



## ARLEKIN: A COLLABORATIVE ACTION-RESEARCH-TRAINING PROJECT WITHOUT FRONTIERS<sup>1</sup>

**Ana Maria Costa e Silva**

Institute of Education and CECS, University of Minho, Portugal.

**Maria de Lurdes Carvalho**

Institute of Education and CIEC, University of Minho, Portugal.

**André Moisan**

National Center of Arts and Occupations (CNAM), Paris, France.

**Clarisse Fortecœf**

National Center of Arts and Occupations (CNAM), Paris, France.

### ABSTRACT

*This article presents the characteristics and methodology related to the implementation of a European project centered on the training of social mediators through European mobility and collaborative action-research. The ArleKin - Training in Mediation for Social Inclusion through European Mobility Project was financed by the European Union (ref: 539947-LLP-1-2013-1-FR- GRUNDTVIG-GMP) and focused on the following objectives: i) to give visibility to social mediation, as a means of innovative and pertinent social intervention for responding to new challenges of social cohesion in contemporary societies; ii) to develop the professionalization of social mediators in a concerted way at the European level; and iii) to experiment in-service training course in mediation through European mobility that was inspired by the tradition of the Companions of the Tour of France. The realization of the objectives of the project were attained through collaborative work among the various European partners and in the setting up of a community of practice and research composed of academics, researchers, professionals and politicians with the view of consolidating the professionalization and visibility of social mediators at a European level.*

**Key words:** Social Mediation, Training, Action-research, Collaboration

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## 1. Introduction

Social mediation constitutes a socio-professional practice that has been expanding in recent years and, like other occupations, it is learnt by immersion in specific and diversified contexts. The in-service training of the Companions of the *Tour of France* - an aspect of the intangible heritage of humanity in which the apprentices of various occupations learn alongside masters in different cities - provided the inspiration for the in-service training that was conceived and experimented with for the training of social mediators from different European countries.

This historic system, which was adopted by this Project and updated with contemporary resources like the Internet, constituted an initial first experience for the definition of an enduring system. The Practitioner-Mediators (PMs) were chosen by the Masters (or specialists) in Mediation (MMs) in institutions in various European countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain,), who shared their learning through a participative site on the Internet.

The ArleKin Project also had the objective of establishing a professional and European community for Social Mediation by creating a network of professional and training organizations concerned with Mediation for Social Inclusion (MSI). For this a European consortium was established with different Project partners, which included organizations for mediation and training and research institutions like the Institutions of Higher Education. So collaborations were developed at a European level between universities, cities and various networks of international organizations of Social Mediation, so as to strengthen a structured interchange between the mediators not only at the level of the institutions but also among the universities, with the objective of sharing and comparing the practices and the representations related to the activities of social mediation. The objective was to identify what there was in common in the practices of social mediation, while respecting the diverse ways it was realized in the specific contexts of each country.

This text concerns the setting up of a community of reflection and dialog within a common project, which was sustained by shared values and beliefs. Initially, it was made up of a community of researchers (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Bruce & Easley JR, 2000), although it identified itself as a community of learning and practice at the same time (Wenger, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 2008).

Communication between members of the community of learning and practice, who were professors, researchers and mediators in these European micro-systems, as well as at the macro level of the Project, was facilitated by the fact that they shared interests and common

and diverse knowledge in this professional area. In other words, they were drawn together by their mutual involvement and by a shared program and negotiation (Wenger, 2001).

## **2. The pillars of the ArleKin Project methodology**

### **2.1 Research, action and training: collaborative forms of the Project**

Action-Research (AR) came about according to some authors, as a result of the work of the German psychologist Kurt Lewin (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992), but others mentioned that it is also associated with Collier or even Moreno (Tozini-Reis & Tozini-Reis, 2004). Whatever its origin, AR is, still today, a commonly used methodology of research in the Social Sciences field (Máximo-Esteves, 2008) and it is associated with innovation and the improvement of practices (Elliot, 1991). In the field of the Sciences of Education, AR is a methodology that is also commonly used in “educational research” (Elliot, 2005), as it promotes reflection and critical thinking, since it is focused on the improvement of the quality of the action of the participants.

This relationship between change and the pursuit of improvements in AR depends on various factors; namely, the nature of the objectives, the pertinence of the planned actions, the articulation between the objectives and the defined principles, as well as the coherence of the process of reflection, dialog and systematic questioning of the intervention.

Also the conceptualization of AR in the course of time has met with many different approaches (Zeichner, 2001; Franco, 2005), which are applied and applicable to countless contexts. For Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) AR seeks to achieve self-reflection by the participants in specific social situations with the objective of perfecting themselves logically and with equity and in particular their own practices, their understanding and the contexts in which they find themselves.

Taking into account the presuppositions, the ArleKin Project, while a community of practice and learning, sustained its epistemological and praxeological construct and even its identity in the processes of collaborative action-research-training. Although various authors (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Tripp, 2005) consider that AR is necessarily participative and, therefore, that it is able to do without adjectives like participative or collaborative, others recognize that its implementation does not always favor these characteristics. For that reason, this explanation, which discusses the work of the ArleKin Project, is considered relevant.

The diversity and heterogeneity of the group that constituted the community of practice and learning of the ArleKin Project, their interests and training, as well as their perspectives and experiences, permitted the development of a significant process of

(re)signification of AR. This process promoted the “empowerment” of the actors involved (Moreira, 2005) and the democratic spirit by “taking joint decisions, oriented towards the creation of self-critical communities with the objective of transforming the social environment” (Rodríguez-Gómez, Gil Flores, & García Jiménez, 1996, p. 52). From this perspective, AR articulated with a culture of transformation “in that the shared and collaborative systematic reflective action served the purpose of improving the rationality, justice and democratic nature of the situations and contexts of work by constituting a vehicle for the promotion of professional autonomy and emancipation” (Moreira, Paiva, Vieira, Barbosa & Fernandes, 2010, p. 48).

And because we are dealing with a [participative] action-research project, the ArleKin Project sustained itself using the “principles of partnership and recognition that emerge as if establishing networks, one with another, which mutually form, reform and transform the practices in action-research” (Edwards-Groves, Olinb, & Karlberg-Granlundc, 2016, p. 321). With regard to this, Robertson (2000, p. 307) presents the “3 Rs of AR methodology; namely, reciprocity, reflexivity and reflection-in-reality”, as the integral and integrated principles of AR. For this author, reciprocity permits the implication of the participants in the study and, simultaneously, the introduction of changes in the context of professionals by supporting and challenging those involved to reflect about their practice in a way that they themselves create new knowledge. These “ideas-in-action” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), when shared, favor an “AR culture” that promotes learning, sharing and development. Robertson (2000), supported by Lather (1986), mentions that reciprocity implies “giving and receiving, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power” and it is sustained by two main factors: “the interactions between researcher and researched, and between information and theory” (p. 311). These points lead to reflexivity *in* and *about* the action promoting self-reflection, the shared use of knowledge and, consequently, reflection-in-reality, through a free ranging dialog between the participants, which leads to a freedom in the flow of information coming from the professional development of the participants.

The AR cycle – action-reflection-action – allows for the describing of a flexible, ecological, more rigorous path that is guided by values and ethical considerations, which are capable of comprehending the complexity of the social or human systems that are studied in order to introduce changes in the quest for a superior quality, some of which could be covered by the “theory of structures of practices and the ecologies of practices” (Edwards-Groves, Olinb & Karlberg-Granlundc, 2016, p. 321), because, just as Kurt Lewin would say, “it is necessary to intervene about the reality in order to understand it”. This path, which was organized in

cycles, “improves practice by the systematic oscillation between acting in the field of practice and researching with respect to it. It plans, implements, describes and evaluates a change for improving a practice by learning more - in the running of the process - about what concerns the practice and the research itself” (Tripp, 2005, pp. 445-446).

AR will be able still to manifest itself with an increased potential, as the strategy promotes innovation<sup>2</sup>, to make possible a complex approach in real contexts, through theoretical and praxeological multi-referenciality (Barros, 2012) and with the participation and involvement of actors with varying statuses (trainers, researchers, mediators...). In the case of the ArleKin Project a common investigative process took shape that was focused on the professional practice of mediation for social inclusion and its comprehension, so as to achieve its best quality and visibility.

AR is a group activity (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992) and, as such, a strategy for continuous professional development (Zeichner, 2009) with shared responsibility and decisions taken jointly. In the ArleKin Project the regular seminars of the team both face-to-face and via Skype, including the *Tour of Europe* by the social mediators, constituted contexts and essential periods “of thinking about our thinking, because we explored our own construction of consciousness, our own production” (Kincheloe, 1997, p. 197) and self-training with the support of a community of practice and learning.

## **2.2 The community(ies) of practice and learning**

The ArleKin Project constituted a community of practice, learning and professionals at a European level for Social Mediation, which we called the ‘*ArleKin Community*’ (ArC).

Communities of practice and learning are spaces for sharing experiences, knowledge and learning with space for the definition of personal, professional and academic interests and objectives. In the case of the ArleKin Project, they were spaces for sharing among the academic community, mediators and organizations that intervened in the field of mediation for social inclusion. Also they were spaces with a capacity for contributing to knowledge, research and experience, for objectives common to everyone, objectives common to some groups and individual objectives. In this sense:

the communities of learning, in general, are open spaces for questioning and reflection about specific themes, which accommodate and celebrate the diversity of disciplinary perspectives and the cross fertilization of practical

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<sup>2</sup> Innovation is understood to be “a series of mechanisms and more or less deliberate and systematic processes, through which it is intended to introduce and promote certain changes [...] in the light of defined principles and values, which give them meaning and legitimacy” (Alonso, 1998, p.263).

and academic knowledge. They can be imagined as spaces of co-operative learning from an initial identification of experiences and knowledge of those that are within the community and where there is an active quest for responses to questions that anyone may want to formulate within the community (Silva, Piedade, Morgado, & Ribeiro, 2016, p. 21).

With the communities of practice and learning are associated notions of place-based and collaborative learning, where their potential is ever more recognized in the context of lifelong learning and of professional and organizational development (Wenger, 2001). Nowadays, these communities are constituted and developed in virtual contexts, so as to make the most of and strengthen distances and availabilities. The 'ArleKin Community' (ArC) returned to these contexts systematically: i) through the Project web site and that of *Virtual Cayenne*<sup>3</sup>, ii) through periodic meetings of the team via Skype and even, iii) by recourse to electronic mail.

The virtual and also face-to-face contexts, which occurred in the various countries of the European partners, were fundamental for the ArleKin Project to achieve its objectives by means of a collaborative methodology and the setting up of a community of practice and learning network.

Paulo Dias (2008, p. 4) drew attention to:

the change in the learning environment in a network; namely, in the sense of the dislocation of the focus on its conception, as spaces of information and communication for the interactive activity of the social networks of publication, learning and collective knowledge. In the latter, learning is sustained by the dynamic of the network in the contexts of the collaborative construction of objects and narratives of knowledge of the community and in the integration of the social representations in the development of a common and shared practice.

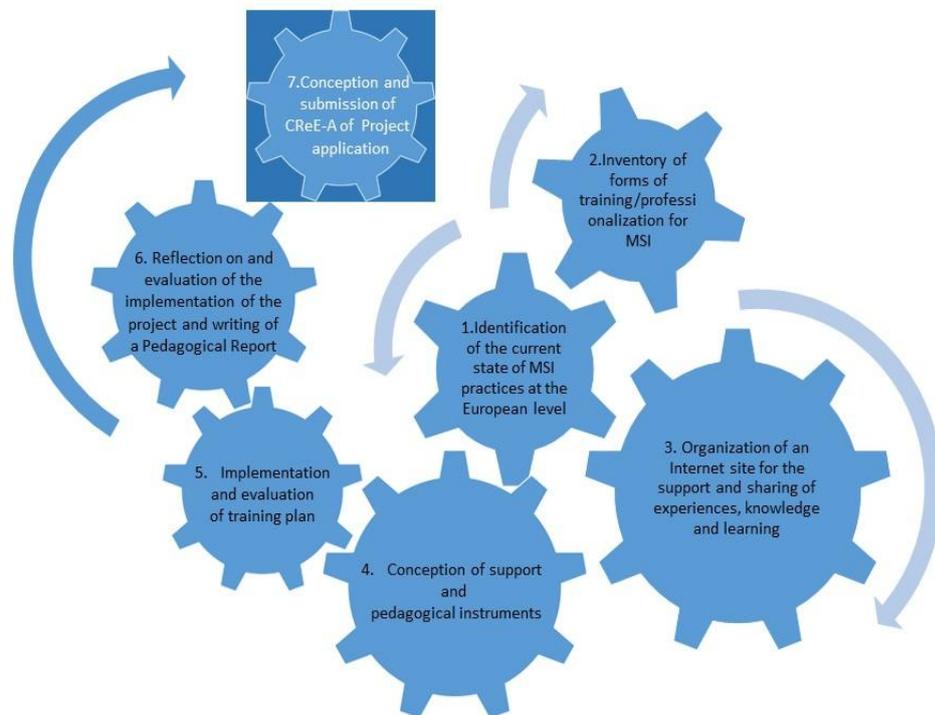
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<sup>3</sup> 'Cayenne' is the designation in French for a 'House', which receives the Companions of the *Tour of France* in different cities. In it the Companions gather at the end of the day and share their experiences among themselves having been received by and under the supervision of a more experienced Companion known as the 'Rouler'. In the ArleKin Project the Internet web site anticipated this space of socialization at a distance, which was designated the '*Virtual Cayenne*', a space of mutual knowledge for the Practitioner-Mediators and the Master Mediators and for the sharing of experiences before, during and after the *Tour of Europe*. Also this space was stimulated at a distance by a 'Rouler', who was a Mediator from the co-ordinating team of the Project.

In this sense, we were able to identify and define the relational movements among the participants of the ArC in the process of the construction and sharing of collective knowledge.

### **2.3 Relational movements and interactions among the participants in the process: participation, collaboration, communication**

Having as its purpose the conception and implementation an experimental in-service training in Mediation for Social Inclusion through European mobility and with the objective of validating future methods for an enduring system, the Project took place over three years. It was implemented and progressed in various stages, which were previously identified and reorganized, when it was considered appropriate following critically constructive debate and collaborative dialog (Silva, Moisan, Fortecöef & Carvalho, 2016). This way, the stages that are shown in Figure 1 took shape.



**Figure 1 - Stages of the ArleKin Project**  
(cf. Silva, Moisan, Fortecöef & Carvalho, 2016, p. 250)

The various stages were developed in a progressive and non-linear way by being both concurrent and simultaneously interdependent from each other. Initially it started with a community of learning constituted by the members of the project team. This team was

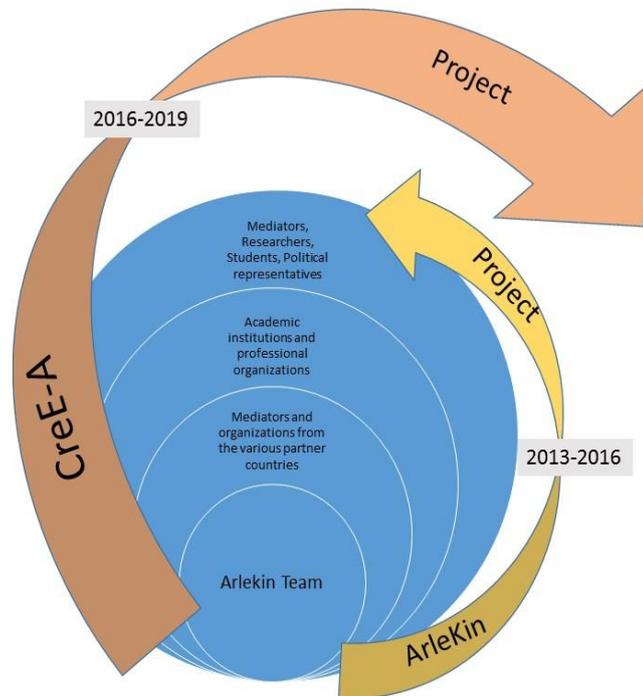
composed of academics from various scientific areas and professionals and mediators with whom were associated some participating observers; namely, political representatives.

Although each one of the stages had a responsible partner, all of the team members participated actively in diverse ways, through empirical research in their respective countries, the writing up of parts of reports, attending meetings and daily work – both face-to-face and at a distance - that included discussions and reflection about methodological procedures, inventories of research, the collection of information and the sharing of doubts and experiences.

Even so, for the fulfillment of the various stages, the team in each partner country resorted to collaboration with their several participants in order: 1) to collect essential information about the state of the practices, training and research in Mediation for Social Inclusion in their country; 2) to participate in the *Tour of Europe* by the Mediators and Receiving Organizations; and 3) to share mutual experiences between academics, professionals, students, politicians and between other interested participants in the debate about MSI both in work forums and disseminations.

Having, as its main aim, the implementation of the *Tour of Europe* by the Social Mediators and the conception of a training system for the training and development of Social Mediator professionals, the ArC constituted a space and time for sharing and collaboration in the construction of knowledge and practices without frontiers, where Practitioner-Mediators (PMs) were welcomed by the Specialists in Mediation or Master Mediators (MMs) in different territories and organizations – the Receiving Organizations (ROs) - from various European countries. This mobility and immersion in different contexts of social mediation created opportunities for networks of interaction and work, thus, promoting a space of sharing and dialogue – a community of practice - between the mediators from the various organizations in the partner countries with the common objective of learning together (Wenger, 2006), as a higher form of learning, through shared group activities.

Figure 2 seeks to illustrate the progressive creation and enlargement of the assembled community of practice and learning in terms of the objectives of the Project, as moderated by the ArleKin Team. It was a community, which had been open to dialog, while also being participative, trans-national, inter-disciplinary and pluri-institutional and which made progress in communication, participation and collaboration in its review and consolidation of the purpose and objectives of the ArleKin Project.



**Figure 2. Constitution and consolidation of the community of practice and learning**  
(cf. Silva, Moisan, Fortecœf & Carvalho, 2016, p. 252)

This progressive consolidation of a community of research, training and learning permitted the expansion of its objectives in the making of a new project for the construction of a European space of mediation for social inclusion; namely, the CreE.A (*Construction d'un espace européen de la Médiation pour l'inclusion social*)[*Construction of European space of Mediation for Social Inclusion*] (Reference: EACEA, N° 580448-EPP-1-2016-1-FR-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN).

### 3. Construction and implementation of a training system

By way of fulfilling the objectives of the ArleKin Project and particularly the development of the professionalization of social mediators in a concerted way at the European level and promoting the visibility of social mediation, one of the principal activities of the Project consisted of the creation of and experimentation a in-service training in Mediation for Social Inclusion through European mobility; namely, the *Tour of Europe* by the Social Mediators. This training system was inspired by the tradition of the *Companions of the Tour of France*, which was a method of training that promoted the learning of an occupation by the apprentices working alongside a master in different cities.

In the Arlekin Project the Practitioner-Mediators were welcomed and accompanied by the Masters (or specialists) in Mediation; namely, the Master Mediators (MMs), who were also

mediators in an institution from another European country. With this arrangement the trainees learnt and shared learning in working contexts.

It was a matter of a training that involved a methodology of action-research-training in which the experiential, reflective and self-training dimensions were ever present and associated with a worldly perspective or - returning to an expression of Pineau (2011, p. 97) - a “self-training open to dialog with the world”.

For self-training and dialog with the world an experiential and reflective pathway was proposed; namely, a journey through Europe, during which each participant knew and shared biographical and professional experiences, as a mediator with other Practitioner-Mediators of different countries. Also it was an opportunity of getting to know other contexts and practices of mediation, which it was intended that they would observe, reflect upon and speak about, both through the use of virtual means; namely, the *Virtual Cayenne*, and through face-to-face seminars - one before the journey and another at the end of the placement.

This system of training - combined with symbolical, material and institutional conditions instigators of a reflective dynamic (Correia, 1999) – presumed the valuing of informal contexts, the central role of each person, the integration of a long time scale - all conditions inherent to narrative-reflective and training dynamics (Silva, 2007).

In this line of thinking the following conditions, which were present in the conception and implementation of this system are reported.

### **3.1 Symbolic conditions**

Two symbolic elements inspired and marked the path of the Project and the training system; namely, the Harlequin (ArleKin) and the *Tour of France* of the Companions. They were important in the construction of the community of practice and learning and in the conception and implementation of the training system. The motivations of the ArleKin team were consolidated around these two symbolic elements, which inspired the setting up of the system and the communication and sharing between the various members of the community.

The simplicity and charm of the Harlequin - a character of European cultural heritage, whose colorful costume symbolizes the diversity of the cultures, identities and practices of social mediation - associated with the will to learn through immersion in different contexts, through the sharing of experiences between the apprentices (PMs) and the masters (MMs) became the symbol of the different participants in this process of learning together.

These symbolic markers were strengthened as they shared in the community of practice and learning, where they were recognized as elements with effective significance for the training-learning of mediation for social inclusion. The sharing was carried out during

various periods and contexts (team meetings, dissemination conferences, written documents, training seminars, etc) in a way that favored the (co)construction and the (re)learning from a shared and formalized system by means of the definition of objectives and a specific methodology that will be explained later.

Also these shared symbolic conditions were explained in the motivations and expectations of the different participants in the process, who included the ArleKin team, Practitioner-Mediators, Master Mediators, representatives of receiving organizations, amongst others, and in the collaborative dialog encompassing these motivations and expectations, which favored the regulation and progressive improvement of the institutional and material conditions of the system.

### **3.2 Institutional conditions**

For the implementation of the training it was necessary to conceive and formalize a set of organizational and institutional procedures, so as to make viable the mobility of the mediators and their institutional reception in the different countries.

Also the viability and success of the training through mobility depended on a set of institutional conditions that would permit the guarantying of a pluri-institutional commitment between the European Project Manager, partner institutions in the Project, original institutions and receiving institutions of the Practitioner-Mediators.

For this, it was necessary to formalize commitments of a diverse and complementary nature including:

(a) In relation to pedagogy: i) the formalization of the candidature of the Practitioner-Mediators and agreement of the receiving institutions in the different countries taking into account the criteria identified by the ArleKin Committee; and ii) (after the selection of the candidates) the formalization of a pedagogical contract between each one of the Receiving Institutions (RIs) and the Practitioner-Mediator, who would be selected, so as to guarantee a reception and training plan related to the training objectives and the duration of the placement.

(b) In relation to finance: the formalization of an agreement between the partner institution of the Project (from each one of the participating countries) and the Practitioner-Mediators and Master Mediators from the original country participating in the *Tour of Europe* by the Social Mediators. This agreement ensured a commitment for financing the expenses of each participant from the partner institution up to a maximum amount foreseen by the financial rules of the Project.

After the phase of candidatures and formalization of the contractual procedures, 12 Practitioner-Mediators and 12 Master Mediators were selected. For the completion of the *Tour of Europe* by the Social Mediators 24 agreements of financial commitment (distributed among the various partner countries and related to the participating PMs and MMs and 12 pedagogical contracts between PMs and MMs were formalized.

### **3.3 Material conditions: objectives, methodology and pedagogical instruments**

A set of pedagogical conditions was associated with the training course that allowed for its implementation and experimentation. The shared symbolic conditions were fundamental for the definition and formalization of objectives, methodology and pedagogical materials specifically conceived for the purpose and shared with the different participants; namely, the ArleKin Team, the Practitioner-Mediators and the Master Mediators. Therefore, we were dealing with a process of co-construction of a set of supports for training and action, as well as a variety of pedagogical instruments for helping with the immersion in different contexts. These supports were created according to the diversity of viewpoints of the participants, their idiosyncrasies and knowledge in such a way that they were taken into account and combined with theoretical and experiential knowledge that the various participants in the community of practice had before, during and after the mobility.

The ArleKin co-ordinating team conceived a training process with various periods of collaborative training, organized in three essential periods that were discussed and agreed in the ArleKin team and with these PMs and the MMs. Later on a fourth period was added to these three periods, as agreed and decided during the third training period by the ArleKin team and the PMs and MMs. The periods were as follows:

- A two-day training seminar with all of the PMs, MMs and the co-ordinating team for the training course with the purpose of getting to know each other, sharing their motivations and expectations and information about the methodology of the proposed *Tour of Europe* by the Social Mediators.
- 12 days of placement involving the immersion of the PMs in organizations and contexts of Mediation for Social Inclusion in the various participating countries (France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Portugal) under the supervision of the MM with whom they had established their pedagogical contract.
- A one-day seminar for sharing experiences and evaluating the placements with all of the PMs, the MLs and the co-ordinating team followed by another day of a dissemination conference - the International Congress for Social Mediation.

- Symposiums for the presentation and defense of the work (Chef d’Oeuvre) carried out during and after the placement in a public session in the presence of a European panel of experts in mediation and including the PMs and MMs, which was followed by a one-day symposium for dissemination – the European Symposium on Mediation for Social Inclusion.

These different periods also had the intention of ensuring, on the one hand, the collaborative training-research and, on the other hand, permitting conditions for a better realization of the planned learning objectives. These objectives considered the self-training and experiential perspective, so as to value the prior experience and knowledge already acquired by the mediators and enriched them with new knowledge and experiences from a lifelong learning perspective. So the following objectives were identified and shared: i) to reflect about the personal and professional biography; ii) to identify personal professional experience and knowledge; iii) to be aware of practices of mediation for social inclusion in another country; iv) to describe the practices observed; and v) to pass on the learning and training experience by means of a document that was called the ‘Chef d’Oeuvre’<sup>4</sup>.

The training presupposed a process of collaborative learning among the Practitioner-Mediators, who were mediators with some experience of the various European countries and the Master Mediators, who were the more experienced Mediators, who due to their knowledge and professional practices helped, collaborated and shared experiences with the Practitioner-Mediator chosen by their Institution.

In order to facilitate the process of mutual and experimental learning this model of training various helpful instruments were conceived and made available to the Practitioner-Mediators and Masters Mediator in the *Virtual Cayenne* some time before they began their mobility having also been presented in the first face-to-face seminar.

These instruments were conceived by the co-ordinating team responsible for the design of the training system with the collaboration of various members of the ArleKin Team. Also throughout the implementation of the training system, the very Practitioner-Mediators were making adaptations and suggestions for improving these instruments. Table 1 below shows

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<sup>4</sup> This expression is taken from the *Tour of France* of the Companions. It corresponds to the ‘Principal Assignment’ that the Companions must elaborate and present documenting their ‘occupational art’ in order to obtain the title of Companion. In the case of the Social Mediators it happened to be a Travel Diary, which each one uploaded to the *Virtual Cayenne* at the end of the placement and defended before a European panel of experts in order to obtain the title of Arlekin European Practitioner-Mediator. This Travel Diary, as an objective, allowed each PM to progressively construct his/her ‘occupational art’ by integrating and articulating the different dimensions foreseen in the learning objectives. These documents will be made available in a European Observatory of Social Mediation Practices in Europe.

the various instruments in articulation with the learning objectives, the participants in the training process and the training and sharing contexts.

Objectives	Instruments		Participants	Formative Contexts	Sharing Contexts
	PM	MM			
i) To reflect about personal and professional biography	I1 – Topics for reflection I3 – Topics for developing reflection		Practitioner-Mediators Master Mediators	Before the start of training First training Seminar	<i>Virtual Cayenne</i> First face-to-face seminar
ii) To identify personal experience and professional knowledge	I2 – Video presentation guide	I2 – Video presentation guide	Practitioner-Mediators Master Mediators	Before, during and after training	<i>Virtual Cayenne</i> Face-to-face: Evaluation seminar and symposiums
iii) To be aware of practices of mediation for social inclusion in another country	I4 – Context observation table I6 – Mediation case study observation table I7 – Interview guide	I1 – Presentation guide for Receiving Institution I3 – Table of planned activities	Practitioner-Mediators Master Mediators Other mediators and professionals	Placement	Placement Contexts
iv) To describe the practices observed	I5 – Daily Diary I8 – Topics for analyzing cases of mediation		Practitioner-Mediators	Throughout and after Placement	<i>Virtual Cayenne</i>
v) To pass on learning and experience from training	I5 – Daily Diary I9 – Example of Travel Diary		Practitioner-Mediators Master Mediators	Throughout and after Placement Presentations before a panel of experts	<i>Virtual Cayenne</i> Face-to-face: Symposiums

**Table 1 – Pedagogical objectives and instruments of the experimental *Tour of Europe***

The pedagogical instruments were conceived with the intention of facilitating:

- communication between the participants and mutual knowledge (I2 – PMs and MMs);
- reflection about and acknowledgement of learning (I1 and I3 PMs);
- observation and knowledge of the contexts and practices (I4, I6 and I7 – PMs; and I1 and I3 - MMs);
- recording, analysis, reflection and sharing of learning (I5, I8 and I9 - PMs).

The process of collaborative training-action contemplated situations of analysis and sharing of professional experiences during the processes of mediation, as well as contact with different contexts for the identification and observation of cases or situations of mediation, levels and forms of intervention that were marked out by ethical criteria and professional deontology. Simultaneously, this (self)reflection process provided levels of collaborative training between the mediators (MMs and PMs), through periods of analysis, recording and

evaluation of strategies, techniques and forms of supervision of the different processes of mediation.

In this process, the daily diaries were conceived as instruments for recording and reflection, throughout the process, as well as for sharing experiences between other various Practitioner-Mediators during and after the *Tour of Europe*. They constituted instruments that would permit and guide the recording of the more noteworthy aspects and situations that the PMs observed, analyzed and reflected about concerning their learning and its relevance for their personal and professional development.

The process of reflection and attribution of personal significance is fundamental in the (re)construction of professional identity. In keeping with this Gómez-Redondo (2012, p.26) stresses that the “individual does not interpret the context from the purely rational point of view but rather he/she brings it closer to his/herself and turns it away from him/herself through the emotion”. This relationship between the rational, cognitive and emotional is essential in the process of professional development, particularly of social mediators.

The systematic and systematized reflective practices of the experiential training process within the *ArleKin Community* created a dialogic space of learning, sharing and trust not only throughout the different periods of the *Tour of Europe* but also in the narrative form in the records of the different supporting pedagogical instruments. As an example, the *Cayenne* became essentially virtual and a communication link for sharing and reflection between mediators (PMs and MMs) via the Project web site, which was not for public access. One other example of sharing arose in the seminar for the presentation of experiences and evaluation of placements with all of the PMs and MLs and the co-ordinating team present. Others came from participation in the International Congress for Social Mediation and conference presentations of oral work carried out throughout and after the placement, which led to the publication of a book<sup>5</sup>.

The recourse to virtual tools facilitated synchronous and asynchronous communication. Yet, if, on the one hand, these tools possessed great potential, on the other, they also brought some associated difficulties or constraints; namely, the weak mastery of these technologies by the PMs and MMs, as well as even difficulties in accessing the web in some contexts.

From conception to recording the set of resources and instruments - scientifically demarcated in the ecological and systematic vision of mediation for social inclusion - were

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<sup>5</sup> Moisan, A., Silva, A.M.C., Fortecœf, C., & Buelens, N. (2016) (Eds.). *Le Tour d'Europe des médiateurs sociaux: de la valorisation de l'expérience et la formation à la reconnaissance et la professionnalisation*. Braga: Center for Studies of Communication and Society (CECS), University of Minho. ISBN 978-989-8600-59-2.

structured and valued, due to their articulation of theory and practice. While not forgetting that the participants of the *Tour of Europe* – the PMs and MMs - were all mediators, the reconstruction and co-construction of knowledge, the development of professional competencies and the professional development of the mediators constituted fundamental links for the consolidation of their own community of practice and learning – the ArleKin Community - with the objective of transforming the social environment.

This way, the *Tour of Europe* promoted reflective, collective and individual processes but, above all, the assignment of a personal significance *of* and *in* the training of each one of the participants, where the new contextual realities and practices of mediation, reflection and the feeling of ownership allowed the rational and emotional re-interpretation (Gómez-Redondo, 2012) of each situation or context of the processes of Mediation for Social Inclusion.

#### **4. Path(s) of training-learning through collaborative action-research**

The ArleKin Project – *Training in Mediation for Social Inclusion through European Mobility*, through the characteristics that it adopted by a process of collaborative action-research-training, constituted an innovative training experience, because of its European mobility.

The setting up of a community of practice and learning, while not an explicit objective of the Project, strengthened the experiential, reflective and self-training dimensions that the participants wanted to favor with this method of training.

Nowadays the training and professionalization in mediation for social inclusion (MSI) is a necessity in view of the transformations that contemporary society is confronting. It is urgent to train competent professionals capable of strengthening the social and cultural bonds promoting communication, dialog and recognition of others in an inclusive Europe without frontiers.

Knowing new contexts and other practices of mediation in Europe allowed for interfaces between the participants from various cultures and countries, diversity and color that the Harlequin costume symbolizes, besides creating synergies between the viewpoints and voices of the diverse participants in the Project, thus fostering a “self-training open to dialog with the world” (Pineau, 2011, p.97) and the feeling of ownership by the community.

The feeling of community proportionate throughout the experiential training grew through the “integration of diversity of representations, including the *social voice* as

mentioned by Wenger (2007), in the construction of common practices of participation, interaction and collaborative learning” (Dias, 2008, p. 6).

The different periods of collaborative training-research previously identified constituted contexts of learning together that were fundamental for personal training and the reconstruction of professional identity. Professional identity is a dynamic, interactive, contextualized and continuous construction (Silva, Carvalho, & Aparicio, 2016). The *Tour of Europe*, while “meeting and open to other people (one of the ethical foundations of social mediation) allowed for abundant learning” (Moisan, 2016, p. 79) by each one of the PMs and MMs. They were confronted with different practices and by taking into account new viewpoints and questioning, they enlarged their world of social mediation under construction (idem). They were able to reconfigure the image and definition of themselves, their references, ownership, assignments and identifications, as well as their collective recognition as a member of the professional family of Mediators.

In the *Tour of Europe* it was intended that they identify what was common in their practices of social mediation, while respecting the diverse forms of its implementation in the specific contexts of each country. The reflection and critical thinking *of* and *in* the practice, as well as the communication between the members of the community of learning and practice, were facilitated by the sharing of interests and common and diverse knowledge in the professional environment. This dialogic learning, which was inherent to the principles of the community of learning and so present in the relationships between the PMs and the MMs, “results from the interactions that produce egalitarian dialog, in other words, a dialog in which different people presented their arguments in conditions of equality in order to arrive at a consensus, assuming that they wanted to understand each other speaking with a basis in the requirement of validity” (Elboj, Puigdel·l·ivol, Soler & Valls, 2002, p. 76). This involvement and mutual repertoire, as well as the shared negotiation, besides promoting better quality practices in mediation and particularly relevant in the processes of action-research, will be fundamental support for “the social recognition of mediation [by the] collective commitment in the construction of a common identity” (Silva, Carvalho, & Aparicio, 2016, p. 102).

This collective commitment in the construction of a common identity was reflected in the setting-up of the *ArleKin Community*, as a community of reflection and dialog surrounding a Project, which was sustained by shared values and beliefs. It promoted and valued the co-construction of a set of supports for training in and the practice of mediation, as well as a diversity of pedagogical instruments for helping with immersion in different contexts that were founded on the diversity of viewpoints of the participants, their

idiosyncrasies and knowledge, which were taken account of and combined with theoretical knowledge and experiential knowledge that the various participants in the community of practice had. The Seminar for sharing experiences and evaluation of the placements with all of the PMs and MMs and the co-ordinating team present, the International Congress for Social Mediation, as well as the oral presentation conferences of the *Chef d'Oeuvre* before a European panel of expert mediators by the PMs in a public session in which the PMs and MMs participated, all constituted periods of training and explanation of knowledge, thereby framing and exemplifying the tacit knowledge ever present in their daily practices.

## **5. Final considerations: from collaborative action-research-training to the collective construction of knowledge**

The ArleKin Project allowed for the validation of a training system in mediation and a methodology of collaborative action-research. Its objective was the building up of a professional and European community of Social Mediation, while not departing from an earlier explicit intention to attain its objectives through a process of collaborative research-training. However, the process and achieved results permitted the validation of an unanticipated methodology and the construction of a community of practice and learning that considered itself appropriate for the professionalization of Social Mediation.

Considering that Social Mediation is an emerging profession, its professionalization is construed by the identification of its diversity of practices and by its knowledge and mutual sharing. The results also showed evidence of what other studies already revealed (Silva et al., 2010; Silva, 2015) i.e. that the knowledge of the mediators is fundamentally a knowledge of experience, an unspoken informal experience, an in-built knowledge, because it is acquired through experience. Thus it is a tacit knowledge.

In this sense, the model of training-learning of the Companions of the *Tour of France* offered a system of training that allowed, through immersion, the apprentices to be placed in contact with the experience of the Master Mediators (MMs) and with their tacit knowledge by way of socialization. By means of a final presentation (*Chef d'Ouevre*), the Practitioner-Mediators (PMs) clarified the doing knowledge of the Mediators of the Receiving Organizations and, in this way, transformed this doing knowledge into professional knowledge at the disposal of all of the mediators of the professional community – thus externalizing the knowledge (cf. Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1997). This process of learning and

professionalization through immersion, socialization and externalization of knowledge was validated by the ArleKin Project.

In summary, it is possible to recognize that the Practitioner-Mediators and the Master Mediators showed real interest in mutually exploring the practices of social mediation and its contexts in different European countries. This fact confirms that the homogenization of this new professional activity and its evolution, as a profession, is constructed from the bottom up, through an explanation of its practices and tacit knowledge that they developed mutually. This is in conformity with what it was possible to observe, through the wealth and reflexivity of the sharing that was carried out between the Mediators of the *Tour of Europe*. The European dimension should also be pointed out, as a space appropriate for making visible the diversity of practices and their externalization and recognition, which are circumstances that will continue to be valid in the CreE-A Project, through pursuit of its own spiral of action-research.

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