

Art of Inclusion

mdj

Best practices

Strategic partnership for the Exchange of good practices – Erasmus+ Programme

Art as a vehicle of learning and sharing of methods and techniques for the creation of learning opportunities for adults with disability



The partnership is composed by:
Associazione Uniamoci Onlus (ITALY) - Coordinator
Diakonisches Werk Bremen e.V. (GERMANY) - Partner
Centro Social e Paroquial Santos Mártires (PORTUGAL) - Partner
Fundatia Crestina Diakonia Filiala Sfantu Gheorghe (ROMANIA) - Partner



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Index

Introduction.....	5
About the project.....	6
1. BENEFITS OF MAKING ART IN ADULT LEARNING OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY.....	10
2. EXCHANGE OF APPROACHES AND ART ACTIVITIES.....	11
3. THE POTENTIAL OF THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION.....	12
3.1 How was this miracle possible? - Parallel local activities.....	12
3.2 How was this miracle possible? - Virtual meetings.....	16
3.3 How was this miracle possible? - An extraordinary partnership.....	17



Introduction

This publication contains a description of the best practices developed and exchanged during the project “Art of Inclusion” in the field of social inclusion through and as an “art”. It contains the most relevant results of the project and shows how Art combined with transnationality can be key elements for the cultural, personal and social learning of adult people with disability.

It is considered that art is a human creation with aesthetic values that synthesizes the emotions, the history, the feelings, the culture. This project aimed to highlight the importance of the application of art in special education, since it is considered to be an important medium for the development of the human being, socially, affectively and in the psychomotor aspect. It is believed that through art in education it is possible to develop certain areas of knowledge such as visual perception, auditory, body expression, intuition, imagination, analogical, concrete, holistic thinking and reflection, thus allowing the development of creativity, and also a form of stimulus for the student, especially the special educational needs. It is known that art can be a means of accomplishment and an instrument of work for anyone, both in the family and in the social environment. It is assumed that society needs to create conditions and opportunities for access to work and promote work carried out by people with special needs.

It is considered that a setting of creative activities is a space where everyone should have the same opportunities, seeking to abandon the labels, classifications, taking into account the possibilities and needs of the people with special needs. It is believed that through art can be worked the interdisciplinarity in the institution, making a pleasant and interesting work in the intellectual development of the human being. It is very important for the Carrier of Special Educational Needs to contact the art, be it plastic, scenic, musical, etc., so he will be developing his potential and expressing his emotions, sensations and perceptions. The main objective of teaching art to the holder of special educational needs is to offer them the opportunity to develop their potential through creativity, reasoning, perception and motor control, with the accompaniment of people and professionals informed of their importance, understanding the results and from the suggested practices. It is believed that through Art, the technician has the opportunity to provide experiences that will contribute to the evolution of the personality of the student with special educational needs and its social adjustment, since the attitude of the student is a product of what he learns, think and its possibilities. It is considered that Art is one of the most important channels for the individual to develop his potential, is the representation of life. It is known that for centuries the disabled were considered distinct beings and on the margins of social groups, but as the right of man to equality and citizenship became a concern of thinkers, the history of Special Education began to change. On the other hand, the achievements of so many artists with disability shows what great cultural and valuable contributions impaired persons might produce the aesthetic experience, artistic practices, have been part of the daily construction of life, from the first steps taken by man in the construction of culture, when he began to sing, dance, leave graphic marks on drawings and paintings in caves and other spaces. The importance of Art is not only in the development of the creativity it provides, or in the improvement of the forms of perception on the part of the People with Special Educational Needs, because Art is relevant as an object of knowledge that extends man’s understanding of himself and his interaction with the world in which he lives. It stands out that the Art has the objective ludic, with spontaneous participation, having no fixed rules nor borders. One does it for the pleasure of discovery. Hence its importance to organize a good program where People with Disabilities can participate regardless of their limitations. The art equals the differences, therefore, one must encourage the realization of programs of Art with music, dance and corporal expression, where the Person motivated not through the competition, but through the pleasure. **Art is the pleasure of surprise.** It is up to the school or adult training institution to find educational responses to the needs of its students and demand a transformation. Inclusion would then be the process by which the institution itself adapts itself, transforming itself to be able to insert into its regular classes children and young people with special educational needs who are in search of their full development and exercise of citizenship. **It is considered important to propose a quality education based on experiences and experiences with art, since discovery and creativity are seen as one of the most important aspects of learning.** An interdisciplinary proposal for learning, in order to have effect, needs to seek integration. Family, school, team, educator, need to move in the “come and go”, “lead and seek” of solidarity, support and integration. It is believed that it is also through the artistic activities that the child and the youth dialogue and exist, besides feeling.

About the project

Inclusion is an “art” in each society as well for people responsible for social and political developments as well for the individuals who need a certain “art of life” to overcome obstacles.

Our partnership – organizations responsible for day centres and leisure time activities for people with disability based in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Romania - aims at the exchange of best practises among the partner organizations in the field of social inclusion of people with disability, through the creation of a common learning path for their staff, users and volunteers explored art as a vehicle for learning and sharing; this path led the reflection about the art of inclusion in the participating Countries and in the participant’s life.

“Art of Inclusion” wants to give a concrete response to the still perceived barriers to mobility (creating real and virtual mobilities for the beneficiaries), to education and leisure (creating an international and inclusive learning process), to the fruition of art and culture, to employment (through a deepening on the possibility of matching art and income); it also promote the use of easy language and ICT technologies to overcome language and physical barriers. The international cooperation created by this project lead to identify effective, shared and generalizable operative strategies in the perspective of a European Strategy for social inclusion of people with disability, while empowering its learners, giving voice to their needs and suggestions, and making them aware of their power to produce a change.

The project had a duration of 3 years (September 2016 - August 2019) and involved 100 participants (25 adult learners for each partner) among people with disability, volunteers and staff members. They were involved in some local workshops and activities, and other joint activities and meetings realized during the 4 bended mobilities on the topic of art and/as social inclusion:



- Analysis of cultural sites/art objects to be found in the local area and how to encounter them with disabilities.
- Deepening on local artists for the creation of reports.
- Art workshops with artistic guidance.
- Case studies about disability and art of life.
- Workshop about the European regulation and politicians and opinion leaders attitude about the art of creating a more and more inclusive society.
- Workshop about the possibilities to create an income from artistic and artisanal activities for people with disabilities.
- Comparisons about the state of social inclusion in the partner countries.

The implementation of the project was based on a collaborative approach among the four partners who shared tasks and responsibilities: each partner hosted a blended mobility and all the partners worked on common local activities sharing techniques and results through a constant communication using different channels. The project activities were based on non formal learning methods: group work, task division, open discussions, learning by doing, group or individual analysis under the guidance of local artists and/or pedagogical specialists. The results of the local activities were constantly shared inside the partnership. An inclusive approach was adopted in all the undertaken activities by the use of easy language and the use of technology promoted as a mean to overcome the physical barriers.

Art of Inclusion is a strategic partnership for the exchange of good practises in the field of adult education, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union; it is coordinated by ASSOCIAZIONE UNIAMOCI ONLUS (Italy) with the partnership of CENTRO SOCIAL E PAROQUIAL SANTOS MÁRTIRES (Portugal), DIAKONISCHES WERK BREMEN E.V. (Germany) and FUNDATIA CRESTINA DIAKONIA FILIALA SFANTU GHEORGHE (Romania).





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1. BENEFITS OF MAKING ART IN ADULT LEARNING OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

The importance of making, realizing, creating is well known:

Plato stated *“every man and every woman is born with the instinct to build and to do”*.

Art can be several different things (painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture, creative up-cycling, creating a garden, music, writing, creating decorations, land art, performances) and everyone is able to experience art because it is based on the process, on creativity and it doesn't have strict rules. So it even allows to create a meeting point between people with disabilities and so-called able bodied people because it is an interesting and relaxing activity for everyone, it doesn't need words but it stimulates the relation.

Our three years project involved adult people with disability and adult volunteers in a diversified group creative process, made of experimentation of different materials, techniques and forms of art but also meetings with artists, research work and visits to cultural and artistic sites; that demonstrated to have a strong impact on the participants with disability in terms of:

- **Development of communication skills and social integration:** intended as the ability to express oneself, ability to relate with the others in the group during the shared creative process developing social and relational skills and learning from the others, ability to relate at a peer level with adult able bodied participants.
- **Development of self awareness:** the creation of an object helps to understand how it is made but most of all allows the person to experience his own commitment, determination, attention and concentration, motivation to reach a satisfying result.
- **Development of self esteem** connected with the sense of gratification for being able to obtain a result.
- **Increased sense of personal well-being:** in general to make art can cheer up and reduce stress and anxiety allowing to overcome adversities or problems; the reinforcement by the social workers and the group mates who observe and help create a sense of delight.
- **Development of an active attitude:** creating allows the person to feel able to follow the instructions, to solve, to plan.
- **Improvement of the fine motor skills abilities** with positive repercussions on the daily praxic activities.
- **Development of the capacity of knowing how to wait:** to create means to learn to be patient, more time and care the person will dedicate to the art activity and more easily he will be able to obtain satisfying results.
- **Development of interests towards the external reality** and artistic and cultural events.



2. EXCHANGE OF APPROACHES AND ART ACTIVITIES

The exchange of methods of art therapy and realization of art workshops, good practices and approaches in the realization of social inclusion among the partners, led to the creation of an innovative shared approach enriched from the opportunity to understand the social policy in the different European Countries and the discovery of weaknesses and good practices through the active involvement of the disabled people themselves. The practical connection to art and manufacture in the project allowed to implement a learning process on culture and art for the participants and introduced new kind of inclusive activities for the disabled learners in the ordinary work of each partner organization.

The international cooperation created by Art of Inclusion led to identify effective, shared and generalizable operative strategies in the perspective of a European Strategy for social inclusion of people with disabilities.

The participation to the virtual mobilities, hosted by each partner, where activities from the usual art and craft activities of the center were proposed to the people with disability and the volunteers from other countries: it allowed to staff and users to practice new types of activities, developing their know how, interests and cultural and artistic knowledge, observing different ways of putting the instructions given into practice in different settings.

The art and cultural activities realized during the physical mobility allowed to each hosting partner to involve the participants in their approach and method in rehabilitation, management of art group activities, educational approach but also their connections with the local media and the community in general.



[*Click here for a short summary of all the blended mobilities*](#)

The local shared and parallel activities (see paragraph 3.1), allowed to the national groups of learners to make some research activities about artists and works of art, hidden art in their cities, to reflect about their own „Art of Life“, to learn about the european law, how to earn from art and crafts but most of all they had the opportunity to exchange the process and the result of the activities from the other partner organizations, turning also the local activities into transnational learning.

Art of Inclusion means to give the dignity of adults to the people with disabilities, to stimulate them to take an active role in their life thanks to the use of art not just as occupational activity but as a powerful learning tool able to stimulate the interest toward the external world to who experiences and enjoys art while offering them the analytical instruments to be able to “read” the world. For people with disability art is not just drawing, it is the opportunity to feel productive, it is the commitment to reach a result, it is learning new abilities and being open to new opportunities, also earning ones.

Educators and social workers have a crucial role in the realization of the Art of Inclusion; they need to:

- Involve experts in the art field.
- Adequately organize the workshops keeping always in mind the real benefits that those activities connected with art can have for the users.
- Involve volunteers because art is not only for people with disabilities, it is for everybody.
- Stimulate the participants to go beyond their limits giving professional advice to make it better or organizing some small working groups based on mutual support.
- Giving theoretical inputs and instructions using an easy to understand language and a welcoming approach.
- It may be useful to foresee a practical use for the artworks created: a charity sale, a public exhibition, a paper or online publication.

3. THE POTENTIAL OF THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION

Blended mobility after blended mobility it was possible to feel more and more the intercultural atmosphere and the amazing results of making art together: people with disabilities, staff members and volunteers, people from Italy, Germany, Portugal and Romania who started to get to know each other and each other's culture, to find a way to communicate, to make new experiences together. The project offered to users, staff and volunteers indescribable learning experience that had a huge impact on their personal, social and professional life: "it is the power of Erasmus+!" was something that we heard several times from the accompanying persons of the participants in mobility while observing their disabled users going beyond their limits, actively participating, communicating in different languages, discovering new dimensions of learning and staying together beyond any kind of diversity.

Thanks to Art of Inclusion a dozen people took their first airplane ride and even more people went abroad for the first time, around 7 people had the opportunity to swim in the sea for the first time (one was so surprised that the water was salty like a baby discovering the world) or see themselves or their produced work in a TV-news or newspaper with that set of divergent emotions, from enthusiasm to fear that characterizes first times. "The power of Erasmus+" was much more noticeable during the last blended mobility, where each participant could feel himself as part of a big transnational group because they already got used to different cultures: accompanying persons were able to support people with disabilities from the other Countries in a very natural way, the hosting organization prepared some activities in small groups where, even if the instructions were given in English and most of the participants didn't know it, without any translation, the group was able to follow the instructions, thanks to the patience, ability to observe, willingness to participate developed during the project; equally unforgettable was the moment when a person with cognitive disability from Romania was helping a person with disability from Italy in creating handcrafts, or to see how naturally people with disability from different countries were working at the same table, communicating some way with each other, without the need of the constant presence of the accompanying persons.

3.1 How was this miracle possible? - Parallel local activities

The learning path of the project was made of parallel local activities: the project duration has been broken down into several learning sub activities on the topics of art and/or social inclusion. Each of them was discussed among the partners in terms of expected results and learning methods and then proposed to the group of learners: each partner organization realized the same activity in the same period of time, exchanging its progresses with the others and the general public through an exchange of e-mails and the updating of the project facebook page where one member from each organization had the role of "author" being able to publish posts on their own. The work on parallel activities stimulated among the participants both the interest about what the other participants were doing in the other Countries and also the commitment to work hard to produce a good result.

Here a description of the activities proposed to the learners and the methods that were used:

- **Creation of descriptions of six local artists' career and works (some from previous time and some living ones):** at first each national group organized some meetings with the group of learners for the selection of the artists to be explored: each learner had the chance to propose some artists, some information about them were collected and presented and the six artists were chosen by voting or by drawing; interesting the choice of the German partner to make an open casting for the selection of the artists from former time on facebook, which gave some public attention to the partnership activities.

After that it was time to collect information and write the texts about the artists: the groups were made of people with very different abilities so tricks were used to make the activities more dynamic and allow the active involvement of all learners, for example the Portuguese partner proceeded to search for historical details of their region and in particular the rural world so the users made several walks where the physical activity was successfully combined with the search and collection of interesting data of cultural heritage or both the Italian and the German partner visited some art exhibitions; about the living artists it was also possible to meet them and to interview them or to invite them to have a live exhibition, so the research for information were combined with the opportunity to meet the artist, asking questions, enjoying their art in live performances or even working together. About the process of collection of information and creation of the texts, in Italy

the educators or some volunteers or users with a higher cognitive abilities looked for a big text about life and while some small groups of learners were looking for the artists' work and small description, another group was reading the information underlining the most important ones to be included in the text to be typed on computer; the works to be explored were selected by voting and considering specific criteria and their descriptions were enriched with the considerations by the learners. The final text was read and discussed in the group to share and consolidate the learning outcomes; in this phase, if we were working on a living artist, the group prepared and interview for the artist to be made during a meeting with him. This collaborative and supportive approach allowed to people with physical and or mental and or cognitive disability and able-bodied volunteers to work together giving their active contribution to the workshop.



[Click here for the final result](#)



• **Research for art objects or places that are “hidden” or overlooked in the cities of the partner organizations:** the learners of the project were involved in walks or city tours taking pictures of what they thought to be interesting for the purpose of the activity or simply suggested places or art objects in the city they found in their personal life. Persons with disability, for example wheelchair users have another „height of eye-level“, so they see things that others might overlook. In Bremen, the explorers' group made a special tram ride through the city suburbs, to look for „street art“ from this perspective. The participants then selected the 4 best photos that were later organized in 4 postcards by a graphic: each postcard is composed by 4 images, one per each city (Braga, Palermo, Braganca and Sfantu Gheorghe).



[Click here for the final result](#)



- **Case studies about the participants' life situation and the "art" needed to realize survival and participation in society:** the learners were asked to reflect on their life, reflecting on how they manage to overcome problems and to participate in social life; they were supported in the creation of personal reports on the topic using ict presentations, drawings, text.



[Click here for the final result](#)



- **Workshop about the European regulation for social inclusion of people with disabilities:** some volunteers in each partner organization collected relevant information that were shared with learners during a local workshop and prepared an interview for stakeholders asking what is needed for the actualization of social inclusion. The European Semester reports on social inclusion in the EU member states were used to compare the situation and the way such reports are made.



[Click here for the final result](#)



- **Art workshops:** simply the partner organizations keep a weekly art workshop sharing activities on the common facebook page.
- **Organization of group visits to cultural sites/participation to local cultural events:** the partner organization realized some group visits to art exhibitions or local historical places sharing photos and descriptions of the common facebook page. By this way, visual impaired and blind people got access to guided tours where they might touch and feel works of art or material connected with them (at such an event at Bremen we arranged for example that a special type of 19th century „ladies saddle“ seen on the picture on display was put next to it and the impaired persons might explore it by touch – the museum liked this piece so much that it was kept in place even after our special tour was finished) or people with anxiety disorders made this tour in a very quiet and protected arrangement. Some museums indeed offer special tours like this for their general collection, but with the help of the partnership funds we could realize such guidance for the short-time „special exhibitions“, too. Persons with disability got by this way an access not only to these events but to the actual cultural life of their city, where these special exhibitions were promoted and discussed.
- **Local inclusive art projects with artistic guidance:** during the transnational meeting was agreed to create sensory gardens, that are garden environments designed with the purpose of stimulating the senses. This stimulation occurs courtesy of plants and the use of materials that engage one's senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound. The organization in Bragança and Sfântu Gheorghe had some field around their centers that was transformed into a beautiful garden with flowers, plants, aromatic/medicinal plants and wooden furniture, original pieces of art and dedicated places for cognitive stimulation. In Bremen, the yard of the Wichernhaus center was turned into a sensory garden with flowers, the creation of small statues and wooden installations capable of producing sounds with the wind; the group of learners also experienced the opportunities offered by natural colours made from plant and flowers for fabric. In Italy, it was decided to create a sensory garden for the children of the local kindergarten of the district where the organization is located: aromatic plants, succulents, flowers, coloured decorations for the trees, windchimes, a sensory walking path were planted, created and installed; the learners also prepared a sensory activity to propose to the children and some nature related songs. The learners participated to the creation of the sensory gardens with the guidance of a professional.

• **Local workshop about the possibilities to create an income from artisanal activities for people with disabilities:** staff and volunteers from the partner organizations looked for the national regulations and widespread practices for the sale of handcrafts and illustrated them to the whole group of learners in an easy to understand way. These information were later shared inside the partnership. The sale of works and services of art, art teaching or project consulting is certainly a possibility for many persons with disability to get access income. It became clear, on the other hand, that persons with disability who are welfare payment recipients or in a similar status have difficulties to „profit“ from the sale or artistic works or services as such income might be reckoned against such payments. On the other hand, the „right of ownership“ is sometimes by arrangements not with the artist but with the institution where the work is made and „sales“ at charity events etc. are mostly for the benefit of the often very under-funded institutions, not income for the artists.



[Click here for the final result](#)



3.2 How was this miracle possible? - Virtual meetings

The virtual meetings of the blended mobilities were relevant: they were something very new for our organizations that revealed to be interesting moments of exchange of activities and methods. The virtual meetings were built as creative moments where the hosting organization stimulated the learners from other countries to experience art related techniques and methods. In general we had 6 virtual meetings for each blended mobility, usually 4 meetings before and two after the physical mobility. Each organization extended the virtual meetings not only to the 6 participants that would have physically travelled, but the entire group of learners of the project.

It was chose Thursday afternoon as the day dedicated to the virtual meetings, planning a calendar of meetings suitable for all the partners. The hosting partner had the task to send the learning material (written instructions, theoretical introductions, demonstration videos) around one week before the virtual meeting, so to give to the partners the time to prepare the activity and collect materials. It was chosen to work in parallel in the 3 partner organizations trying to be coordinated in the different time zones and to use the facebook page as meeting place, were to share the process and the results of the activities.

The chosen virtual learning activities had a very practical imprint, so to make them more interesting and accessible for the target group of learners, mainly made of people with mental or cognitive disability.

The intercultural dimension of the activities (“today we are going to make an Art activity inspired to the German artist Friedensreich Hunderwasser’s “Line of Hamburg” or “we are going to paint on glass a dragon - symbol of the city of Sfântu Gheorghe”, “we will reproduce the decorations of the portuguese traditional tails “Azulejo”, or “we will create some upcycled objects inspired to the creative upcycling workshops of the italian organization”) and the possibility to watch online the other groups at work (facebook streamings or simply posting photos in real time) represented an added value to the learning process and worked as a preparation and a conclusion to the physical mobility.

The virtual mobilities represented the main tool of exchange of art techniques and methods but even of the approaches to the occupational activities between the partner organizations. They represented a learning moment not only for the participating organizations, but even for the hosting one, thanks to the opportunity to observe how a same activity could take different shapes in different groups and with different staff members.



[Click here for a detailed description of the virtual learning tools exchanged during the project](#)



3.3 How was this miracle possible? - An extraordinary partnership

Associazione Uniamoci Onlus, Diakonisches Werk Bremen e.V. and Fundația Creștină Diakonia Filiala Sfantu Gheorghe were already partner in the Grundtvig Learning Partnership that inspired this project being its follow-up plan. The similarities of objectives, the work in the same social area and the reciprocal interest for the strengths of each other organization linked to the will to learn from each other for the creation of an inclusive European society and the good communication laid the foundation for a solid and lasting international cooperation.

The project involved also a portuguese organization who was never involved in a similar project, Centro Social e Paroquial Santos Mártires, whos profile, users and objectives are very similar to the other partners and who revealed a great enthusiasm and disposability to join the project and cooperate in the application process: it was chosen after an email exchange for the interest generated by the big variety of services provided to people with disabilities.

All the partner organizations brought to the project their experience in the actual work with adult people with disabilities in their local area, the competences in the use of specific forms of art as vehicles of learning and also their wide local network. Some of them brought their experience in international cooperation, some others in organizational and management matters or in the use of ICT, organization of specific events, management of workshops and activities, involvement of media. In general, the tasks and responsibilities were divided between the partners in an equal way an all of them actively participated to monitoring, evaluation and dissemination.

The result was a peaceful and inspirational work environment, where all the partners felt really committed to the project and participated in the decision making process. Deadlines were always accomplished and any problem was simply solved through communication.









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