

# Research Report E-Motive Going Global

## A critical perspective on multiple learning on a digital platform

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Research Design.....</b>	<b>3-8</b>
1.1 Aims and Objectives	
1.2 Methodologies	
The online	
The offline	
The video as research tool	
Research questions and concerns	
1.3 The Position of the Researcher	
<b>2. Pilot projects.....</b>	<b>9-10</b>
2.1 Elos	
E-mpulse Game	
Fieldwork at E-mpulse Festival in Madrid, Spain	
2.2 Young in Prison	
I2E ‘Innovate to Empower’ Project	
Fieldwork in Cape Town, South Africa	
<b>3. Research results.....</b>	<b>11-16</b>
3.1 Elos	
Strengths of the E-mpulse Game	
Weaknesses of the E-mpulse Game	
3.2 Young in Prison	
<b>4. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>17-18</b>
<b>5. Recommendations.....</b>	<b>19</b>

## Introduction

This report gives an overview of the research that has been conducted by Utrecht University on the project 'E-Motive Going Global' (EGG) between February 2015 and January 2016. With the Going Global project E-Motive entered a new phase in which the face2face learning and knowledge exchanges are brought to the online level of a digital platform. In this first pilot phase of the project, the focus of the research undertaken by the team at Utrecht University was the evaluation and monitoring of the E-Motive digital platform, designed by Somos Mas, and tested by three selected pilot projects:

- Elos – E-mpulse Game
- COC – Common Ground 'The Global Queer Movement
- Young in Prison – Innovative to Empower

Elos, COC and Young in Prison have tested their pilot projects on the digital platform from March 2015 until January 2016. During this period the research team of Utrecht University first set up a Research Design, then it closely observed the development of the three pilots and evaluated the process of activating the online usage and the functioning of the digital platform. The main question that guided the research was how the E-Motive face2face exchanges can work on an online and global level, transforming them from mutual learning to multiple learning, from a one to one exchange, to a multi-actors and multilayered learning platform. The study done so far, as well as the research design envisioned for the future activities of the EGG, is based upon the observation and analysis of what happened online on the digital platform and what happened offline at events organised by the pilots in relation to the digital platform.

The first phase of the research was the development of the research design while the digital platform was being constructed in cooperation with the pilot projects. The second phase of the research entailed the analysis of the exchanges on the digital platform and to conduct fieldwork during the E-mpulse Festival of Elos in Madrid, Spain, and in Johannesburg, South Africa for Young in Prison. Due to the limited timeframe and scarce online activity, the pilot project of COC was precluded from further research during phase two.

The role of Utrecht University as a consortium partner within this project is to undergird the E-Motive project in a scientific manner and with a multidisciplinary approach that yields academic insights of a high international standard to benefit the platform and the other partners involved.

With this report we intend to provide a critical, reflexive and productive perspective on E-motive Going Global. The report includes an outline of the research design and envisioned methodologies (section 1), an overview of the two pilots observed (section 2), a process analysis and outcomes of the fieldwork (section 3), conclusions (4), and finally, recommendations for the future development of E-Motive Going Global (5).

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## 1. Research Design

To evaluate and monitor the E-Motive digital platform the research team of Utrecht University developed a multidisciplinary Research Design. The first version of the research design was presented on 16 June 2015 at a consortium meeting in Madrid. The initial intention of this design was to investigate how the theory and practice of ‘multiple learning’ functions on the E-Motive’s digital platform, how online communities are created and sustained, and how different social entrepreneurs and organizations can share their local solutions and learn from each other, in a reciprocal manner, on a global level.

Between June and September 2015 the E-Motive consortium decided to switch the focus away from multiple learning and digital community building towards a business-to-business (B2B) model of the relation between Going Global projects, with the explicit intention to upscale the impact of their activities. For practical reasons, it was also decided to focus the research of Utrecht University upon two rather than three pilot projects (i.e. the E-mpulse Game of Elos, and the I2E ‘Innovate to Empower’ project of Young in Prison). Accordingly, rather than investigating how the theory and practice of ‘multiple learning’ is actualised and operates on the E-Motive’s digital platform and how online communities are created and sustained, the focus of the second version of the UU research design shifted to envision and monitor the creation and maintenance of a digital learning environment for social innovators across the world and the fostering of structured collaborations and exchanges between them.

These broader adjustments of the EGG project, as well as the outcomes of the research on the two pilots, have clearly shown how it is impossible, and scientifically inaccurate, to work with a one-size-fits-all research design. Instead, as the conditions and needs of the project and the pilots change, so does the research design; and thus the methods and approaches have to be adapted. A flexible and reflexive research methodology is therefore crucial in order to be able to support, evaluate and monitor a dynamic project such as E-Motive Going Global.

### 1.1 Aims and Objectives

Despite the altered objectives of E-Motive Going Global, the main goals of the original research design remained the same, while some details had to be adjusted. More specifically, the aims of the research were:

1. To **monitor and evaluate** the project ‘Going Global’ in an academically sound and scientifically rigorous manner that is beneficial to all parties concerned.
2. To **contribute to the improvement** of the online activities of the E-Motive ‘Going Global’ project by periodically analysing the digital communication as it evolves. Our research will indicate which aspects are most successful and effective, but also those aspects that are less effective or otherwise in need of adjustment.
3. To bring our **in-depth, specialized knowledge** of social theory, pedagogy and media convergence cultures to bear on the questions of responsible development practice and participatory learning at the very heart of the E-Motive Going Global initiative.

4. To explore and thus solidly **underpin the global scientific relevance of this research**, seek ways to further contribute to various academic discourses, gather data, identify issues, and establish global collaborations that will inspire further research in those areas.

The overall objective of the research design developed by the research team of Utrecht University was to fortify the development and ongoing effectiveness of the E-Motive 'Going Global' project in its goal of bringing together social innovators (i.e.: in a 'business-to-business' mode) in physical and virtual innovation labs in order to share local solutions in a global network, and to generate new hybrid and adaptable solutions to social problems.

Beside the focus on the online platform, it is equally important to include an attentive study of the offline component, as the E-Motive digital learning environment is designed to work in symbiosis with the actions and developments of the social entrepreneurs on the ground, as those are the actors who positively impact the everyday social realities and future prospects of citizens and communities. By taking into account both the online and the offline aspects of the project, this research design provides the theoretical and scientific grounding to EGG and enhances the possibilities of a serious and affective intercultural applicability of the strategies shared and developed on the digital platform.

Finally, to further strengthen the work of E-Motive it is necessary to thoroughly reflect on the ideological dimensions of the language used by everyone involved in this project. We have therefore critically reflected, interrogated and refined key operational concepts such as 'business-to-business', 'positive impact' and 'upscaling'.

## **1.2. Methodologies**

The research design proposed a methodology that is informed by multiple fields of study, mainly new media studies, cultural studies, gender studies, post-colonial studies, community arts, international development, education, anthropology and social sciences. The particular configurations of ontological, epistemological and methodological conceptions, analytical categories and procedure differ within these fields. This diversity and complexity is a great advantage as it allows this methodology to benefit from the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, as they are valued as equally valuable and complementary. Given the expertise of the UU-researchers involved at this stage of the project, the methodology deployed so far entailed a focus on qualitative methodologies, to be then complemented with quantitative research at a later stage. The envisioned research methodologies have been organised, and are here presented, in terms of the materials to be studied, that is: online actions and offline actions. These two levels are then integrated through key questions and approaches.

### *The online*

In the period this exploratory research took place, there has been little online activity on the digital platform; moreover, the timeframe available for this investigation was too short to conduct a thorough research on the online exchanges on the digital platform. Nevertheless, we used a selection of methods to observe the online activities that were taking place. Basic data that was to be analysed include the materials published on the platform and the

exchanges among users (i.e., blog posts, videos, comments, images, documents, tutorials, chats) with the following methodologies:

- Digital ethnography
- User participation
- Surveys
- Discourse analysis
- Semiotics

### *The offline*

To observe the offline activities in relation to the digital platform we conducted fieldwork. For Elos we observed and documented the E-mpulse Festival on November 28-29, 2015 in Madrid, Spain. For Young in Prison South Africa, we conducted ethnographic field research in Cape Town, South Africa from December 5 to 15, 2015. For the offline research, we intended to use an array of methodologies, some of which have proven to be more effective than other. They include:

- Semi-structured in-depth interviews
- Focus groups
- Participant observation
- Ethnography

### *The video camera as research tool*

Video cameras can be employed to record as well as generate responses and information during participant observation as well as the gathering of interviews. These audio-visual tools yield tangible data that can be stored, used for future reinterpretation by other scholars, and edited for presentation purposes. It is important to note, however, that the implications of the use of the camera (like that of the human researcher in general, see '1.3 Position of the researcher') and the potential social disruption due to the use of recording devices are matters for our ongoing critical self-examination. Nevertheless, the usage of video cameras enriches the research and vastly improves the quality of data. Therefore, the research process has been recorded by documentary filmmaker Angie Hernández Izquierdo from Barcelona, Spain. For the research phase in South Africa, it is Dr. Akin Hubbard who recorded the interactions of the various social actors in the field, alongside conducting interviews and collecting data otherwise.

Ms. Hernández filmed at the E-Motive mid-term evaluation in September 2015 and during the YiP #GoodYouthPrison week in Rotterdam. She also filmed during the Elos E-mpulse festival in Madrid and at the international conference of E-Motive on 21 January 2016. During these events her work consisted of recording general impressions of workshops, presentations, discussions, and other formal and informal activities. Most important for our research design, are the video recordings of interviews produced in close collaboration with the UU-researchers. Together with the material that Dr Hubbard has filmed in South Africa, Ms. Hernández has produced two ten-minute long videos of the pilot projects Elos and Young in Prison, and a two-minute promotion trailer for E-Motive Going Global.

### *Research questions and concerns*

Since the pilot projects of Elos and Young in Prison have been refocused during the months this research took place, and the overall goals of the E-Motive Going Global have changed, we have formulated and reformulated an extensive set of research questions designed specifically for each pilot project. The research questions were the following:

- Who is using the digital platform?
- Who has access to the digital platform and who not? And why?
- How are various actors using the digital platform?
- Who decides what is published on the digital platform?
- What kind of knowledge is being shared?
- What kinds of relations are being established through the digital platform?
- Which tools are successfully used and which are not?
- What is the relation between online and offline activities?
- What is effective on the digital platform and what can be improved?

Throughout the research, the following key aspects and concerns have been of the foremost importance:

- Accessibility
- Representation
- Ethics
- Power relations
- Safety
- Sustainability
- Language

### **1.3 Position of the Researcher**

Scientific research is carried out by human subjects who are always prone to some degree of bias, so awareness of our subjective positioning as researchers and of how our perspectives have been constructed is a crucial concern. For this reason, it is very important to take into account the position and location of the researcher throughout the monitoring and evaluation process. Although the aim of this research is to provide a solid scientific basis for this investigation, the position of the researcher can never be considered entirely neutral or objective. The theoretical framework of our research is, therefore, firmly rooted in a thorough awareness of the historical, cultural, social, economic and geo-political orientation of the researchers involved. Our position is that the complex, ever-expanding intercultural space in which E-Motive functions requires a highly diverse team of researchers who are sensitive to global asymmetries, to social differences and inequalities, and to the categorical intersections of gender, ethnicity, class, age and religion.

Meanwhile, as an independent research team, our “outsider perspective” affords us a great deal of objectivity in our inquiry into how knowledge production takes place on the ground. This requires a profound investigation of the discourses that the two pilot projects draw on, an analysis of the power relations and ideologies that determine who is visible or invisible (or who speaks and who is silenced), what kind of knowledge is being shared (and what not), and how meanings are constructed. Our complex, non-linear and multi-sited

methodology targets micro- as well as macro-level social interactions, and not only in the quantifiable social sphere but also in the cognitive and the affective domains. We highly value methodological adaptability, operating with the understanding that social interactions may change in intensity and quality over time, and that some of these changes may be the effects of unforeseen and unintended causes. This overall approach to research design and methodology has not changed as a consequence of E-Motive's altered focus.

Given E-Motive's ongoing emphasis on digital communication and given the vast array of social justice issues that the two pilot projects address, and future Going Global partners will address, we foresee that additional expertise will be required from the fields of new media and game studies, cultural studies, gender studies, post-colonial studies, applied arts, international development, education, anthropology and social sciences, with possibly additional support from international law and criminology. Foremost, the inclusion of scholarly perspectives and expertise from the Global South remains essential. For this latter purpose the close relationship Dr. Hubbard maintains with his alma mater, the University of the West Indies, will prove invaluable.



## 2. Pilot projects

### 2.1 Elos

#### *The E-mpulse Game*

The E-mpulse game is an on- and offline incubation game that is open to NGOs, communities, social entrepreneurs or individuals with an idea or project. The main aim of the E-mpulse game is to support social initiatives in helping them to develop their ideas and projects, and to build partnerships. With the E-mpulse game Elos provides a service – an incubation tool – that creates a space – the digital platform – on which projects can be further developed with the experience of existing and new networks (i.e. E-motive partners), and with the application of experienced methodologies (i.e. the Elos philosophy and the Oasis Game).

They opened the first call on the digital platform in the spring of 2015 and spread it through their network. After a selection round, 50 participants started the game on 15 June 2015 in which they were given assignments according to a 7-step module: from sharpening their idea to formulating a business plan and partnership proposal. It was a program of in total 4 months (16 weeks) in which they received coaching sessions, masterclasses and created an online community on the platform, via group calls and other social media.

The Elos organization who was in charge of the E-mpulse game consists of Javier Fernández, Niels Koldewijn and Marta Orihuel. They provided the coaching programme of the game and had direct contact with all the players.

#### *Fieldwork at E-mpulse festival in Madrid, Spain*

On 28 and 29 November 2015, Elos organized the E-mpulse festival as the closing of the first edition of the game, in which all the participants gathered at ImpactHUB in Madrid to present their projects. Of the 50 participants who started the E-mpulse game eventually 13 players presented their project at the festival. In total there were about 80 people present at the festival, both participants, organisers and interested. Elos organized a two-day programme with 5 talks, workshops, presentations by the participants and collaboration sessions. The festival provided the offline space for people to connect with whom they met online via the E-mpulse game.

During the two-day festival we used participant observation as a methodology to gain familiarity with the E-mpulse Game through an involvement with the people in their environment, and we collected data through semi-structured interviews with the Elos team and the players of the E-mpulse Game. Furthermore, the whole festival was recorded by Ms. Hernández.

### 2.2 Young in Prison – South Africa

#### *The I2E ('Innovate to Empower') Project*

I2E (i.e., 'Innovate to Empower') is a pilot project that involved the entire worldwide network of Young in Prison, an international NGO network targeting youth in conflict with the law. Headquartered in the Netherlands, YiP comprises five autonomous member organisations operating in five different countries: YiP Netherlands, YiP South Africa, YADEN (Kenya), Music Crossroads (Malawi), and La Familia Ayara (Colombia). The I2E pilot project, managed by YiP South Africa, was inaugurated in January of 2015 and concluded in

December 2015. As project manager, YiP South Africa (YiP-SA) assumed the role of determining the objectives of the I2E project, which were, in turn, grounded in YiP-SA's own organizational mission, i.e., rehabilitation, reintegration and advocacy with regard to youth in conflict with the law. Focusing mainly on the area of advocacy, I2E was an online platform that existed to facilitate connections, learning, knowledge exchanges, and the building of a community of practitioners from all over the world who are working with youth in conflict with the law. The digital platform provided a transnational, sector-specific forum in which these diverse, like-minded participating organizations – within and outside of the YiP international network – could showcase their advocacy work, strategies and solutions as well as gain new, locally applicable insights from each other.

The project had a slow start because YiP-SA initially intended to build the platform itself, but around the middle of the year 2015 it became clear that the organization lacked the necessary expertise to produce a world-class professional platform. YiP-SA then outsourced the platform's construction to a private web designer, while they created the content. Content development included collecting "stories" or experiential vignettes, conducting interviews with various participants (with a view to creating professional profiles to be showcased on the platform), and creating a space to prepare for the I2E Conference held in Amsterdam, The Netherlands in October 2015.

*Ethnographic Fieldwork in South Africa, December 2015.*

Dr. Edward Akintola Hubbard, an anthropologist and member of the UU research team visited Cape Town, South Africa from December 5 to 15 and conducted ethnographic research that included site visits, participant observation, multiple in-depth interviews and extensive filming. Over the course of approximately nine days, Dr. Hubbard conducted site visits, observation and filming at the YiP-SA's Cape Town office and multiple locations in and around the city of Cape Town (for information on the ethnographic setting as well as for the purpose of gathering visual data and "b-roll" footage for a short informational video on YiP), and the Brandvlei Correctional Centre located near Worcester, Western Cape (approximately one hours' drive from the city of Cape Town). In-depth (filmed) interviews were conducted with the director of YiP-SA (Khethiwe Cele), with the YiP-Netherlands project manager responsible for coordinating YiP's international hub (Sabrina Gehrlein, at the time based in Cape Town). Informal interviews were conducted with YiP-SA's program coordinators, facilitators and support staff. Participant observation and filming were conducted at YiP-SA's office and at YiP-SA's inmate program graduation event held at the Brandvlei Correctional Centre. Filmed interviews were also conducted with a warden of Brandvlei and with two young male inmates who had just completed YiP's program at that facility.

### 3. Research results

#### 3.1 Elos – E-mpulse Game

Based on our research which consisted of analysing reports by Elos and E-motive, and field work during the E-mpulse festival, we can conclude that overall the pilot project E-mpulse game has proven to be a success for E-motive, the Elos team and its players. The completion of the game was executed in the desired timeframe, and the E-mpulse festival was a fruitful closing of the project. Below we explain more in detail our observations.

##### *Strengths of the E-mpulse game*

###### 1. Structure of the project

The E-mpulse game provided useful tools such as writing proposals and business plans to give a clear structure in the process of making the project of the players more concrete. The module of steps was logically ordered, useful and clear, which eventually helped the players to understand the needs of their projects: financial support, technical support, other knowledge etc.

In this sense the E-mpulse game provided a service: an incubation game with useful tools that helped social innovators to give an impulse to their projects.

###### Example 1. Altra Polar

This project is about creating awareness and provide alternatives to the clothing industry through workshops in schools and creating a workplace where to sew donated old clothes into new garments. Through the E-mpulse game they could speed up the process of making the project more concrete. Moreover, as a result of one of the assignment of E-mpulse they got in contact with a group of people with mental disabilities to work in their workplace. This was beneficial for Altra Polar and empowered this group of people.

###### Example 2. The Modern Tribe

This project is about facilitating spaces for creativity and art that can be shared by everybody that seeks inspiration. Through the E-mpulse game the player could make his project – for which he travelled the world for 4 years learning different techniques of art practices – more concrete. Up until step 4 this was very useful. For step 5 (writing a business plan) and further his project was not ready yet, but he will continue the game in his own pace.

###### Example 3. Plant Nation

This project is about creating an online platform in which knowledge about nature can be exchanged to search for sustainable solutions. The player came up with the idea last year, hence the E-mpulse game provided her with the right structure and tools to make the project concrete. Through the assignment and tools of the game the player managed to sharpen her project and look for relationships. The pace of the game was going too fast, so the player stopped at step 5, but will continue in their own pace.

###### 2. Finding a community of support

The E-mpulse game provided with the digital platform an initial contact between players who would otherwise most likely not have met. On the platform the profiles of all the players were visible, which included information about themselves and their projects. In this way the players could see what the other players were doing and find potential contacts. Initially most players did not see any connections with others, but throughout the game

they understood that topics and contexts might vary, but that they have similarities in approaches. In our research all players identified the community as one of the most crucial factors in making the game and their projects successful.

In this sense the E-mpulse game provided with a digital platform an online space on which people who have hitherto not met, but who have similar ambitions and ideas, can find each other and form a community.

#### Example 1. Put your hands together

This project is about using bio-architecture to create eco-friendly housing for communities in India. Their project was already very well established so most of the steps of the E-mpulse game were not so useful for the player, but it provided the opportunity for building a further community. The players were already familiar with Elos and some of the other players, hence for them the main purpose and outcome of the game was to grow relationships. This resulted in connecting with the project 'Centre des Hommes' in Togo and exchanging ideas on how to use natural materials and traditional construction techniques to built houses in rural areas.

#### Example 2. Mama Osha

This project is about building a human powered washing machine that can be used in areas where there is no running water or electricity. Through the E-mpulse game the player not only improved the project more professionally by getting in touch with engineers to help building the prototype. The player also connected with the project 'Altro Polar' and exchanged ideas on washing clothes that are donated and given a new life.

#### Example 3. Library of Stuff

This project is about creating an online sharing platform in which you can borrow things from each other for a short period of time. Through the E-mpulse game the player got in contact with others to grow her project internationally by translating the Turkish platform into English.

### *Weaknesses and opportunities of the E-mpulse game*

#### 1. Pace of the game

One of the main important weaknesses of the game identified in our research is the pace of the game. The projects that participated varied in terms of development, from established organisations to abstract ideas of individuals. Furthermore, also the possible time investment of the participants was not equal; some had fulltime jobs while others were completely dedicated to their project for the E-mpulse game. Consequently, this affected the experience of the pace of the game which was for some players too slow and for others too fast.

- ❖ A recommendation is to provide a more flexible approach to the game that takes into account the different stages of the participating projects (i.e. more advanced or preliminary stage), and potential personal circumstances of the participants (i.e. fulltime jobs, pregnancy, active in other projects).

## 2. Lack of clarity

Another weakness of the game is the lack of clarity given in advance. Prior to applying it was rather unclear what to expect from the game. Limited information was given on the structure of the game and what could be gained from it. Also, during the game the added value of the assignment players had to do, was not always evident from the start.

- ❖ A recommendation is to give more transparency on the E-mpulse game in advance in terms of aims, objectives, expectations and structure. Furthermore, it is helpful for the players to understand what the possible outcomes of assignments are, so the point of doing them is more clear.

## 3. Accessibility

The main necessity for playing the game, and to access the platform of E-motive in general, is access to internet. This has been a key issue for an amount of players who dropped out of the game or wanted to participate in the first place. The game required a reliable internet connection that is qualitative enough to be able to participate in group calls or upload videos and photos. Another issue that relates to accessibility is language and the level of digital literacy. The game was designed in English, which excludes everybody who does not have a sufficient level of speaking the language. Furthermore, the design of the game requires a certain set of skills and knowledge on using online spaces such as digital platforms.

- ❖ A recommendation is therefore to always keep very clear in mind that certain people are excluded from the platform, because of the technological insufficiency of their environment or because of lacking the sufficient skills and knowledge to use the digital platform.

## 4. Online and offline communities

What should be approached carefully is the relation between online and offline. Even though the platform is online and the players formed a community through the platform, it is not through the platform only that this community exists. What is identified in our research is that for the players the platform provides the initial connection. The rest of forming a community and building relationships happens away from the platform via other online sources such as Skype, Facebook, Twitter and email. Furthermore, all the participants stated that online is important, but cannot compete with seeing each other offline. This was clearly noticeable during the festival where there was literally a need for physical contact. To see each other in real life gave the experience of the E-mpulse game more weight and ground.

- ❖ A recommendation is to develop methods to establish a relation between online and offline such as organizing a festival in order for participants of the platform to meet in real life.

### **3.2 Young in Prison**

The ethnographic data gathered in South Africa provided valuable information about the potential usefulness of the I2E digital platform, the progress and outcome of the project (including the relationship between online and offline activities), the technical challenges

faced by this pilot throughout the course of the project, and possible areas for improvement of the digital platform for future users.

Our informants reported that the I2E project struggled conceptually in the very beginning. The platform came into existence before a clear purpose for it was found, so I2E's managers and users never saw the platform as a technological means of addressing an existing sectoral need. YiP-SA, however, eventually devised a concrete project plan that would potentially assist the advocacy component of its work and hopefully the work of other like-minded organizations. The plan was to employ the services of the YiP community managers within the organization's international network in order to seek out and recruit 50 organizations outside the YiP network that did fairly similar work to that of YiP, or that did some kind of work with youth in conflict with the law. The YiP community managers would select the organizations; conduct interviews with members of these organizations; profile their stories, ideas and perspectives on the I2E website; and motivate them to actually go online to participate in discussions and exchange ideas. Throughout this process, YiP-SA would coordinate the website, maintain quality control of the content, and post and curate the material.

YiP-SA reported that their greatest operational difficulty was with the community-building component of the platform. The organization vastly underestimated the task of getting users online, and ended up meeting its target only halfway, i.e., 25 non-YiP organizations rather than the projected 50. Once the I2E platform became fully functional, YiP-SA also realized that they needed someone with special expertise in online community building, who could facilitate the exchanges and ensure that they were of value to all the users of the platform.

The benefits accrued from use of the platform were limited, but the online postings did yield some fruit. The stories and profiles on the website featured quite a few ideas for rehabilitation/reintegration from across the world that YiP, at least, found somewhat interesting and potentially useful. These include an inmate-run food truck, various fundraising activities, animal therapy, art therapy and skills training. The consensus, however, among YiP staff and other users was that these ideas were much more inspiring than they were concretely useful. They were interesting to imagine in a local context, but not necessarily implementable.

The main weakness of the I2E platform as reported by the pilot's staff was that it never became a priority for its users. The presentation of stories and profiles, and the exchange of experiences were simply not the core business of the people who came online to use the platform. Moreover, these exchanges were seen by many of the users as being outside the realm of their most pressing needs – which typically lie in the area of funding and day-to-day operations. One informant expressed the view that had the platform provided a facility for funding applications, the downloading of methodologies, or enrolment in training exercise, it would have been more immediately useful. The YiP project manager in charge of the platform made the following assessment:

The thing we realized is that if people didn't have an interest in [the I2E platform] themselves, they are not going to be actively engaged. They sign up, and then they look once, and then they don't come back anymore. So that's actually what happened. Almost none of the people that came online and subscribed themselves actually got engaged. It was, like, only the community managers, and maybe, like, a few [non-YiP users], and they were *very* enthusiastic. But it stayed with a few, like, five people.

According to YiP-SA's coordinators, the feedback that they received from all the partners as well as the 25 non-YiP participant organizations could be summarized as follows: "It's fun, it's cool. But it's not important enough. At this stage, it's not something we're looking for, because it doesn't bring us anything we really need." This needs-based approach was also reported as being the main lacuna in the community-building component of the platform.

Finally, the absence of a community-building expert meant that any ideas generated by and through the platform could not be properly contextualized for local implementation, thus weakening the important relationship between online and offline activities.

### *Recommendations arising out of the I2E Project*

Based on the results of our fieldwork with the I2E project managed by YiP-SA, our research team has the following recommendations for improvement of the digital platform for users such as YiP-SA that work in the area of youth in conflict with the law:

- The digital platform should be problem-and-solution-driven. For users to "own" and actually use the platform, it must have a practical (rather than purely abstract or ideational) component; providing means to access or share information about funding, operations and training.
- The platform must respond to the need for an open space to discuss socio-economic issues, challenges, share experiences and analysis underpinning the work of organizations working with youth in conflict with the law.
- A curator or specialist in community building is necessary. This facilitator should be trained in a field such as social sciences, journalism humanities, legal studies, etc. – to set the an agenda for discourse, moderate exchanges and maintain the participatory dynamic.
- The platform should be a space for the creation of the language necessary for dialogue between correctional centers and organizations dealing with youth In conflict with the law.

The UU team further recommends that the digital platform would benefit greatly from the adoption of "discourse" as a working concept. A "discursive" approach to E-Motive's work would not only seek to generate solutions, actions and innovations, but have these emerge out of a consideration of endemic social issues, debates, common problems, mutual knowledge-sharing, power and inequality. With this concept in mind, we see the following potential for the digital platform:

- It would provide a deeper understanding of the varying social worlds from which youth in conflict with the law come and into which they return after incarceration.
- Greater degree of ownership of the platform, since it would involve the passions, personal opinions and familiar narratives of everyday experience.
- The concept of "discourse" immediately implies a union of both online and offline environments.
- An open space for the full cross-cultural exploration of problems *along with* solutions.
- Dynamic global exchange between social entrepreneurs that results in greater awareness of the commonalities and differences that underpin social problems.
- A basis for compiling necessary data about globally occurring social phenomena

- Making cultural/historical context a key consideration in the sharing of innovative solutions. Citizen-led strategies and solutions would be socially embedded and historically situated.
- A focus on power and inequality: “meta-level” problem-solving that takes into consideration that race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality are all important factors in any kind of work with youth in conflict with the law.



## 4. Conclusions

How can the idea of mutual learning in E-Motive face2face exchanges be transformed into a business2business multiple learning model, on a global scale, mediated via an online digital platform? This question, which has been leading our research, is not easily answered. Not only was there a limited timeframe in which we could execute our research, also the online activity of the pilot projects on the digital platform was not very extensive. Nevertheless, based upon the research results of the two pilot projects that have been using the E-Motive digital platform we can draw important conclusions and lesson learned.

The main conclusion of our evaluation is that assumptions should be (con)tested by actual work on the ground. To develop a digital platform which provides a service of exchanging knowledge and effective solutions for social entrepreneurs and aims at forming an online community is a complex process. The four important aspects that need to be critically reflected upon are:

- **Design of the digital platform**

Things that have been envisioned in the design, might not work in practice. Make sure you can provide in terms of technological manners what you want to offer. Take into account on where the digital platform can be accessed and that this might need additional technological expertise to make the digital platform confirm to the various devices used: personal computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones etc. Think here also of the heaviness of the website, in order to keep it as accessible as possible. Having webpages that need a lot of time to load is not only often not appreciated, but also insufficient for those who have a less stable and fast internet connection. Also, take into account a certain level of digital literacy, hence have an interface that is attractive, friendly and easy to understand towards the user.

- **Services provided on the digital platform**

The digital platform is not Facebook, Twitter or any other online social media platform, so it needs to be clear what it offers. The service you are providing should be clear in terms of structure and content for both the provider and the user. When you provide tailor-made learning packages it needs to be transparent what can be expected from this, hence there should be as little discrepancy as possible between the user's expectations and the outcomes of the service.

Introducing a clear professional agent, equipped with critical skills, attentive to issues of access, ethics and inequalities, to moderate the digital exchanges and constantly monitor what is shared and taught, is recommended.

- **Online/offline community**

Community formation cannot be forced. The E-Motive digital platform provides an initial contact, but does not create an online community; this happens between peers on other social media away from the platform. The digital platform is merely a space where likeminded people can meet each other with the specific purpose to exchange their ideas. In order to have a community in which knowledge is being shared, the digital platform therefore needs to provide this community with sufficient tools to do so. Most importantly, an online community does not exist without any offline contact. Therefore,

meeting each other in person, having a face2face exchange, is crucial to form a solid online community.

- **Target groups and networks**

The first partners that will use the E-Motive platform are those that are already present in the network of E-Motive. Therefore, it is important to have clear in mind the profile of your target group and to what extent these people are already in your network or not. Furthermore, even though the digital platform ideally is open to everybody, you always exclude people, whether that is unintentionally or not. Due to the obvious but crucial fact that the digital platform is online, those who do not have sufficient access to internet will be excluded. Moreover, cultural backgrounds that are informed by different levels of experience with social entrepreneurship, fulltime jobs, social constraints or the expectations of communities play a crucial role in determining to what extent people can successfully access and use the digital platform.

Other aspects that should be taken into account when developing and monitoring EGG are issues of language, digital literacy, the broader discourses used, and the cultural, social and economic positions of the people involved.

## 5. Recommendations

Despite the fact that we researched only for a limited period of time and only two pilot projects, we anyway would like to provide recommendations for the usage of the E-Motive digital platform:

- ❖ Be **specific** in what the digital platform offers
- ❖ Be **flexible** in your approach and the service offered
- ❖ Be **inclusive** but dare to specify your target groups
- ❖ Keep a **close relation between online and offline**
- ❖ Be attentive to **issues of inequalities** and to the specific contexts of the projects
- ❖ Avoid a one-fits-all model and **cater to the diversity** of social solutions, global actors, and local users and beneficiaries.