



DigiFuse

DIGITAL FUSION ENVIRONMENTS

Report on WP2: Field research based on S.O.I.T.

Results of the interviews



Information on the project

The DigiFusE initiative aims to improve or expand digital educational environments in closed care facilities, especially in prisons. The aim is to analyse the strategic, organizational, technical and informational needs of prison staff in order to gain essential insights for the implementation of the project.

Project participation and objectives

STEPS is working with many local NGOs and associations at local level, who help migrants, prisoners, ex-prisoners, women and other vulnerable groups. STEPS is exploring how the content provided can best align with real-life practice. The focus is on maximizing the impact the available tools, such as the BLEEP platform and the ETHIKAS Project platform, can have on individuals. Through close cooperation and ongoing feedback, STEPS aims to ensure that such tools and methodologies effectively supports personal development, rehabilitation, and future prospects for its users.

Summary of the interview

The purpose of this interview is to analyze whether the current digital systems in correctional facilities adequately meet the information needs of detainees. Additionally, the interview explores how online platforms can help improve access to relevant, understandable, and timely information for both detainees and staff.

Participant organisations

- Fondazione Yunus Italia Ets
- Arte Migrante
- Antoniano ETS
- Ass. Consorzio Communitas
- Ncv Logistica Evoluta
- Magic Museum
- Open Group
- Refresh Academy

Roles

- Microfinance Manager
- Management of volunteers and Migrant Workshops
- Referent for the Career Orientation, Job, Training and Business Start-up Support Area
- Referent for the work area
- Recruiter
- Social worker
- Training and labour responsible
- Educational and social services Coordinator for a Third Sector organization

1. Organisational level

Effective internal processes and systems

The interviewees answered that they consider effective processes in their organisations:

- planning of new initiatives, based on an effective sharing with colleagues,
- the on-boarding practice,
- the security system,
- the use of Sharepoint and TEAMS to manage all types of communication,
- the File management is effective.

There is a good network of people who collaborate to carry out migrant reception activities.

The socio-educational support process, which aims to achieve the autonomy of the beneficiaries, is an effective process as it is always managed in multidisciplinary teams in which highly qualified figures with different skills work.

There is a good internal system that connects the different areas of the institution, especially connecting the social area with the planning and fundraising office and the communication office.

Most common skills and types of experiences in your organization

These organisations have many types and many different kinds of skills, and it is difficult to make a list, the goal is to provide training and support in job placement to the most vulnerable categories.

In general, the most common skills are:

- **Intercultural** and artistic skills
- **Social-relational** skills are very important and widespread because of the beneficiaries who access our counters.
- Many of us have experiences with people who have socio-economic fragilities, who have a migrant background and come from situations of educational poverty.
- At a central level, **social planning**, reporting, project management.

On the contrary, interviewed people did not identify many ineffective internal processes and systems. The only complain was about being equipped with a new **database** to respond to the changed work needs that have emerged in recent years, and to improve the Data flow management.

Turnover or difficulty in finding staff

It depends on the profiles. Sometimes, especially for "front line" jobs, it is not easy to find suitable profiles quickly.

There is not a high turnover, although social work is perceived in the medium term as tiring.

Adoption of a digital learning platform

Most of the interviewees think that a digital learning platform can improve the organizational structure of the organization.

A learning platform for the target of people who attend the offices could be, if it meets the needs of the beneficiaries, useful for deepening certain topics (for example linguistic, socio-cultural, home economics, civic education).

Also, a digital learning platform could **streamline** some processes in the socio-educational support path.

The only negative factors can be:

- ✓ Some organisations are afraid that maybe only a small number of people would be interested in having a digital learning platform.
- ✓ It is considered important not to lose human contact between people.
- ✓ Few resources only are available and ready to manage the platform over time.
- ✓ A negative aspect could be a low level of involvement or retention of the target group, especially in the presence of materials that are too complex or with inputs that are too distant from the starting level of the beneficiaries.

2. Information level

Level of training for people working in the organization to communicate effectively with users

At least half of the interviewees think that not everyone is adequately trained.

But others consider that the people working in their organization are adequately trained to communicate effectively with users, although the level of competence may vary from person to person.

Satisfaction of users with the clarity and effectiveness of the information they receive

Some respondents think that users are **not fully satisfied**, as often the information does not respond to the reported needs, generating frustration in the person. Some others get good feedback from users.

It depends on the user and the methods chosen to provide the information: communication should be tailored based on the user's background.

User satisfaction regarding the clarity and effectiveness of the information received largely depends on the type of request. It's not always possible to provide an immediate answer or one that exactly meets the user's expectations. Many respondents think that it is often better to **guide and redirect people** to the appropriate services, rather than provide direct solutions, and this can sometimes lead to dissatisfaction.

Obstacles to users accessing information

There are certainly first of all **linguistic difficulties** and difficulties in using technology, as well as barriers linked to having changed the country and, consequently, the functioning of some services.

Obstacles exist especially for those who haven't had the chance to become literate or have a very low level of education: these barriers often also involve the approach, as with this type of user, the approach is the only real vehicle that can convey any kind of message.

There are several obstacles to users accessing information. In addition to language barriers, difficulties in understanding, and limited familiarity with technologies, cultural and organizational differences between the Italian system and that of third countries must also be considered, which can complicate the communication and guidance process.

External factors (e.g., political changes, reforms, new laws) that can hinder the effective transmission of information

Laws change very quickly and this, together with the reorganisation of services, prevents the effective transmission of information.

The uncertainty of information resulting from new laws or practices can “undermine” an operator who is not well-prepared in intercultural communication and make the message indecipherable.

Other respondents can't think of a direct connection between these external factors and the effectiveness of information transmission.

Users' skills to use digital educational platforms

A good portion of users are **not familiar** with using computer devices.

It depends on the level of interaction required. Videos, for example, are accessible to everyone, but communication must still be carefully crafted, especially if it's only in Italian or supported by images.

Some do, but it **depends on their language and education level**.

Not all users have the same level of competence in using digital educational platforms. Unfortunately, many still face difficulties in accessing and using some digital tools, despite their young age.

Can an educational offer with many materials and teaching resources hinder correct usage by users?

It depends on the accessibility of the materials and resources (e.g. language used, presence of figures, audio/video material).

It can work, if the materials and resources are easy to understand.

An educational offer with too many materials and resources can discourage some people from accessing or continuing their studies. The risk is that users struggle to identify the key content and to focus on what is truly essential for their learning path.

Educational resources designed for users with different linguistic and cultural needs

Videos are in any case the most easily accessible tool (even for people with different linguistic and cultural needs), but communication must still be very carefully crafted, especially if it's only in Italian or supported by images.

At the moment, the majority of respondents are not aware of any educational resources specifically designed for users with different linguistic and cultural needs.

Can a digital educational platform help improve users' skills?

Users do not always have the tools, familiarity or time to access digital platforms. If it's well designed, if the content is simple and related to topics of daily interest, it can work. A digital educational platform can certainly help improve users' skills, but its effectiveness depends on numerous internal and external factors.

Internal factors include the user's motivation, willingness, and level of autonomy; external ones include the clarity and simplicity of the platform, as well as the effectiveness of the teaching method used by the trainer.

3. Strategic level

Are you planning to implement digital teaching in your organization? If it already exists, what characteristics does it have?

All interviewees stated that their organizations are not currently planning to implement a digital learning platform. Only one organization already organizes learning paths that include the delivery of some content online. They are currently offering synchronous training with remote tools. They would like to introduce ways to recover lessons missed in the event of illness through asynchronous use. For now they are using the paid platform Codecademy with ups and downs.

What connections does your organization have with public bodies at a local or European level?

Main connections are with:

- University of Bologna (one respondent's organization is a University Spin-off),
- AUSL (Hospital centre – Local Unit)
- Municipality of Bologna
- ASP Bologna (Public Company for Social Services)

What would you like to improve from a strategic point of view?

The organizations involved would like **to expand the network of partners and collaborators.**

For some respondents it would be very important **to establish a consultation round table always open between public bodies and representatives of the Third Sector** in its local representative form of the Forum, with specific tables for transversal problems and not for targets (because for targets would mean denying multidimensionality).

Another organization would like to find ways **to support people with hearing disabilities** but also people who suffer from **mental health problems or attention deficit disorders.**

What are the elements that you believe you do not have in terms of collaborations with other organizations?

For some respondents one of the problems in terms of collaborations with other organizations is the continuity of forms of collaboration in the long term. To establish

and maintain forms of lasting communication and involvement with partner organizations is another crucial issue.

A timely and homogeneous sharing of data would be also very important: each entity has its own database and those who are not managers of services on behalf of the Municipality or ASP city of Bologna do not access the public database.

Are there factors that could prevent the implementation of a digital teaching platform at a strategic level?

Among the factors, interviewees reported their need to access opportunities through ad hoc accompaniment or consultancy, specific training and expertise to show added value and risks/opportunities learning how to combine service management and digital opportunities. Inadequate infrastructure is another important factor.

How could a digital teaching platform be effective at a strategic level in your organization?

Maximization of time and investments, development of new services, systematization of programs and activities, training and valorization of specific skills of human resources would be the advantages for some organizations. For some interviewees a digital teaching platform would facilitate and streamline the various work processes, but it also could promote remote training, collaboration and self-learning sessions.

How could a digital teaching platform contribute to policies at local and national level?

Increasing the tools and making information more accessible to a diverse audience of users who currently struggle to access a series of information seems to be the most important element.

The respondents underline that there are categories of people who, without digital enhancement, struggle to successfully participate in common training programs. The support of an educational platform could make the offerings even more inclusive and have a greater impact.

A digital teaching platform could help to improve the skills of public or political decision makers in terms of learning based on analysis and reading of needs and then design interventions but also promoting participatory and collaborative logics between decision makers and stakeholders.

3. Technical level

What existing systems are currently in place?

Among the systems most used in the interviewees' organizations are databases for data collection and access flows to local services (such as soup kitchens), QR codes, Outlook and Teams for corporate communication, Outlook and G-Suite.

How reliable and scalable are these systems?

The systems are considered overall reliable and responsive to the needs of the interviewees. In particular, the issue of security and protection of data collected by the various organizations appears to be central.

Do the current systems lack features or functionalities?

The systems currently in use are considered by most of the interviewees to be adequate and without any shortcomings in terms of features and functionality. Some interviewees, however, report the presence of systems that are a bit dated or systems that should be optimized in terms of data collection.

Are there any skills gaps in the team for operating or managing the existing systems?

Most of the interviewees stated that all the people in their team have received adequate training and that everyone is able to use and manage the existing systems within their organization. However, there may be different levels of competence in using the systems themselves.

Are there opportunities to integrate systems for better efficiency and data sharing?

Everyone agrees that the systems in use could be integrated to ensure greater efficiency and better data dissemination. According to some interviewees, more work should be done on training and innovation; according to others, internal systems for passing information and internal communication could be optimized.

Are there any innovative standards or tools that could be adopted to improve systems and further develop your work?

An innovative tool that could be adopted to improve systems and further develop the work of some interviewees is **artificial intelligence**. Especially in the social field, the potential of artificial intelligence has not been explored, if not to a minimal extent, and there is curiosity about this topic. Some report the need to use smarter and more innovative tools or tools that help optimize time at work.

Would it be possible to implement a digital teaching platform at your organization, if one does not yet exist? Would you be interested?

At the time of the interviews, **none of the interviewees reported the presence of digital teaching platforms at their organization**. The interviewees are not sure of the will and interest of their organization in implementing a digital teaching platform, but almost all believe that on paper this would be feasible. A digital learning platform could be useful, according to some, internally, to be allocated to volunteers who collaborate with the organization or to employees, or externally, to be allocated to people who benefit from the projects that the organization carries out.

4. Conclusions

The mapping work presented in this report has allowed us to analyze and detail the needs and resources that the organizations involved have in the Bologna area with respect to the objectives of the Digifuse project.

The organizations, carefully selected to offer the most complete and detailed vision possible of the dynamics that affect the realities in which the professionals interviewed operate, have as a common denominator a daily work in contact with people at risk of social exclusion or characterized by socio-economic or educational disadvantage.

As it has emerged, in general the organizations involved are committed to ensuring high standards of professionalism, despite difficulties or limitations that concern not only factors external to the organizations but also internal factors, such as communication and infrastructures that can be optimized in some ways.

The issue of **access to information**, in particular, **remains crucial when talking about people with fragility and vulnerability**. For those coming from contexts of strong deprivation, there is a greater difficulty in accessing services or information channels also due to a situation of widespread educational poverty.

For some of the organizations involved, the attempt to promote learning paths in digital contexts certainly represents an interesting test and a challenging factor. Focusing on learning paths offers an opportunity in the first instance to share practical tools to the people involved and in the second analysis to give the target involved the chance to develop hard and soft skills.

The implementation of a digital platform is an open and undefined topic for many of the organizations involved: **the greatest fear is the difficulty of not being able to make the contents usable for the users**. We believe that we must now start from this warning to think in terms of building an accessible platform and training packages in line with what the organizations declare they need.

