Non-formal educational practices as a tool for achieving social inclusion

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ABSTRACT: This article considers non-formal education as a tool for the social inclusion of young people from vulnerable groups. Theoretical-conceptual analysis and empirical research are based on the experience of social innovation in Bulgaria, such as youth centers. The choice of topic is based on the tendency to seek mechanisms to achieve effective social inclusion of vulnerable groups. The purpose of this article is to analyze and explore the impact of non-formal educational practices as a tool to achieve the social inclusion of young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. An empirical study was conducted on a contingent of the International Youth Center in Stara Zagora, and the study covers a three-year period from 2014 to 2017. The basis of the analysis is a survey of the Social Inclusion Index, which is viewed as a set of activities based on the implementation of inclusive practices, the introduction of inclusive policies and the formation of inclusive values. The subject of analysis in this article is covering non-formal educational practices. The study shows that they are a prerequisite for achieving the social inclusion of vulnerable groups of young people.

Keywords: non-formal education, social inclusion, youth, risk, vulnerable groups, social work

Introduction

Referring to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, published by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union at a meeting of the Nice European Council of 07.12.2000, it is noted that equality is at its core, non-discrimination, the right of access to services, social and national security.

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Chapter one deals with human dignity, which is accepted as the "foundation of fundamental rights." The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states in Art. 34 'In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union, recognizes and respects the right to social assistance and housing assistance intended to ensure the dignity of all persons who do not have sufficient resources under the rules laid down by Union law national legislation and practices. "In this context, it should be borne in mind that the European Community has taken the fight against poverty and social exclusion as a fundamental part of its essence.

The lack of extensive scientific studies on social inclusion through non-formal education brings out the need for an analytical review of the theoretical basis in a European context and the need to examine the experience of organizations aiming at the practical implementation of social inclusion through non-formal education. The relevance of the implementation issues, in the legal and educational space models of non-formal education, as well as the reason for choosing the topic of the article are based on the following prerequisites:

- The development is committed to answering the contribution and impact of non-formal education on social and economic development, and attempts to confirm the need to analyze and evaluate the social functions of this form of education within the educational framework;

- The failure of educational policies to overcome the gaps in the social inclusion process is presented as an important problem whose consequences are compounded by those who fail to receive education, remaining uncompetitive, losing employment and health insurance opportunities, social and political inclusion;

- Lack of extensive scientific studies on the impact on social inclusion of non-formal education.

The generally accepted model of education (formal education) connects with the school, accepting that it is the right way to learn and teach. In its history, however, education is saturated with elements and forms that are an essential part of it and have been realized outside of schools. The current understanding of formal education is limited and controlled by educational policies in place, that is, by the state and, therefore, by the authorities. It is a system in which policies, when drawing up curricula, educational models and conditions in schools, give an idea of the real educational space. This model assumes the acquired knowledge to be evaluated and certified at various stages of their development. This paper considers the meaning and content of non-formal

education as a real positive and proven value, building on the formal enlightenment element of the overall educational framework. It (non-formal education) is a tool for realizing the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. The term "non-formal education" first appeared in 1947 in the UNESCO Report on Education in Developing Countries. This type of education is seen as cheaper and more flexible, meeting the needs of society in the context of theories for the modernization of socio-democratic ideology. (Bozhilova, n.a.). The terminology related to the definition of "non-formal education" appeared in the world of education in the late 1960s to refer to educational efforts targeting vulnerable groups. (Rogers 2005: 13). Over the last 50 years, the idea of non-formal education and its practical implementation has been expanding to the extent that it disregards the dispute when compared to formal education. According to Romi and Schmidt (2009), the previous discourse is no longer accepted. Today, it is viewed by theorists and practitioners as complementary to and supportive of the formal education system.

 The introduction of theoretical, conceptual and conceptual clarity is more than necessary because of the focus of the present work. Although there are differences in definitions, they all reveal social inclusion as a multidimensional phenomenon. This multidimensionality implies the use of not one, but a whole set of indicators, in the establishment and scope of social inclusion and exclusion. Geddes and Benington (O'Reilly, D. 2005) argue that this approach to concepts is tautological as it identifies social problems and then labels them as aspects of exclusion or inclusion, but is not guided by any particular social scientific paradigm or theory of what exclusion or inclusion is related. The lack of theoretical rigour means the lack of ideological orientation allows a relatively open approach for identifying concepts. Social inclusion, by its very nature, is the opposite of exclusion, and it addresses many of the problems that lie at the heart of the term 'social exclusion'. Social exclusion is linked to poverty and is its postmodern definitive continuation. The concept of "social exclusion" is different from the traditional understanding of poverty, because here for the "normal" functioning of society, some people become "unnecessary." In contrast, previously, it was thought that the poor were part of society. (IL Sizova, 2007).

The implementation of non-formal education as part of the educational framework depends on many internal and external factors relevant to creating favourable conditions for acquiring knowledge and skills that lead to social and economic well-being. The implementation of non-formal education is an attempt to increase the opportunities for education of vulnerable groups. It is a "second chance for education" for those who have dropped out or are not covered by the formal system. (Kedrayate, A, 2012). Poorer communities are often underprivileged with different

learning opportunities that can improve living conditions. Most of them do not have the opportunity (such as economic, social, and geographic) to participate in informal education effectively. In this context, non-formal education is a response to the need to implement an effective strategy to support vulnerable groups.

This article aims to analyze and examine the impact of non-formal educational practices as a tool to achieve the social inclusion of young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. An empirical study was conducted on a contingent of the International Youth Center in Stara Zagora, and the study covers a three-year period. The survey is based on the Social Inclusion Index methodology, which considers inclusion as a set of activities based on the implementation of inclusive practices, the introduction of inclusive policies and the formation of inclusive values.

Methodology

The methodology for the Index for Inclusion - Developing Learning and School Participation (Published by the Center for the Study of Inclusive Education (CSIE) adapted to the needs and objectives of the study) was used to carry out the empirical study. English language versions of the Index are used in Australia, Canada, South Africa and the United States of America. In Bulgaria, the Index has been officially translated and implemented by the Center for Inclusive Education, within the framework of the Social Inclusive Europe project, and implemented in a total of 36 schools. For this study, the Inclusion Index has been adapted and used in three main dimensions relevant to:

- the creation of inclusive types of cultures, of which community building and the establishment of inclusive values are integral;

- developing inclusive policies covering the development of education for all and organizing support for diversity;

- developing inclusive practices that underpin the organization of learning. (Tony Booth and Mel Einscoe, 2000)

The study aims to study and analyze the effect of the implementation of non-formal educational approaches in the implementation of social inclusion of vulnerable groups of young people and to outline the dynamics of the educational process, based on data provided by institutions working in this direction.

For the study, data from the work of the International Youth Center in Stara Zagora, which implements non-formal educational activities within the program "BG 06 Children and Youth at Risk" of the Ministry of Education and Science, have been submitted for analysis. The actual

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empirical research was carried out on the territory of the International Youth Center - Stara Zagora. The activities of the center are based on non-formal education and meet the interests and needs of young people in the region. The study analyzes the applied models of non-formal education regarding the social inclusion of children and young people from vulnerable groups, presented as a result of a survey among the contingent of the International Youth Center in Stara Zagora Municipality.

The study covers two stages. In the first phase, a study of theoretical sources related to social inclusion and the role of non-formal educational activities as factors for its implementation was carried out. Studies by leading authors in the field of social inclusion and non-formal education have been studied.

In the second stage, an empirical study was conducted on the effect of non-formal educational activities on the social inclusion of children and young people from vulnerable groups.

Hypothesis

Non-formal educational activities implemented in youth centers are an effective prerequisite for achieving social inclusion for young people between the ages of 15 and 29.

Methods

The methods used to carry out the study are the following:

- A theoretical analysis of the literature corresponding to the topic of this article.

- Analysis of data on documents from the work of a youth center implementing activities within the program "BG 06 Children and youth at risk" of the Ministry of Education and Science. The effect of non-formal education on the social inclusion of children and young people from vulnerable groups was examined, as well as the implementation of preventive mechanisms relevant to the social exclusion of children and young people at risk.

- Immediate observations.

- Survey of the Social Inclusion Index on the Toolkit "Inclusion Index - Developing Learning and School Participation" (Published by the Center for the Study of Inclusive Education (CSIE), adapted to the needs and objectives of the study.

This toolkit for measuring the inclusion index is a resource to support the inclusive development of educational institutions, developed for educational institutions within formal education. It offers the institutions a supportive process of self-assessment and development based on the views of all stakeholders. The index includes a detailed overview of how each learner can overcome learning and participation barriers.

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Sociodemographic characteristics

	Parent		Youth people aged 15 -18		Youth people aged 19-29		Other		Total	
	22	14,7%	52	34,7%	67	44,7%	9	6,0%	150	100%
Gender	Man		Woman		Other				Total	
	92	61,3%	58	38,7%	0	0			150	100%
Social status	Studying		Working		Unemployed		NEET		Total	
	50	33,3%	36	24,0%	24	16,0%	40	26,7%	150	100%

The contingent of this study is over 15 years old. The predominance of young people is between 19 and 29 years old. The largest share of the surveyed was in the group of students - 33.33% of the total number of respondents, followed by the group of NEETs (not studying, not working and not studying), which make up 26.7% of the contingent. Employed and unemployed respondents were as follows: 24.00% and 16.00%. Concerning the social status of the respondents, the largest number of students is 33.3% of the respondents, followed by the group of NEETs (not working, not studying and not studying), whose representatives are 40. the number of respondents or 26.7%, the employed - 24.0%, the unemployed - 16.0%. In terms of age, the study group is the most active between 19 and 29 years - 67 of the respondents or 44.7% of all. The youth between the ages of 15 and 18 is 52, which is 34.7% of the total. Parents involved in youth center activities are 14.7%, and 6% are those who fall into another (larger or smaller) age category.

Results

The study involved 150 people. The analysis of the results of empirical research in a semantic and logical partitioning. - creating inclusive types of culture, developing inclusive policies, and implementing practices. For this Article, only indicators relevant to the implementation of inclusive practices are monitored. Tracking the values of the dimension and analyzing it will give grounds to confirm or reject the hypothesis that informal educational activities carried out at youth centers are an effective prerequisite for achieving social inclusion for young people between the ages of 15 and 29.

For the present study, the indicator "Introducing inclusive practices" is formed by the presence of the development of one element - the organization of learning. For this to happen, the planning and implementation of activities at the youth center must take into account the needs of all young people and be organized in such a way as to encourage the active involvement of every young person in the learning process. The survey also monitors the impact of socio-demographic characteristics on respondents' satisfaction levels.

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Measurement element averages "Introducing Inclusive Practices."

B1.1 Activity planning takes into account the needs of all... 3.71
B1.2 The activities encourage the participation of all young... 3.89
B1.3 Young people are encouraged to think critically 3.74
B1.4 Young people are actively involved in the learning process 3.83
B1.5 Young people learn from each other 3.96
B1.6 Activities build understanding of the similarities and... 3.90
B1.7 Discipline is based on mutual respect 3.94
B1.8 The staff cooperates in the planning, implementation and... 3.73
B1.9 Staff develops and shares resources to support learning 3.66
B1.10 Resources in the youth center area are known and used 3.77

■ Comparison of averages of
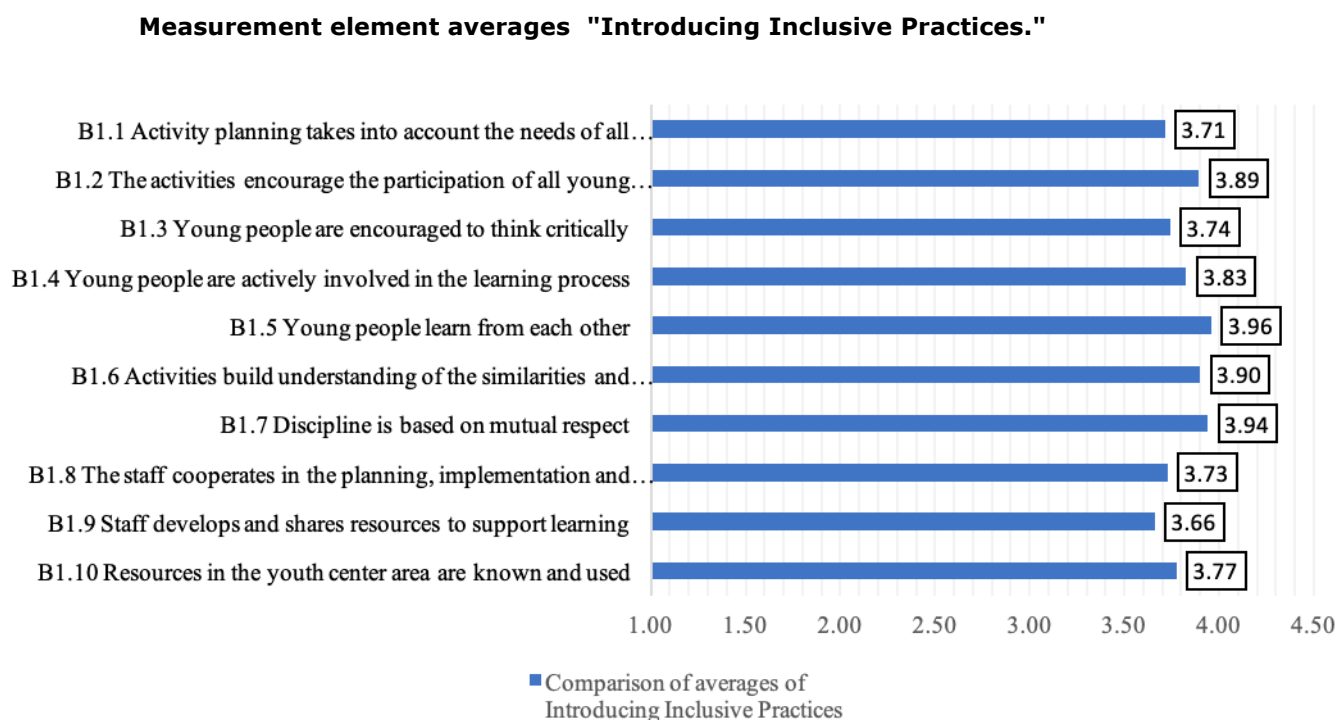Introducing Inclusive Practices

Figure 1 - Mean values of the Elements of Inclusionary Practices dimension

The introduction of inclusive practices is a dimension relevant to the implementation of activities based on non-formal education as a prerequisite for achieving social inclusion. In terms of the methodology used, it is based on the organization of learning and contains ten essential elements. Respondents' satisfaction with each of them is a prerequisite for the practical realization of the social inclusion of vulnerable groups in the youth center. The study contingent demonstrates almost complete agreement with these statements, with the lowest values observed in the development of resources to support learning and the planning and cooperation process in the implementation of non-formal educational activities.

Average values of the "Organization of learning" section by gender indicator

The data show that there is equality between women and men in the claims made in the survey. The study found that gender does not influence the opinion of the respondents regarding the introduction of inclusive practices in the activities of the youth center. The level of satisfaction in men and women is perfectly balanced.
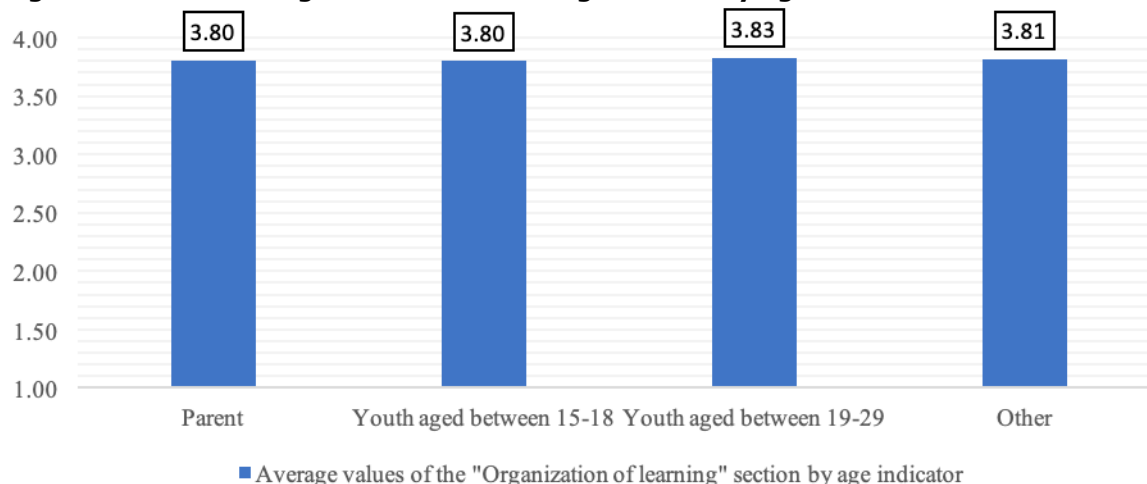
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Average values of the "Organization of learning" section by age indicator

Figure 2 - Average values of the "Organization of learning" section by age indicator

Graphic representation of the average values of the section "Organization of learning" by age indicator gives grounds for concluding that the age does not influence the opinion of the respondents regarding the introduction of inclusive practices.
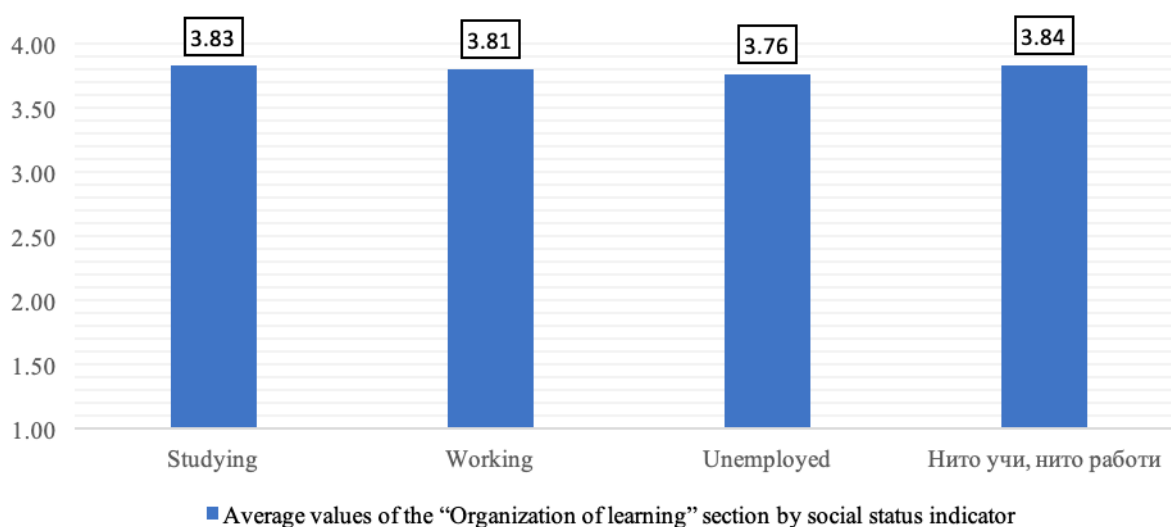
Average values of the "Organization of learning" section by the social status indicator

Figure 3 - Average values of the "Organization of learning" section by the social status indicator

Figure 3 shows the average values of the "Organization of learning" section by the social status indicator graphically. The distribution of the results indicates that the social status of the contingent does not directly influence the levels of satisfaction with the indicators, as a result of which we can summarize that all groups, regardless of their social status, show agreement with the indicators indicated in the section.

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Discussion

The introduction of inclusive practices is a dimension that promotes social inclusion through non-formal education. In terms of the methodology used, it is based on the organization of learning and contains ten essential elements. Respondents' satisfaction with each of them is a prerequisite for the practical realization of the social inclusion of vulnerable groups in the youth center.

As a result of the conducted empirical research and the realized analysis, the following trends emerge:

1. The study subject contingent is primarily composed of representatives of the group of socially passive young people. Their involvement in the activities of the International Youth Center is in support of the thesis that non-formal education is gaining increasing importance in empowering young people and enriching their potential. This form of education is an equal partner of educational and social institutions in the implementation of social inclusion processes.

2. The study contingent demonstrates almost complete agreement with these statements (Figure 1), with the lowest values observed in the development of resources to support learning and the planning and cooperation process in the implementation of non-formal educational activities. From a practical perspective, a targeted analysis of the needs of the target groups, development and adaptation of educational materials to support learning is needed.

3. Developing learning support resources tailored to the specificities of the target group and the socio-cultural characteristics of young people is crucial to achieving a positive impact on delivering social inclusion. Following the example of the Council of Europe, any methodology used to organize activities should be adapted to the local reality and needs of the contingent.

4. The analysis of the section "Organization of learning" by gender shows equality between women and men in the statements made in the survey. The findings show that gender does not influence the opinion of the respondents regarding the introduction of inclusive practices in the activities of the youth center. The level of satisfaction in men and women is perfectly balanced. The graphical presentation of the mean values of the section "Organization of learning" by age indicator (Figure 2) gives grounds for generating trends in practice, according to which age does not influence the opinion of the respondents regarding the introduction of inclusive practices. The results of the average values on the indicator of the social status of the contingent are similar. This indicator does not directly influence the levels of satisfaction with the indicators, as a result of which we can

summarize that all groups, regardless of their social status, show agreement with the indicators indicated in the section.

5. The planning and organization of the activities take into account the needs of the different groups attending the youth center, while encouraging the participation of all young people, regardless of their gender, age, social status, religion, ethnicity, etc.

6. In the Youth Center, learning is based on mutual respect and is based on the cooperation of staff and young people.

7. The positive values of the individual indicators indicate that inclusive practices have been introduced at the youth center, which creates a prerequisite for the participation of all young people in a safe and tolerant environment.

8. The need to develop educational materials tailored to the needs and socio-cultural characteristics of the contingent is outlined. The lack of such requires the adaptation of specialized manuals to the local reality and the requirements of young people.

Conclusion

The analysis of the present work, structured according to its goals and objectives, literature review and empirical study, gives us a reason to draw the following conclusions of theoretical and practically applied nature:

- The establishment of youth centers in Bulgaria whose activities are subordinated to non-formal education is highly successful in terms of achieving social inclusion of young people from vulnerable groups;

- Despite the lack of legislation and targeted measures to validate the knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal education, insufficient efforts to consolidate the profession of a youth worker and the lack of qualified specialists in the field, a new direction is needed for the development of social work with young people, reflecting on the creation of inclusive types of culture, the formulation of policies and the development of practices based on non-formal educational activities;

- The data from the empirical study prove that the introduction of inclusive practices creates prerequisites for realizing social inclusion based on activities with a non-formal educational profile.

As a result of the research carried out, the thesis that non-formal educational activities create a prerequisite for achieving social inclusion of children and young people from vulnerable groups is protected, and actions in this direction are effective in preventing the social exclusion of this category of citizens.

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