**BACKPACKER EUROPE**

*Investing in discovering the European heritage for 16 to 25-year-olds is creating a European citizenship and a sustainable future for Europe.*

Backpacker Europe is an initiative with which we try to help young people without any European travel experience to prepare and experience their holiday. The experience was developed on a local scale by Vacances Ouvertes (Sac Ados) in a number of French regions. ISTO–Europe wants to extend the experience throughout Europe by using the discovery of the European heritage as a trigger. The main goal is to create a European citizenship also for the young people who never travelled outside their country.
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**PROBLEMS AND AMBITION**

The free movement of goods and persons is one of the pillars of Europe. The Schengen zone is its realization in 26 countries. Citizenship is built and structured from a young age onwards. 17% of the Europeans are younger than 29 (about 90 million people) but how many young people have already had the chance to visit another European region? This question can be answered: it is not only due to the lack of money but also to the lack of culture and mobility experience.

![Map of Europe showing proportions of youth populations.](image)

**Factors of non-mobility** are generally related to socio-professional categories but also to age. Whereas the Erasmus initiative proved its importance for education and cultural exchange in Europe, there still is a group of young people who are not able to benefit from the positive effects of cultural exchange and the discovery of new European horizons.

In **France**, 40% of the 16 to 25-year-old youngsters never go on holiday. This is even more so for people who left school early. Although we don’t have any information on other countries, we have indications that this is also the case for 5 million young people between 20 and 24 who are unemployed and who don’t participate in education or formation.

![Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union](image)
Europe and its institutions are for many people something far away and what you don’t experience, people are afraid of its workings or they don’t understand.

The culture of exploring, learning and experiencing new ideas is at its height when one is 16 to 25 years old. That’s the moment when you learn that you are part of society, that you can open new horizons, that you have your place in a European environment or… that you become disappointed, frustrated and afraid of the unknown.

The Backpacker Europe project wants to send a positive message to this target group to create a positive attitude for Europe. The idea must be “Europe is my country”: the possibilities of travelling and exploring Europe’s rich culture gives me a good feeling, I am part of a European population with a great history. But also with lessons learned: a large part of the heritage refers to a past when European people were at war. Backpacker Europe also wants to build an awareness for peace.

PROPOSAL

The discovery of “the elsewhere” and ‘the other’ cannot be decreed, it has to be built. The challenge is to create a place where this is made possible. This is not just about travelling. It also requires arrangements, means, methods and social skills.

Mobility is a competence that not everyone has. Generally, young people with a higher education have it, but not always the 15% of 16 to 29-year-olds who dropped out of school.

The proposal is for this target group, and especially for those who never went outside their country autonomously to visit another European country and who need methodological support and a financial boost to discover Europe for a few days. A Europe, where they can encounter other people like them.

The challenge is to demonstrate that Europe means the institutions on the one hand, but that on the other it also means that similar young people having the same interests, a diverse culture and heritage.

Obviously, mobility and skills and the knowledge of travelling also open up new areas in the search for work, which for this target group is often very limited. Here we are talking about transferable competences, in this sense we can talk about travelling as a way of non-formal learning or non-formal education.
**Good Practice: Sac Ados® - France**

*Sac Ados* is a support tool for young people to go on their first autonomous trip. It is proposed by Vacances Ouvertes to the entire set of structures that are active within the field of youth work.

It has been created by Vacances Ouvertes (VO) in 1994 and it wants to help young people, aged 16 to 25 that are generally left out of holidays, to set up their own holiday experience. It concerns the *first autonomous holiday experience*. This means outside a family or a group framework where the youngsters receive support on their destination.

A *diverse range of structures & organizations* active in the field of youth work, leisure participation or holiday accessibility that stand close to the youth accompany the youth in the elaboration and setting up of their holiday project. Vacances Ouvertes provides youth professionals with formats, help with the specific set up and training sessions.

The originality of the device exists in the *unique partnership on the ground* with a diverse range of actors: the subsidizing government (local, regional or national; health services; family services; holiday funds; …), the structures on the ground helping to communicate & implement the project working with the participants & last but not least the participants themselves who submit their holiday projects.

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‘*Structure of a project – VO helps the partners in setting up the device*’

- ‘Sponsors’ pilot, finance & establish the rules of functioning (government agencies: local, regional, national/ family services/ holiday funds/ health associations)
- Structures on the terrain (youth services, youth organisations, …) Help the youth in developing their holiday projects
- The youth develop a project proposal. Live their first autonomous holiday experience
- Specifications & Conditions
- Training sessions
- Provision of grants
- Methodological support
- Awarding of the grants

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BENEFITS of the Sac Ados device

- **For the financing organisation**
  - A locally adaptable support tool on the issue of youth holidays, which can help in making policy choices.
  - A recognition ('branding') tool and a networking tool for sectoral professionals on the ground.
  - A local and proximate dissemination of information and access to information on actions in favour of the youth.

- **For the intermediary structures on the ground**
  - A qualification for the team by thematically organized workshops and exchange of practices
  - Methodological support for the setup and co-construction of holiday projects
  - Picking up of a new public

- **For the Youth**
  - A secured and innovative access to autonomous holidays
  - A personalized methodological support throughout the elaboration of a holiday project
  - Financial support where needed
  - An efficient springboard towards autonomy and mobility
Vacances Ouvertes

The organisation provides (within and beyond Sac Ados):

- **Advice & accompaniment** for project management & setup
- **Formation**, qualification, networking
- **Thematical studies**, research & publications
- **Direct financial support & indirect financial support (Sac Ados)** for holidays

Actions & approach:

The devices developed by VO are **addressed at structures** (communities, associations, sociocultural centers, family associations, …) that help beneficiaries at different levels.

The methodological support of VO permits these structures to **facilitate the co-construction** of holiday projects by the beneficiaries themselves.

The **direct and indirect (active) engagement of the public** forms the basis of success & fulfilment of a project. This approach allows that participants at any level can enlarge their field of expertise.

The pursued goals through the Sac Ados device are:

- **A policy of social and territorial cohesion**: enhance access to information, learning chances for autonomy and mobility of youth on the whole of the territory
- **A policy of management**: encourage the coordination, the qualification, the reinforcement of local action of social and educational structures; a proposition of alternatives where professionals are being coached and supported for the accompaniment of projects; the promotion of working within a network of partners.
- **The educational challenges**: mobilising the acquisition of competences throughout the organisation and realisation of an autonomous holiday project
BACKPACKER EUROPE

CHALLENGES
Encouraging young people to have their first autonomous heritage holiday experience in Europe with a methodological and financial support.

Creating a flexible framework (preventing a complex administrative burden)

For the EU
- Boost youth tourism policy.
- Strengthen partnerships on the territories.
- Improve the visibility of Europe among young people.
- Improve the knowledge of the European heritage for a new target group.

For the young
- Form part of a project process
- Develop transferable skills in their daily lives and future work
- Build a European citizenship

Vacances Ouvertes (France) describes some of the transversal qualities and characteristics of holiday projects as follows: “The transversality of the themes that are addressed during the setup of a holiday project favours the mobilisation and development of transferable skills in other dynamical projects (such as: professional insertion, studies, housing, personal projects, …)”

It has a range of psycho-social effects which are experienced by the young adults who participated.

- **CAPABILITY:** They feel capable by departing on a holiday autonomously.
  - Growing self esteem
- **ASSURANCE:** (realization of competences)
  - Growing desire and capacity to travel.
  - Growing capability to cope with everyday life.
  - The desire to invest and insert themselves in actions of successful social integration.
- **SOCIAL SUPPORT:** Reinforcement of friendships
  - Growing parental confidence
- **WELLBEING:**
  - Serenity (pride, rest)
  - New Motivations (knowledge about the own desires & wishes)
General principles for the setup of an action (device)

- A strong delegation towards the local level is fundamental (taken into a clearly fixed methodological framework). This delegation permits that the device can be adapted to the specificities of the different local contexts and to found the attribution of grants on the familiarity with the youth and their situations by the professionals of the organisations of the partners.
- Autonomous holidays: the young people receive technical and financial support before leaving and have to manage their holidays without any family/professional help during their stay.
- The educational objectives aren’t focussed on the content of the holiday, but on the acquisition of a project methodology by the participants (defining, setup and realisation of a holiday project). In a way that will permit them to reinvest these skills within the framework of their socio-professional undertakings.
- A financial aid is provided in addition to the technical/methodological support to the youth, on a fix basis (the amount is not proportional to the youths incomes)

Criteria: target group

- People between 16 and 25, school, training, unemployed, underprivileged...
- Eligibility criteria: have never been in another European country autonomously
- Need for methodological and financial support for low incomes (setting the threshold by country)

Criteria: individual project

- Holidays – not working trips, educational trips, health travelling
- It should be the first autonomous travel (without parents, organised group travelling, no support at the destination)
- There needs to be a form of commitment from the young participants
- The target group is the youth (age category to be defined within the partnership)