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STRIPS
on the integration road



ANALYSIS OF THE FOCUS GROUP

within the framework of the European project **STRIPS ON THE INTEGRATION ROAD**

Bluebook S.r.l. - August 24, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The present document is an analysis of the focus group activity carried out by Bluebook S.r.l. in collaboration with Cooperazione Sud Per l'Europa, dated August 24, 2016, within the framework of the European project with title *STRIPS on the Integration Road* with reference number 2016-1-SE02-KA205-001475.

As a introduction to the focus activity, Bluebook presented the Erasmus+ program and the project in its main points: objectives, participants, milestones.

In particular the project objectives have been presented to the participants as follow:

The project has got three main objectives:

- 1. to design, implement, test and disseminate an effective educational tool easy to use and decode able to support youth workers in developing their daily activities and their channels of communication with the goal to support young new migrants and refugees, in their integration path starting from the principle that knowledge of the hosting society's language, history, institutions is crucial for successful integration: the aim of integration calls for efforts by the migrant to accept the basic values of the hosting society.*
- 2. To design, implement and disseminate a guide accompanying youth workers, step by step, through the process of using comics to communicate. The tool implemented by the project will be suitable for re-processing and for being used with a wide range of different target profiles (in general young people with fewer opportunities) in different contexts and starting from different topics.*
- 3. To experience an alliance between NGOs, youth centers, refugee centers, and, by a general point of view, an alliance with people engaged in processes of integration support.*
- 4. To experience and promote an innovative cross sectorial partnership (one NGO dealing with immigration issues; a social communication agency and an association whose core mission is integration and European cooperation in the youth field) with the aim to reinforce the dialogue among highly different, but complementary entities and to exploit each partners competences for the benefit of youth workers and the behoof of all the people they potentially get in touch with.*

The analysis has considered the opinions of seven participants coming from associations related to inter-culture and migrant's rights:

- Palmira Varone, graduated by DAMS - Discipline delle Arti della Musica e dello Spettacolo. She works in CSPE as referent person of the SPRAR project database (Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati)
- Angela Ioculano, psychology graduated - She works in the Ionadi refugee center
- Vittoria Vardè, psychology graduated - She works in the Arena refugee center
- Donatella Tropeano, psychology graduated - She works in the Polistena centre "Le muse del sorriso"
- Margherita Loiacono, social worker - She works in the Polistena centre



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- Nisrine Bokaudour, cultural mediator - She works in CSPE
- Emmanuel Grant - He is training in CSPE

THE analysis takes account of eight questions as follows.

Introduction questions - 1 and 2

What are the comics for you?

Which is your favorite comic?

Comics are considered by the participants as an entertainment, a kill time.

Somebody says that the most relevant feature of comics is fantasy: the power of imagination able to create a story using drawings.

The mentioned comics are Mickey Mouse and Donald Fauntleroy Duck, but in principle, the most loved kind of comics is the adventure genre.

Questions 3 and 4

What kind of comic does better fit the project?

What type of characters?

The participants agree on the idea of using comics as a medium to inform young migrants and to foster the principles of integration, as comics are considered to be a flexible tool by which it is possible to build a story using simple drawings and few words.

Some of the participants opt for superheroes, while others prefer real characters, closed to the young migrants experience even if they don't leave out the chance to mix the characters: real people and superheroes.

As regards the superheroes, one of the participants suggests the design of a new character: the superhero Europe, because most of young migrants actually consider Europe as a superhero that will let them to lead a better life and will let their dreams come true.

On this point the debate is open because some of the participants underline the risk linked to an idealized picture of Europe, too much better than in reality.

As regards the real characters the participants suggest to design characters referring to the features of the target. All the participants agree on the principle that both genders must be represented while some of the participants would like to design the comics involving also a family, with all its members.

In addition some participants suggest the design of a character belonging to our society: an Italian person.

According to them this character could facilitate the design of the comic dialogue as an intercultural one, underlining the difficulties daily faced by the migrants but also the difficulties and awkwardness faced by local people.

Going further, another addressed issue regards the differences among migrant people: they actually come from different countries and have different background and culture.

How can we mix and tell our readers these differences? The participants' suggestion is to feature the characters using stuffs belonging to different cultures as musical instruments,

food, sports. One of the participants suggests to design the strips using, as characters, a musical group.



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Finally some of the participants suggest to add in the series some famous characters as singers.

Questions 5

Which would be the best setting?

According to the majority of the participants, the setting should be a local small city, in particular a small area in which the immigrants can feel welcome but they also suggest the idea of movement from one area to another, from the small city to a bigger one. The participants, referring to their experiences with migrants, underline the fact that the majority of migrant people dream to live in a big town.

Another addressed issue regards the settings linked to the migrants' experience: the sea and the desert.

The participants underline the fact that the migration journey represents for migrants a crucial element in their lives and, as a consequence, the journey-topic must be faced with a special care.

As regards the sea, they suggest that one of the first strip could tell the coming journey imaging a mermaid (or the superhero Europe) guiding them.

Another suggested idea is connected with the concept of family and some of the participants suggest the idea to design strips in which an Italian family hosts a migrant family so that daily-life situations could be related.

Questions 6

Which are the crucial issues to be dealt with the comics?

The debate on this point starts with some examples reported by the participants.

The reported experiences are connected with events to which both local people and migrants took part: according to the participants these events demonstrate that, living together, people can easily learn about each other and reach the objective of intercultural dialogue.

During the reported events (fair food) both the newcomers and the autochthonous spent together a joyful time. The newcomers had the opportunity to learn about local gastronomic tradition and the autochthonous had the opportunity to learn about newcomers' habits.

As a consequence of this personal positive experience, the participants claim that food is a topic worth mentioning.

As regards values and beliefs the participants underline religion as a matter that strongly impact both the newcomers and the local people: all of them agree on the fact that this aspect must be taken into account, also exploring the local traditional heritage.

Another explored issue is language and, in particular, the difficulties of understanding. According to the participants the languages skills are crucial for newcomers and it is relevant to underline, by the strips, this relevance, with the aim to goad newcomers to learn the hosting country language.

All the participants are deeply convinced that integration is a long path and a bidirectional action and that all the actors must play their role actively, starting from a positive attitude.

All of them agree on the idea that stereotypes block this process and one person in the group focus on the fact that not only local people have stereotypes and prejudices but also the



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newcomers have ones. This person reports her personal experience quoting sentences like the following one: *Italian people don't care of us. You give us only room and board.*

All the participants agree on this point claiming that too often coming people complain of the assistance quality without working on a personal project for their life: this generate a sense of frustration among people that work hard on this field and can be exacerbate existing tensions.

Welfarism is a complex issue the participants debated on. It is a complex issue also because it is closely linked to a negative feeling towards new migrants expressed by a part of our society: some Italian people actually believe that the migrants' integration is too much expensive for Italy as a whole and that migrants sometimes have more then some Italians have (the possession of a mobile is, for example, a popular issue in our country as it is associated to a state of welfare).

According to the participants and as told before, this crucial point could be overcome if we could foster the principle that the main goal of a person is the construction of his or her life project.

Another stereotype quoted is the one that connotes the foreign person as a dangerous person. According to all the participants, the comic strips should demonstrate that this is not true and that all of us have the same life expectations, hope and fears. Somebody suggests the design of comic strips in which a new-comer acts as an active citizenship helping other people in trouble.

Another issue to focus on, according to all the participants, is the condition of life in the countries which people escape from: this could foster a sense of compassion (in this case the word is used in its original latin meaning: "to suffer with") and facilitate the integration.

Finally, at the end of this section, the coordinator of the focus group asks the participants to list the essential issues the comic strips have to express. They list the following key words: equality, solidarity, friendship, respect of law, respect of Italian culture, duty, rights. The participants suggest also a headline: together we can!

Question 7

How to overcome the language barrier?

As regards the language, as told before, the participants agree on the fact that the comic strips can be a relevant tool to foster the principle that the language skills are a crucial element for integration: even if new migrants have difficulties to understand the country hosting language they think the strips should use verbal language. At the same time they underline the relevance of non verbal communication and in particular the attention to be paid to the differences of non verbal communication in different cultures.

Finally the participants claim the relevance of the use of metaphors even if they admit that metaphors could be misleading and so they must be used with great care.

Question 8

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Nothing to add.