Impact of the TAP project – owns report

Being a partner in a project which can’t be counted among the core business of the own organization, means that there must be awaited whether some concrete possibilities will meet the expectations. It is also not sure what the effects are on the regular network and especially on the organizations with which we as Leido regularly are dealing. In addition to this all new contacts should also be established, without knowing at what level there is an acceptance of the contribution of the side of Leido. At the end of the project it can be said that a bunch of real amazing opportunities have arisen. There has been talk of unexpectedly positive response, with useful effects for the coming period. These effects fit in the way Leido is doing its job, when it comes to ‘lifelong learning’. This article outlines them.

It is always difficult to assess whether a project will have real impact on the situation being examined. Certainly a topic as the fight against and prevention of poverty - often in conjunction with a form of social exclusion – can be handled for many points of view. Also the case is that several organizations are already working on it, from many different angles with different objectives. The government is seen as the party which should set out the broad lines around the poverty policy and strategy, with a matching budget. But in the Netherlands we have now mainly the municipalities, often bundled into regions, which have the task to stay close to the target groups, using in their own way all kinds of concrete actions. Also, for those who are in poverty or will be in high risk for that, it should be made easier to knock on some doors, and likely the best ones. The developments in recent years, in conjunction with that, have ensured that new networks of organizations have emerged, with its own dynamics. How to deal with that as a partner in a project?

A project like TAP does not just fall from the sky. There is an obvious reason for that such as the growing number of people in Europe living in poverty. The rapidly increasing number of young people who can’t find work in more and more countries, poses a threat to society in the coming years. These are findings having interfaces for our organization Leido with what is being done to lifelong learning, but they do not lead themselves to the need of developing specific activities. The request in 2013 to act as a partner in the TAP project was therefore remarkable for Leido, considering our core business. Following a fair internal discussion, it was decided to say ‘yes’, partly in order to see what ‘education’ and ‘poverty’ can mean for each other. Also the aspect of the use of learning about entrepreneurship and specifically focused on entrepreneurial behavior, played an important role.

The first part of the project focused on the questioning of persons who are in poverty, also to see what options training for them can have. In order to put this into effect, we had to use special contacts within Leido. It turned out that this was possible and that therefore people who might otherwise not do anything with us, could be used. They then brought their own networks and
contacts with them, under the ‘umbrella’ of Leido. It was surprising to discover that we have built up such a trust in the past 17 years that they were prepared from these organizations to be linked up with the project. This also helped by the fact that in general ‘education’ is increasingly seen as a possible solution for the control and prevention of poverty. Leido is unique in the Netherlands when it comes to finding creative possibilities for the use of training for a range of developments. By extension, the hook up with the project to the interests of those organizations that were new to Leido, could be seen as a logical development - with a positive impact of the partnership in TAP.

The investigation that arose from the second part of the project, gave the opportunity to communicate in a structured way with organizations that are formally involved in the implementation of the social policy. That happened in the first phase at a regional level especially in view of the role of municipalities. But then our approach attracted the attention of national organizations especially those which are cooperating with the government. It then relates specifically to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. It so happened that in 2015 preparations were made for the Presidency of the Netherlands of the European Union for the first half of 2016. This led to a national working group chaired by the Secretary of State involved. Leido was on the basis of the reports issued about the TAP-studies strongly invited for this group. One of the main reasons seems to be the independent position of Leido without direct interests and not involved in studies controlled by the government. It has led to interviews with staff members of the Ministry who were asked to carry out the Dutch approach, giving us the ability to attend meetings in the first months of 2016. Having a status as a European project, with training as a target, the impact has not been missed with a clear effect on how certain issues can be addressed in the future.

A good project not only ties in with cases already going on or already being in the picture for some time. There must also be opportunities to respond to new developments and to play a role in finding solutions and creating ideas. That means that the project offers the opportunity to use as partner its own experience and all accumulated expertise. Thus it also can build on what has been achieved after completion of the project within the own network.

In the second part of the project it was possible in different sessions with experts from various organizations, involved in the fight against poverty, to exchange views on issues the country is facing now. We have also followed the media reports, in order to see for ourselves what can be the role of education. About these findings we had discussions with relevant institutions. This resulted in making all kinds of agreements, an interesting effect on our network, with impact on our target groups.

Based on the project and the opportunities we got as Leido to join the national network around the fight against poverty, we have seen that there are two major issues to go to work. They are having a close relationship with the use of secondary and higher education, within ‘lifelong learning’
The first issue is to examine how young people living in a situation with little income can be informed about opportunities to study in higher education. The introduction of a system that means that students have to get a loan for the study (apart from certain benefits for this group of students) has led to possible various obstacles. Just these young people - and their parents - should have the opportunity to escape through training from a threatening situation, also on a longer term.

In addition, recently the Ministry of Education discovered that a group of youngsters studying in Vocational Education and Training are doing another study to which the preference has been. One of the main reasons seems to be that students from poor families can’t afford the extra cost of a study. There are several interesting studies with the need to purchase additional material, besides the regular tuition fee. In this way this situation can lead to a dichotomy to arise in society, an unwelcome side effect of the education system.

It is clear that the project has had an added value to all its findings, with a double effect on our organization. We have been able to make new contacts with the aim of linking it to what is already being done. In addition to that the government has now the opportunity to have Leido involved in some qualitative developments, by using our network for new constructions. These effects will definitely pay in the coming years, with a certain impact on the policies at regional and national level, regarding the fight against poverty through the use of training and education.