



Lap's Panorama PREVENT network

AN URBACT II PROJECT



Involving parents in early school leaving



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“ While it is never too early for parents to be involved, it is also true that it is never too late, as children benefit from involvement at each and every stage of their lives... ”

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1. PREVENT LAP REVIEWS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

One of the headline targets in the EU 2020 strategy is to **reduce the share of early school leavers to less than 10%**. The EU definition of early school leaving (hereby ESL) is referred to as “those 18 to 24 year-olds with lower secondary education attainment at most and currently no longer in formal or non-formal education or training”.¹ Today there is also a lot of attention paid to the issue of “school drop-outs”. While the ESL definition covers all forms of leaving education and training before completing upper secondary education or equivalents in vocational education and training, the “official” definition of school dropout is about leaving an on-going course, education or training scheme. It is fair to say that both definitions as well as the double perception of ESL (and/or school dropout) have been present in the Prevent project.

Reducing ESL is essential for achieving a number of key objectives in the EU2020 strategy. Cutting ESL rates addresses both EU objectives for ‘smart growth’ by improving education and training levels and the aims for ‘inclusive growth’ by addressing one of the major risk factors for unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. From the perspective of the EU as an economic region, a high level of early school leavers has a lot of implications; increased costs for public welfare systems, decrease in taxes, lack of skills and/or skills mismatch, and not the least, less active citizens leading to less participation in democratic processes².

Education researchers and practitioners consider the role of parents in the prevention of ESL a crucial success factor. Through a wide range of policies, local authorities, and especially schools and educational institutions can play a key role in better involving parents. The [PREVENT project](#) promotes sharing and dissemination of experiences and supports the development of innovative actions and policy measures related to **the involvement of parents** in favour of the prevention of early school leaving. This document, the LAP Panorama, summarises the nine **Local action plans** (hereby LAP’s) developed by PREVENT partner cities. In each LAP, a set of recommendations – both for actions and strategy – are made, as a response to local needs and ambitions, and as a contribution to European and global challenges. LAP’s are, as part of the **URBACT Methodology**, a mandatory action.

In each of the PREVENT partner cities, the local work process has been carried out with the help of an **URBACT Local Support Group** (ULSG). Each ULSG has its own, unique setting, matching the project theme and URBACT criteria (participative and integrated approach, wide range of stakeholder and end users, holistic and experimental design). Each city is connected in a transnational network of partner cities, sharing ideas and good practices.

¹ Education and Training Monitor 2014, http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor14_en.pdf, p. 30

² NESSE (2009), p. 31

PREVENT PROJECT

As one of the headline targets in the EU 2020 strategy is to **reduce the share of early school leavers to less than 10%** there is a need for new and innovative approaches to ESL prevention. Leaving school early is often the result of a multi-faceted and complex situation, including both individual conditions as well as organisational (i.e. the way schools and curricula's are managed and delivered) and contextual (environmental situation, i.e. family, neighbourhood etc.). Over the years, thousands of projects aiming at 'doing something' about the ESL issue have been, and many still are, co-founded by regions, nations and, not the least, the EU. However, there is still a need for the 'golden recipe' – or at least, for something new, something different than another round of 'more of the same'-solutions. One often foreseen input when discussing ESL prevention is that education researchers and practitioners in different fields consider the role of parents in the prevention of ESL as crucial. Through a range of policies, local authorities can play a key role to better involve parents. Starting from that, the PREVENT idea is to share experiences and develop solutions related to the involvement of parents in the prevention of early school leaving. Moreover, PREVENT considers the use of this innovative approach, where **parents are considered key actors** in reducing ESL and where cities are driving forces to create synergies, common understanding, and in developing concrete collaboration models between relevant (both expected and unusual) stakeholders, as an interesting contribution to more general attempts to prevent ESL. In its work, PREVENT cities have elaborated on ways to:

- Build sustainable partnerships with parents in the prevention of ESL
- Involve parents in building educational activities offers outside school
- Bring educational stakeholders to better involve parents and recognise their skills
- Involve, support and better coordinate local stakeholders
- Share a common understanding of the issues and elaborate, in an inclusive and participatory process, a common response
- Build a holistic and sustainable local strategy with all stakeholders
- Include innovative approaches to ESL prevention – and to involving parents in the process

In this LAP PANORAMA report you will get acquainted both with the cities involved in the PREVENT network and with the ideas, processes, actions and strategies that have emerged from extensive collaborative networking and knowledge sharing, both at city and European levels. We are convinced that the examples provided will bring inspiration to others in their work to support young people in the cities of Europe in their educational and life success!

PREVENT CITIES

In this section, we give a brief overview of the conditions and reasons why cities chose to participate in the PREVENT network. The overview relates to data and contextual analysis collected during application phase. As all development processes start from more or less specific need or problem, these initial ‘city snapshots’ offer a starting point for readers in tracking the development process in a city – from initial need, via transfer of good practices, exchange, innovation, tests and societal/contextual and/or system changes and of course new learning as such, to each city’s final Local action plan.

Antwerp, Belgium:

Antwerp is a truly multicultural/multi-ethnic city. More than 170 nationalities make up the population of the city, giving it a very special and dynamic atmosphere. But there are also implications; the average educational results in Antwerp are relatively poor when compared to the Flemish average. 2010, the dropout rate and unqualified school leaving in Antwerp was almost double the Flemish average. The aim of the city government is to bring ESL levels down to the Flemish standard, not the least by promoting parental involvement, as it is considered a major success factor, positively affecting the psychosocial functioning of students. In Antwerp, schools are viewed as the strongest partner in this process, implying that schools have to take the lead.

The mission of the Antwerp education policy department is that ‘All schools work together with the city services to ensure that children, teenagers and youngsters get and take the opportunity to develop competences and obtain qualifications that lead to a wide personal formation and gives them access to higher education and / or the labour market’. The vision is supported by the fact that Antwerp for quite a long time has developed and launched a wide range of services, organisations and actions aiming at involving parents in the educational journey of their kids. Still, some issues that were highlighted as areas for further improvement and development were alternative approaches to parental involvement and evidence-based knowledge on “what works and what does not” to improve both policies and actions. Another objective was, by building on and developing the work and participation of the Local support group, to develop an expert group on parental involvement that could integrate experiences from PREVENT, relevant research and further European and international good practice.

Gijon, Spain:

Given the fact that Spain in general has been prompted as one of the countries with the highest ESL rates in the EU, the city of Gijon does not really match the overall picture. The

city has already since 2002 developed a Programme on Prevention of Truancy ("Trabajo Socioeducativo en el Absentismo Escolar"), implemented via a network of school centres, social services, and the local police. Already back in 2004, the Programme started involving parents as a vital partner to achieve success, especially regarding students with a higher risk of truancy and early school leaving. To continue the good work of Gijon to fight truancy, there is a need to coordinate policies, tools and procedures and to build a strong network of partners and actors to continuously share, develop and discuss coordination, know-how and approaches in the field. Objectives for the LAP are to establish a database of resources, and to strengthen networks between actors and stakeholders at local and regional levels.

By joining the PREVENT network, the city of Gijon looks forward to contributions that could assist in reaching city objectives – by sharing thoughts, tools, good practice, programmes and policies in a reflective forum.

The Hague, Netherlands:

The city of The Hague, including the municipalities in the Region and its schools, have a long tradition in working together on the prevention and reduction of ESL. For a number of years, ESL figures in The Hague have had a significant drop. Not the least because parents have become more and more involved in the educational process of their child/children. But despite the overall positive trend, data reveals stagnation in last years that implies there is still some issues of great importance that need to be developed. One of the issues with greatest concern is how to motivate secondary schools to invest in parents to a level that is equal to primary schools. Supporting parental involvement is low on the agenda of secondary schools; but there is a trend that parents of students at secondary schools do request more information and a more intense relationship with secondary schools. Parents find themselves losing track of the educational development of their child as soon as it leaves primary for secondary school, with the result that parents with positive experiences from being involved at primary school level now feel disappointed and disengaged by the 'non-openness' of secondary schools.

Therefore, one of the major objectives is to further develop the involvement of parents, not the least at secondary school level. By joining the PREVENT network the city has high expectations for good practice, projects and expertise to support that process.

Munich, Germany:

Even if Munich at the start of the project was slightly better off regarding ESL statistics than the German average, the city had not reached EU2020 goals of maximum 10 %. The city target to increase equal opportunities in education (e.g. to increase the participation in the

education of disadvantaged persons and in city areas of great concern), jointly agreed by the citizens of Munich, relevant stakeholders and local partners and approved by the Munich Council, also involves an effort to better involve parents in the education of their children. And even if Munich starts from a high level, with many projects and programmes already in place concerning ESL prevention and work with parents, there is a need to continuously connect and coordinate these actions.

One important objective of Munich is therefore to develop a common strategy focused on the prevention of early school leaving, concerning the involvement of parents. Focus must be on education as a life-long learning process, with efforts made especially to parents in disadvantaged areas to accompany them through different institutions till the transition from school to work.

Nantes, France:

In Nantes, the starting point for preventing ESL is not specifically the ESL issue itself. Instead, a local education policy named “Educational success of every child” is. But as the ambition is to support all children and their families to fully benefit from the educational services proposed by the city, the policy also includes the ambition to position parents as partners in the process. And although France has a very long tradition of supporting a dialogue between schools and parents (the first parents associations were created already at the beginning of the 20th century) there is still a need to develop processes to support local stakeholders, including parents associations, in reaching common understanding of the problems and in building joint strategies and actions to prevent ESL.

Finally, Nantes wants the coordination and synergies between actors to be further reinforced. Building on and expanding the work of the local support group is one way to reach the overall aim of the city of Nantes; to create a service dedicated to educational success for every child, also involving parents as partners. Such a process will require schools to open up to the surrounding world and to expand partnerships to exceed the only useful knowledge for economical integration.

Sofia, Bulgaria:

The starting point of Sofia is a situation where ESL rates in general are very low while for some disadvantaged schools, especially in Roma neighbourhoods, significantly higher. A number of problems are directly or indirectly linked to early school leavers’ parents and their economical, educational and ethno cultural family contexts. As the situation in Sofia also includes a shortage of social services in early stages of intervention, preventive

measures such as assessments of the risk of falling into social exclusion at the different risk groups, to work in advance to change the attitudes and as early as possible promote positive involvement in the educational system are not yet properly scaled up. Thus, work is improving. Already at the beginning of the PREVENT project, Boards of School Trustees and parent advocacy have been established, as also actions for a better integration of children with special educational needs and of minority children and teachers education.

On the top list of improvements for future ESL prevention and parental involvement is a comprehensive strategy to prevent dropouts and reintegration of Roma children who have already dropped out, counselling on education and upbringing for poor families, mobile services aimed at families with children at risk of dropping out and ultimately, a data base for proper monitoring of data regarding school attendance and dropout figures.

Stockholm/Spånga-Tensta, Sweden:

The situation of Stockholm is presented as one where ESL rates increased, with too many children facing problems that eventually could lead to early school leaving. Children in the risk zone for dropping out could be both those suffering from socio-economic and/or psychological problems. At school level, some schools show bad overall results, reasons being sudden or regular influx of newcomers, and even more often because of an extremely high turnover rate. The city has launched some good initiatives in several city districts, of which many have been set up using an integrated and multi actor approach, but there is still a lack of coordination, dissemination and scaling up that needs to be put in place. One reason for this is said to be that there is no common understanding of the problem, no common and on-going discussion on the theme and, as a consequence, no general policies and solutions implemented. Regarding parental involvement, Stockholm considers parents the strongest and most important part in keeping the children and young in school and in supporting their educational success.

Major ideas are therefore to develop ways to disseminate and implement good examples, both those tested in Stockholm and relevant good practices from PREVENT partner cities.

Tallinn, Estonia:

A strategic three-step process makes up ESL prevention in the city of Tallinn; when a dropout situation occurs, first step is that school staff communicates with the student and parents. In the second step (when needed), local government officials responsible for the child welfare in cooperation with the schools, counsel the student and their parents, based on the information received from the schools. If a third step is necessary, the members of municipal city districts' commissions of juvenile (including police officials, local government officials

responsible for child welfare, probation officials, educational officials etc) counsel the parents. Even though Tallinn has an extremely low number of early school leavers, some challenges regarding the issue are still on the agenda. Regarding the involvement of parents as actors in the prevention process, the Tallinn experience is that the more serious the problems are, the more difficult it is to include the parents in the cooperation network. The reason is often problems of the family itself. It is often difficult to get in contact with parents, as the parents may lack the strength and /or the belief that problems can be solved. Another issue that does not facilitate contacts between schools/government and parents is the fact that participation in the counselling process is voluntary for the parents, although it has obligatory form.

Based on the above findings, Tallinn wants to develop ways to better communicate with and motivate parents to be involved in the development process of their children, as well as to develop and disseminate new ways of cooperation between schools, society and parents.

Usti nad Labem, Czech Republic:

Even if there were no official data on the level of early school leavers available from Usti nad Labem at the application phase, ESL was still considered a 'highly actual problem' from the city perspective. With a rather high percentage of socially excluded and disadvantaged groups, of many Roma, many of these children find themselves having less opportunities and less support to be engaged in further education. However, some positive initiatives have been launched, both to promote children to continue to higher education and to prevent early dropping out. Thanks to individual educational plans, schools are successful in keeping younger children at school. Special amendments help children with special needs to stay in regular schools. Tutoring and drop-in centres, field social work, employment counselling in cooperation with NGO's and pilot project of retro-scholarships are other examples.

First and foremost Usti wanted to develop, via the learning network provided by PREVENT, its knowledge on how to motivate and involve parents in concrete actions that would help in preventing ESL. Another issue of great importance was to initiate a change of legislation in the way that the parents who care for education of their child would have a right to gain higher financial support for the child. This would not only be relevant to excluded children/families but should become a general rule based in law.

Presentation of PREVENT LOCAL ACTION PLANS (LAP's)

Antwerp: Capacity building and co-creative innovation through a digital LAP!

The Antwerp LAP, named 'Involved parents, strong schools – Making school together' is something quite different than the other Prevent LAP's. As many cities produce LAP's as written documents, Antwerp chose to develop a digital one, directly embedded in the website of the education policy department!

The reason for “going digital” with the LAP for sure has to do with the hard work and the experiences of ESL and parental involvement in Antwerp. The issues have for a long time



already been given a high level of attention and many structures and initiatives, both to prevent children from dropping out and to motivate parental involvement, are in place and working. The official slogan of the Antwerp education policy department is 'Samen tot aan de meet' (Together to the finish). Concretely, this means

that schools and city services must work together to bring about the best possible outcome for every child related to educational success. Parental involvement is pinpointed as a crucial means for reaching set targets, as the integrated, holistic and cross-cutting approach to stakeholder co-operation. Maybe this is why the work of Antwerp, as we have learned it through PREVENT, has proved to be a real crusade for what we might call 'inclusive cooperation'.

Implementing the digital LAP

At a point where ESL as a phenomenon is already enough analysed and discussed, Antwerp is mature enough to realise that the LAP must be about action and co-operation, not about further committee sitting. As the good practices of Antwerp, both the already existing ones and the ones launched as a result of PREVENT, seem to be working very well both in practice and within the political context, the digital LAP could serve as a 'co-active' platform for

involving parents and stakeholders in a dynamic process for ESL prevention. Among new features, emerging from PREVENT, is *'The day of the Parent – making school together'*, a yearly capacity building and exchange event for education services, schools, service providers and parents. Matching the digital LAP with the support from a continued Local support group, where civil servants have a relevant arena to share, examine and realise new ideas and initiatives with and from motivated partners and stakeholders, is a highly attractive outcome. As the message from the city is that the LAP is a mutual asset, owned by all stakeholders, it has brought about a sense of joint ownership and accountability among partners. From a sustainability point of view this is clearly dynamic.

So what could be found in the (digital) LAP of Antwerp?

According to the city of Antwerp, delivering the LAP as a digital platform means a common place to share information, ideas and plans. As the website is part of the overall education policy services and linked with the monthly education policy newsletter, it reaches every school in Antwerp. The platform also makes it easier to respond to and manage new ideas, items and events.

To summarise its advantages, the digital LAP is the place

- to connect organisations and activities in Antwerp in the field of parental involvement,
- to launch new ideas and actions,
- to find a toolbox for 'parental involvement',
- to find evidence-based materials,
- to find good practices,
- to inform schools about 'The day of the parent – making school together' as well as other events
- to find the good practices of PREVENT

It is already up and kicking; check it out at:

<http://onderwijsantwerpen.be/nl/beleidsthemas/leerloopbanen/ouderbetrokkenheid>

Find rest of Antwerp and PREVENT stuff at <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

Gijon: The LAP as a holistic, strategic road map in preventing, detecting and reducing absenteeism and school dropout in compulsory education

The Gijon LAP – “How to involve parents in the prevention of early school leaving” – has as its ultimate purpose to offer tools and actions for prevention, detection and reduction of school absenteeism in compulsory educational centres of the Municipality of Gijón. The plan is realised by action work based on relationship between family, school and the social environment.

Work to decrease absenteeism in Gijon compulsory schools has been on the agenda since 2002 when the project “Socio-educational project in School absenteeism”, managed by the city’s Foundation of Social services (FMSS). The project has been running for several years, involving relevant stakeholders in the field.

Over the years, the importance of parents and families in prevention work has become a vital issue. Since 2004, several projects and services, not the least the work of Family Support Intervention teams, have a clear focus on supporting and involving parents and families. One example of this is the implementation of the Guide-program for the development of emotional, educational, parental skills (author dr. Raquel Amaya Martínez González),



published by the Ministry of Health and Social Policy in 2008.

In Gijon, school absenteeism is regarded as a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon with an important social dimension that has an influence on the construction of young peoples’ social identity and constitutes a reflection on existing social inequalities. School absenteeism is not only considered as an education problem but also rather as a multidimensional one, closely linked with vulnerability and social exclusion situations in adulthood.

The LAP as a roadmap for action

The several specific goals of the Gijon LAP are closely linked to the idea of preventing, detecting and reducing absenteeism in compulsory schools. Actions like identifying

absenteeism cases, obtaining the profile of a dropout student, providing reflection, suggestion and proposals on the part of every stakeholder, considering the protocols in action and assuming the efficiency of local policies in terms of social-educational issues are all part of a holistic strategy for prevention. The knowledge, expertise and the wide approach of the local support group that has developed the plan has provided a true and realistic diagnosis of needs, gaps and mapped problems of the city, which, in addition to its strong support from/in local government policies, would make a great foundation for sustainability of the proposed actions. In fact, the way the local support group has been managed and developed, not the least through joint training activities and the use of Urbact methodology and tools, already gives positive effects; some of the actions are already being delivered and the LAP as well as good examples are now disseminated to other institutions.

And even if there is still a process of involving health/care services in the work, there is, overall, a good feeling about the way the LAP process has been managed in Gijon. Reasons are firstly, that the Gijon LAP is the result of the participation and agreement of all sectors involved. Secondly, the actions developed are aimed at the different problems related to drop out in the city and finally, the LAP is a strategic document with political recommendations; family involvement being the most important one. From a core PREVENT point of view, the argumentation seems quite well balanced. Costs for implementation of the plan is covered by the FMSS as part of the ordinary budget, which should be considered as a relevant success to the LAP process itself.

So where is the action in the LAP of Gijon?

The 16 actions presented in the Gijon LAP represent a very interesting library of what can and should be done to prevent absenteeism and school drop out in the framework of a cross-sectorial, integrated city policy. Actions include teacher's training and up-skilling, individualised and more flexible curricula, structural incentives such as family spaces, connected to schools and leisure activities, for positive integration. Other actions of importance are homework support systems with the help of retired teachers and teacher students, communication tools, a programme to stop bullying and a system for young people to come up with and implement ideas for change and development within their areas of interest – as a means to empower the young and to facilitate general democratic participation mechanisms.

All in all, the Gijon LAP is a candy shop for those searching for ideas, be at single pilot or a comprehensive strategic level, on how to set up measures for both short and long term prevention of ESL. Even if the actions presented in the LAP are exclusively made up as a response to local city needs, most of them would fit in any multi actor, integrated city approach for ESL prevention.

The Gijon LAP can be downloaded from <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

The Hague: A LAP with engagement and political, strategic and practical approval

'The most surprising thing was that before the LAP we didn't see the connection between the involvement of parents and dropout. Never thought about that! Since Prevent we are fully aware that there is a significant connection and that we can use that to prevent dropout! So now we do...'

The LAP of The Hague, coordinated by the Education Policy department of the Municipality of The Hague, is called *"Parents in sight; together against dropout"*. It is envisaged as a policy document rather than an action plan, even if there are some 'golden nuggets' to be found as well, describing prioritised actions directed towards parental involvement. With regards to the initial quote, it could be a bit surprising to readers that until a couple of years ago, parental involvement was not really acknowledged within the educational context as a vital success factor in ESL prevention. Nevertheless, there has been incentives for quite some time, of many supported by government money, supporting the involvement of parents in



schools. But the involvement has often had the role of 'extra hands' and volunteers in the classroom, in the playground and in outdoor activities. Obviously, today there is a growing awareness, not the least promoted by Prevent participation, that true communication with and involvement from parents will have to include more than just visiting the classroom or offering

support in the playground. This growing awareness has also contributed to improving the partnership between actors in the field of education, policy advisors and field workers, and maybe most important of all, it has boosted a common reflection on 'how we do things in The Hague'. And the growing awareness and reflection has given fruit. ESL rates are declining. Together with schools, regional municipalities and core partners, the Education Policy department has, over the past few years, worked hard to decrease early school leaving in the 'Haaglanden' region. However, The Hague still has an above-average number of early school leavers compared to the rest of the Netherlands – a fact that inspires to further work with core partners to find new methods that support young people finishing school. This is of course what Prevent is all about. Because, to quote the Prevent team of The Hague once more: *'After all, young people with a basic qualification have better opportunities on the labour market and better career prospects.'*

Using the LAP as a policy instrument

The LAP of The Hague is a first and foremost a policy document rather than a practical guide on how to approach parents or how to solve problems in the relation with parents. The plan takes off from the political ambition spelled out in the city's local educational agenda, jointly approved by school boards and politicians, which of course is both logic and realistic. The LAP is also considered both realistic and innovative, as it is the first in its kind where a multitude of stakeholders, all involved in parental involvement activities and processes have joined forces to support – parental involvement. But it has also to do with the fact that schools in The Hague already are very good at reaching out to, motivating and involving parents in many kinds of ways. Therefore, it was neither necessary to develop the LAP as an outreach guide, nor a manual on how to solve problems in the relation with parents. Instead, the LAP taps right into 'The Hague's Educational Agenda 2014 - 2018 (HEA)³, with a special 'task' to promote parental involvement. One of the HEA objectives is that *'...parents must be involved in preventing and tackling early school leaving and absenteeism. In the special attention districts we personally appeal to parents to encourage and motivate their children to finish their school career. We offer them assistance and tools in this...'*

Prevent work and experiences are covered in HEA's 'Pupils in their Place' programme⁴. The Local Action Plan constitutes the policy framework of HEA objective 8.8: *'Lessons from the Prevent project have been translated into concrete measures in which parents play a role in preventing or tackling school drop-out'*. Clearly, the way the LAP is managed in The Hague must be a dream for those who love words like 'implementation' and 'sustainability'...

So where is the action in the LAP of The Hague?

Even if the LAP of The Hague has a policy approach rather than an action one, it does not mean it lacks action. It is clear that the city and good practice exchange structures in Prevent has had great impact on the discussion in The Hague, with regards to the overall topic as well as to revealing local gaps and possible transfer and development of actions. Another appreciated help in the 'planning for actions'-process of The Hague has been the different URBACT methods, not the least the problem and solution tree exercises, where the Local support group after a couple of intense workshops, agreed on five actions that needed to be developed. To any city that would like to invest in a strategy for a) a better understanding of ESL and the role of parents in ESL prevention and b) how connections between schools, parents and local government could be reinforced, these actions offer a good starting point:

³ Quality as compass. Working on Excellent Education in The Hague. The Hague's Educational Agenda 2014 - 2018 for education, child care, the municipality and the educational partners in The Hague'. March 2014

⁴ 'Pupils in their Place Programme 2014 - 2018'. Department of Education, Culture & Welfare, Education Policy Product Group.

- The Hague Model for Parental Involvement (HMO), providing schools with guidance on what can be successful parent policy and what cannot, as well as a theory based resource for schools for diagnosing parental involvement in their policy
- Mapping of existing initiatives related to parental involvement; what is already up and running? What works, and what does not?
- Case studies on early detection and close chain cooperation with parents (why do things still go wrong, and how could we do things better?)
- Parent Match – a peer-to-peer-support function for parents (supporting each other)
- Urban regeneration district project – involving parents in reducing non-attenders and school drop-outs in The Hague’s urban regeneration districts

To learn more about the actions and the LAP of The Hague, visit <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

Munich: Joining and coordinating forces to involve parents in ESL prevention

The Prevent Action Plan in Munich is about 'Getting everybody together'. It is envisaged as a LAP for joining forces among stakeholders who work on the involvement of parents in the prevention of early school leaving. But who should join who, and what? Clearly, the Munich issue is about coordination, not innovation.

The overall objective of the Munich LAP is to increase effectiveness and sustainability in the field of parental involvement/work. This is no coincidence; at the beginning of the LAP process in Munich there was already a large variety of programs and stakeholders working on the prevention of early school leaving. The multitude of initiatives also included a lot of effort by public as well as private (non-profit and profit) entities to include collaboration with parents on different levels (kindergarten to higher secondary education) in various areas (formal education, career counselling etc.) So far, so good – but the main problem was the perceived lack of connection and many parallel structures between these stakeholders. Therefore it was necessary to bring together all relevant stakeholders in order to facilitate networking and to establish transparent communication structures. Hence the Munich LAP is a starting point to join forces.

Putting the pieces together – a puzzling process

Starting from a situation with so many different local actors in the field, a lot of parallel structures (and maybe even a slight touch of multilateral envy) made the idea to bring all relevant stakeholders together, in order to facilitate networking and to establish transparent communication structures, seem quite necessary. The purpose was threefold; to facilitate enhanced understanding, both between practitioners (operative level) and administrative staff/ policy makers (strategic level), to visualise the positive effects of both formal and non-formal education and last but not least, to support cooperation between practitioners in the field, i.e. kindergarten teachers/child care workers, teachers, social workers, counsellors etc.

on different levels and in different transition phases in the education process from kindergarten to the job market. In a big city it would, at least from an outside perspective, be quite a suicidal mission to try to manage a process like the one in Munich. But as the objective of the city LAP was to increase effectiveness and sustainability in the fields



of ESL prevention and parental involvement, the only possible way was to go for it, namely to involve all relevant actors and consequently, even knowing they hardly ever had worked together, to involve them in the work of the Local support group. Adding the fact that there has been some challenges related to the local project coordination (change of staff/staff shortage) that at least for some time negatively affected the motivation of some Local support group members and the fact that the collaborative transformation process for sure is going to survive the Prevent project, there are some good examples achieved that must be seen as positive progress markers in the process; one is the recording of The Prevent video of Munich, exemplified by the following quote: *'It was incredible to see how, in such a team, suddenly different actors worked together who would rather have avoided this in the first place...'*

Participation in the transnational network meetings is another good example that has contributed to a positive outcome. By going abroad together, the partners did not only get the chance to learn from other European partners, but also, maybe most important in the case of Munich, they got to exchange their ideas among each other during these trips.

So where is the action in the LAP of Munich?

Despite the challenges, at structural as well as at organisational level, the Munich local support group has managed to deliver quite interesting results already within the timeframe of the Prevent project. Worth mentioning are the workshops performed to innovate on how to best involve parents in the two agreed prioritised transition processes; kindergarten to school and school to work (two workshops) and the pilot carried out as a result. Other examples are the establishment of a permanent network of experts in order to share information and learn from each other. Still another one is the visualisation matrix of existing projects and approaches, with a set of jointly developed and agreed indicators – for being able to track and compare results and, maybe above all, for continuous mutual learning and understanding.

Concrete steps planned for in the LAP after the end of the PREVENT project are:

- Continuation of the dissemination of the project results and collected best practice examples among all interested stakeholders locally, nationally and internationally
- Implementation of the ULSG as a permanent committee of local experts in order to keep up the started process of exchange and joint development
- Creation of an overview matrix according to the developed indicators as a tool of transparency of all local stakeholders (staff costs have for this tool have already been approved)

From a strategic point of view, with the continuation of the local support group, Munich will have a path to follow when it comes to how to work together even more closely, and to make use of synergetic effects. On the operative level, the LAP might work as an overview

for all involved actors to find out about already existing as well as other approaches, on how to involve parents in the prevention of ESL.

You can download your own version of the Munich LAP at <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

Nantes: A LAP with no name, but with lots of content

Ideally, local action plans being a result emerging from URBACT projects are embedded in, or given the importance of, prioritised city plans or strategies. In Nantes, with the role as the Lead partner city of the Prevent network, it is the first option. The LAP is considered part of Nantes city local policy 'Growing up well in Nantes', approved 19/12/14 and implemented, in a co-creative spirit, with some Territory Educational Projects (TEP). Sustainability..? Check!

Starting from the clearly outspoken French position that educational questions are



considered the same for everybody, whatever the parental background, the Nantes' LAP finds itself among the cities adopting a rather universal approach to the ESL theme. The overarching approach is to 'offer every child a better educational process' – not to focus on target grouping, 'victim searching' or labelling of the young. It is a very appealing approach, as it promotes both inclusive and democratic societal values. In reality, it is often a bit more complex to stick to a universal approach, at least when trying to do something about issues like early school leaving and school dropout – a fact that is also supported by the people responsible for the Prevent

project in Nantes: *'Of course we have already some selected initiatives for allophone parents for example and some indicated ones with "Club Coup de Pouce" for instance. And the LAP will probably have to be adapted in some ways...'*

However, The City of Nantes wants to facilitate access to information for all parents and give them the means to better assist the well-being of their children. The city also wants to encourage all means to develop a dialogue between the parents, the teachers and the students. Widely, it aims to create better conditions for a common approach and a thought-sharing context between the different actors on a territory. And by using the universal

approach as a benchmark, both local situations in a territory as well as actions and policies will have to start from a holistic perspective. Referring to the level of innovation, there are already signs pointing in the direction that the Nantes' LAP have brought about *'a bit more diversity at school adapted to the very universal approach of the French educative system'*.

LAP implementation in Nantes – getting it right from the start

It is obvious that to a large extent, the City of Nantes has succeeded in implementing the *'Prevent attitude'* in its Educational success public policy frame. The LAP process, as well as the positive implementation of Prevent experiences, is a result of a comprehensive effort to develop for change and thus, to be able to influence policies. At the core of the positive process is the local support group, composed of members from different fields. The regular meetings, delivered as a process with methodological support and facilitation by local experts, has provided a *'safe environment'* where different stakeholders could think and talk about parental involvement in general and more specifically, how parents and schools could develop a climate where parents can play an equal role towards the school. The co-operative focus has been on bringing in the sensibility and experience of stakeholders really involved *'on the ground'*. It seems these ideas have been working out very well: *'It has made it possible for people not really used to meet to think together, and sometimes even for people used to meet in formal meetings, to find a more un-formal way of doing it, in a more equal and co-productive way'*.

Both the positive spirit in the local support group, making up for a participative and co-creative process and the structured work model of the local support group in Nantes can be sensed when going through the Nantes LAP. In all, the local support group in Nantes has met ten times. The last five were needed to manage the LAP creation process; not because the group did not know what to do or how to do it, but because this was what was needed to hammer out a plan that every stakeholder could accept and be proud of. The local support group process has used a model for tracking good practice, both locally and in partner cities, following the steps of identification (observation) → evaluation (leverages/obstacles) → prioritisation (voting). The later LAP formulation process was similarly designed:

1. Defining the actors system concerned by the issue;
2. Presenting the LAP's ambitions;
3. Formalising the recommendations and
4. Validating the LAP

Overall, parents, both locally and from the transnational Prevent community, have played a vital role in validating and adapting the actions emerging from the modelling process. In Nantes as well as in most other cities succeeding in involving parents in the local support group, the fact that parents (as well as other *'unusual suspects'*) have been present, acting as partners on equal terms, have been considered a kind of innovation in itself:

'The contribution and role of parents in the group is to be highlighted and encouraged'.

So where is the action in the LAP of Nantes?

The Nantes' LAP has four strategic objectives;

- Project steering: adopt a common strategy (co-working – follow up) and establish a follow-up system to improve the parents ability to act;
- Involvement of the Stakeholders: improve involvement of all the stakeholders (support – open up – enhancement of the roles);
- Access to information: share information and make it easy to understand (support of transitions – digital technology – outline of information sharing)
- Understanding of the territory: seize the territory (support in discovering the neighbourhood-lead support persons).

To achieve these objectives, 11 recommendations, spread across the four objectives and together covering both the operational and the policy level and using a multi governmental approach, are developed. The time frame set to accomplish the recommendations is divided in three phases; short term (2015/2016), medium term (2016/2017) and long term (2017 and onwards). Each recommendation makes up for one slide, using the same structure to present the operational objective, responsible actor, target group(s), expected output/outcome, resources, partnership and time frame. It also gives a brief explanation of the action concerning methodology and content.

Totally, the 'nameless LAP of Nantes' is what could be expected from a Lead partner city; a well-structured, well-anchored and well-implemented plan, free to others to use for some creative copying. So start by downloading your own copy at <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

Sofia: Living the 'Prevent' dream!

Sofia has chosen to name its LAP 'Local action plan for dropout prevention and social solidarity'. Prevent-ers in Sofia have developed a 'Prevent' dream, being '...well-educated pupils are socially, personally and emotionally intelligent, know what kind of knowledge they need and how to acquire and use it in various contexts'. The plan is mainly directed towards the Roma community in Sofia, which makes it a bit extra interesting.

The main idea in Sofia is to develop ways to better provide Roma children with equal opportunities to high quality education from preschool, preparatory classes and primary mixed school. It is a work with high ambitions, hence being a sign mark for the Prevent team in Sofia; by promoting and piloting successful models of the inclusion of Roma children in mixed preschools and schools in Sofia, they hope to be able to implement these models from the local level to the national level policy. One of the most important drivers for this change process is to support capacity building at preschool level through preschool and school improvement programs and teacher professional development. Others are a systematic secured structure to support the integration process, information and communication tools such as 'Familiathlon' and the 'Pathfinder' guidebook for parents and families, training sessions for both teachers and parents and of course, the most important corner stone – promoting the involvement of parents in general. Prevent work in Sofia is carried out in three pilot schools, it is based on the Municipality Strategy of Education and is, despite the strong Roma focus, considered mainly universal in its approach. To Sofia, participation in the Prevent project has been of great importance: *'We change in the way you have developed the deficits in communication between generations, institutions and among all interested parties, because before PREVENT, school and family were not successful in developing an effective model for prevention of risk behaviour among the growing up students; despite the common goal they realize their concrete steps in a "parallel" way'.*



The Sofia LAP work process – a social innovation laboratory

Main project objective of Sofia is to synchronise and improve the existing work methods, models and instruments in field of dropout prevention. Demonstrating to the public (other institutions, parents, media, local societies) the need of educational programmes for social skills, health and civic education and to develop effective models for prevention and reintegration. With

the help of a devoted, professional and relevant, in terms of number and representation, local support group, Sofia has done its homework well. Collection of baseline data, explaining definitions and swot analyses are all examples of the kind of activities needed to promote joint sharing and understanding as well as to clear the ground for further innovation, development and implementation. Sofia has chosen to pick up the 'Innovation spiral' model (originally developed by the Young Foundation) as a mental model for joint innovation in their LAP development process. Maybe introducing the model is part of the explanation of why the dialogue within the support group did exceed the ESL prevention and parental involvement issues to a wider, more underlying theme; the one of *social solidarity*. By using an adapted model of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, the group of experts and practitioners manage to give the term a new meaning. It was stated, as a consequence of the joint thought process, that '*...unequal chances at the beginning, because of the social, economic and cultural surroundings where children live, brings unequal results. Effective care may in parts resolve the problem with equal chances at the beginning.../.../ It's a right to every student to receive qualitative education, besides of resources of his/her family*'.

The Sofia team has also developed a 'quality standard' for the LAP, something that should be mandatory for all LAP's. The format for the Sofia standard is not rocket science; it is simply a set of indicators, stating what 'success' would be if indicators would be met. At the same time, it provides readers with an idea of how actions and policies could interact in a holistic strategy for involving and supporting parents in preventing ESL. For the Sofia LAP the following relevant indicators were addressed:

- Secured programmatic support of the integration process- extra curricular activities, a Municipal program developed;
- Informed and motivated parents and community members, considerable increased number of people attending the parents meetings and community open forums, different types of information – "Familatlon" days, discussions with parents and students at school; yearly parent involvement in school life, etc.;
- Collaboration with Sofia Municipal and Sofia Children Center using the methods of formal and non-formal education;
- Training teachers about causes and effects of aggression and harassment among students, about the ways for identifying children-victims of domestic violence;
- Teach and help parents how to understand and communicate with their children;
- Pathfinder for family and for parents;
- Special developed Guidebook for parents – based on the experience in the 3 pilot schools

The Sofia LAP also includes a thorough multi-level dissemination plan with clear targets, time frames and responsibilities, as well as some concluding bullet points, emerging from the review of present sources of information regarding the actions of public institutions directed towards the prevention of school dropout. The list of recommendations – covering aspects

from general outreach approaches to parents, precautions at all different school levels, dual reintegration aspects and the need for evaluation and assessment – is a good starting point for any city looking for initial ideas.

So where is the action in the LAP of Sofia?

The action plan for Sofia is divided into four main areas of intervention; actions in schools, actions at municipal level, actions between schools and the municipal level and supporting activities. Actions are listed below each heading and also developed in a supporting matrix, where the priority field/purpose of each activity, Lead institution/ organisation, resources/mechanism and expected results are clearly presented. As in most of the Prevent LAP's, the activities and actions presented in the Sofia LAP represent the result of a serious, participative and innovative problem solving process concerning ESL prevention and specifically, how parents could be involved and supported – no matter by direct outreach actions from schools/society or by strategic and structural changes that mainstream the involvement of parents in issues regarding children/the young – to better assist them in well-being and educational success.

It is all there, available in the Sofia LAP – get your version at <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

Stockholm/Spånga-Tensta: Sending parents an invitation they cannot resist

The Stockholm case is quite interesting as it is set up as a co-responsibility pact between the Education Department in Stockholm and the City District of Spånga-Tensta, one of the local neighbourhoods in the city of Stockholm. In practice, this means that in Stockholm, the work of Prevent has had a kind of well-connected, parallel process between the city's educational administrative and policy level on the one hand and a local school community on the other. At least on paper, that should make up for a good starting point.

Tensta is a city district with about 17 000 inhabitants, situated North West of Stockholm City Centre. It is known for being a culturally diverse district with a high proportion of immigrants, large families, high unemployment rates, poor school results and high dropout levels. Only about 65% of pupils in Tensta reach upper secondary program level after finishing secondary school. As a response, schools being worst off receive more funding compared to other schools, have smaller classes and a higher proportion of teachers and staff. Several projects for better integration, school results and so on have been done over the years, unfortunately with little or non long-term impact on school results. In recent years there has been a lot of ideas and proposals coming from different actors and stakeholders on implementing a more preventive, participative, democratic and holistic approach on the very complex challenges that are



connected with the ESL situation and the overall socio-economic challenges in Tensta. Therefore it might come as no surprise that the heading of the Spånga-Tensta LAP is *“Let’s make an invitation that no one can resist!”* It takes off from the very positive assumption that all parents can and want to be involved in their child’s education, and that supporting ESL must look upon all parents as strong and important resources, irrespective of background, language skills, state of integration and education level, in order to support and acknowledge them as being the most valuable person in every child’s life and development process. But in the process leading to the LAP formulation, some challenging questions have occurred concerning how well ‘society’ is doing in inviting, involving and supporting parents. This is especially important for parents to those children having difficulties to do well in school or in life in general. In Spånga-Tensta, these kinds of issues are well represented in the initial dialogue. But there is also an important insight in Stockholm, not the least as a result of participating and networking within the Prevent project: *‘...involving all parents in preventing early school leaving actually means to invite educational strategists, educational*

departments, headmasters, teachers and parents to build understanding, confidence and trust in the issue itself as well as to find new ways and recourses in benefit of the children...'

And as school success is proven to be a very strong and preventive factor for future good health and success, other stakeholders, as social and health services and NGO:s, must be invited to join with the professionals in the challenge to support every child to succeed in school. Maybe it is just because one of the local Prevent coordinators, on a daily basis, is working as a headmaster in the neighbourhood of Spånga-Tensta these thoughts are so present in the on-going dialogue and in the LAP of Stockholm/Spånga-Tensta. In many ways the direct and daily local contact with schools, teachers, kids, families, values, challenges, culture, context etc. represents the kind of 'proof' or reality check that actually many times is foreseen by professionals. Not because professionals are stupid or suspicious, but because they are supposed to 'know'. Looking at the participants in the different Prevent city teams, not the least the teams set up for the several transnational network meetings, clearly show that the majority is professionals, employed at city administrations. Not that this is not good, just that in every project aiming at providing results that will improve the life quality of (a certain group of) people, we should, in general, look for that reality check.

LAP implementation – a bumpy road

The Spånga-Tensta process has included delivery and involvement at the local city district level already from the start of the Prevent project. This is due to well-defined needs to involve (immigrant) parents in many ways, not just in the ESL issue. With this situation in mind, the initial idea was to connect the local, concrete operational processes in Spånga-Tensta to the policy level of the centralised city education department, but because of organisational and staff issues the project has had some problems over time to establish a smooth and synergetic relation based on the initial win-win concept. Eventually the cooperation is now 'on-line', with fruitful and on-going cooperation between the two levels: *'... the plan for 2015 is now to enhance the collaboration in promoting holistic coordination and joint strategies for ESL prevention and parental involvement...'*

The Stockholm/Spånga-Tensta local support group, about 15 people mainly representing the educational sector and NGO:s, have had continuous meetings over time, working from a local perspective but with great inspiration from URBACT methodology and tools and from project partners. The working process has involved actions like:

- Inventory of "good examples" to be disseminated
- Defining problems and needs to be taken care of in the Problem and Solution tree work processes
- Mapping and involving "unusual partners" trough the Social innovation spiral
- Reflecting on the role of Structural Indicators in organisations and ways of work
- Make changes we have worked on this Local Action Plan for future achievements and activities

There is some self-critique regarding the fact that the LAP development process should have involved the local support group to a higher extent. As for the continuation of the local support group, there is high hope that PREVENT results, mind-set and experiences can be implemented in everyday work, as well as within the network as such.

So where is the action in the LAP of Spånga-Tensta?

The Spånga-Tensta LAP is developed from aggregated knowledge and conclusions emerging from the participation in the Prevent project. These could be summarised as follows:

- Supporting ESL must look upon ALL parents as strong and important resources
- Supporting ESL must be organised and structured in cooperation “from top to down and from down to top level
- Supporting ESL is a multi-stakeholders’ issue
- Supporting ESL starts as soon as the child is born
- Supporting ESL means to cover the universal, selected and indicated prevention levels - with a holistic view and a common strategy throughout the years
- Supporting ESL must prepare for change, both at individual, organisational and system levels

Building on these ‘principles’, the Spånga-Tensta model for action delivery, as presented in the LAP, is quite unusual and maybe even a bit innovative. Instead of setting project objectives, the LAP focuses on working with and involving target groups. The target groups – chosen according to a ‘challenges analysis’ – are a) executive education directors, headmasters, operations managers in social services, b) parents and c) the National agency for Education. The LAP sets out a number of achievements and activities related to each target group – a kind of ‘accountability’ matrix, where everyone must benefit from involving – or from getting involved.

Learn more about the Swedish ‘target group accountability approach’ in the LAP that can be downloaded at <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

Tallinn: Back to basics!

Families have the main responsibility for childcare and development. Schools respect the principles of the parenting and cooperate with parents regarding the development and learning of the child, based on mutual trust and an open dialogue. These are guiding principles of Tallinn, hence setting the scene for a realistic approach to ESL prevention.

Having Tallinn joining a network with the aim of preventing ESL is a bit like inviting, well, maybe not the devil for dinner but obviously something in that direction. For the academic year of 2013/2014, 27 students, equal to 0.067 %, of students in basic level dropped out of school. Still, the goal of the education department of Tallinn is that no student should drop out of a basic school. And there are some emerging issues around the corner that would add some reasonable logic to the project participation of Tallinn; analyses from the academic year of 2013/2014 shows a rather high degree of absenteeism, now counting 32,3 lessons in years 7-9.

The Tallinn LAP has been given the name '*Parents in school*'. A quite interesting angle from the Tallinn side is that education also means shaping of attitudes in addition to acquired knowledge and skills. Values are shaped via the influence of people and surrounding environments – including areas like home/family, friends/networks and school/education. Acknowledging the role of attitudes has raised some interesting questions; what kinds of cooperation forms offer the best opportunities to include parents? What to do if values or parenting principles of parents and teachers differ from each other? No doubt that the combination of Tallinn joining the Prevent project and the on-going discussion on values and the process of parents' inclusion and involvement as a consequence of that, has brought about a bit of exciting thinking and systematic change in the five pilot schools involved in the local Prevent project. The message is that the schools now better understand that inclusion of parents improves the understanding on the shaping of common values and on the development of school culture. Also for the parents, of which many have been included also earlier, the issue has now become more systematic and well thought. The project school teams are empowered and schools have understood that many positive factors with good communication will lead to the parties' mutual understanding and to shared values.

Implementing the LAP

The Tallinn LAP describes the different forms of and objectives for cooperation and inclusion as well as activities and practices of communication and cooperation between the school and parents. The LAP, developed in close cooperation between the five pilot schools and Tallinn Education Department, holds two dimensions:

- General inclusion of parents and
- Needs-based inclusion

None of the two dimensions excludes the other. School culture and inclusion are mutually interconnected and the two are influencing one another. School culture expresses how the communication and cooperation with the parents works, while relationships and communication shape important values.



It is important to communicate that Tallinn pilot schools are already very active in developing the way schools and parents communicate, and how the involvement of parents in schools, and in school activities, is managed. As the five pilot schools are at different educational levels, ranging from primary to upper secondary levels, they already offer an interesting learning area with lots of possibilities for

good practice transfer, behavioural change and, ultimately, policy reform. Some examples of actions that already concern the implementation of parental involvement (or inclusion of parents in Tallinn language) in Tallinn schools are:

- Meetings with parents in smaller groups rather than general ones
- Workshops with and for parents
- Parents' cafés
- Information meetings to support transition
- Open days at schools
- Web-based surveys, communication and monitoring applications
- Parents' days at schools (parents inform about their jobs)
- Activity days on several different topics

From what has been said from Tallinn project coordinators, that the fact that schools to a greater extent involve, engage and communicate with parents, has had a major and positive impact on the image of these schools. And such a situation is more or less exactly what the general goal of the Tallinn LAP is about: *'To contribute with project activities to the involvement of parents in school activities and to achieve a situation where no student drops out of basic school.'*

So where is the action in the LAP of Tallinn?

The general goal of the LAP, supposed to be realised within the period 2014-2019, is divided into five key objectives;

1. Schools have good conditions for the organisation of training for parents
2. Families are able to get timely competent support for the solution of the educational problems of their children
3. A parent gets positive feedback from the school about the child
4. Parents are involved in school activities and have a positive attitude towards the school as the cooperation partner
5. There is close cooperation between the school and the home

Each objective is in turn completed with activities, in total 23, thoroughly described in a comprehensive Implementation plan, with indicators, expected results, present status, time plan and responsible actor(s) for implementing the action. The ownership and responsibility for implementation of all five objectives and 23 activities is first and foremost at school management and/or Tallinn education department levels. Guess that is as close one can get to a 'bulls eye' on sustainability. Dive into the interesting approach of Tallinn by downloading the full Tallinn LAP at <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

Usti nad Labem: Working on the issue of trust and mutual respect

'...the most innovative element was actually starting the process. The fact that we started to speak about it, to accept it as something that needed to be solved. To give it enough time and energy. Being part of the project (Prevent) helped in realising the importance of the topic, and working on it was obligatory then (in a good way)...'

The 'Local action plan for Education in Usti nad Labem', being the name of the LAP, is based on two things; first, issues which have been unsuccessfully solved in the past and secondly, on new activities inspired by local initiatives, partners abroad and the empowerment of good functioning practices. For Usti at the moment, supporting schools is the first step, as there is a need to create a network of activities the school can provide families with. It all boils down to establishing mutual respect and understanding with parents, as trust is an essential element in the process of involving parents in ESL prevention.

LAP implementation in Usti – transparency in the making

It is obvious that the Usti LAP is well accepted by city officials and leadership. In the brand new 'Strategy of city development', ESL is mentioned in the chapter 'Human sources,



education and social issues' as an actual subject of necessary interventions. The authors of the LAP (the NGO 'People in Need', the local project coordinator of the Municipality of Usti nad Labem and representatives of the Local Support Group of the PREVENT project in Usti nad Labem) are convinced that the LAP has an

important role to play, not only in ESL prevention but also as a road model for integrated, participative development planning: *'...the city's new political leadership is planning for new strategic documents and policies, including a wider educational strategy or a strategy of socially excluded areas. Also the fight against unemployment is a big topic. To all of these issues, the LAP can be a good source and be part of a bigger solution...'*

The range of local actors that have contributed to the LAP is considered as one of the biggest benefits of joining the Prevent work. The local support group is not only willing to continue to work together on the themes of ESL and parental involvement; in fact, some of the members have already started to communicate with others – to try to solve some other issues beside the Prevent topic. This kind of ‘partnership evolution’, when curiosity, confidence and trust builds creativity and synergy, is perhaps, for the future of cities, the best example of what a participative, altruistic approach to problem solving could mean. Usti nad Labem might be the first city in the network where the local support group, motivated (only?) by the success coming from previous collaborative efforts, start looking for new complex challenges in need of new solutions. Imagine the power of a process like that!

So where is the action in the LAP of Usti nad Labem?

The actual action plan of Usti is divided in three main sections with in total, eight measures:

- School support
 - o Measure I. Platform for meetings of schools
 - o Measure II. Fundraising – project advisory
 - o Measure III. Improvement of the school climate through the encouragement of professional occupations at schools and DVPP
- Support of the school and family relationships
 - o Measure I. Truancy prevention – hidden absence
 - o Measure II. School clubs
 - o Measure III. Parents – unexpected allies
- Associated services
 - o Measure I. Support of education
 - o Measure II. Retro-scholarships

The ambitions of the planned actions in the LAP are first and foremost means to improve the communication between the city hall and the schools, to increase the capacity of schools by adding expert staff and by raising the capacity of the schools to have a wider offer of activities that also parents can attend; to develop a functional system for solving truancy; to promote a positive atmosphere in schools and to preserve and support activities, that have been working good in the past. Each ‘measure’ is relevant according to the local need and current situational analyses, is well planned, clear on responsibilities and resources and beautifully structured for monitoring and evaluation purposes. It provides a holistic offer as it involves actions on both universal, indicated and targeted levels.

To cities and municipalities struggling with problems rather than ideas, the Usti nad Labem LAP might be the shortcut they have been looking for. At least it will release some useful creativity for interested readers. Download your personal copy of the Usti LAP at <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

2 – TRANSVERSAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Every URBACT project (network of cities) is on one hand about solving urban challenges and problems and on the other to making use of possibilities related to urban development. Each URBACT network is obliged to firstly share and disseminate, via a number of workshops, partnership good practice. Secondly, each city has to produce a Local Action Plan, a LAP, that meets local needs and that completes and enhances existing city strategies by presenting innovative, integrated actions and policy recommendations. Proposals of actions and strategies are inspired from the transfer and adaptation process of partner's examples as well as from the cre-active, multi-actor work and development process in each city, facilitated within the framework of the URBACT Local Support Group, the ULSG. The aggregated messages from each network are supposed to bring about solutions and concepts that could be transferred to the EU and to European cities to support transition.

The idea of the PREVENT network is to contribute to the EU2020 goal of reducing Early school leaving (ESL). As the ESL theme is widely examined in recent years, what makes PREVENT different than the rest? Well, with ambitions such as building sustainable partnerships with parents and with stakeholders, enhancing the understanding, communication and co-action between schools/city education administration and parents and to involve all actors, parents included, in innovating both for actions and strategy, the PREVENT network has chosen a different starting point than many other ESL/dropout prevention projects. The role of parents – either being in supporting children to enter higher education (the ESL issue) or to be able to finalise an ongoing educational level (the dropout prevention issue) – is, even if better acknowledged in last years, still not used and developed to its full potential.

In the analysis of PREVENT work and especially, of PREVENT LAP's to follow we will present major findings and conclusions – for others to learn from, use and develop in their work on ESL prevention. It is an inspiring collection of thoughts, ideas and action, as well as good examples of innovation and changes, both in mindsets and in behaviour, that will prove useful to any city with ambitions to implement a holistic, multi actor-driven set of good practice – of course including parents – rather than inventing the wheel once again.

The “Summary” section gives general reflections on PREVENT issues from the perspective of PREVENT cities and Local action plans. The “Performance indicator” section offer additional analysis on a number of key components in the work of PREVENT and in Local action plans of PREVENT cities. Full versions of PREVENT Local action plans, as well as all other recordings including experts' reports, recommendations and briefs, could be found at the Prevent project mini website: <http://urbact.eu/prevent>

BEHIND THE CURTAINS: UPDATED ESL AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT DATA

It is a fact that many countries, cities and regions face negative effects of the economic crisis. But for the young people of Europe, effects of the crisis have been particularly tough. In the last four years, the overall employment rate for young people has fallen **three times as much** as for adults. In the second quarter of 2014, youth unemployment rate in EU was 21.7%, more than twice as high as the adult unemployment rate of 9.0%. Translated into people, that means that more than five million young (under the age of 25) were unemployed in the EU-28 area in mid 2014. Moreover, 7.5 million young Europeans between 15 and 24 are neither in employment, nor in education or training (NEET:s). The gap between the countries with the highest and the lowest jobless rates for young people is extremely high. There is a gap of nearly 50 percentage points between Germany at 7.8% (July 2014) while figures for Spain, being the EU country with the highest rate, stop at 53.8% in July 2014. Behind these challenging data is a tremendous waste of human resource, possibilities for workplace renewal, innovation and public spending (source: EU).

Official data on ESL in the EU (July 2014) is that 12% of the 18-24 year old population are early school leavers, representing a positive trend that, hopefully, will help reaching the EU2020 goals of 10 %. There are, and already have been, lots of projects trying to do something about the early school leaving (ESL) and school dropout issues. Its consequences both for the individual and for society are widely acknowledged, and the issue, reducing ESL, is one of the top priorities in the EU2020 agenda. The connection between early school leaving / school dropout and youth unemployment/NEET situation is also vital to consider. With the growing awareness that both the ESL/school dropout and the NEET/youth unemployment issues are complex matters proving difficult to solve, there is a need for a new dynamic in addressing them.

SCHOOLS AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT - WHAT INCENTIVES ARE THERE?

With ambitions as building sustainable partnerships with parents and with stakeholders, enhancing the understanding, communication and co-action between schools/city education administration and parents and to involve all actors, parents included, in innovating both for actions and strategy, PREVENT has chosen a different starting point than many other ESL/dropout prevention projects. The role of parents – either being in supporting children to enter higher education (the ESL issue) or to be able to finalise an on going educational level (the dropout prevention issue) – is, even if more often acknowledged in last years, still not used and developed to its full potential. So why is it that parents, at least from a certain educational level, are not sufficiently involved in processes regarding the educational success, including ESL and dropout prevention, of their children? Some explanations, sometimes coinciding, and of which many being discussed within PREVENT could be that:

- Children do not want parents to come to school
- Chaotic situation for child and/or in family
- Parents hold (demand from) schools to be responsible for and to 'fix', the child
- Parents do not consider education important and therefore pay no attention
- Parents have negative experiences from education and have difficulties in trust and in building equal relations with school/education
- Multicultural diversities and language difficulties build walls, not bridges
- Parents' job situation is too stressed and complicated
- Schools are 'separated' from, or at least seen as separated from, the rest of society – including parents – leading to a situation where schools 'manage by themselves'
- Education at a certain level is considered voluntary (upper secondary schools etc)
- Students are considered 'adults', by parents and/or from a social or juridical perspective
- Alert and monitoring systems on absenteeism and risk behaviour are insufficient or not in place

But of course these 'challenges' do not mean that there are no existing good practices in the field of cooperation between schools, the young and parents. In many countries, there are policies, a kind of basic level, regulating how and when schools should communicate with parents. In general, this must be considered a good platform for further development towards an enhanced level of collaboration. But in reality, the dialogue process between school and parents could be affected negatively by a large amount of reasons, of which some are mentioned above.

When analysing success (knowing that some difficulties in defining success most probably occur) of any project or initiative, spending some time considering which factors that could, from different perspectives, 'play a role' in the success making, hence being positive or negative with regards to the outcome. Some concrete examples were already given in the bullet points above, but behind many of these points are larger scale societal, organisational and political system shifts. As most of these shifts are gradually implemented at system levels over a longer period of years, the notion 'out in the field' of what is really happening (reasons, purpose, ideas, ideology etc) may not be perceived until much later.

In recent times, one of the most obvious examples of these kinds of shifts is the implementation and harmonisation in many countries, also in the EU, of the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm. Initially thought of as a driver for modernisation and improvement of public sector efficiency, it has consequently affected the way public administration relate to results and quality, as well as how and which, 'elements' should be measured and validated. NPM clearly introduced a market-oriented approach to public sector and administration. And since I believe it is quite fair to say that also within the mind-set of PREVENT, schools are supposed to be frontrunners in initialising a fruitful cooperation

between schools and parents, it is of relevance to shortly offer a discussion on what has happened in schools regarding systemic change.

In schools, we talk about a shift from governance to management that, for most schools, has meant significant system changes. In last 20 years, school logic in many countries has shifted from governing schools in centralised, bureaucratic systems to managing schools in a more competitive and market-like environment. In countries where additional features as free school choice, independent schools etc., public schools and administrations have found themselves on one hand being decentralised and autonomous, and on the other 'suddenly' being part of a commercial, market-oriented system. But honestly, the decentralisation of education policy has been a visible trend around the globe for the last thirty years. Originally, the overall idea was to improve the quality of education, but it was conducted also for other reasons, such as encouraging innovation, efficiency increase and combatting segregation and social inequality in education⁵. These larger scale decentralisation processes, with a higher level of autonomy as an effect, have brought about the increasing need of new competencies and approaches of school managers/headmasters and on the other, a rapidly growing number of new tasks to be performed, besides teaching and supporting pupils and students, by school teachers. In reality, many teachers consider these tasks, of most being administrative, as contra-productive and often in conflict and interfering with what they see as their role as teachers; namely teaching, supporting and empowering the young. Education, by history being described as a long-term investment, might not necessarily be best associated with short term, market oriented rules.

On the other hand, with reference to PREVENT and its ambitions on promoting a wider approach of stakeholder collaboration as a means to prevent ESL and school dropout, this shift could offer some opportunities worth mentioning. Because of the need for new competencies in schools, no matter being effects of NPM, system shifts or globalisation, schools are obliged or rather forced to engage with stakeholders outside of the school. Parents are, despite the form of 'bodies' established (consultative or decision-making), of course the 'number one' stakeholder. Involving parents, and the wider local community such as business, academia/research, culture and social representatives, NGO's and of course the young themselves, would put schools in a much better position to identifying and formulating needs, both those at school level and of local community. In general, implementing and/or developing the participation and role of overall external stakeholder functions would for sure help schools become both more dynamic, flexible, results and efficiency oriented - of course from a child and family centred perspective.

⁵ Waslander 2010

SUMMARY of LAP's analysis

Overall, the work of PREVENT – including the transnational exchange, local ULSG development work and LAP processing as well as additional contributions from project experts – does indeed provide knowledge, tools and concepts that bridges a gap in the existing ecology of ESL prevention. Its focus on involving parents is widely being considered a crucial success factor, but yet the 'parental factor' is not as widely developed as many other, indeed also relevant, ones.

Also for the cities involved in PREVENT, the focus explicitly on the parental involvement issue of ESL has been an interesting experience with, for most, new insights and discoveries. Even for those cities with the most experiences from involving parents, PREVENT has contributed positively to a wider, and in many cases more strategic, approach to the subject. 'PREVENT cities' is first and foremost a reference to those mostly involved in the project. In PREVENT, the majority represent first and foremost educational administrations of cities (including politicians/decision makers), schools (teachers, managers), NGO's involved in educational service delivery and parents (including parents' associations). Besides the fact that 'cities' are the core target group of the URBACT programme, representation in PREVENT seems logic also according to 'common understanding' of the chosen issue. Involving parents in the educational success of their children – including supporting steps to higher education or preventing them from dropping out of school – is a process that must start with a dialogue between education departments at city administrative (governmental) level and schools. It is about thoroughly examining the problem, mapping good examples, understanding existing actions and initiatives. It is about analysing the issue from a contextual, policy and strategy point of view and it is about finding the best relevant stakeholders, who, in a participative and collaborative process, could help in bridging existing gaps and develop innovative approaches to the subject. In most cities, alternatives of this scenario has made up the initial starting point for the ULSG process, continually expanding as the multi stakeholder approach – as well as a greater knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the ESL issue – has evolved. Even if some PREVENT cities could be considered 'top level' concerning national, regional and local policies and frameworks for schools and educational development, even regarding parental involvement, full awareness at city administration of 'what is going on' was not always in place:

At first we had no idea about how schools think about parents and how they approach parents. Since we started to investigate in our ULSG how schools are dealing with parents, we became aware that most of the schools are already active on parent involvement issues in all kind of ways. So, we found that it was not a matter of encouraging schools to involve parents but more to improve methods, and to support and help schools to find

more adequate ways to do so... // ...the most surprising thing was that before the LAP we didn't do the connection between parent involvement and school dropout. Never thought about that! Since Prevent, we are fully aware that there is a significant connection and that we can use that to prevent dropout! So we do...

But the example above, offered by The Hague, is also an example of a serious top-level political ambition to involve parents in schools. The level of knowledge of how this is carried out in schools at local administrative/governmental level is of course due to organisational issues, not to the lack of actions in schools. However, in this case PREVENT made great contribution as resources in The Hague now are better coordinated regarding ESL prevention – a great result in its own.

A lot of emphasis in PREVENT has been on understanding how schools could better involve (and support) parents, and what they need to be able to do it. Even if The Hague is a good example of the opposite, too few teachers and managers are educated or updated in dealing with negative consequences caused by emerging themes as immigration, multi-culturalism and social exclusion. Nor do schools in general have great knowledge about what causes early school leaving and school dropout, and in even smaller scale, about strategies preventing it.

With regards to in which ways schools support children throughout their educational process, we have come across several examples. In some PREVENT cities, students have access to multi-professional teams (health officers, social workers etc.) and/or mediator resources that could help in promoting understanding, problem solving and in setting up a constructive dialogue between the child, the parent(s) and the school. Some PREVENT cities do constantly involve NGO's, both in the role as providing extracurricular activities aiming at empowering children, and as 'problem solvers' both at school, family and society levels. In some cities with outspoken challenges regarding the social exclusion of neighbourhoods and/or groups, the use of mediators from and with the same background has proven effective in promoting motivation and trust between families and schools. But there are also risks when NGO's (or any external provider) are hired to deliver services on behalf of schools or public administration. If money and/or contracts run out, due to 'projecting', piloting or insufficient long-term strategies, the service delivered is most likely to disappear. As the situation for children and families, and consequently for schools, in many ways is more complex now than before, outsourcing vital functions – at least without comprehensive involvement from school staff to transfer knowledge – could end up rather disastrous.

In a network like PREVENT, with cities spread around Europe, we see different solutions as part of different traditions and values – on how resources are being allocated, services being organised and maybe to some extent, on how the world is perceived, both inside and outside of schools. In Nantes for example, working from an integrated approach to enhance

communication, understanding and dialogue seems to be an ultimate goal of city administration:

The City of Nantes wants to facilitate access to information for all parents and give them the means to better assist their children's well being. It also wishes to encourage all means to develop the dialogue between parents, teachers and students. Widely, it aims to create better conditions for a common approach and a thought-sharing context between the different actors on a territory...

Several PREVENT cities have acknowledged the need for teachers' training in issues like the ones mentioned above, and there are already existing good practices delivered. One is the model for **"Seven steps to parental involvement"**, presented to exemplify how a coordinated parallel empowerment process for teachers and parents could be managed. Even if the Belgian model is not specifically directed towards preventing ESL, it is, from a universal point of view, a good example on how the dialogue between schools and parents/families could be developed - to manage all kinds of issues related to the support of wellbeing of children. In a situation where no one knows where and how to start, a structured model to support an action aiming at better understanding and communication skills between schools and parents could be a perfect first step.

A second concern is that of the city level; how city administrations in charge of education could support a positive process in schools and in society referring to the acknowledgement of parents – and other stakeholders – as vital partners in ESL prevention as well as in a positive development process as such of all children in the city. The PREVENT LAP's provide many interesting proposals in this direction, some being concrete actions on short term such as facilitating access to information for all parents, supporting piloting of different kinds in schools, training and capacity building for key staff and parents, implementing good practices from partners cities, piloting on best models for communication and cooperation between schools and parents and the development and implementation of alert systems to track and manage truancy and absenteeism. A realistic view on what is needed is provided in the quote below:

Cooperation with the schools at local level on the issue parental involvement calls for more support, guidelines and strategies through the education system and department to be successful. So our LAP focuses on both "the bottom-up and top-down actions" that has to be dealt with as well as continued local action in the City district through our Local Support Group...

The ambition of PREVENT cities to do something 'now' is of course very positive, and there is no doubt many of these cities will be spoken of as 'inventors' of tools and models that have impacted modern ways of preventing ESL and school dropout. Still, many cities set their focus more long-term, addressing changes in mind-sets, coordination, and organisation. While cities on one hand see opportunities for direct action, they are in parallel very aware

that some of the ideas of PREVENT will take time to implement as they, or at least some of them, attempt to change systems and behaviours radically. The fact that radical change takes time is true regardless of regime, political ideology or traditions of service delivery. Even if the need for system change is perfectly clear to everyone, the system itself will do its best to 'correct' changes to stabilise it back to – almost – the way it used to be. The awareness that changing of systems, attitudes and behaviour often take time is well embedded in this quote from the Stockholm team:

To involve all parents in preventing Early School Leaving means to invite educational strategists, educational departments, headmasters, teachers and parents to build understanding, confidence and trust in "the thought", to find new ways and recourses in benefit for the children...

One feature as introduced as an innovative component in the works of PREVENT is the concept of Structural Indicators, SI's. The concept, originally developed by the United Nations to help measure issues related to health, has been adapted and piloted in PREVENT workshops and by questionnaires throughout a period of time. The reason has been to inject incitements for a collective discussion on what changes needs to be done at a systemic and/or structural level to involve parents in society in general, and in school issues more specifically. SI's have been presented in various forms; as general guiding principles, as indicators for physical spaces etc. In PREVENT, three areas were of certain interest, namely 'outreach' (to parents), 'bridges between health and education' and 'ways to promote democratic and relational systems of communication'. Despite some initial challenges in how to best understand and promote use of SI's, it is obvious that the concept has been an eye-opener for many cities, not only regarding how to support the involvement of parents but rather, as an inevitable way of thinking when thoroughly investigating, or proposing, what is needed to accomplish change. With the help from the Gijon team the notion and relevance of SI thinking becomes very clear:

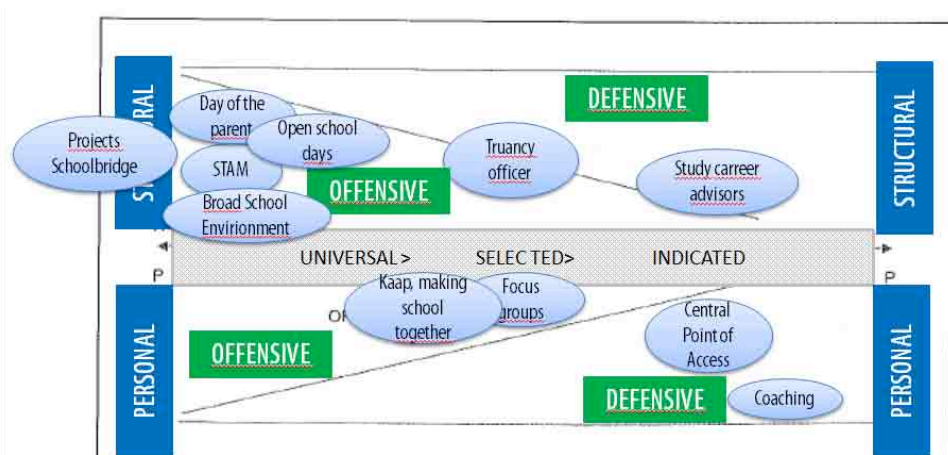
*This approach has been very much taken into account by our LAP. Many actions may be mentioned as an example: action 1, "**Communication channels**" (tools set up to make communication and information fluent between school and families, making long-term actions possible); action 5, "**Diversity as key**" (programme developed by the FMSS called "Get close to my reality", video and didactic units to integrate disable people in primary and secondary school); action 12, "**Dissemination of social services initiatives and programmes** (Dissemination of childhood, social integration and health activities); action 13, "**Prevention of school bullying as a way against childhood violence**" (second campaign of awareness to work with different types of violence in primary and secondary school); action 14, "**Proposals of children and young people**", compilation of proposals made by child members of Gijón's Childhood Council assessing those assumable by the FMSS to hammer out an agreement for action.*

However, we have realized that our LAP lacks the connection between Health and Education...

A third issue is the one of prevention in general. Prevention is difficult by nature. Prevention ‘of something’ is often blurry; especially if the situation in focus for prevention is complex. As results of prevention can be difficult to measure, prevention could be difficult to advocate, especially when resources are scarce. Prevention of early school leaving and school dropout must be embedded in a long-term strategy. In the work of PREVENT we have introduced concepts and models of prevention, of which one, developed by the European Thematic Working Group (ETWG) on ESL, is ultimately addressing ways to build a holistic chain of prevention. Even if there is no “one model fits all”, the ETWG model helps cities both in mapping gaps and in promoting already existing features. As such it helps in answering ‘what’ and ‘when’ questions. Another model is the Pyramid, a result from developments in modern time prevention research. The Pyramid was introduced to PREVENT cities as a framework to support cities in answering the ‘who’ question, as it outlines the different levels of intervention with regards to who is being addressed by a preventive measure. The levels are ‘Universal’, ‘Selected’ and ‘Indicated’, the Universal level ‘addressing all’) while the Selected level targets risk groups and the Indicated targets individuals at substantive risk. The Pyramid has also been developed, with ‘hybrids’ introducing components like ‘proportionate universalism’. The term is explained as “...actions must be universal, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage” (Marmot 2010). Exactly on the spot for some cities:

Being a bit “sloppy” you could say that many parents in our city district belong to the selected area. They have big needs in many ways. Through PREVENT we have spotted that we ought to have a “universal way” of working to reach the “selected group of parents”. Because the universal programs/methods we use are not working for many of the parents living in our area. They lack knowledge and understanding of being a supportive (school-) parent in their new country...

In PREVENT, the model has been slightly developed by PREVENT Thematic expert Paul Downes in that a ‘Promotion of strengths’ part has been added as part of the Universal stage.



Adding the dimension helps reminding cities to also consider, develop and include good practices, either being those developed in their own cities or relevant dittos, shared between partner cities throughout the PREVENT work process. The ‘strengths’ component manifests that no

matter how challenging and problematic an issue, there is always something positive that works, always 'jewels' that can be developed, scaled up, implemented and learned from. On a more conceptual level, the 'Promotion of strengths' component promotes a mental shift in focus, from "solely prevention to also including the aspect of promotion" (Downes 2014). So how have cities responded to this model thinking? In fact, many LAP's consult them as a tool for clarifying their own strategy. To others, the models have offered some help in coming closer to a sustainable and holistic chain of prevention, including schools, parents, educational departments and relevant stakeholders. In some cases, the cities have come up with hybrid models of their own to visualise the prevention process, city of Antwerp maybe offering the most explicit (above).

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

RELEVANCE of LAP's:

To be considered relevant, LAP's in general have to provide solutions to existing needs and gaps. Comparing initial PREVENT city profiles with LAP content it is obvious that 'things happen' along the way. Not that PREVENT cities are unhappy or unsatisfied with what they have accomplished; the situation is actually quite the opposite, many cities being both happy and proud of what they have achieved:

As this is our first experience with URBACT project and working of ULSG, we didn't know what to expect exactly. Anyway, our worries, that the members will lose interest during the process, didn't come true. So, I'd say we could be happy with the way our LAP has been processed.

To many cities, the fear factor for LAP relevance seems to have been closely connected to whether or not the URBACT local support group (ULSG) was going to be a success or not. This is certainly true as the local support group, as being a vital part of the URBACT Method, is highlighted as the engine for integrated development at local level. To a great extent, its functionality and importance for results at city level is jointly saluted:

*We are **happy and proud**, because our LAP is not only paper\documents, but its based on the experience of different experts and on the questions and needs of parents. Our LAP is team production and result...*

URBACT projects are, due to an agile programme approach, not looking for fixed needs and clear objectives from start. In itself this approach should be considered very positive – offering both a relief and a challenge for cities. With the help of a diverse local support group and tools like the Logical Framework Approach, initial needs and gaps as well as solutions can prove to be quite different, hence even more precise, than the ones indicated in earlier phases. In some cities, organisational changes has led to demands for new objectives, clarifying the need for political back up and clearly decided and explicit goals such as one on parental involvement: *“Though the political leadership had recently changed, our LAP has been well accepted and its content remained untouched.”*

Most PREVENT cities embrace their ULSG's and the work it has achieved and the power it has brought to the development process. The fact that initial fear for motivational and/or organisational problems did not occur offered cities the possibility to develop trust and relations in a long collaborative and experimental process, in most cases also including parents:

The local group created in 2012, composed of members from different fields, allowed good conditions for a co-production of the Nantes' Action Plan for 2015.

The group regularly met to think about the sense of the parents' involvement and the way to allow them to fully play their role in a facilitated dialogue with the school also using the most adequate resources on the territories.

It has made it possible for people not used to meet to think together, and sometimes for people used to meet in formal meetings to find a more informal way of doing it, in a more equal and co-productive way...

It is also, for a number of reasons, very positive that most PREVENT cities seem to plan for a continuation of the ULSG's. As long as parents will be equally involved, and the issues discussed will promote stakeholder capacity building on parental involvement and ESL prevention, this should be considered a massive success.

MODELS of PREVENTION - USE and THOUGHTS

Prevention of ESL and dropout is closely connected to early childhood education and care. Early prevention is therefore a key component in a comprehensive city strategy, involving supportive measures and alert systems that allow early interventions. Some efforts have to be universal – directed to all – to reduce general risks and to promote better opportunities and choices. In the case of PREVENT, a number of relevant universal preventive measures such as parental outreach and communication programmes, transition and guidance support, continuous teacher training on how to interact and communicate with parents, how to address vulnerable groups (both children and parents) and overlapping monitoring systems for truancy and absenteeism could be possible examples. But many of PREVENT cities are also addressing neighbourhoods, groups and individuals – children and parents – that need a higher level of attention. In every society is most likely a need for both the universal, selected and indicated measures of prevention, as long as the ambition is to improve the overall situation. From a PREVENT point of view, prevention as discussed here could be most relevant when addressing the dropout issue. Nevertheless, PREVENT cities give good guidance on the way they look at prevention. A majority of cities recognise their LAP as mainly delivering at the universal level, often complemented with some actions dedicated to the selected one. Some cities also exemplify measures at indicated level, while a couple of cities do not offer any categorisation of actions in their LAP. However, reflecting from the levels of prevention could be quite rewarding when presenting a preventive agenda:

A few actions are Universal, such as the digital platform and the developing of a theoretical model for parental involvement; the others are selected because it concerns only a small group of parents. The level of indicated actions is not covered in our LAP...

Choices made regarding levels of prevention could also tell something about the general approach, politically and/or traditionally, to the issue. The following comment makes a clear statement, though with a necessary touch of flexibility attached:

It's clearly the universal approach because in France the educational question is considered to be the same for everybody whatever the parental background.

Of course we have already some selected initiatives for allophone parents for example and some indicated one with "Club Coup de Pouce" for instance...

In some cases, cities explain levels with no coverage with the fact that there do already exist features dealing with that. In the best of worlds, this 'wider knowledge on what exists' could be interpreted as a result of ULSG and LAP processes.

LAP's and THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

Besides everything a LAP can be in terms of innovation, rationale and format, it needs to be developed from a holistic approach. Basically this would, to support URBACT ideology, mean a wide range of relevant stakeholders including target groups, addressing, linking and coordinating overlapping policy areas, include research and practice etc. Could PREVENT LAP's match these criteria? The answer is beautifully designed by The Hague:

Yes, it is a holistic approach because: a) it is based on an political ambition from our local educational agenda (approved by school boards and politicians); b) partici-pants of each level were involved in each phase of developing this LAP; c) it contains a part of research and good practise, so it is not only theoretical and d) it contains assistance for parents, teachers, administrators and executives.

All cities consider their LAP to be holistic. Most frequent reason for that boils down to the fact that it is developed more or less within the support of the ULSG's, of which most are seen as the ultimate guarantee for providing a holistic approach to the LAP. As the groups, as mentioned already before, involve a wide range of stakeholders representing different views and experiences, the holistic approach is automatically evident – as long as facilitation guarantees models that enable everyone to get his/her voice across, the holistic approach may also lead to added value such as co-creative synergies and innovation. In Usti nad Labem it sure has:

The range of local actors contributing to the LAP is one thing we really feel as the big benefit of our Prevent work. The ULSG is willing to continue to work together; some of the members have already started to communicate with others and to solve some other issues outside Prevent topic (though similar)...

But there is nothing really simple in bringing actors together. In societies with fixed and clearly divided and defined responsibilities, collaboration and innovation could be quite threatening to the existing structures. Allocation of resources, ownership of competence, organisational status etc. could suddenly become more important than solving the problem. But things could also turn to the better:

The main aim of taking part in the project and going about the LAP process was and is a holistic approach. There are many different local actors, a lot of parallel structures and sometimes also an element of multilateral envy. It has been tough to bring together these different notions and there is still a long way to go. However, taking our PREVENT film as an example, it is incredible to see how in such a team suddenly different actors work together who would rather have avoided this in the first place...

So maybe the high level of notion of a holistic approach in PREVENT LAP's, is a kind of reward for an altruistic, open-minded facilitation and management process, supported on one hand of a genuine local interest and ambition to really make a difference in ESL and dropout prevention and in involving stakeholders 'on the ground'. On the other, intertwined with URBACT demands – for multi actor collaboration, target group participation, for innovation and accountability. If that is the case, then we have to say it works like a clock.

CONTRIBUTIONS of LAP's

Referring to differences in legal, state, policy and cultural issues between PREVENT cities, it is of interest to learn more about the status given to LAP's and in which areas and formats cities expect their respective LAP to contribute the most. Most cities have managed well in attaching the LAP to existing policies, strategies and plans, and some cities mention their LAP in terms of *“a driver for realising a mind shift and change in behaviour”, “our LAP is a strategic document with political recommendations being family involvement the most important one”* and *“for parents to see new opportunities and options to be involved in school”*.

Cities of PREVENT seem to have extremely high expectations on their LAP's. Analysing them means a boost of 'feel good' and brings very positive thoughts for the future. And still expectations are not unrealistic; every city has its plan, and they all look supported by and integrated in a bigger picture. City of Gijon explains the logic:

Mainly in Education and Social Services. Firstly, our LAP has been the result of the participation and agreement of all the sectors involved. Secondly, the actions developed aimed at the different problems related to drop out in our city and finally, our LAP is a strategic document with political recommendations being family involvement the most important one.

At present we are implementing two new actions, nº 7 “Adding skills “ and nº 16 “Preventing absenteeism”. The first action is being developed in a local high school (universal approach) while the second one is being developed in the social services department in a selective approach...

Realising that different LAP's will 'act' at different levels and in different contexts is by no means a reason to compare them by anything else than how they are perceived to bring

about good value at city level, irrespective if being delivered as actions in a prioritised neighbourhood, prevention modelling in a couple of pilot schools, a web resource for parents and stakeholders to keep well informed or as parts of, or even the backbone in, a comprehensive city strategy for involving parents in ESL and dropout prevention. Of many good examples, the one of Usti nad Labem really sets ideas in motion:

Usti nad Labem has now brand new Strategy of city development and ESL is mentioned there as an actual subject of necessary interventions (capture called Human sources, education and social issues). New political leadership plans on creating some new strategic documents and policies, including wider educational strategy or strategy of socially excluded areas. Also fighting with the unemployment is a big topic. For all of it our LAP can provide good source and be part of a bigger solution...

Another aspect of the way the LAP is going to 'make sense' is presented by the city of Tallinn. It addresses values as a vital driver for mutual respect and understanding, thus pointing at factors that, if not processed accordingly, could mean difficulties in the way the dialogue between schools, parents and the child is managed:

Our LAP enables to use good practices. There are two dimensions in the LAP: general inclusion of parents and needs-based inclusion. They do not exclude each other. School culture and inclusion are mutually bounded and influencing each other. The school culture expresses how communication and cooperation with parents functions, while relationships and communication shape important values...

STRUCTURAL INDICATORS – innovation or mumbo jumbo?

Introducing the Structural indicators (SI's) in 'city thinking and planning' in PREVENT has indeed been a journey of itself. Initial mind bending among PREVENT experts on best ways to present the concept and examples on application was followed by explanatory and practical hands-on workshops, questionnaires and reviews. All in all, the way cities have received the SI idea has shifted from doubt to serious interest, maybe even in a couple of cases to 'aha!-s... *"It becomes more and more obvious how things are linked to each other and how important it is to reflect on structural indicators when about to make changes..."*

From the examples provided in the SI process, three topics were highlighted by PREVENT cities as highly relevant to ESL and dropout prevention/parental involvement. These three were:

- Outreach
- Bridges between health and education
- Ways to promote democratic and relational systems of communication

For obvious reasons, cities of PREVENT were instructed to do their best to adopt the SI concept in their LAP's. The idea was of course to see if adding some 'SI-fication' in LAP

planning procedures could bring forward a set of actions or strategic/systemic changes that could be considered controversial or innovative. However, not all cities have provided information and reflection on SI's with reference to actions presented in their LAP's, but still most of them have. Majority is in the theme of outreach, a fact that is perfectly validated by the city of Nantes:

Outreach is clearly our main challenge as a city regarding the French educational system. 7 upon 11 of our recommendations are based on the necessity to go towards parents and not only to offer them more services:

SHORT TERM (2015/2016)

Recommendation n°1: Support in between parents

Recommendation n°2: Meet the parents

Recommendation n°3: Develop digital technology use to link with families

Recommendation n°4: Professional discovering the neighbourhood thanks to the Territory Landing Kit (TLK)

MEDIUM TERM (2016/2017)

Recommendation n°5 : Disseminate information desk for parents on all territories

Recommendation n° 8 : Harmonize the information spreading/disseminating outline

Recommendation n° 9 : Discovery of the neighbourhood by the families...

But there are as well some examples in ways to promote democratic and relational systems of communication and bridges between health and education:

There are no themes of related to the theme 'bridges between health and education', but most of our actions have a firm relationship with 'outreach' because most of the actions stimulate partners to adjust parents at home, to visit them, to invite them to join in at schools and talk about the education of their children as an equal partner. So, also the theme of 'promoting democratic and relational systems of communication' is very present in our actions because it is all based on the assumption that parents are not a subject but partners...

The best possible outcome concerning the use of SI is perhaps the fact that cities have, bit by bit, internalised it in their thinking. Most cities give clear pictures of 'what is what' in a way that must be recognised as knowledge, not guessing: *"Our focus is mainly on the outreach. The LAP is aiming at making all the possibilities visible to everybody involved with the theme..."*

And still another Swedish example confirming that the concept is working:

Outreach – We have already realised that we have to go out and find the parents where they are in different ways. NGO:s have been of good help to understand and do that. We have also invented new places to talk about school and parenthood with parents, for

instance in the adult education for immigrants, in ethnical clubs etc. To create a “one-stop-shop” in a central local place for different parental issues is still a vision...

LAP's and SUSTAINABILITY

The issue of sustainability could be perceived in many ways. Examples of relevant indicators in the example of PREVENT LAP's are ownership structure, partnership and partnership agreements, financing, coordination and status of the LAP. We could talk of a “Sustainability index” to discover strong or possibly weaker areas. Referring to how cities have measured its index, PREVENT LAP's have a great possibility to deliver substantial changes starting from what has been presented in forms of actions and policy measures. The logic ‘realistic’, ‘well implemented and supported’, ‘well financed/easy to finance’ and ‘high commitment from stakeholders and parents’ seems to be the common denominator for sustainability tracking in many LAP's:

We think that our LAP has a high level of sustainability because there is a solid basis of political, strategic and practical approval and engagement; there is money and there is a theoretical framework to stimulate schools to act better and to coordinate actions; and, the goals are relevant and realistic...

With regards to funding of actions, at least two strategies are presented; besides the one mentioned in the quote above – money is within existing budgets – there is always EU funding somewhere to be found, at least according to the experiences of Usti nad Labem:

With sufficient political support and active schools our LAP has quite high sustainability index. Most of the measures aren't so costly and many activities could be financed through EU funding. The initial measure called “Fundraiser” should provide a person able to coordinate activities, integrate them and to find resources for them...

Only in Munich there is some doubt about sustainability. It refers to organisational issues that have been solved due to serious crisis management. On the other hand, Munich has succeeded in bringing actors that normally would have resisted to join the ULSG and to start a positive working process from there. The Munich team has also, by well-managed negotiations and facilitating, succeeded in getting frustrated ULSG rep's back in line. With these skills and the positive feeling of finding ways to turn a negative trend, they should not worry too much.

WHERE IS INNOVATION in PREVENT LAP'S?

There is a lot of talk about innovation these days. In the field of PREVENT, we might talk about social innovation:

Social innovations are new strategies, concepts, ideas and organizations that meet the social needs of different elements which can be from working conditions and education to community development and health — they extend and strengthen civil society. Social innovation includes the social processes of innovation, such as open source methods and techniques and also the innovations, which have a social purpose (Wikipedia).

So thoughts and ideas can be extremely innovative – but an innovation is when ideas are developed, up-scaled and implemented in regular services. Looking at PREVENT LAP's, there are absolutely a great number of innovative ideas (planned actions) and already implemented innovations. From a PREVENT perspective, the best innovation should of course involve parents. One innovation is definitely the Day of the Parent in Antwerp; a yearly event, invented within the framework of PREVENT, that will be the engine in stakeholder participation, a kick-off arena for schools and parents, a way to launch new ideas and ultimately, to keep focus on parental involvement.

Another feature seen by many cities as 'the' innovation, are the local multi-actor stakeholder groups, known as ULSG's. In some cities, hopefully all or at least as many as possible, these groups could, if properly sustained and with necessary mandate and resources, reach the status of innovations. As in an earlier quote from Usti nad Labem, groups doing well in establishing a core of trust and respect could be extremely innovative and productive over time.

Besides events and workgroup collaboration, cities also reward examples such as the URBACT methodology, bringing diversity to universal approaches of national educational systems, declaration confidence in and necessity of support on the side of educational institutions from both children and parents, reaching consensus and common understanding in the inclusion of parents and its efficiency and the sheer fact that ESL, dropout prevention and parental involvement is on the agenda.

In many ways, the examples mapped also represents 'openings' for changes in behaviour related to the topic. Having local support/stakeholder group, with parents as equal parts, will inevitably change the ways things are done and people are acting. This is already happening – in all PREVENT cities: *"The bridge between politicians and practitioners is thanks to Prevent also an important added value."*

The fact that many cities now experience that planned actions and processes are being carried out is another good and very supportive example. In several cities, networks between schools, municipality, parents and fieldworkers/NGO's are already in action. Another great change is that in many cities, parents are empowered in their role, acknowledging that they can, and have to, be part in preventing ESL and dropout issues.

Still another feature that will have a great impact is about communication: *“We change the deficits in communication between generations, institutions, and among all interested parties...”*

Despite the NPM discussion above, the question what direction schools should take in the future is very much an open one. The rapid progress in technological as well as dynamic global changes makes it harder than ever to predict educational and personal needs. This will, inevitably, offer fantastic opportunities for developing exciting schools for the future.

FINAL REMARKS

To be a project implemented over 2,5 years, PREVENT holds its flag rewardingly high! Having the opportunity to act as the Lead expert in the PREVENT network of cities has been an outstanding pleasure. Speed-dating tours around Europe with the Lead partner coordinator Mr Derrien, nightly SKYPE-sessions with my Thematic expert Dr Downes, creative and inspiring workshops and events, spectacular dinners and surprises and above all, the myriad of nice people, not the least parents from all cities, will last forever in my heart and (European) mind. Watching the French mother at the workshop in Usti nad Labem, when inviting us all to the Final meeting in Nantes, is forever embedded in the back of my head. At moments like that, it is easy to be proud of what we have accomplished. Maybe the Tallinn team summarises it all in its quote:

Different forms of cooperation, exchange of good experiences, better communication at different levels, strengthened partnerships, more open-minded on the defining of the problems and solving them...

I know that you all, cities of PREVENT, share my positive experiences of the transnational partnership. We give and we receive, we share and develop, we laugh and sometimes we even cry. We have, by perfect facilitation of Nantes and Mr Derrien, reached a good and fruitful working climate, with humour and respect at the same time.

I am convinced that PREVENT cities will continue the journey of PREVENT. I wish you all the best of luck on your next flight!

<p>ANTWERP</p> <p>The LAP is an integrated, strategic community web resource, a platform for ESL prevention and involvement of parents and stakeholders.</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>	<p>GIJON</p> <p>Integrated in FMSS strategy of Gijón City Council. 16 coordinated actions for prevention, detection and reduction of school absenteeism. Needs link to ECEC</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>	<p>THE HAGUE</p> <p>Integrated policy document on PI. Includes actions as well as theoretical framework for schools how to address and assess parent's involvement.</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>
<p>MUNICH</p> <p>Integrated in city policies. Main objective is to provide transparency and GP knowledge at all levels and to implement indicators developed.</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>	<p>NANTES</p> <p>Integrated in city policy frame on Educational success of children. Focus is on strategy, involvement, info-/communication and 'territorial knowledge'.</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>	<p>STOCKHOLM/SPÅNGA-TENSTA</p> <p>Towards support and mandate from Education Dep, city council, schools and social services. Focus on split target groups for buy-in and support.</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>
<p>SOFIA</p> <p>Completes the Municipality Strategy of Education. Built on piloting in three schools, now focus is on implementing, tools and thinking in schools/nat pol.</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>	<p>TALLINN</p> <p>Strategic city plan, developed in collaboration with five schools. Five parent-centered objectives; training, support, feedback, activities and cooperation.</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>	<p>USTI nad LABEM</p> <p>LAP = Local plan for Education, approved by City assembly in March 2015. Three areas; school support, support of schools and families and extra services.</p> <p>Network will continue and develop!</p>

AN URBACT II PROJECT

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development. It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants. URBACT is co-financed by the ERDF Funds and the Member States.

www.urbact.eu/project
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