Effective Ways for Implementing Educational Policies: Direct Effects on Societal Security

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1. Introduction

The Europe of knowledge - competitive and ready to overcome obstacles to its progress - cannot be imagined without solid foundation given by education and training. This is a reality recognised by politicians at European level. EU education and training policies have gained impetus since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy, recognising that knowledge and innovation are the EU's most valuable assets, particularly in light of increasing global competition.

The Treaty on the functioning of the EU highlights that *"[...] the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion and a high level of education, training and protection of human health".* Signatories of the Treaty declared that they are *"[...] determined to promote the development of the highest possible level of knowledge for their peoples through a wide access to education and through its continuous updating"*[1].

The modern society faces major challenges concerning the integration of disadvantaged groups. But social inclusion cannot be properly addressed without the support of education and training. Adults in deprived contexts need rapid and viable solutions to their complex problems. In this context, education and training should be at the forefront of EU joint efforts. EU decision-makers have recognised that *"Education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges facing Europe"* [2]. Europe must make education and training one of its strongest instruments in providing social inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

2. Social inclusion through education and training: case study – IN PATH project

The "IN PATH – Intelligent Pathways for Better Inclusion" is a LLP/Grundtvig Multilateral Project (517976-LLP-1-2011-1-PT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP) that aims to break the pattern of transferring poverty and exclusion from one generation to the next, by empowering marginalised and disadvantaged citizens to easily manage everyday problems in different areas and not to be held back by their background. Thus, discontinuing the exclusion and poverty cycle is one of the major goals of the project.

The purpose of supporting those who live in deprived contexts in their (re)integration processes and of reducing their higher risks of poverty by strengthening their competences in nuclear areas, is conceived in the project with the support of the Multiple Intelligence Theory (MI Theory) of Prof. Howard Gardner from Harvard University, a theory which challenges traditional views of intelligence and states that each individual has a different intelligence profile and that education can be improved by assessing learners' intelligence profiles and designing activities accordingly. It also aims to change the perspectives and beliefs about the learning processes, by fostering the commitment with lifelong learning initiatives.

MI Theory postulates are well known among psychologists and pedagogues and are used in some innovative schools where curricula were reviewed to stimulate nine different kinds of intelligence in their students (verbal/linguistic; logical/mathematical; visual/spatial; bodily/kinaesthetic; naturalistic; musical intelligence; interpersonal; intrapersonal; and existential). Good practices of using MI Theory in the educational system are already identified in North American initiatives like Project Zero, which is intended to understand and enhance learning, thinking, and creativity of disadvantaged populations in the arts, humanistic and scientific disciplines at the individual and institutional levels.

The idea of IN PATH is to use the key points of MI Theory (all human beings possess all nine intelligences in varying degrees, each individual has a different intelligence profile, education can be improved by assessment of students' intelligence profiles and designing activities accordingly) in the development of a practical intervention guide for adult trainers and social work professionals, where 4 nuclear areas (including learning to learn skills, financial management skills, parenting skills & initiative and active skills for employment & entrepreneurship) can be explored in a non-traditional way. Within IN PATH, MI Theory will be used to turn learning more adjusted, attractive and easy (reinforcing the motivation of the trainees that are not used to formal learning contexts) and the 4 areas were chosen because of their major role in promoting inclusion (increasing the chances of employability; facilitating the management of financial resources and avoiding risk of mismanagement and indebtedness; encouraging better parenting styles and giving confidence for the involvement in further learning opportunities).

The use of the MI Theory for inclusion purposes will have impact in different areas (including financial management, job seeking, parenting and commitment with lifelong learning), strengthening self-confidence and personal fulfilment. By creating opportunities for changing rooted beliefs and reinforcing skills in key areas, IN PATH will prevent the inter-generational transmission of poverty and exclusion.

IN PATH will help adult trainers and social work professionals to introduce new learning scenarios of approach in their training initiatives for disadvantaged citizens living in marginal social contexts. Using MI Theory as background and exploring key areas directly linked to day life problems, adult trainers and social work professionals will attain a better understanding about different learning styles and intelligence profiles, adjusting techniques and stimulating the learning processes.

The methodology of the project implementation is built on needs analysis that includes the use of 3 methodological tools to identify the needs from the target group (questionnaire, interview, desk research). This will facilitate the collection of expert and state-of-the-art knowledge and the identification of educational tools that are based on MI Theory and on various learning styles. Each partner will develop a national report based on the findings and results from the data collection process and a compilation will be done in a transnational Need Analysis Report. Subsequently, development of a Handbook for the validation workshops will be achieved, and after the Handbook has been tested, improvements shall be implemented and a final version of the Handbook will be available. The content of the Handbook will be based on the observations and results from needs analysis phase and on MI Theory findings, exploring 4 major areas in different possible pedagogical scenarios. The content of the Handbook and the results of the workshops will also be used to develop the content of a Grundtvig In-Service Training Course, which will give visibility of the project products at European level.

By bridging key competences in training and multiple intelligence concepts, IN PATH will generate creative and useful products addressed to professionals that work for social cohesion, who will be able to use new tools to foster personal fulfilment, active citizenship and other important values among disadvantaged people. Thus, the project reinforces the role of adult education in strengthening social inclusion by providing adults from deprived contexts with pathways to improve their knowledge and competences through attractive, adjusted and constructive learning opportunities.

3. Implementation of educational policies and their impact on societal security

Security is essentially a mental concept that is directly associated with mentality and understanding of people regarding vulnerability and threats. Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan argued that security is about survival in the face of an existential threat to the referent object, whether it is the state, sovereignty, or the nation, among others. Societal security grew from debates about security in Europe in the post-Cold War era. It was developed as a conceptual approach by a group of scholars concerned that ''nation'' and ''state'' do not mean the same thing in a majority of countries around the world and that ''national security'' is becoming an increasingly irrelevant framework with which to study post-Cold War developments in Europe. In its stead, they proposed the term ''societal security'' and a focus on the insecurities of societies, understood as national, ethnic, or religious communities.

Following the end of the Cold War, terrorism, cross-border crime, drug-trafficking, and immigration have replaced traditional frontier disputes as main sources of insecurity for the countries of the European Union.

No longer associated solely with labor market dislocations, humanitarian reasons and social integration concerns, migration has become part of the new national security agendas of the receiving and transit countries. Thus, the perceived threats to economic well-being, social order, cultural and religious values and political stability have placed migration policies within a framework intended to protect the societies of Western Europe.

The issue of migration touches upon central concepts, such as borders and border politics, security, sovereignty, citizenship and identity, the nature of which has been changing under the pressure of globalization and integration. Existential threats differ according to the character of the referent object, which vary within the different sectors, society being one of them. In the societal sector the referent objects are large-scale collective identities, which evolve in conjunction with internal and external developments. Hence, the framing of an issue as a societal security problem depends upon how members of these groups see the creation and maintenance of their collective identities. Societal security, then, is about the preservation of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity, within acceptable conditions for evolution. In other words, societal security is about "large, self-sustaining identity groups"[3].

As European integration deepens and the member states pool their sovereignties in a growing number of areas, there is a growing perception that the member states cannot adequately protect their societies as a result of their borderless frontiers, resulting in an increasing societal insecurity. In other words, significant groups in society feel threatened, and immigrants as well as refugees are often seen as having no legitimate right to social assistance and welfare provisions. The calls for curtailing the social rights of immigrants is linked to the idea that immigration is a threat to cultural homogeneity as well as to the preservation of the welfare state [4]. Hence, within the EU context, the issue of migration has been securitized along the dimensions of cultural identity and welfare provisions as part of the overall societal security of the internal market.

Migration is the main cause determining the growing of disadvantaged clusters. These groups represent the crucible where associated phenomena like unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, organised crime, drug or human-trafficking are growing, creating social tensions, leading to social exclusion of the group members themselves. The solution for these groups to escape from this vicious circle is education and training. Getting a suitable educational level and acquiring professional qualification opens their access to the labour market, to stable and well paid jobs and thus supports their social inclusion.

Different levels of education and training, cultural, ethnic, religious differences as well as unemployment and legal/illegal migration represent risks and threats to societal security. They may be reduced or annihilated through education and professional training of persons in deprived contexts, opening the way to their social inclusion. An efficient, carefully planned and harmonized implementation of the educational strategies will have positive and sustainable effects upon social inclusion.

Growing up in a low socio-economic status environment, being from indigenous descent, living in a remote area, or having a disability are factors contributing to poor labour market outcomes and social exclusion. Participating in tertiary education and training can help overcome such disadvantages. Education and lifelong learning, delivered through appropriate policies, help to overcome or prevent marginalisation and exclusion of disadvantaged groups.

At the core of EU policies there is the one promoting social cohesion: *"Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners - **including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants** - complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second chance education and the provision of more personalised learning"* [5]. Education and training represent thus the key to employment, economic success and people's full participation in society.

Member States should aim towards active social integration of all and fight poverty and exclusion of groups who are most marginalized in society [6]. To provide wide range access to those from deprived contexts, modern and adapted learning methodologies and tools have to be applied and common efforts of professionals have to be achieved.

4. Conclusions

The problem of disadvantaged groups' social inclusion has to be approached in a professional way, through a diversity of learning, teaching and training methods which to be innovative and to fit/adapt better on the needs of those who have to be integrated, but in the same time on the professional needs of social operators and trainers and on the profile and dimension of the threats, risks and challenges. This is why combined and adapted strategies are needed, as well as an active involvement of all actors having responsibilities in the system and introducing innovation within the implementation ways. A possible and viable solution is therefore the implementation of afferent policies and strategies through transnational cooperation projects in the field of education and training. IN PATH [7] is such an example of success and efficiency.

References

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