape Rooms. To meet the project's objectives and provide a response to the needs mentioned, the partnership will develop a compendium of challenge-based resources in the format of online escape rooms for target groups, through which they can acquire specific entrepreneurial and digital skills and competencies.

The second (IO2) is the CO-ART KIT: Youth Worker Training Program: An in-service training program to ensure that youth workers are fully trained to leverage the potential of CO-ART's online resources and online platform to support target group members to develop identified skills. A learners' manual is developed that will contain all the learning content; the resources should be interactive and provide the opportunity to include them in workshops and other training. This Intellectual Output is linked to the learning and training activity included in the project; this activity allows 4 Youth Workers, Youth Leaders, and Trainers to understand what a digital learning resource is and develop their own to build their prosperous future. We will see later in this thesis how the activity was concretely developed and how the participants perceived it.

The third Intellectual Output (IO3) is the CO-ART online platform, the space where the materials and resources created by IO1 and IO2 will be housed, as well as a digital environment where young professionals and youth workers in the CCS will have the opportunity to create their network.

The Re-Cultural Heritage project also consists of three project outcomes. The first project result (PR1) is called the European Framework Basic Skills Handbook; it is intended to lay common foundations for administrations that manage artistic and landscape heritage to activate

training programs that alternate training and qualification with productive work, specifically designed for public administrations. The second result of the project (PR2) is the creation of a multifunctional, interactive, and user-friendly e-learning platform to provide a wide range of content and training courses, tailored to different users and targets, thus ensuring access to inclusive digital training, which will have the protection and preservation of cultural heritage as its first objective. The third (PR3) is Assessment Nationals Reports and Dissemination, which is a kind of employment plan/methodology to relocate youth, adults, and minorities in the tourism and cultural sector, especially in rural areas, and to be disseminated with government departments. It also organizes a Dissemination Workshop, a small 2-hour performance on how to use the plan by involving public administrations. This project's learning and training activity is related to PR2 and PR3 and has been named Insight Seminar. Three cultural heritage experts and technicians will be selected for this pilot activity. They will be involved in a series of concrete and virtual experiences related to the results of the project, experiencing realistic examples; they will have to test the innovative training method provided by the project: the examples will be based on real good practices collected from all over Europe; they are expected to gain knowledge about the methods also to bring new people closer and make this sector still attractive in their eyes.

3.6 Projects partnership

The composition and formation of the partnership are important aspects to consider. From the needs analysis that precedes the drafting of a project, one of the first actions is to find partners who fit in and can contribute to a successful project outcome. An ideal partnership should be composed of diverse entities in terms of country of origin and/or representation, type of entity (SME/NGO/public entity/...), urban or rural location, strength in project focus, and working methodology, ... It

is therefore far from the easy and superficial task at the project preparation stage.

The CO-ART consortium consists of 6 partners from 6 member states. ANTIC (project coordinator), SYNTHESIS, INNO HIVE, and SIC are listed as the experts in European project management of the partnership. In the explanation of how the partnership was chosen, we see that the project coordinator, ANTIC from France, in its experience has provided training activities for professionals from various industries, developing and implementing local and transnational projects toward innovation and creativity, supporting the community, particularly that of the creative industry. Then there is a Cypriot partner, reported as a major player in his country for social entrepreneurship and social innovation. In addition, key staff members have expertise in Entrepreneurship and Cultural Management and Museum, Gallery, and Heritage Studies.

The Latvian partner provides nonformal learning on social innovation, social entrepreneurship, and policy formation for disadvantaged social groups, particularly youth, creative industry representatives, and entrepreneurs.

The Greek organization is a pioneer in technology-enhanced learning. Its team is fully equipped to carry out tasks related to audiovisual and text-based training materials, e-learning, training activities, and curriculum design.

Instituto Ikigai, representing Spain, can count on staff with more than 10 years of experience creating online training portals, courses, and activities. It specializes in the areas of entrepreneurship, leadership, promotion, and the provision of creative training and networking opportunities and solutions for young people and their personal and professional development.

Finally, the Polish one, in its experience, organizes courses and workshops for youth workers' capacity building and youth empowerment, based on nonformal learning methods and organization of events,

especially cultural ones. It also deals with the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of entrepreneurial activities in rural areas. It can be said that this partnership covers different areas of Europe; its component entities are SMEs or NGOs; some of them can bring a stronger background in the development of non-formal learning activities and knowledge of the target employment sector, and others are more supportive with their digital and technological capabilities.

Transnationality is also a vital factor in the objectives of the Re-cultural heritage project; in fact, the members of the partnership are widely distributed across European territories: from the Mediterranean (Italy, Spain, Greece), through continental Europe (Austria), across Eastern Europe (Slovakia) to the Eastern Mediterranean (Turkey). In this partnership the Italian, Austrian and Slovak partners have more experience in research activities and the production of training materials; the coordinator has a lot of experience in the field of cultural heritage. GEINNOVA, as a training center, has long experience in European projects, especially in the development of learning platforms and websites; the Turkish partner specializes in dissemination activities and is therefore useful in spreading the project results among its wide network and ensuring its sustainability. The Greek partner is an expert in course delivery methodology. Again, therefore, it can be said that the partnership covers relevant areas of Europe and also adds a non-EU country, Turkey, which is rich in cultural heritage and can provide a different perspective.

Responsibilities and tasks are divided among the partners based on their previous experience, background, and expertise.

3.7 Indicators

In Erasmus+ projects, an important role is also played by indicators. Indicators in project management are crucial; they represent measurable criteria that allow a project to be monitored and evaluated. They are the link between theory and practice.

There are indicators for project management and indicators for evaluating project activities and results. In the program, you can find some suggestions and the indication to include them is a project that wants to be funded. Usually, in Erasmus+ projects, KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are preferred: they help show how an organization or entity is achieving its objectives. They refer to specific objectives and targets. They are divided into quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative indicators are required to provide a hundred percent objective result, give it numerical meaning, are usually based on a standard, and are free from people's personal feelings.

Qualitative indicators are an expression of people's feelings, impressions, and tastes in evaluating an aspect of the project.

In the Erasmus+ project, one or more designated partner organizations usually have the role of establishing and/or measuring indicators. Typically, one partner is responsible for measuring the quality of the project, its activities, and development, while another is responsible for evaluating the impact of the project results. This is an important part of the thesis because what we are looking for is innovation in Erasmus+ projects, and it has been made clear that it is not easy to measure innovation, depending on what we mean by innovation. In these projects, to give quantification and qualification to innovation, some indicators were established already in the application form.

In the case of the CO-ART project, they were stated in the question asking what indicators the partnership would use to measure the quality of the project results, that is, to establish those related to the impact of the project.

The quantitative indicators are as follows:

- number of online escape room resources produced at each level for each key competence area;
- number of youth workers and trainers completing the in-service training (C1);

- number of youth workers and trainers attending the local training events;
- number of young people completing the digital breakout challenges for each of the 2 key competence areas and at each of the 4 learning levels provided;
- number of young people achieving recognition of learning and building the desired key competencies;
- number of young people attending the CO-ART Networking Events in each partner country;
- number of youth workers attending the CO-ART Networking Events in each partner country;
- number of other stakeholders attending the CO-ART Networking Events in each partner country;
- number of registered users/followers on the online learning platform and the Facebook page.

The qualitative indicators, on the other hand, specified that they will focus on how well the project was able to adhere to best practice processes and procedures:

- compliance with accessibility guidelines in the design and production of all pedagogic resources;
- achievement of stated objectives about the initial value proposition and the desired learning outcomes;
- the ability of the consortium to localize all learning materials to ensure cultural appropriateness;
- assessment of pedagogic innovation achieved
- robustness of the educational model development and its capacity to meet the needs of both educators and end-users

Moreover, the application specifies that the project evaluation will also be supported by the Quality Assurance process which will measure and evaluate the collaboration and cooperation of the partners, adherence to the project timetable, adherence to the project objectives, and the

appropriate use of resources/budget. This means that an internal evaluation of the partnership is also carried out, especially in terms of management and communication, but that specific tools and indicators are agreed upon during project implementation, not before.

Quantitative and qualitative markers for close monitoring of the Re-Cultural Heritage project have also been collected in the application form. Here is the distinction.

Quantitative indicators:

- number of unemployed youngers who will participate in the pilot phase;
- number of adults workers and trainers who will participate in the pilot phase and in in the teachers' training activity;
- number of cultural heritage professionals who will participate in the pilot phase, complete the self-assessment tool and use the resources developed;
- number of learning courses made for different users and different targets depending on their level of preparation;
- numbers of users on the e-learning platform;
- number of participants attending the re-cultural heritage online events;
- number of local, national, and transnational stakeholders attending the re-cultural heritage online events;
- number of organizations involved in the dissemination process.

Qualitative indicators:

- promote awareness of the importance of the artistic and landscape heritage for the economic development of rural areas;
- the capacity of the courses to engage the participation of a large group of people for each target group involved;
- introduce innovative tools to improve education in the restoration field;

- the capacity of providing high-quality training courses to people who do not have solid training;

- the capacity of providing the basis for regional development and smart specialization strategies;

- accessibility to training courses and learning materials;

- extend the possibility of entering the world of work also to people who belong to vulnerable groups;

- ability to extend the effects of the project to other European realities that have the same characteristics;

- ability to create strong cooperation between the involved European country with a common guideline for the administrations.

Then, all projects collect this data and issue reports, usually an interim and a final report, which provide an overview of the project's development and success. At the evaluation stage of the innovation element, the indicators mentioned above will be useful and helpful to understand how the innovation is perceived.

3.8 Impact and sustainability

This subchapter is the product of the value of indicators in a sense. The expected impact and whether a project should survive after its completion is something that is always evaluated and considered during the evaluation phase of project applications and evaluation of funded projects after their completion. It measures the success of projects and their impact on people's lives. Impact evaluation gives a sense of continuing with this type of project, ensuring that the projects produce something and offer something to their intended audience. Of course, impact evaluation stems from the needs investigated in the initial phase, whether during project implementation the identified needs were addressed and how, and also after the individual activities, how they affected the community and/or the environment is considered. In short, it reveals what worked in a project and what needs to be improved.

Impact evaluation can be focused on several levels. On the individual one, on the community of which individuals are part, on partner organizations, on the society not directly involved in a project, and on the institutional level (influence on policy debates). Each target group requires its moment of impact assessment and its modality. The impact is generally measured before, during, and after the project duration.

A distinction was made in the impact section of the projects under review. In the Co-Art project, the impact was explained according to target, duration (short and long), and spatial level (local, national, and European).

The explanation focused mainly on the central target group: youth workers and CCS workers.

In the short term, youth workers are expected to acquire new skills, especially digital and entrepreneurial skills; they will also gain knowledge about new nonformal tools and can start thinking about how to employ them in their professional lives. Indirectly, their self-esteem will also be strengthened.

In the long run, the knowledge, skills, and abilities will be put into practice, and this may produce more income and success in their work. In addition, they will be able to pass this background on to others, also being better able to disseminate their products and/or knowledge efficiently, such as by taking advantage of social media.

It is also said that this initial impact will also generate a positive effect, in economic terms, in the sector in which they work and at the local level where they act.

The project is also thought to have a direct and indirect impact on partner organizations: they will be able to integrate new innovative practices into their daily work to engage digital natives and improve their awareness of the potential of dynamic online learning environments. Another outcome in terms of impact is expected for stakeholders and different groups not directly involved in the project: through the direct target groups, it is

expected to bring to the wider society an awareness of a digital society that is evolving and can successfully respond to new challenges.

The other distinction at different spatial levels is explained as follows:

- Local/regional/national level: youth workers at these levels would learn how to develop an online escape room and expand and attract people to this tool in fun and interactive ways. The impact is then empowerment of the people involved and a trigger effect toward digital change and entrepreneurial activities, which would also benefit the community.

- European/international level: dissemination is crucial; due to the well-distributed geographical location of the partners, the project can receive feedback and attention; this is a real strength because different perspectives can bring real improvements and innovations to the project. In addition, the project would create future possibilities for the creation of new projects to meet the needs of the CCS sector and the shift to digitization, not only for the community but also for youth workers in the organizations.

Regarding sustainability, according to the Eu Commission, "a project is sustainable when it continues to deliver benefits to project beneficiaries and/or other constituencies for an extended period after the Commission's financial assistance has been terminated"[60]. It is related to impact: it is the continuity of impact.

In the CO-ART project, Instituto Ikigai is responsible for drafting the plan. The strategy adopted focuses on three key points to successfully exploit the results of the project:

1. Ensure synergies between the project and local, national, and European stakeholders.

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[60] European Commission Directorate-General Education and Culture. (2006). *Sustainability of international cooperation projects in the field of higher education and vocational training -Handbook on Sustainability.* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, ISBN: 92-9157-476-7 Retrieved September 2, 2022, from https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6647795f-b5d3-4cae- 9b9c-13df2570413

2. Identify and fill gaps in the main thematic areas addressed by the project and further exploit the results.

3. Ensure that partners have a deep interest in the results.

To make sure this happens, it has been planned that the technology infrastructure will be maintained beyond the project duration for a minimum period of 5 years; in addition, the project results will be published on the SALTO-Youth portal and the Erasmus+ project results platform. The results of the project will also be useful to youth workers in organizing and implementing other activities, workshops, and future projects, ...

In addition, in the Re-Cultural Heritage project, differentiation was made according to the duration of impact.

The learning courses and training materials will have an impact on the target groups, enhancing their training, while over a longer period, they will be able to put the acquired skills into practice and create more job opportunities on their own, thus participating in the recovery and enhancement of the urban system and its heritage. In addition, the project aims to provide the basis for regional development and smart specialization strategies and to create strong cooperation among the European countries involved with a common guideline for administrations.

Also in this project, the spatial distinction is divided between:

- Local/regional/national level. The impact the project aims to achieve is capacity building of cultural heritage professionals through innovative methods; raising awareness of the importance of the role of cultural heritage for a sustainable economy in rural areas and the positive impact of cultural heritage for new generations; triggering a process of inclusion of minorities and combating the stereotype that identifies the restoration sector as elitist; increased collaboration between public administrations and local stakeholders to create a single action plan for the development of sustainable tourism in rural areas; and engaging the younger

generation in the field of restoration, which opens up more job opportunities for them.

- European/international level. At this level, we seek to achieve: the realization of a shared and unified action plan to coordinate heritage management in these areas; the creation of a collaboration between administrations, partners, and stakeholders; the consolidation of the economic and employment development strategy related to quality tourism according to the framework produced as PR1; a cross-cultural exchange between professionals in the field of artistic and landscape heritage from different European countries; and a well-planned dissemination of the project results to attract the attention and recognition of other areas.

In terms of sustainability, the three pillars are:

1. Ensure strong networking and coordination among all actors involved in the implementation of the project, including public administrations and local, national, and European stakeholders.

2. Enable the project to be sustained after the end of the funding cycle by incorporating additional elements that will improve outcomes and/or complement Erasmus+ KA1 mobility practices.

3. Ensure that participants are involved in the success of the project. The intention is to maintain the personal learning networks established during the training period, as they are critical to the long-term sustainability of the project.

Quality reports will also be important in determining whether the project was in line with what was previously planned. The results of the Re-Cultural Heritage project will be made available online for at least 5 years after the end of the project, and most importantly, partners need to adopt an effective dissemination strategy that allows them to efficiently reach

out to networks and try to reach out to all potentially interested people, encouraging them to seize this opportunity and not be afraid of it.

3.9 Implementation progress

On September 1, 2022, we are in month 17 of the CO-ART project and month 6 of the Re-Cultural Heritage project, respectively.

The CO-ART project has already achieved significant results, and some people have already begun to benefit from the implementation of the project. The element of the project that was considered most innovative, including the questionnaire that will be analyzed later, is the Escape Rooms. Their English version for all levels is already ready but has not yet been transferred to the platform. They need to be translated into each partner's language before being disseminated among the target groups. Online Escape Rooms demand the player to find a way to escape from digital imprisonment by solving some challenges to unlock the level. The Ers created for the CO-ART project are designed to achieve specific learning outcomes that are those included in the Entrepreneurial Skills Framework (ENTRECOMP)[61] and The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DIGCOMP 2.1)[62]. According to the ENTRECOMP Framework, entrepreneurship as a transversal key competence enables citizens to nurture their personal development, to actively contribute to social development, to enter the job market as an employee or as self-employed, and to start-up or scale-up ventures which may have a cultural, social, or business motivation. DIGCOMP 2.1 introduces 8 proficiency levels of competence for digital competence development. Digital proficiency is a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes about the use of technology to perform tasks, solve problems, communicate, manage information, and collaborate, as well as to create and share content

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[61] Bacigalupo, M., Kampylis, P., Punie, Y., & Van den Brande, G. (2016). EntreComp: The entrepreneurship competence framework. *Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union*, *10*, 593884.

[62] European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Carretero, S., Vuorikari, R., Punie, Y. (2018). *DigComp 2.1 : the digital competence framework for citizens with eight proficiency levels and examples of use*, Publications Office. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/38842

effectively, appropriately, securely, critically, creatively, independently, and ethically.[63]

Twelve entrepreneurial and digital skill areas were selected to build the framework of CO-ART learning experiences based on employment needs during the Covid-19 pandemic, youth attractiveness, and underrepresentation of skills in youth work. ENTRECOMP:

- Spotting opportunities;
- Ethical and Sustainable Thinking;
- Mobilizing Resources;
- Financial Literacy;
- Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk;
- Working with others.

DIGICOMP 2.1:

- Collaborating through Digital Technologies;
- Netiquette;
- Developing Digital Content;
- Copyrights and Licences;
- Protecting Personal Data and Privacy;
- Protecting Health and Well-Being.

Digital breakouts (ERs) are a great way to make the learning process based on these two frameworks more fun; CO-ART's online Escape Rooms were created following different storylines for each skill. Each partner has created a real-life scenario in which different challenges are offered to the user depending on the level (Introductory, Intermediate, Advanced, Expert). Thus, gamification is a feature of these digital environments; in this way, users are more motivated to complete the tests. Images, videos, articles, external links, and audio are all multimedia tools included in ERs, which also help prevent users from getting bored while learning. In addition, each time users complete a

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[63] Skov, A. (2016, March). *The Digital Competence Wheel*. Center for Digital Dannelse. Retrieved September 2, 2022, from https://digital-competence.eu/dc/front/what-is-digital-competence/%C3%B9

level, they receive some sort of reward upon completion: badges that attest to the level achieved. The fact that ERs are online also makes them more easily accessible to a wider group of people at all times of the day and from different locations. This factor is also related to the fact that this project was written during the Covid pandemic, and the online format was chosen because of the lockdown situation in which various online games, apps, and other tools gained popularity. In addition, online access also allows for faster connection to other related content or to check out sources that can bring solutions to proposed challenges. The partnership collaborated in their creation, exchanging sources but also suggestions for improving them or technically creating these online spaces. The environment chosen to create the drafts before transferring them to the official platform is Google form; at the moment, Innovation Hive is finalizing the official platform based on feedback gathered during the learning and training activity in Latvia. The platform will officially host the rooms. The Escape Rooms underwent a pilot activity: the learning and training activity in Latvia, which took place from July 5-8, 2022. It brought together 4 participants from each partner country, for a total of 24 participants. The participants were youth workers, youth leaders, and trainers. Among the four participants from each country, one was sent directly from the partner organization as a trainer.

The LTTA is considered a milestone in the CO-ART project and was developed through the following three phases:

- Phase 1 - introductory workshop in each partner country as preparation for the transnational training event in Latvia;
- Phase 2 - Face-to-face training program supporting youth workers and trainers to develop their own online digital learning resources based on breakout challenges in Latvia;
- Phase 3 - Self-directed online learning through the e-learning portal to develop the skills and competencies needed to conduct workshops and training in dynamic online environments and to successfully manage the new digital student/trainer work

relationships with youth, which are a key part of successful learning partnerships.

After the face-to-face training in Latvia, a survey was delivered to participants to evaluate the activity from the perspective of those who received the training as well as those who deliver it. The survey was prepared by Synthesis, the partner responsible for the quality evaluation of the project. It is a key tool for quantifying and collecting feedback on the implementation of the activity. It is divided into three sections: the first focuses on evaluating the overall organization and management of the LTTA. The second investigates which learning outcomes were best achieved according to the participants. The last is composed of open-ended questions, in which participants can better explain their previous responses and give feedback on what they consider to be strengths and weaknesses. In general, the feedback is very positive: participants stated that they learned how to create an online escape room and how this could be a resource for further training. What was rated as a weakness of the event is the visual appeal of the Escape Rooms, which was recommended to be improved, while the aspects mentioned as most valuable are: the new knowledge gained about the Escape Rooms and the fact that they are a valuable tool to make learning fun and playful; the networking aspect and the opportunity to connect with people working in different areas of creativity; and the fact that each of them contributed by bringing suggestions to the table to improve the Escape Rooms or to integrate the use of other online platforms. Now, the partnership is also working on the CO-ART Kit, to have an online manual to spread the use of Escape Rooms to a wider audience.

Regarding the Re-Cultural heritage project, it is important to mention that it has not been started for a long time, so it is not possible to provide many details about it.

In May, the project kickoff meeting was held in Albarracín, a small village in the Aragon region of Spain, as the applicant organization is Fundación Santa Maria de Albarracín. This was a crucial opportunity to clarify all

the unclear aspects of the project application form and to reinforce the aspects considered innovative by the partnership; in particular, the fact that it is about empowering employees in the cultural and tourism sector. Right now, the partnership is working mainly on the outcome of Project 1: European Framework Basic Skills Handbook. This document aims to define strategies and modus operandi for the regeneration of "rural areas," simultaneously content and containers of cultural value. It also aims to provide local administrators with a multi-sectoral training course on how to facilitate the process of regeneration of rural areas and, consequently, also address youth workers who live in these rural areas or who want to work in the field of cultural education, to activate training programs that alternate training and qualification with productive work. In this way, target groups participate in the recovery and enhancement of the urban system and its heritage. The Handbook offers a collection of good practices of cultural heritage enhancement in Europe. The Handbook will be provided to support economic systems and the integration of young generations into the cultural sector labor market, helping them rethink employment opportunities. In addition, special attention is given to tools for the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

The Handbook has been divided into six sections as follows:

- Institutional Powers and Stakeholders;
- Financial Resources;
- Sustainable Tourism;
- Digital and Communication;
- Tangible Heritage;
- Intangible heritage.

Currently, all sections have at least two best practices/strategies, which experts in the cultural heritage sector are reviewing to improve the quality of the manual. This is also an important aspect of having a review process from those who are professionals in the field, who can also help suggest

other innovative practices or features to properly enhance cultural heritage.

The next step of the project is the creation of the online platform for the Re-Cultural Heritage project, which will provide a series of courses and content tailored for those in the field who want to evolve professionally and for cultural heritage professionals. There is a need to address the lack of awareness about the importance of cultural heritage in innovative and modern terms by supporting and engaging CSS professionals and cultural entrepreneurs. What was emphasized during the kick-off meeting is the need to find innovative tools and gamification elements for the delivery of these courses; in addition, the platform will give open access to these educational resources so that more people have the opportunity to benefit from them. This tool will also be useful for the subsequent creation of Project Outcome 3 - National Evaluation and Dissemination Reports, which were previously explained.

It is important to note how innovation can be found both in the tools used to transmit knowledge or create a project result and in the content of the material produced.

## 3.10 Results from the questionnaires

As I mentioned earlier, questionnaires were sent to the staff of each partner organization participating in the two projects. The questionnaire proposed to them is the same, and it was created to investigate how they perceive the innovation element in the two projects. The difference between the two lies only in a few labels that are different within the projects; thus, first of all, their names, the countries involved, and the name of the material results of the project, namely Intellectual Outputs (for the CO-ART project) and Project Results (for Re-Cultural Heritage).

Both surveys begin with a brief explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire and ask respondents to provide their opinion to offer quality research. This first part is followed by the consent agreement, in which it is made clear that the information provided will be used solely

to write the thesis; they are warned of the possibility of abandoning the questionnaire at any time since it is voluntary; it is made clear that they could ask for as much information as they need to complete it; and that the results will be kept anonymously, making it impossible to identify them. After these statements, they were asked, through a closed-ended question, whether they understood the purpose of the form and agreed to participate. I report first the results of the CO-ART project and then those of Re-Cultural Heritage. It is important to note that the respondents' answers were copied and pasted verbatim.

3.10.1 Results of the CO-ART Questionnaire

Six people, representing the CO-ART project partnership, agreed to fill out the questionnaire. (Figure 3. 1)

Figure 3. 1

Do you understand the purpose of the survey and agree to participate?
6 responses

● Yes
● No

100%
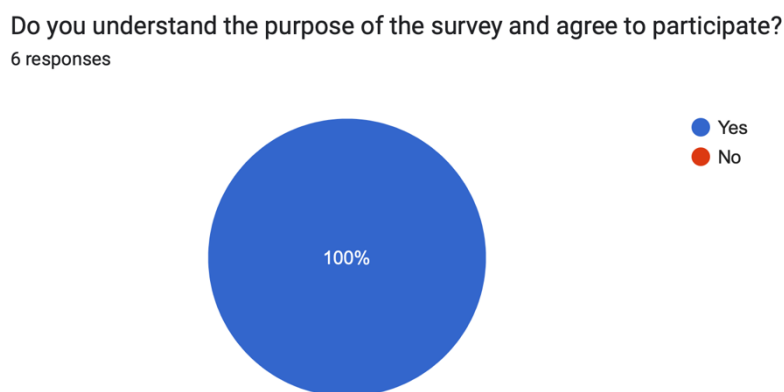
From "Innovation and public policy_CO-ART project" questionnaire

The next question was a check question: the country of origin was asked, to make sure that all project managers surveyed voted. One person per organization filled it out. (Figure 3. 2). We have one representative from

each of the following countries: France, Greece, Cyprus, Poland, Latvia, and Spain.

Figure 3. 2

The country you represent is
6 responses

France
Greece
Cyprus
Poland
Latvia
Spain
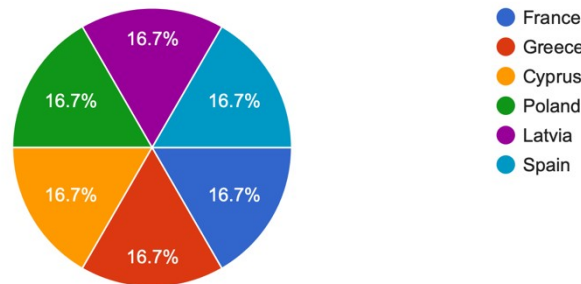
From "Innovation and public policy_CO-ART project" questionnaire

The first part continues with background information to understand their qualification within their organization and their role in the project. Three of them responded that they are Project Managers, one is a Project Officer, another is an International Project Coordinator and Researcher, and yet another is a Project Coordinator. By and large, they all hold the same position in terms of their work.

In terms of their role in the project, however, we have a division:

- Project Coordinator
- Leader of IO1: Online Escape Rooms
- Leader of IO2: CO-ART KIT
- Leader of IO3: CO-ART Online Platform
- Dissemination coordination
- Quality Assurance coordination
- Exploitation and Sustainability coordination

They were also able to clarify other tasks they have in the project, and the answers were as follows:

- n/a

- No

- Dissemination coordination

- -

- We are also in charge of the project's website.

The second part, "Innovation in the CO-ART Project," is the same for both projects and is the most relevant part of the questionnaire.

The Likert scale was used for the first question, and respondents could choose between "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," and "Strongly agree." (Figure 3. 3)

The table shows the scores and the average score:

Figure 3. 3

Question	Average score	Scores distribution
1. Do you consider the CO-ART project an innovative one?	3.5	4 (Strongly Agree): 3 responses 3 (Agree): 3 responses 2 (Disagree): 0 responses 1 (Strongly Disagree): 0 responses

From "Innovation and public policy_CO-ART project" questionnaire

According to the partnership, the CO-ART project is innovative. In the vein of the previous question, they were asked to identify at least two aspects that they consider most innovative in the project (Figure 3. 4):

Figure 3. 4

•	the use of digital breakouts and the target group

•	It is a matter of using tools such as online escape rooms, gamification, and storytelling. This introduces a completely new and innovative approach to the learning and self-learning process.
•	gamification, target group, EU framework used
•	The approach to non-formal learning that leverages digital tools, the use of the concept of the escape room in non-formal learning
•	1. Gamified elements in education 2. Upskilling of digital competencies through digital challenges
•	1.The escape rooms used for teaching and enhancing digital and entrepreneurial competences is a fun and innovative way to transfer knowledge. 2.The creativity of the challenges presented on the escape rooms

From "Innovation and public policy_CO-ART project" questionnaire

From the responses received, it is clear that gamification and the use of non-formal learning such as Escape Rooms are the elements considered most innovative in the project.

Concerning the two aspects they consider less innovative, the responses were as follows (Figure 3. 5):

Figure 3. 5

•	developing another platform and a long manual
•	Less innovative are on-site training and local workshops, which consist only of passing on knowledge using presentations and then working in groups.
•	platform because more digitized means could be used today
•	The least innovative part is the technical solutions used for creating the escape rooms (google forms). The communications strategies in the project are not very modern or innovative either.
•	1. As an intellectual output, the handbook is necessary but not as innovative as the escape rooms 2. Actions of the dissemination are limited to the basic processes included in every dissemination plan
•	Perhaps the training program described in IO2, which is not developed yet, however many training programs already exist and it is difficult to differentiate form already existing ones.

From "Innovation and public policy_CO-ART project" questionnaire

The production of manuals and the way they are disseminated are considered less innovative, as the way they are delivered is not considered novel, but only a technique of replication.

The questionnaire concludes with a question on the role of innovation in the employment of young workers; the scores are listed below (Figure 3. 6):

Figure 3. 6

Questions	Average score	Scores distribution
1. Do you think innovation plays a role in Co-Art project to support youth workers in terms of employment?	3.67	4: 2 responses 3: 4 responses 2: 1 response 1: 0 responses

From "Innovation and public policy_CO-ART project" questionnaire

Almost everyone agrees that innovation plays a key role in the youth workers employed in the project; the person who disagrees reports (Figure 3. 7) that youth workers are not the target group of the project, but this is not true: the project explicitly addresses youth workers as the target group. Other explanations of their judgments follow:

Figure 3. 7

●	Because it uses non formal education which is still too rare
●	Yes, because as already mentioned, the use of tools such as gamification and storytelling help in the acquisition of new skills. These two elements improve the understanding and

	memory of information and stimulate motivation to learn. Skill development affects the possibility of finding better employment.
•	Discovering new networking opportunities
•	Youth workers are not the target group of the project.
•	Turning learning material into games or creating gamified versions of learning outcomes requires creativity and technical knowledge. I believe that mastering the creation of online escape rooms as learning resources is a great skill for a youth worker.
•	Since CO-ART project focuses on CSS professionals which faced a lot of challenges especially due to the pandemic, innovation is an important aspect to battle these difficulties and propose new and creative ways to enhance their digital and entrepreneurial skills

From "Innovation and public policy_CO-ART project" questionnaire

Other people surveyed judged the project to be innovative and important, as it helps the target group develop new skills not only digital and entrepreneurial but also creative through the playful aspects. The project

also proved to be an effective and innovative response to the difficulties faced by CCS professionals due to Covid-19.

3.10.2 Results of the Re-Cultural Heritage Questionnaire

It is now the turn to report the responses collected from the Re-Cultural Heritage project leaders. All of them agreed to participate in the survey (Figure 3. 8).

Figure 3. 8

Do you understand the purpose of the survey and agree to participate?
8 responses

- Yes
- No

100%
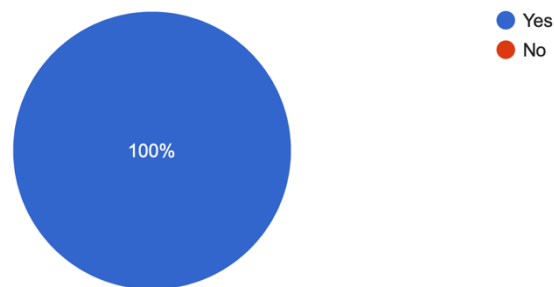
From "Innovation and public policy_Re-Cultural Heritage project" questionnaire

Then the country of origin was asked to see if all partners had replied; from Greece and Italy two project leaders responded (Figure 3.9); while

one person answered representing the other countries involved - Austria, Slovakia, Turkey, and Spain.

Figure 3. 9
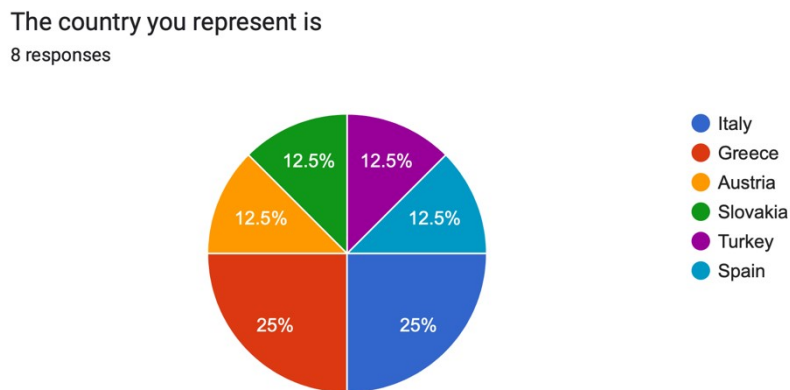
The country you represent is
8 responses

The next question is about the role in the organization they work for, to understand the professional qualification of the people working on the project: six answered project manager or similar, one project assistant, and one department head. It is relevant that one of the respondents indicated that he was a cultural specialist.

The last two questions were about the role in the project. This was also a follow-up question to give a broader picture to people who want to consult the results. The responses were:

- Project Coordinator
- Leader of PR1: European Framework Basic Skills Handbook
- Leader of PR2: E-learning Platform
- Leader of PR3: Assessment Nationals Reports and Dissemination
- Dissemination coordination
- Quality Assurance Plot coordination
- Sustainability Plan coordination
- Other

The persons who opted for "Other" could specify the following question and the answers were

- Each partner will collect the data of the Assessment Questionnaire of their country and the VAEV will collect them together, have feedback from a) the users and their progress b) the utility and quality of learning courses and materials c) the results of the project.
- no
- Partially in all of them, but not a leading partner in these activities
- I didn't select "other"
- Sustainable Tourism Topic – Developing Best Practices 1-2.

The second part is the heart of the questionnaire. It has been called "Innovation in the Re-Cultural Heritage Project."

The first question is a general one about innovation (Figure 3. 10); to have a better overview of the response, I have listed the questions and the exact numbers corresponding to the answers in the table so that the average score could also be calculated. As mentioned above, the Likert scale was used, and respondents were able to express their thoughts by choosing between "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," and "Strongly Agree." In this way, it is possible to get a clear picture of whether they consider the project innovative or not.

Figure 3. 10

Question	Average score	Scores distribution
1. Do you consider the Re-Cultural Heritage project an innovative one?	3.6	4 (Strongly Agree): 3 responses 3 (Agree): 3 responses 2 (Disagree): 0 responses

	1 (Strongly Disagree): 0 responses

The average score is 3.6, which indicates that project managers of this project perceive it as innovative; the majority strongly believe so.

To gain more insight into their perceptions, they were asked to indicate at least two aspects that they see as most innovative and to explain why (Figure 3. 11).

Figure 3. 11

•	It addresses a problem that it is new for Europe (as a pandemic) and it involves vulnerable groups with a double benefit: for the local community and promotion of tourism – and employment/social inclusion.
•	In my opinion, the innovativeness of the project is a) how it implements various activities and develops high-quality documents to empower and promote the development of quality tourism in rural areas. B) the Online Learning Platform that will include teaching courses and the learning material, also considering the minorities in the economic system by developing training paths to access employment and interaction at the social level.
•	1. Empowerment of employability through cultural heritage (not to common in my area), 2. Ensuring higher qualifications, in order to diversify the employment of vulnerable groups, most of which is concentrated in the

	agricultural sector, facilitating the access to different labour market. The focus of the project on agricultural topics and the raising awareness of the youth about the topic (with the provided tools) is something i personally consider innovative.
•	utilization of new technologies (online study platform), integration of traditional assets with the innovative utilization (re-culture heritage)
•	1. Considering culture as a real and effective source of employment, which means that culture can really move money. This is a crucial issue for its possible consequences on public policies and investments (some years ago a controversy broke in Italy out when the Minister of Economy, Giulio Tremonti claimed that "with culture you don't get to eat"). 2. The implementation of a specific, ad hoc training
•	Best Practices and Handbook
•	rural and historic heritage is considered and balanced with new digital technologies or innovative participative approaches. Is a new way to perceive it cause one of the goal is also to achieve sustainable use of it (quality tourism).
•	It focuses on the importance on cultural heritage and its management, giving space to this sector, mixing it with the use of digital tools which are essential nowadays.

	Furthermore, it allows to learn more about best practices, improving also employability practices.

The majority pointed to the fact that the project is intended to empower cultural employees and trigger a process of social inclusion by going to more disadvantaged groups. In addition, the promotion of quality tourism was described as innovative, especially after the pandemic, a difficult time for this sector.

A question was then asked which aspect they considered least innovative. Six responses were obtained (Figure 3. 12):

Figure 3. 12

●	To implement an online platform and a handbook
●	The way of working and the structure of the deliverables. Both are quite common and their structure is repetitive in every project
●	maybe it is not so much about innovation.. but there is missing more advanced way how to attract the target groups (how to persuade them participating in the project activities), not only the persons how take part at the LTTA
●	1. The collection of good practices, which is important in our project, but not so new 2. I can't think of any other

•	best practice research is good but less innovative as a procedure. It might be good if the result are well disseminated to everyone (not just involving policy makers) – policy makers are the main target – i believe it would be better to focus on new generations – scholars, researchers, etc… in the field as main and direct target
•	the project follows the same structure of other European projects and the presence of a handbook, even if its content is quite innovative.

From "Innovation and public policy_Re-Cultural Heritage project" questionnaire

In general, the aspects that are not considered innovative are more related to the framework of European Erasmus+ projects, which is always similar; in addition, the presence of a manual is considered no longer attractive. Finally, more than one person said that the project lacks an effective strategy to disseminate the project and involve new generations. When asked "Do you think innovation plays a role in the Re-cultural Heritage project to support young workers in terms of employment?" the scores were distributed in this way (Figure 3. 13):

Figure 3. 13

Questions	Average score	Scores distribution
1. Do you think innovation plays a role in Re-cultural Heritage project to support	3.25	4: 2 responses 3: 5 responses 2: 1 response

youth workers in terms of employment?		1: 0 responses

The average score is quite high which means that the respondents believe that the project is positively influenced by innovation to support young workers in terms of employment. However, one of them disagrees with this statement. Below is an explanation of their opinions (Figure 3. 14).

Figure 3.14

•	The project does not aim to create more options and employment for youth workers. It is innovative in setting up the premises for vulnerable groups to become an active (and independent) part of the society
•	Innovation always plays a role in any type of project. Regarding the Re-cultural Heritage project, the enhancement of tourism, especially in rural areas, for people with likely fewer opportunities based on a strategy of economic and employment development in these areas, particularly in and after a Covid-19 pandemic, is crucial and can be indeed considered innovative.
•	Certainly. By providing the knowledge and tools to youth workers, in a working field (agriculture) that the last years tends to concern less and less people, it's something innovative. The purpose is the innovation in that case.

•	Generally yes, but it will depend how is the project implemented.
•	The participation in the training of experts and technicians in the field of cultural heritage field has a huge potential for the innovation of training methods addressed to different groups of participants, included fragile people.
•	The Re-Cultural Heritage Project provides the youth with cultural and historical aspects.
•	it does but everything depends on how the result, on each national level, are implemented. Anyone, it is very good that the project entails a concrete experience for specialist in the field in Slovenia.
•	yes, because this project goes to empower some disadvantaged groups which have also been affected by the pandemic, a total new situation and it goes to address this difficult situation and provide its target groups with new methodologies and knowledge in the field of cultural heritage protection and enhancement.

From "Innovation and public policy_Re-Cultural Heritage project" questionnaire

From these useful comments, a general idea is shared: potentially, innovation will support the employment of young workers through the project, especially in the tourism and cultural sector, but it will depend on its implementation, on how the project results will be concretely applied in local and national contexts.

3.11 Discussion

From the results gathered through the questionnaires, it is clear that all project managers consider the selected Erasmus+ co-funded projects to be innovative. Examining the responses for both projects, the aspects rated as most innovative differ. In the CO-ART project, a non-formal activity tool such as online Escape Rooms was particularly appreciated for its gamification features; whereas, in the Re-Cultural Heritage project, the innovative objective of the project, namely its aspiration to attract people in a job category that is not always rightly valued and well remunerated, was admired.

In analyzing the results, it is crucial to take into account the fact that the two projects are at two different stages of the implementation process; this could be a factor in the fact that CO-ART respondents indicated something more concrete as innovative elements than those from Re-Cultural Heritage reported. This is certainly a weakness that should be avoided in further research.

Moreover, innovation is a very broad topic with countless aspects and peculiarities. In this research, we considered it only in the context of two projects co-funded by a European program focused on education and training, which allocates a limited budget to them. It is important to remember this, otherwise, it could be argued that the innovation brought by the projects is not relevant enough. But what can be affirmed from the research is that in each small area of project influence an initial innovation effect was created. If not yet around the project objectives, certainly in the awareness of the youth workers working as project managers in the projects; they realized the importance of the areas of work considered in the projects, but also the opportunities that digital tools and non-formal activities can offer for learning and transferring knowledge and skills.

Two other aspects need to be improved in the following research. First, the number of projects selected. It would be useful to consider more

projects within the same Program and in which other European countries also participate. Second, to have a better comparison, it would have been better to focus on the same time frame. The CO-ART project comes from an extra call from the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ program, while Re-Cultural Heritage comes from the new 2021-2027 program. These are elements to take into account that may affect the research results. But it is a good starting point because the goal of European projects is also to launch a discussion on a topic relevant to the European Union and present some good practices and/or tools that can be implemented in other countries in the community as well. Innovation is continuously pursued from year to year, so in further research, it might be interesting to note what new elements have been introduced from the experience gained during the previous program period and to point out what aspects have been improved both in terms of project structure and in terms of the material activities proposed by the new partnerships.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the relationship between innovation and public policy, some conclusions can be drawn.

From all that has been developed in this paper, the first conclusion that the author can state is that, indeed, there is a place for innovation in public policy and it reveals this in concrete terms. Certainly, we have noted how innovation has not been much investigated when it comes to considering social and educational aspects; innovation is more often linked to other types of topics involving technology and/or industry. However, it was stressed that the mindset about the meaning of innovation is changing in society; more and more people consider the human component as a key aspect of innovation production, especially social innovation. It is an engine that cannot be left behind. For this reason, this thesis has focused on analyzing a specific type of innovation, social innovation. It turns out that innovation and public policy have elements in common, starting with the fact that both seek to produce a change in response to problems. And both affect the lives of citizens. Through this thesis, we realized that innovation and public policy can help and support each other, responding to specific needs and succeeding in producing something that improves people's lives.

This master's degree is the final step in the European and Global Studies degree program, and the chosen track is European Policies. This is why the public policies studied were placed within the framework of the structure of the European Union. It has been shown how the European Union has and is currently allocating more and more funds for internal policies and their programs to strengthen the education and training component; it seeks innovation in it, to provide its young citizens with more opportunities and enable them to look at them independently and benefit from them. Improvements and "innovations" in this regard are not easy to identify. A great deal of work and research is needed to better investigate this issue.

Youth employment has been the public policy of choice. It is an essential issue for the future of the European Union and intrinsically for its innovation. Related to this, the thesis sought what kind of innovation could be found within the Erasmus+ call for proposals, a policy-making tool for youth employment. The Erasmus+ program has been in existence for more than 35 years and has proven to be an active player in supporting youth employment and training. The European Union is aware of the importance of education in driving innovation, and this is demonstrated by the increased budget allocated to this program.

The Erasmus+ program fosters linkages between European member states, allowing them to exchange practices that have proven successful in their local communities and that can be transferred to other contexts. This thesis supported the idea that, in projects co-funded by Erasmus+, the most relevant elements of innovation are the internationalization of education and the glocal approach, digitization, and the delivery of training and education through non-formal activities. Both projects include the aspects considered innovative in this thesis; they are most explicitly expressed in the project results, as they are the most concrete material of the projects. Both projects have identified a window of opportunity to intervene, i.e., to offer people working in the cultural and creative sector to benefit from tailor-made and personalized training that considers specific characteristics at the local and, at the European level (at least, those detected in the countries involved). The CO-ART project focuses primarily on people whose work is creative, such as musicians, artists, dancers, and photographers... While Re-Cultural Heritage targets people who work in the cultural sector, particularly in cultural heritage preservation. The goal of the projects could be achieved through the innovative components within them that were studied in this thesis.

Those responsible for the approved proposals reported in the questionnaire submitted that they considered the innovative projects as a whole. Relevant and critical to the thesis is the fact that the CO-ART partnership lists as more innovative elements the non-formal activities

and digital aspects, particularly present in the production of the Escape Rooms. While the Re-Cultural Heritage partners see the project's goal of empowering heritage practitioners, starting with local and, in this case, rural realities, as more innovative. Thus, to some extent, both support the thesis argument. In the CO-ART project, digitalization and non-formal activities were mentioned as the most innovative aspects; in Re-Cultural Heritage, the project's glocal approach is the reference for innovation. On the other hand, the production of a manual for the CO-ART project and a manual for Re-cultural is considered the least innovative. Today there are many more tools and methodologies to transfer knowledge that are more attractive and innovative. Communication of data and instructions is essential, but the digital environment integrated with non-formal methods now offers many other possibilities for data transmission that need to be studied and supported by policies to attract the younger generation, remembering the argument that the objectives of a policy must be included in its formulation stage. According to questionnaire respondents, innovation is a key point in the selected projects to support youth workers and their employability. They can strengthen their skills by stimulating the desire to learn through innovative elements such as gamification and digital aspects.

Young people are the engine of society; the elements of innovation are already present in society and the tools to create even more innovation are at our disposal; the responsibility for a prosperous and inclusive future for the European Union is shared. Public policies must be strengthened, as must, the participation of young people; innovation is part of the process and goal of boosting progress.

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