Why is it so difficult to include "inclusion" in mobility talks and discussions?

By Snežana Bačlija Knoch

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You might be wondering why I am asking this guestion and where it comes from! True, it could seem formulated and a bit odd. Even if it doesn't, you might not feel that there is any particular difficulty in addressing inclusion when talking about mobility. And that's fair enough. Perhaps if I tell you a little bit about the origin of the question, it will make some more sense. Perhaps...

> This edition of Coyote deals with issues from the European Platform for Learning Mobility (EPLM) Conference. The title of this event was "Learning mobility in the youth field: towards opportunities for all - Evidence, experience, discourse". I attended as a Coyote editorial team member and was somehow expecting to hear a lot about whether all young people have opportunities to take part in learning mobility and if they don't, how we can make sure that these opportunities are there. Perhaps I was a little bit too eager, but my impression was that we spent most of the time at the conference talking about learning mobility and the different experiences and research that surrounds it, but not so much about how inclusive it is and whether it is really open for all young people. And even less about how we can make it happen. The feeling that I got was that most of the people, if not everyone, in that big conference room in Istanbul felt the burning need to make sure the opportunities were there for everyone, that they were passionate and willing to do something about it themselves, but that there was also some kind of discomfort when addressing the subject.

> Based on that, instead of blaming, shaming and pointing fingers (which would probably be pointed at me as well, anyway), I decided to take this feeling further, transform it into a question and see where it takes us. The question led to even more questions and those created further questions to be reflected upon. The maps in front of you are not attempts to provide answers, but rather to leave the questions with you and see what you think. And maybe, if we approached our next mobility discussions with these questions in mind, just maybe, we would get a little bit closer to gaining confidence in trying to deal with them.

How comfortable are you when dealing with and talking about these subjects? Does that depend on the sensitivity of the issue at hand? And should we only speak when we are comfortable enough?

"Inclusion" and "young people with fewer opportunities" do seem to be included in a lot of conversations in the European youth work field. But the real issue is about the quality of those conversations: do we just feel an imperative to talk about it or do we actually know what we are saying? Are we comfortable about it?

How can it be difficult, when we, in the European youth work field, seem to be talking about inclusion all the time?!

Would you say that experience and expertise in mobility programmes guarantee experience in inclusion as well? Have you ever tried talking about your experience with inclusion? Was it easy for you to find the words? How about providing "evidence" for including young people with fewer opportunities?

True. But that also depends on which "field" we

towards opportunities for all - evidence, experience,

and discussions addressed inclusion of young people

with fewer opportunities (as part of opportunities for all).

discourse". Yet, it seemed that very few speeches

And if they did, in a lot of cases it seemed like an

delivered by an expert in the field of (international)

addition to mobility-dedicated discourse,

mobility, but not necessarily inclusion.

are talking about. The EPLM Conference had

the title "Learning mobility in the youth field:

What makes it difficult to find the "right" words? And why are we trying to get it right?

Another thing that was noticeable during the conference was the struggle with naming target group(s) when talking about inclusion. Some of the terms that were used were: young people "from modest backgrounds". "socially disadvantaged", "from the periphery",

"with special needs" and -

Surely, people that have expertise in the field are familiar with the topic and able to speak about it at length!

Beyond the academics and researchers,

most of the people active in the field

even - "losers".

OK, fine, but then it is clearly not difficult for me. since I decided to write this article in the first place! So this could be even taken as patronising!

Young people often find it challenging to identify themselves as having fewer opportunities. Sometimes it might feel like a desirable answer and yet, sometimes, like a label or a burden.

How easy it is for you or young people you are working with to identify as a young person with fewer opportunities? How can we avoid using it as a label for someone (yourself)?

should know how to address inclusion, both through their activities and interventions and in discussions. Right? Again, it depends on the field.

Wait.

but who

says it is difficult?

experienced in the field of international mobility programmes) application form, but also when

Do you recognise the need to emphasise inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in your activities? Where does this need come from? How do you "justify" it?

A lot of youth workers who are dedicated to working on inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities work primarily on the local level, as mobility programmes pose a new set of challenges. For those people, it is sometimes more difficult to put things into writing, although they have a lot of knowledge of it.

How easy is it to overcome those barriers and start working on inclusion through international mobility programmes?

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> Are we perhaps scared of our inner thoughts and so it is easier to avoid talking about it altogether?

> > How does this impact on our willingness to talk about inclusion and our work with it? Could the challenges perhaps hinder our discussions altogether?

> > > Sometimes we want inclusion to happen so much that we are willing to believe in the positive impact of what we do, even if the facts behind it are not so strong. This was possibly what happened with SALTO Inclusion Research (www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/ InclusionResearch/), presented during the EPLM Conference. The research proved, among other things, that young people with fewer opportunities benefit more from mobility programmes than those with more opportunities (albeit with a very narrow margin), although the research was not rooted in very strong evidence. Nonetheless, most of us were very keen to believe it fully, even rejecting some very important questions and concerns raised.

How does agreeing to believe in not very strong evidence impact further discussion in the field? Does it leave space for open, honest and critical talks?

> Once young people arrive to take part in a (group) learning mobility programme, those working with them (youth leaders/ trainers/ mentors) work hard to help them become a group and start perceiving them as one, as a whole. If they continue using labels (such as "young people with fewer opportunities") for certain young people, they risk falling into the spiral of stereotypes/prejudice/ discrimination and even exclusion. But if they don't have it at least in the back of their minds, it might become impossible to provide equal opportunities for everyone in the group.

Does the sensitive nature of talking about inclusion and young

people with fewer opportunities challenge our need for political

correctness? Do we change the terminology because of this as

well? Is that part of our attempt to sleep better at night?

Inclusion is one of the areas of working with young people

(mobility programmes). As such, working with inclusion can

questions and doubts.

have no actual background in inclusion, which

were ticked and certain guotas fulfilled.

makes it difficult to explain why particular boxes

be quite demotivating at times and it comes with quite a lot of

where it often takes years to see any real progress and there are

many challenges, barriers and setbacks. This goes in particular

for including young people in activities on the international level

When does the label "young people with fewer opportunities" stop being helpful? How do we decide that? Is it enough for young people to come together as a group?

> opportunities before joining the conversation? Do you know any practitioners for whom filling in the application for an Erasmus+ grant (for example) was one of their first encounters with It is not rare to encounter people working with the subject? How easy was it for them to "walk young people for whom inclusion is just one the talk" in this case? of the boxes to tick on an application form for mobility programmes, and mentioning young people with fewer opportunities is a great way to score additional points in the selection process. However, more often than not, they

Does it sometimes feel that we are just adding "inclusion" and "young people with fewer opportunities" to existing mobility projects? Are they almost a burden? And if so, how can something that is so important become an administrative decision?

Did you have experience working for the

inclusion of young people with fewer

Have you ever tried looking for definitions of "inclusion" or "young people with fewer opportunities"? Have you found any that made it clear for you what you are dealing with and consequently how to address and talk about it? Have you created one or more of your own? What made them work, or not work?

What often helps us in addressing issues is defining concepts as clearly as possible in our heads. When trying to find that "perfect" definition for inclusion or young people with fewer opportunities, one might easily find themselves swimming in a sea of ambiguity. While that's generally not a bad thing, it does make things a bit more difficult to address or even explore further. Of course, creating your own definition is always an option, but there is a good chance that our friend ambiguity will interfere in that creative process as well.

There are various groups that could be referred to as "young people with fewer opportunities". Often, when working in the field of inclusion, practitioners (for a good reason) tend to focus on just one group or a limited number of them. Sometimes this can create a lack of understanding of other groups of young people with fewer opportunities.

If we try to precisely define "inclusion" and "young people with fewer opportunities" in order to achieve more clarity in dealing with those concepts, there is a real risk that any attempt would ultimately exclude some young people or even whole groups of them.

much context-specific subjects and it is difficult to talk about them in general terms. Sometimes that makes it difficult to describe the challenges young people with fewer opportunities face and search for evidence or even possible solutions.

What are some possible ways to overcome

Bear with me. Let's assume there is a certain degree of difficulty. What are some of the possible underlying causes for it?

> this difficulty, compare experiences from different contexts and learn together from them? Are they even possible?

It is often stated that exclusion and inclusion are very



How hard is it to find one definition that would encompass all excluded (groups) of young people? Would that kind of definition be helpful at all in understanding the "bigger picture"?

Is this a reason for not

defining things? Could the lack of clear ideas of what we are

dealing with make it difficult

to talk about things freely?

Is there perhaps a risk that,

if very clear criteria existed,

it would be very difficult to say

to someone "you are just not

How much would we have to

know about the target group in order to make that "judgment"

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without labelling them?

excluded enough"?

BUDGETS FOR WORK WITH DISADVANTAGED YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE BEEN CUT Illustration by Siiri Taimla

Why is it so difficult to include "inclusion"?

Why do I need to be talking about inclusion? Is that something that comes as part of my role in the European youth work field? Or am I genuinely interested in talking about it?

How can I focus on inclusion without feeling that I need to squeeze it into some programmes or any other

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questions could potentially help us confront difficulty when including inclusion in our mobility conversations.

Answers to these

Who benefits from my being involved in the conversation about inclusion? Am I contributing to some overall shift in the field? And do I benefit myself?

> If I am so interested in talking about it, but don't feel competent enough, how could I gain more confidence? Should I go and try to do (some more) work in the field of inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, in particular through mobility programmes? Or should I read more about it? Or perhaps something completely different?

Do I know the reality of working with young people with fewer opportunities enough to be able to talk about it freely and provide evidence of what works and what doesn't?

Am I ready to admit defeat and reflect on potential failures in my attempts to work with the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in mobility programmes? In addition, am I ready to challenge existing practices and demand real proof that inclusion is happening as the organisers claim it is?

WE FOCUSED ON BUILDING UP THOSE KIDS SELF-ESTEEN YOU NEED TO BE WHO AN I 2 ABLE TO KNOW WHERE I AH NOURSELF BEFORE FRONT FROZECTS IF YOU WHANT TO INCLUDE PEOPLE IN NEEDS YOU HAVE 10 GO LOOK FOR THEH Illustration by Siiri Taimla

Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?



By Özgehan Şenyuva

The added value of youth mobility, in particular the skill-developing benefits of international mobility, is well documented. Rigorous research – as conducted for instance by the RAY network (Research Based Analysis of Youth in Action) – provides sufficient evidence that young people develop various competences through their participation in learning mobility schemes.¹ After their mobility experience young people, in general, have acquired a more global mindset, stronger self-confidence, intercultural teamwork skills, and a higher degree of individual responsibility.

1. Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action' (RAY), implemented by a network of Erasmus+: Youth in Action National Agencies and their research partners currently in 29 European countries http://www.researchyouth.net/publications.