

8 Case study ES

Title: Volunteers in rural regeneration



Introduction

A self-organised and self-regulated team of 8 volunteers, with collaboration from other community members improved the facilities of their home village by converting a former chicken stable of a local historic building into a community library and information centre. Additional benefits of the project included:

- i) the creation of social and community dynamics, that went beyond the immediate project.
- ii) improving communication and cooperation across the generational boundaries
- iii) Increasing the inhabitant's identification with their village.

The aim of this volunteer project was at first a hands-on approach to reconstruction, with no life-long learning projection. As the project got finished, the participants gained awareness of the achieved learning, particularly with the use Level 5, as an evaluation method of their work. This method was used by the volunteers to further explore the group possibilities as a team (team building competence) as well as a decision-making tool to see how should they carry on, with their capacities, as a volunteer group in the future.

At the individual level, Level 5 made the individual volunteers aware of the important informal learning components of this volunteer renewal project. Participants, with very diverse backgrounds got familiar with the concept of Life-long learning and they decided to integrate the learning component into the design of future projects. Through the project, participants learned to allocate human resources better according to skills, motivation and synergy between individuals and gained useful management and planning tools. As a result, they increased their group confidence. Level 5 method served was a tool to convince the informal volunteer group of their capacity to continue developing future volunteer projects.

Setting

The volunteer project in rural regeneration took place during 18 months, with a group of 8 local volunteers, from young adult to pensioner and from a diverse professional backgrounds, working for the benefit of a rural village community in Catalonia, Spain.

Project Activities

The volunteer team performed diverse activities, according to individual qualifications in this hands-on rural regeneration project: design, planning, management, organizing of funding, networking for support, hands-on demolition work, reconstruction and building work; carpentry, cleaning, public request of books, organisation of a library, opening event, etc. A main part of the work was forming a functioning team and improving their communication and ability to work together. The initial regular informal planning meetings got substituted by informal sub-committees as the work progressed. This group received collaboration from other members.

Level 5 Evaluation Scheme Applied to the Project

The volunteers group wanted to assess their capacity as a team to develop new renewal projects. The group, with guidance support, applied Level 5, to the competence of “team building”. This procedure was a successful way to formalize as a group and reflect upon their team performance and sustainability potential for the future projects.

The instruments used for Level 5 at group level where:

- Observation by the external evaluators.
- A guided interview proposed to the group. The interview was a self-conducted interview, tailored to the reference system constructed for team building. Results were reported to the external evaluators.

Project Impact

The precedent sections have already highlighted the impact of this volunteer project, both at the community and individual level. The self-conducted volunteer group fully recuperated an unused space as part of their cultural heritage, with the participation of inhabitants; gained a library as a meeting space for the villagers, increased their sense of community and learned to establish a working team (team building competence) with efficient patterns of communication. At the end of the project, and particularly with the evaluation approach of Level 5, volunteers became aware of their learning, an important side effect of the renewal project.

Discussion & Perspectives

Level 5 is a successful way to formalise the group and reflect how the group could increase its performance (at group level and individual level). Team members became aware of their specific role in the team and identified necessity of adjustments for future collaborations. Level 5 was a successful procedure to reflect on the sustainability potential of the group and the new directions this would take.