



Strengthening the intercultural learning impact of voluntary programmes for the local communities

Report of the study session held by
Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organizations
in co-operation with the
European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe

European Youth Centre Strasbourg
19 - 26 February 2012



This report gives an account of various aspects of the study session. It has been produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

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Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations

c/o MS/Action Aid Denmark
Fælledvej 12, 2200 Copenhagen, Denmark
Tel/ fax: 0039068 841 880
E-mail: alliance@alliance-network.eu
Website: alliance-network.eu

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Aims and objectives of the study session

The study session aimed to develop the intercultural learning impact of the programmes implemented by Alliance and empower the leaders of Alliance's projects to organise intercultural education activities for youth of the local communities where international voluntary projects take place, paying special attention to youth with special needs.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were proposed:

- to define the meaning of intercultural learning and its potential for the development of personal competences of youth to make social changes in multicultural environments, peace-building, conflict prevention and transformation, combating discrimination and to promote respect for human rights;
- to identify the role of international voluntary programmes in the process of intercultural learning of local youth and in developing a safe multicultural environment using tools of cultural dynamism, global interdependency and common responsibilities;
- to exchange tools and practices for the involvement of local youth in intercultural learning through international voluntary programmes;
- to improve the competences of facilitators and leaders of Alliance's voluntary programmes in leading intercultural education activities with involvement of local youth with different cultural and social backgrounds;
- to discuss possible follow-up of voluntary projects for the local community to ensure a sustainable intercultural learning impact.

Profile of participants and educational team

34 participants representing 18 Council of Europe member states and 4 non Council of Europe countries were selected from active volunteers and experienced camp leaders participating in Alliance activities and working, at the same time, with local communities. All of them had some experience in working with the topic of intercultural learning, but the level of expertise in this area was very different.

The educational team of the study session represented Alliance organisations from different parts of Europe: Russia, Ukraine, Serbia, Slovakia and Finland. Each of them had experience both in trainings and practical implementation of intercultural projects at local level.

Programme and main issues discussed

The programme flow was designed in order to start from participants' experiences, guide them through a series of experiences and concepts related to intercultural learning and to finally encourage them to take active steps in including intercultural learning in their volunteering activities and to plan common projects.

The session started with some modules that helped participants to get to know each other, break the ice and build the team. The getting to know each other part started with some activities in the evening of the arrival day. The next morning, the ice-breaking and team building activities already introduced the main topics and concepts, as participants were asked to present their definitions of terms like (intercultural learning, volunteering, youth work, identity, human rights), using the silent

discussion method. The objectives of the study session, the programme and the role and experience of Alliance in the implementation of intercultural projects targeting local communities were also discussed in the first morning.

The team building and the so called “intercultural discovery of the group” parts consisted of interactive activities that helped participants learn more about each other, about their experience in volunteering and intercultural learning. It was important to ensure enough time for the team building as the group was quite big and diverse.

The last activity of the day was called “Intercultural discovery of Alliance”. The experience participants had with Alliance activities was quite diverse. In order to reach a more even understanding, participants were asked to present in small groups, in the format of a TV show, the main activities of Alliance, based on their experience:

- Workcamps for renovation and reconstruction
- Workcamps to support festivals and cultural events
- Workcamps for teenagers
- European Voluntary Service projects
- Youth exchanges
- Ecological workcamps
- Training for camp leaders
- Structure of Alliance and its connection with intercultural learning (this one was done by the educational team)

The next day of the study session, participants explored issues connected with intercultural learning: culture, identity, intercultural society and intercultural learning. All those issues were related with the personal understanding and experience of participants, as well as with their connection with local realities in different countries. In the beginning, participants were asked to present their own definition of culture, then to pair-up and develop a common definition, then to make bigger and bigger groups to finally develop the whole group’s definition of culture. The session on identity was closely linked to culture. The debriefing in both modules focused on the fluidity of culture and identity, emphasising the fact that they are not static, but dynamic and changing manifestations at individual and societal level.

In the afternoon, a module was allocated to analysing the intercultural relations in participants’ specific contexts. Starting from a simple model of acculturation, participants analysed in small groups the relationship between majorities and minorities in their local realities. The last session of the day introduced participants to the challenges of intercultural communication, of discovering cultures that are different from ours and finding common ground. An “artificial culture types” exercise was used, except cultures presented (Minangkabau or Balkarian) were not artificial, but real ones, presented however very stereotypical. The day ended with an intercultural evening.

The following day, participants went much deeper in exploring the challenges of intercultural learning: stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination, and ways of dealing with them. All the challenges were discussed on the basis of participants’ experiences and experience of Alliance organisations. The first module consisted of simulation activities, followed by a long and deep debriefing on the impact stereotypes have in our lives, how easy they are formed and transmitted. The second module consisted of a discussion on combating stereotypes, starting from small pieces of paper with stereotypes proposed for discussion. Here are a few examples of the stereotypes discussed:

- *“Migrants come to our country and take our job”*
- *“Roma people don’t want to work, only dance and steal”*
- *“Women should stay at home and raise children”*

The rest of the day was free time for participants to explore the city. They received a small task they had to accomplish (most of them implied interaction with local people) and present the next morning.

The next day started with the presentation of the results of the outreach activity, where participants found out even in Strasbourg people are not familiar with human rights, do not know a lot about other nationalities and minorities living in their region.

The second part of the session was dedicated to mid-term evaluation, to check what was already accomplished, what changes were needed, which information and knowledge was still missing.

The next session was a presentation about human rights and intercultural learning and the approaches of the Council of Europe, done by Rui Gomes, the Head of Education and Training Division in the youth sector. This session was followed by an activity aiming at making the link between global and local levels in human rights education and intercultural learning approaches, to help global and local volunteers understand how global values can be implemented at local level. This session ended with a questions and answers session in which the educational advisor from the youth sector of the Council of Europe Mara Georgescu answered specific questions about human rights education. The day ended with the “intercultural movie night”, during which the movie “A class divided” was projected and discussed by participants.

The following stage of the study session explored the implementation of intercultural projects at local level: values of intercultural learning for the local communities, intercultural learning in life-long learning, management of intercultural projects (involvement of different local stakeholders, dealing with challenges in work with local community), exploring concrete tools in the work of Alliance with the local community. In the beginning, the participants were encouraged to reflect to the importance of building partnerships at local level, during an activity that was an adaptation of the exercise “Making links” from Compass – A manual on human rights education with young people of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, participants discussed the challenges of partnerships at local level, based on concrete case studies from Alliance’s experience. Afterwards, they had the opportunity to present concrete tools they can use, in a format of 35 minute parallel workshops.

The last session of the day provided the opportunity of meeting with an expert, Alexander Kirishev, former president of Alliance, who stimulated participants to think about intercultural learning challenges, by asking them to develop the “worst recipe” of intercultural learning at local level.

The day ended with the so called “night rope course”, which consisted of challenging activities (walking on rope, walking blindfolded etc.) done outside, for which trust in the group was the main ingredient.

During the final day of the study session, participants planned initiatives which can support the strengthening of intercultural learning impact for local communities, based on the project management theory and supported by the information about main funding opportunities for the implementation of such initiatives. The last sessions were dedicated to self-assessment, based on the autobiography of intercultural encounters, and the final evaluation of the study session.

Main outcomes of the study session

The study session showed possible links between international youth projects and sustainable development of youth on local territories using intercultural learning approach and human rights education. The study session participants will work with at least 1000 young people from rural territories representing disadvantaged groups during voluntary camp seasons in 2012-2013 and translate the outcomes of the study session in activities and educational approaches with those young people. Participants will also share the resources they have got during the study session, like tools, techniques, manuals and leaflets, with youth from their local communities. Participants of the study session will initiate and develop follow-up project ideas for applying to European Youth Foundation to deepen the theme of the study session.

While organising other study sessions, youth workers can find useful following recommendations:

- Pay a special attention to the level of previous knowledge and experience of your participants: they will feel comfortable and motivated to participate if they understand the subject and have quite equal level of knowledge.
- Prepare a library corner where participants can find more information related to the topic and try to prepare an Information Pack (published materials) which participants can take home. They can find also very interesting the information about cultures and countries presented on the study session, not only materials about the main topic.
- Is it useful to make a practical phase during the study session where participants can meet new cultures in the real life. The best would be to organise an event for one of the national minorities living in the city where the study session takes place. This needs a lot of preparation, so, during the preliminary meeting of the educational team of the study session, it is necessary already to visit the place and to agree about possible activities.
- It is very important to invite participants out of Europe, who live and work in different contexts and who can present other systems of values and an external view on European values. In our experience, the most surprising and exiting moments in discussions came when participants from Asia, Africa and America shared their opinions and experiences.
- If you plan to work on project development during the study session, participants have to be able to make decisions on behalf of their organisations.

The Constitution of Alliance (article on intercultural learning 2.1.) says Alliance unites voluntary organizations who promote intercultural understanding, peace and voluntary service as a valuable force in the common search for human betterment... and supports wherever possible local voluntary programs enabling young people ...to understand different cultures with an educational objective. The study session allowed Alliance to reflect about the educational objectives that can satisfy the needs of modern young people and modern societies. The study session contributed to formulate those objectives: to make local young people familiar with the processes and values of intercultural dialogue and open for this learning.

Alliance needs to find young leaders sharing Alliance's values and mission, not only leading projects. The study session contributed to this point showing the uniqueness of Alliance and forming loyalty to this network. Also, participants expressed their wish to develop all-Alliance projects and participate in the working groups of Alliance.

In 2012-2013 participants of the study session will realise initiatives to improve intercultural learning impact in the local community during Alliances international voluntary projects (like youth exchanges, workcamps, short-term voluntary service, etc.)

The intercultural learning tools presented and used during the study session will be included in the tool-boxes of Alliance's organisations, in particular, the intercultural learning exercises, the theory of intercultural society, main definitions, tools presented by participants during the workshops, rope course exercises etc.

Participants have developed their understanding and skills during the study session in the following directions:

- Intercultural learning is strongly connected with human rights education and promotes human rights values for people involved.
- The local community can benefit from intercultural projects organised by sharing European values, having wider access to international youth projects, increasing youth participation and active citizenship.
- Different challenges in working with the local community can be addressed by youth leaders with developed competences and cannot be an excuse for avoiding intercultural work with the local community.
- Tolerance is not the highest step in intercultural growth, we can go deeper to adaptation and integration for forming of the real respect.
- Definitions of culture and intercultural learning are very diverse, as well as culture itself.

Follow-up by participants

Participants developed the following project ideas during the study session:

- Adult exchange of environmental practices realised on the local level
- Project on stimulating youth participation on the local level
- “Rural and urban relations” youth exchange
- Integration of minorities in a country (experimental project using the example of Vietnam)
- Workshops series on intercultural learning opportunities for youth with fewer opportunities
- Training course on different kinds of minorities and majorities
- Presentations of cultures which participants of voluntary projects represent to local communities: cultural fairs, festivals, etc.
- Street theatre about intercultural learning with the involvement of the local community
- Debates on cultural issues (team of local youth and team of international volunteers)
- Presentations of international youth programmes available for the local youth and individual consultations on how to participate
- Common voluntary work with the local community, fighting stereotypes through common actions and learning by doing
- “Cultural discovery” activities with the participation of the local community

Only first drafts of the projects were developed during the study session, as the decisions to continue the development of the projects depend on the participants’ organisations.

Next year Alliance is going to apply for another study session “Transforming the intercultural learning experience in voluntary projects into life-long learning” to continue learning about issues raised during this study session.

Some of the Alliance’s organisations (SFERA, Alternative-V, Concordia France, etc.) will initiate training courses for young leaders from countries where youth is not so familiar with European practices and values of intercultural learning, to prepare “intercultural learning messengers” at local level.

Evaluation of the study session

At the end of the study session participants were asked to fill in an evaluation form.

Here are the most important results of the study session:

1. gaining knowledge and great energy to stay focused and active
2. gaining skills of teambuilding, group work, etc.
3. developing some concrete projects
4. gaining inspiration to involve youth in volunteering
5. new ideas and hope to develop them
6. gaining a better understanding of what Alliance is doing
7. meeting people with similar interests
8. gaining new experience in youth work

About a half of participants mentioned it was too early to speak about concrete results, they needed time to analyse everything and to try to implement ideas in real life. Some participants mentioned that it would be interesting for them to evaluate the study session's results a year later.

All the activities realised were mentioned by at least 2 participants as the most useful and inspirational. The work of the educational team was appreciated as an example of real teamwork, and participants appreciated a lot the expert's – Mr.Kurushev, - contribution, which was very practical and impressive.

For the following study sessions, participants recommended (besides what was mentioned before) the following topics:

1. Inequalities, prejudices, racism, power relation. How they work and how can we try to reduce them.
2. Peace: What is peace? How can we reach peace?
3. How to be a good team member / how to form a team at local community.
4. Learning methods. Team building games. Problem solving. Team leadership
5. Intercultural learning, voluntary work and gender.
6. How to keep volunteers involved in volunteering after the project? How to support volunteers? How to prepare volunteers before a project?
7. How to improve active participation of workcamps participants (after workcamps)
8. How to improve the over-all impact/quality of the workcamps.
9. Intercultural conflicts.

Programme of the study session

	Feb 19	Day 1 Feb 20	Day 2 Feb 21	Day 3 Feb 22	Day 4 Feb 23	Day 5 Feb 24	Day 6 Feb 25	Feb 26	
8.00 – 9.00	Arrival day	Breakfast							Dep artur e day
9.30-11.00		Getting to know each other	What is culture?	Stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination	Presentation of the results of outreach	Development of the partnership with the local community	Projects planning		
11.00 - 11.30		Coffee break							
11.30 – 13.00		Team building	What is identity?	Challenges in intercultural learning management	Council of Europe's work in human rights and intercultural learning	Challenges in development partnership on the local level	Projects consulting		
13.00 – 15.00		Lunch							
15.00 – 16.30		Intercultural discovering of the group	Intercultural society	Outreach activity + free time	Global education and local education	Workshops on practical tools how to work with the local community	AIE self-assessment session		
16.30 – 17.00		Coffee break			Coffee break				
17.00 – 18.30		Organizational projects fair	Intercultural learning		Global volunteering and local volunteering	Life-long intercultural learning and intercultural learning on the local level	Evaluation		
18.30 – 19.00		Reflection groups			Reflection groups				
19.00 – 20.00		Dinner			Dinner out	Dinner			
20.30 - ...		Ice breaking session	Free time	Intercultural evening	Intercultural learning movie evening	Night rope course	Farewell party		

List of participants

Family name	First name	Country	Organization
Babayan	Anahit	Armenia	HUJ
Stepanyan	Lusine	Armenia	HUJ
Chielens	Sophie	Belgium	CBB
Romero	Armando	Cyprus/Spain	LCEducational/Cocat
Tembo	Barbora	Czech Republic	Inex-SDA
Käige	Marie	Estonia	EstYes
Medell	Kristi	Estonia	EstYes
Vaisanen	Viivi	Finland	Allianci youth exchanges
Siekkinen	Jatta	Finland	Allianci youth exchanges
Bonnassies	Victor	France	Concordia
Bonnefoy	Stephane	France	JR
Ropert	Nadege	France	SJ
Martin-Ramelli	Charline	France	UNAREC
Burduli	Iamze	Georgia	LYVG
Boller	Soeren	Germany	IBG
RoEmer	Vanita	Germany	VJF
Schroth	Konstantin	Germany	VJF
Björklund	Axel	Greece	CIA
Guðmundsson	‘Asgeir	Iceland	WF
Coppola	Luca	Italy	YaP-Italy
Kawamura	Hanae	Japan	NICE
Calderon	Victor	Mexico	ViveMexico
Riesmeijer	Evelien	The Netherlands	SIW
Lohuis	Jolien	The Netherlands	SIW
Konyshkin	Ratmir	Russia	SFERA
Kuznetsova	Ekaterina	Russia	W4U
Popov	Sanja	Serbia	YRS - Voluntary Service of Serbia
Marković	Ivana	Serbia	YRS - Voluntary Service of Serbia
Kebis	Michal	Slovakia	Inex-Slovakia
Compte Perez	Sergio Mikel	Spain	COCAT
Karoui	Akrem	Tunisia	Association tunisienne d'action volontaire
Isaeva	Anna	Ukraine	Alternative-V
Barbukova	Iryna	Ukraine	Alternative-V
Quang Thi Thu	Hang	Vietnam	NVDA secretariate
Nikitina	Natalia	Russia	SFERA
Nestian	Oana	Romania	CoE Pool of Trainers
Milojevic	Dusan	Serbia	YRS - Voluntary Service of Serbia
Bodnar	Iryna	Ukraine	Alternative-V
Nasman	Bettina	Finland	Allianci youth exchanges
Gavuliak	Roman	Slovakia	Inex-Slovakia
Kurushev	Alexander	Estonia	EstYes

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