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CARLA WEINZIERL

Intercultural Education as a Means to Foster Equality in Diversity – Understanding ‘Participation’ in the Austrian *Vielfalter* Initiative

*ABSTRACT Social cohesion is clearly at stake in Europe. A key to achieving it is striking the balance between equality and diversity by understanding it as a complex, multi-layered problématique, that needs to be tackled in terms of being able to ‘live together differently’. This paper asks about the contributions of a socially innovative initiative in the field of intercultural education in Austria, the *Vielfalter*, to social cohesion. In particular, the article scrutinises the *Vielfalter*’s approach to ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’, quasi-concepts that have become buzzwords in social innovation.*

KEYWORDS diversity, empowerment, equality, participation, social cohesion

1. Introduction

Striking the balance between equality and diversity is a key to social cohesion, a major challenge of our time: over the last decades, diversity as well as inequality have increased, apparently hand in hand, and the concern for inequality has become a key issue in social policy (OECD 2011). The adoption in 2000 of the EU’s motto ‘United in Diversity’ reflects the increasing diversity of European societies. Yet diversity has not just increased in terms of ethnic background due to increasing mobility and migration, but also in terms of people’s position in the labour market, as well as regarding gender roles and family models.

While historically, struggles for cohesion were intended to repair the damage done by capitalist modernisation, in recent decades, especially

with the Lisbon Agenda, the term has been de-politicised and framed as being functional to competitiveness (Maloutas et al. 2008: 260). Clearly, social cohesion has to be understood as a contradictory and contested quasi-concept with different definitions in different policy fields (Jenson 1998), for instance dealing with the exclusionary dynamics of social inequality and poverty from a socioeconomic perspective, or with participation, representation, mobilisation and questions of citizenship from a political perspective, or with the co-existing rights to difference on the one hand, and recognition, dignity and belonging on the other, from a cultural perspective. This article proposes to conceptualise social cohesion as a *problématique*, i.e. a complex, multilayered problem that can only be tackled in a transdisciplinary, multi-scalar and multi-dimensional way. It is about “living together differently” (Novy et al. 2012: 1874), that is, enabling people to live together, and yet have the opportunity to be different, in a context-sensitive way. This is of special relevance due to the current policy discourse on poverty in the EU that mainly focusses on the lack of income of people at the margins of society.

This integrated and multi-dimensional approach to social cohesion is increasingly picked up by socially innovative initiatives.¹ This article focusses on one of these – the *Vielfalter*², an initiative fostering intercultural education in Austria – and its contribution to social cohesion in the context of an education system that faces various challenges regarding social cohesion, for example in terms of reproducing socio-economic inequalities.

European welfare state models were developed during the Fordist era and based on the male breadwinner model and a national community of shared values and ethnic-cultural background. For a long time, the key objective of national welfare institutions has been to offer social rights for all citizens to equally participate in socio-economic life. While material equality was neither the objective nor the outcome, there has been a uniformisation in the access to social services and infrastructure which was often not very attentive to diversity. On the contrary, sociocultural and ethnic discrimination can be perceived as weaknesses of European welfare models, with assimilationist tendencies especially strong in the conservative-corporatist welfare models, as is the case in Austria (Weinzierl et al. forthcoming).

This issue aims to contribute to research on the “spatial and institutional conditions under which localized forms of social innovation can complement and strengthen existing institutionalized welfare programs” (Oosterlynck et al. 2013: 3). In this framing, this paper focusses on one of several governance challenges to social innovation³, namely participation, and the challenge “to design a framework for localized forms of welfare provision that includes decentralized participatory (deliberative) institutions in a way that they can react to experienced social needs, benefit the practices in other localities [and] enrich the knowledge and responsiveness of centralized institutions” (Improve Social Innovation Team 2013: 4).

Socially innovative initiatives need to resolve the tension between claims for the recognition of various forms of diversity on the one hand and more traditional socio-economic claims for civic and social rights and universal social protection on the other. In this context, this article asks how *Vielfalter* as a socially innovative initiative is a laboratory that takes on the challenge of social cohesion by tackling the negotiation between the right to belong and the right to be different at the same time. More specifically, this paper asks about the *Vielfalter*'s approach to participation and empowerment and its contribution to tackling the challenge of social cohesion, here understood as equality in diversity. Even though participation has become a ‘buzzword’ (Leal 2007; Cornwall/Brock 2005), the term remains elusive. It is often used uncritically, and frequently co-occurs with the term empowerment, yet these concepts and their relation are quite fuzzy (Cooke/Kothari 2001). As it is *Vielfalter*'s explicit aim to contribute to the participation and empowerment of marginalised members of Austrian society, it serves as a good case study for the purpose of sharpening the participation term by asking: ‘How is participation thought and practised in *Vielfalter* funded initiatives?’, looking both at the discourse and practice of participation in this field of intercultural education.

In what follows, the *Vielfalter* is placed in the context of the Austrian education system, which continues to reproduce inequalities. This is followed by a brief introduction to different, partly contradictory, elements of participatory theory. Section 4 consists of a presentation of empirics, where one of 15 interviews with project leaders is scrutinised in closer detail, followed by a synthesis of all interviews and the results of a questionnaire.

Concluding, reflections on the *Vielfalter*'s contributions to participation and empowerment sum up the initiative's relevance as a laboratory for the creation of cohesive societies.

2. *Vielfalter* in the context of the Austrian education system

Vielfalter funds initiatives in the field of intercultural education in kindergartens, schools (at all levels), and for associations working with children and adults with migratory background.⁴ The aim of the *Vielfalter* initiative is to contribute to the empowerment and participation of people with migratory background and to promote a change in the Austrian value system towards the appreciation of diversity in Austria in order to harness the potentials of a multicultural and multilingual society. The target group consists of children and youth with a migratory background as well as of mainstream society, their parents, and pedagogues. The funded projects aim at helping children and their parents from diverse cultural and social backgrounds to discover their talents and to strengthen their self-esteem; they should feel 'proud to belong' and be empowered to actively participate in kindergartens or schools and – as a larger aim – in society in general. At the same time, *Vielfalter* attempts to establish inclusive structures at kindergarten and school level and to contribute to a gradual change of perspective in the Austrian education system by understanding diversity and multilingualism as valuable resources.

The initiative was set up in 2009, in cooperation between the Vienna hub of Western Union, an international US-based company specialising in money transfer, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (nowadays the Federal Ministry of Education) and Interkulturelles Zentrum (IZ), an independent non-profit organisation based in Vienna that was founded in 1987. Owing to this collaboration of representatives of the public sector, the private sector and of civil society, *Vielfalter* benefits from diverse approaches and experiences. IZ brings in experience and expertise in the fields of education and cultural/linguistic diversity, as well as access to contacts and networks. The ministry contributes to the selection process of projects as part of the jury and presents the initiative to the public. The Western Union Foundation provides the project funding and

Western Union gives stimulus regarding the initiative's focus and content, drawing on the company's experience with diversity among customers as well as staff.

In its self-image the project is a butterfly⁵ that brings diversity to the education system, which focusses on German skills as a prerequisite to integration and a strong orientation towards performance, while the individual's other potentials are not sufficiently recognised.

Austria was a country of immigrants long before the heated debates on the refugee movements of recent years started: in 2014, the time when the field work underlying this article was conducted, one out of seven people living in Austria was foreign born, i.e. was a first generation immigrant (Statistic Austria 2014a). Yet this fact is rarely accepted as such, and people with a migratory background, including second and third generation immigrants, continue to be regarded as foreigners in mainstream Austrian society as well as in political discourse (Luciak 2008: 46). Aside from the six officially recognised national autochthonous minorities tracing back to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Austria's immigrant population is predominantly from the former Yugoslavia or Turkey, due to labour migration in the second half of the 20th century, as well as to refugee flows after the Yugoslav wars (Statistik Austria 2014b). In recent years the profile of the country's minority groups has become more diverse and even before the much discussed refugee movements of the past few years, students from more than 160 countries attended Austrian schools. More than a third of the population of foreign citizens lives in Vienna, where cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity in classrooms has become a reality in many schools (Luciak 2008: 45-49; BMBF 2014: 5f.).

However, regarding Austrian educational policy, this diversity has historically largely been met with measures aimed at students with immigrant background, and assimilatory approaches or 'pedagogy for foreigners', based on conceptualisations of 'deficit' and later of 'difference', have dominated (Wältli 2010: 130; Luciak 2008: 52). A discourse on intercultural education – aimed at all students and reflected in a discursive focus on 'diversity' (Rieber 2010)– only began to form during the 1980s, and it was introduced as an educational principle in the early 1990s in Austria (BMUKK 2013a,b). Nevertheless, to this day systematic implementation is lacking.

Furthermore, the focus in language education in Austria is first and foremost on German language skills, as continuously identified as the top priority by policy makers, with English as the first foreign language and a secondary focus on Romance languages (Dalton-Puffer et al. 2009). In other words, available resources are not being used, since the foreign languages primarily taught in Austria are neither the languages of immigrants nor of the autochthonous minorities. This lack of intercultural understanding is also reflected in today's schoolbooks (Mayrhofer 2010).

These issues need to be seen in the overall context of a problematic education system, which reproduces socio-economic status not only because of the different valuations of languages, but especially via the dual school system and the early segregation at the age of 10 and 14/15. Additionally, the rigidity of Austria's education system stems from a fragmentation of competencies, with higher education being a federal responsibility but compulsory education (the first nine grades) falling within the competence of the nine regions (Bundesländer). This division, in combination with a strong teachers' union as a third major political actor in this field, hinders progressive change and flexibility. This again highlights the importance of *Vielfalter* as a promoter of innovative ideas and alternatives in education.

3. Participation – liberation or tyranny?

In order to be able to account for the complex and potentially contradictory effects of participatory practices in terms of empowerment and social change, a dialectical approach is necessary (Jäger/Springler 2012: 86ff.), one that allows the capturing of participation in its totality and “true nature” (Schaerer 2008). In order to capture this true nature as lived and practised in *Vielfalter*, a grounded theory approach was chosen. Therefore, the focus of this article is mainly on the narrative of the interviews; however, a quick, admittedly overly simplistic introduction to participatory theory is necessary. In what follows, potentially contradictory aspects of participation and empowerment are highlighted: an optimistic conceptualisation of participation regarding its potential for empowerment and social change is complemented by an understanding of participation, which exposes it as an oppressive, rather than progressive, concept.

Social pedagogy calls for intercultural education in order to build an inclusive society, that is, one where people of different ethnicities and cultures not only live together but interact with each other, and constantly exchange ideals, rules, values and meanings (Portera 2011: 17). The concept of interculture moves beyond mere multiculturalism, the latter meaning the peaceful coexistence of cultures, which are conceptualised as equally good, but static. This concept constrains immigrants to their 'native' culture and ascribes patterns of behaviour to them that might actually be outdated in their country of origin (ibid: 19f.). Interculture on the other hand, approaches culture and identity dynamically, where 'otherness' is not regarded as a potential threat but as an opportunity for personal and common enrichment (ibid: 20). Additionally, interculture is thought to be crucial in a context of globalisation and increasing migration flows (Grant/Brueck 2011: 10). Subject-orientation and multi-perspectivity are thus crucial characteristics in intercultural pedagogy (Rieber 2010: 99), which furthermore requires a different understanding of teaching: intercultural education cannot be taught in specific lessons but needs to be included in *all* disciplines and activities at schools (Portera 2011: 21). In order to foster a society based on a dialogue of cultures and co-existence free from discrimination and racism, intercultural education also needs to be seen as moral education, based on universal values such as freedom, justice and solidarity (Puig Rovira 2000: 97). The understanding that an open, democratic society crucially depends on the education that *all* children receive, lets social pedagogues call for educational practices that enable individuals to "participate and transform the social system for the benefit of everyone" (Singh 2000: 85). This is possible when education is not seen as merely quantifiable and functionalist, but in a neo-humanist manner as a goal in itself, allowing human subjectivity, autonomy and responsibility to unfold (Scherr 2010: 353). This indicates that in social pedagogy, intercultural education and the positive identities, values and skills it promotes are seen as a basis for the successful participation of autonomous individuals in society.

Aside from the intercultural education literature, social pedagogy promotes participatory methods in pedagogy in general, largely with the goal of *empowering* students to develop the skills and understandings needed to *participate* in a democratic society (McQuillan 2005: 640; Knauer 2005).

In this sense, participation of students in educational facilities empowers students in several ways: personally, academically, politically and socially (Sturzenhecker et al. 2010: 110ff.; Knauer 2005; McQuillan 2005: 642ff.). In this understanding, the relationship between empowerment and participation is not clearly defined, or at least lacks a common definition, but overall the understanding appears to be that the two concepts are interdependent: empowerment is seen as the basis for participation, but at the same time it is participatory methods that lead to empowerment (Scheipl et al. 2009; Herriger 2010). McQuillan (2005) even appears to use the terms synonymously (e.g. page 641). Overall, this strand of social pedagogy literature deals with preparing individuals for a fulfilling life in a democratic society. However, this literature appears to be focussed on culturally homogenous contexts or at least to be lacking a focus on intercultural. What participation might mean for people denied access to the formal mechanisms by which individuals shape democratic societies, especially the right to vote as it continues to be based on an understanding of citizenship not based on residence but rather origin, thus remains unclear in this line of literature. Yet, marginalized groups in particular face multiple barriers to participating in a democratic way: even aside from the status of their voting rights, the poorest and most excluded groups structurally also have very limited access to civil society organisations (Castela/Novy 1996; Novy 1996), thus depriving them of their capabilities (Sen 1999) to lead the kind of free lives they wish for themselves and to actively shape their society by participating in the collective action of civil society organisations. A “culture of silence” (Freire 1974) or the inability of “the subaltern to speak” (Spivak 2009) indicates the poor are misrepresented and thus have very little political voice (Hirschman 1970). According to Fraser (1999, 2007), social justice has three dimensions: redistribution, (the socio-economic dimension), recognition (the cultural dimension), and representation (the political dimension). Cucca et al. (forthcoming) argue that empowerment exists only if all three interrelated dimensions are addressed, due to dynamics of circular cumulative causation processes (Myrdal 1957) of relational and multidimensional deprivation, as elaborated in Bourdieu’s theory of capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1989). Deprivation in one of the three dimensions is frequently accompanied by deprivation in other dimensions.

An additional look into critical development theory (Munck/O’Hearn 1999) offers tools to shed more light on the relationship between participation and empowerment in an intercultural context. It is informed by theories of power, including Foucauldian power/knowledge (Foucault 1978, 1980, 2000), Gramscian conceptualisations of hegemony and civil society (Gramsci 1992), and Bourdieusian concepts of symbolic capital and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977, 1986, 1989). Freire understands empowerment as the “ability to act against the oppressive influences of real life” (Freire 1974). In line with Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, empowerment can be defined as processes through which social groups improve their ability to create, manage and control material, social, cultural and symbolic resources (Andersen/Siim 2004). The empowerment approach as a critical paradigm places collective action and changes to unjust opportunity structures in the centre and opposes neo-liberalism and market fundamentalism (Craig/Mayo 1995). Similarly, originally conceived as a critique of the Eurocentric, top-down development efforts in the ‘Global South’ and therefore as part of a counter-hegemonic approach, participatory methods in development practice represented a challenge to the status quo (Leal 2007: 539f.). However, as neoliberalism is immensely resilient to critique, due to its hegemonic status and the ability to incorporate threatening concepts by perverting them without challenging fundamental structures, participation gained legitimacy during the 1980s and 90s in mainstream development discourse. Critical development researchers therefore argue today that participation has been co-opted (Cooke 2004: 45; Cooke/Kothari 2001; Cornwall/Brock 2005) and that the conversion of “a radical proposal into something that could serve the neo-liberal world order led to participation’s political decapitation” (Leal 2007: 539). The promoted participatory methods, while understood as leading to the empowerment of the marginalised by mainstream development practice (Narayanan 2003: 2484), are identified in this line of thought as “clouded by the state and market model of governance where people are either objects or clients of development and not the agency of development” (ibid: 2486). Critics argue that while participation and empowerment are uncritically assumed to co-occur, the participatory methods promoted by the mainstream are depoliticised and individualised, ensuring an inability to produce structural change. In other words, a lack of institutionalisation prevents trans-

formation above the local level and masks power asymmetries, thus reproducing and at the same time lending legitimacy to the status quo (Cooke/Kothari 2001; Christens/Speer 2006; Mohan/Stokke 2000).

4. *Vielfalter's* approach to participation and empowerment

In its self-understanding, the *Vielfalter* initiative works towards a change in the Austrian value system towards the appreciation of diversity in Austria the country so that the potentials of a multicultural and multilingual society can be fully harnessed. It aims to do so by contributing to empowerment and participation.

Specifically, the *Vielfalter* funds projects in four key areas in the field of diversity: the promotion of multilingualism, empowerment and building self-confidence, intercultural education, and integrative parent participation. The target group consists of children and youth, both native and with migratory background, their parents and pedagogues. Further criteria to be met for the submission of project ideas include the innovation and creativity of the approach; a participatory concept, i.e. the involvement of the target group, pursuant to the corporate values of Western Union, namely integrity, team work, partnership, commitment and the creation of opportunities; and project sustainability, understood as long-term benefits for society as a whole.

The range of projects the *Vielfalter* has funded over the years is thus quite wide; it is a colourful mosaic of implementing institutions, the people involved, and approaches to inclusion. While this chapter and especially section 3.2. are informed by the analysis of interviews held with 15 project leaders and a questionnaire answered anonymously by 50 project leaders, the following section, 3.1. zooms into one of the projects funded in order to elaborate some aspects of participation and empowerment in more detail.⁶

4.1 Claiming public space for marginalised social groups by bottom-up approaches in a youth and family centre

The project presented in more detail in this section was implemented by a youth and family centre, and built on previous low threshold German as foreign language courses for educationally disadvantaged Turkish women

(of whom at least a third were analphabets), who has largely been in Austria for years but isolated from mainstream society. The project added a German as foreign language expert to a multiplier (a German teacher with Turkish background) for those with slightly advanced German skills. The course content focussed on hearing comprehension and conversational skills for beginners, the acquisition of basic skills in writing and math, and understanding and reproducing biographical data, for instance that needed in communication with public institutions and local authorities. The course was designed to motivate and overcome previous negative learning experiences in two ways: firstly, an art project with an art therapist, and secondly, an intercultural cooking project with a nutrition expert were designed to draw public attention to the presence of immigrant women in the city where the project was based on the one hand, and on the other to transcend the women's traditional role in a mutual learning process aimed at experiencing their cooking skills as a resource. This project was later expanded by various field trips to familiarise the women with public space. These trips and accompanying workshops were centered around four themes: literacy, creativity, health, and mobility.

The idea for the project also grew from the bottom up in the sense that the projects not only respond to a demand perceived by the association, but also because the association had already established contacts with the target group via the German course that preceded the project. In this context, the role of the multiplier with Turkish background was crucial, according to the interviewee. She acted as a key person, without whom the ties to the target community could not have been established as successfully.

The interviewee illuminated the complexities of a participatory approach when dealing with marginalised groups: while the projects do respond to the needs and wishes of the target group, these wishes are not always expressly communicated by the affected people. Instead, project ideas arise out of a complex learning process that also relies on experts being able to 'read in between the lines'. Seeing as most of the targeted women not only speak no or only very little German, but are multiply disadvantaged (in a process termed *intersectionality*), their capacities to voice their wishes are severely constrained. However, this barrier was not met with a top-down approach to project design and implementation; besides the perceptions of the experts and the team of the association

behind the project, that were based on their already established contacts with the target group, the interviewee mentioned the important role of the targeted women's children, who were generally more comfortable not only speaking German, but also voicing their concerns and ideas. Overall, the project responds to a demand not only perceived by experts, but indicates the important role of people who can serve as a mouthpiece for those most disadvantaged and marginalised, in this case the course leader who shared a migratory background with the target group, as well as their children, whose interactions in turn shaped the ideas of the social workers and experts in the association. Additionally, however, some of the targeted women also contributed actively to conceptualising the projects from the beginning on. These were women that had already been reached via the previous language classes and who had built a trusting relationship with the Turkish course leader. This sheds further light on the relationship between empowerment and participation: according to the interviewee, when the association officially and via a number of information channels called for members of the target group to come to a meeting with a view to network or to tighten relations within the target group and between the association and the targeted women, it was largely women who had already gathered experience with the association who came. This indicates the high barriers to participation for members of marginalised groups also identified in the literature. These barriers decrease with every project experience, as the projects aim at increasing individual capacities to become active and to participate in society in general.

On the whole, the interviewee stressed that participation is a highly held principle of the association, but, depending on the capacities the target group members already have, in other words, depending on the 'empoweredness' of the targeted women, this principle can be put into practice more or less effectively. The idea is to include the women from the beginning on, not only to let them contribute, but also to open spaces for them to develop their own, new ideas; however, this is a delicate process that takes time, as individual barriers to participation are high and go well beyond language barriers.

To sum up, participation in this association means to include the target group members' ideas and resources from the project conceptualisation stage onwards, to address their wishes, needs and worries via the project,

and also to let the women plan the project themselves, depending on their individual capacities to contribute, given the context. At the same time, the projects aim at empowerment, in the sense of increasing these capacities by strengthening their resources and raising their independence and self-worth with a view to increasing the participation in further projects and in societal, public life in general.

Nevertheless, empowerment is not merely understood as a process related to the individual. Instead, the interviewee spoke of a learning process that also affected the association: the project shifted the focus from improving German skills towards a more inclusionary approach. The project has the effect of increasing the public presence of the targeted women as a group, for instance through the art they created and presented in public, but also through their increasing participation in the public transport system and so on. These project aspects address a lack of public awareness of the situation of the targeted women, or even of their presence in the respective city, or more generally in Austria. Furthermore, while the effects of one single project might not transcend the impact on the individual, any such project is to be seen in the context of the entire course programme of the association: the effects are thought to accumulate. In this sense, each project, and the public relations work done within it, contributes to raising awareness and potentially also to changing structures within the Austrian mainstream society, as the interviewee understands it.

4.2 *Vielfalter's* innovative dimension: contributing to cohesion via the promotion of participation in intercultural settings

The *Vielfalter*-funded projects indicate, on the whole, that participation and empowerment remain contested concepts characterised by the tension of change and persistence and that the individualisation and privatization (Arendt 1997; Sennett 2004) of inclusion strategies have to some extent led to a hollowing-out regarding their transformative and radical character. Nonetheless, they continue to have potential.

The analysis of the interviews produces four categories, whereby participation is both a means (process dimension) and an end (discourse dimension), and empowerment has an individual dimension (best translated as *Befähigung*) and a collective dimension (understood as *Ermächtigung*, which is based on the German word for power: *Macht*).

So the reality is not ‘either-or’ as the strands of participatory theory presented in section 3 would suggest. Clearly, theoretical “celebrations of ‘individual liberation’ and critiques of ‘subjection to the system’ both oversimplify participation’s power effects” (Williams 2004: 557). Participation and empowerment in *Vielfalter* are certainly pursued first and foremost in a social-pedagogic sense. They are not primarily thought in collective terms of socio-political mobilisation and movement-building capable of triggering lasting societal transformations, or finding a common voice for marginalised groups with a view to self-representation. Yet, at the same time it would be wrong to condemn *Vielfalter*’s efforts as promoting participation at the local level in order to keep resistance fragmented and maintain the status quo at macro levels. While empowerment is mainly present as individual capacity building, the objective, and as far as measurable also the outcome, is not to capacitate people to better arrange their lives within a given system, but to become active members of society that collectively shape the structures they are embedded in.

Participation in the projects leads to empowerment, which in turn is assumed to lead to participation on a wider, societal level in the future. The empirical data show that participation is both a method and an outcome and it operates in a circular fashion with empowerment. The projects targeting children have a long-term claim to societal change: via the empowerment the children experience in the projects, their identities are strengthened, allowing them to grow up to be open-minded, responsible, and respectful adults, who take on active roles in society. Eventually, this should lead to a socially inclusive society based on openness and diversity.

The experience in the above presented project for instance, shows the children growing together; instead of opposing groupings, the projects create cohesion, according to the interviewee. The children think and act as a group and leave thought structures of ‘us’ and ‘them’ behind. The expectation is that children who grow up this way will also become adults who approach others with openness and without, or with fewer, preconceptions. In this sense, *Vielfalter* projects transcend the aspect of individual identity strengthening, as they allow individuals to interact socially and step into contact with each other more easily: the fostering of plurilingual competencies opens people’s hearts, as one interviewee put it.

Another interviewee stressed her conviction that the fact that this cohesion and openness towards one another can rarely be witnessed today in youth with migratory background, is to be explained by the lack of intercultural content in educational methods 15 years ago. The earlier these contents reach the children, the less rivalry will occur and the better they are prepared for life in a diverse society.

In addition to the envisioned abandonment of ethnocentric views and the ideological welcoming of a multicultural, multilingual society, long-term effects include democratization according to the self-assessment of the project leaders. The democratic and participatory processes associated with several of the 15 projects analysed, for instance, are designed to show the students they have a voice and to bring out the desire in them to use it democratically. Yet, to one interviewee it is unclear how this will play out, as with the expansion of the EU, European immigrants have less incentive to be naturalised than they did prior to the 2000s; formal democracy, however, remains based on citizenship. Another expectation of project leaders, besides a peaceful society based on cultural and linguistic openness and democratic participation, is the increased access children will have to the labour market, adding to equality of opportunity and a diverse labour force.⁷

Overall, these processes will increase the quality of Austrian society, as formerly excluded individuals are empowered to demand change and in turn react upon mainstream society, ideally creating an environment where all are free to choose their paths, including the culture and language they feel comfortable with. It has to be kept in mind, however, that even the best projects at the kindergarten age will not lead to such long-term results if the children face completely different situations once they enter school. Another project not mentioned in detail also clearly created unity among kindergarten children, but the conservative at best, racist at worst, structures in the community can entail children being classified according to their countries of origin once they begin school, especially where teachers leave room for such attitudes. Overall then, the effects of the kindergarten projects largely depend on the schools that are available afterwards. The importance of creating standards and in turn of implementing them in the entire education system cannot be stressed enough.

The projects targeting adults have more immediate effects regarding social inclusion and cohesion. While the contribution to social inclusion of several projects' effects on the children are long-term and dependent on several changeable factors, the effect on the involved parents is more immediate: the project builds up the parents' pride in their background and language and empowers them to transcend fears and previous negative experiences, and in turn the isolation from mainstream society. The work with parents in one kindergarten project, for instance, provides settings where parents diverse in family language, cultural background, educational and professional attainment and world views come together and exchange ideas. For a lot of the first generation immigrants, such a meeting space is the first step towards inclusion. Similarly, the open atmosphere in another kindergarten project has the effect that women with headscarves proudly enter and feel accepted, which they didn't before given the context of the village, according to the interviewee. In this sense, the projects move beyond the obsolete concept of integration and contribute important aspects to the social inclusion of immigrants and to cohesion in Austria. This is starting to be felt in the village of the respective kindergartens as well, although change is slow paced. Some of the projects even lay explicit claims to societal change: for example, a sub-project of a self-organised black women's association was to create a children's book, as the group found there was a clear lack of children's books and educational materials that transcend prevailing ethnocentric views. Such a collaborative project aims at overcoming the individual level through the joint creation of a product as a group. Additionally, the public presentation of the project and final product were intended to have direct repercussions on mainstream society and discourse. Such effects were for instance, felt in the neighbourhood of a higher secondary school for economic professions (HLW), that offered training courses in intercultural mediation to its students and teachers to become so-called 'integration-guides': the student body comprised diverse groups represented in the school's district; as the gulf between them was gradually closed in the school setting, a relaxation of the situation in the district is witnessed as well. Other projects, such as the one presented in section 3.1. successfully increased Turkish women's access to and presence in public spaces; in turn, this is also expected to have repercussions on mainstream society. One kindergarten's multilingual

library had the effect that the women get familiarised with the concept of a lending library, which can be regarded as a first step towards the utilisation of public libraries. Another project that introduced the same target group to the 'Kulturpass' (essentially subsidised access to cultural activities such as festivals, theatres, museums, or libraries), as well as the idea of familiarising marginalised women with the public transport system, followed the same idea.

In conclusion, all projects are designed to contribute to social inclusion in the long run; nonetheless, the interviewees generally shared the opinion that while the projects are important steps and certainly lead to deep, positive ramifications for the directly involved target group, the projects remain a mere drop in the ocean and that they cannot satisfyingly compensate for the slow change in the education system. In other words, the issues and challenges the projects respond to will continue to hinder social inclusion in terms of equality of opportunity, of equality of outcome, and social cohesion in terms of being able to be different together, unless structural change is induced and the contents are enshrined in the education system.

5. Conclusion

Striking the balance between equality and diversity is difficult and often leads to one-sided either-or solutions. Diversity is increasingly understood in terms of diversity management, a neoliberal strategy of competitiveness that doesn't necessarily have anti-racism at its core (MAIZ 2014: 231f.). But diversity must not be instrumentalised to legitimate inequalities, it has rather to be re-attached to struggles for equality and justice in order to be a useful concept (Ahmed 2007). In Europe, policies either favour so-called universal services to which all ethnic and social groups have access, which often results in biased welfare services, as there is an inclination to misunderstand equality as homogenisation and assimilation. Or policies have a culturalisation bias, often connected to an essentialist understanding of culture (MAIZ 2014: 237f.), for example by focussing on the problems of marginalized groups as if they were only cultural, meeting them with purely cultural measures. Cohesion is culturalised as a problem of immigration by non-EU citizens in the dominant discourse, but declining social

cohesion is actually an outcome of neoliberal policy (Boucher 2013). The perspectives of the lower and middle classes are increasingly threatened, which in part explains the rise of radicalisation and ethnocentrism (Eribon 2016). These value polarisations further threaten cohesion (Aschauer 2016). Yet social cohesion needs to be regarded as a *problématique*, a complex phenomenon; often, solutions consist in overcoming either-or dualisms by identifying as-well-as strategies. From this perspective, cultural aspects of social exclusion need to be seen in the context of the power of symbolic (or cultural) and social capital, by which powerful groups monopolise resources and opportunities in the form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977, 1986, 1989). Nevertheless, social cohesion additionally requires a focus on socio-economic factors, including aspects of ecological justice, and most of all, of political representation. This indicates that social cohesion will neither be achieved without the collective action of marginalised groups nor without a redefinition of citizenship based on residence rather than nationality. From this perspective, a broadening of problem awareness needs to replace the tendency to culturalise issues in some of the *Vielfalter* projects, even though, on the whole, *Vielfalter* succeeds well in approaching cohesion as a multi-layered *problématique*. The broadening of perspectives, that the array of *Vielfalter*-funded projects also promote, should lead to a critical assessment of the underlying structures, which could open up truly emancipatory room for manoeuvre.

Given the current debate on refugee movements, pending Brexit, and the continued increase in various forms of inequalities across Europe, the relevance of finding ways of „living together differently“ (Novy et al. 2012: 1874), as the key challenge to social and territorial cohesion, is still increasing. Unfortunately, the management of the refugee movements does not seem promising: it tends to be used as a pretext for deepening cuts in social policies as well as conserving the existing, assimilation-oriented welfare institutions, even if they are clearly deficient. Intercultural conviviality remains an unresolved challenge in fostering social cohesion, which is currently increasingly solved in a reductionist way: by defending identities at the expense of appreciating diversity. In this context, laboratories like *Vielfalter* contain lessons for social cohesion by bridging communities and building trust. Multi-dimensional and long-term support of intercultural initiatives could be the key investment towards realising the EU's motto

and building a Europe ‘united in diversity’. This is invaluable, but will not come for free. Brussel’s austerity politics has undermined solidarity in Europe for long, to the extent of becoming a real threat to European integration. In the context of welfare state retrenchment, the complementary potential of social innovations like *Vielfalter* and especially their innovative aspects in terms of multidimensionality cannot be fully realised. As long as there is increasing pressure on socially innovative initiatives to compensate in a short-term logic for weaknesses of welfare regimes, there are limited resources available to focus on exploring their full potential for social cohesion. Unfortunately, it seems as if the current crisis reinforces path dependencies, thereby deepening secular deficiencies and reinforcing essentialist concepts of identity, ethnic homogeneity and enforced assimilation. While in the 1970s and 80s social innovation was led by social movements and other collective actors that followed targets of collective emancipation (empowerment as *Ermächtigung*), today it is often private actors that promote (generally less radical) change. The role of philanthropy and (social) entrepreneurship, not least through Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, needs to be seen in this light and critically reflected upon. Also, the increasing importance of volunteers indicates an understanding of social innovation that is less oriented towards social rights or a broad understanding of solidarity, but one that arises rather out of (Christian) traditions of charity. Neoliberal interests were in this sense able to coopt social innovation, which is thus „Janus-faced“ (Swyngedouw 2005). Social innovation today might still be aimed at improving individual life-worlds, but hardly targets systemic change and the transformation of those structures that create exclusion and poverty in the first place (Weinzierl/Novy 2016). At EU level, the Commission, under Manuel Barroso (2004-2014), played a key role in establishing this new understanding of social innovation, according to which, creativity and the engagement of society are to be used to counter budgetary constraints (Bureau of European Policy Advisors 2010: 27). Social innovation is thus increasingly incorporated into a neoliberal logic: activities get funded as long as they are functional for the marketisation logic and competitiveness (Jessop 2002; Moulaert/Nussbaumer 2005). Certainly, there are still projects in the field of education or the labour market that are historically rooted in the the older holistic understanding (Novy/Hammer/Leubolt 2009), but social inno-

vation today is dominated by a functionalist understanding of empowering individuals in terms of increasing their capabilities to participate in set structures, notably the labour market. Conflict and the transformation of structures, of modes of life and of production are no longer integral parts of social innovation. The old generation of social innovation saw participation at the project level as a first step towards a democratisation of society on a larger level. This is lacking today, and certainly more difficult to envision within the neoliberal project logic. Projects dependent on EU resources tend to be system-reproducing and conservative rather than system-altering, radical innovations (Edminston 2015). Participation and empowerment as *Ermächtigung*, as a collective process, would require a broader conceptualisation of social innovation oriented towards macro-processes, not merely the local level. At its core, this would require an understanding of social innovation as multi-dimensional and inherently political, whereby participation and representation are furthermore not reduced to formal citizenship and initiatives not reduced to approaches based on culturalisation.

Initiatives such as *Vielfalter* need to strategically focus on creating knowledge alliances (Novy 2012) in order to promote structural change towards an emancipatory education system: this would be a long-term learning and research partnership that implies a transdisciplinary research process, i.e. the collective research activity of multiple, diverse actors from marginalised groups to policy makers. It would be characterised by bringing various forms of knowledge together in a partnership, with Paulo Freire's approach to education, which aimed at mobilising the resources of the oppressed by starting learning processes directly in the context of their lifeworlds and basing it on their participation in social activism in order to collectively overcome oppression (Novy 2012). A forum more conducive to long-term partnerships of multiple actors should be established in order for the so-far locally and politically scattered initiatives to collectively exert political pressure. Such a forum would have to be multilingual, in order to accommodate potential project leaders, who still face the challenge of a German-only application process.

A knowledge alliance has different objectives due to the different interests of the participants. In the case of *Vielfalter*, its overall target should be the finding of answers to the *problématique* of „living together differ-

ently“ (Novy et al. 2012: 1874). Cohesion is not the sum of assimilated individuals, but a characteristic of a community, where unity in diversity is possible. This includes the right to equal participation on a societal level as well as the right to being different. The question is how equality can be promoted without fostering homogenisation and assimilation: how we can be equal, yet different. The existence of diversity has to become the standard of equality: a socially cohesive society is neither based on abstract universalism nor on identity-based communitarianism, but rather on a dynamic construction and recognition of particularity (Rosanvallon 2013).

- 1 This is showcased by the ImPRovE case studies, a large share of which deal with questions of intercultural and inclusion across the three fields of education, housing and labour market.
- 2 The *Vielfalter* is one of the 31 case studies of the ImPRovE research project (2012-2016), which explores social innovation in the field of poverty and social exclusion in the EU (www.improve-research.eu). The findings of this article are therefore based on the collaborative research of Florian Wukovitsch, Andreas Novy and the author, within the ImPRovE framework: the representatives of the actors behind the *Vielfalter* (the IZ, WU and the ministry) were interviewed and a focus group with experts in the field and *Vielfalter* affiliates was held with a view to synthesising the findings of the interviews. In addition to the ImPRovE case study, the author conducted a further 15 semi-standardised interviews with 15 project leaders as well as an online questionnaire that was sent to all former and current project leaders.
- 3 See the introduction of this issue for an overview of definitions and approaches. The evolution of the concept of social innovation is furthermore discussed critically in the conclusion of this contribution.
- 4 In Austria understood as immigrants of the 1st and 2nd generation
- 5 The term *Vielfalter*, is a play on words: *Vielfalt* means diversity in German, *Falter* means butterfly.
- 6 Given the heterogeneity of *Vielfalter* funded projects, the chosen project cannot be seen as representative. But it serves to allow for a more detailed look into the workings of participation and empowerment. A synthesis of projects not presented in detail due to space constraints follows in section 3.2.
- 7 Western Union's engagement in the *Vielfalter* is to be critically reflected in this light.

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ABSTRACT Kohäsion ist in der EU eindeutig gefährdet. Um sie zu erreichen, ist es nötig, eine Balance zwischen Gleichheit und Verschiedenheit herzustellen. Dies ist nur möglich, indem sozialer Zusammenhalt als vielschichtiges Problem verstanden wird, das im Sinne eines ‚Zusammenlebens in Verschiedenartigkeit‘ gelöst werden muss. Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit dem Beitrag zu sozialer Kohäsion einer sozial innovativen Initiative im Bereich der interkulturellen Bildung in Österreich, dem Vielfalter. Genauer noch geht er der Frage nach, wie im Vielfalter ‚Partizipation‘ und ‚Empowerment‘ – nur schwammig definierte, aber viel verwendete Begriffe – verstanden werden.

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