

INTERNAL INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT

THE EASE PROJECT. (Empowerment Approaches and Social Enterprise)

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Background.

The EASE project began in October 2013 and is funded by the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme, Transfer of Innovation strand. The project is coordinated by Basta, Sweden and is based upon a strong partnership comprising organisations that have worked together in past projects as well as several new groups with no prior European experience.

Basta is a well respected social business, established in 1994, which uses a series of "Cornerstones" to facilitate sustainable reintegration for its members. Basta was founded on solidarity principles and modelled on the San Patrignano Centre in Rimini, Italy, which is a partner in the EASE project.

The EASE Partners.

This is a large partnership comprising ten organisations spread across 5 countries. Each Core Partner is supported by one or more Support Partners in their own country. There are therefore several levels of beneficial information exchange and innovation transfer, occurring horizontally and laterally. Further benefit is achieved through "umbrella" organisations learning from each other through collaboration at transnational levels.

The partnership operates on two levels:

- Core Partners - who import the Basta Model into their local activity and test its suitability for overcoming local problems of exclusion and deprivation. The Core Partners are Ellebore Calestega (Elia), France and Diagrama Foundation, UK. Each of the Core Partners works to test the Basta Model within their local zone of activity and with their specific client groups.
- Support Partners - who support the Core Partners, also bringing new experiences, methodologies and good practice examples to be integrated into the Model. The Support Partners include San Patrignano, Italy; Action with Communities in Rural Kent, UK; Ex-Cons, Sweden; Fryshuset Sweden; La Claire, France; Jegersberg, Norway; Diagrama Foundation, Spain;

The EASE Project.

Transferring Basta's Model of social inclusion through community enterprise (social enterprise) is the focus of the project.

Elia, France. This Core Partner organisation works on the theme of work preparation and employment support, particularly for disadvantaged women, using the medium of recycling, re-use and sustainable/environmental good practice.

Diagrama Foundation UK. This Core Partner organisation intends to create a Basta look-alike centre for excluded people, particularly ex-offenders and those with a history of substance abuse.

Both Core Partners use social enterprise as the key to unlocking individual potential, supported by close mentoring and entrepreneurship training, featuring Basta's key principles and cornerstones within their local training and work creation programmes.

Evaluation of Activity and Progress so far.

Management of the Project.

There have been a series of meetings, some attended by all partners and others held specifically for the Core Partners. At each meeting the progress of the overall project has been measured alongside the achievements and difficulties experienced by each Core Partner.

The central management team were complimented by all partners as having been reliable, efficient, well organised and excellent at passing on information and giving guidance on all aspects of the project administration and management requirements.

This is especially commendable as in June the Project Coordinator went on maternity leave, requiring a thorough handover to her Basta colleagues. This transfer took place smoothly and efficiently without any adverse affect on the project. The new, Project Coordinator continues to work very well with all partners.

All partners have responded well to the central management team's requests for information and each partner has taken their role within the overall project with responsibility and shown commitment to the agreed objectives.

Significant Events.

During the first year of the EASE project the partners were represented (three organisations attending) at the Strasbourg Entrepreneurs Have Your Say event in January 2014, where 900+ people came together to create the Strasbourg Convention, recognising the essential role of social enterprise as a tool for meeting the Europe 2020 objectives.

This was followed in June 2014 by a major Social Enterprise and Micro Finance event hosted by San Patrignano in Italy, attended by all partners.

Other events are planned in coming months including one to be hosted by Elia, France.

Progress towards Specific Objectives.

The Support Partners have supported the Core Partners, contributing suggestions, observations, guidance and resources at every opportunity. The general operation has been shown to be beneficial for everyone taking part.

Evaluation sessions have been held after each meeting. These evaluation sessions have included questions relating to the quality of event management, hospitality and accommodation, general support and project specific issues. On every occasion all partners were totally happy with resources, facilities and services provided as well as being completely satisfied with the work of the project's central management team.

Evaluation / Views of Support Partners.

Individual partners have been canvassed by the Evaluator and asked for their comments about how the project has influenced their daily work. All partners reported having

learned about new ways of working that has some impact on the work of their organisation.

Those partners with no previous experience of working within transnational projects all reported enthusiasm and re-motivation having learned about what is possible when in contact with organisations from other countries.

Partners report being inspired by observed good practice and stimulated by meeting practitioners from different locations, even within their own country. Support organisations such as La Claié and Action with Communities in Rural Kent reported finding new information about wider issues through working together on this project (e.g. main EU Structural Funds, exchanging information of "umbrella" support-type activities that enrich their local work, impacting on their ability to provide better and more comprehensive services and information to their local networks).

Reports from the Core Partners.

Elia France is growing and as a direct result of the project so far has identified potential new premises in which their operation can grow. Elia intends to broaden its activity to provide wider benefit to its target group. New staff have been recruited so the project team is also growing. Elia's Project Coordinator reports being very satisfied with the support given by partners, especially Basta, saying that the achievements to date have exceeded all expectations.

The difference in each national system dictates variance in approaches to setting up and managing social enterprises. Therefore each of the Core Partners are limited to some extent as to how much of the Basta Model can be imported.

In the UK consideration also has to be given to the constraints and opportunities pertaining to the judicial structure that will impact on Diagrama's proposed new Centre. Diagrama Foundation UK is making slower progress but confirms its intention to reach its targets before the project ends. Funding has been secured to set up a foundation training course in Kent. The participants in this course will help guide the design and setting up of the new RISE initiative (Reintegration, Inclusion, Social Enterprise) which will form the foundation of the new Basta look-alike centre.

Diagrama's Project Coordinator has left the project and her replacement will take the project forward.

Basta's Project Coordinator reports that in general terms the project achievements are on target, but due to staff changes and other factors in some partner organisations, some results may be different to those anticipated.

Future Planning & Conclusions.

When consulted, all partners have said they wish to continue working with EASE project partners and several ideas have been made to extend results through future projects together. At the next full partnership meeting this will be discussed. All partners reported being satisfied with the progress of the project so far and all said that they were totally happy with the work plan and targets agreed. All those taking part share an expectation that the EASE project will fully meet its objectives and results will be achieved in accordance with those foreseen in the initial application.

Maureen Walby, September 2014