

My learning experience from Promyse training on social entrepreneurship in health and social care

by Natalia Filippon

Early this month I had the fantastic opportunity to take part in the Promyse accredited training on social entrepreneurship in the fields of health and social care. Promyse is a two-years European collaborative project funded by Erasmus + and coordinated by IARS. It aims to promote and support social entrepreneurship in the field by disseminating knowledge about it, and by producing a youth-led accredited course uniquely designed to equip young entrepreneurs, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the skills and know-how needed to set up their own social enterprises.

The training was attended by delegations from partner institutions from the five countries involved in the project: the UK, Lithuania, Belgium, Italy and Greece. It took place in Vilnius, Lithuania, during the first week of September 2018, bringing together participants with the aim to assess progress, test ideas, set up directions and increase awareness and dissemination of the project and of social enterprise among young people.

My impressions, learning outcomes and personal experience were overall highly positive. I thought the training was comprised of a very fruitful mixture of open discussions, topic presentations, interactive exercises, visit to local best practice and cultural exchange activities that created a great environment for learning and exchanging ideas.

Much have I learned from this experience. Firstly, it made me realize the greatest contribution of initiatives like Promyse lies in the realization that many young people have the passion for, and first-hand experience with providing much needed social and health care, but do not necessarily have the means, technical know-how and support needed to turn their passion into concrete social enterprises; this should be addressed. Many talented young people in Europe from more disadvantaged backgrounds are faced with several socio-economic constraints and barriers that prevent them from accessing education, training and support. Promyse aims to address this by equipping these talented and passionate young people with the knowledge and technical skills needed to set up and/or promote social enterprises, in a language and format accessible to them.

I have also learnt that in our current context—still marked by the consequences of the recent financial crises that led to the exacerbation of social issues that states are struggling

to solve—leveraging the potential of members of the civil society to find innovative solutions for problems affecting society, the environment and local communities should be made into a priority. I was made aware that social enterprises can work as effective and fruitful alternatives to more traditional non-profit organizations and to traditional profit-driven businesses by combining elements of the two to create enterprises that are at once financially sustainable and that create social value.

Overall, I was left with the impression that the most effective and innovative approaches often come from young people willing to help their local communities by investing in what they are most passionate about and have first-hand knowledge of. I learnt that by hearing from young social entrepreneur themselves in our visits to local best practices. To me, this was one of the highlights of the training. It made me realize that, despite the existence of several challenges to young social entrepreneurs (such as the requirement for certain levels of technical skills, know-how and financial support) what unites successful social entrepreneurs is their great passion for supporting their communities, and great vision and desire to create social value and change. It should thus be civil society's and governments' duty to promote and support these initiatives. I, for myself, will be committed to transmitting what I have learnt by disseminating this in social media and among friends and family.

Finally, I learnt very much from multi-cultural exchanges. I thought bringing together people from different educational and work backgrounds, different cultures and age groups was very enriching. It gave me the opportunity to learn about the current context for the development of social enterprises in the partners' countries and about the commonalities and differences between those. It also gave me the invaluable opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with people that share a concern and passion for addressing social issues that European societies are currently faced with.