

# Booklet on Collaboration Between Organisations

Experiences and tips from transnational collaboration



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MARIA ROSA



# Introduction & About the partners

## Introduction

This booklet shares experiences and tips on how organisations from different European countries can collaborate in implementing international projects with international and national impact. It is based on collaboration between Forandringsfabrikken (Norway) and ComParte - Fundação Maria Rosa (Portugal) within the Learn Safely project.

## Short about the project and the foundation for this booklet

Learn Safely (2024-2025) is an Erasmus+ project funded by the European Union - KA210-SCH - with the aim of creating tools for adults, based on children's knowledge and advice. The tools are meant to contribute to the creation of safe and supportive schools for everyone. This project brought together Forandringsfabrikken (Norway) and ComParte (Portugal) in partnership to make it a reality. In both countries, in total, around 260 children from 9 schools in Portugal and Norway were listened to and consulted about how they feel safe in various learning situations, in school and in their classes. When students feel safe in school in different situations, it can become easier to learn, ask questions and show what they are capable of.

Children shared their views on how teachers can promote well-being, how assessments can be conducted in a safe manner, whether through presentations or group work, and how to ensure calm and safe classroom environments. The knowledge from children was, then, the basis for creating a set of digital tools with ideas, tips, and videos designed for teachers and other adults who work with children to use in their day-to-day work. The tools were created with the help of both children and teachers and are intended to promote safety in the classroom, to be used by teachers and other adults across Europe.

## About the partners

The collaboration between Forandringsfabrikken and ComParte began around 10 years ago with shared values on civic and political participation, believing that decisions, laws and professional practices should include the inputs of their ultimate beneficiaries. Over time, moments of sharing methodologies and listening to students, trust and friendship grew, and this became the foundation for the Learn Safely project, the first project implemented in partnership.

**Forandringsfabrikken's (Norway)** main goal is that all systems designed for children and young people should be experienced as safe and useful for them. Forandringsfabrikken has extensive experience conducting national surveys with many children and young people, facilitating meetings between children and young people and decision-makers, and engaging in advocacy work.

**ComParte - Fundação Maria Rosa (Portugal)** is driven by the idea that information arising from citizens' experiences can be an enriching contribution to decision-making processes and ways of functioning in different systems of society. ComParte works with youth and migrant/refugee people and creates informal contexts for participation, where citizens are listened to and, then state their ideas and recommendations through moments of sharing and collaboration with professionals and decision-makers.

## Aim of the booklet

This booklet can inspire other organisations that wish to start a transnational project with tips, learnings or solutions on collaboration. It is based on our own experience. The most important thing to keep in mind is that the partners together work out how to find common ground and shared values, principles and understanding, in order for the project and the collaboration to be as successful as it can be.

This booklet does not describe every step of our project, but highlights what we learned that may be useful for others implementing projects together. Throughout our collaboration period, we have identified several key phases that we believe are most crucial, where establishing common ground is essential for the project to proceed smoothly.

# Before the project starts

## Creating the project idea

Developing the project idea is one of the most crucial stages of the project. It is not only about writing down activities and objectives, but about shaping a shared vision. The more ownership all partners feel, the smoother the later collaboration will be. Use workshops or brainstorming sessions where every partner contributes and is actively involved, both in designing the activities and defining the project's products and results. Even if some ideas are not used, the process helps create commitment and ownership to the project. Here, it can also be helpful to talk about motivation and methodologies. Why does each partner want to join this project? In what ways do our methodologies converge and differ? What kind of experiences do the organisations have from previous projects that can be relevant in the new project, and how can those experiences be used? Understanding what drives each organisation and what are similarities and/or differences in methodology makes it easier to balance priorities and to foresee needs of adjustment later.

Often, the process starts with a rough outline or idea that one organisation brings to the table. Sometimes it is a single partner who develops the first draft, and other times partners have already discussed the idea together before it takes shape. The level of detail in the idea can therefore vary before partners are invited in, but regardless of where it starts, it is valuable that the idea is further developed collaboratively among partners. When one partner already has an idea and invites others to join, it is important to be clear about what they are inviting the others into, while at the same time staying flexible and open to changes. This ensures that all partners can still contribute, shape, and feel ownership of the project, even if the starting point comes from one organisation.

## Getting the right partners

Finding the right partner is, among other things, about values and methods. Before the project begins, it is essential to establish what values and strengths are important when selecting partners for a transnational collaboration, considering the main goals of the project to be implemented. Search for organisations that share core values, but also bring different strengths into the project. Shared values create a foundation and a safe space to talk and adjust, while differences in approach can enrich the project. Ask yourself, what is most important for us in this work?

What organisations do we already know about that might be great for this work? What kind of partner can both challenge and support us? You can also look for partners through existing Erasmus+ or NGO collaboration platforms. They can be a good place to start when you want to connect with organisations that share similar aims.

## Getting to know each other

Once the project has been approved, invest in time together before starting the project. The collaboration can grow stronger when partners develop a relationship that extends beyond the project's objectives. Even though meeting online can be fruitful, it is often not enough. If possible, it is valuable to visit each other in your respective countries, spending time talking about who you are, why this work matters to you and sharing some informal moments over a meal from your partner's home country. This kind of informal exchange fosters trust, making it easier to raise concerns later. If partners only meet in formal settings, misunderstandings are more likely to grow into frustration rather than being resolved in time.

## Structuring the application

When planning the project, writing the application, creating the activities and considering the perceived outcome of the project, it is essential to include space for physical meetings. Meeting in person can set the tone for the entire project and, at the same time, facilitate a shared understanding of what the project entails. This can also be a good time to clarify definitions and concepts or communication flows that may be understood differently by the partnering organisations.

## EXAMPLES FROM OUR COLLABORATION

In the case of Learn Safely, Forandringsfabrikken and ComParte had already known each other for 10 years, sharing common ground in mission and methodology. Forandringsfabrikken had the original idea and considered ComParte as a possible partner. After some meetings and revisions of the draft proposal, ComParte was on board. All activities made sense in relation to both partners' mission and strategy. However, it would have been helpful to include more detail on how each partner would implement the activities. Even though the methodologies share similar logics and assumptions, the "how to" and the final results look a bit different. This was something Forandringsfabrikken and ComParte had to address later in the project. Knowing these main differences from the start would have reduced the need for adjustments during implementation.

# Staying Connected in Implementation

## **Shared experiences and understanding of methodology**

Sharing experiences is not only about exchanging skills or building capacity from earlier projects. It is also about developing a shared understanding of the project's methodology. When partners work side by side, both get the chance to explain their perspectives, show how they usually work, and learn from each other. Conducting a short test run during a partner visit can be very useful, even if it uses materials from earlier or simplified versions of the activities. This allows both organisations to discuss why activities are designed in certain ways, compare approaches, make necessary adjustments for their local context, and agree on how data will be collected and systematised.

At this stage, it is also helpful to look at what competences and resources each organisation has to carry out the different activities. If one partner needs additional training or support, consider whether capacity building could be provided or whether alternative solutions can be found together. This helps avoid misunderstandings and ensures that both partners feel equally confident and able to contribute.

In this way, the methodology becomes something co-owned by both partners rather than directed by one, and it can even enrich each organisation's individual work by helping their methods evolve into something more complete.

## **Agree on how far you can stray from the project's objectives**

Each partner works in different contexts. Agree on what has to be the same, like core values, purpose and what can be adapted, like how activities are carried out. This balance maintains the project's coherence while allowing for flexibility in different countries as needed. Be sure to agree on how much each partner can adapt the various activities in order to still stay on track with the project's aims and objectives. If something has been planned and agreed on, but it doesn't work out like it was supposed to or the respective results look a bit different, inform your partner about it and count on the project's promoter to guide the necessary adjustment. Hopefully, by taking the time to get to know each other and to understand the different methodologies before the project starts, it can make this process less intimidating and necessary.

## Overcoming challenges

Even when partners have agreed on a common structure for activities, it is important to keep checking in along the way. If one partner finds that the plan does not work in practice, this should be openly discussed before any adjustments are made. That way, both sides can reflect on what is not working, explain why they use certain approaches, and adapt together. It may also be helpful to conduct a small test workshop during a visit, ensuring that everyone has a clear understanding of both the process and what the data will look like and how it will be handled afterwards.

Don't assume that your way of doing something is the only way. Stay curious about each other's culture and ways of working, learn from each other and adapt. Therefore, it's always important to keep this in mind when working transnationally.

## EXAMPLES FROM OUR COLLABORATION

During the implementation of some Learn Safely activities, we noticed that even when trying to use the exact same methodology and "how to," the local context made a difference. Not everything that works in Norwegian schools works in Portuguese schools, and vice versa. Being aware of this and allowing flexibility in how activities are implemented can make it much easier to stay on track in international projects.

# Communication and cultural differences

## Digital communication

Choose platforms together and be clear about how you will follow up. Agree on platforms that you can work on together for each component of the project (communication, planning activities, creating materials, etc) and make sure that the subscription for all partners is included in the project budget, if there are paid versions of the chosen platforms. Working on the same platform or in a shared document can strengthen the sense of collaboration and make it easier to ask questions when something is unclear, while also fostering a sense of connection. Depending on where you are in the project, regular short check-ins can be more effective than rare long meetings.

## Translation of materials

Translation and language are a big part of a transnational collaboration. However, translation is not only about language - it is also about making sure everyone understands the meaning of the content. Some concepts cannot be translated directly. It is, therefore, helpful to discuss the concept until you reach a shared understanding of its definition. Build in time for this process to avoid misunderstandings or double work. For example, even a common term like "assessment" might mean different things in different school systems. Talking it through ensures that activities are aligned and that tools or other results developed are meaningful in both contexts.

## Handling differences

There is no one "right way" in a collaboration. The important thing is to have enough similarity to stay on the same page, while still allowing differences that reflect local context. See variation as a strength, not a weakness. When differences appear, use them as an opportunity to learn and create safe spaces to talk about them. Ask questions like "What can we take from your way of doing it?" Often, a combination of approaches proves stronger than either approach alone, and it can enrich the project's result in a way that you did not even think of.

## Making fun

While working on a transnational, collaborative project can sometimes feel overwhelming, it is important to remember that the project is also about having fun and sharing good moments together, unexpected learning points and joys of overcoming challenges in carrying out activities. Moments like these can make people feel connected and motivated, and they can also serve as a way to strengthen collaboration. Fun can be small things, like laughing together during an online meeting, sharing a meal or sharing experiences. Remember, your partners are also human beings, so ask questions about how they are doing, what they did during the holidays or how their weekend was, instead of diving straight into the work.

## EXAMPLES FROM OUR COLLABORATION

In transnational projects, the concept of "safety" can be understood differently depending on cultural background. For some, safety is linked to structure and clear rules. For others, to openness and freedom of expression. These differences also shape how pupils and teachers experience the project activities. By discussing openly what safety means in each context, partners can avoid misunderstandings and establish a shared approach. The aim is not to agree on one definition, but on principles that make everyone, students, teachers, and partners, feel respected and supported. The same approach can be applied to other central concepts in a project.

In Learn Safely, when creating the videos to illustrate the tools, the partners had different levels of experience and resources in video editing and access to the suggested software. This caused some challenges, which meant bringing in external support during implementation and adjusting the budget accordingly.

Digital resources can also differ in the "how to" of each partner. For example, Change Factory usually uses iPads in their activities, while ComParte does not, and didn't have iPads available. It would have been helpful to discuss this in advance, but we solved it by ensuring that, regardless of the method, material, or tool, both partners still gathered answers to the same questions.

# Personal learning points

I appreciated the cultural learning.

We found new ways of explaining our methods because we had to translate them.

The in-person visits were very important as moments of learning more about the other organisation's work and of deeply connecting.

We expanded the horizons of the types of products and results our national projects can have.

## From Forandringsfabrikken and Comparte

Transnational collaboration is not always easy, but it can be gratifying. With trust, openness and respect, organisations can learn from each other and create more impact together. Thank you to all who contributed, children, youth and teachers, in Portugal and Norway.

