



## Intellectual Output 4 - Pilot Reports

# STARTING WITH PEOPLE, EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT FOR AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH | IRES F.V.G.

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Project “Diversity Capacities - Improving the Capacities of Adult Education Institutions to Successful Dealing with Diversity”

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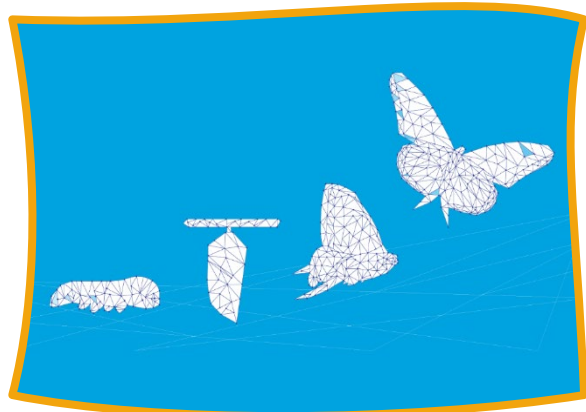
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Creating an Inclusive Mission and Vision with the Organisation's staff

Illustration 1: © 2021 Shoalhaven Psychology Services | Website by Handmade Web & Design

## The Organisation

Ires FVG deals with training, research and consultancy for companies and public bodies, for the promotion of the economic, social, environmental and cultural development of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG).

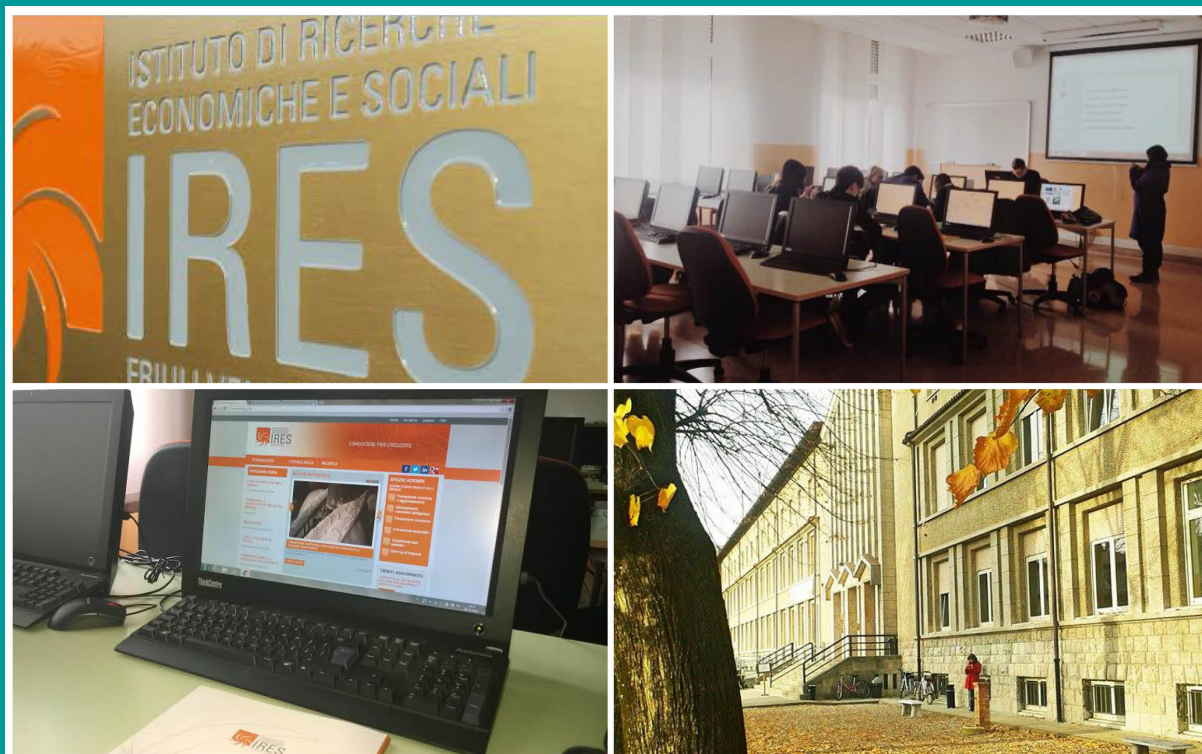


Illustration 2: © IRES FVG 2020



## 1. An institute that moves from research to executive projects

The I.R.E.S. F.V.G. Institute of Economic and Social Research of Friuli Venezia Giulia, active since 1983, is a Social Enterprise, from about 6-7 years - 2012/2013, a non-profit association with legal personality recognized by the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. The company deals with training, research and consultancy for companies and public bodies, for the promotion of the economic, social, environmental and cultural development of Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG). It is an independent company. There are three pillars that characterize Ires, which are: Training, Research and Advice on and for the region. The institute is very attentive to changes in society and keeps its eyes open on transformations.

In fact, a mission statement does not exist but there is a sharing of corporate values among the staff, in daily practice, which arises from the problems that are faced.

The institute works with 35 employees and 15 collaborators (in the area of Udine and Trieste).

Regarding company organization in general, the tools used for the development of activities are based on project advancements, work with objectives and results, identification and achievement of annual objectives. The sharing method is based on internal laboratories to deal with issues, perspectives and proposals, together with all staff members.

The organization adopts the management of diversity for generic reasons, because it is a social enterprise, and this is then concretized with standardized procedures included in this kind of companies.

Regarding the students, being their clients, diversity is more complex as the users of the training services are varied. Often the institution is confronted with various difficulties of the average user, in fact the population of the trainees has been changed.

Participants are not selected for courses, but sent by the national employment centre; mainly they are courses for the unemployed and for this reason users are mixed in age, cultural background, competence, gender, etc.

"Diversity" represents a richness from the cultural point of view and the growth of people, we are talking about a sort of fluid society that is better to manage rather than letting it manage you.  
(a teacher)



The basic learner of the institution is already a fragile person, identifying the "different" is almost secondary.

With regard to credentials, Ires is accredited for the implementation of vocational training courses financed by the FVG Region; it is enrolled in the national research registry and periodically draws up and publishes in-depth reports on the main regional socio-economic data; it is qualified as a Proponent at the Fondimpresa Interprofessional Fund and is qualified to present training projects on the Fapi Interprofessional Fund and Fondartigianato; it adheres to the Charter for Equal Opportunities and Equality at Work and to the Pordenone Charter "Media and Gender Representation" - Memorandum of Understanding to promote a representation that respects the dignity of the person in the field of information and communication; it is registered in the National Register of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies among the bodies that operate in favour of migrants; it is a Test Centre for ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence), law (courses of law and rights) and ICT, EPM (European Project Management) certifications.

## 2. Status regarding diversity in the organisation - A work in Progress

### 2.1 The starting situation

There is no specific focus of the institute for migrants or political refugees, but the institution works a lot and in collaboration with the associations that deal with the integration of migrants and political refugees. Ires is involved in training and in inclusion projects and deals with the training of the unemployed including many migrants or people of foreign origin. Its formal context, the fact that it is a Social Enterprise, also addresses its target audience. Greater sensitivity to "diversity" is also reflected in the adherence to the Charter for Equal Opportunities and Equality at Work and to the Pordenone Charter.

Specifically, being a research organization, an analysis on regional migration flows was commissioned to Ires by the region Friuli Venezia Giulia.

In the case of the Trieste branch, it is a border city with Slovenia, therefore involved in welcoming passers-by to the border, specific courses were organized for political refugees in collaboration with Caritas for individual consultancy and entrepreneurial training.

As regards the Udine headquarters, especially about courses for unemployed that include mixed groups, the percentage of attending students with migrant origins cannot be defined, but 10-15% of the total courses (including the Trieste office) is specifically dedicated to refugees (their data refers to the years 2018/2019).

Only in the Trieste office all courses in general involve 40% of people with migratory backgrounds or refugees who are present for about 25-30% in courses for unemployed.

Migrants dropout rate in courses is quite high. As they attend courses exclusively for job placement, but when they understand that Ires is not a temporary agency that can make them work in the immediate future or when they find a job even of short duration, due to contingent needs, they leave the courses.  
(an administrative employee)



In general, the courses specifically dedicated to political refugees have short duration (12 hours) and are generally dedicated to linguistic literacy.

At the beginning of the project, the company's website, in reconstruction, did not contain information and images that refer to the involvement of the institution with a focus on migrants; on the other hand, however, the images and information were very neutral so that the diversity of any type (gender, sexual orientation, age, etc.) do not emerge.



From the point of view of the migrant population, fragility lies above all in adapting to the customs and habits of the place with problems relating course attendance, respect for timetables, ways of presenting oneself to others, sharing, great expectations for work, heterogeneous age group, mental health, generic fragility.

The institute does not only work with immigration-related diversity but, especially in recent years, is confronted with diversity related to the new population of students, who are unemployed and find it difficult to enter the world of work. The group includes NEETs, young women from the south of Italy who follow their husbands into short-term jobs related to health care, school, etc. but who cannot find work for themselves in the region, older people who have lost a long-term job and are unable to reintegrate into new jobs mainly because of their lack of IT skills, to mention just a few.

## 2.2 Human Resources Management

Ires employs a total of 50 internal persons - 35 employees and 15 collaborators (with VAT number/contract) employed with a long-term contract. Furthermore, there is a long list, which changes from year to year, of trainers and external collaborators engaged in the development of training courses. Some are of foreign origin, but none of which has a migration background.

While recognizing the important intercultural competence, there are no elements that make such competences emerge, if not specifically required for the management of particular target groups or users. The institution tends, both externally and internally, to use a neutral approach, so there are no differences, if not related to the competence needed to perform a particular task.

From an organizational point of view, the approach is to work in the field and when a problem arises, solve it in agreement with the service manager.

There is a formal document on equal opportunities. Furthermore, there is a responsible person dealing with the topic, which is available to suggest methods and find solutions, if necessary. The same person twice a year, following a constant monitoring, reports to the assembly about bringing back the results of the work or projects carried out.

Concerning the recruitment, which has not been carried out since 2008, curricula arrived from self-nomination or through the national employment centre and the resumes were usually evaluated in order to follow the neutrality policy that distinguishes the institution. In the search for staff, if a criterion is indicated, it relates only to the skills needed to fill the post required.

From the HR management point of view, especially in recent years, the institute is confronted with internal diversity inherent in the two groups of workers: the founders, those who work on a self-employed basis and in some way manage and have responsibility for the company, and the new generation, people employed on a salaried basis.

## 2.3 Networking

Ires, pursuing the objectives defined in its statute and due to its status as a social enterprise, has for years been in contact with institutes and associations working in the field of immigration and refugee management. The network has widened considerably thanks also to research commissioned by the FVG region, the Statistical Yearbook dedicated to immigration (2002 - 2008), which enabled the institute to obtain new contacts in this field.

In direct form and for the management of the courses, Ires collaborates with the major referents and associations of the Region such as: Oikos (Organization for International Kooperation and Solidarity), Caritas, Ospiti in Arrivo (an association that support the integration of recent immigrants) and ICS (Italian Solidarity Consortium - Refugee Office). The Trieste group also collaborates with various cultural mediation associations, various cooperatives and above all Slovenian trade associations. For vocational training courses the institution is in contact with shipbuilding companies in the area of Trieste and Monfalcone (where there are employed mainly foreigners) where Ires places migrants for on-the-job training or for internships or training internships.

In the promotion of active courses or entrepreneurship, the institution collaborates with these immigration-related associations for the distribution of promotional leaflets to their users, this applies not only to migrants but also to other types of diversity, in fact Ires maintains regular contacts with centres of mental health, Casa delle Donne (woman's house) and ICS to integrate their users in the training courses they organize.

Usually, from an organizational point of view, only some people of Ires have contacts with such networking, which are the leaders and the coordinators of entrepreneurship courses or company courses.

## 2.4 Education

The educators differ mainly in specific competence, not in cultural background. No problems have been found.

With regard to support for migrants, reference is made to the tools valid for all courses such as the accompaniment to the course by a coordinator and the availability of a tutor for each problem identified in relation to classmates, trainers, training environment, tools available, information on formalities etc. In some cases, financial data or financial aids are given (purchase of bus tickets, train, contribution for lunch, etc.).

The Trieste branch is able to manage the participants of migratory origins independently, in Udine they sometimes make use of the professionalism of the cultural mediators.

A major support for this target is the use in the classroom of tools facilitated for understanding the topics covered, such as videos, group work, role-playing games, sometimes in some courses the main purpose is not to train people, but to better amalgamate the class.

An important challenge for trainers, who are often professionals in the field they teach (they have their own company) are those of letting migrants perceive the usefulness of the course. Often students are passing through, sometimes with a different destination than Italy and, in some cases, it is difficult to make them understand that it is important that they learn Italian. Another important challenge is specially to emphasize the usefulness of training in the long term, because what generally characterizes groups of foreign users is their "urgency" to be placed both bureaucratically (recognition of citizenship or administrative documents) and at work (must survive).

To deal with diversity, the greatest challenge is the culture, we need to know the "diversity" we face in the classroom to be able to manage it e.g. the economic situation, physical and mental distress, different religion or origin, etc.  
(Teachers interviewed)



Teachers do not have specific training on diversity, in most cases, especially freelancers, they are professionals who do training. They often do not know how to deal with certain situations. To try to understand, they often inform and / or ask for advice to other trainers, who had similar experiences of diversity to manage. In certain situations, support is offered by the tutors who follow the courses.

But in general, the institute's employees and its trainers, whether internal or external, have not been trained in diversity management. There is currently no system, no guidelines, no protocols available to help manage certain fragile situations. The positive fact is that there is a very good sensitivity of those who work in Ires towards "diversity", having to deal daily with classrooms where there are many differences.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Ires does not have a defined mission statement. That is, the mission statement is not published. Its website is in progress and, at the beginning of the project, had a very neutral format, not very visual, with descriptions only in Italian.

From the point of view of HR management, at the moment the staff, although numerous, does not have a cultural background other than Italian, there is no recruitment plan, and no thought has been given to integrating staff from different backgrounds.

The interest in the staff refers rather to the need to involve the current staff on the issue of involvement in the company and the management of "diversity" by working daily with users covering a wide range of diversity from gender, age, origin, etc.

**Communicating with the 'different' is not only a matter of words,  
but also of images, gestures and expressions!**

The diversity that is most keenly felt, and therefore treated with reporting and various training initiatives or implementation in projects and courses, is gender-related equal opportunities.



### 3. The change and learning process - From the values to the mission.

#### 3.1 Aims and Approaches

Ires FVG is an institution in which "diversity" is not a topic dealt with on a formal level. In recent years staff have been confronted with other types of diversity, that are no less important and that have somehow stimulated the management, sensible to the gender diversity, to participate in this project. These were mainly targets related to disadvantage, marginality, age diversity or economic status, although the organization doesn't have a policy aimed at improving sales or services to migrants, there are no migrant workers, no intercultural training on how to improve intercultural cooperation or leadership have been developed, and there is no intercultural personnel policy.

The objectives of the project stimulated a dialogue among the institute's referents on these issues and later, in the discussion with the management, some specific needs emerged that could be addressed in some way to raise awareness and take a step forward in the organisation's stage.

What made the breakthrough and allowed the development of the piloting phase was the great sensitivity of the referents on the topic of "diversity".

We have to consider that Ires is a competing institute with respect to the project partner Cramars. The great advantage is that there is collaboration and mutual esteem, which is why the institute evaluated the proposal to develop the piloting phase as a possibility granted, a possible enrichment and internal development, rather than as a challenge or worrying about sensitive data.

The approach was therefore to propose the piloting to the equal opportunities contact person, who discussed it with the board and together they decided to join the initiative. During the data collection phase for the implementation of the case study, Ires indicated the available contact persons for a personalised interview from which some characteristics of the institution and some possible gaps to be overcome emerged.

A good tool to stimulate the discussion was the contribution of specific data, collected on the internet, from the institute's website or through observation of the premises, by the interviewer. What had emerged in the observation was precisely the lack, on the website or in the premises of the Ires, of references, images, linguistic contributions etc. that could favour on the one hand the interest of migrant users in the services offered by the institute, and on the other hand the possibility for migrants to apply as the experts.

The results reported to the referents through the recommendations allowed an internal exchange and a declination of possible implementation activities of the institute.

The final recommendations were made at a time when the institute was already undergoing change and when some activities were being implemented. This was the case of the staff meetings for the implementation of a shared mission and value model, and the implementation of a new web page. Therefore, the piloting proposal intervened to modify some objectives that the institute had already set itself, namely to:

- Involve staff in a mission definition process (in which the themes of "diversity" and "value sharing" would also be introduced).
- rebuild the institute's website
- In addition, it was necessary to train staff and internal trainers or freelancers on diversity issues.

In fact, the motto that supports the institute's "about us" page is:



KNOW TO GROW

**CONOSCERE PER CRESCERE**

Because, in fact, in order to deal with certain situations and certain difficulties, it is necessary to first know and understand them, then accept them and finally resolve them.

## 3.2 Activities

### 3.2.1 Commitment with management

Initial meetings with referents and the management of the institution indicated the need to have staff involvement in the process. A guided or invited involvement, taking into account the amount of work that the staff has to face on a daily basis in order to perform their functions and services.

Undoubtedly, the first phase directly involved the management not so much in the data collection phase for the drafting of the case study, but above all, once the recommendations had been made available, in the decision-making phase, in the final definition of the activities to be carried out and the objectives to be pursued by participating in the project.

Obviously, the choice has gone towards a process that was already in place, that the management has decided to implement taking into account the objectives and the development keys posed by a diversity management approach.

In this case the will to participate has implicitly determined also an indirect economic involvement to the project for the hours dedicated to the process from the staff involved in the activities commonly approved.

The case study was the first stage in which the management was involved, but only partially to respond to the interview, then instead, in the most active phase, the decision was left to the staff whether to participate in the planned activities.

The project referent person shared the results of the case study and the specific recommendations with the board and within this group, short- and long-term objectives were defined with the aim of getting the institute at least one step further along the long path towards a management that actually takes into account and benefits from "diversity".

### 3.2.2 The Plan

The Cramars contact person gave feedback on the recommendations at two points in time, initially with a face-to-face appointment with the contact person, for Ires, from the pilot. During this first meeting, various possibilities for implementation were outlined, possible short- and long-term goals were discussed, and timelines and methods were defined for involving the board first, to make final decisions, and the staff later.

In a second moment, the Cramars contact person met, through an online meeting, the board and summarized to them the results coming from the case study, the external observations, the possible recommendations and giving them the time to decide what to do.

#### **The possible implementation coming from the recommendations included:**

- work on motivation with staff
- shared definition of company mission statement and values
- share mission statement with the public
- reorganize the spaces in the offices (to get it more open)
- re-evaluate of staff roles in the company
- Rethinking about services provided
- have a more open approach to clients
- communicate better about "diversity", refresh the website

#### **During the discussion it emerged a possible "wish list" to cover such as:**

- ✓ Have a manual of good practices, to manage difficulties related to client diversity or that teachers could discuss these issues
- ✓ Share good practices in working groups
- ✓ Have a mission statement that includes intentions related to actions in support of diversity
- ✓ Have a more open website with more images related to diversity and perhaps in other languages
- ✓ Introduce diversity within the workgroup related to contract/responsibility
- ✓ That everyone has a common or shared company-wide understanding of diversity
- ✓ Conduct diversity trainings
- ✓ Re-evaluate roles and responsibilities on this issue company-wide
- ✓ Define together in the long term on this issue what could be the end point and share the methodology



In a third moment, always through an in-person meeting with the Ires contact person for the piloting, the objectives of the plan were outlined.

The company agreed on the results of the recommendations but, because of the tight timeframe and the need, in the process, to actively involve staff, they thought they would focus on 3 points, adding one that was not included in the recommendations, but that they defined and expressed as a need:

1. redefine the content of the website, taking into account the suggestions given by the recommendations
2. continue the process of involving staff in the mission statement and corporate values, also taking into account the issue of diversity
3. and in addition develop a training or discuss through a training activity or workshop the topic of diversity to, as a main objective, introduce and / or discuss the same with the participants to increase awareness on the subject.

They decided to start with the website that was being implemented, as early as November 2019, and then continue with the ongoing activities of employee meetings from January 2020 and, in the meantime, implement training. The training phase needed to be defined in relation to the results of the working groups and the specific needs emerged from the discussions.

By 2020, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, priorities changed and the project saw a forced suspension.

After several feedbacks with the referents of Ires and Cramars, the activities resumed in September 2020 coming to define and develop the training part in 2021.

### 3.2.3 Implementation

Ires staff, as a first step, were given information about the project and its objectives. Initially a step was defined, a meeting between small groups of Ires staff with the Cramars representative to tell about the project and stimulate thinking about "diversity". It was thought to carry out this activity through small awareness workshops on the theme of diversity. Covid-19 limited this activity.

The target of Ires to engage was different depending on the activities:

- website - marketing referents and IT technicians
- mission statement - the whole group of newcomers to Ires
- training - those who wanted to participate by inviting all the internal staff and external trainers and freelancers

The process of change, to be effective, must be based on freedom of choice and not be conducted through imposition.



## The Institution Website

The implementation of the website was already in progress, when the plan was implemented followed by the recommendations. For this reason, the Ires referent reported directly the suggestions about the platform and the images to the marketing referent who collected the information and outlined in the pages provided by the new Ires website.

The references given concerned above all the neutrality of the institute's web page which, for the referents could also mean equality. From the point of view of the marketing of the services offered, and of the possibility of comprehension of the contents by "different" users, this neutrality disadvantaged a certain target, in fact the website was readable only by certain targets of people, Italian, with ownership of language, understanding of technical text, etc.

The suggestions referred to the possibility of varying the language of the site. Not only transforming it into text to be read (not only in Italian) but also into videos or images to be browsed. Images representing the target category to which the particular service or course offered referred. In such a way that, even foreigners interested in participating in training courses can, at first glance through an image, or a video, or a short simple phrase understand for example which profession a course refers to. And if interested with the contribution of symbols, how to ask for information on where and how to enroll.



Illustration 3: Screen shot of the new Ires website © IRES

In addition, the user should recognize him\*herself in the images proposed and understand, through whether a service is for him\*her or not, or the degree of formality to be held in the institution, etc.

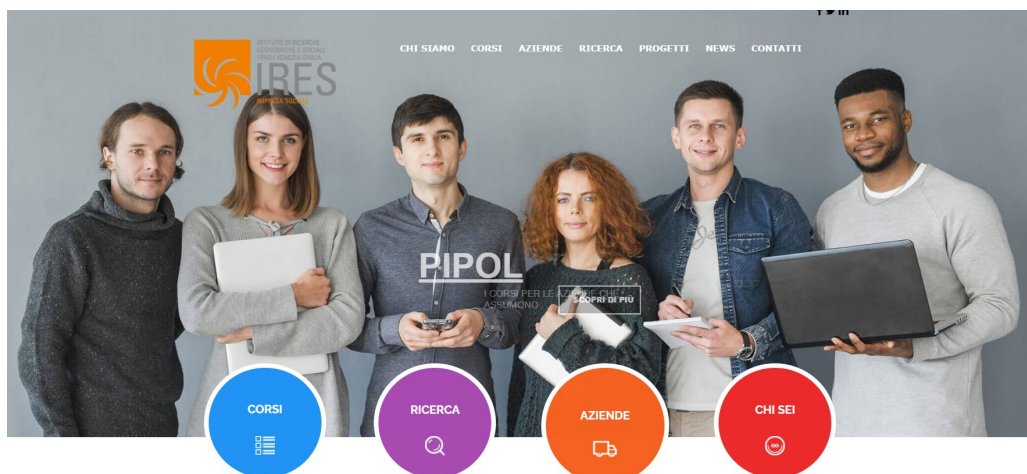


Illustration 4: Screen shot of the new Ires website © IRES

The website must be easily accessible through a mobile phone because, in most cases, this is the only mean of information available to certain categories of users, e.g. immigrants.

The current result shows in fact, an institute open to young people of various backgrounds, directs through the icons to specific career paths and is user friendly. Still missing is the implementation of a language, e.g. English, which would allow easier access to foreigners who do not handle Italian perfectly. But the website is still a work in progress and will soon include the possibility of using content in various languages.

## The mission statement/values charter

The definition of a shared mission statement, and the involvement of staff in corporate responsibilities was a process that had already begun at Ires.

The process started already in 2019 but the contribution of DivCap allowed to specify the topics outlining them also in consideration of "diversity".

In order to improve relations between colleagues, actively involve staff, define common goals and values, but also to put different groups and offices in communication, Ires FVG decided to organize Workshops on "organizational improvement".

These workshops, conceived, organized and managed by an Ires member who is part of the board of directors, took place in presence, during working hours and involved almost all Ires employees and workers from all the Udine and Trieste offices.

The program included 3 workshops that were then replicated to allow for broad participation (with a total of 6 workshops). The method used in some of these workshops was that of "strategic problem solving" to try to gather ideas from the working groups.

The topics covered during these workshops included:

- Values
- Communication
- Trust
- Time management
- Soft skills



The **direction** given to the workshops was mainly based on the principles and values reported in the certifications for companies - organizational model d.lgs 231/01 and administrative responsibility of companies. The Legislative Decree 231/2001 introduced in Italy the System of Administrative Responsibility of the Entity. In order to be exempt from administrative liability, the company must demonstrate that it has adopted and effectively implemented an organizational, management and control model.

This model includes, among other things:

- the identification of potential risks and the map of activities at risk;
- the creation of the organizational model (general part plus special part) and the definition of the code of ethics;
- the preparation of specific internal procedures for the various company processes;
- the organization of the system of proxies and responsibilities;
- the definition of the disciplinary system;
- personnel training and information.



For this reason, Ires has taken advantage of this tool to involve staff in the declination of the code of ethics and the charter of values in a participatory manner.

The results of the various labs were reported to the Board or Directors of Ires for the purpose of organizing the continuation of the process and the organization of other sharing labs, which however have stalled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, these labs were supposed to restart in autumn 2020, but new dates have not yet been redefined.

The next development laboratories have the purpose of relaunching and restarting the ongoing process through thematic workshops that can bring out new ideas and plans for the future.

From the values that emerged during the workshops the theme of Diversity had a central role, this especially due to the fact that in recent years Ires users, who are mostly unemployed, fall, in many cases, in the protected or disadvantaged user group, so employees had to touch problems related to the "diversity" factor.

The results of the completed process have been made explicit, above all, in the social balance sheet of Ires FVG. At the moment, a formal and shared document that is identified as a Charter of Values has not been stipulated. The path made has however gone in the direction of the company organization and, even if linked to the d.lgs 231/01, it has allowed to undertake a path of awareness by the workers that has given many hints that now can be useful to the definition of the charter of values.

A final result at the moment has not been shared or enhanced with the Ires staff or towards the external public with a publication on the website, but the intention is just that, to take up what has been done and reinvest on this activity.

In fact, in the next planning period, and always with the aim of involving but also keeping staff active, Ires has thought of organizing specific thematic seminars/workshops, which from time to time will focus on salient themes regarding the company organization, social cooperation, diversity management, etc., in order to work on a shared charter of values, which will then lead to the definition of the shared company mission.

## Need for Staff Training

From the very beginning of the process in the exchange of views with the Ires representatives, during the interviews for the implementation of the case study, and following the first meeting with some staff representatives, what emerged was the need to start with a shared idea of "diversity", shared at least within the company.

It was therefore necessary, even if initially not planned in detail, to determine meetings that could make staff, or part of them, aware of the definition and understanding of "diversity". For this reason, in agreement with Cramars, the second partner in the experiment, it was decided to develop a training/knowledge course/workshop. The definition of the contents was shared between the two institutions, marrying the needs of both. Thus, after several meetings and discussions, the proposal was to work on:

- **definition of diversity - good practices to manage users**
- **diversity applied through social theatre practices**
- **communicating for and with diversity**



To this aim, taking advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that all courses are now conducted remotely, we decided to look for external experts and run the course for both institutions, with the approval, contribution and partly also the participation of the group of stakeholders, the supervisors, involved in the project.

Ires indicated all its employees as possible beneficiaries of the workshops, who were invited to participate during office opening hours (therefore also in relation to their work commitments), but the important decision was also to invite all the trainers and experts from outside the organisation who hold courses for the trainees and who therefore, although not directly employed by Ires, have to manage users who sometimes have some integration difficulties.

The added value of this initiative was also the involvement of the two training organisations, and the sharing and discussing about different areas and points of view on diversity. This was a sign of the sensitivity that both organisations show to the problem and also a mark of how they want to deal with the subject, with professionalism and seriousness.

In detail, Cramars project contact person researched, also with the suggestions and help of some project partners, the expertise present in Italy, contacted them asking for information and defining the topics to be dealt with. In this first training phase the most felt need to be addressed was, in agreement with Ires, the theme of the definition of diversity. Then we went on to deal with hidden stereotypes, working through a role-plays approach also in relation to how to communicate with the "different" and collecting some good practices.

The course took place online between April and May 2021, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., during working hours, and involved a total of 16 participants, depending on the day. The course was recorded and the contents of the recordings made available to those who, for work reasons, could not participate directly in the course.

The aim of the meetings was to show how, in our societies, diversity is affected by power relations aimed at organising it in a hierarchical way. In dealing with diversity, an intersectional perspective was adopted, i.e. not only cultural and ethno-racial background was taken into account, but also elements of gender, class, nationality, 19 ability (etc.).

The training, using examples drawn from concrete experiences, aimed to highlight the conflictual aspects linked to the confrontation with these diversities, and to find shared meanings and ways to identify reflexive and conscious interaction practices. Specifically, the workshop focused on diversity in work and service spaces.

Particular attention was paid to the interactions between different subjects in working environments - such as relationships within offices and teams - and in contact with the public - such as services involving encounters with heterogeneous users.

During the meetings held on 20 and 28 April, 04 and 11 May 2021, the specific topics covered, as agreed at the beginning, were: Introduction to the topic of Diversity - experiences and concrete examples; Exploring Diversity with Social Theatre; and Communicating Diversity.

This initial approach led to a specific interest in the topic also on the part of staff participants who, due to their type of contract, do not have direct contact with the "different" - perhaps part of the administrative/financial group.

Surprisingly, they showed a particular interest in the topic, above all for its farsightedness and transversality, also reflecting on the benefits of an economic nature that the target of the "different" understood as beneficiaries but also among the staff.



During the course it emerged that both organisations, dealing with adult education, face the same type of target, even if they work in different territorial contexts. We realized that, although we do not want to, we all have stereotypes, we realized that the diversity management depends a lot also on the position of power from which we start. And we realized that, even though we do not know it, we are already able to manage certain criticalities and have good practices at work.



However, we do not have the time to exchange them, each of the training participant has many competences that are not expressed during the work but that help to face or find a language compatible with the "different."

The best result is demonstrated by the active participation in the course. On the other hand, the management also did its part by deciding to provide the course during working hours so that result as a sort of co-financing.



## Other Implementation Activities

The process that goes through or is completed with a "diversity" approach actually allows, among the working group, to adopt principles of awareness and integration within the company.

Equal opportunities, especially gender-related, was not a topic I was aware of before working at Ires. The fact that I had to report on it, that I read annual reports on the topic and that I had a company supervisor dealing with it, made me sensitive to it. Now it has become a topic I know and am interested in. This can also apply to other "diversities" if the company is sensitive to the issue.



As in the case of the workshops and laboratories developed with employees, the topic of diversity is also a key to discussing corporate values, the ethics of the company, which passes through personal recognition and awareness. Sharing the values of the company in some way makes us an active part of the corporate group and allows us to work with a different spirit and involvement, thus increasing the approach to responsibility and commitment towards the company.

### 3.3 Lessons Learned

Rather than lessons learned, we could call it a great achievement, this is especially due to the fact to have worked with a competing organisation.

Of course, since this is a proposal coming from outside and not from a need or a direct request from the pilot organisation, it is necessary to refer to the whole board group so that the steps of the eventual approved process can be shared together.

The approach to the board is certainly facilitated when one is familiar with the subject matter. Or better to define an approach of shared growth and common experimentation.

The relationship between the pilot organisation and the organising supporting the piloting must be based on a give and take relationship on both sides. It is necessary in this case to clarify that there is not a position of strength of one or the other body but of sharing, this especially for the barriers related to competition.

In our case, it was easy because the IRES representatives immediately approached the proposal with a vision of implementation, rather than a vision of challenge, and this also facilitated communication.

What we have understood most about this process is that by working together, both sides benefit, and that such a meeting also allows for an internal discussion that is broader and takes into account different perspectives that are often not easily discernible except through external observation.



How you approach change depends on many factors, as was the case with Ires and Cramars, although they had the same objectives, in the piloting phase, the way to achieve them was different. Cramars worked in a shared group giving the individuals responsibilities, Ires worked in small groups moderated by a single facilitator who was therefore able to collect and assemble reporting from different perspectives. This was also and above all due to the position of the organisation in the area, the type of users, the number of staff working in the organisation and the services offered.

For this reason, and to better fit the needs of a specific institution, the process of change has to be built in a shared way within the working group and in a way that is acceptable to all, giving a direction, but not an imposition.

„Give a direction, not an imposition”



Sharing is the first important step for involvement

Here in detail a list of lessons learned that can be shared for other implementations:

- since it is a question of working within an organisation, the initial and all the way through management approval is essential
- it is necessary to identify a contact person within the organisation with whom one can have constant contact, who will then communicate the various steps to the organization responsible persons
- when defining, together with the decision-makers, the possible developments, always take into account the type of company you are working with, thus having information about the starting point and checking their objectives
- it will be easier to implement a process on the subject of diversity by involving persons who are sensitive to the subject and who can therefore involve the whole company to which the process is addressed
- since it is a process, there are specific steps to be taken, we cannot expect an immediate result.
- all progress and novelties must be constantly shared with the project leader who, in turn, must share them with the top management or the working group
- before publishing a document, such as a case study, the approval of the body to which the case study refers must be obtained
- describe the activities in general without including specific names and surnames.
- constantly collect information and feedback from the entity doing the piloting, on the one hand to avoid missing steps, and on the other to keep the relationship alive.
- be ready to change course and suggest different paths (see the case of the Covid-19 pandemic), change the route if, in the long term, it does not work or is no longer shared
- explain to the team and the management that the route cannot lead to success if it is not desired, if it is imposed.

### 3.4 Good Practices

On the part of Ires, a process of internal development involving the institution had already begun. The advantage in this respect came with the contribution of the external body, Cramars, which proposed the initiative planned in the DivCap project while this internal implementation was in progress. This allowed Ires to implement the proposal with a view also to "diversity" and to obtain suggestions, with external input, that allowed it to expand the planned development by modifying the ongoing activities and results.

From the point of view of Cramars, while it was easy to intervene, as there was already an idea of evolution within Ires, it was difficult on the other hand to push through the specific changes on an already predefined plan. What facilitated this intervention was the sensitivity of the institution towards the topic and the concrete results brought by the case study document.

In fact, from the first meeting before the initial interviews, the request of the Ires contact person was to test during the interview, whether the respondents were ready or wanted to be part of the change process.

Since I started working with Ires, I have met many "different" users and I realise that, through a long process, I have changed not only in the way I teach, but also in the way I think.

(A teacher)



A second good practice was the comparison between the needs of two similar institutions, Ires and Cramars. In fact, both in the implementation phase of the interviews and in the suggestion of possible implementations, the fact of knowing perfectly the type of users, the training delivery process, the balances linked to legislative and reporting issues, facilitated the drafting of the recommendations.

The last good practice was the shared decision of the two institutions to develop a training course together. On the one hand, implementing and better directing the contents to be offered, on the other hand, saving money in the payment of the trainers; moreover, the comparison of the training results allowed a further implementation of the participants' skills.

## 4. Analysis of the experiences in the change and learning process, more sensitive and prepared staff towards diversity

### 4.1 Summary

From the point of view of the implementing partner, Cramars, working with a competitor was both a challenge and an asset. Right from the start of the project, working with Ires was very easy because of the sensitivity of the institute and its representatives towards the subject of the DivCap project.

The training organisations, especially if, as in our case, they have a social enterprise framework, have in their statute the mission to change, first of all the users who are trained in our offices, thus transforming their skills. Implicit in this mission is the principle of accompaniment, guidance, a form of help to improve or evolve. In recent years, the users of these institutions have changed, the economic crisis has increased the unemployment rate, so the objective of evolution has been reinforced.

We have to deal more and more with disadvantaged users who represent "diversities" that are not established or homologated, ranging from gender, age, social status, language, culture, but also from the availability of means, basic skills, the forced need to survive in a world of continuous and rapid change and the difficulty of accepting or confronting such change.

(A teacher of Ires)



Consequently, institutions and their employees have also had to adapt to change and challenges without having the skills to do so.

Ires has undergone a major and rapid change due to the economic crisis, which has seen a drastic reduction in staff and working hours. Somehow, the staff had to adapt, without being prepared, to these changes as well.

Aware of this situation and in order to redefine balances and values, the referents therefore decided to organise meetings that would make it possible to mend relations between the staff, especially those of the two sites in Udine and Trieste, and to work towards the same objectives and therefore to share needs and ideas for implementation.

The change plan also included a change in the external image of Ires, represented by the Institute's website, which needed to be updated in terms of both form and content.

Cramars became part of this evolutionary situation, proposing to add a vision that would also include the complex topic of "diversity" and Diversity Management.

Possible implementations related to the topic of new hires was not an element to be discussed with the company as, in the medium term, there were no perspectives that would lead to such discussions. Even though, in the first meetings and discussions held with the institute's referents, orientation was also made to possibilities coming from different management referring to the introduction and involvement of staff with a different cultural background, due to the large group of immigrant users Ires has to deal with.

The focus therefore went towards working with the staff already present in the company and above all through a process of change or involvement in the company's values and an awareness of the "diversity" dealt with in the company, by its users.

In fact, in this case, it started from the top, from the involvement of the top management, and then worked on the staff.

The approach normally used by Ires, as a research body, is a scientific one. That means first think and then plan, starting from project-based work, strategic analysis, measure to know. But in this case, they choose to use a more involving approach by exchange exercises, motivating for finding solutions that best fits the staff, solutions that people find together by ignoring power and stifling systems.

The participatory approach and the sharing of objectives by the staff was the main approach, so that the staff could really participate and feel they belong to the organisation they work for and share its values.

From a practical point of view, this could be achieved through several meetings, managed by a supervisor which collected the results of the 3 workshops that were then replicated to allow for broad participation (with a total of 6 workshops). The method used in some of these workshops was that of "strategic problem solving" to gather ideas from the working groups covering the topics of values; communication; trust; time management; soft skills. The results were reported to the board of Ires for the purpose of organizing the continuation of the process and the organization of other sharing labs, which however have stalled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The direct approach to the topic of diversity, however, was more introduced by the two most concrete actions in the short term.

The first was the suggestions given for the implementation of the Ires website and external communication. The suggestions were included in the recommendations and also defined directly during the meetings with the contact persons and were the result of an external observation of the website. Changes adopted included varying the language of the site, transforming it into videos or images, use more icons, include other languages, as a minimum English.

The second action was the implementation of training on diversity issues that made the participants, Ires internal and external staff, who voluntarily participated in the training, discuss what diversity is in the company, how to exchange good practices to deal with it (by experimenting it also through social theatre) and how to communicate towards diversity.

During the training it was possible to observe the difficulties and face it in a concrete way. What they found out is that the capacities and skills are already present within the organisation, what is perhaps lacking is a way of constant and regular exchange regarding possible good practices to deal with the "different", this will become part of a future implementation programme on these issues.

In the relationship the way I approached the "different" was to bring other personal skills that are not professional but related to my passions. For example, cooking. This allowed me to communicate through a language understandable by the user who, despite having a different culture, had a passion similar to mine. So, we put ourselves on the same level, we could communicate better from that moment on.



(A tutor from Ires)



## 4.2 What worked well?

### What could be done better?

In entering a process that is already underway, the focus should be on the positive implementation of the process and not on its radical change. For this reason, we can say that what worked, through continuous exchange with contacts, was precisely the inclusion of the "diversity" theme in an approach that first and foremost took into account the sharing of values and objectives for company growth. The input given by the outside observation served Ires to modify and implement an approach in progress and to address issues, including those regarding "diversity" values, that were not foreseen but were important in defining their mission and in validating certain tools suggested by Cramars.

We realized, through this experiment, that it is necessary to listen to external input, because often from the inside we don't pick up on certain nuances that are taken for granted.

This helped develop the process in both entities. Cramars, too, following that path and through each other's vision has changed the approach initially defined for the better. An exchange that was therefore fruitful on both sides.

An example of this may be the implementation of the training that involved both entities and through the exchange, during the training, participants were able to address broader visions and alternatives.

A great way to change is to apply to yourself observations you made to others



Another important aspect that worked well was the spontaneous interest and unforced participation of the staff in the proposals made. What has surprised, in some cases, even the board of Ires.

What could be implemented is, undoubtedly, the element of verification, the constant collection of feedback not only from the representatives of the institution being tested, but also from the staff participating in the process. This is important in order to collect results, that are useful to the project and to its dynamics of results, but also to the institution that is the object of the experimentation that can, through these verifications, constantly modify the path to satisfy and better act on the participants.

Another aspect that could improve the process is to solicit feedback from outside, especially from users who may be considered "different".

## 4.3 Recommendations

### Management

- Involve all staff in defining a mission statement that is visible to everyone especially on the website, but also for all internal and external collaborators,
- In the statement should also be explicitly addressed the nonverbal values, the principles we believe in and on which our work as educators is based without forgetting the focus on “diversity”;
- Ask for external feedback from experts before starting a process of change;
- Take advantage of the network of contacts in the field of diversity, networks and associations of immigrants, NGOs, health companies, etc. to collect data and get feedback on how to communicate and engage the “different”;
- Define the internal and external communication mode for the “diversity” target group. It might be useful to understand, also from a distribution point of view, in which language to write them, and in which places to distribute flyers useful for promoting the courses;
- Knowing what is “diversity” in the company, i.e. taking into account the number of “clients” that may fall into this category and highlighting the economic contribution made to the entity and the possibility of expanding services to this target group;
- Talk about, with the board, how staff from different cultural background could become an important element to be taken into account also from the economic advantage of the company;
- Define a “diversity” responsible that can collect all the information about this subject, useful for the management evaluations and staff needs;
- Work on motivation about this subject with staff;
- Find the funds to invest in the best management and education of diversity;
- Rethink about services provided.

### Non-educational Staff

- Involve administrators in “diversity” issues especially for the internal staff management;
- Gather data on the possibilities given by engaging a diverse staff;

## Educational Staff

- Have a more open approach to clients.
- Organize training courses on "diversity" - and share the contents with those who cannot attend the courses, now more useful by doing it online;
- Share good practices with other educational staff on how to deal with "diversity";
- Develop and participate to some courses or training or invite experts to better interact with diversity within the institution and with clients - psychological aspects, contribution to guidance, diversity management, involvement of "different" users in courses, etc.;
- Get feedback from trainers/teachers (external or internal) with the use of an assessment questionnaire to know and share teachers' problems, how they dealt with the classroom, etc.;
- Ask teachers about their needs to help students considered "diverse";
- Make use of tools that can best facilitate communication with diverse groups, video, images, etc.;
- Confront diverse groups starting from a position of equality rather than prevalence or superiority;
- Facilitate communication by finding common interests with the "different" person;
- Ask people in need directly what might be helpful to make it easier for them to get involved in the classroom or in the training;
- In the classroom, create situations, role plays, icebreakers, ways to get everyone in the classroom to feel on the same level, even during the first few class meetings;
- Ask for help from other staff, tutors, and management if there are problems in handling difficult situations.

## 5. ANNEX - Good Practice Examples

### 5.1 Diversity Training Course

4 online trainings sessions

Duration: 2 hours each

Development: on working hours

#### Topics:

- Introduction to the topic of Diversity - experiences and concrete examples;
- Exploring Diversity with Social Theatre;
- Communicating Diversity.

#### Agenda:

##### Day 1 - 17:00 - 19:00 Introduction to the topic of Diversity

The aim of the workshop is to show how, in our societies, diversity is crossed by power relations aimed at organising it in a hierarchical way.

In dealing with diversity, an intersectional perspective is adopted, i.e. not only cultural and ethno-racial belonging is taken into account, but also elements of gender, class, nationality, ability (etc.).

The training, using examples drawn from concrete experiences, aims to highlight the conflictual aspects linked to the confrontation with these diversities, and to find shared meanings and modalities to identify practices of reflexive and conscious interaction.

##### Day 2 - 17:00 - 18:00 Experiences and concrete examples

Focusing on concrete experiences on diversity in work and service spaces. Particular attention is paid to the interactions between different subjects in working environments - such as relationships within offices and teams - and in contact with the public - such as services involving encounters with heterogeneous users.

##### Day 2 - 18:00 - 19:00 Exploring Diversity with Social Theatre

Introduction. What tools does Community and Social Theatre (TSC) offer to talk about diversity? How can the languages and techniques of theatre train us to deal with the theme of "different" in the best possible way and encourage inclusion in relationships with others and in leading a group?

### Day 3 - 17:00 - 19:00 Exploring Diversity with Social Theatre

Using the TSC tool, the course aims at a double objective, achieved in parallel:

1. To make the group explore the theme of diversity by exploring its various facets on the basis of each person's experience.
2. To make the group experience inclusive techniques and expressive languages (used for the exploration of the theme and the acquisition of knowledge) that can be acquired and reused by the trainers.

Exploration of the theme "diversity" through expressive languages

- Exploration of the theme "good practices for valuing diversity".
- Elements of group building and management - me and the other, communication, trust
- Elements of planning and conducting activities: objectives and needs; techniques for listening to the group and the individual
- Limits and creativity - two sides of the same coin
- The objective view: critical thinking against inferences and prejudices
- Languages and techniques for the development of socio-affective life skills

### Day 4 - 17:00 - 19:00 Communicating Diversity

What is inclusive communication:

- Communicating better to include differences: some data
- Difference factors: gender, age, schooling, background, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation
- What are Unconscious Biases
- Acquiring awareness: a self-assessment test

Overcoming stereotypes in communication and speaking to all target groups:

The basics: how to speak the language of inclusion

- Internal documents
- Mail
- Signposting

Internal communication

- The correct use of language
- The different linguistic possibilities (from schwa to asterisks to verbal expressions)

External communication

- The use of photos and images
- Social media and website
- Examples of campaigns



[www.diversitycapacities.eu](http://www.diversitycapacities.eu)

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