

HOW TO START AN UNEXCITED PROJECT? HOW TO START AN UNEXCITED PROCESS?

Five countries meet and set themselves the goal of conducting an unexcited discourse on "how does unexcited sexual education work".

This should result in various outputs that "prove" that it is possible – the "unexcited turning to sexual education".

In addition to the results, it is just as important to look at the process and to appreciate how these different people with all their cultural, pedagogical-didactic, linguistic and value-oriented environments come to start such an "unexcited" process in the first place, to make it fruitful in the further course and to adorn it with results at the end.

Ein Beitrag von
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Competencies and responsibility framework

The project outline anticipated a "functioning" in which certain functions were anchored: there is a project management, an external evaluation, "suppliers" for the technical implementation, a supervisory support and, at the core, the "participants", i.e. those whose work and further development will be the focus of the project.

These different roles are invited with appropriate weighting and it is made clear that, despite the achievement of all objectives, the way to achieve them will be decisive.

Manageable intermediate steps will provide an initial overview, and the qualitative framework is set by agreement on existing and well evaluated standards by the WHO/ BZgA. It becomes clear that a decision is needed at the beginning, which discussions are important, that they are held and at which points a joint decision can be made based on quality that has already been processed. This saves time and effort. And it brings the essential into focus: How can the existing diversity be adequately reflected by the participating countries or organizations?

Diversity as the linchpin

The concept of "environments" can play a decisive role here: If I situate "sexual education" in my contexts, what map emerges? Which "environments" need to be considered? So what is an appropriately complex description of the thematic pull of sexual education in the public sphere or in "practice"? Which values are touched or triggered, which needs and desires and which calls for boundaries or limitations are awakened, if necessary?

The respectful handling of the existing differences is the connecting action: it is not about "who is furthest", "who is most backward" or similar. It is rather about taking up and recognizing this diversity as part of sexual education reality, which as a rule also exists transculturally, transnationally, transreligiously etc. In the sense of an intersectional understanding it must therefore always be about the landscapes on the maps, i.e. people have their environments, which now come together with the environments of sexual education and must be thought of together.

In the project practice of *#unexcited* – talking about sexuality the first step towards the acceptance of diversity has been made.

Connect and listen

How has the group managed to maintain this sensitivity to what is common and different?

The ability to connect, i.e. to engage seriously with one another without getting entangled in team development processes, is only possible if there is a common understanding of standards, work assignment and a focus on complementing rather than improving from the outset.

In everyday project life this meant defining meetings, determining contents and thus creating transparency (meaning) and proceeding methodically at these meetings in such a way that the contributions of all are important and thus experiencing dominance as "unimportant".

The different language skills were used very skillfully here to ensure a common understanding. In this project it was English, which was not the mother tongue of any of the participants. This respect for all feelings of insufficiency in verbal participation was, however, precisely the decisive point: assured dialogues shaped the project's everyday life and replaced quantity with efficient quality in communication.

It was therefore "worth" asking because there was always the risk of being left behind or losing connection. The risk of being incomprehensible was thus drastically reduced, as everyone wanted to understand as much as possible.

Recognizing shortcomings, increasing liabilities, taking responsibility

After the first two meetings it turned out that the commitment for the transnational, i.e. personal meetings was quite given, but the spaces in between were not well used for joint work. A SWOT analysis revealed that it was mainly due to the continuity of the contact that the project remained below the possibilities. It also became clear that there was a concern that, if the concrete direction of output is now taken, the decision-making processes and powers are not clearly regulated. Is the respectful interaction and "*as well as thinking*" instead of "*either-or*" sufficient?

Here a regulation has been found which is taken from participation: the right to decide for one's own work with the right of the others to veto it. This made it clear how cleverly responsibilities were distributed: I as the "contributor" of a contribution take responsibility for it while everyone else has the responsibility of whether they can go along with it.

But for this, a manageable "amount" of contributions is needed and thus also a shortened feedback period in order to pass things at all, which might have to be revised again.

The decision to arrange a monthly Skype conference was born.

Also, a clear, manageable and timely announced agenda by the project management creates a framework which in turn can "capture" all diversity.

Ensure calm, evaluate evaluations, create results

In the 3rd international meeting it became clear how important the agreed and very regularly held Skype meetings were: They ensured the continuity of the cooperation as hoped or expected. From now on, the focus of the output was in the centre of attention. The Skype meetings were characterized by the high reliability of the participants.

The special quality of the structure was now also clearly evident in the basic framework of the overall project: In addition to the focus on an unexcited communication process and the achievement of the result targets, the safeguarding of these qualities was emphasized in the 3rd meeting. The fact that both the evaluation as mainstream, i.e. both in regular surveys and in the presence at each meeting, and the function of advising the project (senior consultant) were considered and used from the very beginning, now proved to be a direct hit.

For what had proved to be valuable and atmospherically useful in the cooperation, was now also evident in the compilation of the results: there is a great variety of material that has been collected and elaborated. The output would thus show the same diversity as the composition of the people and their fields of work.

How can this diversity of results be jointly evaluated and published? Is the "enduring" of diverse qualities and thus also the disturbance of one's own standards of evaluation a necessary compromise? Or is it a sign of inclusive thinking and thus a strengthening of the quality of the results?

The now familiar form of self-evaluation using the SWOT analysis¹ also provided initial answers to these questions: "*more trust in cooperation*", "*more trust in the quality of the partners' work*", "*more openness*", "*good agreements*" and, last but not least, "*humor*" were mentioned as strengths of the cooperation or the project. And the warning was expressed that if we do not continuously apply and reflect on our diversity and the benevolently critical cooperation, the quality of the project will fall.

¹ responsibility evaluation team

In this context, the task of coming together in mixed small groups from different organizations (and thus from different languages, fields of work and other environments) and dealing with concrete enquiries from young people from sex education contexts was particularly adept. In other words, to meet out of their own and joint reflective work into the concrete discussion of pedagogical action. And to show oneself also professionally: what is the answer to this particular question? How do you see that? How far are you going? Which aspects reveal how much about your own attitudes, values and norms? What form of professional ethics do you practice?

The project participants thus practised quite specifically in the disclosure, negotiation, agreement, presentation and reception of the various work results. And thus exemplarily represented the entire project process in a microform.

This also made it clear how diverse the results must also be and that the tool of the "veto regulation" as the only evaluation standard is sufficient and good.

The publication of the results will thus be able to take place with self-confidence and it will be left to the readers of the results to choose the appropriate one and thus be thrown back on their own "usefulness evaluation".

This understanding is supported by the reader's own experience that many of the modules and materials that have already been worked out and compiled are already being used in their own practice or have been taken up as impulses for their own further development processes. It thus became apparent that "useful" things were and are being produced.

But how could the results be secured?²

Since the output was created by the joint discourse, the many technical discussions and not least by the various resources available, a form of dignified presentation is now needed.

When it comes to emphasizing both the differences and the togetherness of the same thing at the same time, it is worth taking a look at diversity research and systemic theory. In order to bring "both and" into focus, it is necessary to decide that despite all the differences in the results of the project #unexcited, the value does not diverge! No matter who, how and with what effort - all results are valuable and furthermore allow valuable conclusions about their origin and environments. So it does make a difference if the results come from one participating partner country or another - but this does not make the result a "better" or a "worse" one.

Communitarianism as a current developed in the USA in the 1960s (main representative is Amitai Etzioni) was a valuable resource for the project #unexcited: Communitarianism is about seeing individuals in their differences but always united in the agreement and commitment to common values – values that create and maintain community.

This diversity in unity is explained by the symbol of the salad bowl, among other things. There are various ingredients that make a salad through their distinctiveness. Unlike a melting pot, the ingredients remain visible. An image is created for the existing heterogeneity, which is however united.

Taken literally, it does not make sense to categorize the ingredients into values: Why should the lettuce leaf be worth more or less than the cucumber slices?

² responsibility project leader
and senior consultant

Basically, however, the metaphor of the salad bowl is particularly interesting against the background of the understanding of the common values to which the participants feel committed. This meant for the project #unexcited that the questions of attitude towards sex education and also the question of the recognizability of unexcitedness is the bowl to be able to fill it at all.

Systemically thought, the resulting content of the salad bowl of the project #unexcited is **ONE** possibility to prepare a salad - in the future it will be that other ingredients will come into view, feedback will lead to diversification or variations and tastes will change. Then it will start all over again.

Working and moving apart unexcited

If the aim of the project is an "unexcited" way of working in sexual education/sex pedagogy, this must also be reflected in the results of the project cooperation. Since there was only one more international meeting, it was now time to turn into the home stretch while still having a full to-do list. Is a fair distribution of the remaining tasks successful? Does the loyalty and commitment to deadlines hold?

The 4th international meeting benefited from the solidarity with the project and the willingness to work of all participants, because: Now all work that had been started had to be either completed or discarded, a revision of the existing work had to be carried out and the forged work alliance had to be terminated.

The decision of the evaluators to bring forward the third and thus final survey was very helpful in preparation. On the other hand, the presentation of the survey results enabled a differentiated evaluation. But one after the other.

The core of the questionnaires to be filled out in the meantime was the evaluation of the previous work with regard to the respective approval and usefulness for the own work. The positive feedback on this confirmed the course. This summary also resulted in a list of tasks still to be completed.

The project partners were also asked to evaluate the contact with each other (broken down by the participating organizations), which then allowed a critical examination of the commitment of all participants.

The evaluation of the jointly compiled glossary on the website also came into focus through the questionnaire and required additions or corrections in some places.

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All this also meant restructuring times on the agenda and setting realistic goals for this last meeting. Since "international working" had been tested in the meantime, it was also possible to work in parallel in mixed groups. Here, too, it became clear that the differences in linguistic ability were a decisive advantage: communication was more cautious, explanations had to be expressed more clearly and complexity more appropriately.

The anticipatory overview of the results already achieved and the review of the remaining work on site had the psychological effect that both reassurance and pride in all the work done was achieved. Also a final preparation of the work for the public could be seen more relaxed.

Whether it was coincidence regarding the partners* who met or part of the planned structural quality: the fact that all participants were keen to use the breaks as real breaks must also be seen in the context of the "unexcited" claim of the project. The joint work, including critical discussions and professional debates, was always framed, interrupted and enriched by shared (good!) meals, coffee breaks and the sure knowledge that the host organization is concerned about the well-being of the participants.

It becomes clear that in this way the relationship aspect takes on a special meaning for unexcitedness. This is structurally evident above all in the "accessibility" of the others, the associated reflection on one's own involvement in the project and not least in the constant clarification of the various roles in the project. A clear position and role in such a context, which is considered valuable and thus recognized, brings security, which in turn ensures that the project is approachable and thus provides the necessary coolness. And the breaks were also decisive for this.

Breaking up the cooperation is an important part of projects and must be considered from the very beginning. The project experience of many participants is also evident here: It is sounded out what might be possible in the future at other meetings, cooperation etc. and it becomes important that the project can be regarded as "finished" by all participants. Only then will it be possible to make a real farewell in several respects.

After the remaining formalities had also been clarified in a gratifyingly binding manner, there was a feedback round. Completely unexcited. After all, most aspects had already been communicated through the presentation of the third questionnaire, so that the emotional assurances of good cooperation were particularly important.

And then: a lunch together in a nice atmosphere and with a lot of attention. There was no better way to end the project.