

First annual report – Network meetings

EUROCULTURA – Italy

Reporting period: January 2023 - December 2023

Overview

The first annual report concerning the Italian network meetings covers the period from January to December 2023. In the previous months, at the end of 2022, the Reality Check project started, and the first phase was used to draft clear guidelines on how to set up the regional networks in each country, and how to lead them afterwards.

Therefore, since January 2023 at Eurocultura we started to create the communication strategy and materials necessary for the next stakeholders contact phase. After the preparation and the sending of the first communications, between March and May we started to hold individual in-person and online meetings with the actors we planned to involve in the network. We met the stakeholders one by one to investigate their interest in the network and to collect adhesions.

Then, the regional network was finally launched in June. The venue chosen for the in-person meetings was Eurocultura's conference room, located inside of our office in Vicenza. Further communication between the members of the network took place via telephone or online.

Between June and December 2023, we held a total of three meetings with the network, aimed at designing, discussing, and planning the implementation of 3 new Reality Checks. The meetings were conducted as follows:

June 15th, first official network meeting, to introduce each other, investigate members' interests, needs and motivation, brainstorm.

1. September 28th, alignment meeting: summary of inputs emerged in the previous meeting, draft of idea for a possible first initiative (RealityCheck).

December 14th, operational meeting to recap on first RealityCheck, collect ideas for the next initiatives, divide tasks for the organisation of the first RealityChecks.

Network and members

The Italian network is composed of a total of 11 members coming from the Veneto region, most specifically from the Vicenza area and its province. The network presents a heterogeneous mixture of actors, including representatives of educational institutes and companies, as well as freelance professionals. The professional profiles involved are therefore teachers, employers, employees, career counsellors, and trainers. A network composed of different stakeholders was seen as the best basis for discussing RealityChecks from different perspectives, resulting in a broader and more comprehensive view on new possible forms of cooperation between the school and the world of work. Indeed, this idea was confirmed during the first contacts with stakeholders during the network-creation phase, in which different interpretations and interests on the Reality Check project already emerged.



First network meeting

Date & Time: June 15th 2023 – 14:30-16:30

N. of participants: 14

Description/minutes

The first meeting of the Reality Check regional network in Italy was held on the 15th of June 2023. All members were represented by at least one participant, for a total of 14 attendees. Since it was the first official network meeting, the initial part was dedicated to a brief introduction of each member and a summary of the network's purpose and objectives. Therefore, every partner of the network took turns to speak and introduced themselves or the organisation they represent. Afterwards, Eurocultura took the floor and provided an overview of the Reality Check project, with a special focus on its objectives and on examples of RealityChecks (identified through activity 2E2). Then, members were presented a summary of the roles and scopes of the regional network, as well as its guiding principles of Communication-Cooperation-Coordination (Ko-Ko-Ko). At the end of the first part, a few minutes were left for questions and eventual remarks.

The second part of the meeting was used to investigate the members' interests in the field of school-work cooperation, as well as the current challenges seen and perceived in the passage from studies to the working world. A sort of joint need analysis of the school-to-work passage. Finally, in the last part of the meeting we conducted a brainstorming session in plenary, asking participants to express ideas about possible RealityChecks in turn. At the end of the session, a short time was left for questions and concluding remarks. Finally, decisions on further steps to take were made and the appointment for the next meeting was set.

Key decisions & Future milestones

- Decisions on meetings rules, timeframes, roles
- Eurocultura will collect all ideas emerged and prepare a summary document
- In the next meeting, draft of first idea for a RealityCheck is planned
- Date for the next meeting: 28th of September 2023.

Second network meeting

Date & Time: September 28th 2023 – 14:30-16:30

N. of participants: 12

Description/minutes

The second meeting of the Italian Reality Check network was aimed at finding an agreement between the members regarding the first RealityChecks to implement. To do so, the meeting started with the presentation of a summary done by Eurocultura, which consisted of an orderly collection of all inputs emerged in the previous meeting for the creation of a RealityCheck. Since these suggestions of the first meeting were numerous and heterogeneous, a reworking and categorisation work was necessary to start putting together proposals and giving them direction. So, in brief, the first part of the meeting was fundamentally an alignment phase led by Eurocultura. During the short break that followed, all members were asked to reflect upon the proposals emerged and to select one or two that they were most interested in.

In the second place, we held a short feedback-round involving all participants. They were asked to concentrate on their preferred proposal(s), and to reason about its feasibility and appeal. Each member took the floor and at the end of the discussion-round Eurocultura took some minutes to put the results together. Surprisingly, after the discussion the network seemed to converge on two main ideas for possible RealityCheck initiatives: one related to a company leading an activity for students in a school (upper-secondary was chosen as a target), and one targeted at younger students (lower-secondary school) and focused on deepening their knowledge on the labour market.

Ultimately, Eurocultura proposed a vote to check if everyone was in favour of these two proposals and the result was positive. So, a brief summary of the outcomes of the meeting was presented and a proposal on the subsequent actions to be done by the network was made. The meeting ended with an agreement on the following steps, final remarks, and the planning of the next online meeting of the network.

Key decisions & Future milestones

- Agreement on a first RealityCheck on companies entering upper-secondary schools
- Agreement on a second RealityCheck for lower-secondary students and aimed at discovering the labour market
- Agreement on the need of a division of roles and tasks between members for the RealityChecks draft and implementation
- Date for the next meeting: 14th of December 2023.

Third network meeting

Date & Time: December 14th 2023 – 14:00-16:00

N. of participants: 11

Description/minutes

The third meeting of the regional network took place on December 14th and represented the conclusive meeting of the first year of network activity. The main purposes of this meeting were to design the first two RealityChecks more in detail, and to define the roles and responsibilities of the members directly involved in their implementation.

We started with a recap on what a RealityCheck is and should look like, using as support material the examples of RealityChecks identified by the project partners in activity 2E2, and additional suggestions from Eurocultura. After this warm-up phase, to discuss the finalisation of the first two RealityChecks the assembly divided in two subgroups (mixed in terms of occupations), and each group was in charge of discussing one RealityCheck. The task for both groups was to go from the idea to a final product, meaning a RealityCheck activity to be actually implemented with young people. The guidelines given recommended to think of RealityChecks based on resources available inside the network, and to keep in mind the criteria of replicability of the activity in similar or different contexts.

After the discussion phase, a restitution moment followed. Each group reported about their internal discussion and the final conclusion reached, and both groups ended up with a proposal for a RealityCheck:

1. The first RealityCheck was defined as a workshop held by a company in a school with students aged between 14-18 years old, providing for the use of innovative technological equipment used in the company.
2. Differently, the second RealityCheck was described as a learning-by-playing activity aimed at acquiring knowledge on the labour market, as the sectors of which it is composed and the professions that belong to each sector. The activity is targeted at lower-secondary students (11-14 years old) and has to be practical and engaging.

After the restitution and a common agreement on the two RealityCheck ideas developed, in the final part of the meeting the participants were asked in which activity implementation they would have liked to contribute, voluntarily. The first RealityCheck captured the interest of a company and a school, as well as a couple of trainers who offered to support with their expertise in workshop activities. In the second RealityCheck a secondary school and two trainers, supported by Eurocultura, decided to take part. At this point, there was a short moment of contacts exchange, followed by a discussion in plenary on the essential roles needed for the development of each initiative.

At the end, Eurocultura provided a short summary of the decisions made, proposed a list of further steps to be taken by each subgroup, and underlined a few recommendations on communication modalities for the partners. Lastly, the date of the next network meeting in January 2024 was set.

Key decisions & Future milestones

- Definition of first and second RealityChecks
- Division into operational subgroups and exchange of contacts between members
- Division of tasks for the first RealityCheck
- Division of tasks for the second RealityCheck
- Date for the next meeting: 18th of January 2024.

Conclusions and recommendations

Throughout the first year of implementation of Reality Check (2023) some core results of WP2 were reached, here specifically referring to the creation of the regional networks. The main outcomes were:

- The establishment and launch of a regional network of Reality Check in Italy in the first half of 2023.
- The agreement on common rules to follow and objectives to pursue into the network.
- The design of two out of three RealityChecks to be piloted in Italy.

In the first months of activity, the network showed a positive atmosphere of cooperation between the members, and an active engagement and participation in the discussions related to school-work cooperation. The participation was quite constant, with just a small decrease over time in the total number of participants attending the meetings. At the beginning, a few difficulties due to a divergence of interests between schools and companies emerged. Indeed, even though both parts agreed that there is an evident mismatch between the notions learnt in school and the actual skills demanded by the working world, they seemed to have different perspectives on how to face the issue. Nevertheless, the discussions held in the framework of the regional network helped to define a common view and to find compromise solutions.

Additionally, the meetings held represented precious occasions of networking for the organisations and professionals involved, since many of them did not know each other and new forms of cooperation between different actors started. For instance, the contact between lower-secondary schools and companies is rare to find in our regional context, but most probably at the national level too.

One relevant recommendation for the next activities of the network is to structure the work in a practical and operative way, in order to simplify and favour the upcoming implementation phase. The most suitable solution found is the division of the assembly into operative subgroups, depending on their involvement in the RealityChecks, each with its own decision-making and communicational autonomy.