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## Transnational Training Activities - Lessons learned and Guidelines for their replicability



### Games Without Barriers

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Games Without Barriers  
Game-based learning in initial VET for Accessible Tourism

Document Identification Sheet

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<b>Author(s)</b>	Roberta Lunghi (Consorzio ITACA), Monica Boni and Gabriele Carli (Wattajob) with the contribution of the other partners' representatives
<b>IO / Task Responsible</b>	Consorzio Itaca
<b>Abstract</b>	
<p>The implementation of the training activities encountered some obstacles during the project's lifetime to which the partnership found efficient and prompt solutions.</p> <p>As can be seen in this report of the obstacles and the corrective solutions, the project's experience can become a useful case study to be replicated in other training contexts and for other covered topics.</p>	
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Hybrid learning, gaming, practical activities, experiential and game-like learning activities, proactivitu and co-design approach.	





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### Introduction

As planned in the project application form, 72 students and 15 teachers from the three schools participating in the project have been involved in experimental training activities focused on accessible tourism through an innovative game-based approaches and digital tools.

These training activities have been organized in three “Short-term Students’ Exchanges” and three “Operational Joint Staff Training Events” in order to test the new training modules on accessible tourism and the innovative Game web-based app and to put into practice, in particular for the teachers, the knowledge acquired.

During these transnational exchanges, the innovative training tool (the Game web-based App) has been developed by the project’s partners together with the selected teachers and students.

The planned objectives of the training activities have been efficiently achieved, in particular the students have:

- increased their engagement and boosted their participation in training activities;
- increased their awareness and knowledge regarding social inclusion and accessibility for all, including people with disabilities and/ or other with specific access requirements;
- acquired new knowledge, skills and competences with regard to accessible tourism.

Moreover, the teachers had the opportunity to:

- experiment edutainment approaches and tools in training, by integrating game-based and experiential learning in the teaching practices and using new media and digital technologies in a creative and collaborative way;
- improve their knowledge on accessible tourism and increase their expertise and skills in the use of game-based learning approaches and digital training tools.

The “game-based learning” and “gamification” approaches have been combined with the learning by doing method and experiential learning, according to which learning shouldn’t be just theoretical, but rather active and practical, to create a real immersive learning experience, engaging and with lasting results.



## Transnational Training Activities – Lessons learned and Guidelines for their replicability

Due to the pandemic Covid-19 context, the implementation of the training activities encountered some obstacles during the project's lifetime to which the partnership found efficient and prompt solutions. As can be seen from the report of the obstacles and the corrective solutions below, the project's experience can become a useful case study to be replicated in other training contexts and for other covered topics.



## Obstacles and corrective solutions

1. Travelling restrictions	
<p><b>The obstacle</b></p>	<p>Due to the problems for travelling abroad following the Covid-19 pandemic, the three “Short-term Students’ Exchanges” and the three “Operational Joint Staff Training Events” have not been implemented in presence in the three countries (Assisi in Italy, Satu Mare in Romania and Barcelona in Spain), as originally planned.</p> <p>As stated in many analysis developed throughout this pandemic era, <b>this unpredictable situation of restricted mobility proved to be an obstacle, but at the same time an opportunity.</b></p> <p>To turn it in a true and powerful opportunity it’s thus been the approach our partnership worked to seize both for teachers, and for students.</p>
<p><b>The changes and adjustments</b></p>	<p>All except the last originally planned face-to-face events took place online, as synchronous training and students exchange activities. Thanks to the <b>use of an online conferencing tool</b> (Zoom), all participants were able to meet, exchange and cooperate.</p> <p>Besides traditional PPT presentations, involved teachers, trainers, students, and representatives of the project partners were asked to enrich their training with some <b>practical activities</b> – quizzes, tests, group works, video making, etc.– using interactive tools and platforms and as much as possible based on <b>gaming</b>, according to the edutainment approach promoted in the project.</p> <p>Tools such as Mentimeter.com proved particularly effective to help participants “be on the same page”, enhancing and strengthening alignment, cooperation and co-design.</p>

<p><b>The lessons learned</b></p>	<p>The online implementation of the training activities allowed teachers and trainers to increase innovative teaching practices and to use new media and digital technologies in a creative and collaborative way.</p> <p>The <i>Toolkit for planning and carrying out training activities</i>, prepared by Wattajob in collaboration with the other “technical” partners, certainly represented a useful tool to provide teachers of entry-level students of catering and hospitality with suggestions for planning and carrying out planned activities related to accessible tourism, following an "edutainment" approach. This document contains recommendations on <b>how to make learning engaging and exciting for students</b>, by adding to more traditional lessons delivery (which will have to be reduced as much as possible) experiential learning activities and game-like activities, such as simulations, role-plays, location-based games, etc. The document contains suggestions to perform teaching activities both in presence and remote learning. The new teaching tools allowed a higher involvement and participation of the students.</p> <p>As recently stated by Liat Eyal and Einat Gil in the paper “Hybrid learning spaces – a three-fold evolving perspective”<sup>1</sup> <b>Hybrid learning has become a buzzword over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic</b>. The term is used by departments of education, institutions of higher learning, and anyone wishing to introduce an innovative and up-to-date educational service or product to a broad audience. Although widespread use of the term began before the Covid-19 crisis, hybridity has become the need of the hour during the pandemic. In fact, there sometimes exists the impression that anything that is not hybrid is outdated and irrelevant.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353547179\\_Hybrid\\_learning\\_spaces\\_-\\_a\\_three-fold\\_evolutionary\\_perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353547179_Hybrid_learning_spaces_-_a_three-fold_evolutionary_perspective)

<p><b>The replicability in other training contexts and for other covered topics</b></p>	<p>Nowadays it is necessary to consider travelling restrictions as unforeseen issues which could forbid the implementation of face-to-face training activities. Schools’ teachers and VET trainers should acquire more competences in using digital and interactive tools to implement engaging and motivating online training activities.</p> <p>The replicability in other training contexts could be realized producing Toolkits, as the one produced in this project, in order <b>to provide to teachers and trainers suggestions for carrying out experiential and game-like learning activities.</b></p>
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<h3 style="color: #4F81BD;">2. Low direct contact between the participants</h3>	
<p><b>The obstacle</b></p>	<p>The online organization of the training events reduced the possibility of direct contact between the participants from the three countries, which partly limited the interrelation with foreign students and affected the overall students’ evaluations of the training experiences.</p>
<p><b>The changes and adjustments</b></p>	<p>During the online activities, to stimulate the contacts among the students from the same school at least, they were divided into different groups and carried out <b>practical activities</b> to deepen the topics.</p> <p>During the offline activities, group works, practical assessments and video making were considered engaging and useful tools for learning and knowing better each other.</p> <p>To give students and teachers the opportunity to meet each other, an additional face-to-face event has been planned in Italy, also thanks to the slackening of travelling restrictions.</p>

<p><b>The lessons learned</b></p>	<p>Even if the training activities were implemented online, the students had the opportunity to know other students and teachers from foreign countries, also improving their English language.</p> <p><b>The online and hybrid training activities were followed by the students with interest and attention, and they were considered engaging and motivating.</b></p> <p>However, the online classes have been more productive during the second and third exchanges, when the students attended the activities all together from their own schools and not from their homes. This allowed greater interaction between students and between students and teachers, although limited to those from the same school, and consequently greater involvement in the training activities.</p> <p>On the other hand, <b>fully online classes proved to be very effective in terms of proactivity and active participation of students</b> (many of them raised the hand, asked to speak, and gave interesting contributions).</p>
<p><b>The replicability in other training contexts and for other covered topics</b></p>	<p>Though face-to-face events always have an undeniable value in term of direct contact with different people and new cultures, <b>online and hybrid training activities should be implemented to strengthen the relationships among trainers and learners.</b> Thanks to their low cost and ease of organization such sync opportunities and alignments can represent important moments to build and reinforce cooperation among all project’s stakeholder.</p> <p>Our recommendation is <b>to organize training activities mixing both traditional and creative practical tools.</b> Organizing online working groups represents an efficient way to encourage learners to collaborate with other people and to improve English communication. The</p>

	<p>offline activities might be used to strengthen learners' capacity building, friendships, cooperation skills and team working instead.</p>
<p><b>3. Low participation of students in online theoretical training activities</b></p>	
<p><b>The obstacle</b></p>	<p>The online organization of the training events and the linguistic difficulties have limited the involvement and participation of all the students during the theoretical training activities.</p>
<p><b>The changes and adjustments</b></p>	<p>To enhance students' involvement, the training events were organized looking for <b>a good balance between theoretical and practical activities</b>, the adequacy of the didactic supporting materials and <b>the contribution of external experts and testimonials</b> who made it possible to integrate the theoretical aspects with more practical and operational ones.</p> <p>Following the feedback of the first students' exchange calling for greater engagements, it was decided to organise additional practical activities. For example, the partners decided to involve the students during the second exchange in <b>the production of short videos</b> with the support of their teachers in which they would represent what they had learned during the theoretical lessons and training activities. During the third exchange, the practical activity consisted in carrying out accessibility assessments at some local tourism facilities (hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and conference rooms).</p> <p>The greatest involvement of the students took place during <b>the co-design and testing activities of the web app</b>. This game-based tool has been developed by Wattajob together with the students and teachers during the training activities, starting from an immersive and</p>

	<p>learning by doing approach in order to increase their engagement and stimulate their participation.</p>
<p><b>The lessons learned</b></p>	<p>The choice of listening to students’ feedback and the decision of adding new practical activities proved to be a winning solution.</p> <p>The students put a lot of effort into practical activities and had fun and, while having fun, deepened what they learned during the theoretical lessons, by putting themselves in the shoes of people with disabilities and/or other specific access requirements.</p> <p><b>The experiential and active learning has been the successful key point of the project.</b> The co-design approach of the web app has allowed learners to act at the same time as readers and writers of the story. They learned by taking decisions, in a digital game-based, learning by doing and immersive approach.</p>
<p><b>The replicability in other training contexts and for other covered topics</b></p>	<p>The difficulty of involving young learners in training activities could be solved by listening to their suggestions and implementing a higher number of creative activities.</p> <p>In our experience, <b>online activities can become as efficient and engaging as physical ones through a proper use of digital learning environments</b>, thus enabling students’ collaboration and communication. This requires a certain degree of digital skills from the part of the teachers and the trainers designing and delivery the training sessions.</p> <p>Of course, the organization of some manual and concrete exercises foreseeing interaction and collaboration is more effective in a physical location. <b>A good mix of both digital and in person activities can build a solid success for learning experiences.</b></p>

#### 4. Tendency of trainers to apply traditional teaching methods

<b>The obstacle</b>	<p>Despite the Covid-19 pandemic having boosted the introduction of online training both in term of platforms (Google classroom, Microsoft Teams, etc) and online brainstorming tools (Mentimeter, Kaoot, etc), <b>still many teachers and trainers remain loyal to old training methodologies</b>. In addition, it is often very difficult for some trainers to speak fluently and express themselves through the online classes.</p> <p>This is particularly visible in countries with a higher average age of teachers, but not necessarily. What the pandemic revealed is a strong polarization of teachers: from hyper-technological to old fashioned.</p>
<b>The changes and adjustments</b>	<p>To better engage teachers in the hybrid learning environment, we enhanced a <b>“co-design approach”</b> helping them feel more at ease with both contents and activities provided by the project. Such a bottom-up design approach helped our partnership take into consideration all valuable contributions.</p> <p>Moreover, we profited from shared cloud resources (Google Drive) and co-design tools (Mentimeter), where participant teachers could exchange, visualize and cooperate.</p>
<b>The lessons learned</b>	<p>Before the pandemic, there was a widely held notion that technology will revolutionize the field of education. It was commonly believed technology would alter how teachers instruct, but in reality, not all teachers are now equally enthusiastic about using technology as part of their instruction. Some teachers may be more open to incorporate digital solutions, while others present higher levels of resistance to technology integration. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic showed a poor</p>

	<p>integration of technology, that has led to widespread learning loss.</p> <p>The first step, and the “easiest” one, is <b>the introduction of technology to teachers</b>. A common problem that arises at this stage is that some teachers do not understand how to use technology effectively, and they become skeptical of its potential benefits in the education fields. To solve this issue, digital training is essential: teachers should be incentivized in using tools and skills in their daily practice, and guided in understanding when, where and how new methodologies of training can be effective.</p>
<p><b>The replicability in other training contexts and for other covered topics</b></p>	<p>We believe that such co-design and participative approaches could be fully replicable in similar contexts, since it proved to be very effective for a larger commitment and engagement of teachers.</p> <p>According to our experience key success factors are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good digital skills from all involved participants.</li> <li>- The use of user-friendly digital tools (e.g. Mentimeter, Mural).</li> <li>- Fluency in the common spoken language (mostly English).</li> <li>- Clear shared guidelines and rules to be used during the project.</li> </ul> <p>Last but not least, a high degree of empathy and open-mindedness in helping teachers leverage all the opportunities of hybrid learning spaces is certainly the real X-factor.</p>
<p><b>5. The organisation of engaging and involving training activities in presence</b></p>	
<p><b>The obstacle</b></p>	<p>As mentioned before, the travelling restrictions proved to be an obstacle for students, teachers and partners to meet and work together in person, but at the same time it</p>

	<p>has been an opportunity for them to increase innovative teaching practices and to use new media and digital technologies in a creative and collaborative way.</p> <p>Nevertheless, students, teachers and partners considered that <b>it was essential to organize a joint training event in presence</b> in order to reinforce their professional and personal experience. However, <b>the organisation of a training event in presence always deals with difficulties in terms of involvement and engagement of different targets of participants</b>. The challenge was both finding the best way to involve students who didn't know each other and organise engaging activities to test and strengthen the accessibility competences acquired during the previous hybrid training activities.</p>
<p><b>The changes and adjustments</b></p>	<p>The "Fourth short-term students' exchange" and the "Fourth operational joint staff training event" have been organised in Italy as an additional training event in presence in order to allow students, teachers and partners' representatives to <b>meet and work together in person</b>.</p> <p>This event had the objective <b>to let the students testing and applying the accessible tourism competences</b> already acquired during the previous hybrid training activities. The training activities have been organised following the game-based, edutainment, experiential and active approaches. <b>Ice-breaking exercises, team games and group competitions have been designed to better involve students during the training</b>.</p> <p>For the teachers, a meeting with the Municipality of Assisi has been organised in order <b>to let them concretely learn about the problems of accessibility in a historical town</b>.</p>

	<p>Beyond the training activities, all the participants met a tourism operator promoting tourism that is accessible to all and visited a temporary exhibition designed also for blind people in <b>order to personally live and know two different accessible experiences.</b></p>
<p><b>The lessons learned</b></p>	<p>The organisation of the 4<sup>th</sup> joint event in presence has been very appreciated by all the participants.</p> <p>The students had the opportunity to meet each other and collaborate in practical activities which tested their new competences acquired during the hybrid training of the previous months. In particular, the cooking competition, named <i>Let's Cook for All!</i> was focused on <b>the creation of dishes meeting different dietary requirements</b>, while the <i>Barrier Hunt</i> game has allowed students, divided in teams, <b>to find out and document</b> (by photos and descriptions) <b>the architectural barriers and facilitating structures/presidiiums</b> in the historic centre of Assisi (Italy).</p> <p>Besides the mentioned activities, all the participants enjoyed the visit of the temporary exhibition which addresses the issue of accessibility of contemporary art for a public with visual impairment. This visit let the participants <b>to live a very immersive sensory experiences, putting themselves in the shoes of visually impaired persons and understand their feelings.</b></p> <p>The most appreciated activity has been the involvement of other students from the Italian school, some with disabilities, who had prepared a lunch for all the participants. It represented <b>an excellent example of school inclusion and integration</b> among all the school's pupils, including those with some difficulties.</p> <p>The organisation of engaging activities based on games and/or direct experiences, such as those experimented</p>

	<p>during the event and listed above, proved successful and effective in achieving the training objectives, confirming the initial assumptions of the project. The possibility of carrying them out in person all together and not remotely constituted a further added value.</p>
<p><b>The replicability in other training contexts and for other covered topics</b></p>	<p>Experimenting game-based and edutainment activities in presence and working together enriches participants' knowledge and competences. These approaches represent one of the best way to implement successful and engaging training activities both for trainers and learners. The combination of involving activities, positive competition, immersive experiences and personal challenges can be replicated in other training contexts and for other covered topics to make learning more engaging, exciting and useful in terms of professional and personal growth.</p>

## Conclusions

Having to organize and manage teachers' and students' exchanges during a Pandemic has been a tough and challenging issue. Our partnership faced that challenge with enthusiasm, energy, and professionalism, trying to deliver always the best possible solution.

We managed to engage, empower, and involve teachers, trainers and students and we are confident that the lessons learned can be of great value for all our stakeholders. Ahead of us we have complex and ever-changing contexts concerning both the education and work, which will require flexibility, agility, and big empathy skills for most of us.

Games Without Barriers proved to be an excellent opportunity to develop a curriculum and introduce training methods on accessibility in the catering and hospitality VET and, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, test ourselves under challenging conditions.