
Hi, how are you today?

We're back again with another episode of the Inclusion and Diversity Kitchen Podcast. Nice to have you with us!

Greg, how's your level of Estonian?

I'm afraid that's not that up to date...why?

Today, we have not one, but three amazing guests from Estonia! I talked to Kelly Hrupa, Meelika Hirmo and Annet Männiste from the Estonian National Agency.

And of course, we didn't just talk about inclusion and diversity but also about their favourite meals, here's them introducing themselves:

Anett → ESC in Estonian... bad cook. Always tastes a bit weird. Vegan chickpea salad.

Kelly SALTO participation resource center. Assistant. ~~And...~~ I guess the cooking. It's not that I can't cook... biggest fan of cooking. Quinoa salad. Really easy fast thing to make. Green vegetables. ~~So that's something nice.~~

Meelika → coordinator a SALTO, supports developing quality youth work. Focused on media and information ...strategic communication. More visible and promote critical thinking. I love cooking. Creative process... try new things. Salty... See what I have in the fridge.

Well... it sounds to me like we're heading into a salad today, huh?

Yes, maybe we make it chickpea quinoa salad?

Let's do it, chatting while peeling chickpeas makes it much more interesting! So, where do we start?

I asked all three of them if they would consider themselves to be experts in inclusion, here's what they said:

Yes and no. I studied youth work. I became a person who I am through different youth work. Still trying to figure out what participation is and don't really know. What it means really? Connected to inclusion... but doesn't have to be. Tricky concept. Rather feel it than can define it through work.

Am I sort of an expert in inclusion? It's an area where I'm keeping an open mind...and realizing you are constantly learning and re-learning and unlearning. It's possible, not close personal with deep contact with all imaginable groups of people and within the groups are differences. There is value-based attitude, but practically learning process. Being open for feedback from any group / humble... is totally ok. It's like with sustainability, I don't need to be perfect, but open and learn. Had to learn and discover bits and pieces. Have I experienced all types? No... but I have attitude and value. Expands my own limits... makes the world richer. Some areas I have closer experience with... but I just feel it's a huge sea to sail.

I would like to know yes and no. No it wasn't part of my life in an explicit way. Explicitly it wasn't ... this topic of inclusion we are now ... in our work we are approaching it very much through accessibility. It takes this more explicit more tangible sense. I didn't think of it that way.

Let's start with our basic question for the day: what's the role communication plays when it comes to promoting inclusion and diversity...

Luckily, both you and I have some background in the area, right? Before we hear from our guests, why do you think it's important that we dedicate an episode to communication?

I feel like communication is so intrinsically intertwined with inclusion and diversity that it would be impossible not to talk about. Think about it: to include young people with fewer opportunities and the organisations that work with them... requires communication about the programs and the tools for inclusion to reach them.

Yes, that's one important side of communication: what channels we use and if our audience actually will receive what we send, if the tools we use are accessible and used by the audience...

When I asked the three specifically about how to make communication inclusive, here's what they shared:

When I started working with communication. Reality was so different. It's ever changing. What people use, prefer, used to be completely ok to just post in Facebook or youtube. You would reach out to people and then there was a wave that it's just social media... for second it was.

Meelika went on explaining that today, in order to reach the audience, social media is not enough anymore. Sometimes, what is needed is one-on-one communication with key people. Furthermore, different online channels require different strategies, etc.

~~Now we need to go back to mixed communication. Needs to be one-on-one approaches, various online channels, well strategized.~~ Youth work tends to stay in their bubble. So involved in youth work... I recognized some faced. Always same types of people. How inclusive youth

work really is. What's the issue it's always the same people. The main thing that can be done is to keep an open mind, explore outside the youth work bubble. Mix and max with other groups... why not private sector who have very diverse teams... have good practises.

That's a really great point... in some way the way you work ... if you work in inclusive way you include other players... you welcome cooperation is no inclusive. That makes for inclusive result.

It has also changed... in the last two years, regarding COVID situation. First of all, for the first time I see concrete communication that application forms are not very inclusive. Consideration of using videos as application... is an actual ... other means to apply, instead of many questions. Not just at the local level, EU level. Huge progress. Different communication tool has opened up.

And then besides the channels and communication tools, there's content: the way we write, the images we use, the things we say and do not say...

Questions like: Do I think that message is for me? Do I understand what it says? Is it clear to me what I need to do to get engaged? Here's what I heard from Meelika about that:

At SALTO we try to make sure materials are accessible. Prefer inclusive materials. Show different types of people, engage different types of people. Learn a lot from SALTO who is super focused on inclusion. I don't think anyone of us in youth work is in perfection...

we create materials that someone gives feedback that with my condition or my situation this is not helpful. You can reach ideal world. The best recommendation is to consult... not rely on usual suspects, keep these things in mind. If you want to reach out, just putting information out there is not enough. Best communication is meaningful cooperation and partnerships. Takes more time... energy, but most efficiently. Most inclusive way to do any communication.

It can certainly be quite overwhelming to think about all these different points when working with communication. Did you hear any best practises in that sense from the three?

Yes, I think it's important to keep in mind that you probably won't be able to do everything at the same time... Anett touched upon that in our conversation:

Other thing with communication, very often people want to do it but don't have knowledge. Website procurement... standard... never heard about it. You have to discover all the time. We don't have the time to read new things. Have daily work too. Realistic check of how much I can really do it. If I don't reach standard, at least I have tried. Ideal and standard changes every day. Really to be realistic what youthwork can actually do. Not forget young person that youth workers needs to focus on.

An important first step is getting a good understanding, mapping out needs and useful approaches.

In that sense, Meelika shared a specific approach they took:

We had a working group with ...customer journey map. Focusing on communication and inclusion. Better support existing beneficiaries... to feel encouraged and welcomed. Mapping and researching... information available about program.s How beneficiaries are communicated with. When project applications are going through. What pain points... how to approach them. ~~We work in a way in our own bubble, come out of the bubble and explore and do research.~~ The NA also had focus groups with different young people just to see how to best reach out to different groups. ~~Huge challenge... big european program, different obstacles. All Nas work in that direction.~~

Now, Greg, let me share with you a different perspective that I gained by talking to Kelly, Anett and Meelika. Given that the Estonian national agency hosts the SALTO resource center for participation and information, we ended up reflecting on how inclusion and diversity relate to participation.

Let's hear from Meelika first:

The connection between participation and inclusion is a very logical one to me → participation for all young people. No matter their stories. Only way to really have meaningful participation is to include various types of groups / diversity. With our activities we try to emphasize that.. Youth participation toolkit. Worksheets and examples and recommendations make sure projects leaders also considers organisations with different interests.

She then went on explaining how participation is a right for all:

To be able and equipped to influence the world around you. It's not a privilege for just two types of elitarian youth groups. It's not what we want to promote or try see as a normal thing.

And Kelly continued reflecting:

Regarding connection... there is this connection. It's almost like it's a continuum. Maybe we don't start of with inclusive participation. The more we have access to participate in society, the more inclusive it will become. If you delimit decision making to narrow group... it won't make for a very diverse society and will exclude some groups. It's a circular dynamic. Participation leads to inclusion, and inclusion leads to more inclusive participation. ~~We should want in ...~~

Oh wow, that's indeed an important perspective on inclusion and diversity. I can see a clear link to what we said before about communication having this role of making someone feel like they are part of this, that they are welcome on the programs, that these programs are for them.

I can see you're advancing well with those chickpeas Greg, the Quinoa and the vegetables are also ready.

Oh thank you, Rahel! I must confess I think peeling the chickpeas is quite laborious. Anyway, it's worth the effort. Now, we just need the dressing and our salad is good to go. But, before that, I'm sure you have more topics linked to communication to share from your conversations.

Of course, as we said, it's a rather vast topic, so plenty to discuss. We explored, for example, that communication is not always direct... that sometimes it goes through peers, parents ... influencers. Here's Anett:

Parents are a very interesting target group. Underused sometimes. It's a real discussion with young person...culturally influenced. Sharing knowledge of youth work... can really influence young people to be part of these projects and what inclusion and participation means.

And Anett also shared that in her efforts to reach diverse youth for the programs, she always keeps in mind that the person she wants to reach might not directly receive the message... but maybe a friend will.

And that friend can pass on the message, right? It has actually happened to me and I am still grateful to the messenger. And now I try to pass on the message whenever I can.

All right, time to set the table. But knowing you, you must have a last topic up your sleeve that we can discuss while enjoying our salad, huh?

Haha, yes, I sure do! Our conversation eventually led us to talk about media literacy and its link to inclusion and diversity. Also because information is the other big topic of the SALTO hosted in Estonia besides participation, right?

Meelika shared with me about the importance of promoting media literacy as a tool to increase tolerance and understanding for differences:

Media information and literacy... This is an area in youth work where there is a lot to explore. How media portrays different groups and not just media... what's happening on social media hate speech on social media towards different groups. Cyber-bullying, misinformation... disinformation, deep fake... videos are taken mixed and matched with others, looks like it's real.

There's someone's interest to show immigrant young people being violent... creating conflicts between different groups... political or personal reasons to manipulate... media and technology so easy to do... someone other's face and deep fake ...unfair representation of some groups... immigrant groups... misinformation ...info pandemic. Related to inclusion and participation. I see who are the most vulnerable groups most impacted by media age... diversity groups if I may call them this way.

Meelika then explained how the publications of the NAs and SALTOs are a way of creating a counter-narrative and how important it is to make these publications really carry the values of the organisations.

And for that media literacy is important!

I have the feeling that, just generally, Training regarding critical thinking and media literacy more ... open society.

I couldn't agree more! There's only so much we can do if media literacy is not a widespread skill. I see it as sort of an 'antidote' to the abundance of information and misinformation we simply cannot control.

Yes, I think it's a responsibility we all have.

Well, I think we have reached the end of this episode. It's been a pleasure again to cook and talk with you Rahel.

Yes, a big thank you goes out to Kelly, Meelika and Anett for the great conversation.

By the way, I brought some Kombucha, do you want some?

Always! And now after touching upon the topic quite a lot, I'm curious what your connection to social media is...

Are you following me on all these different channels? I actually have two YouTube channels...

Haha, the truth is I wouldn't know if you're joking about having many channels. I don't seem to have time to do much following these days...

This podcast has been produced by SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre, for more resources and tools check: www.salto-youth.net/inclusion/