BADED 2006 - 2008

Barriers in Adult Education

BADED – Barriers in Adult Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 the European Commission set the ambitious goal of becoming the most advanced knowledge-based economy on this planet. For this reason a number of educational programmes were introduced in Europe, which are believed to support those goals included in the Lisbon Strategy.

For the programme period 2007-2013 a total of about 7 billion EURO will be spent on school education, universities, vocational training and adult education.

Adult Education receives only 4% of the allocated funds and definitely comes last in many respects. However, training adults seems to be as important as training members of all other groups.

The Grundtvig programme is dedicated to all adults, no matter what age they are and whether they are in employment or not. In the programme we are basically dealing with people of rather low educational levels, who are often socially disadvantaged and/or come from economically disadvantaged regions. In Grundtvig activities are mainly concerned with the teaching of life skills, rather than offering formal learning. This is because many Grundtvig target groups lack precisely those skills and might therefore be left behind in various ways.

In the project BADED partners looked into the barriers that stop adults from continuous learning within the terms of Lifelong Learning. What was discovered in the project is sometimes obvious, but at the same time it emphasises the needs of adults, which have to be addressed before people can adopt the principles of Lifelong Learning.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1. Objectives of BADED

The duration of the project was limited to 2 years, from August 2006 – July 2008. During this period the partners developed the Package of Measures at hand, by generating ideas and suggestions about how internal and external barriers in Adult Education can be overcome.

In the first phase of the project the focus was on the analysis of the most frequent barriers. Using semi-structured interviews and the Life Story method information on those barriers was collected and compared in the 3 partner countries. The results of the research activities were discussed in the meetings and the questioning tools were improved and modified. Local partners like Employment Agencies and Adult Learners delivered feedback and got involved in the discussions about the findings of the research activities.

In the second phase – which corresponds to the second project year - partners attempt to identify examples of "Best Practice", in order to build up know-how for the development of effective methods for overcoming barriers in Adult Education. The project participants will observe tuition and training programmes for adults, attend discussions and workshops, as well as conduct case studies.

The objective of the BADED project was to define obstacles and barriers that make it difficult for adults, particularly those living in geographically and socially disadvantaged areas, to undergo various kinds and forms of continuing education. Those barriers can be related to the education and/or guidance system in the country of residence, the labour market or social and cultural standards as well as personal circumstances.

The list of suspected barriers was first widely discussed between the project partners, along with studying relevant literature (existing publications on adult education and research studies on this topic).

An initial discussion on the project objectives and ways of achieving the planned outcome took place at the first meeting of project partners in October 2006 in Prague. It was agreed that the barriers would be identified via semi-structured interviews. The interviews, which all the partners conducted, also served as a basis for discussions at a second meeting of project partners in Vienna in April 2007, while the methodology was expanded with life story interviews. Another meeting in June 2007 took place in Finland where the results – in this case the main barriers – were discussed in depth. During the second year of the project partners extended the interviews to educational institutions and finally used the results for the development of strategies which are thought to help people overcome some of the barriers mentioned.

In two other meetings – in October 2007 and January 2008 - the method of interviewing as well as the interviewed institutions were chosen. The partners agreed to conduct interviews with advisers or/and counsellors from counselling institutions and labour offices, as well as from private organizations and teachers or/and advisers from educational institutions.

All materials gathered were analysed and discussed in the meeting in May 2008 in Finland and the main counselling categories were identified.

In four bilateral meetings across the project duration selected issues were discussed and developed in more depth. All activities aimed for the identification of essential elements for a successful access to training and further education for people of all social levels and cultures, while determining the most effective methods for overcoming the barriers to adult education. The fact that the project partners could exchange their expert knowledge with others provided them with a chance to reflect on their own methods and to question their previous approaches.

2.2. Method

2.2.1. Semi-structured Interview

The method of semi-structured interviews provides a very clear outline for every interviewer to get structured information by still leaving some space for interviewees to speak about their personal issues/problems openly. The interviews included questions geared towards education, previous and present jobs, attitudes of their family they grew up in and their present family, opinions about further education and the barriers which did or would prevent people from pursuing it. Most questions were designed as so-called „open questions", gathering more information from the interviwees than just a ‚yes' or ‚no' answer. The results were then analysed according to a qualitative methodology (Strauss, A., & Corbin, J., 1998: *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, Sage publications, Thousand Oaks) and the main categories – of barriers in further education – were identified.

2.2.2. Life Story Interview

This innovative method of interviewing was introduced following an initiative of the Austrian partner, who learnt about it during a previous Learning Partnership.

The aim of the research was to gain knowledge about education, mainly further education, and what it implies, what attitudes and behaviour are involved and in which context we adapt to learning at various stages of our lives. The life stories narrated to us were nothing more than that: narrations of someone's past and present, and possibly their future intentions. But those narrations represent the context in which we place the questions about values and attitudes the narrators consider important. This helps us to understand what basic assumptions have been made and how they were learnt. This does not mean,

naturally, that what is true in one case can be applied across the scale – however, we can assume that repeatedly occuring traits prevailing among the interviewees do have a certain degree of universality. In other words, the attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour we have identified are by no means an exhaustive list of barriers in adult education. They are rather a framework within which we – as vocational guides and career counsellors – can find hints and ideas about possible barriers or even clusters of limitations.

The interviews consisted of two parts: the *narrative part*, in which the individual interviewees were allowed to retell their story uninterruptedly, and the *qualitative part*, in which the interviewees were asked five questions. All life stories had their role in the development of this report, but that does not mean that they were all equally interesting or good – or equally bad, for that matter. Some were very relevant to the topic, others far from it. Nevertheless, they helped us to put the qualitative questions into a context, and that was what ultimately mattered. We refrained from putting a research tube down the throat of the interviewees in order to make them say what we wanted. They were given the liberty to choose those aspects of their lives that they wanted to share in order to deliver a ‚personal truth' that might or might not have a basis in historical fact. For example, when one interviewee claims that the thing she remembers best from school is finding a four-leaf shamrock during a school trip, one cannot help noticing a certain peculiarity, particularly because school is not about finding symbols of good luck. But at the same time, it is relatively easy to make sense of the ‚personal truth' behind it, namely that the interviewee has coloured her school memories with a few very positive occurrences, which allow her to look back with enjoyment and appreciation. In fact, as we will see later on, most attitudes and behaviour we analysed will have been acquired through personal experiences of the type mentioned above, rather than learnt within a formal, or even non-formal, educational frame.

Having said this, we must also remember, that we listen to and read the interviews within the context of carrying out research. We are not therapists or priests ready to help the narrators make sense of their lives or discover the truth. We will only interpret the information given from the perspective of education/further education as something people appreciate or don't, and refrain from other comments that would appear out of place within this paper.

2.2.2.1. Questions

The five qualitative questions that partners agreed to ask each interviewee were:
1. How do you feel about education?
2. What do you remember from school?
3. How does/did education influence your life?
4. If you had unlimited financial resources, what would you do?
5. Whom do you admire?

These questions might appear relevant to the topic even when they stand on their own, taken out of the context of the narration. However, we thought that interpreting them within the context of the interview would give us an insight into the causes that triggered those answers; they would help us understand "why" those attitudes developed, not only "what" the attitudes are.

2.2.2.2. Process

To put down here the entire framework for analysis would be too time-consuming. A few details, however, are needed in order to understand the claims made later on.

Firstly, we look at the time and temporal sequence of each story, comparing the order of the narration with the reconstruction of the actual chronology of events. The duration, frequency and order of events give us an idea about the narrator's conception of time, be it linear, cyclical or fragmented. This, connected with an analysis of space (physical or contextual), helps us to understand the importance of patience and negotiation as personal competencies. Some places are given much attention and symbolic meaning, while others are presented in a negative light. This aspect is also important in terms of identity and belonging – answering questions related to why and how a place has marked a person's identity and what values have been induced or modified by it. If we notice a turning-point in the story, we should try to understand if there was a conflict or a crisis involved, which might cause changes in attitudes and values.

Secondly, we analyse the voices, persons and relations appearing within the narration, whether the interviewee is the active subject of an experience retold ("I" or "we", showing affiliation and empathy) or just a passive observer ("he/she", showing that the narrator dissociates him or herself from the experience retold). This latter instance helps in the analysis of the rhetoric of "the other", in the identification of personal values and attitudes as opposed to "them".

Thirdly, we look at the values and attitudes themselves, whether they are overtly expressed or implicitly accepted or rejected. When a religious, political or historical point of view is expressed, we should try to look beyond it and see the "educational plot", the possible attitudes derived from it. Rituals, traditions and common educational activities are also noted, and their meaning should be put again into the context of the entire story.

Finally, we should look for metaphors in the narrations. This task is often made more difficult if interviews are analysed in their English translation, or if they are led in another language than the speaker's native tongue; in this case, probably many of the metaphors from the narrator's mother tongue are lost. However, where we find them we should try to see beyond their immediate meaning and look for a hidden understanding of life, of the self, of emotions, etc.

Needless to say, the outcome of this analysis cannot be much more than a subjective interpretation of the stories. One cannot step out of one's own (cultural + educational) background when analysing, and therefore the conclusions are bound to be biased. They will, however, address several standards of personal, interpersonal and educational attitudes, behaviour, values and beliefs.

The source: *Developing Skills for Efficient Communication with People from Different Cultural Backgrounds - Basic Trainer Competencies; Grundtvig Learning Partnership. Deurne – Karjaa – Sibiu – Vienna April 2005*

3. PARTNERS

The Learning Partnership BADED involves three partner organisations from Austria, the Czech Republic and Finland. The original number of partners in the application was seven, but unfortunately only 4 of them were selected for a grant. The Italian partner had to withdraw from the project activities in the first months of the project, due to a heavy workload. The types of partner organisations are fairly diverse, which will greatly contribute to the versatility of the project's content and results. All partners are very experienced in developing and conducting training for adults and/or in advising and counselling adults in making career decisions.

The major change in the number of partners naturally reduces the validity of the findings. However some of the results are valid universally and can still be considered valuable for professionals working in the field of vocational guidance and career counselling.

3.1. National Training Fund – Guidance Services Support Unit, Prague, Czech Republic

The National Training Fund (NTF) is a non-profit organisation founded in 1994 with the support of the European Commission and the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA). Its primary mission is human resources development, support for lifelong learning, for employment and the social development in the Czech Republic, increasing management quality and competitiveness and contributing to national social and economic transformation. The Guidance Services Support Unit (GSSU) is one of the subsections of the NTF.

GSSU has sound professional knowledge in the field of educational and career guidance. It supports the Czech guidance community through its regular contacts and co-operation with various institutions in the guidance sphere under the competence of the MoEYS and MoLSA. GSSU gathers and distributes information on educational opportunities and supports guidance structures in the Czech Republic. It has an extensive research capacity as well as knowledge of the Czech education and labour markets. One of the present tasks of GSSU is assisting the process of formation of a new national policy in the area of

educational and career guidance for adults, within the framework of a policy of lifelong learning.

3.2. Mag. Ingrid Wagenhofer, Fischamend, Austria

The Austrian partner is a self-employed trainer & counsellor, who has been working with unemployed people from various cultural and social backgrounds, providing training and counselling to individuals and groups, mainly in the field of vocational guidance and communication skills.

She holds a degree in Business Administration/ Marketing and is a Master Practitioner in NLP. She is also a graduate of the Australian College of Applied Psychology in Sydney, Australia, and according to Australian law a certified careers counsellor and therapist. For the last 7 years she has been working with unemployed people from rural and metropolitan areas of Austria, assisting them to re-integrate into the workforce.

One of the main objectives of these training activities was motivating participants to take steps towards a higher level of education. According to statistics and from personal experience it can be shown that less educated members of the workforce are disadvantaged and very often less satisfied with their work. Because of political and economic development – some call it globalisation – individuals nowadays need better skills and higher education levels in order to perform at the same level. Identifying barriers and developing instruments for people to overcome these barriers is an essential tool for a well trained European workforce.

3.3. Municipal Federation of Education in Western Pirkanmaa District (Pirkanmaa Westcome – PW), Ikaalinen, Finland

PW has several years' experience in the field of adult education, and many good, successful results from marketing during different ESF projects. PW offers professional further and continuing education for adults in different fields and has experience in projects at a transnational and national level, as co-ordinator and partner. The college has diverse ICT-equipment and software, and a wide selection of ICT-related training courses and other courses. On a national level the department is involved in a new development of vocational education, where pedagogical tools for more individually-based training are being developed and could contribute both at a professional and pedagogic/didactic level.

4. INTERVIEW PHASES

4.1. First Project Year – Individuals, Adults

During the first year both methods of interviewing – semi-structured and life story interview - were used. All partners conducted a total of 28 interviews in the first year – 16 semi-structured and 12 life story interviews. The target persons in all partner countries came from socially and geographically disadvantaged

regions, or were themselves socially and/or economically disadvantaged. For that reason all partners got in touch with regional labour offices or EURES branches and co-operated with those very closely in order to find aproppriate interview partners.

The co-ordinator NVF prepared the first draft version – created a scenario for a semi-structured interview and conducted four pilot interviews. Then the Czech partner translated the revised scenario into English and then the partners discussed the scenario and agreed on a common version of the developed scenario. Later the Czech partner conducted another four interviews.

The Austrian partner prepared a German version of the questionnaire, had it translated and carried out a couple of test interviews in the German version, in order to make sure the language used was as close to the English version as possible. Following this workplan, the Austrian partner then started with the pilot interviews, which were carried out with a promised maximum of 8 pilot interviewees. In order to find the appropriate interviewees the Austrian partner got in touch with the Austrian Employment Agency, the AMS-EURES+Berufsinfozentrum, Mr. Peter Jedlicka, asking for support in identifying a sufficient number of pilot persons with various professional and cultural backgrounds.

Based on the outcome of the semi-structured interviews, the Austrian partner suggested the remaining interviews be complemented by life story interviews, using the life story method introduced in a previous Learning Partnership "Developing Skills for Efficient Communication with People from Different Cultural Backgrounds", where she was a partner. This was in order to gain an even better insight into the issue.

Then further three life story interviews were also carried out by the co-ordinating institution. The Austrian partner conducted another four life story interviews, in order to be able to compare the results.

The Finnish partner completed five semi-structured interviews with unemployed people from the area.

The interviews were analysed and additional categories and findings were added to the existing data.

In the third meeting of project partners, the collected interview results/outcomes i.e. barriers identified, of participating countries were compared. At the meeting partners engaged in intense discussions about these barriers and the implications of them for further project implementation.

BADED – Barriers in Adult Education

Table 1. : Sample in all partner countries:

Sex of respondent	Age	Country	Unemployment period
Female	19	AT	0
Female	26	AT	8month
Female	31	CZ	6months
Female	32	CZ	0
Female	32	CZ	3years
Female	32	CZ	3months
Female	34	CZ	6months
Female	35	CZ	3years
Female	36	FI	0
Female	37	AT	4years
Female	37	CZ	7years
Female	45	AT	11months
Female	45	FI	4 months
Female	49	AT	6months
Female	50	FI	4 months
Female	51	AT	3years
Female	53	FI	0
Male	22	CZ	6months
Male	25	AT	6months
Male	31	AT	4years
Male	40	AT	7months
Male	40	CZ	3years
Male	41	AT	2years
Male	42	AT	3months
Male	42	CZ	6months
Male	44	AT	6years
Male	46	CZ	3months
Male	55	FI	0

Number of female	17	Long term unemployed	10
Number of male	11	Long term unemployed	8
Number of all respondents	28	Long term unemployed	18

4.2. Second Project Year – Counsellors, Advisers and Trainers

In the second year the method of semi-structured interviews was used again and short but concise scenarios were prepared.

Each partner then conducted a few interviews in counselling and educational organisations and institutions. The Czech and Austrian partners each carried

out four interviews and the Finnish partner completed two interviews. All interviews were thoroughly analysed and the main categories identified. All results were then intensely discussed and compared in the seventh project meeting.

Czech Republic	1. Consultant, counsellor for personal and career development, AC, counselling and consultation for improvment of human resources during reconstruction of companies. The goal is for clients to find a job.
	2. Career consultant and counsellor in "supporting employment". Supporting employment is a time-constrained service for people who want to have a paid job in the primary labour market. Their ability to do so is limited for several reasons which means they need individual support in finding and carrying out a job. The support is provided mainly because the client requires it, not because of a medical diagnosis (in the Czech Republic formely only available to mentally ill people). The clients of „supporting services" mostly lack certain skills, or cannot cope with everyday work-life requirements e.g. finding and keeping a job. The main goal for them is to find a permanent job in the open job market and to increase their working abilities.
	3. Counsellor at a labour office - career counselling, working with longterm unemployed. The goal is to activate people so they can re-start their career and adopt a healthier lifestyle.
	4. Trainer of social competencies. The goal is to assist people in realising their needs
Austria	5. Career counsellor and trainer, coach; Education level: psychological training; one-on-one counselling and courses. The goal is to motivate and activate people to get back into the workforce and find a permanent job.
	6. Trainer of social competencies and career development, communication and memory; Educational level: trainer and coach. The goal is to activate clients and put them into a workplace
	7. Trainer and counsellor for personal development, helping people to cope with feelings of guilt. Educational level: psychological training. Targets are clients with multiple handicaps. The goal is to find a job either in the secondary or the primary job market.
	8. Consultant and coach, Educational level: consultant for career and learning, media consultant. Clients can obtain one-on-one consultations. The goal is to support people in gaining further education in order to stay in a job or get a better job
Finland	9. Tutor/teacher, providing practical support, whatever is needed in the courses, keeping in touch with students and financing organizations. Guidance and counselling, developing a study plan with the student, helping students to find a good place for fieldwork placement/ practical work experience.
	10. Adult educator, lecturer, project specialist.

5. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

5.1. Defined Barriers

The primary outcome of the project is a list or description of barriers, as reported by people from socially, economically and geographically disadvantaged backgrounds. These barriers can be classified as external and internal. Both categories are, of course, inter-related and inseparable in real life. Therefore some topics are inter-linked.

The main barriers we analysed from interviews are:

5.1.1. External Barriers:

- *Lack of finance*

Lack of finance was frequently stated as the reason for non-involvement in continuing education. This is also linked to the fact that almost all respondents were unemployed at the time of the survey and therefore did not have enough money for ongoing education. The costs of some courses, which are basically free of charge for unemployed people, have to be covered by the participant, if the person terminates the course before completion (e.g. in the event that the participant finds a job).

- *Lack of time*

Women stated family obligations as one of the major reasons for not having enough time left for further or even basic education. They either consider family as a priority or do not see another alternative. Women also mentioned a lack of part-time employment opportunities, which would make it possible for them to combine work, continuing education and family care. Another barrier mentioned was that courses leading to a qualification last too long and take too much time. Moreover, when the employer does not support continuing education, obtaining leave from work is seen as another big problem.

- *Limited or unattractive offer of good quality courses, bad experience with training-employment*

Some respondents mentioned that only a few or unattractive courses are available or were offered to them. They experienced courses which, according to them, do not have sufficient quality or which failed to give them any advantage in seeking employment – the desire for a strong link between a course and a chance of finding employment became apparent, courses were not seen as a means of self-education and personal development but only as a means of getting a job.

- *Lack of information about courses: no access to advisors and appropriate advice*

Respondents do not know where to find information, some claim that there are many courses, but it is difficult to find the ones they want.

- *Family problems*

One respondent mentioned that she had to look after her mother and therefore could not pursue further education – i.e. Family duties hindering personal development and the choice to move to a place where education is more accessible.

- *Too little practical support*

Some respondents said they did not have enough support from their families – e.g. help with everyday chores, which would allow the respondent to attend a course. A lack of support on the part of employers was also mentioned. Moreover, a lack of guidance services as a source of support was mentioned as well.

- *The place – access to further education*

The course is held at a place which is difficult to access or too far away from the respondent's home.

- *The disadvantage of women on and after maternity leave*

No, or only a few opportunities for, part-time work is available for women on maternity leave, which would allow mothers to get back into the labour market gradually. Women also mentioned having had difficulties returning to employment after maternity leave, as employers prefer not to employ them while looking after a small child - this develops into a personal barrier as the women mentioned decreased self-confidence.

- *Courses/ education as meeting places*

This is less a barrier than a way in which people perceive courses they are forced to attend by the labour offices: courses and training are used as a platform for meeting people – who mostly are in the same situation of unemployment, lack of money and of free time during the day. Learning and aquiring new skills are less important than the social aspect of getting in touch with other people *(see also sacrifice).*

- *Formal learning*

All interviewees appreciate informal learning as opposed to formal, as they dislike/hate the structure and requirements of formal learning *(see being different and rebellion).* Life and people are considered the best teachers and trainers, teaching life skills rather than skills required for jobs "Life is my best teacher".

- *Lack of money/ education is a luxury*

Money is spent on life's necessities e.g. food, shelter, children and there is no extra money available for "luxury" items; learning is seen as a luxury as well *(connection with self-worth)*; At the same time most interviewees consider money less important than social contacts and communication with other people.

5.1.2. Internal Barriers:

- *Giving up*

Some respondents gave up on their situation – e.g. when they are unemployed for some time, they become unable to mobilise themselves and to still think positively. In their minds the feeling or thought occurs that continuing education (courses or retraining) is futile, as employers prefer graduates anyway, who can offer a more comprehensive education.

- *Family or health problems, a gloomy situation*

In these circumstances, education is not a priority due to health or family problems, or – again - due to a burdensome period of unemployment – all these issues must be resolved first. Therefore they experience negative thinking, related to lack of energy for embarking on new activities, exhaustion caused by the difficult situation, which also can have a bad impact on mental health.

- *Thinking in stereotypes*

The opinion that some (e.g. language) courses are attended by young people and the respondents would not feel comfortable in a group of young learners; they consider themselves too old for learning. Another stereotype is seeing a course solely as a means for finding work and not as an opportunity or way to improve, for example, a personal situation, to make contacts, etc.

- *Insufficient willpower*

Some interviewees report a total lack of motivation, even aversion, like getting stuck in a no-win situation (e.g. unemployment benefits) – and this attitude is very difficult to deal with or to break. They even admit to laziness as a main reason for not attempting anything in their lives any more.

- *Anxiety*

People are paralysed by their worries; they constantly tell themselves – I will fail, I will not complete the course.

- *Personal or physical problems*

Serious barriers in pursuing further education and/or even finding a new job are conditions like depression, insomnia, stress and low self-confidence.

- *Other priorities*

Higher priorities than further education include family care, spending time with friends, job seeking and other things.

- *Lack of psychological support*

Some respondents mentioned lack of psychological support on the part of people close to them. Furthermore, they mentioned lack of appropriate services that would provide such support e.g. an advisor who provides psychological assistance in addition to only giving information.

- *Lack of orientation*

People sometimes seem to need to find their bearings. They cannot tell yet what the situation is like; they lack the ability to apply their judgment to the situation.

- *Bad personal experience in regards to education system or training*

This concern is carried through from a very early age. People keep negative experiences related to educational institutions and courses in their memory, which actually date back to a time when the respondents were little and helpless. Education is intimidating for them.

- *Rebellion*

Most interviewees referred to themselves as rebels against society and other people's opinion. They want things their way and are not ready to negotiate a solution or compromise.

- *Being different*

Again all interviewees described their experiences as different from those of others, showing a high degree of self-centredness in the sense of "Take me as I am - or leave me".

- *Contradiction/ discrepancies*

In almost all interviews many contradiction/discrepancies were identified e.g. "I like education, but I mostly enjoy the social aspect of being part of a group, as I already know a lot"; or "I want to learn, but I dislike change".

- *Life as a battle, no-one can win*

Life is considered a battle on all levels by all interviewees; at the same time, most seem to think they can never win, as the system, society or God is against them anyway. Therefore it is OK to give up and enjoy the benefits of unemployment – free time during the day, less stress, getting away form the stress of a "normal" job, raising children as a fulltime job for life.

- *Life is serious*

Life is experienced as something very serious and sometimes exhausting. To have fun while working is totally foreign to those interviewees and things have to be taken seriously, while life is usually hard.

- *Exploitation*

Being part of society and an economy means being exploited by companies, the state and other bodies; why invest in the system, when one does not receive a proper salary and is not valued as an important part of the company/society anyway. For most interviewees this is a good enough reason to stay out of jobs, as they feel exploited and abused.

- *Sacrifice/ win-lose situation*

Doing things for others is important, even when one has to pay a high price for that oneself. In most Life stories this is an issue and shows a high degree of social responsibility towards children, the sick and old people and everyone handicapped. However, this is often contradicted by the abuse of the system through exploitation of unemployment benefits *(see contradiction)*

- *Lack of self-worth/ money not important*

On the one hand interviewees think that things should be done their way, at the same time they seem to lack self-worth. They consider money less important,

as if they feel they are not worthy enough to have a good life and sufficient funds to support that life.

5.2. Sources and Reasons for Further Education

During the interviews respondents were asked about their sources of information and interviewers also wanted to know where the respondents obtained information about continuing education opportunities.

The following sources were identified, ranked according to importance:

1. Labour office
2. Acquaintances, friends, relatives
3. Internet
4. Specific educational institutions (if there is interest in a specific course)

A most important aspect – as regards barriers in continuing education – is the personal motivation of each individual. The following most frequent reasons for involvement in continuing education were stated by the respondents, again ranked according to their importance:

1. Course outcomes are directly applicable in a specific job – i.e. if the respondents need to expand their knowledge and skills in a specific area, they can imagine signing up for such a course; or if getting a job is dependent on undergoing a specific course, they would be prepared to attend that course.
2. If the course can guarantee or facilitate employment.
3. The course delivers knowledge or skills, which are interesting or important for the individual, but do not need to be directly related to a specific job e.g. improving social skills.
4. The course can serve as a means of meeting new people and a networking opportunity. This can indirectly result in increased self-confidence.

The respondents most frequently stated the following types of continuing education that would interest them:

Foreign Languages, Computer Skills, Re-training, Study at a Higher Education Institution.

In addition to finding the major barriers, the issue of guidance in continuing education was also important. The partners therefore asked the interviewees, what their views and experience are in relation to this topic:

1. Some respondents stated that in the event of difficulties or if they needed to find continuing education opportunities, they opt for self-help and rely on the relevant resources.

2. Others said they do not have any idea whom they could contact and whether they would welcome such advice.

3. The respondents also stated that they would view guidance as a way of addressing problems which they cannot handle on their own. Possibly, guidance could also help them boost their motivation and point them into the right direction in case of being at a crossroad. Guidance could also be a way of resolving their personal problems and working on increasing their own value and self-confidence.

One general conclusion partners have to draw, is that many people with a rather low educational level face multi-faceted problems, which they need to overcome before they can even consider further education. Information about courses and education is wasted at the stage of battling several serious issues at the same time. An essential step for these people would be psychological and practical support in solving existential problems first. Only after having aquired some skills for resolving at least some of life's basic challenges, can people (re-)open their minds to education and training. Comprehensive counselling would be suitable for such people throughout the whole process, as it can boost self-confidence, personal development and would certainly improve their personal situation and could help them to get involved in further life and career activities again.

6. STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS

As described previously, the second year was dedicated to the interviews with counsellors/advisers and teachers/trainers in educational institutions. Below a description of the necessary counselling strategies is given – matters of detail which were pointed out by the counsellors/advisers and teachers we were speaking with. We discovered that the problem of further education for people from disadvantaged regions is very often strongly connected with unemployment and the determination to find a job. That is why the strategies are oriented not just towards further education, but also towards career and personal development and useful steps which can help people to find a job.

Counsellors/advisers
- give short to medium-term support, assistance and coaching for jobs relevant to education. Helping clients through the process of orienting themselves and developing options, trying to define a career and profession as well as offering them support with psycho-social problems.

- provide information on where to find courses, available funds and procedures of funding, about labour offices, the selection process, rights and duties. They assist clients in finding information about the job market, companies and in making contacts. They provide an estimation of real job availability and the real situation in the region. Clients can also obtain information about the different forms of support, and how a client can access those.

- assist clients in filling in forms and applications for funding, while also supporting clients in providing necessary documents and papers.

- assess clients' skills, abilities, the present situation of a client and the relevance of further education. They provide recommendations for courses and re-qualification activities.

- help the client to design a development plan - summarising information resources, future activities and possible challenges.

- support clients in making contact with current employers, negotiating their further education or fieldwork placements. They also give support in making contact with potential employers, either for permanent and part-time jobs or fieldwork placements.

- assist and train participants for job applications, help to access sources for job offers, to research a job, how to write a proper CV for a particular job, and provide training for working with the internet.

- offer training for self-presentation and job application skills, assist clients to prepare for job interviews, by supervising role plays and attending job interviews with clients.

- conduct training in social competencies – social communication and self presentation, verbal and nonverbal communication.

- help for finding support in a group and in a personal environment, by improving social contacts.

- assist in meeting the challenges of daily life, housing, cooking and cleaning. They also give support with the organization of daily life and help people find solutions to difficult personal situations - divorce, single parent, debts.

- challenge clients to recognize their need to deal with different problems and difficulties in learning –problems with concentration, reading, writing etc. They also support people in developing new strategies and skills for studying – increasing the ability to study.

- recognize groups who need more complex help e.g. in Finland adult education institutions nowadays face a lot of adult students from the immigrant communities, who need more and different assistance than other Finns – therefore co-ordination of help between the educational institution, social and labour offices is required.

- assistance in discovering the competencies, strengths and needs of adult students/clients. In co-operation with the advisers in the employment office and psychologists they try to identify the competencies of students, by finding out what could be of extra value to the student and how this person could benefit most from the training.

- guide them to do practical work experience and help them to find employers who provide such work opportunities.

- support clients to manage themselves and to seek information in an appropriate way, relying on their own initiative. They encourage them to practise self-evaluation and ask for feedback from them.

- go into the workplace and help students to evaluate their progress and to value the benefits of learning at work as well as the benefits of different learning environments.

- answer the question, whether training does/could help in other situations in life.

- assess levels of professionalism and skills - what a person has to offer, how to improve or learn – and help in opening their eyes to new opportunities. They support clients in improving the process of self-evaluation – what he/she can do and what their actual abilities are.

- conduct psychological tests and give practical feedback – pointing out their strengths and weaknesses.

- offer longterm help, assistance, or training in practical situations which are difficult to cope with.

- assist in learning new skills and abilities to be applied in practice - in concrete situations. They provide orientation and direct assistance in the work place. The goal is a gowing independence and ability to cope with difficult work situations, stress and personal relationships. They also offer direct support to people with decreased ability to learn, helping with problematic situations in the workplace (this should not take more than two years).

- teach people to accept a changed situation e.g. losing a job will influence all aspects of life. They help the client to accept the current situation as it is.

- help the clients to increase self-respect and self-support, by helping them to appreciate their own abillities, to know what they are good at, to reveal deep concerns and hopes. Counsellors/advisers support people in achieving a self determined life, developing structure and routine, teaching them relaxation – and support their rising self-confidence. They are helping people get out of isolation, which often goes hand-in-hand with unemployment, and to stop them being inward-looking. They teach clients to appreciate their own abilities: to know what they are good at.

- motivate the client through communication - through communication the client learns to clarify his/her needs, helping to find real opportunities, make people start thinking about another qualification or re-qualification. They assist in reflecting on the current situation and help to reduce fear and prejudice. Helping clients to keep pursuing new jobs or further education; looking for jobs, even if it takes a while, getting up after falling down – learning from failures.

- emphasise positive aspects of situations, not just the negative ones, and reframe unpleasant occurances as opportunities to learn.

- work in groups, which is interactive and helps with personal development – self-reflection and motivation for career development, improving presentation skills - who I am, what I can do, what I want to do and why, increase communication styles and communication under stress conditions. They point out ways in which people can realise ambitions and how they can overcome fear. Counsellors/advisers introduce mutual understanding, motivation, support and appreciation of group work, as important aspects of learning. They let clients do things themselves, learning together and from others, enjoying the company of others, opening avenues for (slight) changes. They furthermore foster group dynamics – like sharing similar experiences, realising that they are not alone in this situation, but rather are part of a like-minded group.

- help with activisation and finding the inner dynamic of a person.

- help clients to realise their present situation, where it could be valuable to speak about negative aspects: why I can not want to find a job, to change my way of life - they provide the open space necessary for other approaches, and assist clients to develop awareness about the need – escaping pressure - for change. They point out the advantages of the present situation, what that could mean for a person, when being unemployed, or not satisfied.

- help clients to realise their own needs: what and how much can I do, what do I like and don't like, what I can and what I want, assist in making individual plans.

- use techniques of relaxation for release of tension and stress.

- listen to people's concerns and fears, while drawing their attention to the positive side of things and referring clients on to other services, if needed.

- are empathetic and trust the clients' ability to solve their problems eventually. They set boundaries of support in order to avoid dependency.

7. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

7.1. Storytelling

The word "story" or "narrative" appears in social sciences in a variety of definitions (Riessman, 1993). I have used the word 'story' as a sequence of events that help the narrator and the listener to make sense of experience and the world around them. The telling of stories helps the narrator to identify the meaning of anticipated, unrelated or even forgotten events and identify a reference point between the self, others and the environment. When daily routine is interrupted for any reason, a narrative offers an opportunity to put the pieces together, make sense of what is taking or has taken place and build a new context.

The ingredients of our lifestory come from the familial, communal, and cultural setting into which we were born. As we grew up and assumed power to write our own story, this happened within the limits of our early beginning. We are both actor and "co-author" (Brody, 1987). We stand alone in our story, yet how we choose to write our story makes a difference. We are not completely determined by our conditioning or biological inheritance. How we have chosen and will continue to choose, follow or pattern ourselves afterwards will determine our well- or ill being. How human life turns out will in turn affect neurological and biological components (Blumenthal, 1996; Damasio, 1994).

A story is composed of several layers, often hidden from oneself and others (e.g. Freud, 1900). Through telling our story and hearing others´ stories, we gain a wider understanding of our life, the community that held us together and the good we had in common with them (MacIntyre, 1984). Stories also reveal our dreams, hopes, love, hate, and despair. The story becomes "an act of self-knowing" (Kidd, 1989). Through storytelling we may become aware of the restricted range of choices we were allowed to make. We are now offered a freedom of decision; to continue living and coping as we had learned in the past or to redirect our "destination and map" (Frank, 1996).

By taking responsibility for our story, we may assume responsibility for our life (Frank, 1996). We had no freedom from the biological or psychological conditioning we received from our ancestors. Our past determined the present. We had to play the hand we had as best we could. But to focus on biological deterministic explanations solely is often a denial of human freedom and dignity (Sire, 1988; Mercadante, 1996). The ability to make choices, except at the extremities of human experience such as catastrophies and grave illnesses, gives people a sense of transcendence over their environment (Mercandante, 1996).

People do not always have a choice over what happens, but they do have a choice of how they respond (Sire, 1988). By assuming responsibility for our actions, we are assuming responsibility for our present condition. The past provided us with the "map and destination". Through telling our story our new "map" is already taking place and can thus become "an act of healing".

One way in which „an act of healing" can take place is through learning new skills. Life skills are developmental competencies for effective living and coping (Darden et al., 1996; Botwin and Griffin, 2004). The term conveys the image of pulling ropes for the purpose of steering a ship. This term was passed over to political life where it came to mean problem solving skills that require experience and intuition in matters such as strategy, diplomacy and negotiation skills. In the book of Proverbs, skills refer to the good advice given by royal counsellors concerning the nation's livelihood (Brown, 1996). In the modern sense skills enhance the learner's sense of being an efficacious person (Bandura, 1997). The skills include interpersonal communication and human relational skills, problem solving and decision-making skills, physical fitness and

health maintenance, identity development and purpose-in-life skills. Deficiency in one or all areas refers to a lack of appropriate experiences (Darden, et al., 1996). Skills in return reward their user by providing courage to face life as it comes lovingly and constructively, in other words, things can be done well, in the best way, in harmony with circumstances and other people.

The skills do not necessarily guarantee success in life and success in life does not necessarily tell everything about the person. A good life is a way of life that could be characterized as integrated. A person has the necessary skills and strength to live his or her own life. Integrity does not save one from making any mistakes or getting hurt or always doing the right thing. Integrity means a person having the necessary strength for life as it comes without having to resort to denial, manipulation, coercion, escapism or explanations (Baumeister, 1991; Peck, 1998). When young men and women lack the necessary support and opportunities and skills to become productive citizens, their potential to contribute to society is underused. Youths in these circumstances are more likely to be a long-term drain on public and private resources in terms of increased unemployment, higher health and social welfare costs, and lower economic growth (…..).

Moral identity establishes a sense of personal worth (Power, 2005). According to Rawls (1971) a sense of personal worth carries a sense of one's own value and a sense of the good that is worth carrying out. This in turn requires that one has a rational plan of life that is consistent with the principles of human motivation that respect excellence, and finds one's person and one's acts appreciated and confirmed by the community, and has confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to carry out the rational plan of life that has been chosen (p. 440). A moral life is a skilled life. Therefore intellectual and moral powers need to be constantly encouraged and strengthened by exercise.

7.1.1. Important Steps

There are several steps towards change, which every counsellor should support in a challenging way in work with clients/students:

1. Accepting a person's present condition/situation: Story telling – being aware about the present situation, what is happening in his/her life.
2. Do they want to change? – Do they need something else/new?
3. Seeking help and assistance.
4. Starting to work on identified issues.
5. Finding other people, a community – they are not alone in their situation.
6. Using past experience for the common good.

In everyone's life it is important to develop self-respect:

1. Realising that my life is valuable. My life has a certain direction, I have a rational plan of life.
2. Realising the plan of life. I take responsibility for my life and its occurences, respect reality.

7.2. It Is All in the Mind - Psychological Support

There are some categories analysed and about which conclusions were reached from the interviews with counsellors/advisers and teachers, which they should focus on in teaching, guidance and counselling.

Attitudes:

- listening empathetically to people's concerns and problems
- setting clear boundaries by clarifying roles of counsellor/trainer/adviser and client
- challenging stereotypes and prejudice
- teaching people relaxation techniques and skills
- creating a supportive and motivating enviroment for individuals and groups

Support:

- helping people to realize their own needs
- assisting people to become realistic about their situation and life while realizing their possibilities and options - get help, change perspective, find support
- identifying personal motivation - find out how people tick
- acknowledging even slight changes
- appreciating diversity and managing intercultural issues
- encouraging people to practise self-evaluation and ask for feedback
- assisting clients in getting out of isolation
- offering further help and therapeutic support

Approach:

- developing and enhancing self-confidence
- re-shaping people's self-image
- identifying inner power and personal strengths
- fostering assertiveness
- trusting people's ability to solve their problems eventually

Activation:

- helping people to own their difficulties and their personal situation in order to develop solutions
- support people to develop structure and rituals for a self-determined life
- assisting people to share positive and negative experiences with others
- focusing on the positive - reframing a situation looking for positive aspects or opportunities for learning
- establishing a peer group support
- developing strategies to cope with fear and failure
- creating mutual trust between counsellor/trainer/adviser and client/student as well as between group members

- identifying problem areas in people's lives and working out possible solutions together

7.3. Hands-on Approach - Practical Support

There are practical elements of every counselling process:

Information & Clarification:
- giving information about the educational system and opportunities and the job market
- supporting clients in preparing documents for job applications
- offering a selection of appropriate courses
- offering training/coaching of social competencies, communication and presentation skills and job application skills
- information about employees rights and duties, integration and equal opportunities
- assistance in making informed career choices
- assistance in making a development and/or career plan and putting that plan into action
- assisting clients in identifying inner and outer resources
- training people to use the internet as a research and learning tool
- information about available funds and funding procedures for further education
- assisting in filling in forms and applications for funding
- assisting clients to arrange fieldwork placements and practical experience.
- assisting clients in accessing personal and professional networks

Realisation:
- conducting psychological tests, client's interests, abilities and skills
- offering role play, video taping and exercises in order to overcome problem situations
- assessing a client's personal situation and possible problem areas
- assessing the relevance of planned educational steps
- assisting clients with language and cultural problems by providing interpreting services

Problem Solving:
- helping clients to establish a support system (family, friends, professionals)
- developing solutions for a difficult personal situation - divorce, debts, single parent, addiction
- attending job interviews with clients
- supporting special clients through coaching during their first months of employment
- offering counselling and coaching

- offering training "learn to learn"
- helping clients to overcome personal/learning deficits and develop life skills in a practical way
- offering psychological support
- referring clients on to professional help

8. PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAINERS AND COUNSELLORS/ADVISERS

8.1. Personal Requirements

- allowing each individual to make his/her own decision
- create a climate of trust and understanding
- provide information without restriction
- working in the here and now
- always keep the client's best interest in mind
- always link ideas, activities and plans to reality
- only promise what you can live up to and be concrete
- disclose your personal experiences if appropriate
- clarify the tasks of a trainer and/or counsellor and what is expected of the client
- negotiate a working contract with your client
- support the forming, and performing of a group
- quickly deal with the critical brainstorming period of a group
- stay aware of each individual's responsibilty for their life
- focus on positive aspects and learning about/from an experience
- establish and respect personal and professional boundaries
- communicate clearly and check whether your client has understood the message
- repeat what people tell you in order to make sure you have understood correctly
- listen to your clients patiently, without interruptions and in mutual respect
- be creative and resourceful when dealing with clients
- keep asking questions and stay curious about the person opposite you
- keep an open mind about unusual and unexpected responses and ideas
- keep a professional distance from your clients and watch out for signs of dependency
- adopt the principles of lifelong learning for your own personal and professional development
- get support and help from other professionals and/or colleagues if necessary
- educate yourself in intercultural skills, diversity and gender mainstreaming

- respect your own boundaries and only accept as much work as you can deliver
- get enough rest and recreation time as required in order to avoid burn-out
- use the opportunities of individual mobility grants for exploring educational systems of other European countries
- strive for the best possible results by making the best use of your resources
- develop/join a network of other professional and educational institutions as a resource
- stay up-to-date with developments in education, counselling and the job market
- ask for feedback from your clients and colleagues and do regular self-evaluation
- refer clients on to other professionals, if you feel you cannot help the client in the best way possible or if you suspect pathological problems
- make useful suggestions for improving the structure and the available offer of courses and services in your institution/region/country

8.2. Institutional Requirements

- create a safe and open space/room for training and/or counselling
- counsellors/advisers/trainers need to be professionals with permanent upgrading of their skills
- ongoing supervision needs to be provided
- sufficient funds for training and counselling activities need to be provided
- the number of clients per trainer and counsellor should be limited (per day/week/month)
- trainer and counsellor need to have sufficient time for each client
- network on a regional, national and European/International basis, in order to benefit from other people's experience and professional approaches

8.3. Code of Ethics – in short

- *see every person as an individual human being*
- *accept people as they are with their own model of the world*
- *create space for opening up and trust*
- *listen actively and carefully*
- *challenge people's unhealthy coping mechanisms in a gentle way*
- *communicate honestly and respectfully*
- *respect people's needs and interests*
- *be realistic and allow dreams to become true*

9. OVERALL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The problem of the continuing education of people from socially and geographically disadvantaged backgrounds is a complex one and cannot be narrowed down to a mere access to such education. The obstacles people face are related to their family background, employment, education, and, of course, their mental condition. Besides describing these barriers the project has provided observations, suggestions and an account of the methods of guidance practitioners who are in contact with these people and help them generate motivation for further steps and changes in their lives.

While summarising the experience of advisers it has become clear that the following principles are important for work with disadvantaged clients:

- Provide a safe space for exploration and development.

- Create a sense of belonging between group members and individuals.

- Appreciate every success, achievements and prior learnings – even small ones.

- Develop awareness of new possibilities and options.

- Put things into action step by step and celebrate even small successes.

We hope that the text provides interesting suggestions and inspiration for work with such disadvantaged people.

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