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WHAT'S YOUR ROMAN EMPIRE?

PARTNER: Skill Up

COUNTRY: Italy



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1. Introduction

The activity “**What’s Your Roman Empire?**” is an informal training practice designed to explore a reflection on core **EU Values**, using the Roman Empire as a metaphor, a symbolic gateway: during the Roman Empire, for the first time all Europe was united. Talking about values and principles during the **Roman Empire**, using landmark monuments as starting points, will lead to discussions on contemporary values and how to foster them in our time. The practice connects cultural heritage with personal and collective reflection on values such as peace, justice, sustainability and active citizenship.

Why the Roman Empire?

The Roman Empire has left an **enduring legacy** that continues to shape modern Europe in profound ways. From legal systems to architecture, urban planning, languages, and cultural values, many elements of our contemporary societies trace their roots back to the innovations and ideals of Ancient Rome.

As one of the most influential civilizations in history, the Roman Empire contributed to the development of shared European principles such as justice, civic participation, peace, and infrastructure for collective well-being. The idea of a united and interconnected society that transcends borders echoes strongly in today’s European Union and its foundational values.

Through this activity, learners are encouraged to **reflect** on how the **legacy of ancient Rome** still resonates in **today’s European values** such as **peace, justice, sustainability, solidarity, and citizenship**. By associating iconic Roman monuments to contemporary values, participants creatively **connect the past with the present** and imagine how they, as active citizens, can contribute to shaping the future of Europe.

This practice **aligns** with the **goals** of the ONE Culture project **by promoting a deeper sense of belonging to both local and European communities**. It fosters cultural awareness, civic participation, and inclusiveness, empowering participants to understand and relate to European values in a concrete and personal way. The use of cultural heritage as a learning tool helps reinforce **intergenerational learning** and **critical thinking**, essential pillars of inclusive adult education.

This practice is adaptable to various contexts: if implemented in **Rome** or **cities with Roman heritage**, it can take the form of a **guided cultural walk**. In other settings, it can be delivered in a **classroom** or **informal space** using **images, maps, and multimedia content**.

- **Target**

The main target group consists of adult learners from different backgrounds, including migrants, women, and people at risk of exclusion. The methodology is suitable for both formal and non-formal education settings, including community centers, schools for adults, or intercultural workshops.

- **Duration**

The activity can be completed in approximately **2 to 3 hours**, depending on the **setting** and **group size**. It can also be extended as part of a **thematic week** or **series** on European identity and values.

2. Activity Implementation

2.1 Activity Objectives

This training practice aims to:

- Encourage learners to reflect on the **common European roots** found in **Roman heritage**.
- Connect iconic Roman monuments to core EU values such as peace, justice, solidarity, sustainability, and freedom.
- Inspire participants to creatively express how they would uphold and promote these values today.
- Strengthen learners' sense of belonging to both their local and European communities.
- Foster critical thinking and civic engagement through an exploration of cultural heritage.

2.2 Activity Description and Methodology

The activity begins with a short introduction on the legacy of the Roman Empire and its influence on modern European societies. The trainer then presents a series of monuments from the Roman era—such as the **Colosseum**, **Ara Pacis**, **Via Appia**, and **Roman Forums**—each linked to a specific EU value. For instance:

- **Colosseum** → Justice & Citizenship
- **Ara Pacis** → Peace
- **Aqueducts or Baths** → Public Welfare & Solidarity
- **Via Appia** → Freedom of Movement
- **Roman Forums** → Democracy
- **Villae Rusticae** → Environmental Sustainability

Participants are invited to reflect on the historical significance of each monument and its corresponding value. For each monument, the trainer poses a question to spark personal and collective engagement. Example:

- “If you could bring peace to Europe, what would you do?”
- “If you had the power to shape justice today, what would be your first step?”
- “What does sustainability mean to you in your daily life?”

Depending on the setting, the activity can be implemented in two formats:

- **Urban/Heritage settings (e.g., in cities like Rome):** learners take part in a **guided educational walk** among selected monuments, taking notes, photos, or videos as part of their reflective process.
- **Classroom or community settings:** learners work with **printed or digital images**, short documentary clips, and accessible VR/AR tools to explore monuments virtually.

Learners then create their **own Roman Empire of Values** by selecting 3–5 monuments and writing or drawing their personal responses to the value-based questions. These responses can be turned into a personal or group poster, a digital collage, or a shared group presentation.

Methodology:

The activity uses **experiential learning, storytelling, metaphor, and reflective questioning** to foster a personal and values-based approach to European heritage. It promotes **creative expression, civic imagination, and inclusive discussion**, encouraging learners to connect personal identity with shared European values.

The use of metaphor in education is grounded in well-established cognitive and pedagogical frameworks. As a metacognitive tool, metaphor supports learners in reflecting on their own thinking by connecting abstract concepts to familiar imagery. Metaphors also serve as cognitive structures, shaping how we understand the world (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Framing values like justice or freedom through metaphors (e.g., “roads,” “pillars,” or “foundations”) creates accessible mental models that foster engagement and critical reflection.

In adult education, metaphor aligns with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), where symbolic narratives help learners reassess beliefs and adopt new perspectives. This makes metaphor particularly effective in exploring complex issues such as European values and civic identity.

2.3 Tools and Resources

The tools required will vary depending on whether the activity is conducted outdoors (e.g., urban setting) or indoors (e.g., classroom or community space). Suggested materials include:

- **Smartphones or digital cameras:** for taking photos or videos during the exploration or virtual tour.
- **Printed or digital images of monuments:** for indoor settings where direct visits are not possible.
- **Basic art supplies** (paper, markers, glue, scissors): for learners to create visual maps, posters, or collages representing their personal “Roman Empire of Values.”
- **Access to digital platforms** (e.g., Padlet, Canva, PowerPoint): for learners who prefer to create digital outputs such as slideshows, infographics, or short videos.
- **Guided handouts or worksheets:** to support value reflection and provide guiding questions.

2.4 Suggested integrations

This activity directly complements the **Toolkit for Trainers** modules that focus on **European Cultural Heritage**, **EU Values**, and **Environmental and Social Sustainability**. It transforms theoretical learning into experiential reflection and creative expression.

The practice can be paired with classroom-based modules to reinforce value-based learning with visual, historical, and emotional engagement. For example:

- After a module on **EU values**, this activity can help learners explore how these abstract concepts are rooted in their shared cultural heritage.
- It can also be integrated with other informal practices such as **photographic storytelling** or **art-based interpretation of cultural values**, encouraging learners to visualize and personalize their understanding of European identity.

Used early in a learning sequence, it can serve as a foundation for later creative or collaborative activities. Used at the end, it works as a reflective wrap-up that reinforces key messages and strengthens the learner's sense of belonging to European history and values.

3. Debriefing and Feedback

At the end of the activity, the trainer facilitates a debriefing session to guide learners in reflecting on the monuments and values they explored and how these connect to their personal and cultural identity. The focus is on fostering a sense of belonging, critical thinking, and creative engagement with EU values.

The debrief can be conducted as an open conversation, a group sharing circle, or with the support of visual tools such as sticky notes, posters, or digital boards (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter) where learners write or draw their responses.

Suggested debriefing questions:

- Which monument or value resonated with you the most, and why?
- How do you see the legacy of the Roman Empire in your country or city today?
- If you could embody one of the values we discussed (e.g., Peace, Solidarity, Sustainability), how would you put it into practice in your everyday life?
- Did this activity change your perspective on what it means to be European?
- What did you enjoy most during the experience? What would you improve?

Trainer's evaluation:

Trainers should assess the success of the activity by observing learner engagement, participation level, and depth of reflection during the debrief. Simple feedback tools (short questionnaires, smiley scales, quick interviews) can also be used to collect impressions on:

- Clarity and relevance of the activity;
- Emotional connection with the values;
- Inclusiveness and accessibility;
- Suggestions for improvement.

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