EQUAL SPACE – why should gender and diversity focused in adult education?

Summary

How can educationally disadvantaged women with a migration or minority background be integrated into adult education? So far, adult education has only limited access to this target group. The project "EQUAL SPACE" gives an answer. Methods and didactics are developed through a community education approach, how the target group can be better integrated into adult education. In four countries (Austria, Bulgaria, France, Portugal) community education facilitators (CEFs) are trained in the field of intersection of gender and cultural diversity. The article discusses first a comparative study of the situation of migrants and minorities in adult education in the partner countries and recommendations. The second part – you will find it soon – introduces the curriculum for (CEFs).

Long Version

Intersection of gender and cultural diversity become a more and more important distribution criteria in European societies, in particular educational opportunities are determined about them.

Female migrants and Roma women on many occasions face more complex forms of discrimination and exclusion, on the grounds of belonging to a minority which historically suffers from socio-economic exclusion in Europe combined with discrimination within the majority society due to gender and cultural diversity. In terms of education, all over Europe, lower levels of education of migrant and Roma women stands out. This is why the project is working and fighting for a greater access in adult education as the key for social promotion and overcoming of social exclusion for migrant and Roma women.

So far, adult education has only limited access to this target group. For this reason, strategies and methods must be developed that can motivate this target group for further education. As identified by the partner organisations and main stakeholders, the transformation towards more equality between migrant women and men and the native people, requires changes in favour of a more equal model of adult education. In this way the project "Equal Space" follows a Community Education approach. Community Education is characterized by participation, empowerment, organisation of the own learn process

The idea for this project derives from the joint observation among the partners of the role adult education can play for intersection of gender and cultural diversity and for the inclusion of disadvantaged groups to society and education.

Our experience in community education have shown that community education processes need actors – community educator facilitator (CEF) , who initiate local or regional learning processes, which would anchor community education in the field of gender and cultural diversity (intersection) as a central task. Currently there is no curriculum or training program for CEFS in this field. There are

community development courses, but education and learning are by-products in them and there are concepts of outreach learning and embedded learning. Our approach is to train CEFs in the field of intersection (gender and cultural diversity) connected with strategies which change the structure of education systems.

The comparative study and the recommendations give a deep insight into the national starting situation in all partner countries.

Situation of migrants and minorities in adult education

The study in the four countries (Austria, Bulgaria, France, Portugal) aimed to create basic knowledge about immigrant and minority adult education in each country. The situation of migrants in Bulgaria and Portugal is different from the other countries. While in Austria and France the share of migrants in the total population is between 10 and 15% - depending on how the recognition of citizenship is regulated - Bulgaria and Portugal have an insignificant share of migrants.

In Austria, France and Portugal female migrants, in particular, have much lower and, in some cases, higher education than the general population. What they all have in common is that they find it difficult to use their training in the labour market. Migrants in Austria, France and Portugal have relatively poor job market positions compared to the general population and from these also a relatively bad social situation. The nationalities of migrants are shaped by history in all four countries.

In Bulgaria, the situation of migrants is in many cases different. The proportion of migrants is vanishingly small, they usually have a very good education and they held good jobs or are often self-employed.

In terms of minorities, Austria is an exception in our comparison of countries. While the largest or most important minority group in Bulgaria, France and Portugal is the Roma, in Austria the Roma minority is a very small group in quantitative terms. Roma minorities in all four countries have a poor education and integration, a high drop-out rate of school, especially for girls, and Roma are nearly not integrated in the labour market.

Adult education is centrally organized in all partner countries, and all governments emphasize the importance of lifelong learning. However, the consequences of adult education are very different in the countries: Bulgaria lies last in the ranking, while in France, Austria and Portugal the situation is much better.

In order to promote adult education, EU countries have set themselves the target of 15% of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 participating by 2020. In 2012, the average participation was 9% and only five EU countries had reached the target.[1] However, with an average of 10.8% across Europe, they are still far from the target.

The participation in adult education in Austria is 14.9% - lies with it above the European average. Nevertheless, Austria is well behind the leading countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland.[2] The Netherlands, France, Luxembourg and Estonia were the only other Member States where the participation rate in 2016 already exceeded the 15% benchmark. By contrast, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia, Poland and Greece reported adult learning rates of 4% or less. The proportion of the population who had participated in adult learning was higher among women (11.7% in 2016) in the EU-28 than among men (9.8%); the shares for men and women were both higher in 2016 than they had been five years earlier.[3] When we look at the participation rate of adult education of our partner countries, we see that France is the best, followed from Austria, Portugal and Bulgaria.[4]

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[1] Eurostat: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/adult-learning/adult_de (05/10/2018)
[2] Erwachsenenbildung.at: https://erwachsenenbildung.at/aktuell/nachrichten_details.php?nid=11975 (05/10/2018)
[3] Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Adult_learning_statistics (05/10/2018)
[4] Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Adult_learning_statistics (05/10/2018)

Inequality[5]

There is a strong association between educational attainment and social outcomes. People with only basic education are almost three times more likely to live in poverty or social exclusion than those with tertiary education. In 2016, only 44% of young people (18 - 24), who had finished school below the upper secondary level, were employed. And in the general population (15 - 64), unemployment is much more prevalent among those with only basic education (16.6%) than for the tertiary educated (5.1%). Furthermore, a higher share of people with tertiary education (80.4%, according to the 2015 data) perceived their health as 'good or very good', while the rate was much lower among those with only basic education (53.8%). Life expectancy grows in line with the level of education too: the education premium can span up to 10 years between the low-qualified and highly qualified (2015 data).[6]

While education plays a key role in the integration of migrants, their situation in terms of educational achievement compared to native-born remains disadvantageous. In 2016, 33.9% of the non-EU-born population aged 30 to 34 held low qualifications (i.e. they had lower secondary education or below), 19.1 percentage points (pp) more than the native-born population. Moreover, people with a migrant background from outside the EU often cumulate several disadvantages at once, e. g. having poor or low-skilled parents, not speaking the local language at home, having access to fewer cultural resources and suffering from isolation and poor social networks in the host country. Young people with a migrant background are also at a greater risk of performing badly at school and of dropping out of school early.

More generally, pupils with migrant background, i.e. either born outside the country (i.e. in another EU Member State or outside the EU) or with foreign-born parents, face difficulties in their schooling, as evidenced by their significantly lower educational performance and attainment compared to the native-born population.[7]

Adult education in the migrant society[8]

Adult education in the migration society is not limited to working with specific target groups. Rather, it is required to adequately reflect and include the phenomena associated with migration in their theoretical assumptions, institutional structures, their concepts and offers, and their political and social self-image.

This includes dealing with increasingly heterogeneous groups of learners (e. g. linguistically, socially or culturally), the fight against racism and discrimination or the question of the realization of participation opportunities under restrictive legal conditions (examples: integration agreement, recognition of educational qualifications, asylum law ...).

Empirical Research Results
Altogether, 80 expert interviews with trainers, trainings and research institutions and stakeholder were conducted.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] European Commission (2018) Education and Training. Monitor 2017:
https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017_en.pdf (05/10/2018)

[7] European Commission (2018) Education and Training. Monitor 2017:
https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017_en.pdf (05/10/2018)

[8] Sprung, Annette (2016) Migration und Wissenschaft: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wz41XIpPDoA (05/11/2018)

All interviewed experts agree that migrants and minorities, especially because of their social situation, facing big obstacles to attend adult education. Women attend more adult education, but shorter and less job-related adult education.

Obstacles

Migrants and minorities face in all four countries the same obstacles to participate in adult education. Women with migrant or minority background have major obstacles to overcome. In the study we found obstacles at the individual, institutional and structural level. One of the most important on the individual level is the language barrier or that migrant/minority women do not see the benefit of participating in training. Obstacles on the institutional level are shaped by the lack of intercultural opening of the adult educational institutions as that trainers with migrant or minority background are missing. On the structural level obstacles are for example shaped by the traditional gender roles as the family obligations of women or the financial situation of migrant women and women from minority communities, what makes participating on trainings hard.

The early drop-out of school of Roma girls and women is one of the most important challenges for the professionals working with this community in Bulgaria and Portugal. They have internal and external obstacles: internal from the Roma Community itself, where education is not value, and external from the system, which is not capable to motivate and integrate these women and allow them to abandon their studies.

Approaches/Strategies

In order to change this situation, in the opinion of the interviewees much should be modified in adult education:

Women, who are approached, should be very well informed by Community Educators and Facilitators about the objectives of the training.

The offers should be tailored to the target group, because female migrants and minorities vary very much: considering the linguistic requirements, the educational level and the social and family situation. Diversity in the learning group and special groups for women are conducive. Empowerment and skills are key aspects of Community Education projects with migrant women. The trainers should work on the problems of discrimination experienced by women in order to integrate them professionally, on self-confidence, on intersectional issues, on secularism through courses.

Main topics of the trainings should be Human Rights/Women's Rights, the deconstruction of the stereotypes of gender, class, race or ethnicity and the need to fight against professional disqualification of migrants and minorities.

The training programme should focus on an approach to make them open and connected, without causing them problems with the migrant or minority community. Target groups of refugee women and Roma communities should be activated through appropriate training to seek opportunities to become economically independent, to earn money for themselves and for the family.

Training for professionals is also necessary and desirable, and the exchange of knowledge during the courses could be an important illustrative material for the training modules we plan. Training on diversity and interculturality could be very useful, so that gender-specific sequences can be inserted. Finally, the idea that brings everyone together is that migrant women should be able to participate in the construction of these new programmes, they should be co-authors. Concepts and programmes should not be invented without them. They should be modelled by their needs. The important roles and tasks of peer multipliers and the limitations of their activity should be clarified at the beginning of CEFs trainings (Community Education Facilitators trainings).

Intersection

While in Austria many interviewees work explicitly in the field of intersection, in the other countries intersection is only implicit a topic. In Austria and France the understanding of intersection differs between the interviewed persons: Most of the interviewed persons understood intersectionality can cause discrimination and coincide. Some of the interviewees see that the migration status doubles all of the mentioned criteria of discrimination such as being a woman, being disabled, being old, having a different sexual orientation, others see it the other way around, being a woman doubles all other possible discrimination criteria. In France trainers and people working practical think that intersectionality is very important and have many questions on it. Politicians and stakeholders have no real idea about what intersectionality means and how it could be integrated well in adult education.

In Portugal exists a big awareness of the importance of cultural and gender intersectionality in adult education processes, especially the black women organizations see the importance of the connection between race and gender inequality. The approach of intersectionality is very important when you work with migrant women. Nevertheless the conditions for the intersectionality of gender and cultural diversity in Portugal are still not very internalized in the training plans. Bulgaria has a similar phenomenon to Portugal: Most of the interviewees, proved to understand well the term "intersectionality" as an approach. Although not defined specifically as an intersection between gender and diversity, most of the interviewed people understand the connection and could give variety of examples on how they see and apply it in their everyday work.

The interviews showed that the topic of inclusion of intersection between gender and diversity as presented in our project seems to be innovative and there is expressed interest to specific training materials for trainers/educators and facilitators/mediators, working with female and male migrants, refugees and minorities.

Compared to all partner countries our empirical research showed that Austria has most of experience with Community Education approaches. In Bulgaria community centres exist, in all other partner countries there are only isolated initiatives.

The Community Education approach should aim at all mentioned levels. The focus of the project should be the empowerment of the target group and the dismantling of institutional barriers. In the sense of an integrative approach, the Community Education approach wants to open existing structures, facilities and resources for different target groups and to make it better usable.

Recommendations

In the following, we present the most important recommendations for training of Community Education Facilitators and professionals, who are working with female migrants and minorities in the four countries.

Individual level
The target group achievement is to meet the needs of women with a migrant or minority background: in the language, in the choice of information media and, moreover, the benefits of the training for women should become clear.

It is important to create a safe space for these groups, especially women. This safe space is a place where they can express themselves without constraints. More of those women, particularly Roma women are very isolated in their communities and has to deal with the domestic and family care work, so they need a place that is not far from their community, where they can bring their children. The adult education institution should offer childcare.

A personalized welcome could be a good way to break the mental barriers between women with migration or minority background and their interlocutors. Moreover, the language barrier is also a major obstacle. Foreigner languages courses are essential to overcome it. These courses must be

adapted to the needs of the respective women. Creating a social bond could overcome certain barriers that this public imposes on itself.

Migrants have very different starting positions in their language skills, literacy, education and work experience. Adult education must also respond to these different starting situations. The study was able to show a lack of higher qualifying training for female migrants for instance language training in special fields of work. There is also a real work to be done in terms of career guidance. Migrant women are also victims of the representation of immigrant women, who are considered to be low-skilled, and regardless of their level of education or professional experience, their know-how and training are rarely recognized. Female migrants are often employed under the qualification and need support to change their position of employment.

Mixing them and allowing them access to more qualified training rather than distributing them in other training courses dedicated to them could prove to be stigmatizing in the end.

Institutional level
The concept of co-training is one concrete examples of adaptation of adult education. At the same time, it is imperative that administrative procedures be refined to address these new challenges (to avoid breaking the motivation of potential participants by causing new cultural shocks).

One other important adaption of the adult education would be an intercultural opening. Intercultural opening of adult education means that migrant and minority women work at all levels of the institution. At the same time, all levels of the institution – aims, reaching the target group, didactics, training, monitoring and evaluation – must be reflected and changed according to intercultural criteria. That would bring huge improvements for migrants and minorities. If this intercultural opening also includes gender aspects, the measures would be even more suitable for the target group.

Vulnerable groups should be housed in separate structures. At the same time, asylum procedures need to be improved and more female staff recruited to conduct interviews and act as interpreters. Staff working around them should be trained on gender equality, interculturality, intersection and Human Rights. It would also be necessary to train officers and social workers, on the front line at the Welcome point for these women. Create benevolent spaces to welcome them, so as not to immediately confront them with a stigmatizing world, especially for women is this important.

Investing in childcare is essential that women are able to take part in adult education.

Cooperation between institutions, not only educational but related to health, borders, asylum, finances is important to reach the target group of female migrants and Roma women. The creation of social networks between people who do not work in the same field is crucial.

Fundamental are also trainings for trainers and other professionals, working with migrants, minorities and refugees in public institutions in gender and cultural diversity perspectives.

Community Education approaches should be encouraged. In addition to enabling structures like financial resources and qualified personal, it needs support in the activation phase, especially if the target groups are educationally disadvantaged people. The self-organization of this target group without kick-off usually does not take place. Beyond this enabling structure and activation, however, the Community Education approach must allow the communities to articulate needs and to develop goals. Learning takes place quite differently. Learning takes up where people have problems and interests.

Social and political level
The situation of migrant women and female members of minorities is poorly known both to our governmental institutions and education institutions. Yet women play a very important part in this observable phenomenon. Then, it is unanimously noted that this subject should be brought to light,

in particular through seminars or other means of sensitization (media), and provide occasion to decode more and more issues linked to this.

Intercultural opening, Gender Mainstreaming and Community Education should be further promoted in adult education by training staff, developing and implementing concepts. Special attention should be paid on the place to integrate educationally disadvantaged female migrants and minorities into adult education. Governments should make sufficient and long-term financial resources available in their own programs. These measures should be evaluated on an on-going basis and improved on the basis of the results. EQUAL SPACE will make a huge contribution to this strategy.

On the base of the study results we developed a curriculum for Community Education Facilitators in the field of intersection of gender and cultural diversity. You will find an article about it soon on Epale.

Toolkits for face to face and online trainings for Community Education Facilitators are in the making and will be implemented in the next months.

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