PROJECT BREAK!

SOME GENERAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TARGETING GENDER STEREOTYPES VIA MEDIA

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Other publications include:

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Roosalu, T., Raudsepp, M., Kruusvall, J., Aavik, K., & Taru, M. (2019). *Project BREAK! Designing intervention: mapping state of art, collecting good practices and developing indicators.* RASI toimetised nr 6. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikool

Raudsepp, M., Roosalu, T., Kruusvall, J., Aavik, K., & Taru, M. (2019). *Project BREAK! Evaluating outcomes and assessing impact. Empirical insight.* RASI toimetised nr 8. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikool

Roosalu, T., Raudsepp, M., Kruusvall, J., Aavik, K., & Taru, M. (2019). *Project BREAK! Guidelines for planning the media intervention: lessons from the project.* RASI toimetised nr 9. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikool

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Preface

The aim of the BREAK! cross-media project is to influence the audience in the direction of open-mindedness regarding gender role stereotypes - to empower (young) people and help them to overcome stereotype based barriers concerning occupational choices. In order to produce change – promoting desirable dispositions and practices and hindering undesirable dispositions and practices among the target groups (young people and those who can most directly influence their career choices – teachers, parents, career advisors, employers) – a cross-media intervention has been designed.

The tasks of the methodological strand of the project are to

a) propose intervention methods that have proved to be effective in previous interventions,
b) to measure and describe the effects of cross-media intervention, and
c) to explain the observed effects by reference to theoretical frames.

The project is ideologically loaded: it stands for egalitarianism, equal opportunities, social (gender) equality, respecting human rights and human dignity in everyone. This 'bias' is necessarily guiding project activities and provides us with framework for designing and assessing the relevance of the intervention. We need to acknowledge that in current context of rising right-wing populism with anti-feminist bias, spreading inconsiderate rhetoric in the public sphere across Europe, such focus may become sensitive in itself. However, acknowledging the two main virtues behind the project – providing best opportunities for every individual to explore and activate their individual strengths and interests also in the labour market without facing barriers by stereotypes; and promoting acceptance also of non-traditional occupational choices and thus reach the more inclusive as well as more productive labour force – the project is inherently relevant across times and ideologies.

On behalf of the project team, we hope you find the approaches taken in this project inspiring and the experiences of the project team insightful.

We have divided the message into three papers: report outlining the requirements, choices and experiences of designing the intervention; report on recommendations on what to consider when planning such an intervention; and report on measuring and understanding outcomes of the project.

Further information is available from project website *http://bre-ak.eu*

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1 General policy recommendations

The project was not aiming to generate recommendations in terms of legislation or policy making, but there are some aspects clearly emerging for further consideration.

1. **shift in family, educational and labour market institutions surrounding youth is key to enabling them challenging gender stereotypes**, thus the attention to (re)designing institutions, rather than aiming to fix the individuals, would support the changes the most.

2. To reach the aims of empowering youth in challenging gendered occupational stereotypes **the cooperation with teachers, youth workers and career consultants is crucial,** and they are more able to fulfil this role when equipped with quality information and tools to work with youth. Our experience shows that the teacher training as well as guidelines how to best use the materials generated in the project were very highly appreciated, and systematic lack of appropriate materials was acknowledged across the three countries. Suggestion would therefore be to continue efforts to produce and customise content for use when approaching young – as well as the key actors involved with them.

3. It seems the **gender equality mainstreaming is still be best way** to achieve viewer interest in terms of entertainment provision, and our example where topics of challenging gender stereotypes were dealt with alongside other themes that were relevant for the variety of target groups seemed a good strategy. **If the target groups are hesitant of the main goal, they would be more likely to abandon the intervention, thus disabling even nudging effects**.

4. Multimedia support, or possibly cross media support helps to make any production more likely noticed, and also helps to bring forth the various topics that are presented – sometimes explicitly, sometimes more implicitly – in the production itself. Thus the **combination of media use should be promoted more widely to secure the maximum effect**. Especially, when an intervention is targeted at youth audiences, specific aspects should be considered, such as their media consumption practices or expectation of authenticity, and guiding to these resources has to happen outside of the broadcasting organisation.

5. The **framework for public broadcasting** still fits well with achieving social aims via edutaining programmes, and funding and other issues with public broadcasting systems may make the topics covered in this project seem less relevant in their everyday practices compared to other aims. Maintaining high quality and accessibility for all viewer groups makes these public broadcasting systems especially helpful in disseminating such social messages. Thus, **framework to support public media channels as well as to enable public-private cooperation in delivering content is an important factor of success**. Small countries may have low public funding, but this may be compensated by the possibility for easy reach and communication as well as cooperation with the national public broadcasting system across the project countries.

6. The interdisciplinary cross-sector project BREAK! was a case for good practice in all these accounts. Such a project also helped **everyone involved in working on the project to become more aware** of the issues related to the limiting effects of occupational gender stereotypes in daily practices, and we witness the individuals pioneering these approaches would continue applying these in their future projects in the various fields of their activity.

2 Specific recommendations by topic

2.1 Prefer gender mainstreaming approach

Facts: characters in the TV series included men and women of various ages and in variety of social contexts and occupational spheres, sometimes explicitly questioning gender stereotypes and sometimes leaving the more implicit features to be challenged in mediated reflection processes. The TV series also specifically highlighted issues related to safety and wellbeing of youth, at school, at work and at home, thus enabling also discussion of rights of children in various contexts. However, majority of teachers, career counsellor and youth workers that participated the training were women, somewhat corresponding to the biased gender composition of this professional group

Recommendations: a gender-equality targeting project may need special efforts to secure gender balance and reach individuals of any gender at the same rate. In the future, perhaps direct involvement of other target groups could be considered to achieve more diverse groups of learners, such as teachers in vocational education and training programmes, coaches in sports and similar activities, as well as those involved in supervising in military and paramilitary organisations.

2.2 Account for the general media context

Facts: The produced TV series appeared in the context of usual audiovisual media, filled with stereotypical approaches to gender and occupations, it has to compete with stereotypical media content

Recommendations: apply media self-regulation (following media guidelines in public broadcast organisations), apply educational responsibility in preparing TV series for young people. Use reception analysis of TV series among young people systematically, to understand what gets reflected

2.3 Choose comprehensive approach to intervention

Facts: Our intervention included many different elements (fictional TV series and supporting printed and online educational materials, teacher training sessions), which complemented each other. TV series could not realize their educational potential without comments and reflection. Teacher training without supporting TV series where the messages were embedded in narrative form, could have remained boring, and teachers appreciated the possibility to use the provided tools.

Recommendation: provide analogous trainings also for parents, employers; continue with analogous teacher training sessions, provide sustained support to teachers who may feel insecure teaching these topics

2.4   Secure network of interventions for sustainability

Facts: there are and have been many isolated projects with the similar aim but poorly coordinated.

Recommendation: For a sustained impact an intervention should be viable, connected to other projects with the same agenda (creating coalition of projects); some institution should make it their task to gather and systematize the results and approaches

2.5   Reach heterogeneous target audiences

Facts: Although the TV series was first of all meant for young people, it reached directly mostly middle aged and older audience who tend to be more likely watching TV, even though the series was available for online streaming. The series was interesting for viewers of all ages.

Recommendations: younger people require nudging – someone somehow suggesting the series

2.6   Build tools into communication strategies

Facts: TV series included various messages related to gender equality, stereotypes, discrimination, self-assertion, etc. Many relevant topics comprehensively covered – good material for inciting discussions

Recommendations: Use the TV series as an additional tool in teaching social and psychological subjects at school and universities.

2.7   Provide positive role models

Facts: the main character of the TV series was devised and performed so successfully that majority of viewers from different age groups liked her and perceived her as a positive role model.

Recommendation: create and present positive role models in fictional and documentary media (e.g. to encourage men to take up teaching or caring careers, and women to go into STEM professions)

2.8   Understand variety of mechanisms of impact

Facts: Different sociological and socio-psychological theories stress the decisive role of interpersonal and group discussions as mediators of social change. Paucity of public discussions concerning the project's media products was observed. Project's internet site did not enable users' feedback or comments. Reflexivity and social interaction are the main paths to social change through co-construction and modification of collective meanings and thinking habits. Reflexivity is also a necessary condition for transformative learning and re-education.

Recommendation: produce more provoking content or launch catalyzing discussions in the (social) media. Try to catalyze viewers reflexivity by different means – by involving them in guided (social) media discussions, by participating in the creation of new educational materials, etc.

2.9   Be aware of different impact on segments of target audience

Facts: The target audience is heterogeneous in gendered dispositions and practices: in Estonian case, 20% of population is consistently gender liberal, if we add ambivalent groups, then 43% of population support gender equality at work, 53% support gender equal approach in the education of children, and 38% support gender equality in family relations. Diverse groups perceive the TV series differently.

Recommendations: spread knowledge about the proportions of gender attitudes and their change in society. Be aware of the enablers and barriers to gender equality.

2.10   Be culturally sensitive

Facts: The reach among linguistic minority audience was much lower, Russian speaking viewers differed in the reception of the media intervention.

Recommendation: pay attention to reception among cultural minority groups, include representatives of cultural minorities in the story, highlight their values and specific issues.

2.11   Support developing media literacy

Facts: Viewers tend to not question what they see in the media, there is lack of critical approach. However, when mediators (e.g. teachers) point out specific aspects worthy of attention and initiate discussion on those topics, it is easier to recognise implicit agendas next time.

Recommendation: necessary to teach critical attitude to the (social) media content.

2.12   Promote gender neutral/sensitive career guidance

Facts: according to the feedback of seminars for teachers and career counselors, the topic was comparatively new and useful for them.

Recommendation: continue to prepare materials and trainings for teachers and career advisors on the issues of gender neutrality and gender sensitivity in career guidance and other topics. Organize trainings on different levels and for diverse audiences.

2.13   Empower young people to be self-confident regarding their career plans

Fact: Analysis of the reception of the TV series revealed that self-confidence and perseverance of the main character impressed and inspired majority of our respondents. The Why not?! series is a symbolic resource for many viewers that supports to initiate changes in oneself (for example, in the direction of greater self-confidence) or in one's relations with others (towards more considerate parenting and more student-sensitive teaching).

Recommendation: empower the viewers in making changes in their life by providing adequate symbolic resources to support them.

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2.14 Involve target group to the project process

Facts: A good project proceeds in small steps, through validating and assessing the intervention content and form from the viewpoint of the target and all interest groups. TV series script writer consulted the team members, young actors shared their experiences, students were involved in designing cross-media products (exhibition, booklet) and the method of co-creation with the young people was used successfully and various additional educational materials were produced (a theatre production, educational videos and social media activation). School visits and group discussions in schools caught attention. In Iceland another format was used – young people themselves created podcasts on relevant topics.

Recommendation: involve young people in the project design, discuss ideas with different segments of the target groups, find out the topics that really matter to them. Use different formats.

2.15 Design the work of cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary team

Facts: Co-operation of specialists from different disciplines enabled to combine ideas and tools to co-create a joint outcome – multimedia intervention. During the work process we learnt from each other and exchanged our experiences. As an outcome, awareness about gender equality issues increased among all participants.

Recommendation: When working in a heterogeneous (international, multidisciplinary) team like in the BREAK! project special attention should be given to teambuilding and team management. In the beginning the participants' expectations to the project and to each other should be stated explicitly, the work process should be monitored and regulated in the way that empowers all participants, and final self-reflective feedback is necessary for process evaluation from different viewpoints. Promoting group discussions