Introduction to the methods used

In the framework of the »Personal Town Tours«, a European Grundtvig project (2012 - 2014), each partner organisation invented the content of the project and used different methods as to develop thematic personal town tours. Different methods were used because the cultural settings of the partners' towns or regions and the participants' learning culture were different.

In the case of Slovenian Third Age University it was difficult to start the project activities during the initial meeting of the researchers –to-be the project was discussed. It took the Slovenian project members/students some time to understand that they were not supposed to develop an official type of guide with a description of sights. Namely the initial assumption of their project was that »a town is what we feel about it, a town are stories of our lives of us who live there. A town is where people work, love, die (Albert Camus, The Plague). So they needed stories.

Above all it seemed to be difficult for the students to combine two registers of the language because there was the professional discourse they were accustomed to, and there were their stories they wrote in an oralised way. And what is more, some of the participants/students wrote their stories in a very personal way, simply describing what they saw. Later project members/students decided to write the stories as well in the standard language.

Moreover, participants/students went to libraries, archives, searched for books in their own library, as to find documents that would help their research.

The method was also descriptive. Members of the research groups described what they met on their way, and people they met. Of course there were also monuments they described.

The stories were focused on the present days, less on the past. They were all meant to guide visitors through the town, safely and joyfully.

Some members/students turned to their friends or townspeople who knew a lot about their everyday ways through the town and purposeful interviews with them gave interesting results.

Above all there were e-mails, meetings, discussions- a method to exchange knowledge.

Personal Town Tours at Slovenian Third Age University

In the framework of the »Personal Town Tours«, a European Grundtvig project (2012 - 2014), seven older students from Slovenian Third Age University gained knowledge and learned methods for exploring and then introducing their town. Under the mentorship of the architect Meta Kutin they decided on three thematic itineraries thus validating their already gained knowledge of architecture and urbanism. Moreover, in relation with the itineraries they produced their personal stories connected with their own life in the urban environment. They also added stories told by some other known or unknown townspeople, stories about the past living and working in some buildings.

They collected personal recollections of anonymous inhabitants and their impressions about their town. To insert them in a more formal structure of knowledge about architecture and urbanism, which they continued gaining in their study programme on architecture and urbanism called "Squares, streets and buildings around us« run at Slovenian Third Age University.

1st step: Analysing the interests of the participants and enabling them to describe their town using their experiential knowledge and non-formally gained information

A presentation of a town is most successful when it comprises topics, preferred by the participants (future guides) in the educational programme. Topics that they would readily explore. The participants are then encouraged to jot down their impressions and write about their personal experience of the town. Further, they bind them into recollections, impressions, thoughts and short stories. The participants' attention is focused on thus gained new perspectives on the topics that they are have already been familiar with through their structured studies. Problematics is connected to the town areas the students have already studied more formally in their study circle.

2nd step: The collected stories are put into thematic clusters
Various tours' topics are possible and various combinations of single writings/ stories. They are combined in such a way that experience and recollections of the guide are connected also to some current thematics.

3rd step: Collecting information and data regarding single topics is then deepened. Single topics are enriched by personal stories of anonymous townspeople.

How to recruit respondents? By referring to our own social network and the social networks of our students (relatives, friends, ex co-workers, neighbours...).Ways of collecting the data are adapted to single respondents: oral interviews or writing own stories and recollections.

4th step: Personal stories, put in clusters, binding single topics with formal data

Stories are then studied from different perspectives, from the angle of different disciplines (i.e. architecture, urbanism, art history, spatial sociology, psychology). By inserting theoretical knowledge and data from professional literature and studies the knowledge gained in the study circle, stories become more credible. Are recommended also visiting libraries, town archives, museums....

5th step: Piloting single tours

Participants prepared pilot tours where the planned itinerary and tour as a whole were tested, the tour was assessed from the point of view of the target groups. Assessed were the length of the tour, the details of the tour, the itinerary, the duration of the tour, and the participants exercised telling their stories.

6th step: Carrying out the tours

The tours can be conducted for different target groups, each time the tour being adapted to the target group. As time goes by the tours can be modified, including various new experience, the knowledge of the target groups and their expectations, their changed or new interests.

The tours devised in the groups of students for the project Personal Town Tours, were put into clusters though initially they might have had nothing in common. In this way town tours were created, dwelling upon the already known topics, but introduced in a fresh and new way.

1. Cafes and architecture of cultural institutions

The itinerary includes famous cafes in the town, Past and present cafe life is described as well as Ljubljana's townspeople, combining the description of the cafe life with that of architecture of the cultural institutions nearby.

2. Living at the edge of the Ljubljana's Moors and architecture of low density housing

The tour takes the visitors to one of the most wanted neighbourhood of the town, focusing on its advantages and disadvantages as perceived by the local inhabitants. The tour guide emphasises that quality of life in Ljubljana is better due to the nearby moors.

3. The story of the famous Ljubljana's lettuce and the architecture designed by Jože Plečnik, a Slovenian architect.

From the Ljubljana's open air market designed by Plečnik the tour leads the visitors to the Plečnik's home as it leads those who grow vegetables in their gardens near his house. The tour introduces the visitors to the well known Ljubljana's buildings focusing on the importance the open air market has on the life of the Ljubljana's townspeople.

Intellectual outputs

A Personal Town Tours Guide

Two exhibitions on the gender names of streets in Ljubljana

Guiding a tour for children from different European countries

A scientific article

A TV film on the project

A contribution to an ESREA conference