INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS

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This report presents the result of the workshop held at Drömmarnas Hus (House of Dreams) in Malmö, the 6:th of November 2008. The workshop dealt with the issue of intercultural competence among young people in urban neighbourhoods characterised by social exclusion. It has been financed by the EU-project Social Polis[1] within the Seventh Framework Programme.

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[1] http://www.socialpolis.eu/

The workshop topic and the justification of it

Young people in urban neighbourhoods characterised by social exclusion are usually regarded as problems and focused upon from a problem-oriented perspective. Indeed, such neighbourhoods contain many problems, but there are potentials as well and it's vital to build on the potentials in the efforts to solve the problems.

One such potential is a special competence that many young people in multicultural neighbourhoods develop. It could be called intercultural competence as it is about an ability to cross the cultural boundaries, break the cultural codes etc. Young people in multicultural neighbourhoods have to develop such a competence, simply in order to become and stay friends with each other, but also to cross the boundary between the social inclusion and social exclusion of society. Indeed, young people at school have to pass that boundary at least twice a day, in the morning when they go to school and in the afternoon when they go back home.

There is an urgent need in society for an intercultural competence, but the fact that many young people have it is almost not recognized at all. Perhaps, society could have something to learn from the young people in multicultural neighbourhoods. If so, that could perhaps contribute to changing the image of the multicultural neighbourhoods and also make the young people feel empowered. Thus, there is an urgent need to know more about this intercultural competence. Bearing in mind that other projects have dealt with this issue in recent years, this focus on young people in urban neighbourhoods and what they could offer will be quite unique.

It's not difficult to justify this issue with regard to the two main themes of Social Polis; social cohesion and cities. The situation for young people in the socially excluded and multicultural neighbourhoods has become one of the core issues and also indicators of social cohesion in society. The riots in France and other similar examples of unrest among young people indicate very explicitly the lack of social cohesion. Furthermore, besides that this unrest happens in the cities, it's in the cities that the intercultural competence emerges. It could hardly emerge somewhere else as it depends on the amassing of young people with different cultural backgrounds. Regarding the division within Social Polis in 12 Existential Fields, the issue of intercultural competence among young people relates to most of them.

Organisers

The workshop has had three organisers. The first one and main applicant of the proposal has been Drömmarnas Hus (the House of Dreams)[2], a well-known NGO which started as a theatre in the early 1990s. The organisation works with culture in many various forms, using culture as a way to unite people. Drömmarnas Hus has run a diversity of different projects, including

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[2] http://www.drommarnashus.se/

for example art exhibitions by children, rap championships, work with socially excluded young people and training programs. At the workshop and in the preparation of it, Drömmarnas Hus has been represented by Jessica Hultzén[3]. She is responsible for the work with young people at the age between 16 and 25.

The second organiser has been Maria Lindbom[4], research coordinator at Region Skåne[5], but also representing the network South Sweden which Region Skåne is a member of. South Sweden coordinates and promotes the joint interests of six regions with a total of 2.3 million inhabitants. Representing South Sweden, Maria Lindbom was deeply involved in the work 2005-06 to include the concept of Social Platform in FP7.

The third organiser has been the undersigned.[6] I'm a Dr in Sociology, employed at the Department of Urban Studies at the Malmö University[7] where I spend most of the time on research. Ever since the mid 1980s, I've been involved in different research projects on Malmö and I still am, also several of them including comparisons with cities in other European countries. Since 2004, I've been a thematic expert in URBACT[8] and currently, I'm also involved in the EU project Connections[9].

The three of us hadn't worked together before. Maria and I both got involved in Social Polis independently of each other. We met before the launching workshop of Social Polis in May 2008 and decided to apply jointly for a workshop grant. I suggested the idea about intercultural competence as a topic, which we agreed about. It felt obvious to ask Drömmarnas Hus to join us due to all their work with young people in areas marked by social exclusion. After the approval of the proposal at the end of July, the three of us had five meetings in order to plan and prepare the workshop.

Workshop participants

The original idea was to invite 50 participants to the workshop, 40 of them divided into four groups. Two of the groups were supposed to consist of local participants from Malmö, while the participants of two other groups were to be recruited from cities outside the Scania region. The remaining 10 were supposed to consist of representatives for national authorities and agencies, taking part as national observers.

According to the original idea, the four groups with local representatives were supposed to contain representatives from the same categories. We wanted each one of the four groups to consist of 2 young people, 1

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[9] http://www.connectionsprogress.eu/home

politician, 1 from a housing company, 1 social worker, 2 from NGOs, 1 from a private company, 1 teacher and 1 policeman; amounting to 10 in total.

However, it turned out to be difficult to attract participants outside Malmö. We really tried to set up at least one group with participants from cities outside the Scania region, sending out the invitation widely through various networks and contacting a wide range of persons, but didn't succeed. Instead, we filled the vacancies up with participants from Malmö.

The workshop got 37 participants, besides the three of us that organised it. 19 were women and 18 men. 27 were locals from Malmö and 10 from other parts of Sweden, whereof three represented national agencies; the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (Ungdomsstyrelsen)[10], the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sveriges kommuner och landsting)[11] and the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (Forskningsrådet för arbetsliv och socialvetenskap)[12].

Not everybody had the opportunity to stay the whole day. At the end of the day, 26 persons took part in the evaluation, 15 of the women and 11 men. The average age of these 26 persons were 36. 24 of these 26 persons stated their age in the evaluation, the youngest 18 years old and the oldest 60. Among these 24 persons, seven were below the age of 30, 11 between 30 and 50, and the remaining 6 were 50+. Thus, it could be concluded that all the age groups between 18 and 60 were quite well represented.

In the morning, the participants were divided into three groups, instead of four as initially suggested in the application. In one of the groups almost all the participants work and/or live in one and the same area, the Fosie area in Malmö. The other two groups had a more mixed composition, also consisting of participants from outside Malmö. Thus, it was not possible to fully stick to the original idea of setting up groups with participants that had the same restricted geographical belonging. However, the overwhelming majority belonged to Malmö and that of course served as a common denominator. Practically all the participants knew, by their own experience, what areas and young people we were talking about.

Moreover, neither was the original idea about groups with similar compositions, referred to above, possible to realise completely. The groups didn't have the same compositions, nor did their compositions comply completely with the original plan. However, as the accounts show above, we did get a variety of participants in each group and that was of course the main intention.

At the end of the day, we did a small evaluation. As participation is crucial to the concept of social platform, we asked the participants to what extent they felt that they had taken part. To what extent had they got the opportunity to say what they found was important and been listened to? 20

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[10] http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se
[11] http://www.skl.se
[12] http://www.fas.forskning.se/

of the 26 that took part in the evaluation marked the highest score; i.e. five on a scale from one to five. The remaining six marked four, which meant an average of 4.8. The other question we asked concerned how pleased they were with the day. 16 of the 26 marked five, four was marked by 8 and three by 2, accounting to an average of 4,6 on the scale from one to five.

What is intercultural competence?

At the workshop we used OPERA (Innotiimi®OPERA), a method developed by Innotiimi[13]. We were authorized to use it by Innotiimi as Drömmarnas Hus has used it several times before. OPERA starts out from a focused question, carefully formulated, and arrive at a limited number of answers which everybody in the group have contributed to and which has been processed jointly by the group.

Two OPERA session were held, the one in the morning focussing on the issue of intercultural competence and the other in the afternoon focussing on the relation of this issue to the Social Polis research agenda. The sessions started by letting each one reflect individually for some minutes on the question. Secondly, the around ten participants in each group were paired and each pair presented their previous reflections for each other, discussed them and reached an agreement. Thirdly, each pair presented for the others in the group what they have agreed about. Fourthly, each group discussed the presentations and reached an agreement about how to prioritize. Fifthly, each group prepared a presentation of what they had agreed about.

So what was presented? First of all, I want to remind about the specific focus. The workshop wasn't supposed to deal with intercultural competence in general, but the intercultural competence of young people, however not young people in general. More specifically, it concerned the young people in urban neighbourhoods characterised by social exclusion. That was underlined in the invitation and also by me in my introduction.

However, that focus tended to be hard to keep. Two of the three group presentations didn't make any clear references to the kind of intercultural competence possessed by young people. The first group presented intercultural competence in general terms as sensitiveness, being democratic, openness, courage and a willingness to meet. The second group referred explicitly to intercultural competence in general and regarded the restricted focus on young people as an erroneous point of departure.

Only the third group kept the focus. Interestingly, the presentation was made by two young people from the Fosie area and they had quite a lot to say. First of all, intercultural competence includes respect. You need to respect each other and treat each other as equal. Secondly, intercultural competence includes an ability to adapt. You have to be able to adapt and "not ask for pork in an Arabic shop". Thirdly, intercultural competence includes an

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[13] http://www.innotiimi.com/site/?lan=3

ability to build bridges between old antagonisms. Perhaps, the parents can't stand people from another ethnic group for historical reasons. "In our life here in Sweden it doesn't matter. We have to get on with each other."

Fourthly, intercultural competence includes an ability to move between different cultures and situations. Fifthly, intercultural competence includes knowledge about the different worlds and an ability to cross the social and the cultural barriers between the worlds. These barriers are floating and invisible. You have to be able to conceive of the barriers and where they are drawn. For that reason you need knowledge.

And as stated clearly in this third presentation, this intercultural competence is what many young people have: "Our parents turned to the same ethnic group. I know for example Arabic words and already there I break the pattern. And so I can meet another one and crack jokes with him in his own language and that's appreciated." "You live in the area where your dwelling is and follow its values. Our parents think of their homeland, but this is our homeland."

In the discussion that followed after the presentations several contributions were made which further developed the definition of intercultural competence among young people. As one of the participants said, it's not easy to have an intercultural competence: "These young people are also aware about their own and other people's preconditions. They are also aware about these self-chosen and attributed group belongings."

Research agenda

When our proposal got approved at the end of July 2008, we were asked to "devote a slot in your workshop to let participants react to the draft Social Polis focussed research agenda." This request was not part of the original call. It asked for "contributions to future research agendas", but in no more explicit terms than that. I can certainly understand the idea of letting workshop participants react to a draft research agenda. But we were not prepared for it and our original design of the workshop didn't allow for an easy insertion of such a slot.

When the Social Polis research agenda was presented at the end of August, it turned out to be two agendas instead of one. That made it even more difficult. Without being prepared for it, we were now asked to react not only to five themes and the coherence of them in one agenda, but to two such sets of themes and their respective coherence as well as a comparison between them. Again, I understand the very good idea of getting a feedback but it has been a difficult task to deal with.

Despite having worked a lot with the two agendas, trying to make sense of them not only for myself but also for my organizing colleges, I don't understand what makes them coherent. Why do the agendas consist of exactly these five themes? What makes the five themes an agenda? It would have been useful with an introductory explanation of each agenda, similar to

how the themes have been presented, but no such introduction has been provided and the cohesion hasn't come across by itself, at least not to me.

Instead, I tried to work with the ten themes but then found some of them to be overlapping. That led me to amalgamate and reorder the themes which resulted in an agenda similar to the one presented by Social Polis in the second call for workshops to be organized by stakeholders. In the call, Social Polis presents the themes of that agenda as shared by the two research agenda. I regard such a terminology as very confusing and impossible to justify in a co-operation with practitioners. If two agendas share five themes, why not regard these five themes as a synthesis of the other two, treat them as one single agenda and forget about the previous two?

Hence, I tried to use a synthesis of the two research agendas, while keeping the formulations, but even that turned out to be difficult. Some of the themes are formulated in a way which makes them difficult to understand. For example, what does "Redefining welfare in cities, sustainability and social justice" mean? What makes it a coherent theme? Or "Understanding urban behaviour, community initiatives and neighbourhood development"? To me, they look more like containers for the redundant, impossible to communicate clearly to practitioners.

Furthermore, I've found it confusing that some of the themes describe a certain subject of research while others concern how to deal with a subject of research. For example, the theme "Governing cities as a whole" is a subject to deal with, but "Understanding urban practices" describes the activity of dealing with a subject ("Understanding …"). In order to understand the agenda, you need to be able to switch between these two principles of description and not everybody is used to that.

Regarding the theme "Developing a plural economic approach to tackle the urban economic divide", I don't understand which one of the two principles it applies to. Who is the one that develops the plural economic approach? Is it the researcher? Hardly, as researchers won't be able to tackle the urban economic divide but may perhaps and hopefully lay the ground for it. Instead, does the formulation refer to the urban actors that in practice develop a plural economic approach to tackle the urban economic divide? Possibly, but then the focus narrows considerably as developing a plural economic approach to tackle the urban economic divide doesn't seem to be that common, at least not yet.

I'm not intending to be over-ambitiously meticulous, but in the process of translating the themes into Swedish, these difficulties have become obvious and aggravated my communication with the practitioners. The theme formulations seem to express a concern of not being too general. However, to make the themes more specific may also make them more difficult to understand, in particular for a wider audience. In my communication with the Swedish practitioners at the workshop, I chose to present short and general expressions of the themes, while making them more specific by

using subthemes, however also in brief. This was how the themes were presented at the workshop by the use of PowerPoint:

1. The world and the city: Global changes and urban cohesion, the international division of labour, international migration, urban strategies, global communities.

2. Economic development: The labour market, growth strategies and competitive strength, social economy, societal entrepreneurship, formal and informal economy.

3. Exclusion and inclusion: The scope and dimensions of exclusion, the structural causes of exclusion, image and reality, rhetoric and practice, the boundaries between exclusion and inclusion.

4. Neighbourhood development: Local participation, living conditions, grassroots initiatives, social innovations, area-based learning.

5. The politics of cohesion: Politics and diversity, the difference between rhetoric and practice, multidimensional injustices, governance, new ways of communication.

This presentation was held after lunch and then the participants were asked to choose the one of these five themes which they found the most interesting for continued discussions on the issue of intercultural competence. Which one of these five research themes is the most appropriate one for research on intercultural competence? "Neighbourhood development" was chosen by eleven participants, while only three chose "The politics of cohesion". The number of participants choosing each theme as well as the ranking of the themes with regards to number of participants is listed below in the table which also to the right include the result of the group work and which I will explain below. The five themes formed the basis for a new group setting and a new round of OPERA.

	Participants	Rank	Points	Rank	Diff
1 The world and the city	8	2	6	2	0
2 Economic development	5	4	4	3	-1
3 Exclusion and inclusion	6	3	4	3	0
4 Neighbourhood development	11	1	2	5	4
5 The politics of cohesion	3	5	9	1	-4

In the second round of OPERA, the participants were asked to start individually for some minutes by formulating a few research questions concerning intercultural competence but with regard to the theme chosen. Secondly, the participants in each group were paired and each pair presented their previous reflections for each other, discussed them and reached an agreement. Thirdly, each pair presented for the others in the group what they had agreed about. Fourthly, each group discussed the presentations and

reached an agreement about how to prioritize. Fifthly, each group prepared a presentation of what they had agreed about. Each group was asked to agree about three research questions:

1. The world and the city
   a. How does the school have to change in order to develop an intercultural competence?
   b. How could an intercultural competence contribute to strengthen urban cohesion in the global world?
   c. How could intercultural competence be used in town planning? Planners need to acquire an intercultural competence in order to develop areas which everybody can feel at home in.

2. Economic development
   a. Consciousness-raising of competence – empowerment. The first step has to be to raise consciousness about the possession of intercultural competence, i.e. something which could be an asset.
   b. Economic incentives for societal change by the use of intercultural competence
   c. How could intercultural competence be used to favour the export?

3. Exclusion and inclusion
   a. Is intercultural competence a key to break the boundaries between exclusion and inclusion as well as come to terms with the structural causes?
   b. Image and reality: What does intercultural competence really consist of?
   c. Methods – validation – implementation: How does an institution look like that enables and develops intercultural competence?

4. Neighbourhood development
   a. How do we break up segregation?
   b. How can the form for local participation be developed to encompass all the residents and local actors in the area?
   c. How can society become better on capturing people's ideas and potentials?

5. The politics of cohesion
   a. How can the composition of society be reflected in politics?
   b. How important is it that people who engage themselves politically possess an intercultural competence?
   c. Is intercultural competence a new mode of communication?

This is the multifaceted result from the workshop in Malmö. Not all the questions refer explicitly to intercultural competence. Not all are urban issues solely. But all of them have a bearing on the issue of cities and social

cohesion. And first of all, this is what the practitioners found important to deal with in future research and also agreed about in the groups.

As a final exercise, the five groups were asked to make judgements of the five sets of questions. Each group was given 5 points which they were supposed to share between the five sets of questions (perhaps 3 on one and 2 on another or 2 on one, 2 on another and 1 on a third). Bearing in mind the issue of intercultural competence among young people in urban neighbourhoods characterised by social exclusion, how interesting do the five themes seem to be given how they have been specified by the groups in terms of research question?

The result is presented and ranked in the table above to the right. Interestingly, this time "The politics of cohesion" got the most points and "Neighbourhood development" the least. This result runs counter to the previous choice of groups, which the table shows. Averages of the two choices indicate that the five themes have the same validity. Perhaps the five themes could be regarded as equally relevant regarding further research on the issue of intercultural competence among young people in urban neighbourhoods. That's a possible interpretation of the results.

In my view, such an interpretation substantiates the claim stated in the beginning of this report. The intercultural competence among young people in urban neighbourhoods is not an issue like any else. It's an issue that relates to most of the 12 Existential Fields. Furthermore, it's an issue which deals with identifying a significant potential belonging to a strategic group of stakeholders. And this is how I think stakeholders in general should be approached and offered to take part in the dialogue; namely on the basis of their potentials. Thus, identifying the intercultural competence among young people in urban neighbourhoods characterised by social exclusion isn't only an urgent research issue but also a way of realising the social platform.

Conclusions

- The organisers managed to attract a wide variety of stakeholders, including young people, to the workshop. The participants expressed a great interest in the subject and they were in general very pleased with the workshop, according to the evaluation. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that the workshop realised the idea of a social platform.

- It was not that easy to keep the focus demarcated on the particular intercultural competence that the young people in deprived neighbourhood have. The focus tended to be widened to intercultural competence in general. In my view, that confirms the hidden existence of the particular competence dealt with at the workshop and the urgency to highlight it.

- Of the three group presentations, the two young people that presented the results of the third group had most to say about the intercultural competence among young people in deprived neighbourhood. This

proves the validity of letting young people themselves take part in a workshop like this as well as the further dialogue about urban research.

- It turned out to be possible to breed some possible elements in a definition of the intercultural competence among young people in deprived neighbourhoods. Such a definition should include respect, an ability to adapt, an ability to build bridges between old antagonisms (e.g. parents), an ability to move between different cultures as well as situations, knowledge about the different social/cultural worlds as well as the barriers between them, and awareness about the self-chosen as well as attributed group belongings.

- The adaption of the two Social Polis research agendas turned out to be necessary in order to establish an interface between Social Polis and the Swedish stakeholders. The summary in five headings, each one specified briefly in a few points, made a certain communication possible which the suggested 15 questions for further research indicates.

- The five research themes presented seemed to be equally valid regarding further research on the theme of intercultural competence among young people in deprived neighbourhoods. Hence, the workshop lent credit to the claim that this is a broad issue, of concern for most of the 12 Existential Fields.

- The performance of the two young people presenting one of the group results, the elements suggested in a definition of the issue and the broad range of suggested questions for further research indicate the urgency of dealing with this issue as something more than an issue. The intercultural competence among young people in deprived neighbourhood is a potential that has to be highlighted and used, also in research.