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TRANSFORMING HABITS

TO THINK ABOUT TRAINING:

Example of the RenovUp transnational project

(Erasmus+ educational research partnership)

**Extract from the forthcoming publication** **"EXPERIENCE AS TRANSFORMATION: For an epistemology of experience".**

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**The Ulysse experience routes**

**Vase from the 5th century BC, British Museum**

**Paris, 20 December 2023**

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THE WAYS IN WHICH EXPERIENCE IS TRANSFORMED IN THE WORKPLACE: THE TRANSNATIONAL RENOVUP PROJECT

# Project presentation

The transnational RenovUp project, to be carried out between September 2020 and July 2023 under an Erasmus+ contract, was born of the observation by professionals in the construction sector that the training schemes available in the partnership countries for site managers and team leaders did not take sufficient account of the specific features of building renovation. In addition, they did not focus enough on the observation and analysis of work situations specific to renovation. As a result of their preliminary analyses, the project partners found that there was a real need to reorientate the training programmes in terms of objectives, content and learning methods, so as to enable the target learners to improve their ability to better understand renovation as a whole, to anticipate and plan the specific work involved, and to better communicate and persuade in complex situations on these sites, while taking into account new (European and national) safety and environmental protection standards, as well as technological and organisational advances.

The project partners have experience and complementary skills in the design and implementation of vocational training schemes for construction managers, technicians, and workers. The transnational partnership was made up of three national and regional vocational training networks (initial and continuing) for construction trades (Comité de concertation et de la coordination de l'apprentissage [CCCA-BTP] in France; a national body for the promotion and coordination of training, qualifications, and safety [Formedil] in Italy; and a socio-professional foundation offering training courses to companies in the construction sector [FLC Asturias] in Spain. In addition, the partnership included a technological and educational research body Sieć Badawcza ŁUKASIEWICZ ITeE in Poland and a professional federation in the construction sector, also being in consultancy body PEDMEDE in Greece.

The RenovUp project, through its preliminary studies and analyses, as well as its pragmatic productions, carried out in close collaboration with training centres and companies in the five countries of the partnership, has resulted in the following productions:

1. Analysis of existing skills and needs:
* Identifying the specific technical, organisational, and standards-related issues affecting the development of the roles of site managers and renovation team leaders.
* List of skills expected of site managers and team leaders in building renovation.

Good practice in training trainers.

1. Instructional design and training engineering:
* Methodology for identifying work-related situations in building renovation companies.
* Didactic tools for professional training of site managers and team leaders.

Open Badges for trainers, tutors, site managers and renovation team leaders.

* Guides for trainers, teachers, and tutors for the implementation of training courses based on the formative exploitation of work situations.
1. Experimental training.
2. Disseminating, sharing and promoting results:
* Articles, brochures, and notes to disseminate results.
* National dissemination seminars.
* Presence on social networks.

*(Marek Lawinski,*

*Head of the Skills Internationalisation Division,*

*CCCA-BTP)*

# The research programme put in place

For the participants in the RenovUp project, the challenge is to "reverse" the usual ways of thinking about training through the objectives of action, which are the formative exploitation of learning in work situations and the analysis of work situations to improve the arrangements for the professionalisation of site managers and team leaders. The assumption was made by the two researchers involved in this field that the involvement of professionals in this project was likely to constitute a source of learning and innovation for the contributors involved (partner organisations in the RenovUp project, training centres and companies having participated in the reflections and experimental actions).

Attention was paid to the moments of transformation in the account of the respective experiences according to the different functions occupied by the people interviewed (management, deputy management, director of studies, training, coordination, design) in the partner countries: how does involvement in an international educational project contribute to the professional development of its contributors? The field study highlights how entering into the experience of others can be a personal step towards change, illustrating the collaboration in this particular project.

Eight interviews[[1]](#footnote-1) were conducted with RenovUp project collaborators, including four in France and four abroad (three national project pilots and a researcher specialising in the development of vocational education).

The initial interview guide was oriented in three directions:

* How did these employees get involved in the RenovUp project?
* What kind of learning have they done for themselves?
* What does this mean for their usual practices?

The interviews led to the emergence of several themes that are likely to be echoed in the other areas of research relating to the joint transformation of individuals and their environment when they embark on their activities. These include their career paths, their place in the project, their difficulties, their questions, points to watch and personal and professional contributions.

The topics covered intersect with the professional concerns of the people interviewed regarding the creation of training guidelines for renovation site foremen and team leaders, based on the analysis of work situations in the field.

# Experience and expertise to get involved in the RenovUp project

The partners have had one or more experiences of contributing to/participating in similar projects (using real activity as a basis for revising teaching models). One of the people interviewed in France said: *"When I arrived here, I was asked to work on the examinations for the in-service assessment situations (CCF) and on the certification situations. They are based on a real-life situation, so in fact what's certifying must be done in the same way in training. This must also be instructive for the young person. So, it all makes sense. The RenovUp scheme enabled me to put down everything I had in my head, to write it down, to put it into words and to become aware of it". (French educational manager).*

The foreign contributors also unanimously emphasise their experience in designing training courses for operators in the construction sector, through national and European projects. These prior experiences are interesting to consider, as they provide support for the contributors in terms of their place in the project and their mode of involvement.

# Meeting needs identified in the workplace

Whatever their position in the project, the contributors unanimously shared the approach of using real-life situations to guide the revision of teaching models. Although this approach was initially a novelty for some, as emphasised by a regional director and the foreign contributors, who pointed out the unusual aspect of interaction with companies prior to the creation of a training project, most of them had nevertheless experienced this practice in previous European projects.

These habits have formed a common and shared foundation which has facilitated collaboration between the partners throughout the RenovUp project: *"The simulations are there, they are given by the companies, we can see that there are recurring problems...Starting from a real situation...We know that it's everyday stuff".* (French educational manager). According to the people we spoke to, the construction of the reference frameworks involves a great deal of work on "breaking down" recurring themes into training modules.

The habit of commitment can be linked to other experiences in the field of training, such as the fact of having been involved in writing certification situations as part of a national project on work-linked training (French educational manager) or of having participated in the creation of teaching and positioning tools to develop observation grids in real situations (national coordinator of the RenovUp project). According to the same co-ordinator, it can also be linked to non-teaching experiences such as organising technical activities to manage the project and conducting interviews with operators in the renovation sector.

Gathering needs based on actual activity means taking into account the local challenges of the training provided, from one region to another as well as from one country to another (French Regional Director) and, above all, it means having a good knowledge of the practices of trainers in order to support them in changing their practices (French Education Manager and French Regional Director in his capacity as a former CFA director): "*Already work-linked training is disconnected, we need to reconnect the CFA with the company*...".

These issues and transformations relate to the specific national features of the political and legal context, the structuring of the sector and environmental standards: "*In the first phase of RenovUp, we had to do a documentary search, analyse all the standards, legislation, all the changes that the European Union is putting in place to deal with climate change".* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).

The responsibilities and practices of trainers, site managers and team leaders are recurrent in the comments made by contributors when it comes to their perception of the situation.

# Work situations linked to educational issues

The interview guide includes questions relating to points of surprise and difficulties encountered. These difficulties then led the respondents to describe their personal commitment (their personal experience of commitment in the context of their involvement) in this innovative project.

The French contributors are unanimous on the fact that the main difficulty lies in the differences of perception regarding the pedagogical challenges of the project (in its operationalisation) and in particular from the point of view of the trainers who see their practices shaken up. These comments reflect the needs of apprentices in terms of exposure to training and learning situations that are as close as possible to the day-to-day life that awaits them.

A French Head of Education noted that it was difficult for trainers to grasp the importance of using real-life situations as a starting point, even though they are essential for apprentices: *"The reality they need is to relate to real-life situations and not to pile on knowledge".* This also affects assessment issues for new trainers, who find it hard to break away from the "knowledge test" format.

A French trainer sees this difficulty: *"It's comfort, I get them to paint, that's what I'm best at, it's comfort, it doesn't push me to my limits. Or putting up a wall. I would like them to be able to ask 'Why are you putting up a wall? What do you have to respect? And that, of course, is something they must work on beforehand and prepare"*.

This means supporting trainers in the necessary awareness of bringing young people closer to the world of work and the concrete situations that will await them in their daily lives: *"It can't just be top-down, it has to meet a need in companies. You must look and listen to what they need. What do you have in front of you? How can we get it to them"* (French trainer). For the trainer, it is also a matter of thinking about the question of individualisation of courses: *"Thinking about the organisation of courses is my job".*

This difficulty relating to the reluctance of trainers to commit to the proposed approach is also mentioned by one of the foreign contributors, for reasons that are at once cultural, structural, and economic. "*Sometimes they're not in real companies, but they learn practical skills at school too. Often, the schools are not sufficiently equipped with tools, materials and machines, and the skills are not up to date. That is why schools [...] need money to improve equipment, tools, machines, and materials. We also discussed this with the teachers, and they told us that it did not make sense for them to go to a real construction site and observe the use of very innovative tools because when they come back to school, they will not have any opportunity to use this type of tool".* (Foreign researcher)*.*

In addition to this, the foreign contributors mentioned the difficulty of gaining access to the field (to observe the activity being carried out) or convincing professionals in the sector to take time out for interviews about their practice. To a lesser extent, the foreign contributors mentioned difficulties related to time management in the operationalisation of the project.

For one of these contributors, this is due to limitations in terms of human resources: *"We've encountered a lot of difficulties because we have a lot of projects to keep track of. So sometimes it is difficult. But sometimes we have to find the school that can launch the pilot programme. When he first told us OK, but then said no, I changed the situation. But we found the solution and it is not a problem, but it is a good experience. It is a good way of growing and improving with the difficulties. So, we can discuss how we can solve this problem, always together."* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).

For another National Coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country: *"It involves a lot of exchanges and explanations. We are really in a process of mutual understanding... to explain and show them that at the same time it can work... We are in a system which in its very conception can be adapted according to the culture and the availability of resources in each country... It has to be said that there are very significant differences between countries".*

Another foreign contributor agreed:

"*Communicate the project and each objective as early as possible and engage stakeholders and the target group as early as possible from day zero (...) You know that when you use other sources to get information, such as focus groups, interviews, questions and the like, it takes time."* Thus, the perception of the situation implies the need to convince and 'get on board' all the stakeholders, but this is done differently depending on whether the contributor is addressing in-house trainers, his international counterparts, or operators with whom he is already used to interacting.

If, internally, the challenge lies with the trainers, who express fears about the necessary change of posture (impression of a loss of control), at the transnational level, it is more a question of accepting the otherness of collaborators to take account of different approaches. The perception of oneself in the situation will therefore take on different characteristics for the contributors depending on their status and the place they occupy in each professional situation.

# Confronting the experience of others

Four French contributors have identified several characteristic aspects of the project, which requires confrontation with the experience of others.

These confrontational situations involve:

* Evaluation, particularly for the French Education Manager when using the RenovUp training grids with the trainers. "*To what extent will we be able to use these grids with the trainers, how will they be able to work differently rather than doing evaluations in the form of knowledge tests... that's my pet peeve".* A National Co-ordinator of the RenovUp project also agrees with her on the question of acculturating trainers to the use of a new training and assessment methodology. "*We are going to set up a system to prepare trainers to use this method*".
* Training the trainers: *"In the training of trainers, we need to get across the message that there is a risk involved, and that they will inevitably have to take it on board. And that means buying into the project. It's not about the content, it's really about the psychological aspect of things, accepting change, moving from one teaching approach to another".* (French Regional Director)*.*

*It is also a question of not moving too quickly with new trainers, but of proceeding in stages, supporting them in the change of professional posture"* (French Education Manager).

* The management of the completion of the project for the French Regional Director and the explanations needed to ensure that the commitments continue. *"It's just another project, that's what we're hearing. It is a real danger... We have overworked employees who are put to work on all fronts. And so, one day, yet another project will not go through.*
* Managing cultural differences with partners, for the National Coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country. *"This is something extremely new for them. And I think it's a failure on our part. We missed a few stages of explanation. It was so clear to us that we fell into the trap of 'it's obvious'."*
* Acculturation to adapt to the language and approaches of research. "*Our work is in blocks; you have to decipher it. It is a skill in deciphering that I did not necessarily have, that I don't have in its entirety... You break it down; you analyse it in a different way to me".* (French trainer).

Among foreign contributors, these situations concern:

* Communication with stakeholders. *"The sooner you involve them in the project, the sooner you will obtain results and the sooner you will engage them. Let us say throughout the implementation of the project*" (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).
* Calling on expertise that you do not have. "*I try to understand the gap between the current skills and the skills required by the companies for the site manager and the team leader, then we ask our committee of experts, our vocational schools and other experts if the project is going in the right direction and if it really meets our needs, then we report back". (*National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country)*.*
* Training trainers. "*The first thing to do is to train the trainers, because they need to change their attitude in the way they approach company employees. The second piece of advice is to choose a group of former employees who have good experience in this field. For example, older workers, all the team leaders, all the site managers who have long experience in this sector. So, they know the site and the projects they are carrying out better".* (National coordinator of the project in his country).
* The collective development of a common European system and tools, while at the same time being adjustable to the specific characteristics of each country: *"We need to have a certain margin to adjust the results of the project to the solutions of each country, so that, in other ways, the project ends up with the same result, that's for sure. We will adapt a little to all the other countries".* (Researcher specialising in the development of vocational education in a partner country).

Confrontation with the experience of others therefore involves all the stakeholders in a systemic way, whether it be the relationship with the trainers/employees internally or external partner relationships. *"In this project, we made sure that we had a different approach because, before starting the project, we organised a discussion group with other experts to exchange ideas, to better understand the needs, to compare with other people within our schools and with certain team leaders. And all the team leaders on site were keen to take part in this first phase to better target the elements, the problem, the objective."* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).

Regarding the points to watch out for, the responses all agree that confronting the experience of others involves "*a lot of communication to convince people of the perceived interest*" (French Regional Director).

These are:

* *"To check that everyone has understood the same thing before moving on to the next stage.* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country),
* *"Not to forget that there are reticence and obstacles and that these must not be neglected"* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country),
* *"To trust each other. Each profile is useful for the project.* (French trainer),
* *"To bring mutual interests together. If you do not have an interest, it does not work.* (French educational manager),
* *"It's a tightrope walker's balancing act between 'not saying too much' and getting people on board at the most important stages...".* (French Regional Director).

Identifying points to watch out for, while encouraging contributors to express their personal experiences of commitment, then enables us to tackle the question of the transformation of activity habits in relation to confronting the experience of others, particularly in an international context.

# A transformation of habits

The transformation of commitment habits was approached by asking contributors how they saw the project's contribution to their professional development and prospects, in connection with our preliminary question: how does commitment to an international educational project contribute to the professional development of its contributors?

The contributions mentioned by all the contributors, enabling us to analyse them as having contributed to the transformation of commitment habits, mainly concern the fact of getting involved in an international project in which it is necessary to go through a process of mutual acculturation.

* *"It's always interesting to see other people and partners from other countries... We live in an open world, so we must seize opportunities and be aware of them".* (French Regional Director),
* *"It's really a mutual enrichment, it's a richness, the new perspectives and their questions always question the systems we've put in place...Really trying to understand better the contexts of the foreign partners...It's difficult to anticipate because it's at the moment of confrontation and exchange that the differences appear".* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).
* *"It's good to take part in something that is European and that can be used in other countries by people who are going to be trained".* (French trainer).
* *"In general, Erasmus+ projects follow a very common path in their implementation. But* ***RenovUp is not one of them.*** *So that calls into question how the project is implemented and how the Erasmus+ project is implemented because it focuses very much on the practical problems and issues of the vocational training sector and the renovation sector. So that's one of its strengths."* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).
* *"For the first time, we are in the process of fully understanding what is meant by 'work situations', in comparison with learning situations in the workplace. I have just been working for the past 25 years (...) The relationship with companies has been essential".* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).
* *"In RenovUp, we learnt to talk with the experts and with the companies to understand the real needs of the site manager and the team leader. Before designing a course, we did not ask the workers what their real needs were. We designed the training solely based on my experience or the experience of other colleagues".* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).

The contribution of international experience is emphasised by most French contributors who are directly in contact with their foreign counterparts, such as being ready to open up to the world, to seize opportunities, to observe foreign contexts and to be aware of differences.

It also helps all the contributors in their collaboration with other countries and gives them a sense of international recognition.

* *"If I'm there, it's because I can contribute. When people tell me that my investigations are excellent, it is rewarding. I used to think that in this world I did not have anything to contribute, but in the end I do*. (French trainer),
* *"It's a European project, and it also legitimises the fact that what I wanted to promote 13 years ago is being recognised".* (French Regional Director).
* "It'*s the cooperation with people from other countries that will give you a new perspective on different things (...) International cooperation or project work makes us richer, more open, more courageous, so it's really worth getting involved".* (Researcher specialising in the development of vocational education in a partner country).

The contributions made by the international dimension of the project are shaking up the way things are done, including in terms of the teaching expertise acquired. *"No matter how much we plan things in common, the culture of each country is different, so we never manage to deliver the desired training in an identical way, but rather in an equivalent way. So, we provide a flexible framework so that each country can adapt according to its own criteria. Nevertheless, it's the cooperation with people from other countries that will give you a new point of view on different things."* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).

From a purely pedagogical point of view, this shakes up the usual frames of reference insofar as it is also an opportunity to *"perceive another link between the company and the world of training through different examples and illustrations. That's the richness of this work and what's new about it*". (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).

One of the contributors added: "*RenovUp is a very, very different and very interesting project (...). Very important for me. I am more open to confrontation with other people, with the worker, with the company and not only with my colleagues, but also with the outside world".* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).

Changes in reference frameworks also involve new ways of looking at things in terms of the internal workings of apprentice training centres and the training of trainers in terms of support and professionalisation:

* *"We want to develop the rules of the game, and we have to give them to young people. If young people do not know them, they won't play, and they'll be right not to want to play.* (French educational manager).
* *"I don't give the trainers a model, they do it themselves depending on the level of the learners. But that is still our area for improvement*". (French Education Manager).
* *"The Open Badge, as an expert participating in the RenovUp project explained to me, is a new tool for inserting informal and formal skills into work study projects. For me, it's new because I didn't know about this Open Badge, so these are new tools and new questions that can improve our knowledge".* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).
* *"Personally, I've had to learn a lot about the construction industry. It also made me more flexible, even in terms of working hours (...) So I was flexible in my contacts with external partners." (*Researcher specialising in the development of vocational education in a partner country*)*.

# An insight into the experience of others

Personal developments concern all contributors.

* *"What interested me was the idea of learning how to analyse work".* (French educational manager).
* *"It has enabled me to learn a lot of things, a lot of terms; sometimes I laugh when there are a lot of terms that are a bit scientific and all that; when in fact it comes down to things that are more on the ground".* (French trainer).
* *"It gave me a more global vision, starting from the field, the ability to intellectualise things...It allowed me to evolve in this system, it shook up a lot of things and it allows me to evolve now and to have perspectives on things that I didn't have before".* (French trainer).
* *"For me, on a personal level, it's a combination of everything I love, because I have my academic hat on, which I've forgotten, but nevertheless it's a job, not of research, but a job of reflection".* (French Regional Director).
* *"You have to be a good listener and even observe people's reactions to what is said or done... And we also have an external observer, a regulator who allows this to happen and plays his role well. We could have gone further with this project, but we never had the time to do it all.* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).
* *"It's very important for me. I am more open to confrontation with other people, with company bosses and employees, and not only with my colleagues, but also with the outside world."* (European contributor to the RenovUp project).

Expressing these personal developments also leads contributors to make links with positions that are close to their hearts.

* *"I'm a fervent advocate of the fact that lean-tos shouldn't come into the training centre to put up a wall, for example.* (French trainer).
* *"That's what I'd like them to be able to see, to try and make them understand that we absolutely have to get to grips with situations experienced in the workplace, as much as possible".* (French Education Manager).
* *"Our raison d'être is to meet the needs of companies".* (French Regional Director).
* *"The interest for me in this project, which suits me both professionally and personally, is that all these things that are extremely rigid or lack flexibility become, from my point of view, anti-pedagogical and not very effective".* (National coordinator of the RenovUp project in his country).
* *"In our country, we need to introduce young people and women to the construction industry. It is very important to try to understand that work is changing and not the old idea that construction is dirty. It is not right, but with the new technologies, even young women can find work in the construction sector*". (European contributor to the RenovUp project).

The mention of personal development also goes hand in hand with the idea of the time needed to reflect when investing in a long-term project. "*I'm not just someone who deals with problems that come up every day... You want to deal with problems on a day-to-day basis, but you also need to stop and think from time to time*". (French Regional Director).

Lastly, the comments on personal development characterise the respective functions of the contributors and their place in the project, depending on whether the changes relate to the way in which they run a training centre, build apprentices' career paths, rethink the training of instructors or conduct research:

* *"You have to know how to listen to yourself when you're running a training centre, you need a bit of intuition, and you also need to be humble. You can't just do anything and then see it through to the end.* (French Regional Director).
* *"So, we also get a new point of view, a new approach to field research, because they suggest some very interesting tools for interviews and documentary research. It was also very useful for me. I'm probably going to use it for other activities, so even for us, as a research institute, we got something new from a methodological point of view." (*Researcher specialising in the development of vocational education in a project partner country*).*
1. These interviews were conducted in May and June with staff involved in the Erasmus RenovUp project in the five countries concerned. Eight interviews were conducted: four in France by Florence Tardif Bourgoin (a trainer, an educational manager, a regional director and a European project manager) and four in the partner countries (Spain, Greece, Italy and Poland) by Jérôme Mbiatong. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)