

The SHAPE Academy model

Participation and activism promoted through
cooperative group learning experiences.



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SHAPE

SHaring Actions for Participation
and Empowerment of migrant
communities and Las

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Participation and activism are promoted through cooperative learning group experiences.

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Background information

Title	SHAPE Academies
Geographic area	Italy, Portugal, Germany, Hungary and Croatia
City	Milan, Bologna and Legnano (IT), Porto (PT), Stuttgart (DE), Budapest (HU) and Zagreb (HR)
Organization	ALDA, WeWorld, CONNGI, Right Challenge, LAKA, Artemisszio and JRS
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Summary

Initially, the format of the SHAPE Academy was not an activity of the SHAPE Project; however, not long after the project began, the partners' Consortium realized that implementing a sort of school of activism capable of touching on multiple phases and objectives would represent a useful tool to enhance the achievement of various objectives and which was in line with the project's vision, both in terms of coherency and sustainability. The SHAPE Academy was established to link various activities, resulting in a better degree of engagement of persons from migrant backgrounds in both democratic and decision-making processes. The Academy connected them with local authorities to create long-term and successful partnerships. The SHAPE Academies are composed of different phases: research and needs assessment, training for persons with migrant backgrounds and local authorities, public awareness initiatives, field visits and pilot projects. The SHAPE Academy format established five distinct academies in the project's five partner countries: Italy, Germany, Portugal, Croatia, and Hungary. **The Academies maintained a common structure and focused on a series of common elements and themes while also providing participants with**

a context-based experience, which means that the Academies responded to the needs, limitations, and opportunities available in each specific context. It is a fresh innovative structure that has the potential to connect many stakeholders and nations.

Goals

Initially, the SHAPE Academy was not envisaged or included as an activity of the project but to provide a higher level of coherency that is also innovative in reaching the project's goals it was decided to create this new format, composed of 4 phases, with specific objectives and learning outcomes.

1) QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS TO OUTLINE THE NEEDS OF MIGRANTS AND CSOS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

2) TRAINING SESSIONS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS, DIVIDED INTO DIFFERENT STAGES OF TRAINING AND DISSEMINATION

- to increase the capacity of operators, officials and managers of local authorities to build an active and fruitful dialogue with citizens and migrant communities,
- to foster participatory processes in the defining of local policies and improve integration in the main areas of interest (health care, education, housing, work, and gender equality).

3) TRAINING SESSIONS FOR MIGRANTS AIMED AT INCREASING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND SKILL-SETS OF PEOPLE WITH A MIGRATORY BACKGROUND TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN THE DESIGNING OF INTEGRATION POLICIES

- to improve the knowledge of people with a migratory background about the functioning of democratic systems and the resources and initiatives available at local, national and European level;
- To promote networking opportunities and the exchange of good practices on the participation of people with a migratory background in democratic life through direct experiences, including at international level.

4) PILOT ACTIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- to activate a participatory process at local level in the defining of integration policies and priorities, taking into account the different areas of intervention, collecting ideas from migrant associations and citizens on how to improve communication and participation;
- to create structured and formalized avenues to regularly consult immigrants on policies, through the appropriation and bottom-up approach of consultation mechanisms at local level;

- to improve civic education, enabling citizens to understand the complexity of local problems and to develop skills, participatory attitudes and practices;
- to ensure the feasibility of the methodology through experimentation and evaluation of the proposed pilot action.

How does it work?

1) Qualitative research with focus groups and interviews to outline the needs of migrant people and local authorities.

2) Training courses oriented towards public administrators and local authorities.

3) Training courses oriented towards migrant people.

4) Pilot actions at a local level.

The success of the SHAPE Academies was accomplished by a consistent commitment to enable cooperative learning for all participants. Therefore, each partner designed a customized, country and context-specific SHAPE Academy that fit the needs of the participants.

In terms of activities, the SHAPE Academies allowed participants to explore various issues and experiences with one another and with the partner organization.

The SHAPE Academies were successful in attracting a wide range of migrant participants and local authorities, who want to contribute positively to society by offering a comprehensive and inclusion-based approach, but more importantly, it informed the participants about topics or themes about which they may not have been informed and allowed them to open a direct dialogue with local decision-makers in their communities or cities.

The SHAPE Academy put the participants at the heart of the events, which empowered and encouraged them to strive in their attempts to adopt better integration policies and expand the options available to them. One of the most promising outcomes was the networking that migrant participants did among themselves; after broadening their knowledge and skill sets, they sought to promote the work of the Academies outside the scope of the SHAPE project.

Results

Research (WP2): The qualitative research carried out through a participatory approach in the five countries made it possible to immediately identify context-specific and other issues that cross the different countries involved, through focus groups with people from migratory backgrounds and targeted interviews with local authorities.

Training of local authorities and people with a migration background (WP3 and WP4): These two activities were carried out in parallel, in order to integrate the

implementation of a pilot project. Training for people with migratory backgrounds in the five countries has touched on the issues that emerged from the analysis of the research, thus responding to needs. Training for local authorities has helped reach policymakers, technical and political figures at different levels on issues such as good democratic governance, integration processes, participatory tools and the local context in the five countries of intervention. The group of people involved in the training acted as a multiplier by passing on the knowledge gained to other people, both in the case of local authorities and in the case of people with a migration background. At the end of the training, all participants received a certificate of participation in the SHAPE Academy, in addition local authorities received a document of guidelines on the theoretical, legislative and methodological framework of democratic participation in the use of the Municipality. Representatives of the local authorities of the municipalities involved and a delegation of migrants from each country took part in study visits to Germany, Italy and Portugal, thus promoting the sharing of experiences, good practices and advice in a spirit of pan-European action.

Pilot project (WP5): The SHAPE pilot projects were designed to initiate a participatory process on a local level, culminating in the formation of a neighbourhood committee composed predominantly of migrant citizens. This committee served as a structured and formalized group that could be regularly consulted regarding migration and integration policies.

For example, in the Municipality of Legnano, the implementation of consistent meetings and collaborative efforts resulted in the establishment of the "Nuovi Cittadini" council, primarily consisting of residents with migrant backgrounds. This council operates under its own statute and action plan, providing a forum for deliberation and decision-making, aiming to engage with local authorities and serve as a communication bridge between citizens and decision-makers.

To ensure the sustained functionality of this council, the Municipality is set to formalize its commitment through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This agreement aims to integrate the established mechanism into their policies, fostering structured dialogue among migrant citizens. The objective is to enhance community living standards and promote transparency within the activities of both public and private organizations. This concerted effort ultimately contributes to advancing the quality of democracy within the locality.

Evaluation

The SHAPE Academies had few problems since a lot of preceding work was done to eliminate any problems or disruptions. However, one point to consider is the local

diffusion of the SHAPE Academies and their projected activities. Although relying on partner websites or social media posts is a good communication strategy, identifying where migrants spend their time, such as in aggregation points or local community centres, would have tremendously benefited the partners during the first registration process. Going straight to migrant groups with a clear and tangible proposition may be more beneficial than discussing the SHAPE Academies activities at the first meeting. To summarize, when communication or distribution efforts may have gone somewhat short, migrant participants considerably aided through word of mouth in their communities, where they became enthusiastic supporters of the Academies. There were also some issues with local governments, since innovative ideas or suggestions, such as the pilot project, are not always accepted by local governments or decision-makers. When compared to other partner nations that took a more welcoming and open-minded attitude to the project, the political situation in Hungary made it more difficult for our partner, Artemisszio, to undertake activities. Closing the SHAPE Academy requires no large financial commitment and might be enhanced further through the promotion of "twinning" cities or local governments. This will allow for the sharing of best practices and a participatory learning experience overseas for both migrant participants and local governments interested in implementing activities or even pilot projects advocated by the SHAPE Academy.

Who benefits?

The SHAPE Academies' main beneficiaries can be split into four groups:

- 1.) Migrant participants who received context specific training and formation, either from the project partners or from guest speakers, who in most cases were experts in their fields and discussed certain topics, themes and their roles in certain associations and organizations that are working to promote integration efforts in Europe. Without the Academies the migrants might not have been able to participate in such a hands-on experience.
- 2.) Furthermore, the guest speakers themselves, who ranged from local authorities, administrators, politicians, activists, and project managers, gained direct insight into how migrants currently live and perceive their lives in the cities they live in. It is not often that a direct line of dialogue between local decision-makers and migrant groups are opened, and we believe that those invited to share their knowledge and information also received valuable information that they could use to better address the issues that migrants face in Europe.
- 3.) The general public who through the various events or through word of mouth were informed about the SHAPE Academy and the positive impact that it had directly on the lives of participants but also its goals to improve the

participator processes in communities through the inclusion and integration of migrant background citizens.

4.) Local government officials, officers, and managers have been trained to establish effective dialogue and cooperation mechanisms with migrant citizens and communities. This involves promoting active participation in local policymaking and advancing integration across crucial domains such as healthcare, education, housing, employment, and gender equality. The training had a specific focus on understanding the 12 principles Good Democratic Governance outlined by the Council of Europe, integration processes, employing participatory tools, and formulating strategies at a local level to foster collaboration between migrants and local authorities.

Source of funding and resources used

All funds which were used to implement the project and its activities came directly from the AMIF fund of the European Commission.

Replicability

The fact that the SHAPE Academies have already been established in five other European nations demonstrates their replicability. Furthermore, while the Academies' objective was to exchange knowledge and experiences, educate participants, and better their position in society, each academy's technique differed. The SHAPE Academies' replicability may be seen in their adaptability and capacity to accommodate large groups of individuals from many countries who speak different languages and reside in various locations.

Significant insight into the history, context, and social situation is required before replicating a SHAPE Academy; however, as seen in the project, this was possible, and as a result, tailor-made curriculums were created for the various groups of migrants who came from cities such as Milan, Bologna, Porto, Stuttgart, Budapest, and Zagreb. Naturally, local organizations or groups that aim to foster integration efforts in their communities and gladly engage with the various partner organizations play an important role; hence, this must be a pre-existing condition for establishing a SHAPE Academy in a certain city.

Without the cooperation of local actors, it would be hard to tell migrants about resources available to them, organizations that work for them, and local governments that create policies for them. Fortunately, organizations and groups like those in the SHAPE Academies can now be found in practically every large metropolis; nevertheless, adopting this activity in a more rural region or environment may be difficult.

Insights gained

During its execution, the SHAPE project prioritized obtaining input from participants and recipients. After each activity, time was set aside to collect thoughts to acquire a better understanding of how the project may be improved in the future. All parties engaged provided exceptionally excellent feedback, and we learnt that the migrant participants valued the chances provided by the project. Local governments were overjoyed to have the opportunity to hear residents' thoughts, desires, and needs, since the initiative established a direct line of communication between them and migrant participants. Additionally, residents who had been sensitized and educated about the project's goals and objectives showed delight in learning about its activities. *We discovered that having a consistent and coherent communication strategy was critical to the project's success. Our communication strategy was developed to ensure retention and interest in the SHAPE Academy's aims and objectives. The communication initiatives included the design of a logo expressly for the Academies, as well as the presentation of certificates of participation to all participants, which strengthened the sense of connection and community in this activity.*

