



# THEMATIC REPORT

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Mikael Stigendal

Malmö University, Sweden

[mikael.stigendal@mah.se](mailto:mikael.stigendal@mah.se)

I've been asked by the CoNet leadership to write a thematic report on, as described in the contract, "the further development of the results of the URBACT I network *Young people from exclusion to inclusion* in the context of the URBACT II network CoNet". The result from the *Young people from exclusion to inclusion* which I'll concentrate on in this thematic report is the five success criteria. They have been regarded as the main result of the previous URBACT I network and were also further developed as a basis for the peer review at the CoNet meeting in Malmö. I'll start by explaining how and why they were launched as well as what they mean.

## The URBACT 1 origin

The URBACT 1-project *Young people – from exclusion to inclusion* went on 2004-06 and was led by the city of Malmö. The other cities included were Gijón, Copenhagen, Aarhus, Göteborg, Gera, Helsinki, Velenje, Ukmerge, Lomza, Strovolos and Tallinn. The objective of the project was to learn from each others good examples. But really, what's a good example? That question was brought to the fore at an early stage of the project when the participating cities had written their first case study reports. At the kick-off meeting in Malmö in February 2004, the partners got the task to write 2-3 case study reports on what they themselves regarded as good examples. As a basis for the work, we had agreed about using a common template. In that way, we wanted to make sure that all the significant aspects were to be covered.

In all, 19 case studies were sent to me during the summer of 2004. My task then was to try to identify possibilities of comparison. The good examples it showed, were not at all easy to compare, mainly due to the large divergences in contexts, for example regarding welfare systems, type of labour market, the degree of local governance, as well as culture and history. If an example is good or bad is in great part depending on the context. A good example in one city may be considered as a matter of course or even as poor or deficient in another city. Consequently, the examples are in whole not comparable. The

problems they are meant to solve are not entirely the same and the conditions for solving them differ as well.

How do you then compare good examples? What should be compared? A thought arose of founding the comparisons in what they have in common. But what do they have in common? The answer turned out to be the five success criteria. They were formulated from analysis and comparisons of the 19 case study reports. I will summarise them as they are presented in the *Operational Guidelines*, one of three publicised outcomes of the *Youths – from exclusion to inclusion*.

- Empowerment: In order to be regarded as good, practices have to strengthen the ability of young people to act by themselves, to think independently, to make choices, to be responsible and to stand up for their rights. Topdown solutions, treating young people as objects, have to be rejected. Empowerment could be defined as a change from being an object to a subject. In contrast to objectifying, empowerment means subjectifying.
- Strengthen social relations: Learning builds and depends on social relations. For that reason, social relations need to be strengthened in order to favour learning and the social inclusion of young people. That means improving confidence and trust as well as communication in the relation between teachers and young people.
- Structural changes of schools: Examples of how to change young people's situation from exclusion to inclusion cannot be hived off to a space of their own, leaving the structures of school intact. School structures are part of the problem and have to be changed as well. Structural changes of schools should tackle the structural causes of exclusion in order to prevent pupils losing faith and opting out. Also, structural changes have to be made in order for schools to capitalise on the potentials of young people.
- Co-operation with local society: Besides changing the school, structural changes have to be carried through in local society as well. For example, labour markets generate barriers for young people and thus cause social exclusion. Barriers of different kinds appear as a border between the social inclusion and social exclusion of society, taking place in the cities, particularly in schools. For that reason, cooperation between schools and local society has been stated as the fourth criterion. It should be made clear that such cooperation deals with something much more profound than the relation between an individual school and its societal context. It deals with shifting the borders between the social inclusion of society and the social exclusion from it.
- Renewing the view on knowledge: In general, the objectives of the educational systems in Europe have been renewed to catch up with the demands of the knowledge-based economy. The view that takes knowledge for granted and equates learning with a passive digestion of predetermined facts has been replaced by one that put the emphasis on an active and creative relationship to knowledge, enabling young people to learn to solve problems, criticise and take stands. Recognising informal knowledge is another important feature of the renewals. However, the renewals have turned out to be problematic to realise. Hence, there is a need of examples which show what the new view on knowledge means and how it could be put to practice.

The five success criteria were originally formulated as a proposal for the conference held in Århus in the beginning of September 2004. Included in the proposal, an outline for the conference was also presented. The idea was to make the participants discuss the good examples with regard to each of the five success criteria. The participants were therefore divided into five groups. Their task accordingly was to discuss the good examples within the specific criterion. The first group, as an example, discussed the examples with regard to empowerment. All other aspects were meant to be left aside. Only that which concerned empowerment were to be discussed, such as to what degree the examples contribute to empowerment, if they really did contribute and in that case in what ways. Similar discussions about each of the success criteria were held in the other groups.

The groups had also as a task to prepare flipchart presentations. What were the conclusions about for instance the renewal of the view on knowledge? Which good examples contribute to it? What can we learn from the good examples about a renewal of the view on knowledge? After working in the groups they all presented their results. Subsequently the participants were divided into new groups and a new

session of working groups begun. A participant who previously had participated in the working group on strengthen social relations was then perhaps in the group discussing cooperation with the local society.

Three of these working groups' sessions were held at the conference in Århus. Each participant could through this method discuss three out of five of the success criteria. Each criterion was discussed and presented in three different groups. The result, with which I continued to work, was comprehensive and substantial. Above all, the Århus conference resulted in a strong support for the classification of the five success criteria. They were considered understandable and sufficient.

The subsequent work with the URBACT project *Young People From Exclusion to Inclusion* led to a development and modulation of the five success criteria. Simultaneously the support for them was strengthened. Therefore, at the URBACT concluding conference in April 2006 we could say that we had agreed. That was the greatest accomplishment. That participants from so many different countries and cities agree on criteria for success is not to be taken for granted, or even counted on. But with that regard we succeeded.

## Further developments

The question that has to be made at this stage is if and how the five success criteria could be used further. It is not obvious that they can. The success criteria originate from a certain context and probably marked by it. It should be said that I as a researcher have made sure to found the criteria in theories of social science. When the criteria first were launched for the Århus conference in September 2004, they were founded in an analysis of the first 19 case study reports that I tried to make as unbiased as possible. I did not analyse the reports from a predetermined theory. In the analysis of the reports, I didn't seek confirmations of what I already knew, but instead I wanted to make space for the unexpected.

Nevertheless, when the analysis started to result in a number of criteria I was as careful to found these in a theoretical approach. In the final decision on how many criteria there would be and the boundaries between them, the social science theories played a conclusive role. In all brevity, the five success criteria have their basis in a theory on social order. The first criterion belongs in the first level of the theory. The second level concerns social relations, the third social structures and the fourth of what can be called societalization, which very briefly means the co-evolution of different social structures and systems. All of this must be meaningful, at least in some sense, if we are to understand it, bear it and maybe even feel motivated enough, and the point of it all is coherently the fifth level.

As a result of the foundation in social science theories, the five success criteria have an analytical character. The five levels should be considered as different and progressively complex aspects of social order. In a social context, we are included as individuals, but we are also interrelated to others, and we have a role in the social structures that the context may be constituted by, and we collaborate with other individuals in other structured social contexts than the ones that we are part of ourselves, which moreover has some kind of meaning for us.

The five success criteria could be said to bring norms for a good development in these five aspects. Empowerment is important in peoples individual development, i.e. to be able to act on your own accord, think independently, make decisions, take responsibility, stand up for your rights and decide over your own life. Social development benefits from a strengthening of the social relations in regards of for instance understanding and trust. A change of the social structures is important in order to handle the problems built up within them. Co-operation and an integrated approach are important in order to hinder different structures and systems to pull in different directions and maybe even obstruct each other.

In the URBACT 1 project the fifth success criterion concerned knowledge. In the generalisation of the validity of the criteria that I now am trying to do, I want to view the fifth criterion as dealing with meaning. Knowledge is a form of meaning. In school knowledge is the most important meaning. Young people go to school in order to learn knowledge. It is first and foremost the knowledge which

makes the school meaningful. The meaning with school is above all the learning of knowledge. The school can surely be meaningful in other ways as well, for example through being a place for meeting friends, develop identities and learning at lot of other things than what is in the curriculum. But had it not been for the learning knowledge, the school would not be meaningful.

Consequently, the school is not particularly meaningful for the students who do not feel like they are learning something. They could make it meaningful for themselves in other ways by rowdiness and fighting. But then the problems will only aggravate. The participants in the URBACT 1 project all had experiences from schools in their cities of aggravated problems. The question then is how the problems are to be solved. Recently and for a pretty long period of time, there have been numerous discussions within politics and in mass media about enhanced demands and more discipline. In the URBACT project we agreed on a different solution. We agreed on that the view on knowledge must be altered. It is really nothing new. The view on knowledge that the current curriculums recommend, actually all around Europe, includes a change. Instead of passively acquiring knowledge considered as given beforehand, the students will actively learn to question and take stands. This type of knowledge would make school more meaningful and in addition; more up to date.

In other contexts it may be another meaning that has to be altered. If the fifth success criterion is to be generalised, we should not thus get stuck on knowledge. It is explicitly the generalisation that I am after, here meaning the opportunity to develop the five criteria in a way that make them applicable in contexts other than the URBACT 1 project. I see that as fully possible, given the social science theory that they are founded in. Empowerment, strengthened social relations, structural changes, an integrated approach and a renewal of meaning are particularly significant in schools but not merely there.

Another aspect on the generalisation of the success criteria is the connection to the problems. The success criteria point out characteristics of the solutions to problems. But there then has to be problems to solve. Hence, indirectly the criteria could also be used to categorise problems. If, for example, the solutions should be characterised by structural changes there has to be problems with the structures. Otherwise they would not need to change. The five criteria could help us to widen our perspective and prevent biased allegations of for instance youths as problems. Many times youths are easy to blame. But then you forget the problems with for instance the structures or the lack of an integrated approach. Moreover you forget the positive potentials that youths possess.

## The URBACT 2 use

At the CoNet meeting in Malmö, the five success criteria were used as a basis for the peer review of two good examples. The design drew on my own experiences from the EU-project Connections (2008-09), in which I've been a participant, but also the final report of the Inti-Cities project *Benchmarking Integration Governance in Europe's Cities*, published in March 2009 by the Eurocities.<sup>1</sup> As the Connections project hasn't finished, I won't be able to present my lessons in public yet. Instead, I'll refer to the clear and useful framework which the Inti-Cities project presents in its final report.

The peer review method has grown in significance and become more widely used in recent years. It's been promoted by the European Commission as part of the Open Method of Coordination, launched at the Lisbon summit in 2000. A peer review is described by the Inti-Cities project as a "tool for mutual learning whereby local policies, programmes and practices are evaluated by colleagues from other cities – peers who act as 'critical friends'."<sup>2</sup> The Inti-Cities project has used benchmarks to focus and structure the peer reviews. A benchmark is understood as a "standard to aspire to and a reference against which performance can be measured".<sup>3</sup> On the basis of such benchmarks, 75 indicators have been defined in the framework of the Inti-Cities project.

Defining these indicators and first of all the benchmarks has constituted the first out of all together seven steps. In short, these six remaining steps consists of training for peer review teams, the host

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.connectionsprogress.eu> and <http://www.inticities.eu/> (accessed 1 Sep 2009)

<sup>2</sup> *Benchmarking Integration Governance in Europe's Cities*, page 8, at <http://www.inticities.eu/> (accessed 1 Sep 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

city's writing of a pre-review report, the peer's desk review of the pre-review report, peer review visit, making an assessment and giving feedback by writing a post-review report. It should be said that the terminology of pre- and post-review reports has been pick-up from the Connections project, which has followed a similar proceeding. The Inti-Cities project calls it "host city's initial report" and "feedback" consisting of "a comprehensive written report", which means the same.

The CoNet project hasn't been designed for the sole reason of conducting peer reviews. It has a much wider objective than the Inti-Cities project, also allowing a wide scope of methods to be used. Thus, a complete peer review couldn't be undertaken at the CoNet meeting in Malmö. There was no opportunity for the participants to meet a few months beforehand to define benchmarks and indicators. Nor could any training for peer review teams be arranged, except for presentations and instructions made at the meeting. But pre-review reports were written, the participants had the opportunity to make desk reviews of these reports, visits were made as well as assessments and finally, a post-review report has been written, although not by the peers as in the Inti-Cities project but by me.

Thus, the steps or building blocs of the peer review in Malmö consisted of the two pre-review reports with questions included, study visits, group work to answer the questions, presentations of the answers and a post review report, published in tandem with this thematic report. The visitors were divided in two groups on the basis of their own wishes, declared prior to the meeting. On day 1, the two groups visited one of the two projects each and spent a couple of hours to look around, listen to presentations by the project participants and asking questions. On day 2, the two groups got two hours to work out their assessments and answers to the questions. Thereafter, presentations were made by the groups for around 20 minutes each, answering the pre-determined questions.

All of this hadn't been possible if we hadn't had access to some pre-determined benchmarks, well qualified and legitimate. The five success criteria provided us with such benchmarks. They comply with the definition mentioned above of a "standard to aspire to and a reference against which performance can be measured". Moreover, being the most successful result of the previous URBACT 1 project, they could be regarded as well qualified and had the appropriate legitimacy. No quantitative indicators were offered, but the answers to the questions posed in the two pre-review reports were supposed to serve as qualitative correspondents.

It's important to stress that indicators used at a peer review don't have to be quantitative. To be sure, the assessments made by the peers must be based on some indications of how well the reviewed project fulfils the "standard to aspire to" in certain respects. These "certain respects", complying with the "standard to aspire to", were defined by the questions in the pre-review reports and by answering the questions the peers made assessment of how well the projects fulfils them. The good point and indeed strength with the peer review method is that it allows for such qualitative indicators to be used. Accordingly, the two projects, The Green House and the Young in Research, were evaluated and the result of this evaluation is presented in *The Post-review report*, published in tandem with this report. Moreover, by using the peer review method a mutual learning was achieved.