

SUVOT: Spicing Up Vocational Training

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Executive Summary

SUVOT has been a three years European project targeted at people suffering from mental illness, behavioural disorders and learning difficulties associated with mental or behavioural problems (e.g.: schizophrenia, personality disorder, etc.).

SUVOT aimed to establish a methodology of experiential learning to enable the previously mentioned group to acquire skills in order to facilitate them finding a job. SUVOT is a vocational training course in cooking specifically designed to take into account the particular needs of the target group. The innovative aspect of the project lays on the simulation methodology based on socio drama techniques that is used during the vocational training aimed to improve skills as for example team working, self-esteem, conflict resolution, social interaction, hierarchy, communication, etc.

SUVOT partners are experienced organisations working in the socio-sanitary field and trying to improve the quality of life of the people they work for. The Spanish coordinator, *Fundación INTRAS*, runs day centres and one residential home for people suffering from mental illness, offering them psychosocial rehabilitation and constant support according to the recovery approach. *OZARA* plays a similar role in Slovenia, having centres throughout the whole country. Both of them believe that employment is a crucial step in the recovery process of a person suffering from any kind of mental illness, and this is what SUVOT tries to offer. The vast experience implementing cooking training of *CJD*, a German vocational institution for young people and adults suffering from various disabilities, is certainly very valuable for SUVOT's objectives. The innovative content of the project lies with *Teatr Grodzki*, a Polish organisation running educational and artistic programs for vulnerable social groups. They developed the exercises based on socio-drama techniques and role-play which have given an original added value to the SUVOT vocational training course.

During these three years, the SUVOT team has developed a complete set of teaching tools composed of the teaching manual for the trainers with a full description of the cooking curriculum and the methodology to be applied, a textbook for the trainees to follow the course, a teaching DVD including practical cooking videos led by learners with mental illness, additional information, interviews and the books in digital version and, finally, an updated website (<http://suvot.intras.es>) with all the information and feedback about SUVOT.

Prior to the implementation of the pilot programs, SUVOT trainers were trained by experts in a 5-days intensive training. Then, in May 2012, three pilot training courses started in Spain, Slovenia and Germany, having a total of 34 students with any kind of mental illness. SUVOT course was taught three times per week during twelve months, that is to say 126 sessions lasting 378 hours. After these pilot experiences the manual and the textbook (available in five languages) were revised and improved on the basis of the reports written by the trainers after each of the training sessions, so the final versions of these books now include really valuable feedback that makes them easy to implement and applied to SUVOT's target group.

SUVOT has achieved high quality standards thanks to the constant monitoring of the Quality Board established at the beginning of the project and by the external evaluator. All the activities were constantly supervised assuring that everything was as planned.

The SUVOT project arose from the need to end the social stigma attached to mental illness that makes difficult the incorporation of this target group in the labour market. This is why SUVOT team has performed an ambitious dissemination campaign (informative newsletters each four months, brochures, promotional posters, emails, presentation in congresses and events, scientific articles, sent of press releases, [SUVOT Facebook](#), etc.) not only to promote the project, but also to give visibility to this group and make general audience aware of their capabilities. We have also organized several press conferences to reach as much people as possible and increase the impact in the media.

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1. Project Objectives

1.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The main objective of SUVOT project was to establish an innovative model of vocational training in cooking, based on the development of a simulation methodology especially conceived for the target group. People suffering from mental illness have less possibilities of getting a job, surveys reveal a 3 to 5 times higher unemployment rate with mentally ill individuals and this is what SUVOT project wanted to change.

SUVOT partners have developed a different concept of training, including the acquirement or improvement of frequently underestimated social skills that most of the times this target group needs to reinforce. Experiential learning is one of the bases of this new training; the results are mainly practical and applicable to everyday life.

One of the key points is that the partners not only developed the teaching methodology but also the curriculum to be taught: a “tailor-made” vocational training in cooking for people suffering from mental illness.

SUVOT team has produced a complete set of teaching tools listed below:

- A **teaching manual**: this is one of the most important results of the project. It includes 80 teaching sessions with a complete description of the cooking curriculum, 52 exercises developed based on socio drama and role-playing (task oriented games, warm-up exercises, group games) and the exhaustive explanation of the techniques to be used during the training. This manual has been revised and improved taking into consideration the comments and experiences of the trainers performing the pilot experiences (systematically collected after each of the training classes), so it is ready to be used by any educator working with disadvantaged groups.
- A **textbook** for trainees: it is an assisting tool for the trainees following the course. It includes also the 80 cooking lessons, suggestions for outdoor activities, exercises, international recipes and explanations about partners' countries to improve their European knowledge. This book does not include information about the simulation exercises, as it has to be always supervised by an expert.
- A **teaching DVD**: including cooking videos led by the SUVOT trainees performing the pilot experiences, interviews to experts, learning tables (to help the trainers organizing each training session) and additional information to better understand and develop the vocational training course.
- **Web platform** <http://suvot.intras.es>: this is a complete informative tool, as well as an educational and dissemination tool. You can find all the information about SUVOT, news appeared in mass media, the newsletters published, international recipes and the teaching materials developed.

Pilot experience involved 34 people suffering from mental illness and/or learning disabilities from the centres of INTRAS (Spain), OZARA (Slovenia) and CJD (Germany). Feedback from this practical training couldn't be better, trainees learnt how to work in a cooking environment as some of them have already demonstrated: 12 people made a practice period in a catering social firm and 5 people finally got a job related to the vocational course (in a catering company, a hotel or in a restaurant). In addition, the educators realized about a big improvement in their abilities to solve problems, relate to other people, self-esteem, self-confidence, etc. so we can say that SUVOT made a difference in their lives.

The hiring of some of the SUVOT participants seemed to be a very ambitious aim, even more if we consider the economic crisis we are living, but the SUVOT team has

demonstrated that the willingness to learn and to be an active part of our society is bigger than any fear or limitation.

SUVOT has taken also into consideration the big **social stigma** that accompanies the daily life of the target group. To fight against this stereotype and stigmatization, a big effort has been made to inform and educate the general public about mental illness in order to make it clear that people with mental illness are perfectly capable of having a job. Promotional material has been developed and distributed during several national events, seminars, conferences, informal meetings, press conferences, etc. In addition, we have organized integrative activities, for instance; visits to markets to do the shopping with the students, visits to hotels and restaurants, a show-cooking with students of an international culinary school, open-days to show their work, etc.

1.2. AN EXPLANATION OF HOW THE PROJECT BENEFITS A SPECIFIC COMMUNITY OF USERS AND HOW THEY ARE INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

SUVOT is specifically aimed at people suffering from **mental illness, behavioural disorders and learning difficulties**. Most of the times, vocational training does not consider their special needs and they drop out this kind of training or they do not even try it. We are living in a competitive world and education is needed for almost any kind of job. It is proven that **having a job is the first step to social integration**, so if we want our target group to be integrated into our current society, we should facilitate them with to the access to the labour market.

34 people have been directly benefited from the project, being students of the cooking training and thus increasing their knowledge and improving their probability of finding a job and in turn integration into society. Their families were also benefited from the project, as their relatives were taking part in SUVOT they have been kept active and improved their quality of life. With an estimated of 4 people affected per participant; we have a total number of approximately **170 people benefited directly thanks to SUVOT**.

Participants in the vocational training have been regular users from INTRAS, OZARA and CJD willing to improve their abilities and they have shown deep interest in being part of this project. They attended the course three times per week during an entire year, and are monitored and guided by professional staff that already know about their limitations, skills and potential. After 378 teaching hours they were prepared enough to work into the cooking sector, as some of them have demonstrated working as a waiter/waitress or a chef.

It is worth noticing the **high level of motivation** that the trainees have shown in the three countries. Educators were surprised about the level of involvement, the active participation and interest of students (something quite difficult to achieve with this target group). Thanks to SUVOT they have learnt useful things that they could apply not only in a future job but also in their daily life. Cooking is something that they can share with their friends and family and something they can be proud of.

Educators and trainers have found in SUVOT an innovative way to provide training to vulnerable groups. The methods developed can be applied when delivering other kinds of training too, so it is a very valuable tool. Their point of view has been very important and it was taking into consideration in the final revision of the teaching materials. They learnt from the experience of the pilots and all this knowledge has been included in the final versions of the teaching materials.

1.3. THE POTENTIAL IMPACT AND BENEFITS ON THE TARGET GROUP

The users or clients of the different partners' centres have very much enjoyed the SUVOT experience; no previous course or workshop has been as successful as SUVOT in any of the participating organisations. The commitment and motivation of the participants have exceeded all expectations. Normally, it is pretty complicated to involve the target group we are working with in long-term activities, so from the beginning, it was a challenge for the trainers. They were very surprised about the warm welcome and the low number of dropouts. The reason for this, is that the vocational course is very useful and easy to follow; participants had the feeling of actively learning something that they can use in their daily lives.

Mental illness often damages the social abilities of the people that suffer it. Self-esteem and self-confidence decrease and relationships with other people can become difficult. When trying to re-integrate people into society we cannot forget this important fact. That is why SUVOT considered not only the acquisition of technical knowledge but also the acquisition and improvement of the social abilities needed to be integrated in a working environment. This training of the social skills was crucial to improve the learning process and the quality of life of the learners. SUVOT has encouraged their independence and empowered the participants to be active members of society.

Social workers and psychologists working with the target group agree that the methodology developed allows them to provide the users with a *safe environment* where they could deal constructively with their conflicts and insecurities. This innovative approach allows a better use of the theoretical course because all the conflicts that can appear are dealt with in a safe environment which is facilitated by professional staff.

SUVOT means new employment opportunities for everybody. A total of 5 SUVOT trainees have gotten a job once they finished the course. Another important impact has been the establishment of a *permanent cooking vocational training course* in the partner organisations. In addition, one of the partners has integrated a new catering service within a social enterprise that employs some of the SUVOT trainees. Another significant result of this initiative has been the agreement made (negotiation phase) with an International Culinary School to *give some of the SUVOT trainees a scholarship* which will enable them to attend one of the high quality professional cooking courses at this school without an insurmountable financial burden and thus increase the possibilities of employment in the future.

We believe that SUVOT has made a difference in the *overall picture* that society in general has of the people with mental illness. SUVOT has proven that its participants are capable of attending a one year long training course which has produced excellent outcomes, for instance getting a job. Making people aware of the participants potential and capabilities will have also a positive effect on the group and on their recovery process.

2. Project Approach

To better know about the difficulties that people with mental illness have to encounter when trying to get a job, we designed a survey which was distributed amongst 101 people with various kinds of mental illness in Spain, Germany and Slovenia. It included 10 questions to test their concerns about being in a work environment and their attitude towards work. According to the results of these questionnaires, the area of co-operation with colleagues at work is certainly problematic for the target group. Developing social skills in this area is essential to opening vocational opportunities to this group of mentally ill people. Personal motivation is a very important area to address, 39% of respondents to our survey said they are not really motivated to achieve what they want. We tried to solve this point thanks to the methodology development, using role playing and socio-drama techniques to help them in facing their worries and difficulties. SUVOT has taken into account the real needs of the mentally ill people, not only to give them theoretical knowledge but also the confidence and tools to deal with daily problems.

The curriculum of the course was developed by CJD, a renowned vocational training institution that have years of experience in designing cooking courses for people at risk of social exclusion. Teatr Grodzki contributed to SUVOT by integrating simulation exercises based on socio-drama techniques, a creative combination never tested before. This preliminary version of the manual based on the real needs of the target group and in the valuable background of the partners, working for years with people suffering from mental illness and people in risk of social exclusion was tested in three different pilot experiences in Spain, Slovenia and Germany during a complete year. SUVOT was taught three times per week and the training sessions were composed of a mix of theoretical content and practical activities, outdoor activities, exercises, task-oriented games, group games, international recipes, knowledge about Europe, etc. After each of the training sessions, the educators wrote a report reflecting the positive and negative things of each session, things they would change or include and feedback from the students. This valuable information was studied and taken into consideration when reviewing the manual once the pilot experiences were finished. Thus, we managed to have really high quality manuals tested and adapted to real situations that an educator could find during the implementation of the training course. A total of 34 students finished the vocational training course and some of them had the chance to get a job related to cooking sector after that.

The quality of the project has been consistent throughout the duration of SUVOT. A Quality Board was established to monitor each of the activities and assure the excellence in all the products and procedures. Moreover, an external evaluator helped us to detect all the points that could be improved. This evaluation has provided us with an objective assessment and gave us the opportunity to reflect on the work done and on the possibilities to exploit the results obtained.

The SUVOT dissemination campaign was based on the creation of the SUVOT brand, that is to say, a set of newsletters, posters, brochures, press releases, a website (including attractive international recipes), invitations and informative emails all following the same structure and layout in order to make them easily identifiable with SUVOT. The organisations working in SUVOT have been very active in promoting this initiative at national and European level, so it has been possible to reach a large number of people related to the mental health sector and also the general public.

The SUVOT team attended and organized several conferences and events to let people (training organizations, people with mental illness, the organizations working for them and entities working in the socio-drama area, etc.) know about this initiative, so it could be reproduced in the future in any European country and thus allow its sustainability beyond the project duration.

To exploit the results, several informative seminars have been organized in Spain, Slovenia, Germany and Poland, explaining the actions and results of SUVOT. Moreover, to reach the academic circles, a scientific article was written and sent to reputed publications in which the problems that arose in relation to the target group and the benefits of the project were analysed in depth. Many people have shown interest in SUVOT, so we are sure that this is only the beginning.

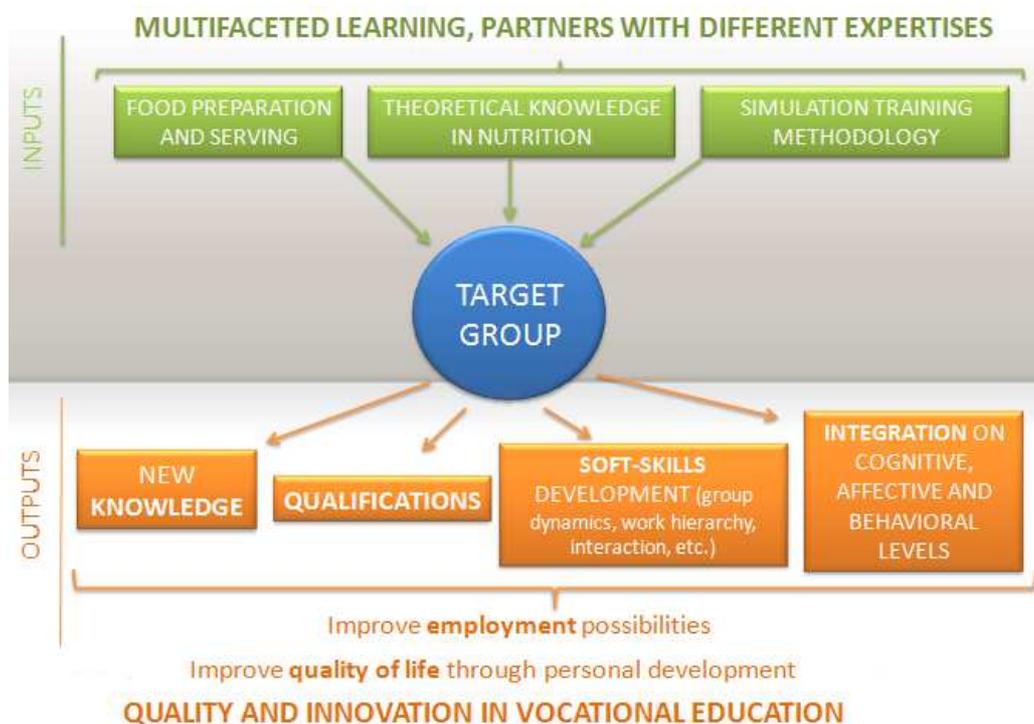


3. Project Outcomes & Results

SUVOT has achieved excellent results, some of them are easy to be explained and shown, but others are more difficult to measure (but even more important!). Let's see some of the most representative outcomes of the SUVOT initiative:

- Tangible results:
 - The development of a model of a vocational cooking training course specially designed for people with mental illness and/or learning disabilities. This model includes a methodology to improve social skills and has been tested in three different countries.
 - Implementation of three pilot experiences in Spain, Slovenia and Germany involving 34 people with mental illness during a complete year, 3 times per week, 3 hours each training session (378 teaching hours).
 - 5 SUVOT trainees have been hired in the cooking sector in both Spain and Germany.
 - 12 SUVOT trainees take part in a work experience period in a catering company.
 - 10 educators have learnt new methods for training groups of vulnerable people which apply not only to technical cooking content but also to other situations and scenarios.
 - Opening of a new business line on cooking and catering services within a social enterprise that employs some of the SUVOT trainees.
 - Improvement of the qualifications of the participants in the vocational training course.
 - Creation of a new stable training opportunity in the organizations developing the project. A cooking course is offered now as another training course or workshop.
 - A teaching manual for the educators including 80 training sessions and the explained methodology to support the learning process in five different languages (English, Spanish, Slovenian, German and Polish).
 - A textbook for the students including exercises, the theoretical content and international recipes in five different languages (English, Spanish, Slovenian, German and Polish).
 - A teaching DVD including instructional cooking videos led by some of the SUVOT trainees, interviews, the manuals in digital version, additional content to improve the quality of the vocational course and a complete overview of the project.
 - An updated website (<http://suvot.intras.es>) conceived not only as an informative website but also as a supporting tool for both the educators and the trainees involved in the course implementation. This platform includes the teaching materials to implement the vocational training course, description of the organizations involved in the project, international recipes, the informative newsletters produced every four months, coverage of the project appeared in the mass media, etc. The SUVOT website is available in five different languages to improve the impact and accessibility (English, Spanish, Slovenian, German and Polish).
 - A scientific article including the results of SUVOT and the problematic of the target group sent to several publications.
 - Production of dissemination material to publicise and inform individuals and organisations about SUVOT and thus reach as much people as possible: posters, brochures, newsletters, invitations, press releases, informative emails, etc. Also dissemination actions were organised or attended, for instance conferences, seminars and events in Spain, Slovenia, Germany and Poland to were used to present SUVOT and its results to both a specialised and general audience. The SUVOT experience was reported on in more than 35 pieces of coverage by various media sources.

- The presence of SUVOT on social networks: [SUVOT Facebook](#) and [VIMEO SUVOT channel](#).
 - The identification of 1.635 stakeholders throughout Europe who are potentially interested in the topics dealt by SUVOT that have been informed about it.
 - An agreement with an International Cooking School situated in Spain to provide a grant enabling attendance by some of the SUVOT trainees to a cookery course (still in the negotiation process).
- Intangible results:
- The improvement of the social skills of the participants in the vocational training course: self-esteem, self-confidence, conflict resolution abilities, team work, discussion about different points of view, communication, etc. A meaningful improvement in the development of activities in their daily lives.
 - Improvement of the learning abilities of the participants in the course and their willingness to continue learning throughout their lives.
 - An increase in the commitment and motivation of the participants in the course.
 - An improvement in the independence and autonomy of the participants in the course.
 - An increase in the visibility of people living with mental illness to the general public.
 - An increase in the working opportunities available to the SUVOT trainees.



4. Partnerships

One of the reasons for the success of SUVOT has been the combined effort, commitment and the quality of the organisations that made it possible. Each of the partners have different but complementary expertise that has been crucial for the development of such high quality teaching tool.

INTRAS and OZARA run several resources for people with severe and prolonged mental illness, so their knowledge and background about the target group is unquestioned. CJD also work with mentally ill people with a particular focus on employment, as they carry out several vocational courses in their centres in Germany thanks to its highly specialised staff. Last but certainly not least, the Polish Teatr Grodzki is a highly reputable institution in psychodrama and education and have made the development of innovative methodologies to improve the learning process and to enhance social abilities possible.

These four institutions have worked in a very coordinated way and the experience has been truly enriching and beneficial. Each of us has different ways of working and facing challenges, so we have learnt a lot of new things and have opened our minds to new methodologies and approaches. We have realised that we share common interests, concerns and objectives and, as a consequence, new project proposals have been prepared and submitted to several European open-calls. Some of them have been approved, thus we will keep on working together in the years to come. For example INTRAS and OZARA are currently working in the Leonardo Da Vinci-Partnership project “LEOSHAPE” to promote physical activity for people with mental issues, CJD and INTRAS are involved in the Youth in Action project “OUTART” (to train youngsters with mental illness to use photography as a way to positively express themselves) and the Daphne application “TRANSPACE” (development of an inter-disciplinary method for children-youth with intellectual and mental health disabilities to deal with the violence they often experience). Also, we have created a solid network of contacts throughout Europe, so we can say that SUVOT has been the beginning of a beneficial and positive relationship between the partners.

It is worth noting that the different origins and the vast list of contacts of the organisations involved have been especially useful for the dissemination of the project. The translation of all the teaching materials has also facilitated the impact of the initiative at a European level.

5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

All of us have been surprised about the level of success of the project, not only in the interest that similar organisations have shown in adopting the course, but also amongst the participants that have been involved in it throughout the year. As already stated, it is difficult to engage this target group in such a long training course but SUVOT did. We have taken advantage of this fact to continue implementing the SUVOT course not only in the centres that ran the course last year but also in other centres, for example we had a SUVOT event at a recent open day-centre in INTRAS' facilities. We can say that SUVOT is here to stay!

SUVOT training materials are available for free on the website (everybody can directly download the manuals) and partners will continue to promote it and share their experiences with other entities. These didactic tools are clearly explained and they are ready to be directly transferred to any other training institution. The website will be running for at least five years after the end of the project (but we would hope for longer), includes valuable feedback from educators and additional information to make the implementation of the training course even easier.

Moreover, the simulation methodology development is applicable not only to cooking courses but also to any other training content or workshop as it has been revealed as a powerful tool to improve the learning process and train social skills. We will keep on using it and continue to improve it to get the best out of the people with mental issues. We are sure they are able to be re-integrated into society and they deserve the opportunity to do so and we hope to provide this.

We will continue to inform the relevant stakeholders about further activities related to SUVOT and we will keep on trying to influence local policy makers in an effort to improve on the education and working opportunities available to people with mental illness.

The SUVOT team has also devised a follow-up project to continue the work of SUVOT, it may be possible to promote it as a case study or work with other organisations to transfer this innovative approach. We are proud of the results obtained so we are aiming to impact on as many people as possible who can either could implement the SUVOT approach and/or benefit from our work.

6. Contribution to EU policies

This project has a clear connection with European policies, for example, the Commission Green Paper “Improving the Mental Health of The Population: Towards A Strategy on Mental Health for The European Union”, and the “European Pact on Mental Health” whose purpose is to highlight the relevance of mental health for public health, productivity, learning and social cohesion within the EU. This project also supports the ET2020 benchmarks of (a) ensuring the acquisition of basic skills by all, and (b) increasing adults’ participation in learning. It also supports two specific European Reference tools i.e. (a) the Recommendation on Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning which emphasises the role of education for individuals’ personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship, and employability and (b) on-going work on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The SUVOT project has been promoted through the European network “Mental Health Europe (MHE)”, which organises, every year, a thematic debate at the European Parliament, to raise awareness and advocate on mental health and wellbeing as key issues impacting on social and health policies in the European Union. SUVOT appeared in the MHE newsletter on January 2012 and September 2013 and manuals and brochures were sent to their members (67 member organizations in 30 European countries and 72 individual members).

SUVOT does not merely aim to develop an innovative training methodology or to facilitate access to the labour market, but it also hopes to propose strategic and structural solutions for a more cohesive and tolerant society of Europe’s tomorrow. We established a cooking vocational training programme in each of the partner organisations and we managed to create a new business line within a catering social enterprise that employs project participants who have been professionally trained thanks to SUVOT.

Lifelong learning has a direct effect on an individual’s and societal well-being, and influences the social and economic environment in which people spend their lives. *“Policies that encourage learning, will enable individuals to develop new skills, strengthen social networks and feel more able to deal with life’s challenges”* (New Economics Foundation, 2009). This is what SUVOT wanted to achieve, to improve the well-being and competences of people with fewer opportunities and thus facilitate their integration into society.

All the materials produced in the framework of SUVOT project are available in five European languages (English, Spanish, Slovenian, German and Polish) to ensure a wide exchange of knowledge and experiences between as many professionals working with the target group of people with mental illness as possible.

