

Solidarity Walls



Participants: asylum seekers, volunteers and local inhabitants
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Location

Como, Lombardia (Garzola)

Country

Italy

Short summarizing description

Our measure enabled to experiment with innovative social and territorial innovation paths. This was possible thanks to a large local network: each partner contributed with its expertise that ranged from nourishing a welcoming culture, managing reception services and facilitating work integration up to organizing creative walks to valorize the landscape surrounding Como and promoting dry stone walls. While managing to restore two terracing that had collapsed, the initiative succeeded in stimulating a fruitful interaction among asylum seekers and local inhabitants, and fostered trust relations among the actors involved. Thanks to this joint community building effort, a piece of land that had been abandoned for over 50 year was regenerated: it is now ready to be cultivated and start produce agricultural products again, as it did for centuries. Starting from April 2018, three African asylum seekers will grow ancient vegetables and fruits at risk of extinction (i.e. Brunate onion)

Key Terms

social and territorial innovation, community building, community regeneration

Context and background, Which problems/challenges does your measure try to solve/cope with?

Our measure tackles various challenges. Firstly, by stimulating the interaction among asylum seekers and local inhabitants it paves the way for a positive change in attitude of the local community towards asylum seekers. This is particularly relevant in mountain territories notably distinguished by a strong social polarization. Secondly, our training enables to take stock of the informal, implicit practice-oriented skills of asylum seekers and it contributes to raising awareness about the agricultural heritage of our territory and the valuable function played dry stone walls, which run the

risk of deteriorating despite their century-long history as a mean whereby to cultivate land in hostile mountain environments.

Which are the key objectives of your measure?

1) Experimenting with innovative social inclusion paths designed to pave the way for the work integration of asylum seekers in a mountain area that witnessed the abandonment of agriculture due to progressive urbanization 2) Empowering asylum seekers by supporting their active engagement as promoters of a regeneration process that benefits the entire community 3) Contributing to revitalizing the territory between Como and Brunate and to harnessing its agricultural potential. Until the 1960s, this land used to feed the inhabitants of Como with its products.

Who are the main target groups and beneficiaries of your measure?

Target groups: 1) asylum seekers hosted in Como and Brunate (small mountain municipality located on the mountain above Como) 2) inhabitants of the territory between Como and Brunate Beneficiaries: 1) various organizations in charge of reception 2) one local cultural association 3) the World Association of Terraced Landscapes - IT section

Which actions have already been implemented and which results have been achieved so far?

We have already experimented with two training modules, each addressed to 15 asylum seekers and to 15 volunteers. During the first training (October, 2017), participants became familiar with the basic theoretical and practical knowledge of the dry stone wall building technique, typical of the Como Lake. Thanks to their strong motivation, participants succeeded in restoring a 30 mt long terracing. The second training (December, 2017) enabled participants to advance their knowledge: despite the less favorable climate conditions, participants restored a second 40 mt terracing. Both terracing are now ready to be cultivated. The training also paved the way for the starting up of new local initiatives: the growing of selected products and beekeeping by a second generation young immigrant - a woman from Salvador.

Which were the main problems and challenges you were/are facing when implementing the project and how did/do you (try to) overcome them?

We faced two main technical problems. We struggled to find two masters experts in dry stone walls' building techniques. Thanks to our large network we managed to identify two very motivated experts who are struggling to ensure the survival of this valuable art, at risk of extinction. Another technical difficulty was generated by the dearth of stones to re-build the dry stone walls. The goodwill of asylum seekers, who volunteered to seek them in the nearby bramble woods, enabled to recover the needed amount of stones. Both challenges contributed to strengthening group cohesiveness.

Link to website

<https://www.facebook.com/garzola.muriasecco>

Starting date

2017-07-01

Duration

6

Regional scale

1 - local (one municipality)

Other involved partners

Rebbio Parish, Coordinamento CAS Comaschi, Associazione Sentiero dei Sogni, Como Accoglie, Alleanza Mondiale dei Paesaggi Terrazzati - Sezione Italiana

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Category 1, Managing social change

Our measure corroborates that under specific conditions it is possible to create win-win situations in hosting asylum seekers for receiving communities. The engagement of various local actors and especially the active involvement of Third Sector organizations that are rooted in the local community was in this respect crucial. Our measure acknowledges particularly the key role of Third Sector organizations in connecting asylum seekers with local inhabitants in a collective community building exercise. Furthermore, emerges the ability of such organizations to innovate service delivery and experiment with community-based pathways for the social and economic inclusion of recipients thanks to the active engagement of volunteers promoted.

Category 2: Integrating migrants into the local/,regional labour market

Our measure aims at setting the ground for the future integration of three asylum seekers in the local labour market. Three asylum seekers from Africa who already expressed their interest in cultivating the regenerated land, will be trained with ad hoc mentoring with a view to strengthen their entrepreneurial skills. They will be encouraged to become members of a local agricultural cooperative to which they will confer the products grown. Garzola Muri a Secco will assist the three asylum seekers by helping them bring about their "survival" skills as basis for fostering their entrepreneurial skills.

Category 3: Improving land use, nature ,protection and regional development

Our measure builds upon the practice oriented informal skills of asylum seekers that are often not acknowledged and sometimes ignored by the same recipients. The valorization of some of these latent skills enabled to achieve outstanding results in terms of meters of dry stone walls re-built. The results achieved - in terms of contributing to improving land use - were judged outstanding and way above any possible expectation by the two experienced masters, who are normally used to train trainees with much lower practice-oriented skills, energy and motivation to work. Two are the main lessons learned: i) asylum seekers are endowed with unrecognized practice oriented skills that can be employed to support initiatives that are of interest to local communities and ii) whenever they are offered the possibility, asylum seekers are more than willing to work than other youths, especially when they feel they are part of a collective endeavor.

Category 5, PR impact and awareness raising

The success of the measure was widely communicated to the general public via social media through: - a dedicated Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/garzola.muriasecco>), - web sites of the promoting organizations - various online web-sites that disseminated the initiative's outcomes <https://www.ciaocomo.it/2017/10/20/corso-base-sullarte-dei-muri-secco/147316/> <http://www.bibazz.it/mondo-bibazz/muri-a-secco-con-i-migranti-per-il-monte-dei-poeti/> <http://www.bibazz.it/culture/ecco-i-muri-a-secco-per-il-monte-dei-poeti/> <https://ecoinformazioni.wordpress.com/2017/12/10/costruire-muri-di-solidarieta/> <https://www.facebook.com/laculturachevince> The measure contributes to raising awareness of Third Sector organizations about the importance of involving the community in the welfare process. It also contributes to raising awareness of the general public about the importance of managing the asylum challenge effectively by valorizing the skills of asylum seekers

Category 6, Innovative dimension

The innovative reach of our measure can be seen from different angles: - it triggers social and territorial innovation: the training proposed enables to bring about and value the informal skills of recipients and at the same time it generates a beneficial impact upon the receiving territory (outcome: terracing built and new collective and entrepreneurial initiatives planned) - it supports organizational innovation: it stimulates networking among organizations that don't normally cooperate (organizations in charge of reception and organizations dealing with landscape and territorial innovation) thus paving the way for the setting up of new cooperation structures - it is meant to last over time: it is the first step of a longer process, which is ultimately aimed at fostering the full integration of recipients in the labour market and it is one of the elements of a broader project: the building the cultural park Poets' Mountain, promoted by the Association Sentiero dei Sogni.

Category 7, Transferability

The format of our initiative (different target groups, including asylum seekers and local inhabitants; key role of volunteers for strengthening trust relations; clear definition of a common general interest aim to be pursued; engagement of masters of traditional crafts as trainers) can be easily transferred to other territories. Indeed, we have already been asked by three distinct Third Sector organizations in charge of managing reception to provide the methodological inputs required to organize a similar initiative in three additional territories. At the same time, we have been encouraged to replicate the initiative with a view to recover additional dry stone walls in the same territory that run the risk of collapsing owing to a lack of proper maintenance. Furthermore, the same format will be used to promote other initiatives in the next future (a training on beekeeping has already been planned for the next year).

Category 8, Embedment in a comprehensive welcoming strategy

Our initiative is part of a comprehensive welcoming strategy. Each of its phases is taken care of by distinct project partners, specialized in either assisting recipients, facilitating their social inclusion and/or nourishing a welcoming cultures. Our measure contributes to connecting distinct phases and partners together, thus moving beyond welfare support in order to facilitate the social and economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees in the local community. The engagement of organizations that struggle to promote the cultural and socio-economic heritage of the Como – Brunate landscape, territory and history aims indeed at designing innovative local strategies whereby to empower recipients. These include start ups where asylum seekers are actively engaged that are designed to generate a beneficial impact upon the receiving community (e.g. promotion of local organic products; regeneration of abandoned and unused lands and spaces)

Further Information



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[Short project.pdf — 2865Kb](#)

Short project describing key aims pursued and structure of the training

[VOLANTINOULT.jpg — 996Kb](#)

Brochure of the first training initiative