POST-REVIEW REPORT

CoNet meeting in Malmö, 25-26 June 2009

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At the CoNet meeting in Malmö, 25-26 June 2009, peer reviews were made of two projects, the Green House and the Young in Research. The use of the peer review method is described in the *Thematic report*, published in tandem with this report. In accordance with the peer review method, the two projects had been described in pre-review reports which were sent to the participants, 2.5 weeks prior to the meeting. By reading these reports, the participants had the opportunity to get acquainted with the projects and thus prepared for the site visits. Also, the reports included a number of questions which the authors wanted the visiting peer reviewers to answer. This post-review report is based on the answers presented at the end of the CoNet meeting. It constitutes the final building bloc of the peer review at the CoNet meeting in Malmö.

The Green House

In their assessment of the Green House project, the Peer Review Team (PRT) highlighted a chain of elements consisting of trust, responsibility, empowerment and increased expectations; the one element leading to the other. However, trust was regarded as the foundation, not only the trust the establishment gave to the young people but also the trust the young people seemed to have in the representatives of the establishment. Trust on both sides was described as the heart of the success. With trust comes responsibility:

> When you are trusted to do and develop things on your own you also then have to take the responsibility. And the young people seem to have taken that onboard, they seem to have taken responsibility not just for the Green House project but for the area where they live and for what happens in that area.

The PRT made a distinction between empowering the project and the individuals. The impression was that both have been empowered, not just the project but also the individuals to move in the future. It was referred to as efficacy; believing you can create your own future, believing that you have the power to do that. The Green House has made people become more efficacious, believing that they could make a difference, instead of saying that they can't.

As a next link in the chain, making people become more efficacious has increased their expectations as well. And that process of increased expectations has to be handled also in the forthcoming steps of the projects, the PRT underlined and that's certainly an important point for the project leadership to bear in mind. As I understand it, it's about recognizing the logic of this process set in motion and that it doesn't stop within the walls of the Green House:

> *You've expanded their minds, their expectations, they're more efficacious and maybe now the next step is looking outwards. So there is a way of expanding the expectations and the knowledge of the young people locally, and we thought that maybe you can develop some communities of interest, using the web, maybe other similar initiatives.*

The PRT perceived the Green House to be more of a boys club and that's not sufficient if you want it to truly engage the young people in the area. A question was raised which the project leadership ought to take into consideration: "What happened to the girls' expectations?"

In order to succeed with structural changes, the PRT urged on the Green House to become more visible. Interestingly, the PRT expressed an admiration for the way of working, describing it as gentle "certainly a lot quiet than what we are all used to in our countries. You know we'll stand up and beat them into submission. If it was a in our country, the first thing it will have is this huge big sign, "This is the Green House", you know in flashing lights and everything, and that seemed to be the last thing that you thought of."

This point will need to be discussed locally, because I don't think people look upon themselves wittingly as particularly gentle, although they perhaps are. Perhaps the PRT has spotted a cultural characteristic here, important to reflect upon. Is it Swedishness? Or what is it part of? Why does it exist? To what extent does it explain the success? Should it be highlighted as a success factor, important for others to take onboard? Or are we perhaps too gentle? Do we need more of that "beat them into submission"-attitude?

Another good point made by the PRT was the perception of networking being linked to education and empowerment. Networking was perceived as being used to educate and empower. This is most certainly deliberately done by Bertil but it's definitely not formalised in a way which encourages and directs others to do it as well.

> *At the moment, the young people at the centre seem to be having a manageable network, guided by you. They were taken along to meetings and I'm sure that when Bertil is going to a meeting he thinks: "Who shall I take along to this meeting?" I don't think it's an accidental thing, it's an education process. It is part of the education, the empowerment of the young people. One of them said: "And they listen to me, at the meetings, and all of that". Again it's that gentle way. We'd put on a week long course: "Now you're efficacious!" We did envy a lot of what was going on. It was a good way.*

The PRT was concerned about the lack of measurements. They rightly pointed to the need of measuring the impact. You have to speak in the language that the establishment understands and one thing that they do understand is the question of impact. What is the impact? That's a questions that you will get with every project. But when the PRT asked the project participants about it and how it's measured, they felt that there was some uncertainty; "you knew that you have to do it but that seemed to be the next job that you have".

The author of the report on the Green House had a particular question concerning intercultural competence. He claimed in his report that "the Green house is built upon a competence not being properly recognized in school, but crucial for the young people themselves." But is this really an asset? Could it be useful for others? How could it be recognized and valued? Could other institutions learn from this?

The PRT recognized the significance of this issue and definitely regarded intercultural competence as an asset "for engagement of the whole community". A distinction was made between multicultural and intercultural competence. Multicultural awareness can be taught but "we were less sure about whether you can teach intercultural competence. We felt that you've developed it from living in an intercultural environment." As they also said, "you got to live it". And it's useful "in every walk in line". In order

to get recognition for it you have to link it to the establishment and the cultural changes. The most important thing is to open up opportunities for these young people within the establishment:

If having people with that intercultural competence actually working in the establishment, if you get that when you're recruiting then part of the recruitment process have to be that competence but if it is not the people with that competence working in that environment then you'll get lip service, you know people will pay scant attention to it. We talked about when to get it certificated and all the rest, but it was not really about that. How to make that significant change to value it then people making the decisions have to have that competence. So with opening up opportunities for these young people also within the establishment that will change the attitude. We also thought you still have to influence people; you still have to persuade the establishment that this is a valuable competence. And we thought that you could do that, through seminars, through conferences, so at least locally you will get the conversation going, but ultimately we feel it is getting those young people in it.

One of the critical issues raised was how to keep the competence within the project when the young people have gone further to perhaps educations or other jobs. The PRT regarded the Green House, with all its content, as an investment which has taken a lot of time to build up and shouldn't be lost. For that reason, the PRT suggested that the project ought to keep in touch with the young people, wherever they go, perhaps by developing something like an alumni. It's important that they come back and mentor the new young people.

The PRT wondered if it would be possible to recreate the Green House. Why did it happen and how? If we don't find the answers to such questions, the Green House will remain an isolated case. Hence, a critical issue concerns the explanations of the project. It has to be analysed and explained why and how it happened, "because it doesn't happen in other cities".

Young in Research

I will begin by quoting the summary given at the end of the presentation as it provides a good overview of the assessment made by this PRT:

We were very sure that the whole thing contributes to personal empowerment, we are also very sure that it contributes to strengthening of social relations and social cohesion in that sense. We were not so sure, because we just don't know enough, of whether or not it really contributes long term to structural change of institutions. And: Yes we do think that it brings another view to knowledge and how to acquire knowledge.

The PRT was struck by the trust and the confidence on both sides. That confidence brought a lot of motivation to the whole project. The PRT "were very much impressed by the openness that the young people hade towards the project and towards us as visitors". As the young people seemed to have accepted it as their project, the PRT found them to be really involved and participating.

An interesting point was the one about the attitude of the young people towards their environment. The PRT "were also impressed that all nine of them when they presented their special places to us, had a very positive attitude towards their environment and surrounding". The young people showed a pride and confidence. They felt that they had a mission for this neighbourhood. They were also "very much focused on solutions so there was not a lot of complaining".

The PRT sensed the group dynamic as very positive. It was difficult to understand that these nine youngsters did not know each other before. For example, they were not from one class or from one sports club. They were hand picked for this project and didn't know one another before that. But maybe this is one of the secrets behind the success of the project as it's not burdened by previous group dynamics. Nevertheless, the PRT were quite positively impressed of the ability of the project, within a week and a half, to create out of nine individuals a real group and to foster social cohesion.

The PRT regarded the project as "very ambitious, but it would be even more ambitious if you would involve even more youngsters, because these nine youngsters that are in the project right now are all hand picked and we had the impression that they were sort of an elite of the youngsters in this

neighbourhood. They are all very ambitious and very interested and they are definitely not the youngsters that throw stones at fire brigades or vandalise schools." The perception of the youngsters as "sort of an elite" is very interesting because they were not selected as such on the basis of formal educational attainment levels. Indeed, they were selected, but with regard to their ambitions and social competence; i.e. qualities which the grading system normally doesn't cover. As I see it, the point made by the PRT in the quotation above confirms that the Young in Research project managed to highlight the existence of such qualities and make use of them. That ought to provoke reflections on what the grading system really covers and, in particular, what it leaves out.

Young in Research is thought to combine empowerment of the young people with academic research. The need of the field work carried out in the project stems from a research project currently going on. For this reason, the author of the pre-review report had asked a question on the significance of the method. Yes, the PRT replied, it's a significant method for academic research, "but you have to be aware of that it is good as a qualitative research tool because you get from 9 people an insight into their district and its probably not a good quantitative research tool because you can not say that they represent all youngsters in Fosie."

Intercultural competence was an important issue in both the reviews. The PRT reviewing Young in Research arrived at a similar conclusion as the review of the Green House. Intercultural competence couldn't be regarded as something that you learn in school. It can't be taught but has to be experienced. The PRT was pretty sure that the nine young people involved in Young in Research all have an intercultural competence. "Just the way you talked to us yesterday, I mean, just the way we interacted shows that."

As a critical issue, the PRT had the suggestion to focus more on the future. What are the next steps? What happens after these four weeks?

> *What we would suggest is that you will present what you will have after the four weeks, in sort of a public meeting. Maybe you could make use of one of your dialogue Fosie T-shirts to give those youngsters a chance to present what they've done during the four weeks. Because we thought that is also important to spread it a bit more. Not to keep it within the group, or just in one discussion with the district Mayor, but to spread it more and make it more public, more open. We also thought that it is important to involve maybe the parents to this public event. To make it more intergenerational, to inform even people of other generations, your parents generations, your grandparents' generations about this project. Could this draw even more actors together? Yeah, you have to publicise what you do. Maybe you could also involve other youth organisations. It would be very good to give a feed back also to your schools that you are going to go to after this summer, so to make use of the in your school life. Give feed back to the landlord, this big housing association that own most of the neighbourhood, and to involve other institutions as well.*

Also, the PRT recommended some kind of a follow-up maybe after half-a year or after one year. It's important that to meet again and see how everybody's doing, "to be sure that your thing is not over after these four weeks". As I see it, all these suggestions on how to strengthen the focus on the future will be very useful and valuable to integrate in the further development of the concept.