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Immigrants and prison: good practices in Europe[1]

Abstract: Within the RiUscire project an important section was devoted to the collection and analysis of good practices that may support the linguistic and social integration of a particular group of adult migrants: those in the prison systems of Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and Portugal. The collection of these practices is necessary and pivotal to start a shared action at a European level. Best practices were surveyed through analysis grids that ensure respect for diversity and the right to rehabilitative actions thanks to linguistic and communicative competences as well as professional development.

Résumé : Un volet important du projet RiUscire a été consacré à la collecte et à l'analyse des bonnes pratiques susceptibles de soutenir l'intégration linguistique et sociale d'un groupe particulier de migrants adultes, incarcérés en Espagne, en Italie, en France, en Allemagne et au Portugal. Le recueil de ces pratiques est nécessaire et essentiel pour lancer une action commune au niveau européen. Les bonnes pratiques ont été examinées à l'aide de grilles d'analyse qui garantissent le respect de la diversité et le droit à des mesures de réinsertion grâce à des compétences linguistiques et de communication, ainsi qu'au développement professionnel.

1 Introduction

RiUscire[2] intends to take advantage of the multi/plurilingual and intercultural dimension of the prison context to turn it into a place of resources, empowerment

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and rehabilitation through integrated training courses addressed to foreign prisoners, prison staff and teachers working in prison. The goals of the project are:

– to promote and utilize the plurilingualism and cultural diversity inherent in prison contexts;
– to promote the education of inmates through intercultural communication and the improvement of linguistic-cultural competencies and linguistic-professional abilities;
– to motivate educational action and personal development/improvement;
– to provide operators and teachers with tools for better understanding the processes of communication with foreign inmates.

The recognition of what is being done in European prisons aims to identify good practices and their typology and to propose a model for better promoting adult education in the prison context through intercultural communication, developing the linguistic-cultural and linguistic-professional skills of detainees for social and occupational reintegration. Finally, we ask ourselves whether and how a practice can be considered a model if it is reused in other socio-linguistic and socio-cultural contexts.

2 Good practices: a definition

The terminology referring to good examples is varied and controversial: sometimes *best practice* is used, other times *good practice,* or also *learning practice.* We prefer to use *good practice* because we do not want to consider only those areas of *learning* and we believe that *best* is limiting in that it does not leave room for improvement, which instead is our ultimate goal.

By "good practices" we mean the best examples of practice in the fields of personal and professional development, education and instruction, approaches, instruments, and use of technology, etc., used to advance the conditions and re-insertion of inmates. These practices must also be easily transferable to other similar situations with similar goals.

In the penitentiary context, a broad variety of courses are organized, but not all of them can be considered as good practices. Good practices are educational, pedagogical and treatment actions or activities that, in the socio-educational penitentiary context, allow the actors to achieve the expected results.[3] According

3 Regarding European prisons, see among others Hawley, Murphy & Souto-Otero (2013), Puy Roca and Aliaga (2007), Benucci (2015).

to Banelytė, Sternadel and Brožaitis, they constitute desirable models for all European countries and a starting point for the development of new shared good practice:

> The aim of the identification and sharing of good practices is to capture evidence on the effectiveness of a practice, to improve its visibility and dissemination so that it becomes easily accessible and reusable by all informed stakeholders: decision-makers, socioeconomic partners, NGOs, academia, media, and civil society at large, and facilitates learning from others. It is expected that the sharing of good practices will inspire further change and "better practice". (Banelytė, Sternadel, and Brožaitis 2015: 5)

In RiUscire good practice is defined by educational as well as pedagogical activity, action or treatments (projects, guidelines, educational material, internships or work experience etc.) that allow the agents to set actions to reach the planned results in the specific socio-educational context of a prison.

This paper provides some general reflections of the most common prison practices in the five European Countries of the project (Italy, Germany, France, Portugal and Spain); the context of the study is limited to a sample from the data collected in different prisons.

3 Methodology and instruments

The analysis of good practices in RiUscire was based on 10 general criteria selected according to the most frequent research in this field (Benucci and Cortés 2014; Benucci 2015):

1. effectiveness (results on target with the objectives of the project and suitable concerning the direct and indirect effects on the final recipients in relation to professional reintegration);
2. efficiency (positive balance between the resources used for the realization and the results obtained);
3. coherence (inner and outer coherence, that is adult education and EU recommendations);
4. reproducibility (in new, similar or different contexts from the situation in which it was originally realized);
5. level of involvement and satisfaction (supports the technical, cultural and human resources of the reference target, evokes positive attitudes among the participants);
6. innovation (new and creative solutions for the project/process; it encourages the active participation of the beneficiaries and other subjects; it involves social agents, from without the penitentiary context);

7. accessibility (practicality in the organization and participation);
8. added value (produces changes in the penitentiary and social context, e. g. reducing the rate of second offenses committed, improving the competences of teachers and penitentiary staff);
9. institutional recognition (if the practice is recognized, respected or promoted at institutional level);
10. sustainability (founded on existing resources or able to create new ones, ability to carry on producing effects well over the duration of the project).

We are aware that the parameters used for measuring the results of a practice are often subjective and not standardized.

Obviously this initial analysis is inherently superficial, and can only give an orientation and overview of our work. Instead, the criterion of innovation offers sufficient proof of reliability because it allows us to highlight those practices and countries which stand out among the others for their originality.

Keeping in mind the above-mentioned elements, we created a form containing the best combination of the elements observed during our investigations. In particular, the form includes a series of sections with different levels of both descriptive and analytic data. For each practice identified by the internal and external collaborators of the project, a form is completed, following these sections: country and practice number; concise description of the project (title, programmatic context, sector, contact person, budget); description of the material/specifications of the projects (aims, description, contextualization, innovative aspects); informative data about the project (practice) participants; contact information; availability of good practices material; description of the RiUscire data base.

The completed forms were then sent to 16 referees from different countries, external to the project but with solid competences in the following fields: communication, language didactics, evaluation of project and didactic/operational/scientific material. The referees were asked to evaluate each practice based on the description given on each form (and when possible, examining the practice itself) and invited to award a score from 1 to 5 (low to high) for each of the 10 criteria. To be considered "good", a practice needed to have a minimum score of 3.

4 Data and conclusions

As we are writing this paper 120 good practices have been collected (still in progress), of which ten were considered not good. In total we have 108 good practices: 61 had a score between 3 and 3.9 and 47 had a score between 4 and 5.

Regarding the scores from 1 to 5 (1 = unsatisfactory, 5 = very good) on each criterion, we can affirm that the average never goes below *satisfactory* (3). The two highest-scoring criteria in the corpus are *reproducibility in other contexts* (4.16) and the degree of *involvement and satisfaction* (4.12), while the lowest are *institutional recognition* (3.46) and degree of *innovation* (3.58). Innovation is quite strongly present in Italy and Spain, with a variety of practices and encouragement of such diversity. By contrast, Portugal is among the least innovative, with fewer genuinely re-educational interventions.

Here, in order, are the most common activities within the typologies considered:
– Job training (35%), with consistent collaboration between prisons and companies to facilitate reinsertion of inmates in the world of work, with the presence of specific courses (i.e. online cookery class; sound technician; green spaces maintenance): most common in Italy, least common in Germany.
– Languages/forms of expression (19.2%.), i.e. theatre, dance, photography, radio broadcasting: most common in Germany, absent in Spain.
– Social reconstruction (11.7%), to prepare inmates for reinsertion in society after prison; activities to improve the psychological and physical health of inmates: most common in France, absent in Portugal and Spain.
– Training for prison personnel and teachers (10.8%), deconstruction of prejudices and intercultural sensitivity training and analysis and suitability of lesson plans: most common in Italy, present in France and Spain.
– Teaching L2 or L1 with a particular focus on reading skills (6.7%): present in Germany and France.
– Writing courses (5.8%), especially workshops on journalistic language: present in Germany and Italy, less so in Spain.
– Communication techniques (4.2%), general and intercultural, with particular focus on artistic practices: most common in France.

The least common typologies of activities include *transversality of learning* (interdisciplinarity and study of various subjects), *secondary and post-secondary education* (usually via e-learning), *computer courses*, *reading courses.*

In order to be able to use these criteria in the evaluation of good practices, one should focus on the intrinsic as well as the extrinsic problems of the concept

itself. When it comes to intrinsic difficulty it is already very clear that the ten criteria mentioned are not sufficient to define the concept of good practices and cannot guarantee correct categorization. Extrinsic difficulties especially concern the differing didactic traditions in the way linguistic and glottodidactic theories are spread in the different countries, and the different value attributed to performance arts as re-education in the countries considered.

Activities in prison are heterogeneous, hardly ever coordinated between institutions, and do not sufficiently allow for positive results in other countries/local contexts. Once a level of first alphabetization or A1 (sometimes A2) has been reached, cultural/linguistic education is no longer of much or widespread interest.

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