

# Learning to Learn and Self Directed Learning to support Employability



A person in a green shirt is climbing a dark rock face on the right side of the image. The background features a range of mountains with snow-capped peaks under a clear sky. A bright sun is visible behind the mountains, creating a lens flare effect.

# Research Report

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# Introduction

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The project 'Learning to Learn(L2L) and Self Directed Learning (SDL) to support Employability' took place between September 2014 and August 2016. The main aim of the project was to investigate how L2L and SDL can support employability of learners. Four countries participated in this project: Belgium, Iceland, Italy and Turkey. In all countries so-called 'learning spaces' took place in which people participated who were unemployed at that moment. Learning spaces guided by innovative educational principles, with L2L and SDL being the underlying approach, where unemployed people can set their learning and development process supported by facilitators.

The expected result from this project was a process of personal and professional development that supports unemployed people to increase their self-esteem, to increase their network, to develop new transversal and professional skills, to be more aware of themselves as a learner (and maybe to re-start a formal educational path), to develop a pro-active attitude and all in all feel much more empowered and not dependent on the system being able to deal better with their realities.

More information about the project you can find in the publication: Transferring the Learning Space Model.



In order to draw from the project conclusions and recommendations towards an approach for setting up learning spaces for unemployed people a research was carried out during the project. The research was coordinated by two researchers from Work in Progress and Pame Ambro in close cooperation with the other partners.

The main basic question for the research was: "What elements contribute to a good self-directed learning environment?". The focus was on 3 components to investigate: the relation between learners and facilitators, the group climate and the impact of the space on learning. Taking into account the objectives of this project the 4th element a special focus was put on how this self-directed environment contributed to the employability of the people participating in this project.

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## The research consisted of three parts



- a desktop research collecting data from publications and research on related topics
- questionnaires for participants of the learning spaces and for the facilitators (annex 1 and 2)
- focus groups with the facilitators

Both questionnaires and focus groups took place after the learning spaces finished. Forty-four participants filled in the questionnaire and twelve facilitators. Four focus-groups took place. (one in every country) The focus groups were facilitated by the national coordinator. The researchers provided guidelines for the facilitation.

The desktop research provided hypothesis around the three main elements of the research and gave guidance to the development of the questionnaires for as well the learners as the facilitators.

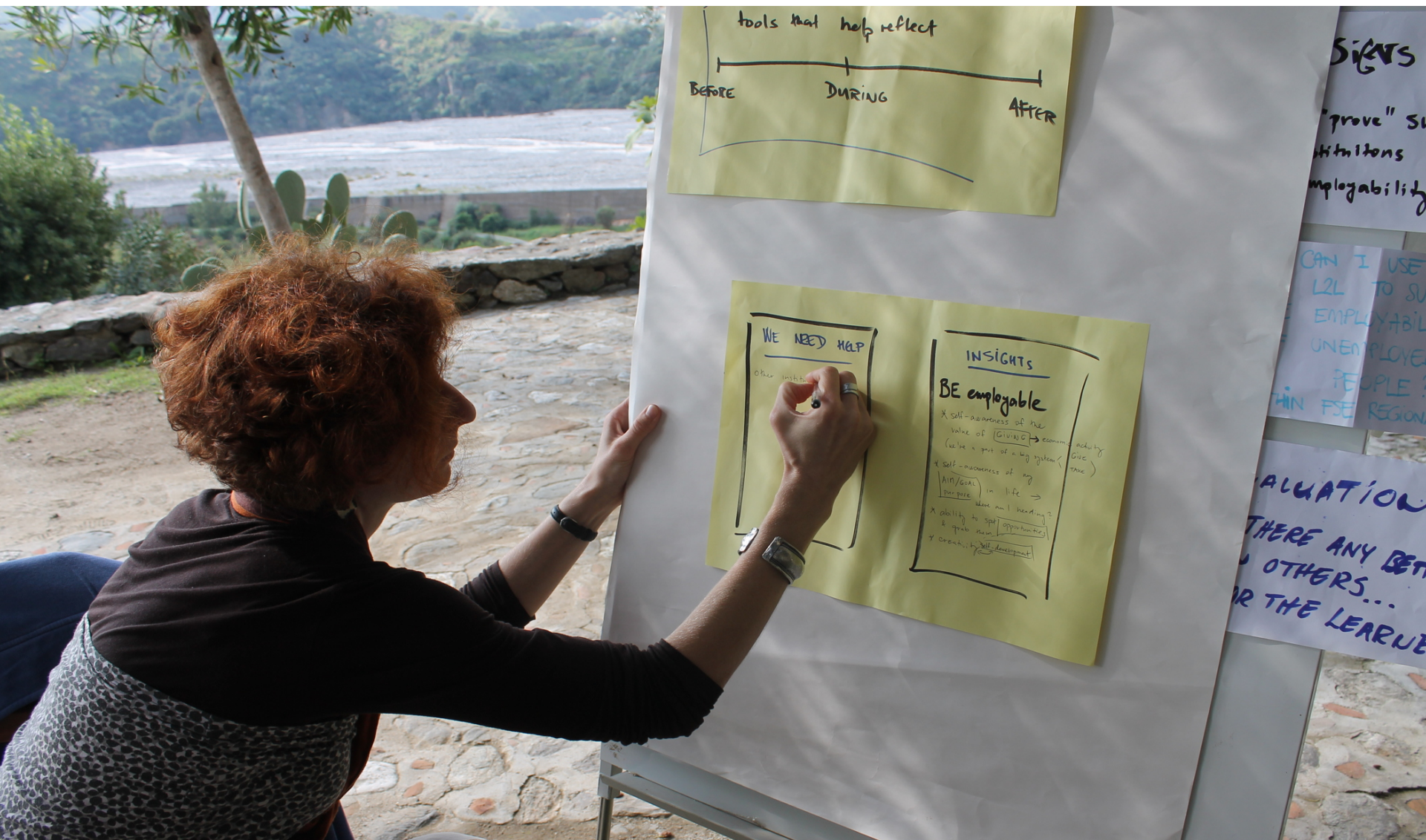
Item	What supports learning
Relation learner-facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ trust, respect and appreciation between learners and facilitators</li> <li>▪ clearly defined roles of facilitators and learners</li> <li>▪ a supportive and empowering role of facilitator</li> <li>▪ facilitators being competent learners and serving as a model for learning</li> <li>▪ facilitators being transparent about objectives, methodologies and process</li> </ul>
Group Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ diversity in the group is appreciated</li> <li>▪ confidentiality</li> <li>▪ safe learning space allowing for trial and mistakes</li> <li>▪ group norms are openly negotiable</li> <li>▪ not feeling restrained by time pressure, group or program</li> <li>▪ willingness to support each other in learning</li> <li>▪ expression in all human dimension, intellectual, creative, emotional and spiritual is encouraged and appreciated</li> </ul>
Relation between physical space and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ co-creation of the space</li> <li>▪ space for interaction (peer learning)</li> <li>▪ space for self reflection</li> <li>▪ space has to reflect the educational principles</li> <li>▪ comfort</li> <li>▪ learning and living go together</li> <li>▪ integrated technology in the space</li> <li>▪ flexibility (one size doesn't fit all)</li> <li>▪ sensory stimulation</li> </ul>

# References for the desktop research

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tools that help reflect

BEFORE DURING AFTER

WE NEED HELP

Other institutions

INSIGHTS

BE employable

- X self-awareness of the value of Givasi → economy activity (we're a part of a big system) Givasi (time)
- X self-awareness of my AIM/GOAL in life → purpose where am I heading?
- X ability to spot opportunities & grab them
- X creativity, self-development

SIGNS

"prove" success  
institutions  
employability

CAN I USE  
L2L TO SU  
EMPLOYABIL  
UNEMPLOYE  
PEOPLE?  
THIN FSE REGION

EVALUATION

THERE ANY BET  
OTHERS...  
OR THE LEARN

# Global research results

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The questionnaires were fulfilled by 56 persons, 12 facilitators of the learning spaces and 44 learners.

Some descriptive figures:

- 12 answers from Iceland, 15 from Italy, 15 from Belgium and 14 from Turkey
- Average age of the learners: 35. The youngest participant was 19 years old, the oldest 51;
- Males and females: the facilitators were 10 females and 2 males; among the learners, there were 32 females and 12 males

The learners had very different backgrounds. 26 had a university degree, and 10 a high school diploma. Looking at their last profession, we had engineers, touristic guides, educators, accountants, labourers, petrol pump attendants – just to mention some of them. They had in common to be unemployed when they started attending the learning spaces.

Both learners and facilitators were asked to fulfil a final questionnaire that aimed to investigate 4 dimensions: the relation learners/facilitators, the group climate, the relation between the physical space and the learning process, the impact of the learning space on their employability.

Four focus groups took place in the participating countries with the facilitators of the learning spaces. The leading question for the research, “What elements contribute to a good self-directed learning environment?” was the starting point for the focus groups. The facilitators were provided with further guidelines.

Under here the analysis of the 4 dimensions investigated.





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## The relation learners/ facilitators

Both facilitators and learners used common words to describe this relation: equal, friendly, supportive, honest. Almost all of the facilitators mentioned empathy as an important element of their facilitation. It stands out that a trustful relationship has to be created, in which people feel safe, comfortable and feel free to ask and behave as they feel. In different wording authenticity comes back several time. You have to give and show something of yourself and share your own experiences.

Asking good questions is seen as an important skill for facilitators. Other points which are mentioned are offering challenges to learners and pointing out the strong point/potentials that learners have.

Considering what the learners learnt from the facilitators, most of them mentioned “technical” information related to job research (CV, job interview, social media etc.).

Then, there are a set of competences that we can consider related to employability: awareness of strengths, passions, talents, how to reach objectives.

The ones who expanded the field, going further into life-skills, mentioned:

- To be more confident in my own experience
- Supported general reflection and thinking
- Receiving feedback
- Not judging the others
- Active listening
- Avoiding self-sabotage
- Self-awareness and self-development
- To consider different point of views

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What is the role of the facilitators in this relationship? We asked this question to both target; they could select maximum 2 answers and add other options. Most of them considered the facilitators to be a support person and a guide.

Role	Guide	Teacher	Support person	Mentor	Peer	Friend
Point of view of learners	15	4	21	3	8	10
Point of view of facilitators	4	0	12	1	2	1

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## The group climate

All groups are described in a quite positive way in which diversity, mutual support, being a group", trust, honest and supportive environment and openness are given as important elements. Listening was THE word related to this group of answers: listening to each other's stories and the feeling to be heard by others is mentioned by most of the respondents as an important element that contributed to learners feeling being supported by each other. Other attitudes that scored high were 'praising each other' and 'encouraging each other to take up challenges'. The point of views of learners and facilitators converged in considering the group very supportive for the individual learning process (scoring higher than 5 on 6). It seems that learners felt to get support more than what they were able to give, while the facilitators did not perceive this discrepancy.



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## The physical space and learning process

It seems that the reflection on how the physical space contributed to the learning process was one of the most difficult to be answered by the learners. Only few people really answered, many only described the place. It is interesting to mention that 5 learners affirmed that the space was not important, only contents and group matter.

The co-creation of the learning space only happened to a limited extend. The impression is that facilitators took a big role here and then tried to involve the learners in a later stage. However, when learners were involved in co-creation it had in general positive response, since it contributed to feeling the ownership of the space and contributed to the safety and solidarity in the group.

The element that comes to light analysing the answers of both facilitators and learners is the importance of a multifaceted learning space. The educational principles behind the creation of the learning space were mainly

expressed in having a space that is flexible, multi-functional and having different 'corners'. To have a space for reflection and relaxing, a space for working, a resource table, a place where people can work individual and a computer corner is seen as an important element to give opportunities' to different needs of learners.

The space was used mainly for peer learning (4,87 on 6), individual reflection and relaxing (4 on 6) and then outdoor and technology (3,26 and 2,75 on 6). When using the technology, the learners did it mostly for web researches. Having different spaces for different activity was really appreciated. This characteristic supported learning in doing what they wanted without feeling restrained.

Other important elements that learners mentioned in the description of the spaces were: the accessibility by public transport, warm colours, having a sofa, nice decoration on the wall, possibility of using the garden, having drinks and food in the same space.

There are some outstanding quotes like: "The learning space did not remind me the school", "It was big enough to be able to walk and not sitting all the time", "Because of non-standard seating arrangements they could step out of conventional ways of learning".

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## Learning Space and Employability

We can summarize the competences developed by learners splitting them in 2 types:

1. The ones related to the job searching: making a proper CV, presentation skills, managing interviews, using social media and IT to search for a job, focusing on talents,
2. The ones related to personal development: team work, self-awareness, communicating and relating with the others, active listening, ability to set goals, social skills, taking decisions.

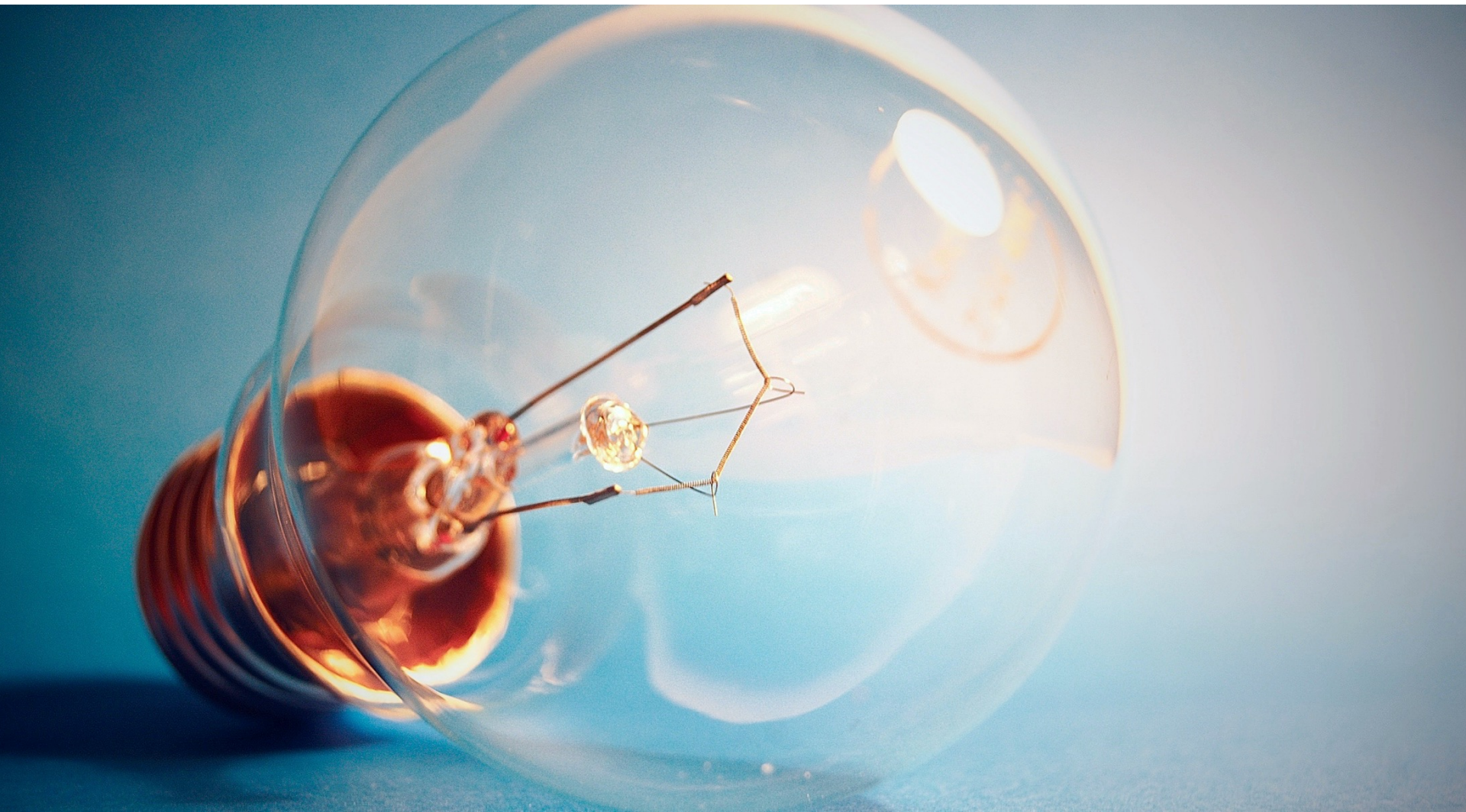
Both learners and facilitators agree here pretty much on the importance of growing self-awareness. A better self-awareness helps you to make choices in life and also in work. Facilitators see that many of the learners have a quite limited perception on themselves which decreases their possibilities when thinking about their employability. In the project many of these limiting beliefs were taken away which opened new opportunities. Participants think that what they learned improved their employability by feeling empowered and more confident. They are generally more aware of their passions and talents, strengths and limits. They also have a clearer vision of what they want from a professional point of view. One of the facilitators says that 'unemployment has a lot to do with that people don't know what they want and a lack of belief in their own capacities'.



# Recommendations

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- A self-directed learning environment is supported by a trustful relationship between facilitator and learner in which honesty and authenticity are important elements.
- Asking good questions, showing empathy, offering challenges and pointing out potentials of learners are essential competences for facilitators.
- When working in a team, it is crucial for facilitators to dedicate time on sharing and agreeing on common educational principles
- A group climate, which embraces diversity, mutual support, trust, honesty and openness, contributes to a self-directed learning environment.
- Peer-support within a group contributes considerably to individual learning
- Learners telling their own stories and listening to each others stories supports a fruitful learning environment
- A multifaceted, multi-functional learning space contributes to a self directed learning environment having different functions available as space for reflection, space for relaxing, a space for peer-talks, a place for individual work, a resource table and a computer corner.
- Co-creating the space with the learners is challenging but increases the level of involvement and ownership.
- Self-awareness, self-confidence, knowing your passions, talents capacities and limits together with empowerment are crucial elements for employability.
- SDL is not a “one shot”! Actually it is, but only if you work with kids that have not gone through the school path. Adults are not used anymore to be in touch with their learning needs and to freely choose how to satisfy them. In practice, it means that it is not enough to explain what SDL is and to expect that people will put it action. Facilitators have to be ready to implement a step-by-step approach if required, supporting learners in developing self-confidence and self-efficacy and in taking gradual ownership of the space.





# Appendix



## Questionnaire FOR LEARNERS

Age:

Gender:

Last work experience:

Level of education:

Item: Relationship learner-facilitator

1. How would you describe the role of the trainer/facilitator?

(tick maximum 2 possibilities)

- ☐ a guide
- ☐ a teacher
- ☐ a support person
- ☐ a mentor
- ☐ a peer
- ☐ a friend

2. What can you tell about your relation with the trainer/facilitator?

3. What did you learn from the trainer/facilitator?

# Annex 1

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## Item: Group Climate

4. Did the group support your learning?

Position yourself between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very well)

Not at all

Very well

1	2	3	4	5	6
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5. How safe did you feel in the group?

Position yourself between 1 and 6 (1 being not safe at all, 6 being very safe)

Not at all

Very well

1	2	3	4	5	6
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Please explain your position.



## Annex 1

6. To what extend could you express yourself in the group?

Position yourself between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very well)

Not at all

Very well

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

7. To what extend could you support others in the group?

Position yourself between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very well)

Not at all

Very well

1	2	3	4	5	6
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8. In what way could you support others in the group

# Annex 1

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Item: Relation between physical space and learning)

9. How did the space contribute to your learning?

10. To what extend did you contribute to the on-going creation of the space?

Position yourself between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very well)

Not at all

Very well

1	2	3	4	5	6
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11. How was to have this chance?

12. What are for you the three most important elements of this space?

13. To what extend did you use the different parts of the space?

## Annex 1

13. To what extend did you use the different parts of the space?

Position yourself for each element between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very much)

individual reflection	1	2	3	4	5	6
peer learning	1	2	3	4	5	6
relaxing	1	2	3	4	5	6
outdoor	1	2	3	4	5	6
others????						

14. How do you think that the different parts of the space fit your different needs?

15. To what extend did you use the technology offered?

Position yourself for each element between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very much)

Not at all						Very well
1	2	3	4	5	6	

# Annex 1

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16. What for did you use most the technology offered?

Position yourself for each element between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very much)

Social media	1	2	3	4	5	6
Making researches	1	2	3	4	5	6
Writing	1	2	3	4	5	6
Playing	1	2	3	4	5	6
Watching movies/videos	1	2	3	4	5	6
Music	1	2	3	4	5	6
Other: _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

Link with employability

17. What competences did you develop being involved in the learning space?

18. How do you think that what you learnt can contribute to your employability?

### Questionnaire FOR FACILITATORS

Item: relationship learner-facilitator

1. How would you describe your role as a facilitator?

(tick maximum 2 possibilities)

- ☐ a guide
- ☐ a teacher
- ☐ a support person
- ☐ a mentor
- ☐ a peer
- ☐ a friend

2. What do you see as your strong points in building a relationship with learners?

3. What do you see as your challenges when building a relationship with learners?



## Annex 2

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### Item: Group Climate

4. How would you describe the group?

5. To what extend was the group-climate supporting the learning?

Position yourself between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very well)

Not at all

Very well

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

Please explain

6. To what extend were learners supporting each other in their learning?

Not at all

Very well

1	2	3	4	5	6
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7. In what ways were learners supporting each other in their learning?

Item: Relation between physical spaces and learning

8. Please describe the learning space

9. Did you feel comfortable in the space?

Not at all			Very much		
1	2	3	4	5	6

10. How was to co-create the learning spaces together with your learners?

11. What impact do you think the co-creation process had on the learners?

12. And on yourself?

## Annex 2

13. Do you think that the space was adequate for the different learners' needs?

Not at all

Very much

1	2	3	4	5	6
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14. How much do you think the learners used the space for:

Position yourself for each element between 1 and 6 (1 being: not at all, 6 being: very much)

individual reflection	1	2	3	4	5	6
peer learning	1	2	3	4	5	6
relaxing	1	2	3	4	5	6
outdoor	1	2	3	4	5	6
others?						

15. How do you think the space reflected your educational principles?

16. All in all, what elements do you think contributed most to a good self-directed learning environment?

17. How do you think that the learning space can contribute to learners' employability?



RÖKSTÓLAR SAMVINNUMÍÐSTÖÐ



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