I4OE - Collaboration for innovation and capacity building for an open ecosystem

Guide of Good Practice

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Short Description:

The guide of good practices provides practical procedures of actuation for achieving an open ecosystem, and also allows other stakeholders to take ownership of the co-construction process carried out in previous activities, to capitalize on it.

Disclaimer:

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1. Introduction

1.1 About the I4OE project

The I4OE project, was born with the aim of supporting the education community in its work with external organisations, exploring how partnerships and networks can be built, helping to identify and solve local problems.

Substantial societal and environmental changes are facing schools today, and the same problems surpass all sectors from early childhood education to adult education.

The educational community does not always know how to approach these changes, as they often involve collaboration with external partners and the search for wider solutions. As part of a wider ecosystem, various stakeholders are called upon to cooperate, but feel disoriented with regard to procedures and practices in the education sector. Unprepared, many of them do not fully contribute to the improvement of the local ecosystem. Similarly, educators and other education professionals do not always know how to integrate and facilitate cooperation with other stakeholders in an open school.

We aim with this project to consult and support community stakeholders to engage and collaborate effectively in an open ecosystem. By reaching out to local policy makers, business decision makers, non-governmental organisations, members of civil society organisations, etc., we aimed at empowering them to promote cooperation, participation and democratic citizenship by giving everyone a voice.

During the following chapters we will show how this path was carried out, what methodological framework we tested, the resources we used and the experiences we developed during these 18 months.

With this we do not intend to present an infallible recipe, but rather to show how we can experiment in education, taking the first steps towards an active conversation between the different key actors in the community entering into dialogue and participation, with a focus on adult education.

2. Aims of the Guide

This guide of good practices provides practical procedures of actuation for achieving an open ecosystem, and also allows other stakeholders to take ownership of the co-construction process carried out in previous activities, to capitalize on it.

It provides the framework in which the I4OE partners have developed in order to realise activities in a way to achieve the collaboration for innovation and capacity building for an open ecosystem.

Present the steps as well as examples on how other stakeholders could built on and reproduce activities and/or create their own.

3. Framework and Methodology for Open and Innovative Ecosystems

The adult education sector, within the context of Erasmus Plus programs, refers to the field of education that focuses on providing learning opportunities for adults. It encompasses formal, non-formal, and informal learning activities designed to meet the needs and interests of adult learners, enabling them to acquire new skills, enhance their competencies, and foster personal growth.

In this context, collaboration and partnerships between educational institutions, organizations, and stakeholders from different countries are encouraged aiming at sharing best practices and foster international cooperation in the field of adult education. In this sense, I4OE consortium aimed to include promoting social inclusion, enhancing employability, supporting active citizenship, and encouraging innovation in education and training, contributing to personal, professional, and social development of learners.

Many of the trainings and activities promoted in this context are aimed at a more disadvantaged public, focusing essentially on strengthening skills for the job market as passive learners. I4OE advocates that adult trainees should broaden their social intervention, seeking solutions to common problems together with other people in their community, regardless of their social conditions. In this context, dialogues and interventions between people with different academic qualifications and different professional, political and social functions and positions are encouraged.
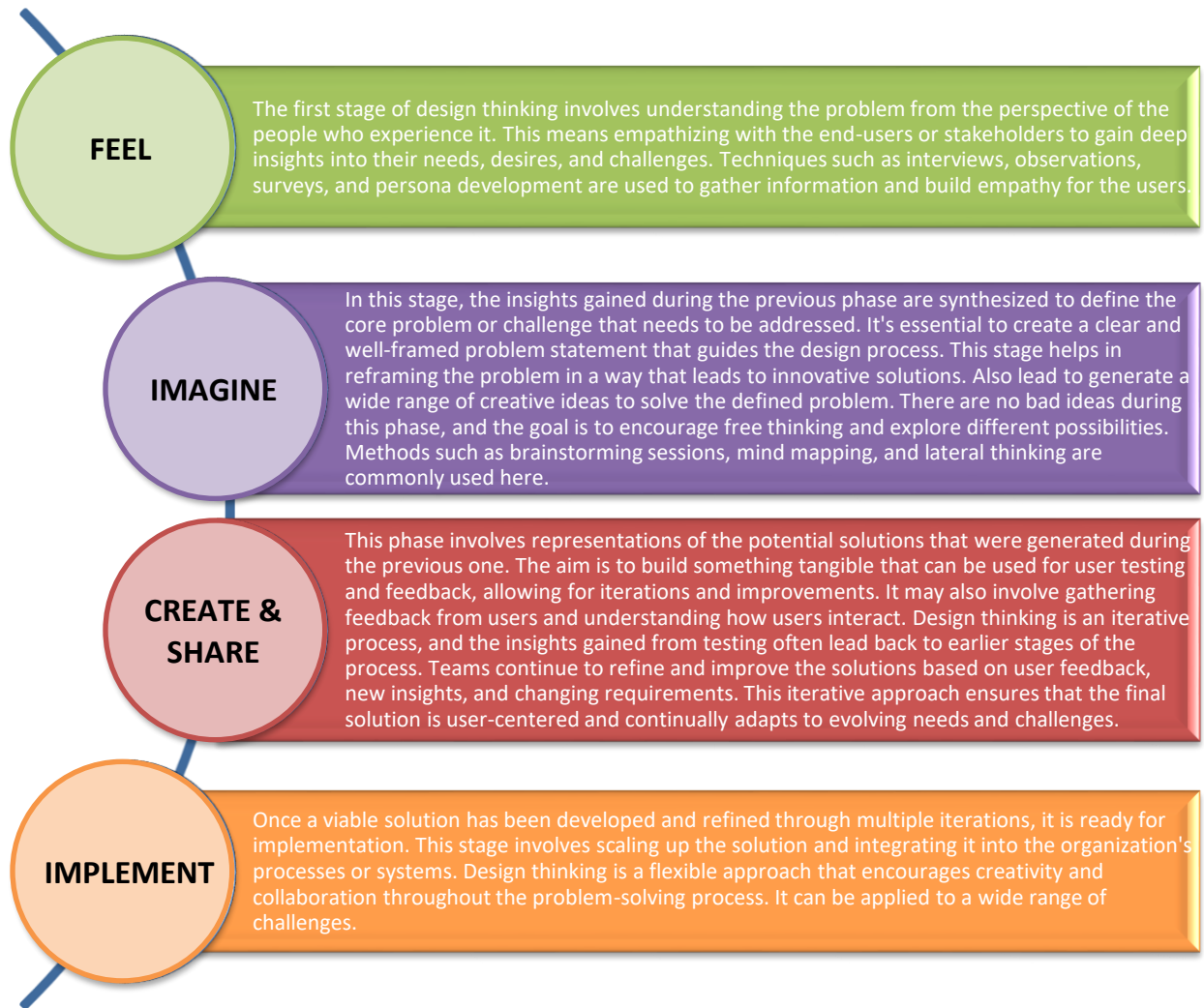
To achieve this I4OE had proposed and achieved to implement active learning approaches, such as participatory workshops, simulations, debates, and problem-solving activities so adult learners were engaged in interactive experiences that promoted dialogue and democratic engagement. These methods encourage critical reflection, collaboration, and the exchange of diverse perspectives. The creation of inclusive learning environments is crucial for fostering dialogue and democratic citizenship. The adult education sector should ensure that the learning spaces are safe, respectful, and inclusive of diverse voices and experiences. This involves promoting open communication, active listening, and valuing and validating different viewpoints.

Adult education institutions can actively engage with local communities and civil society organizations to create partnerships and collaborative initiatives. There are several examples from literature that show us that, using innovative theoretical frameworks and exploratory methodologies and practices such as design thinking which was the corner stone of I4OE approach.

The Design thinking Approach as a concept itself has evolved through the contributions of several designers, educators, and practitioners over the years and continues to evolve and adapt as it is applied to a wide range of fields and challenges worldwide. Although often used in various fields, including product design, service design, business strategy, and more, we based our view of the concept on the non-profit organization founded by IDEO IDEO.org (2011) and the d.standford school (https://dschool.stanford.edu/programs/designing-for-social-systems), which has been influential in demonstrating the application of design thinking to address social challenges. We also used several other projects that experience with this approach such as Erasmus Plus project "The Next Step" (https://www.the-next-step.eu/next-step-project/).

The design thinking approach included four steps in I4OE approach: Feel, Imagine, Create and Share and Implement.

FEEL

The first stage of design thinking involves understanding the problem from the perspective of the people who experience it. This means empathizing with the end-users or stakeholders to gain deep insights into their needs, desires, and challenges. Techniques such as interviews, observations, surveys, and persona development are used to gather information and build empathy for the users.

IMAGINE

In this stage, the insights gained during the previous phase are synthesized to define the core problem or challenge that needs to be addressed. It's essential to create a clear and well-framed problem statement that guides the design process. This stage helps in reframing the problem in a way that leads to innovative solutions. Also lead to generate a wide range of creative ideas to solve the defined problem. There are no bad ideas during this phase, and the goal is to encourage free thinking and explore different possibilities. Methods such as brainstorming sessions, mind mapping, and lateral thinking are commonly used here.

CREATE & SHARE

This phase involves representations of the potential solutions that were generated during the previous one. The aim is to build something tangible that can be used for user testing and feedback, allowing for iterations and improvements. It may also involve gathering feedback from users and understanding how users interact. Design thinking is an iterative process, and the insights gained from testing often lead back to earlier stages of the process. Teams continue to refine and improve the solutions based on user feedback, new insights, and changing requirements. This iterative approach ensures that the final solution is user-centered and continually adapts to evolving needs and challenges.

IMPLEMENT

Once a viable solution has been developed and refined through multiple iterations, it is ready for implementation. This stage involves scaling up the solution and integrating it into the organization's processes or systems. Design thinking is a flexible approach that encourages creativity and collaboration throughout the problem-solving process. It can be applied to a wide range of challenges.

Figure 1: *The 4 steps of the Design Thinking Approach that was the basis for the Framework of the I4OE project.*

The framework took into consideration the design thinking approach and six participatory activities that were developed and tested during the process. The I4OE partnership then further elaborate on the activities and events used to test the framework on three European countries (Portugal, Greece and Norway) and communities.

4. Resources and tools to foster collaboration

4.1 Resources and tools

During the project implementation, the I4OE consortium developed 6 main participatory activities that were used in order to implement and test the proposed approach. These resources were developed from the partners in order to be available also for other stakeholders to use them. Also, to be used as examples from the stakeholders in order to create their own activities.

The 6 resources/activities were:

#	Title	Objective
1	Travelling with others	Be aware of and discuss prejudices
2	Multicultural dinner	Get to know the customs and food habits of other cultures in my community
3	Mapping Workshop	Hands on workshop to collect experiences from a diverse group.
4	Art Makers Space	Story telling workshop that can make the voices, concerns, priorities and aspirations of the participants heard more easily through art
5	Kickoff meeting for an arts and culture participatory event	Brainstorming ideas with a diverse group of community representatives, creating a repertoire of inclusive activities
6	Computer programming as a "teaser" before discussions	Demonstration of school subject practices, cater for discussions about computer programming in school subject renewal processes, and investigating possible cooperation with local businesses to provide dataset with local data for programming lessons beyond beginner level, to ensure relevance of STEAM in local education practices.

All the details about the resources are available on the project's website, here: https://i4oe.nuclio.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/I4OE_Toolkit-of-Activities-to-Foster-Collaboration.pdf

4.2 Main steps of "Good Practices Guide"

As it was presented earlier, I4OE approach was based on the design thinking methodology. Following this methodology, I4OE partnership simplified the steps and included 3 main steps in order to develop a practice/activity. These 3 steps were used also in the 6 resources that were developed and are available from the project.
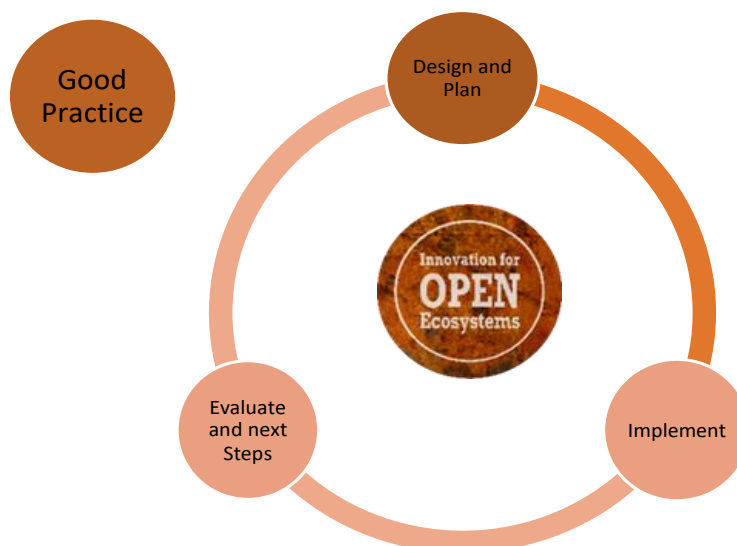
Figure 2: *The main steps in order to develop and implement a practice/activity following the I4OE approach.*

Even if we proposed simplification of the steps from the Design Thinking Approach, presented earlier, it is advisable to follow the content of the design thinking in the proposed 3 steps of the I4OE approach.

The proposed 3 steps are actually including the 4 steps of the Design Thinking approach as follow:

Design and Plan: correspond to Feel and Imagine

Implement: correspond to Create & Share as well as Implement

Evaluate and Next Steps: this is an addition from I4OE in order to get the feedback from each one of the activities and propose/proceed with possible improvements.

Below we will present the contents that each step should have in order to develop an activity. It could be used as a template for each activity that could be designed.

4.3   Template to develop a practice/activity

The following sections includes all the content that it is needed to have in mind while we are developing a practice/activity.

4.3.1   Design and Plan
Type of Good Practice

(Community event/speeches, meetings, third - place gathering)

Rationale

(a small description about the logic)

Scopes/purposes

(a small description about the scope and the objectives)

Other Goals

- European Green deal?
- Other European scopes?
- UN SDGs?

Organizers

(person / members that collaborate to organize it)

Speakers

How are we choosing our speakers for the event?

Stakeholders that will take part.

Create a timetable

Create a detailed schedule towards the implementation of the event.

Agenda / Programme

Duration

Toolkit

Choose the right toolkit

Place

With which criteria do you choose the place/venue

Note the dissemination actions prior the event

Social media, etc.

Note the dissemination actions at the event (prior the event)

Take photographs and snapshots of the event.

4.3.2   Implement

What are the means that used to implement the event?

Describe the Means

Agenda / Programme

Places/Venue

Type of event

Live, Online, Hybrid

Tools used

Eg. OWL , Presentation files

4.3.3 Evaluation and next steps
Make a small description of the evaluation tool or procedure.

Tool used to Evaluate/Assess

Forms, questionnaires, …

What information / factors to evaluate

Did the event achieve its purposes?

Based on the evaluation prepare the next steps (a next event maybe)

Below we are giving some tips to follow while we are developing the practice/activity. These are only indicative and depend on the target audience that we would like to have or the stakeholders that we would like to involve.

- Take participants' opinions for the theme's event you will prepare
- Ask your stakeholders to speak for their experiences!
- Simplify The Data Being Collected
- Set Milestones
- Keep Dissemination Records

5. Partners' Experiences from implementation of Community Events

Below we present the experiences that were gathered from the implementation of the activities in each one of the participating countries.

5.1 Portugal

In Portugal NUCLIO, LusoSpace and Junta de Freguesia de S. Domingos de Rana promoted 3 community events, around the themes that were proposed by the discussion generated during the consortium meetings. The first theme was on lifelong learning, with the aim of exploring what kind of competences adults can develop to feel able to participate in identifying and solving problems that concern everyone (in open systems: Open Ecosystems).

Usually there are certain actors who are on the margins, so what social skills do they need to develop, in a logic of lifelong learning, to be able to actively participate in community life? Basically, we talked about Lifelong Learning for active citizenship.

In the second and third event we discussed the role of local businesses in Lifelong Learning and debated what kind of links can be established between municipalities and local organisations to promote Lifelong Learning, including active citizenship.

5.2 Norway

In Norway, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences - HVL efforts were directed towards the smaller local island community, and municipality of Fitjar, Stord island. The first community event was re-planned as a series of meetings attended by pairs of participants only, due to local Covid19 pandemic restrictions. A meeting series was held with four significant representatives within education and local politics in Fitjar municipality, and the HVL teacher education. In addition, there was a pre-meeting and follow-up with the NAV Bergenhus employment and social services of Bergenhus, in the nearby city of Bergen. The section for employment services in the urban municipal district "youth down-town" initiative, KaNo, invited an input session into their project. Two sessions were attended by the HVL teacher education representative. Finally, two community events were arranged with broader representation, both attended by 31 participants in the small island community. Community Events C1, C2 and C3 were included in reports for the I4OE, and discussed with the small-scale partnership consortium.

Topics emerging from the first series, C1, was getting the local community back on their feet with inclusive post-pandemic practices. Exploring possible measures to prevent dropout from educational systems, at

the transition points between upper secondary and vocational or higher education. C2 was arranged with one school class and their parents at Rimbareid upper secondary school. The overarching perspective was European democracy in times of energy crisis, exploring solidarity across regions. Students gave parents a crash course teaser into contemporary digital schooling, particularly programming in mathematics and sciences. The teaser was accompanied with discussions among the adult group and the young about opportunities and future directions of programming as a skill in Norwegian education. In C3, the overarching perspective was democracy in times of political polarization. A town hall meeting assembled a broad sample of voices from the island community. A "piggybacking" opportunity was utilized to arrange an idea brainstorming workshop for a historic play about the local viking saga king "Haakon the good – ruler in times of peace", to reach as wide a participant audience as possible in community-embedded activities. "Tools" for similar community events were collected successfully.

5.3   Greece

In Greece Science View and Ellinogermaniki Agogi organised 3 community events, around the themes that were proposed by the discussion generated during the consortium meetings. The first event took place on 25th of October 2022 and the theme was on lifelong learning, with the aim of exploring what kind of competences adults can develop to feel able to participate in identifying and solving problems that concern everyone (in open systems: Open Ecosystems). Also, the event covered the digital skills that are needed in order to contribute to the development of social skills. There was also a round table that realised towards the end of the event and the participants gave their feedback concerning their point of view on how to take advantage tools and initiatives to develop the needed skills will contribute to Lifelong Learning for active citizenship.

In the second event, that took place on 24th of March 2023, were discussed the role of local businesses in Lifelong Learning and debated what kind of links can be established between municipalities and local organisations to promote Lifelong Learning, including active citizenship. Especially there were presentations from a University Professor about the importance of developing and realizing actions for the innovation and the corporate responsibility of enterprises in local, national and international level as well as a presentation from a big company representative that explain the anthropocentric approach that technology companies should follow.

The third event, that took place on 25th of April 2023, were presented approaches to develop digital skills for teachers as well as how they can use them in order to collaborate within the local communities with relevant stakeholders. Also, it was discussed how EU projects can contribute to the cooperation of citizens and the empowerment of society, through an indirect and/or direct approach.

6.   Reflection on the I4OE process

Here we summarize a few common reflections and results from the experience with the project and the community events. We believe that experiences of this kind:

- provide opportunities for people to connect with their community and build social bonds. We found that increased social interactions and stronger community ties can be observed.
- can increase awareness about important issues, such as health, safety, or local cultural initiatives, and a more informed and engaged community can result from these events.
- can encourage civic participation and activism. They may inspire attendees to get involved in local government, and volunteer work.
- can enhance cultural exchange and appreciation for diversity.
- may focus on skill-building or community empowerment that equip participants with knowledge and tools to improve their lives.
- may serve to empowered individuals to take positive actions in their lives and communities.
- promote community dialogue and problem-solving efforts.

We found that there was richer dialog and more tangible results at some events than others. For example, it seemed to us that the community in Norway was better prepared for these debates and to move on to the next stage of deliberative decision-making. However, we were able to reflect on and learn from all the experiences shared.