

“Sicilia #conSenso” aimed to improve sexual health outcomes in Sicily by enhancing the availability of and access to SRH information among young Sicilians. The project entailed two main endeavors: first, the creation of a digital campaign tailored to youth; second, a two-day intensive training for teachers and youth workers on sex-education methodologies. While we thought of the campaign to improve short term access to reliable SRH information, the training educators was our attempt to promote sustainable change by enhancing access in the long run. Although the timeline outlined in the original proposal underwent slight changes, both goals were successfully achieved. Below, I provide insight into the design and implementation of the two project milestones.

I. “Sicilia #conSenso”: the Digital Campaign

When designing the project, we thought of the digital campaign as a means to assess the needs of the Sicilian youth. We hoped that, through their engagement with the campaign’s posts, we would be able to get a clearer picture of the youth’s interests as well as the biggest knowledge gaps. We thus began by administering a survey through Maghweb’s (the partner organization) social media platform asking users what they would like to see covered in the campaign. The topics mentioned included: anatomy of the vulva, STIs/STDs, body image, virginity, and porn/industry/revenge porn. Armed with the insights we gathered, the Maghweb team and I came up with the following themes/plan for the campaign’s posts: Orgasm Gap (as it relates to body awareness and empowerment), Masturbation (tied to body image and awareness), Digital Intimacies (including revenge porn), Contraception and STI/STD prevention, and Anatomy of the vulva. Our campaign was specifically designed with a young audience in mind and hence had a “pop” style, with bright colors and eye-catching graphics. When writing the content for our post, we worked with a culturally-sensitive approach in mind and referenced specific Sicilian cultural contexts. For example, the post on the anatomy of the vulva started by naming all the Sicilian words that we use to avoid calling vulvas with their name. Overall, we were very satisfied with the post engagement and interactions we received from the public. Our most “loved” post was the one on the orgasm gap, which reached 2.065 profiles. Interactions with posts fluctuated, especially as the project progressed into the summer and – as expected – engagement went slightly down. The campaign received positive feedback throughout, with one user noted that they were “happy to have finally found a comprehensive source that talked about the transmission of STIs during oral sex”.

II. “Meglio del Porno”: The training

We envisioned this part of the project as our long-term contribution to sustainable peace. We asked ourselves: how can we contribute to making Sicily free from intimate-partner violence and conducive to physical, emotional, and sexual well-being? We discussed ideas, and at the end of our meeting we had no doubt: educators would be our best allies in this mission. They work with youth across different generations, and they have the capacity to keep engaging with young people beyond scope of our project. We hence planned a two-day, intensive training on sexual education methodologies. We contacted a sex-education expert and, together, we came up with a curriculum for the two days. During the first day, we thought it was important to start with a

general primer on sex education to make sure that all group members were on the same page about some key topics such as: gender, identity, consent, and the meaning of “comprehensive sex-education”. Our focus was, however, on the methodology piece. We wanted to equip educators with concrete tools to feel comfortable in using their knowledge on SRH to engage with young people. Besides the theoretical introduction at the beginning of the two-days, the training then revolved around workshops. Some of the activities included a consent-role play, a simulation on stereotypes, and a workshop on gender/LGBTQI+ discrimination. It was heartwarming to see that, during the activities, the educators often turned to each other to announce excitedly: “this activity would be perfect for my students!” or “I can’t wait to propose the same activity to the group I’m working with right now!”.

At the end of the training, we asked our participants if they thought the tools they learned would be helpful in their future work. We gave them a ranking that went from “absolutely disagree” to “absolutely agree” : 57% of respondents said they “agreed”, 43% “absolutely agreed”. Among the feedback received, a pattern stands out: the majority of the participants reported having had an opportunity to challenge and interrogate themselves about their own experience with SRH and reflect on how this has an impact on their job as educators. A participant said: “interrogating myself about my own messages about sex-education showed me that self-awareness needs to be a key component of my pedagogy”. All participants also expressed a desire to continue engaging with the topic and nurturing the enriching relationships that emerged during the training. For this reason, we created a shared document where everyone can share information and resources about SRH. This “living” document is, in many ways, a testament to the legacy of the project: we hoped to make a first step to bring together our educators and support their work with some tools to help them promote better attitudes towards SRH. What truly happened, though, was much more: the participants developed an incredible connection. Throughout the two days, they shared hopes, vulnerabilities, ideals, and experiences. At the end, we witnessed the creation of a powerful network of change-makers willing to continue supporting each other in the common mission of building a more peaceful Sicily. We are very grateful to “Projects for Peace” for providing the opportunity to create the fertile ground for this allyship to emerge. We trust that our youth is in great hands with these educators and hope that the tools they learned during this training will complement their amazing work. In 6 months, we will administer another survey to ask how their work is going and whether they are finding use for what they learned during the two days. We can not wait to hear about the wonderful things that we are sure they will have done.