SUPEER

SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION THROUGH PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

THE SUPEER BOOKLET COLLECTION
ON CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGIES

BOOKLET 2 of 4

PEER LEARNING IN YOUTH WORK AND INTEGRATION

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EMPOWERMENT
IN PEER LEARNING
AND INTEGRATION

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PREFACE

SUPEER – sustainable integration through peer support – is a European project supported by the EU-Commission within the Erasmus+ programme for strategic partnerships. Partner organisations from 6 European countries are collaborating in the SUPEER project from the common aim to support the building of communities, empowerment, social capital and active citizenship among young people from both minority and majority environments. A further aim is to pave the way for a sustainable integration process among young refugees and newcomers through an innovative and peer-based concept, where young people with diverse backgrounds establish equal, appreciative and stable relations through a common learning and networking programme.

Thus, PEER LEARNING is the focal point of the pedagogical and methodological approach in the SUPEER project. However, the peer learning programme is closely linked to 3 CORE CONCEPTS, each of which forms the theoretical and conceptual basis for the aims, objectives and activities in the project:

- EMPOWERMENT
- SOCIAL CAPITAL
- CITIZENSHIP

Generally, these concepts are described and applied separately due to their anchoring in different theoretical and conceptual traditions. However, in the SUPEER project, where young people's well-being, participation, collaboration and mutual learning are at the center – the 3 concepts form a unified, coherent and holistic conceptual framework for the planning and implementation of all learning activities. This approach is based on the following ideas:

- **By building a bridge between the separated concepts, we can show in practice how empowerment, social capital and active citizenship mutually support each other as basic elements in young people's social, cultural, relational and personal growth as well as their well-being and experience of a positive affiliation with the surrounding society. This applies to young people who were born and raised in that society as well as to young newcomers.**

- **By using the holistic conceptual framework, we can define practices such as integration, inclusion and belonging from a positive and resourceful perspective, where the intercultural encounter between young people with diverse backgrounds and experiences learn from each other through a collaboration where everyone is respected for their special contributions.**

- **When young people are empowered through a common learning process and common activities, they mutually enhance their social and cultural capital, which generally will strengthen their motivation for an active and participatory citizenship.**

Thus, peer learning becomes the focal point where the conceptual holism is translated into an equal learning practice for young peers across minority and majority environments. By making empowerment, social capital and active citizenship key concepts in the common learning process, we also create a new and resource-based framework for the young people's mutual integration process:

As an introduction to the conceptual approach and framework for the SUPEER peer learning activities, we have prepared 4 booklets that briefly illustrate how we perceive the key concepts of the project, and how we can translate them into practical peer-based learning situations. Each booklet is supplied with references to relevant literature and other links used.

THE SUPEER BOOKLET COLLECTION ON CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGIES includes:

BOOKLET 1: Peer learning in youth work and integration
BOOKLET 2: Empowerment in peer learning and integration
BOOKLET 3: Social capital in peer learning and integration
BOOKLET 4: Citizenship in peer learning and integration

1. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a core concept in the SUPEER-project, because we strengthen the peers' ability to achieve improved conditions in the integration process and in their everyday life.

The objectives of the project are to develop intercultural empowerment between the youth in the majority and minority culture. For the young people in the minority group, we aim for them to achieve increased self-confidence, improving their abilities to achieve their potential. The purpose is to develop a social group of young people with a peer-to-peer approach, where all the peers can contribute with their competences and knowledge in the process of increasing their sum of individual strengths, capabilities and potentials.

2.   HOW DO WE PERCEIVE THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "empowerment" as "*the action of empowering; the state of being empowered*" and it was first used in this form in 1849. However, the verb "empower" from which this noun is derived was first apparent in the English Language some two hundred years before. The word "empower" is of French and Latin derivation consisting of the preposition "em" and the noun "power". "Em" probably comes from the Old French for "en". They were, at one time, interchangeable words meaning "in".

There is a danger that over the hundreds of years which empowerment has been used the importance of power has been overemphasised. Nowadays there is a constant need to remember that empowerment is not "power itself" but is a process by which the latter is only bestowed to an end or for a purpose.

The term empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. It is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.
Empowerment as action refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence, and to recognise and use their resources.

Empowerment**:** the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives. (Adams, 2008).
Key dimensions of critical youth empowerment:
(1) a welcoming, safe environment,
(2) meaningful participation and engagement,

(3) equitable power-sharing between youth and adults,
(4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and socio-political processes,
(5) participation in socio-political processes to affect change, and
(6) integrated individual- and community-level empowerment,

Concerning the empowerment minority/vulnerable groups, Membership of a minority brings with it automatic powerlessness in a country led by a majority. Laws, rules and attitudes most commonly reflect those in positions of power and act against those that differ from the norm. Empowerment emerges, therefore, as a common theme in the literature covering the lives of minority groups in such areas as race, sexuality, disability and age. There is an assumption here that the oppressed are somehow "driven" to right the injustices which they have suffered. West (1990) attributes this to the fact that once a more authentic identity has been identified, "the existing culture is a place of frustration and low self-esteem for them". The anger and resentment they feel towards this surrounding culture drives them to be proactive in their fight for equality.

The empowerment can generally take three diverging approaches: A neo liberal, a social liberal and a social critical transformative approach. The latter approach apart from empowering the individual's abilities, also wants to achieve more fundamental changes in the society's political environment.
How can we do that in SUPEER? We can spread information and knowledge of the findings of the approach, processes and results of the project.
The empowerment process goes in two directions vertical and horizontal. Vertical empowerment relates to empowering groups and the local communities through policies at the level of local municipalities and governmental authorities. Horizontal empowerment relates to empowering vigorous networks between actors at the same level (Andersen and Larsen, 2016, p. 587). In our project we address both dimensions.

Empowerment has become a common term (in Denmark), for people getting tools to enable them to help themselves becoming autonomous citizens, who can make free choices. We can question though, if we're not expecting them to make the "right choices" according to the common expectation (Andersen, p. 147). The neo-liberal thinking does not set the client free from the oppressing structural conditions but tends to make the client adapt into the leading structure of the society. The point is that in the neo-liberal approach the responsibility lies solely on the client, because the client must take responsibility of his life situation. The approach does not consider the influence of the political and economic discourse that has led to the welfare state (Andersen, p. 148). In SUPEER aim to build on the capabilities of all the peers and through IO3 make the group as well as the individual benefit.

Empowerment is inextricably linked to education. Not only is education a crucial part of all empowerment programmes but it also acts to empower in itself. For those who are illiterate,

have to adapt to a second language, for example, education is crucial for them to develop a sense of self-worth and empowerment. In the educational literature, much is made of the substantive and symbolic concepts which the term "empowerment" encapsulates. The idea is that empowerment can both refer to a substantive form of change at the individual level and a more symbolic form of change at the societal level. This encourages educational theorists to question who exactly education empowers - individuals or groups? Griffin (1992).

Education also helps those that are members of a minority group. This is particularly true for those who are immigrants or a foreign speaking minority of a particular country. In this situation there is a struggle to maintain some sense of oneself whilst accepting that the norms, mores and language of the ruling country must be acknowledged. Bullivant (1995) discussed this dilemma with respect to immigrants to Australia. He talks of the power of the educational system to reproduce the interests of the ruling or dominant class and the need for education to move away from this "power over" towards an empowerment of all schoolchildren. He bases his conclusions on a study of the evolution in Australia of language and culture programmes which aim to empower cultural minorities. He explains that prior to 1973 immigrants were expected to abandon their own backgrounds, culture and
language and conform to the majority. Over the years this has changed, he explains, through various stages of multicultural involvement to the present day. The emphasis has now moved away from the desire to incorporate minorities to a need for encouraging differences and diversity in order to remain economically competitive.

Empowerment and Politics. Political literature seems to embrace the term "empowerment" at three different levels. Empowerment is described at a national level as the result of a revolution whereby new leaders aim to reduce inequity; on a local level through the strengthening of mediating agencies which allow closer ties with individual communities; and on a personal level as a result of the customer revolution and the advent of consumerism.

3. WHY IS EMPOWERMENT A CORE CONCEPT FOR YOUTH WORK AND INTEGRATION?

To maintain the aims of the project empowerment is one of the core points, but at the same time it connects with the other core concepts for this project: peer learning, social capital, active citizenship and integration. The question is how to create changes and sustainable effects. Through the project we encourage building and sharing of knowledge about democracy, culture, education, history, equal rights between genders, communities and population groups. We focus on making events where the peers in the project can be trained in planning and facilitating events in the group as well as in the local community.

It is important to make the group of participants a safe place by strengthening relations between the participants. This can be achieved by making smaller groups to improve the connection as well as improve the feeling of belonging in the group of participants. In the long term the purpose is that the feeling of empowerment and belonging in a smaller group can be transferred to the local community, their work, education etc. and make them see themselves as a worthy member of their new country. It is about gaining power to create a meaningful life.

In the relationship with the peers from the young majority the peers from the young minority can get an access to the majority society. The peers from the majority can make a bridge to the society, but need to be empowered to do so, as well as the peers from the minority has to get empowered to benefit from the relation.

The strength in being seen as equal young people on their own terms and doing things that young people do. The important effect of this relationship is to get a friend, being able to ask questions, get explanations, be curious, the feeling of belonging in the society.

Within the context of the SUPEER project, it will be important to recognise that the term empowerment will hold different meanings and values for every individual taking part, and each person will have multiple contexts within which the project may seek to empower. It is therefore important to explore the intercultural connectivity between each person because, again, this will vary from person to person and peer to peer. It may also be worthwhile exploring and defining what is meant by intercultural empowerment for the project, and how each of these binding elements can intertwine and be brought together in a meaningful and purposeful way, which the young people can shape, take ownership of and most certainly accomplish.

4. HOW DO WE USE EMPOWERMENT IN THE

SUPEER YOUTH PROGRAMMES?

Integration and empowerment are processes, where you need the right environment to improve. It is important to make the peers comfortable through a safe environment, where they can develop, take steps and grow stronger. The participants decision to say yes to meet a local youngster from the majority, can be a challenge, even though they want to. But it is important that it is their own choice and they do it voluntarily. The empowerment process can happen in a period of months or during a couple of days depending on the individuals and their situation. The goal is to plant the seeds of change, focus is on what makes an impact on the youngsters. The following exercise can be used in the SUPEER-project.

How to be empowered – a reflection exercise:
The exercise can be used at an individual level and in a group level of various sizes.
Facilitator: Make a safe space in activities and be accessible during the whole process in case of questions and doubts.

First meeting:
- Expectations: What do you expect from being in a peer-relation? Why do you want to be in a peer-relation? Why do you want a friend from the local community? Express the thoughts of doubts and worries?
- Competences and skills: What are you good at? What do you like doing? Your skills?
- Values: What kind of values are important and how to use them in practice.
- Power/abilities: What is power to you? What do you like to do?
- Goals: Outcome: What do you want to gain? What do you want to achieve? (Language skills e.g.)

Meanwhile meetings/During the process:
- Be aware of own skills, competences and strengths.
- Support in doubts and misunderstandings.

Last meeting:
- Expectations: What did I achieve? What am I able to do/cope that I wouldn't have done before the meetings?
- Competences and skills: Changes? Improvements? Status quo?
- Values: Reflection of values used in SUPEER and the peer-relation

The following two examples from CLAVIS shows the transformative effect on the minority when they are invited into the surrounding society, through a safe space where they can develop.

> After a five-days trip a student (21 years old girl from Syria) tells:
>
> "It was the most amazing trip I have ever been at. We talked a lot and spend a lot of time together. I tried to talk to many different people at the School of Agriculture where we lived, at the Youth Culture House and at the food-workshop where I became friends with the girl who arranged it. The best of it all was, that we were together as one big family, student and teachers. We hang out with all the students both boys and girls and I'm not shy anymore. After this trip I dare to speak to others and I'm not afraid of saying something wrong. When are we going again?"

This example shows how the young girl through common activities gets self-esteem and the feeling of belonging. As she feels safe, she dares to break through her shyness and her lack of belief in her own capacities.

> We were at a workshop with an art project and later meet the mayor for young people in Aarhus. A 17 years old boy from Iraq described it, in this way:
>
> "We made a print of our hand in cast. There were a lot of prints, because it should show, that even if we are different, we are strong, when we are together. And we met a young boy who was the mayor for young people in Aarhus. His family came from Palestine and he said to us 'Don't give up."

The last example is a part of the results of the outcome of the pilot project.

> Food event for mentor and mentees in the Youth-to-youth network:
>
> Creating a dinner together on their own, planning, arranging and cooperation. Mentors and mentees had conversations about how the educational system works in Denmark compared to their home country, plans for the future, wearing religious clothing (scarfs), what to eat when you come from different cultures and religions. Some mentees showed up even though their mentor didn't participate. A conversation with curiosity, being open-minded and making space for each other.

When we are speaking about empowerment, it is important to have in mind, that the young people in the minority group do have competences to manage many challenges whether they are unaccompanied minors, immigrants or second generation of immigrants. They all have strategies to manage in different ways, maybe not the ways the society defines as right or strategies, that will enable them to manage e.g. the educational system. Some of the strategies may not be directly transferable to e.g. the educational system, but it could be a possibility to focus on these skills and competences in order to develop future benefits (Katznelson, p. 81).

5.   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, empowerment is a core concept for all the youngster with different backgrounds, culture, skills and competences as a tool in the peer-to-peer learning and in the process of being an active citizen in the society they live in. Due to the project and the exercises the peers will be able to reflect on their empowerment process. In the process they get the opportunity to get a voice, to participate in discussions and be able to navigate easier in daily life. This process improves their living conditions, improves their self-esteem and it enables the ability to fulfill their hopes in the best possible way.

With the above reflections mind, we must consider ways to make the environment a safe place where the participants can develop along with the core concept of peer-learning. The further steps will be explored in the following SUPEER program.

The concept of empowerment is fundamental for the SUPEER project, learning among equals and make youngsters empowered since the empowerment of all youngsters in the society, brings benefits to all.

6.   LINKS AND LITERATURE

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