

What is the Summer Academy about

The concept of the Mesopartner Summer Academy was born in late 2004, with the first being launched in 2005 in Duisburg, Germany. After the huge success of the first Academy and the positive feedback from the participants, the idea of an annual Summer Academy was established. Seven successful academies were held at the same venue in Duisburg, and in 2012 the 8th Summer Academy was moved to the German capital Berlin, a city whose transformation process is familiar to many. The Mesopartners therefore had the insight that Berlin would not only be an exciting city in which to hold the Summer Academy, but could also present a laboratory of complex economic and social polarities and provide a wide range of experience on how to manage and facilitate change in a complex urban-rural environment.

Due to the strong demand, and in order to customize the Summer Academy concept to local realities, Mesopartner conducted a few 'regional' Academies on Economic Development, such as those in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2006, and in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2008, and a few in Pretoria, South Africa, over the years.

In every Academy there is always great excitement in convening a group of about 30 people who are mostly LED practitioners or who are working in related fields. The group of participants is typically from 12 to 15 different countries, each having experience of territorial development processes, value chain development or other such related topics that everyone can relate to.

The format of the Summer Academy is suitably arranged not only to maximize individual learning, but also to enable the connecting of group experiences and sharing of lessons learned. The informal yet structured training format, as well as the creative facilitation methods and tools, assist in drawing out the participants' extensive experience to match the new information and insights presented to the group. Over and above the in-session training, the carefully planned excursions provide further experiential learning and insights reflecting on the impact of structural changes on a territory and future prospects for local economies.

The topics, which change slightly from year to year, are not only relevant to the participants' experience, but the arrangement also allows them to present case studies, which enable the tools and techniques presented to be tested in a real situation – this gives the rest of the group practical guidelines and tips on approaches and responses to challenges, with perceptive feedback from the trainers.

As the end of the week of a Summer Academy, the participants have not only gained new insights and knowledge, but have also gained new contemporaries and friends – including the Mesopartners – whom they can contact and from whose insights they can draw. Needless to say, once the Summer Academy bug bites, many of the participants return for yet another. This is because no one Summer Academy is exactly like any other, with the participants and experiences differing each year. Working in a dynamic world of regional and local economies, new insights are gained, the tools are refined and adapted and new techniques are developed and themes elaborated and presented.

The Summer Academy is one of the few opportunities for all the partners and some of the associates to work together and develop training materials and sessions. This has positive spill-over effects on other training events that are later presented by only one or two partners, such as those on creative facilitation, green economic development, market failures and many other topics. In this way the academy can be regarded as a learning and training design laboratory from which the participants and the partners and their clients benefit for a much longer time beyond just the one week duration of the Academy.