

 **DIANA**
Disability In sustainable Agriculture :
a New Approach for training of practitioners

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a New Approach for training of practitioners**

Progress Report

Public Part

Project information

Project acronym: DIANA
Project title: Disability In sustainable agriculture: a new approach for training of practitioners
Project number: 5094-LLP-1-2009-1-IT-LEONARDO-LMP
Sub-programme or KA: 2009-2188/001-001
Project website: www.projectdiana.eu

Reporting period: From 01/11/2009
To 30/04/2011
Report version: Final
Date of preparation: 31/05/2011

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Executive Summary

People with disabilities represent around one sixth of the overall EU working age population but their employment rate is comparatively low. Disabled people are almost twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people. Yet, with a little more help, millions of disabled Europeans could enter or re-enter the jobs market. The European policy for jobs and growth, as well several initiatives promoted by Member States work toward inclusion on the basis of the European Employment Strategy (EES) guidelines, including those of disability, is working toward this goal. On this background, the project acts in the field of social farming: agriculture, as highlighted by previous initiatives and experiences, is among the few areas in which people with mental and psychological disabilities can reach higher levels of integration. However, to fully exploit the potentialities of agriculture to support employability of people with disabilities, the skills of practitioners and workers in social farming should be tailored and improved. On the basis of previous experiences, it has been identified a main issue regarding skills of practitioners in social farming, which relates to different backgrounds of the workers: training and tutors with psychological, educational and social background lack of technical/agricultural competences; agricultural technicians lack of educational and psychological competences. However, when acting in social farming, both target groups should have the whole picture of persons with disabilities, in order to properly perform their role.

The project therefore aims at developing a training path specifically addressed to practitioners in social farming working with people with mental and psychiatric disabilities, in order to fill the gap between technical/agricultural and educational/psychological/social backgrounds of workers.

The general objective of the project is to contribute to employability of people with disabilities through agriculture: the added value of social farming is the possibility to disadvantaged people to be integrated into a living context, where their personal capabilities are valued and enhanced¹. The project builds on the main concept of *handicap* as contextual condition: if *deficit*² is given, and not modifiable, *handicap* is the result of a social and cultural process, it is the consequence of the meeting between the individual, with his/her own physical and psychological (including any deficits) characteristics, and his/her personal history and context. In this perspective, the concept of context (*milieu*) becomes more and more relevant in the reduction of the handicapping situation, then keeping the focus on what the disadvantaged person is capable to do, instead of what is not. Practitioners working with people with disabilities are therefore key players toward the reduction of the handicap and the social integration (on which employment is included) of people with disability, and to them the project action is addressed.

¹ Supporting policies for Social Farming in Europe, 2009

² See ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Health and Disability)

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1. Project Objectives

DIANA aims at creating a new training approach addressed to professionals working with mental and psychological disabled in the field of agriculture, to pilot and to promote its integration across social farming in Europe.

Since the definition and the profile of social farming is not yet agreed across Europe, and there are still different ways to identifying it as a way to use agriculture for social purposes, among the objectives a first research work was planned.

At a glance, the project objectives are:

- To prepare the background for transnational work and for further cooperation among social farms in Europe, by providing a picture of national contexts in social farming;
- To provide a common glossary on the way of working: since social farming sector is not harmonized yet in Europe, the project provides a first attempt of harmonisation of words and meanings across countries in Europe in the languages of the consortium;
- To undertake a needs assessment on social farming practitioners, both with social and agricultural background, to identify the competences that the training path piloting should address;
- To design and develop a training path for social farming practitioners, based on experiential learning, having as main features a) a common training of professionals with social/educational/psychological background, and agricultural technicians; b) an approach based on experiential learning, fostering self-reflection and peer learning, and adopting learning by doing and on-the-job methods.
- To pilot the training path in real contexts, in the social farms of the consortium, as well in further social farms participating in the project activities;
- To provide a validated training path for social farming practitioners and professionals based on the results and feedbacks of the piloting;
- To disseminate the results, and promote training for social and agricultural practitioners in social farming through exploitation.

The research and harmonisation work highlighted several difference across social farms in Europe, but a fundamental common goal, it means using agriculture or nature in promoting health, education, therapy or rehabilitation for disadvantaged people. On the basis of this common goal, further improvements should be made toward reciprocal understanding and mutual learning across countries, and to this aim the DIANA's work contributes. The process of gathering data allowed to involve social farms outside the consortium, disseminating then the project itself, but above all raising awareness about the project topics. The report adds information about features, contexts and national profiles in social farming, and to this respect it offers figures, data and subjects for forthcoming actions to researchers, professionals and policy makers in the field.

The design of training path, started from the needs' assessment undertaken with social farming practitioners, allowed to involve directly 86 practitioners both from

agricultural and social background. That served a twofold purposes: it allowed to gather data for the identification of the key competences to be developed in the frame of the training path; it allowed to begin the process of self-reflection with the workers about their role and their competences.

Dissemination, since the very beginning of the project, has aimed at informing, raising awareness about the issue tackled by the project, and involving further beneficiaries in the project action. Dissemination activities have been deployed from local to European level: the channels of communication have been accorded to the target, taking advantage in particular of established communities. Therefore, the consortium reached the target groups, composed by social farming, research centres, community of users (people dealing with disability issues) by means of direct contacts, newsletters articles, articles to specialized press, participation to conferences and workshops. The project website has been a reference point for the main information about the project aims and objectives.

2. Project Approach

In months 1-18 the consortium worked mainly in research and harmonization and design and drafting of the training path. Transversal activities of dissemination and evaluation have also been carried out.

With regard to research and harmonization, a survey has been carried out within the countries represented within the consortium, including associated partner and one further country (France, Italy, The Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Slovenia and Switzerland): national reference partners contacted further social farms and other stakeholders in order to gather data on the addressed topics to report about national contexts. The analysis and summary on the collected data have been in charge of the work package leader, who had the responsibility to deliver the report.

The same process, carried out in parallel, have been adopted for the common glossary on the way of working, aimed at providing a first attempt of harmonisation of words and meanings in the field of social farming in the languages of the consortium. Even if planned separately during the project drafting, the consortium decided to deliver the two outputs in one only report, in order to facilitate the reading of the survey taking advantage of the attached glossary.

The process of gathering data allowed to strengthen relations and networks at national level, introducing DIANA into existent networks.

With regard to design of training path, at month 18 two main outcomes have been carried out, self assessment on training needs and design and development of the training path, on the basis of the identified needs.

Self assessment exercises of practitioners has been carried out by means of an administered questionnaire and a focus group: these activities took place in the social farms of the consortium (included associated partner), and in one further farm that joined the project action. Having collected, analysed and discussed the final data together with the practitioners, each national partner provided a report explaining the process and the outcomes of the self assessment. The national results, listing the key training needs of each farm, have been the basis for the common work of the partners: the analysis and discussion of gathered data took place during a focus group held in Krakow on January 2011 during the third project meeting. The outcome has been the identification of the competences to be addressed by the DIANA training path. The process required a considerable effort by the partners, in terms of internal organisation (within the farms), analysis, reporting, and focus of the common training needs expressed by social farms having different fields of activities (from breeding to horticulture) and different organisational styles. However, the result has been relevant from several points of view, such as: a) the competences that the training path will address come from the reflection of real users, thus they are consistent with the learning needs of social farming; b) the process allowed the direct involvement of the beneficiaries (practitioners), who started the process of self reflection and peer learning before the beginning of the piloting experience; c) the involved farms had the opportunity to better know each other thanks to the sharing of reports and thanks to common work during the focus group: this also enhanced mutual understanding and peer learning.

The design of the training path started formally after the results of the self assessment, has actually been built upon a long exchange among partners, that

started at the beginning of the project about the pedagogical approach to be used in order to provide an efficient, effective, relevant and above all sustainable training experience to practitioners. While the methodologies and processes have been agreed later, the consensus on the adoption of experiential learning approaches has been quite fast. The partners discussed the approaches and the features of the path to be developed throughout all the project meetings and during remote communication. Therefore, the design and development of the procedures and tools to be used for piloting has been rather quick: the appointed work package leader and the whole consortium proved high commitment to reach the project objectives in the due time, also considering the need of begin the piloting in springtime. In facts, being the piloting to be implemented during the daily work, and where possible in agricultural fields, working together with people with disabilities, in most of the countries of the consortium weather conditions and rural cycle could have hindered the regular piloting implementation.

With regard to evaluation, the consortium agreed a tight schedule of evaluation exercises aimed at ensuring above all formative evaluation and frequent feedback, together with summative evaluation. The evaluation exercises take place at distance and in place during the meetings, by means of questionnaires. The restitution of results is given both in a written report and in a presentation of the state of the art, planned at each project meeting. The results of evaluation can be therefore discussed among the partnership during the project meetings, and further improvements as well as adjustments if needed could be jointly discussed and agreed.

With regard to dissemination, the first part of the project has been devoted to communicate the project aims and objectives, to promote interest and involvement by further social farms and other stakeholders, and to raise awareness about the issue tackled by the project action. To do so, taking advantage of the multidisciplinary composition and the transnational dimension of the consortium, dissemination has been performed at several levels:

- With regard to target groups, it has addressed as first audience other social farms in Europe: for this purpose, established networks, mailing list and communities has been addressed by the project information. As a second but important audience, the project information has reached universities, centres of research, training agencies and other stakeholders dealing with training in social farming: to this purpose, existent communities and networks has been addressed by the information, and the participation to conference and workshops allowed the presentation of the project. Besides, policy makers and audience dealing with disability issues have been addressed, by means of articles in specialized online press and in local newspapers, and by means of outreach activities at local level.
- With regard to geographical coverage, the countries of the consortium have been obviously reached more directly by the dissemination effort. However, European and international audience has been addressed as well, through online articles, participation to conferences and especially the website, which is online since month 3 of the project.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The project results at month 18 could be listed as following:

1. Survey on National Contexts and Glossary of the Ways of Working.
This report contains the outcomes of a survey on social farming features across eight countries in Europe, namely France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Switzerland, highlighting goals, organisation, employment and educational structure. The survey is complemented by a Glossary, translating from English into 6 languages (French, German, Dutch, Slovenian, Polish, Portuguese) the key words used in social farming.
This report is freely downloadable from the project website (www.projectdiana.eu)
2. Self assessment results: this short summary reports about the outcomes of the self assessment process on training needs assessment in social farming.
The summary is freely downloadable from the project website (www.projectdiana.eu)
3. Training path for practitioners of social farming
The methodology, procedures and tools for the developed training path are available online in a devoted space in Pbworks (www.pbworks.com).
To access the section, contact the project coordinator (gigliola.paviotti@unibo.it)

4. Partnerships

The partnership is composed by a) Social farms from 7 different countries in Europe (including associated partner). They are experts in agriculture and inclusion of people with special needs, daily in touch with the final beneficiaries and with local communities; b) Universities and centres of research, bringing theoretical approaches to the topic, as well as social research methods and resources. They have strong relations with the research and innovation field, decision makers and local/national authorities; c) SMEs involved in consultancy for social farming and evaluation of projects and programmes.

The added value of the working group is twofold:

- It merges different approaches to the same topic, so different points of view that help to better structure the whole picture of the tackled issue;
- It allows to share practices and approaches among countries, promoting mutual understanding, peer learning and the identification of common grounds for further cooperation and enhancement in European social farming.

All over Europe, there is a rich patrimony of diverse agricultural realities, which are characterized by distinctive relationships between farming practices and those of social inclusion³: the state of development of the systems, ranges from legally recognition and formalized activity (like in The Netherlands) to the lack of institutional environment (like in Italy). These differences across Europe are represented within the consortium: common work therefore represents both an important richness and a challenge. Similarly, if centres of research have a common ground and a common way to work, social farms do not share the same ground, nor among them, neither with the research field. The challenge of mutual understanding and the identification of common objectives and methods have required a big effort and a high commitment by the members of the consortium in past few months, however it has been very rewarding. The partnership, as working group, has continuously grown and improved its performance during the project lifespan until month 18. Lessons learnt thanks to the project is impacting on the partners themselves, in addition to the direct beneficiaries of the action: this is relevant for the organisation involved, and it is equally relevant for the further development of a harmonized social farming in Europe. The consortium gathers research and daily practice: it is linked with the a wide range of stakeholders, from local contexts to international research environments, to decision makers: this is another real added value for the impact of the project, as the relation among research and practice is herein represented and could develop and share innovation coming from both sides.

³ See Survey on National Contexts

5. Plans for the Future

At month 18 the partnership is about to start the piloting of the training path: the first piloting experience, in facts, is to take place in May 2011.

The piloting action will be implemented in seven countries (France, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland), involving eight social farms: one of them, external to the consortium, will pilot in different settings than the mental and psychiatric social farming, then testing the developed path for transferability purposes. An online space has been opened to support the practitioners involved, to share intermediate results and potential problems, and to generally monitor and undertake formative evaluation of the process. Within the piloting, transnational visits between the piloting partners are planned, in order to further enhance peer learning during the training.

At the end of the piloting experience, expected in February 2012, the consortium will work on an improved, reviewed and validated version of the training pathway, on the basis of the feedbacks collected and on the results of the piloting itself (“what worked under which conditions”). The final document (by means of 3100 CDs and of online activities) will be exploited during the last months of the project lifespan, on which the dissemination and exploitation effort will be intensified.

Dissemination is the first step toward exploitation of the results and raised awareness about a topic that is considered relevant by the consortium, as social inclusion and improved employability rates of disadvantage people. The activities of dissemination will be multiplied during the second part of the project, both for the mainstreaming of results and for the involvement of decision makers, on which the effort should be improved. To this aim, the organisation of roundtables is planned, to involve relevant local, national and European decision makers in agricultural, social and employment fields: the roundtables will be aimed at fostering discussion about common policies that can provide benefits in employment ratio both for agricultural and social practitioners; employment ratio for mental and psychological disabled with a related reduction of the costs of welfare state; improvement of multi-functionality in agriculture; increase of youth employment in agriculture.

Other audiences will be reached by means of

- Festivals in social farms (at least one per country involved), in which the partners will invite training centres, professional associations, associations of farmers, associations of disabled persons, policy-local and regional authorities;
- The final conference that will take place in Bologna, Italy, to present the results of the project and promote further discussion and cooperation among the topic within the stakeholders involved in inclusion and social farming.
- The continuous updating of the website and press release;
- The participation to conferences and workshops at academic level.

Evaluation will continue during until the end of the project, to ensure formative reflection and to keep the processes under control.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The project contributes both to employability and education and training policies in the framework of social inclusion.

Through the objective of enhancing skills of practitioners in social farming to better support people with mental and psychiatric disabilities to enter the labour market, DIANA contributes:

- To Education and Training 2020 framework, with specific regard to lifelong learning for practitioners and professionals, and to social inclusion objectives: with adequate support by practitioners, people with mental and psychiatric disabilities can develop their self-esteem, knowledge, skills and capability of learning to learn, and potentially motivated to be back to formal or non-formal learning pathway;
- To New Skills for New Jobs initiative (“Irrespective of age, gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity or disability, all EU citizens should have the opportunity to acquire and develop the mix of knowledge, skills and aptitudes they need to succeed in the labour market”), by providing better skilled staff for people with disability;
- To the general European Employment Strategy, by contributing to the headline targets 1 (75% of people aged 20-64 in work) and 3 (at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion);
- Indirectly, to Environmental policies: social farming is “naturally” oriented toward sustainable, often organic, agriculture. The reasons for this orientation could be found in the founder of farms themselves, who have usually a strong awareness both of social and environmental issues.

7. Extra Heading/Section

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