TACKLING SOCIAL EXCLUSION THROUGH CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

This infoleaflet aims to introduce the concept of social exclusion and to present examples of creative projects tackling social exclusion in the context of anti-racist activity.

Social exclusion and Racism and discrimination social exclusion. People can become both victims. The first victims of racist groups that do not enjoy the majority of us or cultural minorities, the history of persecution of Sinti and Roma or of the Jews during the period of Nazism shows clearly the way from social exclusion to racially motivated genocide.

Violence, discrimination and racism have frequently as reasons: social insecurity, a high rate of unemployment, a lack of perspectives, the feeling of powerlessness, social isolation, "coldness" of society, and many more subjective impressions or objective facts. A society that is split in many small, mutually fighting groups, is easy to govern and control. If employed people quarrel with unemployed people about a decreasing number of jobs, they will not find the time to think about the cause of it and to fight against exploitation and the worsening of social conditions.

If you want to fight and abolish racism and discrimination you need to point out its causes and offer people secure perspectives for their future. There will be no societal peace without social justice, equal opportunities and fairness in distribution and participation.

The climate of social peace within our society can only be secured if there is support for justice and equal treatment as well as prevention of racism, exclusion and discrimination. In order to reach that we need to become aware of our responsibility for people who are socially disadvantaged. It includes political, legal and social equality for immigrants. The fight against racism and discrimination is also a fight for better living conditions for everybody and for more democracy.

Social exclusion in Europe Some European countries are relatively prosperous, and the strength of their economies generates considerable wealth and creates jobs. Both are essential for sustaining high standards of living and quality of life. Moreover, the member states of the European Union have developed comprehensive mechanisms to ensure a degree of redistribution of the prosperity resulting from the competitive economy, in particular through their social protection systems. However, a significant number of Europeans still live in poverty and are subject to social exclusion because of structural barriers. Social exclusion can be a breeding ground for right-wing extremism.

Examples of good practice in Eastern Germany and Czechia
WHAT DOES SOCIAL EXCLUSION MEAN?

Social exclusion can be defined in two different ways. In the first way it is used as a synonym for income poverty and refers specifically to people who are not attached to the paid labour market (exclusion from paid workforce) or to those in low-wage jobs.

A broader definition refers to much more than material poverty. The final reports on the European Union Poverty Programmes systematically articulated social exclusion in this complex way. These reports identified that exclusion was multidimensional, that it involved a lack of resources and/or denial of social rights and that exclusion was a dynamic process. The processes of exclusion result in multiple deprivations, the breaking of family ties and social relationships, and loss of identity and purpose. Therefore social exclusion has important cultural and psychological aspects.

It is in this broad sense the concept of social exclusion can be useful for developing a different and more complex understanding of the factors that lead to well-being and relative advantage on the one hand, and disparities, inequalities and relative disadvantage between members of a community on the other hand.

The concept of social exclusion is distinct in comparison to previously used concepts, such as poverty and marginalisation, by its strong emphasis on process rather than condition. These processes are of both individual and societal nature. Thus, privations of specific social or economic conditions does not necessarily mean that an individual or group of individuals are excluded. However, it means that they become more vulnerable to social exclusion.

Although often taken together, poverty and social exclusion show substantial differences, both on the conceptual as well as on the empirical level. The main distinction concerns the basic assumption underlying each approach: whereas poverty concentrates on the just distribution of material resources, social exclusion asks for ensured social participation and integration.

WHAT LEADS TO SOCIAL EXCLUSION?

Social exclusion is caused by key risk factors such as:

- Long-term unemployment (the most obvious immediate, statistically valid factor of exclusion)
- Insecure, low paid, low quality employment
- Low level of education, illiteracy and e-illiteracy
- Growing up in a vulnerable family (e.g. single parent, large family, domestic violence)
- Disability, poor health
- Living in an area of multiple deprivation (crime, drugs, anti-social behaviour)
- Homelessness and precarious housing conditions
- Racism and discrimination based on ethnicity
- Stigmatising institutionalisation (prisons, institutional care, psychiatric institutions)

These factors can be reduced to three dimensions:

- **Social network**: constituted by the people you can rely on, such as family, close friends, neighbours, colleagues, etc.
- **Social status**: has to do with prestige (the way society sees you)
- **Work**: having a paid job, as well as the income you receive through this work

The most privileged are those who have a well paid job, a good social network and a high social status, for example a manager. On the extreme opposite there are the people who are unemployed, do not have a good social network or a high social status, such as the homeless. In between we find the fragile groups such as immigrants who are employed, have a family and friends, but have no social status because they belong to a disadvantaged ethnic minority. We must also remember that the three dimensions interact; they influence each other.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The following project descriptions are examples of creative projects that work against social exclusion in Germany and the Czech Republic. Of course no single project can change the whole of society. But they help to strengthen people personally, widen their horizons and choices in life and therefore help to (re)discover their resources. Participants get the chance to find out that it is worth to take personal responsibility and therefore participate more directly in civil society.

**Example 1  Empowerment of marginalised kids in Czechia:**

“Even two years ago, I was an ‘ace’ - no rules made by adults applied to me. I lead a small gang of teenagers from the neighbourhood. We were smoking grass, writing graffiti against Gypsies and sometimes we beat up somebody whom we did not like. I got into problems with the police and was put into a special institution. Once, some guy from Duha took several of us to Prague, for the Huckleberry Finn’s Weekend. This was something I had never known before. Such things were much better and with much more fun. I want to help organize something in our “trap” for the others. What I was doing before was just a boring waste of time.”

Jaroslav B., 16 years, DVU Orlova

Duha (Rainbow - Children's and Youth Association for Leisure-time, Nature and Fun) is a nation-wide Czech NGO with more than 5,000 members in more than 100 local groups. Some of them run projects of highest importance. The group “Psholavci” (“Dogheads”) from the city of Karvina at the Czech-Polish border has been working with youngsters from many foster homes and upbringing institutions in the country. In the circumstances of Czechia, the majority of this part of young population are Roma kids.

The objectives of the long-term activities are:

- Awareness-raising for children in orphanages about human rights, especially children’s rights
- Motivation to live without violence with the help of positive examples

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1 Europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/archive 12/01/02 document L10
• Education for tolerance and integrative lifestyle, against racism and right-wing extremism
• Empowerment of children from minorities (Roma)
• Information flow among orphanages

After several years, these activities developed in a whole rainbow-like spectrum with many partners.

Huckleberry Finn’s Weekends:
Three to five hundred kids from different foster homes are taken to Prague where they are actively involved in many activities like adventure sightseeing, competitions, creative arts. They have never got a chance to see the capital city before. The completely new environment takes them out of their daily lives and gives them a strong impulse to change their behaviour.

Magazine “Zamecek” (“Castle”):
It is a monthly magazine which is distributed for free to all foster homes and upbringings institutions through the country. Its quality can compete with commercial products and there is a whole network of children, correspondents and editors, who create substantial parts of the magazine themselves.

It creates a feeling of ownership and solidarity even among the "bad" kids. To motivate them for improvement, there are long-term competitions announced and co-ordinated by the magazine. The correspondents and editors participate in regular training courses and a summer camp to develop their skills. Since 1997, 40 issues with 2000 copies each were published. There are also supplements: Pexeso (memory game), school timetable, CD with songs by talented orphanage children and others.

Ales Valenta’s Saltos:
This is one of the long-term competitions. Ales Valenta is a winner of the Winter Olympic Games in Acrobatic Jumping. He has become very popular in the small country as an idol of the youth. He agreed to become the patron of the competition. His winning jump is composed of five complicated saltos. Every month, a task is published in "Zamecek" in order to improve some abilities (psychological or intellectual) which the kids need for the "salto", including courage or respect for the others. The kids report back to the magazine the progress they have made. The best ones get an invitation to the Huckleberry Finn’s Weekend or to join the editorial board of the magazine.

Participation:
Duha association has been running the national network of children's and youth parliaments with the National Children’s and Youth Parliament. This is a participatory tool through which youngsters learn how to change their environment in a democratic way without violence. The Roma kids would hardly get a chance to speak in the premises of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, should they undergo elections among the Czech majority in municipalities. Therefore a special branch of the elections is being organized in the foster homes where the kids elected their representatives to the NCYP. Their interventions in the parliament are then reported in Zamecek and on the website. It gives empowerment not only to themselves but to all kids in the homes, especially the Roma.

Website www.chiki.cz: "Chiki" is the website of the whole project network. It is also made by youngsters themselves.

Contact for more information:

Example 2  Tach Theatre Chemnitz - Theatre project for and with disadvantaged women & men

Background:
Being unemployed makes sick, it excludes, stigmatizes, discourages. Many of the unemployed lost self-confidence as they lost their hope for a waged job. They may feel disadvantaged in many ways: as employees, as people living in the eastern part of Germany, as women. Because of a courageous decision of the unemployment exchange office of Chemnitz, Alma - Institute for Social and Cultural Education Chemnitz had been able to set up this extraordinary project: a small, experimental theatre, where unemployed people act in their own story. This is unique in Germany and elsewhere.

Tach theatre Chemnitz is a project in Saxony in the eastern part of Germany. It has been existing in this form since 1997. The three animators of the project are Birgit Zweigler (leader of the project), Steffi Schulz (author) and Ulrike Schmidt (theatre educationalist, stage-manager). With the help of an innovative combination of artistically accompanied biographical work, holistic education and individual and group learning, they search for new paths for the participants.

Target groups and targets:
Unemployed women and man gather together for one year in order to play theatre. It happens on the basis of a so-called job creation scheme. One result of their work will be a theatre play, which is based on the biographies of the participants. This theatre play offers incredible experiences for themselves and the audience. It is an example for an unusual, innovative, re-integrating way of change. It’s a reflection of both the world and the personal life.

In the spotlight are human beings that have been unemployed for several years. Ordinary people, apparently without special talents, someone might call them losers of society. They owe nothing except certain courage to say “yes” to an experience with themselves and to let themselves in - for others, for something different, for themselves, for an audience. They have decided to stand on a stage – in the front line.

Methods:
Inspired by Augusto Boal's idea of "the theatre of the oppressed", work at tach theatre is based on three basic constituents:

• A - Artistically accompanied work on one’s own biography
• B - Theatre work
• C - Education and learning

A artistically accompanied work on biographies:
The theatre plays will be the result of interviews and biographical texts of the participants. Working on one’s own biography starts with a confidential interview. The questions focus on the participants’ view of their past, their present and possible future. Behind their perceptions there appear their views of society and its structures and their view on the extent of dependence or freedom.
The individual participant is responsible for his/her own limits on what he/she is willing to talk about and at which speed. It is interesting to find out about subjective perspectives of the participant who expresses his/her personal truth. The subjective view on the past and present can change. This allows a belief in a different future, too. The texts are written down and deepened. The participant who offered the story needs to give his/her approval to the story in order to use it in the play.

B Theatre work

Theatre work gives the participants the experience of being able to give a reasonable performance even in stressful situations. The participants’ experience occurs on a cognitive and emotional level. Acting in a theatre play is active action to change situations, ask questions and search for answers.

The participants can compare their ideas with reality by working on observations, recollections, verbal and nonverbal communication, self-perception and perception of others, certain situations, conflicts and possible solutions. This will help them to improve their competence in action and communication.

Acting in front of the group and of an audience strengthens self-confidence, self-esteem and the belief in free actions and possibilities. There is a focus on social contexts and forces as well as on the individuals and on the audience. This allows to recognize certain structures and to try out processes of change in a clearly defined and protected area.

The main act: The parts are subject to change. The actors need to verify their relation to their part, their character and its original person, as well as their relation to the other parts, the play as a whole, its structures and its audience. The experience of self-effectiveness and the work on authentic material within the play, liberates the participants from perceived determined structures and powerlessness, allowing the transformation to self-sufficient, responsible, and critical acting subjects. Tach theatre wants to find solutions in contradictions and to show ways to liberation.

C Education and learning, group dynamics and processes

The centre of work at tach theatre is the group. The whole process during the year is understood as an individual learning process that is reflected in large parts by the group. The group is an image of society; it bundles up different philosophies of life and different types of personalities. In this context learning happens through living by conflicts. The target of social learning is to support the competence for self-organized learning. The improvement of team ability, independence, the ability for reflection, cooperation and delimitation contribute to more autonomy, social participation and personal change.

Additionally to the work in the group there is individual and political education. This ranges from argumentation of visions, actual topics, plans and models of society to profiling, developing on projects and analysis of learning styles. Education and learning and the intense reflection of group processes and group dynamics allow the participants to understand personal experiences, perceptions and changes in a social and political context. The offering of education and learning confronts the participants with visions, alternatives and models of solutions. This makes a change of previous attitudes and modes of thinking possible.

Resume

After one year, the participants will end their participation in Tach theatre. The labour market has not improved, but most of the participants experienced personal change. The euphoria of the premiere is over, but dignity is going to stay.

Contact for more information:

• Tach - Alma Institut für soziale & kulturelle Bildung e.V • Karl-Liebknecht-Str. 19
• D-09111 Chemnitz • phone 49-371-46199040 • fax 49-371-429829
• institut@alma-haus.de • www.alma-haus.de

CONCLUSION

Creative activities can help in the fight against racism and social exclusion. They alone cannot change the economic base of social exclusion but they contribute significantly to regaining self-confidence of their participants inspiring them to become active agents of positive change for themselves and for society. Please feel free to contact the organisations listed below to find out more about their projects in the field of social exclusion and to exchange experiences and ideas.

• DUHA - Rainbow Association • Senovázné nám. 24 • CZ-147 00 Praha 1
• phone 420-234621374 • fax 234621375
duha@duha.cz • www.duha.cz

• Kulturbüro Sachsen - Mobiles Beratungsteam • Bautzner Strasse 45 • D-01099, Dresden
• phone 49-351-2721490 • fax 56340898
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