

ANALYSIS OF THE SLOVENIAN PROJECT ACTIVITIES. TRADITIONAL RECIPES: THE PUM PHARMACY

The Connecting Generations project is a new experience for the Soča Valley Development Center in Slovenia. The center operates at various levels and has several organizational units: the business and regional development department; the environmental, spatial planning and rural development department; and the human resources department. The Project Learning for Young Adults (PUM) program has been carried out as part of the human resources department since 2004. It targets vulnerable 15- to 25-year-olds that left school for various reasons, and are thus uneducated and currently unemployed. They are socially excluded and often stigmatized. The program seeks to help them at various levels: to pass their school exams, to go back to school, and to find a job. By taking part in different projects, participants learn and develop new skills (communication in Slovenian, basic communication in a foreign language, ICT skills, intercultural and social skills, basic mathematics, etc.) that are important in their everyday lives, career, and so on.

The mentors working with this particular group are adult education experts that have been trained to work in this program and have at least five years of experience in working with vulnerable young people. Mentors in the Project Learning for Young Adults program need to be not only teachers, but also communicators, motivators, and learners with good interpersonal skills. Last but not least, they need to be innovative, flexible, and creative.

Participants in the Project Learning for Young Adults program usually refuse to follow the standard methodology used in school. This is why this program mainly uses methods that focus exclusively on practice. In this regard, the use of traditional recipes to make new products can be compared to the “learning by doing” method, in which participants develop new skills and learn new things in the process. In the case described, they learned various types of skills.

The desire to offer innovative ways of learning was one of the reasons we applied for this particular project. Not knowing what “awaited us around the corner,” we started to prepare the draft program of our activities. We first focused on the traditional knowledge of preparing homemade syrups. During the activities, this was expanded to using herbs in home cooking—that is, not only for preparing syrups, but also for preparing food, such as pastries, bread, and so on.

However, there is a long way before you can finally try out the product you have made. It takes a lot more than just going for a walk and picking some plants or herbs you have never heard of or seen before. This can also be dangerous.

To avoid any problems, we first did some research. We visited our local library and borrowed books on using herbs in home cooking and medicine. We also asked our mothers and

grandmothers which recipes were used in the past and which ones they were using now. We were also interested in any differences between them (ingredients, preparation, etc.).

Did you know that spruce-tip syrup alleviates coughs and treats colds? And that it also stops bleeding and cleans the blood? What about ramsons? Until we did the research, we did not know that it helps with stomach problems and indigestion. There are so many medicinal herbs growing just a few meters from our homes. All you have to do is go out and pick them. And, after doing some research, that was exactly what we did. Picking herbs is a great excuse to get out of the office and enjoy some fresh air. Furthermore, not every medicine tastes awful. On the contrary, all the recipes we tried were delicious in the end. To present our project activities, we prepared a “banquet” for our partner guests that visited us last May, when we hosted the midterm project meeting.

While carrying out the project, the participants informed the public about their activities by presenting the herbs, their medical use, and the recipes on the website <http://pum-tolmin.weebly.com/aktivnosti.html>. They named the project *Pumova lekarna* (the PUM Pharmacy). In that way, the participants had the opportunity to develop their ICT skills. Furthermore, all of the project material was written in Slovenian and English. In this way, the participants practiced their native and foreign-language communications skills.

One of the final project results is a book of all the recipes we tried out during the project activities. However, perhaps the most important result is the preservation of traditional knowledge that would otherwise be lost.