

Sofia CoNet Network Meeting 25 - 27 February 2010 Inclusion and Integration



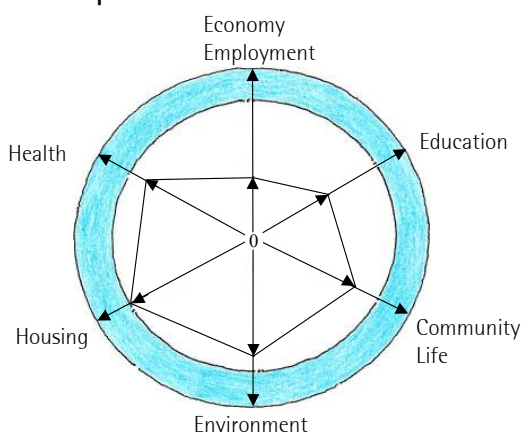
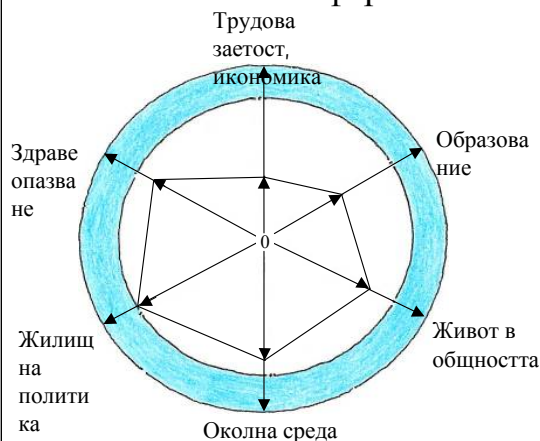
Contribution to the Sofia conference and discussion results

During this network meeting in Sofia we want to pick up again on the topic of social cohesion, because it is so fundamental and yet so complex. I would like to give a short starting point for our discussion on inclusion and integration. It is a huge topic and I am happy to have managed to fit the main ideas and a summary of research onto just these few slides.

The sea of related, often not very clear expressions can make productive discussion difficult.

Социалната кохезия = включване
във всички важни сфери на живот

Social cohesion = inclusion in
all important fields of life



Диаграма на кохезията

Cohesion windrose

Социалната кохезия

Social Cohesion

Включване Много лошо 0 —————> Много добро

Inclusion Very Bad 0 —————> Very Good

More Inclusion in All Important Fields of Life

Action Fields to Strengthen Social Cohesion

Involvement and Proactiveness of the People

Social Cohesion - inclusion in all important fields of life

- ▶ Let's start again with our cohesion windrose. I like this definition of social cohesion very much. Cohesion is based on objective facts: the inclusion of people in the main fields of life.
- ▶ In the modern understanding, inclusion is a two sided active process.
 - Everybody – also the disadvantaged – should be active citizens, and take an active part in all fields of life: education, economy, community life.
 - Society must be open and supportive to let disadvantaged people in.
- ▶ An open society is characterised by no discrimination or more realistically little discrimination.

To achieve inclusion, tolerance and few prejudices against minorities are important. Low opinions of social groups, or even disdain, are crucial barriers to inclusion. The most difficult part of strengthening social inclusion is to change the mentality concerning disadvantaged groups. Ethnic minorities, the long-term unemployed and those in a cycle of welfare dependency face major prejudices. For this reason, this time during our Sofia meeting, we proposed to talk about inclusion and integration.

- ▶ The necessity to change mentality also includes ourselves.

It is an expression of low opinion, when we want to help discriminated groups using top down methods only instead of including them to find and foster solutions themselves.

Where do prejudices come from?

- ▶ **Social inequality, social exclusion**
- ▶ **Social and cultural identity**
the feeling of us and you, a tendency of groups to define and emphasise differences, feeling at home and secure in one's own social and cultural group
- ▶ **Self-fulfilling prophecy**
when you are expected not to do well at school, self confidence and optimism shrink and this influences one not to do well
- ▶ **The scapegoat phenomenon**
if you need a guilty party for negative happenings, you blame the discriminated group*
- ▶ **The just-world-phenomenon**
you would like to see the world as being just and so you explain inequality by putting the blame on the disadvantaged people themselves..

* How dreadful the consequences of this phenomenon can be, is well known in connection with the Jews.

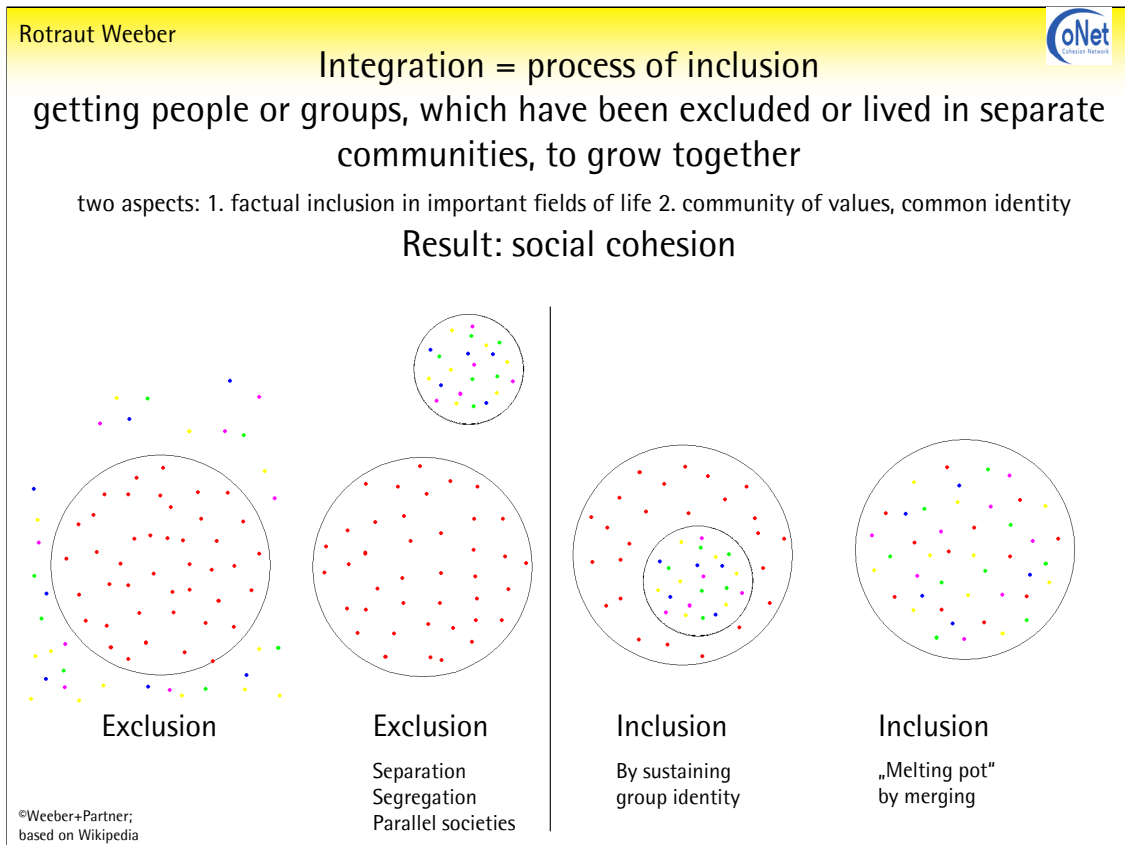
** People don't often notice how thoughts like "poor people are poor because they are lazy" might cause suffering for those concerned. Former ideas such as "disability being god's punishment" are a wicked way to blame the affected persons themselves.

How to overcome prejudices?

Steps	In community development, social work, policies
1. Equal status	Similar jobs, standards of living, education... To foster inclusion in reality
2. To prove negative images as being false	To create and communicate positive examples
3. Contact, cooperation, getting to know each other*	To fight segregation Minimised actions and infrastructure for specialised target groups
4. Shared interests, goals and values	To look for common interests, to promote actions for a common future
5. Positive social climate	That's why common meals, parties and other enjoyable events are very effective in bringing people together
6. Legal protection	e.g. to enforce the legal obligation of attending school **
7. Horizontal approaches against discrimination – management of diversity	To foster awareness, mainstreaming in all action fields, targeting different groups together

* The loss of contacts is one reason, why segregation is so damaging.

** Legal rights very much promote the equalisation of opportunities for disadvantaged people all over Europe. Examples are the European Disability Discrimination Act and nowadays the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. I myself have experienced just how important rights can be. Due to a disabled persons` right to study what they want at university, provided they have completed the necessary exams - my blind son could study physics with success – otherwise prejudices that blind people are not be able to do this would have prevented it.



Integration

For sociologists, integration is the process of inclusion.

- ▶ Migrants always need integration.
- ▶ But society also needs integration to prevent that it separates into different societies, e.g. the rich and poor, young and old, black and white, religious groups (orthodox, protestants, catholics and moslems).

Due not only to the huge number of migrants, but also according to the growing social inequality and cultural diversity, modern societies have to foster the social integration of different population groups.

Integration always has two aspects: on the one hand objective inclusion and on the other hand shared values and common identities. The result is social cohesion.

However it is important not to have a too simplistic or static idea of identity. Of course people can have several identities at the same time and they use their different identities – sometimes very consciously – in different social contexts. In relation to mixed personal or cultural roots, sociologists talk about the “creolisation“ of modern European societies. This term comes from the Latin American example, where cultural elements are not only poor Indian or poor European or poor African, but instead *out of* these mixed influences a new mixed cultural identity has developed.

The pictures show two different forms of exclusion and inclusion. On the far left individuals are excluded – e.g. people with disabilities don't form a discrete social group. The two pictures in the middle show groups which have an independent social identity - like the Roma people - and they are excluded (left) or included (right). Very often people who belong to the majority would like to see integration as a melting pot, like the picture on the right. The once different group has lost its former cultural identity and has merged into mainstream society. This can often be seen in the United States of America, where migrants who came from Europe have forgotten their roots after only one or two generations. But of course not all the migrant or minority cultural groups want to loose their traditional identity. And even from the perspective of the majority population, reduced diversity might be seen as a loss.

Roma integration in Sofia



Discussing Roma integration in Sofia

So, how to foster the processes of integration in Sofia? In Sofia the main minority group is the Roma people. Roma – with approximately 10 million citizens – are the largest ethnic minority in the EU. Roma people also live in other European countries and CoNet cities. In all countries they are an important poverty group, very much suffering from discrimination.

In Sofia, the Roma minority have lived for hundreds of years together with the Bulgarian majority. Bulgarians have long experience of living together. Within CoNet, Sofia wanted to include the topic of Roma integration into an approach concerning all Krasna Poliana and not only conduct an exclusively Roma project. This transversal approach, targeting not only one isolated group, is up-to-date – corresponding to European research-results concerning Roma integration and concerning the modern methodological approaches of managing diversity .

“The Roma fear that preferential treatment will backfire and generate more disdain for their community, therefore they want to be supported but not more so than other people with similar needs. At the same time non-Roma qualify programs to Roma only as unfair. Furthermore citizens distrust national leaders, so that efforts that are promoted by government alone or by outsiders are likely to be met with scepticism. The Roma identity - formed through social interactions and experiences in their environment – is linked to concrete problems they face. The various forms of discriminatory behaviour make them feel Roma.” (Urbact, CoNet baseline study 2008, page 18, on <http://web.worldbank.org> the qualitative research study is available The European Urban Knowledge Network homepage is another key source of information on this topic. On www.eukn.org more projects concerning the Roma minority can be found)

Discussion:

Customs, which make inclusion difficult- attitudes of self-exclusion

Towards better understanding:

- ▶ What are the benefits of being excluded?
- ▶ What are the benefits of being included?
individual benefits and benefits to the community

Inclusion is a two sided active process. But how to foster inclusion, when the disadvantaged persons don't take an active part to be included - in the important fields of life, education, economy and community life? Not wanting to be included is often seen as a major barrier against inclusion. However this argument is also used as a reason to justify disadvantages.

Why do people, belonging to a minority group, stick to traditional customs and attitudes, which make inclusion difficult? E.g. families, who restrict their activities only to family life and don't learn the majority's language; e.g. Roma families, who marry off their 12 year old girls and don't send them to school anymore; e.g. fundamental religious groups, who stick to Islamic clothing like the Niquab and object to the majorities lifestyle and values.

These attitudes should also be seen as a result of choices.

On the one hand: There might be more benefits to being excluded - not necessarily economical benefits, but emotional or social benefits. People submit themselves to group pressure (from the family, minority group and/or the peer group) and feel loved, accepted, sheltered and safe.

On the other hand: Change requires effort and includes the risk of failure. Are the expected benefits of change real and strong enough?

So if we are trying to make them change, we have to very strongly to sell why they should change. And this concerns not only the person themselves, but also the community.

Discussion results: Steps towards change CoNet's advice to the Krasna Poliana Fakultät in Sofia

1. Public responsibility
2. Advanced segregation - challenges of scale
3. Importance of subsistence needs
4. Positive role models
5. High quality of the segregated school – key project for more inclusion
6. Tolerated and not tolerated aspects of diversity

1. Even if there are strong tendencies for disadvantaged groups to withdraw into their segregated minority community, the municipality must take responsibility to overcome this negative situation.
2. The problems of disadvantaged groups in other cities are similar, but the scale in Krasna Poliana is a huge challenge. (Area Fakultät in Krasna Poliana district has approx. 30,000 inhabitants, approx. 100% Roma minority in the year 2010, in 1999 approx. 50% Roma minority. Growing population in Fakultät due not only to the birth rate, but also to the immigration of poor Roma people from other parts of Bulgaria).
3. When people are struggling with the basics of existence, efforts to train them and to provide a job don't have much chance of success. Working on basic subsistence needs should be the starting point.
4. Every person, who takes successful steps to overcome poverty might show the benefits of being included and can be a positive role model, something which is very much needed.
5. Efforts to make school No. 75 an attractive and successful school in Sofia will be a key project for more inclusion. School No. 75 is a segregated school for one thousand Roma pupils.
6. It is necessary to discuss and come to agreement on which aspects of diversity have to be tolerated and which not. E.g. in many European countries the legal obligation of parents to send their school-aged children to school is nowadays much more strictly enforced, mainly by support but in some rare cases also by prosecution of the parents. School-aged girls with children are offered childcare enabling them to go to school. Is laissez-faire adequate, when minor Roma girls marry and leave school according to group traditions?

Steps towards change – CoNet's advice to Krasna Polyana in Sofia – continued

7. Frustrations by unfulfilled promises
8. Creativity and dialogue after riots
9. Learning from other Roma communities
10. Cultural life should support open-minded public opinion
11. A reliable area plan, coproduction with the inhabitants.

Continued:

7. Unfulfilled promises produce a lot of frustration and destroy the impetus and optimism, to act for a positive future.
8. Riots turned out to be a chance for change. Out of the crisis came creativity and out of the dialog people started more productive approaches. There is a chance to learn from these processes.

In the black British communities in Liverpool similar attitudes to those in the Roma community were common. The white community didn't understand their viewpoints. A lot of prejudices prevented open interaction. Lots of money was spent. After the riots, out of a dialogue, people started to build services. In Liverpool, actions mainly addressed the community, whereas in France - after the riots - actions mainly addressed the development of the territory.
9. In Sofia, as well as in other places, more successful Roma communities with less poverty do exist. A dialogue about what has worked might be fruitful.
10. Open-minded public opinion is important to back the integration processes. Public opinion about the chances of Roma inclusion is rather negative. Artists, cultural and intellectual life can support a productive dialogue and better understanding.
11. Together with other Krasna Poliana Fakultäts, starting points should be developed. There are people, who are already active, who have for example made pretty gardens with snowdrops, which can be seen from the street and who might be interested in helping to better the living conditions in the neighbourhood. The huge garbage problems can also be tackled by providing jobs, delivered by a social enterprise. There won't be other chances to start and realise a reliable and sustainable area plan in coproduction with the inhabitants.