

Josep Tresserras: Some considerations about STEPS.

After reading all the discussions papers arrived until now - the binomials inclusion / exclusion, discrimination / non-discrimination, equality / inequality and solidarity /lack of solidarity, I would like to introduce two another aspects to this forum: knowledge of the other and self-determination.

Along the previous discussions a very important binomial element has turned up: on the one hand, the new globalisation tendency; on the other hand, the immediate surroundings of every single person. We should have in mind this antagonist element during our future discussions in order to avoid an excessive theorisation and in order to arrive at a real reflection over the condition of the people with learning disabilities: the people that we want to include in our plan. There are, therefore, two poles apart in a strained relation, which should be included one into the other: On one side, we have to consider the generic policies of countries or communities favouring groups of people in special situations - in our case, people with learning disabilities-. All these policies would be the ones ruled and suggested by the EU. On the other side, we must not forget the immediate surroundings of the people in their towns or local communities, even the individuals with their specific needs, which must not be neglected or abandoned. We have to bear in mind that those are the places where the people live and the general policies are carried out.

Another aspect to bear in mind in our discussions is our origin: we come from different countries, with different traditions, and above all, with different laws, even with different terminology. This may bring us into confusion: We may sometimes use the same terms to refer to different concepts and realities. So, terminology should be clear for every one of us. I could bring an example of this after reading some of the discussion papers.

I have seen some references about guardianship and self-guardianship. Hector talks about self-guardianship in a way that I cannot agree with: our Spanish legal system understands self-guardianship as the procedures that any individual plans in order to organise his / her guardianship for the moment he or she needs it. In other words, it is the capacity that any individual has to choose by himself / herself, when he or she has the capacity for doing so. This would be the recognition of the self-determination. Our Spanish legal system and the comprehension we have of the term do not allow anybody to get the self-guardianship (Latin origin of the term). I think that what Hector means by self-guardianship is the capacity that any person has of self-determination, which is far different from the concept of guardianship.

I agree entirely with Michael Langhanky talking about social exclusion. In general terms, in our societies, everybody talks too easily about no-discrimination, since we assume that discrimination is bad. But there is a deep flow of social exclusion towards the people with learning disabilities, because they do not fit properly with the community or neighbourhood we have been building up.

If we gave a step ahead and we recognised the capacity of people to enjoy their self-determination and we help them to reach this objective, there would be less exclusion and consequently, less discrimination. It is clear that a new policy of education and training would be necessary for all the people involved in the community.