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INTEGRATION AS A MULTI-WAY PROCESS: A CASE STUDY OF INNOVATIVE MIGRANT INTEGRATION PROJECTS IN SLOVENIA

ABSTRACT

This article explores innovative EU-funded migrant integration projects which emerged in Slovenia after the 2008 global economic crisis. It stems from sociological literature that conceptualises integration as a general societal phenomenon that shields against precarity. By conducting qualitative interviews with those running the studied projects and other stakeholders, this article explores the projects' drivers, tactics, and their impact on established institutions. The findings show that the projects were established by proactive activists who utilised EU funds to professionalise their activities and engage in partnerships to develop needs-based, cross-sectional and networked provision that empowers migrants and benchmarks professional norms and standards for migrant integration. Its specific contribution lies in uncovering a multi-way integration process that moves away from mainstream approaches to integration, which segregate and demand change only from migrants, and also includes public institutions and servants, professionals and host societies as a whole.

Keywords: migration, precarity, integration, empowerment, EU projects, Slovenia

INTEGRACIJA KOT VEČSMERNI PROCES: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA INOVATIVNIH PROJEKTOV INTEGRACIJE PRISELJENCEV V SLOVENIJI – POVZETEK

V članku raziskujemo inovativne projekte integracije priseljencev, ki jih financira EU in so se v Sloveniji razvili po globalni ekonomski krizi leta 2008. Pri tem izhajamo iz sociološke literature, ki konceptualizira integracijo kot širši družbeni fenomen, ki varuje pred prekarnostjo. S pomočjo kvalitativnih intervjujev s posamezniki, vpetimi v projekte, in drugimi deležniki raziskujemo vzroke projektov, njihove taktike in vpliv na uveljavljene institucije. Ugotovitve kažejo, da projekte s pomočjo sredstev EU razvijajo proaktivni aktivisti z namenom profesionalizacije teh aktivnosti in oblikovanja partnerstev za razvoj povezanih in medresorskih storitev, ki bi izhajale iz potreb priseljencev in bi bile namenjene njihovem opolnomočenju, ob tem pa bi vzpostavili profesionalne norme in standarde za integracijo migrantov. Posebni prispevek članka je v razkrivanju večsmernega integracijskega procesa, ki se odmika od prevladujočih integracijskih pristopov, ki segregirajo in zahtevajo spremembe zgolj od migrantov, ter tako vključuje tudi javne institucije in uslužbenke, strokovne delavce in družbo gostiteljico kot celoto.

Ključne besede: migracije, prekarnost, integracija, opolnomočenje, projekti EU, Slovenija

INTRODUCTION

This article investigates innovative EU-funded migrant integration projects that emerged in Slovenia after the 2008 global economic crisis. It conceptualises integration as a link between stable work and durable social relations achieved through welfare states' compromise that shields against precarity, i.e. fundamental insecurity characterised by unstable working, employment and living conditions caused by increasing globalisation, labour market deregulation and the shrinking welfare state (Castel, 2003; Schierup & Krifors, 2015). Integration is thus understood not as an interventionist model for specific groups but as a general societal phenomenon that is no longer the norm for an increasing number of individuals (Bolzman, 2002). Although neoliberal attacks on welfare states' compromise have eroded the rights and protective mechanisms for a growing number of residents, the situation is even more precarious for migrants because it is indirectly linked to increasingly restrictive migration policies (Anderson, 2010; Bolzman, 2002) and the segregated integration models explored below.

Across the EU migrant integration is regulated upon the interaction of (supra-)national migration and welfare policies, specific labour market structures and migration histories, which determine the inclusion/exclusion of specific migrant groups and their rights, which are most often clearly separated from prior resident's rights and from general welfare provision (Carmel & Cerami, 2012; Zorn, 2008). In this regard the EU and its member states clearly distinguish between prior residence and EU-citizens on the one hand and non-EU, Third Country Nationals, on the other. The latter are subject to migration law that determines their inclusion/exclusion into the welfare state's compromise, mostly based on their economic utility and security potential, however, there is also a more genuine interest in the social integration of migrants. These rationales also shape EU and national migration policies and its funding mechanism, which can at the EU level come in the form of wider structural or specific Home Affairs funds (Hertog, 2016; Samaluk & Kall, forthcoming).

While research has already scrutinised the impact of EU financial mechanisms on national and local actors in welfare administration and provision as well as on innovative service provision (Greer, Samaluk, & Umney, 2019; Samaluk, 2017a, 2017b; Samaluk & Kall, forthcoming), we still know little about innovative EU-funded integration projects. This article explores the drivers of these projects, their tactics, and their impact on the established institutions and their integrational service provision. The article is structured as follows: first, it presents a literature review on EU and Slovenian migrant integration governance and provision, then it presents the case study selection and methods used, followed by the presentation of findings and finally the concluding section summarises the findings and presents the article's main contributions.

EU GOVERNING MECHANISMS REGULATING THE INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS

Migrant integration across the EU is regulated upon the interaction of (supra-)national migration and welfare policies, specific labour market structures and migration histories. Migrant integration thus represents a mix of different policy domains, such as migration, education, social and labour market policies embedded within national political economy and supra-national modes of governance (Morrice, Shan, & Sprung, 2017; Papadopoulos, 2012). Both common EU and specific national governance thus determine the inclusion/exclusion of specific migrant groups and their rights, which are most often clearly separated from prior resident's rights and from general welfare provision (Carmel & Cerami, 2012; Zorn, 2008). In this regard, EU governance has also always distinguished between intra-EU migration characterised by freedom of movement that is outside of migration law, and the migration of non-EU citizens, i.e. Third Country Nationals (TCNs). These legally defined categories are further distinguished as economic, political, and undocumented migrants, and according to these categorisations either included or excluded from the welfare state's compromise (Gregorc, Brajkovič, & Šoštarič, 2012). While the entry and rights of TCNs are mainly conditioned upon their economic utility and security potential, there is also a more genuine interest in the social integration of migrants.

Migration governance in the EU is thus an assemblage of interlinked political, institutional and discursive logic of security, utility and also (specific and limited) social integration (Carmel, 2012). Since the 2000s there have been attempts to address migrants' specific relationship to the labour market and welfare provision also by giving greater priority to migrant integration in social inclusion policies, which encompass (adult) education and learning as well (Carmel, 2012). As a consequence, the Europe 2020 strategy envisages better integration of migrants in the workforce and the development of "a new agenda for migrants' integration to enable them to take full advantage of their potential" (European Commission, 2010, p. 18). In order to implement migrant and wider social integration policies the EU also has financial mechanisms in the form of structural and specific funds. Amongst these are the European Social Fund (ESF), broadly aimed at reducing poverty and increasing the social inclusion of various vulnerable groups, and specific Home Affairs funds, more concerned with border control, shared management, resettlement and integration of TCNs (Hertog, 2016; Samaluk & Kall, forthcoming). The ESF and Home Affairs funds also fall under separated policy domains within the EU member states, the former under Social Affairs and the latter under Internal Affairs administration, funding, and provision. It is thus important to scrutinise how these funds affect national provision and implementation, especially in new EU member states, whose social, educational, employment, economic and migration policymaking has only recently become embedded into EU governing mechanisms (Carmel & Cerami, 2012).

Research has already scrutinised the impact of EU governing, including that of its financial mechanisms upon national and local actors in welfare administration and provision, which has had particular implications for the new EU member states that started

integrating since 2004 (Bonnet, 2016; Greer et al., 2019; Samaluk, 2017a). Recent EU integration characterised by institutional adjustment and the need for an increased bureaucratic apparatus was quickly met with the 2008 global economic crisis, which led to budgetary constraints. Research shows that in the post-crisis Slovenia, EU funding started acting as a stabiliser for austerity measures, thus replacing integral with temporary EU funds to finance welfare provision (Kump, 2017; Samaluk, 2017a). This stimulated a shift towards project governance, its temporary project-based work organisation with predetermined external funding, timeframes, workers' roles and tasks, broadly defined as projectification (Greer et al., 2019). This has spread the insecure project-based modes of work organisation to the public sector, which consequently became characterised by unsustainable provision and precarious project work, hindering permanent entry into welfare professions (Greer et al., 2019; Samaluk, 2017a).

Nevertheless, EU integration and its financial mechanisms also brought new opportunities and have stimulated much needed innovative responses to growing problems caused by increasing labour market interdependencies and the economic crisis (Samaluk, 2017b; Samaluk & Kall, forthcoming). For instance, in Slovenia a new generation of trade union activists started addressing the growing precarity of non-unionised precarious workers and wider social groups by utilising EU funds (Samaluk, 2017a). While these new external resources were brought to innovative trade union project-based organisations, which introduced innovative organising of precarious workers and wider social groups, including migrants, their maintenance came with high personal costs linked to uncertain funding and consequent precarity (Samaluk & Kall, forthcoming).

However, we still know little about innovative EU-funded migrant integration projects. This article explores the drivers, tactics, and impact of such projects in Slovenia by asking the following questions: 1) What drives innovative EU-funded migrant integration projects? 2) What tactics do these projects employ to address the complexity of the integration process? 3) What is their impact on the established institutions and their service provision?

SLOVENIAN MIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICIES AND PROVISION

As is the case in the rest of the EU, Slovenian migration policies are also mainly based upon security and economic utility, utilising migrant workers when shortages arise, but at the same time limiting their stay and their inclusion into social protection systems (Medica, Lukić, & Kralj, 2011). Slovenia has formally instituted a pluralistic (multicultural) model of integration, which should grant migrants equal inclusion into Slovenian society while enabling the preservation of their cultural identities; however, these principles of equality are not achieved in practice (Medica et al., 2011; Zorn, 2008), as will be shown below.

The management of migrant integration policies falls predominantly (but not exclusively) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) that distinguishes between economic

migrants, asylum claimants, and persons with international protection; according to these categories, it provides differential inclusion through integral as well as special external funds. Between 2007 and 2013 the financial perspective integration of TCNs was managed through two separate funds, the European Fund for the Integration of non-EU immigrants (EIF) and the European Refugee Fund (ERF). Between 2014 and 2020 both fell under the Asylum and Migration Integration Fund (AMIF). The provision of integration programs for migrants is divided between state institutions and various non-governmental, non-profit, and private providers.

The main state institutions of control for TCNs are asylum and detention centres that distinguish between claimants for international protection and economic migrants; in Slovenia they were also established with EU funds (Čebon & Zorn, 2016). The system of segregated housing for asylum claimants and undocumented migrants comes also with an internal system of social and healthcare services, which results in exclusion from general welfare provision (Zorn, 2008). Welfare professionals beyond these centres thus rarely encounter complex problems that migrants face because of external and internal border regimes and only start dealing with them once migrants gain access to general welfare institutions after they are granted refugee status, permanent residence, or citizenship.

Those who have been granted international protection are in their first year placed into an Integration Home and allocated a consultant for integration to assist them in this process. The main pillars of migrant integration consist of Slovenian language learning, intercultural dialogue, the solving of life situations, and assistance with finding accommodation and employment (Ladić, Bajt, Jalušič, & Kogovšek Šalamon, 2017). There are also some special programs for the integration of particular groups of migrants, such as youngsters, women and parents that are provided by NGOs or *Ljudske univerze*, which are otherwise major providers of Slovenian language courses for migrants at the local level (Vrečer & Očkon, 2014). Despite this initial provision of services, many face difficulties in achieving social and labour market integration.

Contrary to Home Affairs management and provision, the management of general welfare provision falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and is covered by integral funds and the European Social Fund (ESF), broadly aiming at the social inclusion of various vulnerable groups. Migrants have also been recognised as a vulnerable group within the National Social Protection Program 2013-2020 and the National Program for Adult Education 2013-2020. Nevertheless, the actual provision of social inclusion programs for migrants is still very limited. These have initially developed not as specialised programs for migrants but as a response to neoliberalisation and the increasing impoverishment of residents, such as programs for the homeless and persons without healthcare insurance (Zorn, 2008). This new service provision has also been increasingly utilised by migrants, who during the economic crisis were first targeted for dismissal and consequently deprived of their residence and social rights (Medica et al., 2011).

Poor bilateral agreements, the quota system, the temporal limitation and linkage of migrants' work permits to one employer and the lack of norms and regulations concerning the standards of living in residential facilities allowed employers to determine the circumstances under which migrants lived, worked and what access to rights they had upon dismissal (Medica et al., 2011). Most of these migrants worked in construction and were from former Yugoslav republics, mainly Bosnia and Hercegovina, who have been historically drawn to Slovenia. As a response to the economic crisis, the Government further restricted the employment of TCNs in 2009 and conditioned their entry into the labour market only if no suitable candidates could be found amongst unemployed Slovenian or other EU/European Economic Area (EEA) citizens (Pajnik & Bajt, 2011).

The discourse surrounding the economic crisis thus also problematised the category of "economic migrants", who were only admitted as long as they brought economic benefits, but were otherwise presented as a threat to the shrinking job market and the welfare state. This has further escalated during the "refugee crisis", where a discursive distinction between seemingly genuine refugees and exploitative "economic migrants" became even more pronounced. This discourse has characterised the EU's and the Slovenian government's responses towards the opening and closing of the temporary corridor that emerged on the Balkan migration route in 2015 and the admittance of only certain TCNs, who were characterised as "genuine refugees" and thus included in European asylum politics (Brumen & Meh, 2016).

Although Slovenia mainly acts as a transit country, it also has one of the lowest rates of granted protection in Europe. Between 2002 and 2018 Slovenia granted international protection to only 779 persons out of 13,599 applicants (Statistični urad RS, 2019). While in 2010 there were 73,962 valid work permits issued to non-EU/EAA nationals, in 2014 this number amounted to only 22,853, and 16,993 in 2016, but it started rising again in 2018 following increased economic growth (Zavod Republike Slovenije za zaposlovanje, 2020). Although the number of migrant workers shrank in 2014 to that of one third in 2010, construction still predominates in the employment of migrant workers, many of whom have later become posted workers in Germany or Austria (Sindikat delavcev gradbene dejavnosti Slovenije, 2015). The above-mentioned circumstances of precarious migrants would not have been detected if it were not for the proactive engagement of activists and the projects explored in this article.

CASE STUDY SELECTION AND METHODS USED

In Slovenia one can find small-scale grassroots alternative approaches to migrant integration and migrant self-organising, which have mainly developed in Ljubljana's Social Center ROG. Most notable in this regard has been the collective Invisible Workers of the World (IWW), who had started exposing the precarious conditions of migrant workers already prior to the economic crisis. ROG has also played an important role during the "refugee crisis", which brought about the establishment of the Antiracist Front Without

Borders at the end of summer 2015, whose actions have encompassed solidarity protests, activities on the borders of the Balkan route, and organising activities with asylum seekers in Slovenia (Pistotnik, Čebren, & Kozinc, 2016). While these self-organised groups played an important role in exposing violations and fostering self-organisation, they were small scale, rarely had funding supporting their activities, thus making it difficult to sustain and professionalise them. Linked to these self-organised groups were also two innovative projects that emerged after the 2008 economic crisis and seized newly available EU funds to professionalise their activity in order to address complex migrant issues in a more systemic fashion. These are the Migration Office in Ljubljana and the Urban Furrows in Maribor, which are the selected case studies explored in this article.

The article is based upon the analysis of 15 in-depth individual or group interviews with 18 participants: activists of self-organised groups, public servants/policy makers at ministries, providers of social protection programs that intersect with migrant issues, and leaders and workers on EU-funded integration projects, which include trade unions, NGOs and public bodies. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. Apart from the analysis of primary sources of data, this article also leans on secondary sources such as project reports and policy documents. Fieldwork was conducted in Slovenia between May 2014 and October 2015, with some follow-up interviews in 2018 to gather additional data. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed through the process of coding later organised into themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The analysis started with primary sources of data and later included a thematic analysis of secondary sources of data thus enabling triangulation amongst different data sources. The findings are presented below.

INNOVATIVE MIGRANT INTEGRATION PROJECTS IN SLOVENIA

The findings reveal that innovative migrant integration projects were driven by the proactive engagement of devoted activists and newly available EU funding streams that allowed for the professionalisation of grassroots activities and bottom-up, multi-way, complex, networked and cross-sectional approaches to migrant integration.

Drivers Enabling the Professionalisation of Grassroots Activities

The 2007-2014 EU financial perspective represented the first perspective in which Slovenia participated in full. It opened up a new funding stream for integration activities initiated by proactive activists. The studied projects emerged owing to proactive activists, who took the opportunity to utilise the newly available European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) fund, which both allowed for bottom-up and longer-term projects.

As explained by one of the project leaders at Maribor's City of Culture's Urban Furrows (UF), this funding stream offered autonomy to frame the project in a way to encourage self-organisation and empower, educate and support specific, including migrant, groups:

This was financed by ECOC. Urban Furrows were one of the four streams... that covered socio-ecological issues [...]. I had complete autonomy when applying to tender [...]. We tried to offer support to people [...] and at the same time educate them about mechanisms [...] we never wanted to become service providers [...] but worked on establishing self-organised structures. (UF, project leader)

Urban Furrows was designed bottom-up as one of the four streams within the ECOC project, which focused on ecological and social issues and comprised of seven ecological and socially engaged interconnected projects. Amongst the latter were Etnomobil, Digitalno Nomadstvo, and Teleport, which also started engaging with precarious migrants. Their primary focus was thus on the process of community building and self-organising, which initially entailed proactive social movement and militant research tactics:

In the first four months [...] we talked to people. We went to singles' homes, integration houses, parks, construction sites. We introduced ourselves and explained what we do. Sometimes people trusted us, sometimes they didn't. This was hard work. To present our work not as a service, but as a common support [...], cooperation really. (UF, project leader)

As part of their proactive tactics, activists visited sites where migrants resided or worked to learn about the issues they faced and to start building a supportive community for self-organising.

The same approach was used by another grassroots initiative that developed in the city of Ljubljana a couple of years earlier, owing to a proactive trade union activist:

The beginning of Migration Office dates back to 2008/2009, when we started visiting singles' homes [...] At that time, together with [an NGO] we started visiting these homes to assess the situation and show that these people are not only economic beings. (MO, project leader)

Although within big construction firms trade unions already represented migrant workers (Samaluk, 2017b), they lacked proactive engagement. This was then introduced by a new generation trade unionist, who started exposing, in cooperation with NGOs, broader violations against migrant workers. These tactics initially increased media exposure and public awareness of the unacceptable living and working conditions of migrants, but this alone did not help them: "When we exposed the story in 2008, there was a big media response, but what can workers do with that [...]. This was the moment when we decided that we need to work in a more systemic fashion" (MO, project leader).

Trade union activist realised that exposing the problems was not enough and that a more systemic approach was needed to assist and empower migrant workers, who in the wake of the economic crisis faced dismissals and consequent further erosion of their employment

and social rights. With this goal in mind, it transformed its informal cooperation with the above-mentioned NGO into a project partnership on a newly available ESF scheme supporting bottom-up social inclusion projects for various vulnerable groups: “this is how the Integration package for unemployed migrants, refugees and asylum seekers came to be.” (MO, project leader)

The utilisation of ESF resources allowed unions and NGOs to frame migrant integration within a broader social inclusion framework that allowed for more wholesome and cross-sectional addressing of complex status, housing and social problems faced by dismissed migrants.

Both ESF and ECOC also covered employment costs, which led to the professionalisation of their activities. Migration Office used this resource to employ workers with migration backgrounds, who had first-hand experience, suitable language skills and knowledge of often invisible migrant networks and whereabouts:

The project employs migrants [...]. We knew where these people reside... former refugee centres, singles’ homes [...]. The first month we visited those, then we heard from other migrants about other locations [...]. In a couple of months, we were familiar with these locations throughout Slovenia [...], then we visited meeting places, construction sites. (MO, project worker)

This approach has further strengthened MO’s proactive organising efforts not only in Ljubljana but across Slovenia. They also ended up cooperating with Maribor’s Urban Furrows.

When the effects of the economic crisis started kicking in, migrant workers became the first targeted for dismissal and therefore both Migration Office and Urban Furrows initially focused on advocacy work:

When Maribor’s traffic enterprise went down, we stopped about 15 deportations [...]. With the help of Migration Office, we managed to postpone deportation procedures [...]. At the same time the MO was pushing for the dismissed workers to gain their right to unemployment benefits. This was crucial since unemployment benefits equal a regular income, which enabled migrants to regain their right to reside in Slovenia. (UF, project leader)

Dismissed migrants thus received quick support that prevented their deportations and enabled them to re-regularise their residence status and consequently regain access to their social and employment rights. The tactics to achieve that also involved several interventions at administrative units, which initially did not take migrants seriously: “We intervened. We accompanied them to the Bureaus for Aliens because they told us that public servants don’t take them seriously [...] [and] we’ve noticed the difference... the attitude towards migrants has changed.” (UF, project leader)

Direct interventions were effective and have resulted in the changed attitudes of public servants, whose administrative decisions were determining the migrants' access to their rights. The advocacy work of Migration Office has been even more systemic and entailed daily cooperation with employers, various public institutions and other organisations, particularly watchdogs and law enforcement bodies, to whom it reported 160 cases of the violation of employment, tax, criminal and other legislation in 2014-15 alone (Samaluk, 2017b). Owing to its long-term systemic advocacy work Migration Office also influenced legislative changes that led to better protection of migrant workers (Samaluk, 2017b).

Building Alliances and Partnerships to Address Emerging Needs

Through their advocacy work and cooperation with various actors Migration Office also uncovered emerging needs and forged further partnerships on a (trans)national level. These partnership projects turned Migration Office into a project-based organisation supported by a portfolio of diverse (trans)national partnership projects financed through the ESF, Fair Mobility Network, and the resources of German trade unions (Samaluk & Kall, forthcoming). This funding, combined with changing needs, also expanded their focus on various diverse migrant groups, including posted workers, undocumented migrants, migrant workers within transnational transport, female migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers (Samaluk, 2017b).

On the national level they built fruitful cooperation with the Info Point for Foreigners, established in 2009 at the public Employment Services of Slovenia (ESS), also with the support of ESF. Their main goal was to provide information to affected migrants, who had neither the knowledge nor capacities to find their way through the whole web of various institutions to gain information about their status and rights and thus even begin resolving their complex situation. Info Point (IP) thus acted as "a sort of crossroad that covers a very wide area" (IP, project leader) and provided connections to other relevant institutions, who were important stakeholders for resolving migrants' complex issues. While as a public institution, the Info Point was obliged to provide provision within their limited jurisdiction, their project partnership with trade unions made very complex and networked provision possible, including information, counselling, advocacy and representation:

If we provided information and counselling, trade unions were advocates, they accompanied the client [...] wherever it was discovered that workers were unlawfully unregistered, or they accompanied workers to report employers to the Labour Inspectorate, they resolved residency issues. (IP, project worker)

In 2013 Migration Office was also contracted by the Info Point to provide services related to migrant empowerment and advocacy. This strategic partnership enabled the rapid resolving of the complex problems of migrants: "When they had unresolvable cases, they called us, they referred many people to us. And we also called them to inquire what is in the system, what is happening with a person's work permit." (MO, project worker)

While trade union activists did not have access to the information kept in state registers, these could be provided by the Info Point, and while it could not do advocacy work, trade unions could. This partnership thus enabled rapid reactions to the migrants' changing needs.

Close cooperation also increased professionalisation within the ESS, who initially lacked the know-how, appropriate staff, and networks:

The beginning was very difficult [...] first the team needed to be put together, we needed to find the right staff [...] then the content needed to be developed [...] the first project leader was not good, the second started changing things because she knew how to connect with trade unions, NGOs. And there was a whole network of public institutions involved, we had direct contacts with people regarding health insurance, pension insurance [...]. A user who came to us immediately got an answer to their questions, which were often complex and sometimes also banal. (Leader of the ESS project Info Point)

Close cooperation amongst innovative projects and public institutions thus also increased institutional capacities to provide migrants with helpful information and assist them with complex issues.

Additionally, Urban Furrows worked on establishing close cooperation with various stakeholders: "We worked on a tripartite structure, on the base, meaning people, on established institutions and other actors [...] and on an intermediary level [...] we tried to encourage all to participate in talks, events [...] to establish an alternative [...] parallel structures." (UF, project leader)

They tried to involve all possible stakeholders in their attempt to build alternative approaches to migrant integration and through their proactive engagement also became recognised as capable actors whose services were procured for other projects. For instance, they became a subcontractor for an NGO after they exposed the problems faced by refugees relocated from Malta to crisis hit Maribor in 2010 as part of the Intra-EU Relocation of Refugees from Malta (EUREMA) project:

We are talking about an EU project that had been approved one year before [...] but it was complete chaos here... banks refused to open bank accounts for them [...] [and] Social Work Centres rejected their claims for social benefits because the Ministry of Internal Affairs failed to inform these people that they have refugee status. Subcontractors were hired [...] one NGO [...] that could not cover Maribor so they hired us [...] for advocacy [...] One institute was supposed to assist them with labour market integration [...] but the refugees told us that they openly told them that there is a lack of demand and that people are without jobs [...] so the refugees quickly recognised that they were being manipulated so that the Ministry of Internal Affairs could brag about cooperating on an intra-European migration project. (UF, project leader)

Even though this was a coordinated project that also allocated funds for the coordination activities of various actors and providers, nothing worked and caused serious ills to incoming refugees. Urban Farrow's proactive tactics and engagement with top-down Internal Affairs projects thus also revealed the pitfalls of mainstream European approaches to migrant integration burden sharing.

Urban Farrows were thus trying to involve various public institutions dealing with these refugees and other migrant and social groups they worked with, but apart from local Employment Services of Slovenia (ESS) they encountered resistance from public institutions:

We encountered a lot of resistance, we approached all institutions [...], but apart from ESS, who were always open to talks, to make public statements and criticise the system [no one engaged] [...] ESS helped us with EUREMA to expose the institutional dimensions [...] [and] they revealed [...] that the ministry failed to do its job [...] and that they had problems because they lacked sufficient information. (UF, project leader)

Although they approached all relevant public institutions, they cooperated closely only with the local employment services, who were critical towards poor management and systemic flaws, and open to alternative approaches. Also, these alternative approaches then made further common partnership projects possible: "They supported us at all levels, we worked hard to increase cooperation, so they can expose more alternative approaches through us and that we get further financing with their partnership." (UF, project leader)

As was the case with Migration Office, fruitful cooperation and further partnership projects with the ESS enabled the development and further financing of alternative approaches.

Focus on Empowerment and Education

Both projects also focused on the empowerment and education of migrants, activists, and institutions. As explained by an Info Point project worker, public institutions often lack the know-how to assist migrants with complex issues that fall under several policy domains:

A big problem seems to be that administrative workers are not well informed [...] These are complex things, and an act of deregistration can cause great harm to migrant workers. There is too little sharing of information and cooperation amongst all those who are involved in these problematic [...] 7-8 institutions and their employees [...] In my opinion it is not only a problem that migrants lack information, but that the people who are involved in this issue lack knowledge. (IP, project worker)

Due to this structural institutional incapacity to deal with the complex issues of migrants, both MO and UF also went some way to educate public servants. Urban Farrows

had already adopted a pedagogical approach at their direct interventions, educating administration clerks on what practices to adopt to actually assist migrants within the established legal framework: “We educated them on what they can and cannot do. We published an information booklet. A combination of law and their strategies. The law says this, but you do that. Therefore, we advise you to change your practice.” (UF, project leader)

With that aim in mind they also published an information booklet in several languages including Slovenian. While the other languages were intended for migrants, the Slovenian version was targeted at institutions to reflect on their poor practices towards migrants with diverse statuses: “We published it in four languages [...] [and the] Slovenian language was primarily for institutions, because we recognised that there are many servants who don’t have a clue.” (UF, project leader)

Furthermore, Migration Office organised events for institutions, trainings for activists/volunteers, workshops for migrants, and prepared various multi-lingual publications tailored to specific migrant groups, such as migrant workers, posted workers, refugees and asylum seekers (Svetovalnica za migrante, 2015). They taught migrants about their rights, work, and violations and about assistance points:

We taught them what it means to work in Slovenia, how to go about finding employment, what violations they can face, what are the symptoms, what is permitted and what isn’t, what is illegal work, what is voluntary work, and of course [we gave them] our contact information if they need anything. (MO, project worker)

They used various educational methods, such as trainings and workshops, but also less conventional ones, such as illustrations and social media, in order to make sure that the information was properly understood and reached diverse, multi-lingual migrant groups (Samaluk, 2017b). Moreover, they broadened migrants’ social networks and assisted with their labour market integration: “In these years I assisted around 15 people to find work. I started [...] involving people as volunteers because this is the best way to expand their network of acquaintances [...] and to get the sense of environment and start integrating in it.” (MO, project worker)

Urban Farrows also organised empowerment workshops to increase migrants’ networks and educate them on how to use information-communication technologies to find useful information: “We introduced them to established networks, such as Invisible Workers of the World [...]. We introduced them to their webpage and useful information there, which comes from workers themselves.” (UF, project leader)

All in all, both projects approached integration as a multi-way process, empowered migrants through education and network building, and benchmarked professional standards for a networked, cross-sectional, and complex service provision.

Unsustainable EU Project Funds and Changing Priorities

Both integration projects were relying on unsustainable EU funds, which had limited timeframes and were linked to financial cycles with specific priorities. The ECOC funding of Urban Farrows lasted for two and a half years and later all its projects became integrated into the Centre of Alternative and Autonomous Production (CAAP), established in 2012, where the already mentioned new partnership projects with the ESS enabled the continuation of their work with specific vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, reliance on project funds also encourages internal competition, which CAAP tried to overcome, not always successfully, and that caused frustration, fluctuation and even the exits of leading activists:

We established CAAP and there was a lot of talk... how we could fairly compete on the market [...]. [The competition is] brutal. This is why I left the NGO scene [...]. When new projects came, we also [...] faced internal competition [...]. We tried to establish a fairer system within an unfair system, but this did not always work. (UF, project leader)

Also, Migration Office's core reliance on ESF, which lasted for five continuous years, compromised its work in 2015, when the European financial cycle and its funding priorities were coming to an end. Within the new financial perspective, the integration of TCNs and asylum seekers was removed from the ESF and moved exclusively under the Home Affairs Fund AMIF: "ESF is now key for the area of training, for this type of inclusion, while AMIF is for their [TNCs] integration [...]. With ESF we can do long-term stories, AMIF is more short-term" (policy maker 1).

This shift in funding priorities marks a return to the mainstream approach to migrant integration marked by short-termism and the strict divisions of tasks and financing among diverse, yet interrelated policy domains, which is further enforced through EU funding rules: "On the EU level there should be no duplication of content, there should be no double financing." (policy maker 1)

In this regard another policy maker explains that these regulations for the usage of funds are "about ticking the box" and in practice cause that several ministries "deal with migration, but no one really" (policy maker 2). While policy makers do realise that there are needs for more complex service provision, this is hindered by rigid rules as well as a lack of agency and political will to defy them.

Therefore, attempts by Migration Office and its partner Info Point for Foreigners to convince policymakers to include social integration of TCNs into the future ESF perspective as well were unsuccessful. As a result, Info Point closed down in September 2015, creating a void that can again be exploited by some employers: "Unscrupulous employers are the ones who are very happy about Info Point closing down, they now again became the only source of information for their employees." (IP, project leader)

It was not rare that migrant workers were charged by employers to sort out their documents and Info Point could intercept these criminal offences and report them to law enforcement. Moreover, the ending of the project also meant the loss of experienced staff who had already developed the know-how and established networks, which are rare within public institutions: “I simply cannot understand the rationality behind it [...]. They will now start developing the network from scratch [...] [and] they will have to learn everything from scratch.” (MO, project leader)

Moreover, the inability of policy makers to turn these projects into more sustainable programs also forced Migration Office to stop working under the trade union umbrella and become an NGO. Until the end of that year, Migration Office was supported by the confederation, but then lost its funding and project workers. Nevertheless, its survival was ensured by its leader, who was prepared to start anew and in January 2016 turned Migration Office into an independent NGO. Under the name of Workers’ Counselling Office, it has employed new workers and today successfully continues its work with a slightly broader focus on all vulnerable workers and wider social groups.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has explored innovative migrant integration projects in Slovenia that have been developing under wider EU governance and its funding mechanisms. The findings show that broader EU funding streams, which offer long-term financing and are not specifically targeted at the integration of TCNs, drew the development of innovative approaches to migrant integration initiated by proactive activists. These approaches have been characterised by fruitful partnerships, which enable needs-based, cross-sectional, and networked provision that empowers migrants and increases their rights to participate in welfare states’ compromise. As a consequence, these innovative approaches also benchmarked professional norms and standards for the protection and integration of migrants, and as such also increased institutional capacities and the know-how to deal with complex and cross-sectional issues faced by various categories of migrants. This article thus contributes to critical adult education research, which understands integration as “a two-way process involving mutual accommodation and change” not only on the part of migrants but also host societies (Morrice et al., 2017, p. 130). Its added value is especially in emphasising the need for a *multi-way integration process* that includes not only migrants but the relevant institutions, public servants, professionals, and host societies as a whole. The focus on these innovative projects revealed serious institutional incapacity to address complex migrant issues and thus the need to move away from segregated mainstream approaches and to educate public servants to offer networked, cross-sectional provision that will not hinder but increase migrants’ rights and capabilities for integration.

While the studied projects offered an innovative example of how this can be achieved, their core reliance on EU funding streams made them unsustainable or reliant on the work of a few devoted leading activists. This article provides new evidence to existent research

(Samaluk, 2017b; Samaluk & Kall, forthcoming), showing that EU funding fosters innovative yet unsustainable approaches to migrant integration. The limited timeframes of the EU funded projects and their changing priorities thus resulted in the loss of established networks, capacities, and know-how. In this regard the findings show that the shift in EU funding priorities was marked by a return to the mainstream approach to migrant integration. Although policy makers have recognised the needs and were in principle supportive of these innovative projects, clashes over jurisdictions and funding streams and bureaucratic rules for the usage of European funds initiated a return to mainstream approaches to migrant integration characterised by segregated funding and provision that acts more as a box ticking exercise for pre-set services than as needs-based support for migrants facing complex issues.

This article thus contributes fresh insights to existent research on EU's migrant integration policies (Carmel, 2012; Carmel & Cerami, 2012). It shows that these need to move beyond the rationale of economic utility and security, towards multi-way integration across policy domains and service provisions. This entails various categories of non-EU migrants becoming and staying included within broader social affairs policy domains supported through the ESF and other non-home affairs EU and integral funding streams. Moreover, the article demonstrates that as in the area of broader welfare provision (Greer et al., 2019; Samaluk, 2017a), the reliance on EU funding alone cannot secure the continuous provision of complex services needed for a multi-way integration process. There is thus a need to integrate these innovative approaches into regular, integrally funded provision. While this research was done some time ago and within a rapidly changing context, its findings are still relevant today as they reveal new opportunity structures and innovative tactics for a multi-way, holistic and non-essentialist integration process needed to address the issues emerging within our increasingly diverse and multicultural societies.

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