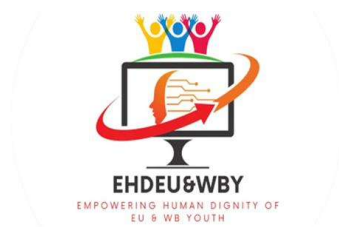




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Manual for New forms of non-formal online learning in intercultural surroundings

A practical guide for youth organisations designing virtual exchanges

Developed within the project

Empowering Human Dignity of EU & WB Youth (EHDEU&WB)

Erasmus+ — Virtual Exchanges in Higher Education and Youth

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Authorship and use

The manual was drafted jointly by the six partner organisations on the basis of activities they designed, facilitated and evaluated during the project. It is published as an open educational resource and remains permanently free of charge on the websites of the partner organisations.

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1. About this manual

This manual sets out a working method for running non-formal learning activities online, with young people who live in different countries and come from different cultural backgrounds. It is written for people who have to organise such activities in practice: youth workers, project staff in non-governmental organisations, university staff running extra-curricular or civic education activities, and volunteer facilitators.

It is based on three years of continuous delivery. Six organisations in Belgium, Spain, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania ran five kinds of online activity together: cultural dialogue events, small-group discussions on human dignity and European values, critical thinking and media literacy trainings, multi-week academies for youth leaders and youth workers, and hybrid formats in which young people from six countries joined events taking place physically in another country. What follows is what survived that process, together with the mistakes worth avoiding.

What the manual does

- Explains five design principles that determined whether an online session worked or not.
- Reduces the many possible activity types to three reusable formats, each with a session structure that can be copied.
- Sets out how to facilitate across languages, cultures and unequal connectivity.
- Explains how to reach and keep young people who face barriers to participation.
- Provides three short templates: a session plan, a participant feedback form and a facilitator debrief note.

What it does not do

It is not a guide to formal curriculum design, accreditation or platform procurement. It does not review software; the formats described work on any mainstream video-conferencing tool. It also does not claim that online activity replaces physical mobility. Online exchange is a complement to travel: it reaches young people who cannot travel, and it keeps intercultural contact alive when travel is not possible.

How to use it

Chapter 3 is the reasoning; Chapter 4 is the operational core. If you have limited time, read Chapter 3, choose one of the three formats in Chapter 4, and take the templates from the annexes. Chapters 5 to 7 answer the questions that arise once you begin: how to hold a room together, how to reach the young people who are hardest to reach, and how to show what was learned.

2. Why online learning across cultures

The gap this method addresses

International learning remains unevenly distributed. Cost, distance from capital cities, visa procedures, employment, caring responsibilities, disability and family circumstances all decide who takes part in an exchange and who hears about it afterwards. The effect is cumulative: the same young people travel repeatedly, while others never acquire the experience of speaking with peers from another country about anything that matters to them.

In the Western Balkans the gap is wider. Access to intercultural and international learning is limited for young people facing social exclusion and economic obstacles, the pandemic interrupted the little mobility that existed, and uptake of European funding opportunities remains uneven across the region. At the same time, the demand is not for more information but for structured contact: young people who never meet peers from neighbouring countries are more exposed to disinformation, polarisation and narratives of division, and less able to test what they read against another person's experience.

What online formats do well, and badly

Three years of delivery produced a consistent picture. Online formats are strong where the objective is sustained conversation, exposure to different interpretations of the same material, and skills that are practised rather than transmitted: analysing a source, taking a position, working in a mixed team, speaking a foreign language under mild pressure. They are weak where the objective depends on shared physical presence, informal time or immersion in an unfamiliar place. They also fail quickly when the group is too large for anyone to be recognised.

This has a practical consequence that runs through the whole manual: online activities should be designed as small, repeated, participatory encounters, not as broadcasts. A webinar with a large audience and a long presentation is easy to organise, easy to report and produces very little intercultural learning.

Policy context

The method sits inside a defined European policy frame, which is worth knowing when you write applications or reports.

- The Erasmus+ virtual exchanges action defines these activities as online people-to-people activities that promote intercultural dialogue and soft skills development, delivered in small groups and always moderated by a trained facilitator. Its objectives include intercultural dialogue and tolerance, complementing physical mobility, critical thinking and media literacy, soft skills for employability, citizenship and common values, and strengthening the youth dimension of the Union's external relations.
- The Council conclusions on digital youth work (2019) and the working definition developed by the European expert group establish that digital youth work is not a separate method but

a dimension that can be part of any youth work setting, pursuing the same aims as youth work in general.

- The European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work (2019) frame digital practice as a route to accessibility and inclusion rather than a technical add-on, and stress the competence development that youth workers themselves need.
- The 2015 Paris Declaration commits education and youth work to promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination — the ground on which activities dealing with human dignity and European values stand.
- Evaluations of earlier virtual exchange initiatives measured impact in terms of attitudinal change, including self-esteem, curiosity, intercultural communication and attitudes towards people of different backgrounds, alongside self-reported gains in active listening, critical thinking, digital competence, teamwork and foreign languages. These are useful categories for your own evaluation questions.

Terms used in this manual

- Virtual exchange — an online people-to-people activity, in a small group and led by a trained facilitator, whose purpose is intercultural dialogue and the development of transversal skills. It complements physical mobility; it does not replace it.
- Non-formal learning — organised learning outside formal education, voluntary, learner-centred, with defined objectives but no compulsory curriculum or grading.
- Facilitator — the person responsible for the learning process rather than for the content: sets the conditions in which participants speak, keeps time, manages asymmetry and captures the outcome.
- Shared object — the text, case, media item or document that the group examines together, and around which intercultural differences of interpretation become visible.
- Hybrid activity — an activity taking place simultaneously in a physical room and online, with participants in both.
- Young people with fewer opportunities — young people facing economic, geographical, educational, health, cultural, linguistic or social obstacles that limit their access to international learning.
- Open educational resource — material published free of charge and with permission to reuse, adapt and translate for educational purposes.

3. Five design principles

These five principles decided the quality of every activity in the project. They are ordered by how much difference they make.

Principle 1 — Keep the group small enough for everyone to speak

The single most reliable predictor of a good session is whether every participant speaks at least twice. In practice this means groups of roughly five to fifteen people for a discussion, and no more than about twenty-five for a training with facilitated exercises. Where interest exceeds that, run the activity again rather than enlarging it.

Project experience: the discussion series on human dignity and European values was deliberately split into small consecutive groups instead of being delivered as one large event. The change was made on advice received during implementation and had two effects — more young people took part in total, and the discussions went considerably deeper, because participants could disagree with each other by name.

Principle 2 — Run a sequence, not a single event

A one-off session produces goodwill; a series produces learning. Over several weekly meetings participants stop performing, begin referring to what someone else said last time, and start bringing their own material. Four to six sessions over four to six weeks proved to be the useful minimum for anything described as an academy or a training programme.

Project experience: the academies for youth leaders and youth workers ran as weekly online series over several weeks. The multi-session structure also allowed a certificate to be attached to attendance, which visibly improved retention.

Principle 3 — Give the dialogue a shared object

Intercultural dialogue organised around the theme of culture itself tends to produce polite generalities. Dialogue organised around a concrete shared object — a text, a case, a piece of media, a research paper, a policy proposal — produces genuine differences of interpretation, and those differences are where the intercultural learning happens. The object also protects participants: they can disagree about a text more easily than about each other.

Project experience: critical thinking sessions worked from philosophical and historical texts and from the organisation's own research papers, followed by live exercises in evaluating sources. Participants reported that the discussion showed them how strongly cultural context shapes the reading of the same digital content. In the media literacy series, the shared objects were concrete: verification of a news item, the influence of artificial intelligence on content, data privacy, and the idea of an information diet.

Principle 4 — Short input, long conversation, named outcome

A two-hour online session can hold at most about thirty minutes of presentation. The rest should be conversation, small-group work and a closing round in which the group names something concrete: a conclusion, a disagreement worth returning to, a list of proposals, a next step. Sessions that end without a named outcome are remembered as pleasant and forgotten within a week.

Project experience: the workshop pattern used in the winter academies — a short introduction, an open discussion of what participants already knew, a substantive input block, and a closing question and answer round, within a two-hour limit — was reused across activities. In the cultural heritage dialogues, the closing brainstorming produced a written set of proposals from the participants themselves, including school and youth-centre workshops, community festivals, digital storytelling and volunteer documentation of oral history. That written output is what made the session usable afterwards.

Principle 5 — Design for absence and for asymmetry

Assume that some of the people you most want to reach will have a weak connection, a shared device, limited confidence in English, a job in the evening, or no experience of speaking in an international group. Design accordingly rather than apologising afterwards: no participation fee, a platform that works on a phone, an audio-only option, recordings for those who cannot attend live, delivery in a local language where the topic is local, interpretation where communities need it, and scheduling outside working hours.

Project experience: the media literacy series was delivered partly in the local language and partly in English, in a hybrid format with a physical room and an online room running in parallel; online participation was consistently at least as large as the room. In the dialogues on rural cultural heritage, interpretation was provided so that participants from non-majority communities could take part in their own language. Recordings of sessions were retained throughout, giving access to those who could not join live.

Using the principles together

The principles reinforce one another and lose most of their effect in isolation. A small group without a shared object drifts; a shared object without a small group produces a lecture with questions; a sequence without a named outcome at each meeting becomes a habit rather than a learning process. The practical test before publishing any invitation is short: is the group small enough for everyone to speak, is there more than one meeting, is there something concrete to look at together, is the input short enough, and can the person with the weakest connection and the least confident language still take part?

4. Three formats that work

The project delivered five named activity types. In practice they reduce to three formats with different logics. Choose the format from the objective, not from the label.

Format	Use it when the objective is	Project activities of this type
A. Facilitated intercultural dialogue session	Exposure to different interpretations; practising discussion, listening and source analysis	Intercultural talks; single critical thinking and media literacy sessions
B. Multi-week academy	Building a defined set of skills and a group that holds together; certification	Academy for youth leaders and youth workers; certified training programme on human dignity and European values
C. Hybrid open event	Giving young people in other countries access to an event happening physically somewhere else	Hybrid projects; seminar series delivered in a room and online at once

4.1 Facilitated intercultural dialogue session

Purpose and learning outcomes

A single session, ninety minutes to two hours, in which a small international group discusses one subject with the help of a facilitator. By the end participants should be able to state a view and give a reason for it, summarise a position they do not share, identify at least one assumption in a source, and name one thing they learned from a participant from another country.

Set-up

- Five to twenty participants; one facilitator, ideally with a co-facilitator handling chat, timing and technical problems.
- One shared object circulated in advance: a short text, a news item, a case, a set of images, a research summary. Short enough to be read on a phone.
- Registration through a simple form, with the link sent only to those registered — this produces the participant record as a by-product.

Session flow

Time	Segment	What the facilitator does
0–15 min	Opening and contracting	Welcome, purpose in two sentences, ground rules agreed rather than announced, short round in which everyone speaks once
15–30 min	Input	Short framing of the subject and of the shared object; no more than this
30–70 min	Discussion	Two or three prepared questions; deliberately invites the quieter participants; uses breakout pairs if the group exceeds twelve
70–85 min	Convergence	Collects proposals, disagreements and open questions in writing on a shared screen
85–95 min	Closing	Each participant names one thing they take away; practical information on what happens next

Adaptations

- If the topic is local, run the session in the local language and note this in the invitation.
- Where communities do not share a language, provide interpretation and slow the pace accordingly.
- Let participants moderate. Peer-moderated sessions in the project generated more proposals than expert-led ones, because the register of the conversation changed.

What to watch

Two failures recur. The first is an input that expands to fill the session; prepare the input as slides you are willing to abandon. The second is a session that closes with thanks instead of a result; the convergence segment is not optional, and the written output is what allows the session to be used later.

Example from the project

A dialogue on the protection of rural cultural heritage brought together young people from several municipalities, including participants from non-majority communities, with interpretation. The format was a facilitated discussion, then questions, then a structured brainstorming. Participants identified the pressures on rural heritage — depopulation and youth migration, declining interest in traditional crafts, scarce funding, weak promotion — and then produced their own list of responses, from workshops in rural schools to digital campaigns and volunteer documentation of oral histories. The value of the session lay in that list: it was written down, published, and became the starting point for later local initiatives.

4.2 Multi-week academy

Purpose and learning outcomes

A series of four to six online sessions, one per week, for a stable group. Suitable where the aim is a defined set of competences — advocacy, leadership, employability, media analysis, understanding of European values — and where you want participants to finish with something they can show.

Set-up

- Fifteen to twenty-five participants selected through an open call; applications rather than sign-ups, because a short motivation question improves commitment.
- A named facilitator across all sessions, plus guest experts for individual sessions; continuity of the facilitator matters more than the seniority of the experts.
- A certificate awarded on a stated attendance threshold, announced at the start.
- Between sessions: one short task — read a paper, bring an example from your own country, prepare a two-minute position.

Structure across the series

Session	Function	Design note
1	Group formation and framing	Invest the whole first session in the group: who is here, from where, why. Content can wait.
2–4	Core content	One competence per session, each with practice, not only explanation. Mixed-country small groups fixed for the series.
5	Application	Participants work on their own case, campaign, position paper or plan and present it to the group.
6	Consolidation and recognition	Peer feedback, self-assessment against the stated outcomes, certificates, and a concrete offer of what to join next.

What to watch

Attrition is the main risk and it is predictable: it occurs after the second session. Countermeasures that worked were a fixed weekly slot, small groups that stayed together, a visible certification threshold, and a personal message to anyone who missed a session rather than a general reminder to everyone.

Example from the project

The academies ran as weekly online series for young people aged eighteen to thirty from all six partner countries. One strand focused on advocacy: participants worked directly with research papers, discussed them in peer groups, and practised presenting a policy position. Another focused

on employability and leadership, combining teamwork, foreign-language practice in a multicultural setting and strategies for professional development. A further strand addressed media literacy in depth, dealing with misinformation and disinformation and their relationship to polarisation and radicalisation, over consecutive days of intensive work. In each case the multi-week structure, and not the individual sessions, produced the result: by the end the participants formed a group that continued to correspond after the activity closed.

4.3 Hybrid open event

Purpose

An event that is happening anyway in a physical space — a conference, a seminar series, a public discussion — is opened to online participants from other countries. This is the cheapest way to give young people access to international content, and the easiest to do badly.

Set-up

- One person whose only task is the online room: admitting participants, reading the chat, relaying questions, watching sound and picture. Without this role, online participants are spectators.
- A named point in the programme where online questions are taken, agreed with the speakers in advance.
- A short facilitated debrief for the online group immediately after the event, or on the following day. This is what converts attendance into learning.
- A recording, so that the content remains available in other time zones and to those working during the event.

What to watch

Online participation in a physical event is passive by default. If you do nothing else, add the debrief: twenty minutes in which the online group says what struck them, what was unclear and what applies to their own country. Second, take the technical set-up seriously — a single microphone at the front of a lecture hall makes an audience question inaudible online, and one such failure loses the online group for the rest of the event.

Example from the project

Young people from six countries took part online in conferences and expert presentations organised physically by partner organisations, including a leaders' conference and a thematic health conference. They followed sessions and put questions to speakers they would otherwise never have heard. The lesson recorded by the partners was that the format demonstrably widens access at almost no additional cost, and that its quality depends entirely on whether someone is responsible for the online room and whether a debrief follows. A related use of the same logic was a seminar series delivered simultaneously in a university hall and online, where the online audience was consistently at least as large as the physical one.

Combining the formats across a year

The three formats work best in sequence rather than in parallel. A workable annual cycle begins with two or three dialogue sessions on topics of local interest, which are cheap to run and identify the young people who want to go further. Those participants are then invited into a multi-week academy, which builds a stable group and produces certificates and visible outputs. Hybrid events are used opportunistically throughout the year, whenever a partner organises something physically, and serve as an entry point for newcomers as well as a reward for academy graduates, who can be given a role in the online room.

In this project the same progression appeared without being planned: participants met first in a single dialogue, returned for a training series, and in several cases ended by moderating a session themselves. Designing for that progression from the beginning and telling participants at the first session what the next step is, converts a series of separate events into a pathway.

5. Facilitating across cultures online

The facilitator is not a presenter and not a moderator of questions. The task is to make it possible for a group of strangers, in different countries and unequal circumstances, to say something true to each other within two hours.

The first ten minutes

Most of the outcome is decided here. Four things must happen: participants learn who is in the room and from where; the purpose is stated in two sentences; the working rules are agreed with the group rather than read to it; and everyone speaks once, however briefly. A group in which someone has not spoken in the first ten minutes will usually contain someone who does not speak at all.

Working rules worth agreeing

- Speak from your own experience; disagree with arguments, not with people.
- Cameras encouraged but not required — bandwidth and living conditions are not equal.
- Nothing personal shared in the session is repeated outside it.
- Any language difficulty may be raised at any time; the group slows down rather than moving on.
- Recording, if any, is announced at the start with its purpose and its audience.

Managing asymmetry

Asymmetry, not conflict, is the normal difficulty of an international online group. Four kinds recur, and each has a practical answer.

Asymmetry	How it shows	Practical response
Language	Fluent participants dominate; others write in the chat instead of speaking	Slow the pace; take chat contributions aloud with attribution; use pairs before plenary; allow contributions in a first language with a summary in English
Connectivity and equipment	Cameras off, participants dropping out, phone-only use	Audio-only participation accepted; slides readable on a small screen; materials sent in advance; recording available
Confidence and experience	The same three people answer every question	Invite by name, with warning; use rounds rather than open questions; small groups before plenary

Asymmetry	How it shows	Practical response
Political and cultural sensitivity	Topics that are ordinary in one country are contested in another	Anchor discussion in the shared object; ask for experience rather than verdicts; name the disagreement instead of resolving it

Disagreement about values

Activities dealing with human dignity, freedom, solidarity, tolerance and non-discrimination will produce genuine disagreement, and that is the point. The facilitator's job is not to arbitrate but to keep the disagreement usable: return to the text or the case, ask what experience lies behind the position, and record the difference as an open question rather than closing it with a summary that satisfies nobody.

Co-facilitation and peer facilitation

Two facilitators are better than one: one holds the conversation, the other holds the room, the chat and the clock. Where participants have taken part before, hand them the moderation of a session. In the project, peer-moderated dialogues were markedly more productive in the generative parts of the session, and the young moderators gained more than any participant.

A short facilitator checklist

- Materials sent at least two days ahead, in a format readable on a phone.
- A written session plan with times, including what you will drop if you are late.
- Two or three prepared questions, not a list of ten.
- A plan for the technical failure that will occur.
- A closing round, always.
- A debrief note written the same day (Annex 3).

Preparing facilitators

The action requires facilitated activities, and facilitation is a competence that has to be built rather than assumed. A small organisation can prepare facilitators with three steps and no budget. First, pair every new facilitator with an experienced one for two sessions in the support role, where they handle the chat and the timing and watch how the room is held. Second, give them a single session of their own with a written plan reviewed in advance. Third, read their debrief note with them afterwards and identify one thing to change. Three cycles of this produce a competent facilitator; a training course alone does not.

Retaining facilitators matters more than recruiting them. In an organisation relying on volunteers, the practical measures are a fixed and predictable schedule, a named person who prepares the materials so the facilitator is not also the researcher, recognition of the role in writing, and the opportunity to move from facilitating to designing activities.

6. Including young people with fewer opportunities

Inclusion in a virtual exchange is a set of design decisions and a set of records, not a statement of intent. The question to answer is who was reached, how, and what was done to make participation possible.

Who is meant

The categories used across European youth programmes are practical rather than academic: economic obstacles, geographical obstacles such as living far from a centre or in a rural area, educational difficulties, disability and health conditions, cultural and linguistic obstacles including belonging to a minority or non-majority community, and social obstacles. Most young people who face barriers face more than one.

Reaching them

General calls on social media reach young people who are already engaged. Reaching others requires intermediaries and specific channels.

- Work through organisations that already have the trust of the community: local youth centres, schools, municipal youth offices, community and minority associations.
- Write the call in the local language and say plainly that participation is free and that no prior experience is required.
- Use an open application form rather than personal networks, so that access does not depend on knowing the organisers.
- Invite individually. A personal message from someone the young person knows converts far better than any public post.

Removing the barriers

Barrier	Design response
Cost	No participation fee; no required software purchase; no printed materials
Weak connection or shared device	Mobile-friendly platform; audio-only participation accepted; light materials; recording afterwards
Language	Delivery in the local language where the topic is local; interpretation where communities require it; contributions accepted in a first language
Time and obligations	Sessions outside working hours; fixed and predictable slot; recordings for those who cannot attend live

Barrier	Design response
Confidence	Small groups; a first session devoted to the group; the option to contribute in writing
Distance and rurality	No travel required at any point; local-language outreach through municipal and community structures

Counting it

Record the relevant information at registration, not after the activity. A registration form that asks country and place of residence, age, and whether the participant identifies any circumstance that makes participation difficult — with a free-text field and an explicit option not to answer — produces a defensible record without intrusive questioning. Keep the registration data, the attendance record and the facilitator note together for each session. Two rules prevent the most common reporting problem: count individuals and attendances separately, and never estimate.

Example from the project

Interpretation at the cultural heritage dialogues allowed participants from non-majority communities to take part in their own language, and their participation changed the substance of the discussion, which turned to the representation of underrepresented groups in heritage policy. Delivery of the media literacy seminars partly in the local language opened them to students who would not have registered for an English-language event. Open application forms, free participation and an explicit statement that no experience was needed were used consistently across partners.

A note on data protection

Information about a young person's circumstances is sensitive, and collecting it carelessly damages both the participant and the organisation. Four rules are sufficient in practice. Collect only what you will actually use for reporting, and say in the registration form what each item is for. Make every question about personal circumstances optional and offer an explicit option not to answer. Store registration data with restricted access and a stated retention period consistent with the record-keeping obligations of the grant. Report only in aggregate, never in a way that allows an individual to be identified, and obtain explicit consent before using photographs, recordings or quotations in any published material.

7. Recognising and measuring learning

Write the outcomes before the content

For each activity, write three to five statements of what a participant will be able to do afterwards. They must be observable: state a position and support it, evaluate the reliability of a source, describe how a policy affects a community, work in a mixed-nationality team to produce a joint output. Outcomes phrased as awareness or understanding cannot be assessed and should be rewritten.

Ask participants, twice

A short self-assessment at the start and the same questions at the end are enough. Ask participants to rate their own confidence against each stated outcome, add two open questions, and keep the whole thing under five minutes. The comparison between the two is the evidence of learning gain; the open answers explain it. Annex 2 provides the form.

Certificates

Attach a certificate to a stated threshold — for example attendance at three of four sessions, or completion of the series task — and announce the threshold before the activity starts. In the project this had a visible effect on retention in multi-session formats. A certificate should name the activity, its duration, the topics covered and the competences addressed.

Mapping to European key competences

Where an activity takes place in an Erasmus+ youth context, participants can be issued a Youthpass certificate, which documents non-formal learning against the European key competences. Mapping the activity to those competences at the design stage makes both the certificate and later reporting straightforward.

Key competence	Typical activity element
Personal, social and learning to learn	Facilitated discussion in a mixed group; self-assessment; peer feedback
Citizenship	Discussion of European values, human dignity and non-discrimination; policy and advocacy work
Digital	Source verification; recognising manipulated or machine-generated content; collaborative work on shared documents
Multilingual	Working in a foreign language; contributions in a first language with summary

Key competence	Typical activity element
Cultural awareness and expression	Cultural dialogues; presentation of local heritage, custom or practice to an international group
Entrepreneurship	Designing and presenting one's own initiative, campaign or position paper

The minimum record

For every session, keep six items. They take minutes to produce during the activity and are impossible to reconstruct afterwards.

1. The invitation or call, showing dates, target group and the funding acknowledgement.
2. The registration data.
3. The attendance record, distinguishing individuals from attendances.
4. The facilitator debrief note (Annex 3).
5. The participant feedback, with the number of respondents.
6. One published item — a news post, newsletter or press release — and the recording where one was made.

Output, outcome and impact

The three are routinely confused, and the confusion weakens both evaluation and reporting. An output is what you produced: sessions delivered, participants reached, materials published. An outcome is what changed for the participants: what they can now do, understand or say that they could not before. An impact is what changed beyond them and lasted: a new activity in their own organisation, a local initiative, a change in how a partner works.

Outputs are easy to count and prove little on their own. Outcomes require the before-and-after questions described above. Impact requires contact after the activity has ended, which is why it is worth asking participants at the closing session whether they may be contacted again in six months, and worth asking then what they have done with what they learned. In this project the observable impacts were of that kind: proposals from a dialogue taken up locally, participants returning as moderators, and partner organisations continuing to run the formats after the funded activity had finished.

8. Putting the method into practice

A twelve-week start-up

Assuming a small organisation with one part-time coordinator and access to volunteer facilitators, the following sequence is realistic.

- Weeks 1–2: decide the objective and choose the format. Write the learning outcomes and the session plan (Annex 1).
- Weeks 3–4: identify partners in the other countries, agree who facilitates what, and fix the dates for the whole series at once.
- Weeks 5–6: prepare the shared objects and the materials; build the registration form; prepare the feedback form.
- Weeks 7–8: publish the call in every partner country, in local languages, through community intermediaries as well as social media; send personal invitations.
- Weeks 9–11: deliver. Write the debrief note the same day as each session. Send a personal message to anyone who misses a session.
- Week 12: close. Send the post-activity questionnaire, issue certificates, publish one item about the activity, and file the six records.

Roles and effort

Three roles are needed and can be held by two people: a coordinator who owns dates, registration and records; a facilitator who runs the room; and a support person who handles the chat, admissions and technical problems during the session. The unglamorous role — records and follow-up — is the one that determines whether the activity can be reported, evaluated and repeated.

Costs

The formats in this manual require staff or volunteer time, a video-conferencing licence, and occasionally interpretation or an external expert fee. There are no travel costs, which is the point: the same budget that funds one physical exchange for a dozen people can fund a year of online activity for several hundred, including many who could not have travelled.

Four failure modes

1. Groups too large. The session becomes a broadcast and no intercultural learning takes place. Split the group and repeat.
2. Single events instead of sequences. Goodwill is generated and nothing is built. Commit to at least four sessions.
3. Online participants at a physical event left unattended. Assign one person to the online room and add a debrief.

4. Inclusion and records handled after the fact. Ask at registration, keep the record per session, and never estimate a number.

Adapting the method

Nothing in the three formats depends on the subject matter of this project. The same structures carry environmental action, employment, health, local democracy or heritage. What must be kept is the logic: a small group, a sequence, a shared object, a short input, a named outcome, and a design that assumes unequal circumstances.

Continuing after the funding ends

These formats are unusually easy to sustain, because their cost is time rather than travel. Four measures keep them running once a grant closes. Keep the materials: the session plans, shared objects and slide sets developed for a funded activity are reusable indefinitely and are the main asset the project leaves behind. Keep the roles: one person in each organisation who owns dates, registration and records can maintain a modest programme alongside other duties. Keep the group: participants who have completed an academy are the cheapest source of facilitators, moderators and recruitment for the next cycle. Keep the partnership: two organisations in different countries willing to open their events to each other can continue hybrid activity at no cost at all.

Publishing the method openly is part of the same logic. Materials that remain free of charge and permit adaptation and translation continue to be used by organisations that were never part of the original consortium, which is the only form of sustainability that does not depend on the original partners remaining active.

9. Annexes

The three templates below are deliberately short. Each is intended to be filled in during the ordinary course of an activity, not as an additional reporting exercise.

Annex 1 — Session plan template

- Activity and session title; format (A, B or C); date and time, with time zone.
- Objective in one sentence.
- Learning outcomes: three to five statements of what participants will be able to do.
- Target group; expected number of participants; countries; language of delivery; interpretation needed.
- Facilitator; co-facilitator or support person; guest expert.
- Shared object: what it is, how and when it is circulated.
- Timed run sheet: segment, minutes, who leads, what happens — including what will be dropped if the session runs late.
- Two or three discussion questions, written out in full.
- Inclusion measures for this session: language, interpretation, mobile access, audio-only option, recording.
- Closing: how the outcome will be captured and where it will be written down.
- Records to be produced: registration data, attendance, feedback, debrief note, published item.

Annex 2 — Participant feedback form

Sent as a short online form. Items 1 to 4 are asked both before and after the activity; the remainder only afterwards. Rating scale: 1 (not at all) to 5 (fully).

1. I can explain the main ideas of this topic to someone else.
2. I can assess how reliable a source of information is.
3. I am confident speaking in a group of people from other countries.
4. I can state my own position and give reasons for it.
5. The group size allowed me to take part actively.
6. I heard a point of view from another country that was new to me. If yes, briefly: which one?
7. Was anything difficult about taking part — language, connection, timing, or anything else?
8. What should be changed if this activity is repeated?
9. Would you take part in a further activity of this kind, and would you recommend it to someone else?

Record the number of respondents alongside the results. A response rate below roughly half means the results describe the most engaged participants only, and should be reported as such.

Annex 3 — Facilitator debrief note

Half a page, written on the day of the session by the person who facilitated it.

- Session, date, facilitator, number of participants and countries represented.
- Did every participant speak? If not, how many did not, and why?
- What worked in the design, concretely?
- What did not work, and what would you change next time?
- Technical or access problems, and how they were handled.
- The named outcome of the session, in one or two lines.
- Anything to follow up: a participant to contact, a question left open, a proposal worth taking further.

Adapting the templates

The templates may be shortened, translated and rebuilt in whatever tool your organisation already uses. Two elements should not be removed. The first is the timed run sheet in the session plan, including the decision about what will be dropped if the session runs late, because that decision is always made — the only question is whether it is made in advance or improvised. The second is the debrief note, because it is the only record of why a design was changed, and it is the material from which a manual like this one can be written.

References and further reading

- European Commission, Erasmus+ Programme Guide, section on virtual exchanges in higher education and youth.
- Council of the European Union, Conclusions on digital youth work, 2019.
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- European Commission, Developing digital youth work: policy recommendations, training needs and good practice examples, Expert Group on digitalisation and youth, 2018.
- Digital Youth Work Consortium, European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work, 2019.
- Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, Impact Reports 2018, 2019 and 2020, on intercultural learning experiences and skills gains in online exchange.
- Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 2015.
- Youthpass, recognition tool for non-formal and informal learning in Erasmus+ youth projects, and its key competence framework.
- Council of Europe and European Commission youth partnership, T-Kit 4: Intercultural Learning.