



Transnational Conference on 5th - 7th March 2003

Conference Report

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Contents

Background	3
Conference Organisers	3
Aims of the Conference	3
Conference Programme	4
Workshops	5
Study visits and workshops	6
Summary	6
Appendix 1	7

Background

This conference report is based on my 2-day participation in the Transnational Conference on 5th - 7th March 2003, arranged by Kista Open University in Stockholm. I was called upon on short notice to act as an evaluator during the conference. The original intention was to present a thorough evaluation of the conference and its achievements, but for a number of reasons that idea has since had to be revised. The main difficulty has been the fact that three months after the conference it seems very little has yet been accomplished in terms of follow-up material and reports from the participating transnational partners. If such materials exist, I have not succeeded in my sincere efforts to gain access to them.

As a consequence, what follows here is a completely subjective overview of what I felt were the most important themes and results of the parts of the conference I myself participated in.

Conference Organisers

The conference was hosted by the "Kista Open Academy" project which is an Equal project, granted by the Swedish ESF council. The project is started by Kista borough (Stockholm) which also acts as a coordinator for a partnership built with municipalities, universities, organisations and companies.

Kista Open Academy realizes the concept of the open university in Sweden. Its overriding goal is to counteract social, economic and ethnic segregation by providing qualified education adapted to the needs and interests of disadvantaged groups. Implementation of the project is founded on flexible education systems, collaboration with universities, public and private education, the experience of the Popular Adult Education organisations and modern information technology.

This information and more about the project can be found at <http://www.openacademy.com/>

Aims of the Conference

The most important aims of the conference corresponded rather directly with the overall goals of the "Kista Open Academy" project and in the conference program the aims were described as follows:

"This conference will address the problem for people, especially with immigrant background, to gain access to higher education organized in different environments. The main focus will be to examine the possibilities and barriers regarding the wishes of the individual and the services provided, or the lack thereof, by society both in the public and private sectors.

The aim of the conference is to explore what prevents people from gaining access to higher education and the well paid jobs e.g. social exclusion, lack of education, or problems with evaluating studies from abroad.

How to facilitate a user-friendly environment is another aim of this conference. Relevant experiences and methods within the transnational networks are to be discussed. Also among the topics to be looked into are the enterprises that have been considered as "best practices".

Finally, collaborating in our transnational networks will also be discussed: not only anti-discrimination laws and social inclusion policies, but also new models and methods within the existing educational systems, as well as participation in decision-making process."

Conference Programme

To live up to such ambitious aims during a three-day conference one has to deal with rather wide-ranging topics, but the organisers had done a good job in planning the conference agenda (see appendix A for the full programme).

Wednesday 5th March 2003

The first day of the conference consisted of a management meeting for the transnational partners and later in the evening a reception and get-together at the conference venue: Memory Hotel in Stockholm. The choice of venue was not bad and all the practical arrangements worked out very well throughout the conference

Thursday 6th March 2003

The programme for the second day had the theme: "*User perspective in Integration and Empowerment*". After an opening speech given by representatives from the Kista Borough, there was an opportunity for the transnational partners to give brief reports and updates of their projects and the situation at present.

Conference attendees were given 15-minute briefings by 1) *Learning Kitchen - Black Country, Birmingham*, 2) *Coesis - Oporto, Portugal*, 3) *KOA, Kista Open Academy – Sweden* and 4) *The Tampere Project, Finland*. At least for me with little background knowledge of these projects this was brief but very useful information.

The following topic, directly related to the theme of the day, was "Presentations from the Target groups". It seemed to me this was a particularly interesting idea in this context, and the organisers expected the following outcome: "Experiences from the target groups and the immigrant organisations about the integration especially focusing on the individual integration experiences from the Swedish society. Ideas, views and proposals in relation to the ongoing activities that would be reflecting the segregation and social exclusion issues. More emphasis will be given to issues related to the empowerment and social inclusions. Lessons learned and best practices from individual and organisational point of views."

In the presentations that followed the following organisations briefly elaborated on some of the topics above: 1) *The Iranian Association, Stockholm County*, 2) *The Swedish Disability Federation*, 3) *The Kurdian National Association* and finally 4) two different projects from Kista "Storstadsstråningen": *Kvinnokraft* and *Kista and Casa Nova*.

The 20-minute time slots given for the presentations obviously did not allow for lengthy and indepth discussions on any of the issues mentioned above. It is also unclear what possible impact the presentations had on the overall focus of the rest of the conference. However, some of the presentations were linked to certain study visits and workshops on the last day of the conference. All in all, bringing in the target groups as an active part of the conference programme was definitely a worthwhile effort.

Workshops

After the lunch break the programme on Thursday continued with four 2-hour workshops on the following topics: 1) *Learning environments*, 2) *Motivation and engagement*, 3) *Learning ambassadors* and 4) *Analysis and evaluation*.

I myself participated in the *Learning Ambassadors*-workshop and I have to say it was a rather confusing experience. This was to be expected to a certain degree since I joined as an "outsider" with no connection to any of the transnational projects involved. From what I learned, however, I was not the only participant feeling that way. The group leader had a tough job trying to keep the discussions on track, but in my opinion we ended up spending far too much time discussing terminology. Particular emphasis was put on the key-term "Learning Ambassador" and which different roles it comprises. As was to be expected at the end of the workshop we did not really reach any definite conclusions.

A worthwhile initiative to continue the discussions in a web-based discussion-forum was introduced and presented by *Göran Hillgren* from Nova Distance. However, I checked the forum regularly before writing this report and as I pointed out in the introduction it turns out that very few contributions have been submitted to the forum after the conference.

The second conference day was closed with short reports and reflections from the four workshops. This had to be done in a haste as people were already tired after a long day. The overall impression was, and this was also spelled out by several, that most of the groups were troubled by the fact that the participants in the workshops were not the same that had been involved in the previous transnational conference. Therefore, in a sense the feeling was that in the process many ended up reinventing the wheel. This is a regrettable fact of transnational co-operation but naturally nothing that conference organisers can do much about. To sum it up, however, the workshops no doubt resulted in some fruitful discussion but probably less by way of effective consensus within, let alone among the groups.

Friday 7th March 2003

Study visits and workshops

The programme for the last conference day consisted in four study visits / workshops on different topics. The participants split into four groups and had a choice between 1) *Learning environments, flexibility and individual solutions* 2) *Motivation and engagement*, 3) *Motivation and engagement and Learning environments* and 4) *Learning ambassadors, Motivation and engagement*.

I decided to join group 3 on *Motivation and engagement and Learning environments*, and this, at least for me personally turned out to be a good choice. We had a very rewarding day with discussions and presentations from the *IT-University* in Kista which among other things deals with applied IT-education and has experience of immigrant students.

Another interesting presentation was given by the company *Interverbum*, specializing in intensive language training for immigrants.

Finally there was a presentation from *Popular Adult Education ABF*. This organisation provides courses according to demands of individuals and groups. Their educational methodology is study circles, an old method for adult education in Sweden.

Summary

I unfortunately had to leave during the final discussions and thus missed the closing of the seminar but the above forms my very personal opinions and experiences from the transnational conference arranged by Kista Open University. All in all it was a well organised and informative event.

Appendix 1



Transnational Conference March 5-7 2003

Outline of Conference

This conference will address the problem for people, especially with immigrant background, to gain access to higher education organized in different environments. The main focus will be to examine the possibilities and barriers regarding the wishes of the individual and the services provided, or the lack thereof, by society both in the public and private sectors.

The aim of the conference is to explore what prevents people from gaining access to higher education and the well paid jobs e.g. social exclusion, lack of education, or problems with evaluating studies from abroad.

How to facilitate a user-friendly environment is another aim of this conference. Relevant experiences and methods within the transnational networks are to be discussed. Also among the topics to be looked into are the enterprises that have been considered as "best practices".

Finally, collaborating in our transnational networks will also be discussed: not only anti-discrimination laws and social inclusion policies, but also new models and methods within the existing educational systems, as well as participation in decision-making process.

Preliminary programme

5th March 2003

Wednesday

10.00 – 16.00 Management meeting

19.0 Reception. Buffet and get-together at Memory Hotel. Carin Flemström & Elisabeth Törner from Kista Borough welcome you.

6th March 2003

Thursday – Seminar programme

Theme: ”User perspective in Integration and Empowerment

9.00 - 9.30 **Opening Speech** – Representatives from the Kista Borough.

9.30 – 10.45 **Short reports from the projects – the situation at present.**

09.30 - 09.45 Learning Kitchen - Black Country, Birmingham

09.45 - 10.00 Coesis - Oporto, Portugal

10.00 - 10.15 KOA, Kista Open Academy - Sweden

10.15 - 10.45 The Tampere Project, Finland

10.45 – 11.00 **Coffee break**

11.00 – 12.45 **Presentations from the Target groups**

Experiences from the target groups & the immigrant organisations about the integration especially focusing on the individual integration experiences from the Swedish society. Ideas, views & proposals in relation to the on going activities that would be reflecting the segregation and social exclusion issues. More emphasis will be given to issues related to the empowerment & social inclusions. Lesson learned & best practices from individual & organisational point of views.

Short presentation from the following organisations:

11.00 – 11.20 Iranian Association, Stockholm County

11.25 - 11.45 Kurdian National Association

11.50 - 12.10 The Swedish Disability Federation

12.15 - 12.45 Kvinnokraft, Kista and Casa Nova – two different projects from Kista”Storstadssatsningen” .

12.45 – 14.00 **Lunch**

14.00 – 16.00 **Workshops**

- Learning environments Group Leader: UK
- Motivation and engagement Group Leader: UK
- Learning ambassadors Group Leader: P
- Analysis and evaluation Group Leader: SE

16.00 – 16.45 Short report from the groups. Reflections and closing of the first day

19.00 Cultural activity with dinner (The Vasa Museum)

7th March 2003

Friday - Study visits and workshops, 4 groups

Time Schedule 09.00 – 14.00. Lunch will be arranged at the place of visit.

Group 1 Learning environments, flexibility and individual solutions

- School with disable students. School showing practice of working with youngsters with different kind of handicap, showing tools for assistance in their daily work
- Kista Upper Secondary School, Education and training for learning-disabled students

Group 2 Motivation and engagement

- Integration Administration. The head of Stockholm Integration Administration will present their work.
- National City Investment Program (Storstadssatsningen) in Kista .

- The City of Stockholms' investment in increasing the competence of the target groups e.g. in different projects as "Better knowledge with multimedia".
- Women -Power & Casa Nova Project (Kvinnokraft, Kista and Casa Nova)
- Project working mainly with immigrant women. They are organizing different activities crossing the cultural barriers to stimulate & increase women's empowerment in the society and also to facilitate the integration process according to the individual's needs & deeds.

Group 3 Motivation and engagement and Learning environments

- IT-University + Interverbum Applied IT-education - Experience of immigrant students (KTH & Stockholm Univ.) Intensive language training for immigrants.
- Popular Adult Education ABF – organizes and provides courses according to the in Sweden demands of individuals and groups. Their educational methodology is study circles, an old method for adult education in Sweden.

Group 4 Learning ambassadors, Motivation and engagement

- Working methods and systems Järfälla Municipality – Learning structures, economical in Swedish adult education prerequisites, guidens and counselling.
- New structures for adult Sollentuna Knowledge Park, new IT-pedagogical models education and distance education and training, incl. education and training in SMEs

Please, choose one visit, e.g. Group 1 or Group 2 from the above mentioned Groups.

14.15 – 14.30 Coffee

14.30 – 15.15 Each group prepare a short summary of their workshop.

15.15 – 16.00 Presentation from the each group .

16.00 - 16.20 Final discussion and closing of the seminar

Saturday Guided tour in Old Town (for those who stay over the weekend)