

ITALY

Implementing local
development
strategies

Location

Alvito, Frosinone

Programming period

2007-2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 4 – LEADER

Measure

M413 – Quality of life /
diversification

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 50 000

RDP 6 000

Other (ESF) 44 000

Project duration

FEB 2015 – JUL 2015

Project promoter

LAG LSNPA

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A social enterprise and a LAG combined EAFRD and ESF support in a project for integrating immigrants through work training in a rural area that is rather disadvantaged and in risk of abandonment

Summary

The project area is very close to two centres for asylum seekers that receive refugees from Africa and the Middle East. Migrants hosted there were usually demotivated, and need economic and psychological support. A social enterprise together with a LAG develop the project blending the use of the ESF and the EAFRD for testing new tools for promoting social innovation. Overall it aimed to exploit the opportunity of integrating immigrants in a rural area that is rather disadvantaged and in risk of abandonment.



The initial part of the project, funded by EARDF, supported the training, with four meetings, of 46 young unemployed people (27 local and 19 migrants) living in the LAG area. The meetings were centred on various issues like enterprise setting up, social farming, and European funding. In the second part of the project 10 out of the 46 participants were selected to spend 100 hours of job either at the premises of the local botanic park on sustainable horticulture or at the LAG offices, involved in analytical and research work on the conditions and problems of migrants present in the area.

Results

The project showed that a common path and shared works can ease the social inclusion of disadvantaged people.

Participants produced a sustainable garden, the wooden African barn, gathered and analysed data on land and on migrants in the area.

After the project end, a new cultural association (Rise Hub) was set-up in the area, involving both local unemployed and migrants (the majority of them coming from the previous training).

This association, jointly with the LAG, has successfully promoted a wide variety of small and medium scale projects building on its members knowledge, linking to other ongoing projects concerning migrants, and/or testing original paths.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Careful analysis of the initial conditions/needs of migrants and of other stakeholders to be involved was essential; as well as having a detailed plan of the project activities;
- ❑ Combining the available funding opportunities enabled not only the project implementation but also to engage them in various projects after the project end.
- ❑ Good cooperation between the LAG and the association was also a success factor.
- ❑ The LAG was afraid that the local community would be negative towards the asylum seekers, and would not support the project activities. But once they became aware of the immigrants condition, and of LAG efforts, local stakeholders actually proved sympathetic with the project.

Context

The project area (Comino valley, in the province of Frosinone-central Italy) is very close to two centres for asylum seekers (Atina-Sora and Isola Liri). These centres were opened in early 2014, and keep receiving a growing number of refugees from Africa and the Middle East. Migrants hosted there were usually demotivated, and needed both economic and psychological support. The social enterprise “Borghi Artistici”, based in Rome, and managed by a person born in Comino valley, wanted to take advantage of this new opportunity of integrating immigrants in a rural area. The social enterprise contacted the LAG LSNPA (Lazio side of the National Park of Abruzzo) in order to test this possibility and to develop the project blending the use of the ESF and the EAFRD. The LAG was eager to test new tools for promoting social innovation in a rather disadvantaged area at risk of abandonment.

Objectives

The project had two main objectives:

- to support social inclusion of migrants and of other disadvantaged people in the rural context,
- to promote social innovation by establishing new relationships among different subjects (e.g. decision-makers, civil society, public and private operators). In particular, the LAG wanted to experiment new ways for counteracting the risk of abandonment affecting its territory, where the average age of inhabitants is very high.

A third objective was represented by the need of improving the quality of life in the area, by creating a social net between migrants and young unemployed people, building on local rural values and identity.

Activities

The project was part of a wider project (“Land & Municipalities”) promoted with the support of EFS. The initial part of the project, funded by EARDF, supported the training, with four meetings, of 46 young unemployed people (27 local and 19 migrants) living in the LAG area. The meetings were centred on various issues like enterprise setting up, social farming, and European funding.

“We learnt that we are too often afraid of what we do not know: when we start relating to other people the initial fears fade away...”

Tiziana Rufo, Manager, LAG LSNPA



In the second part of the project 10 out of the 46 participants were selected to spend 100 hours of training on works coherent with the original project approach (social integration in the local rural context); they received €10/hour as a reimbursement. Out of the 10 participants, 7 spent this period at the premises of the botanic park of the Myosotys association. There they set-up a sustainable horticulture garden, and a wooden barn in Mali style (“bougou”). The remaining three project participants spent the 100 hours at the LAG offices, involved in analytical and research work on the conditions and problems of migrants present in the area. This included:

- preparing a census of vacant land in five municipalities of the LAG territory;
- the identification and assessment of best practices able to ease the involvement of immigrants in the economic and social context;
- the set-up of a database about the background and skills of 40 immigrants staying at a nearby refugee centre (Atina-Sora).

The project included some initial activities of cultural adaptation (especially concerning the need translate from the migrants original languages and to start learning Italian, and the awareness of Italian and European norms concerning migrants).

The project covered the preparation of various communication tools, such as a brochure, the set-up of devoted web site, leaflets, and a much needed map of the project area, previously not available, to let immigrants be more aware of the place they were living and acting.

Main Results

The project produced positive results for what concerned the integration between locals and migrants. It showed that a common path and shared works can ease the social inclusion of disadvantaged people. Moreover, the project offered for the 1st time to its participants the opportunity to establish an actual contact with local actors, and to gain a small economic revenue.

The final participants produced all of the concrete expected results: a sustainable garden, the wooden African barn, the data on land and on migrants. Even more importantly, soon after the project end, a new cultural association (Rise Hub) was set-up in the area, involving both local unemployed and migrants (the majority of them coming from the previous training).

This association, jointly with the LAG, has since then successfully promoted a wide variety of small and medium scale projects building on its members knowledge, linking to other ongoing projects concerning migrants, and/or testing original paths. This represents a true change compared to the initial cultural and social condition of the area.



Key Lessons

There are several reasons explaining the positive outcome of this project:

1. careful analysis of the initial conditions/needs of migrants and of other stakeholders to be involved;
2. detailed planning of the project activities;
3. strong focus on the ultimate social and cultural aims of the project (social integration and innovation);
4. use of available funding opportunities to motivate the participants and to engage them in various projects right after the project end.
5. strong synergy and collaboration between the LAG and the Rise Hub association.

Probably the most unexpected effect of the project was the reaction by local residents. The LAG was afraid that local administrators and residents would have been affected by prejudices against the asylum seekers, and would not have easily tolerated our approach and some project activities. But once they became aware of the immigrants condition, and of LAG efforts, local stakeholders actually proved sympathetic with the project.

“The project helped migrants to change their perspective: when they first arrived here they were looking to move to another place. Now they are starting to consider what opportunities can be found in the countryside”

Silvia Di Passio, President , Rise Hub association

Additional sources of information

<https://www.facebook.com/Rise-Hub-973483802673849/?fref=ts>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNZmyPPvim4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lxZBOQ2VJc>