

PROJECT BREAK!
GUIDELINES FOR
PLANNING THE MEDIA
INTERVENTION: LESSONS
FROM THE PROJECT

RASI toimetised nr. 9

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ÜLIKOOL

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Preface

The following guidelines derive from the experiences of the BREAK! project.

The BREAK! project piloted the possibilities to combat harmful stereotypes related to gender and occupations, by using large-scale cross-media intervention together with educational activities. The evaluation of the process and outcomes of this project may give valuable lessons for successive analogous endeavours.

We have distinguished the recommendations by target groups:

- Young people entering labour market and those whose task it is to support them
- Media intervention designers
- Those who assess the impact of interventions

While background to these recommendations is discussed in other project reports (see Report 1 and Report 2) and full process review is accessible in a separate document (Report 3 available on project website), the following guidelines derive from and acknowledge the experiences of the BREAK! project.

Guidelines are prepared by Maaris Raudsepp and Triin Roosalu from Tallinn University, with the help of Marti Taru, Kadri Aavik, Jüri Kruusvall. Our gratitude is due also to other members of the project team, without whom there would be no experience to write about.

Further information on the project is available <http://bre-ak.eu>

1. Recommendations for those who support educational and occupational choices of the young

Accept diversity and understand it

The population (as well as each of its subgroups, including special target groups) is heterogeneous in gender related dispositions and practices and any interventions have different effect on various segments of population. It is necessary to inform people about this heterogeneity and its sources (interests, traditions, stereotypes, group positioning, etc.). The change of the proportions of gender attitudes in society and in different subgroups (e.g. gender liberal, gender conservative and gender blind segments) should be monitored. Enablers and barriers to understanding and practicing gender equality in specific groups and contexts should be studied.

Young people: awareness, self-efficacy and media literacy

Analysis of the reception of the TV series revealed that self-confidence and perseverance of the main character impressed and inspired majority of our respondents. The empowering effect, increased sense of self-efficacy of young people may be an important outcome of the intervention. Belief in oneself and one's capacity to succeed helps to overcome prejudices and harmful stereotypes as external barriers and make optimal and authentic choices. Social cognitive theory is applicable to develop interventions targeted at increasing individuals' self-efficacy in a variety of areas, for example, promoting aspirations and interests in children and adolescents, expanding career choice options, fostering positive and realistic outcome expectations, setting specific goals, coping with barriers and building supports.

It is necessary to support developing of critical attitude to the (social) media content and media influencers and promote media literacy among young people. On the other hand: while young were generally receptive to the media content (the TV series), they were rather inaccessible from the traditional media communication, thus extra attention should be put on channelling to this target group information about the new content in the ways they could be able to notice this and become familiar with it.

Learning facilitators: awareness, self-efficacy and support

Our experience showed that teachers in formal settings and youth workers in non-formal settings actually need training and support to handle the topic of gender equality and gender sensitive career choices. It is thus crucial to

- Help to raise awareness by providing continuous training courses on gender and career issues to teachers and youth workers
- Involve teachers in preparing additional teaching materials and sharing their teaching experiences.
- Promote teachers' self-efficacy and provide them with sustainable support in teaching gender and career related issues.
- Variety of learning materials should be made available for daily use in formal as well as non-formal learning settings.

Career specialists: awareness and support

Often, career specialists focus on other, seemingly more pressing matters when discussing learning and occupational choices with labour market (future) entrants, whilst attention to gender dimension gets buried under these or assumed. Instead, and to prepare thus avoid future disappointments, gender aspects should be discussed in the career contexts. Thus:

- Continue to prepare materials and trainings for career advisors on the issues of gender to help them to give gender sensitive career guidance
- Create sites for discussion and sharing experiences.

Parents: awareness and social support

Parents should be able to support their children in making career choices but are often themselves helpless in the turbulent environment. Thus:

- Help to raise awareness by providing training courses on gender issues and career choices for parents of young children,
- Create and moderate sites for discussion and sharing experiences between parents.
- Be attentive to each child! Help to find their calling among traditional or non-traditional occupational choices!
- Be aware of heterogeneity of gendered practices and dispositions in society. Be aware of the normativity of gender equality in European countries, and that the subject is integrated into school curriculum.

Employers: awareness and support

Studies indicate low awareness among employers concerning their responsibilities to promote gender equality and avoid discrimination at work. Thus:

- Help to raise awareness by providing training courses for managers where laws and regulations on gender equality and non-discrimination are brought to focus.
- Create and moderate sites for discussion and sharing experiences.
- Be aware of heterogeneity of gendered practices and dispositions in society. Be aware of the normativity of gender equality in European countries.
- Be aware of gender and occupational stereotypes and dare to combat them.
- Create opportunities for non-traditional choices among employees.

2. Recommendations for designers of (cross)media interventions

Public broadcasting has important role

Public broadcasting channels can be effectively used for entertainment education campaigns that are aimed at reducing prejudices and combatting stereotypes. It is possible their role is even more important in the time of media diversity.

Follow institutional regulations

Be responsible in producing media content addressed (or accessible) to young people by following media guidelines for public broadcast organisations.

Take into account the media context

The produced TV series appeared in the context of usual audio-visual media, filled with stereotypical approaches to gender and occupations, any social campaign has to compete with stereotypical media content.

Apply co-creation models

Involve young people – your main target group - in the project design, discuss ideas with different segments of the target groups, and find out the topics that really matter to them. Do expect diversity and make space for this.

Be culturally sensitive

Pay attention to peculiarities of reception among cultural minority groups: include representatives of cultural minorities in the story and avoid unnecessarily touching culturally sensitive topics or phenomena. For instance, in our project, uncensored translation of rap songs in the TV series evoked negative reaction in part of the Russian speaking audience. Try not to neglect cultural minorities in any components of the project.

Learn from audience feedback

Use systematically reception analysis of TV series among young people and modify your next activities according to the audience feedback.

Choose appropriate channels

According to our experience, public TV and radio are not the best channels for reaching young audience, while they are very good for reaching middle-aged and older audience. Availability of the campaign content on YouTube and podcasts enables to widen the reach. Alternative sites (for example, impro-theatre, concerts) could be used for reaching young people with entertainment-

educational messages. Ideally, co-creation possibilities would be provided, while authenticity supported in those environments.

Embed positive role models in stories

In mass media campaigns educative messages are embedded in narrative storytelling. Create and present positive role models in fictional and documentary media. Tell stories of people overcoming obstacles and show possible solutions, including those that might need social and institutional support. (E.g. to encourage men to take up teaching or caring careers, and women to go into STEM professions, and overcome difficulties stemming from their non-traditional choices).

Involve celebrities in catalysing the message

Think of the ways how to best involve the celebrities. Our lesson: in project BREAK! well-known actors, artists and sportsmen performed in the TV series and they were used for promotion of the product. The highly esteemed script-writer Martin Albus was awarded a prize for the best TV series script in 2019, which was an additional boost to the series. However, celebrities were not active in transmitting the campaign messages. Instead, young non-professional actors performing in the series participated in promotion tours and actively discussed the topic of gender stereotyping. The sense of authenticity that their involvement provided was extremely relevant for positive reception, while the opportunity to involve celebrities in promoting the message was not used.

Recognise and consider the mechanisms of impact

Different sociological and socio-psychological theories stress the decisive role of interpersonal and group discussions as mediators of change. The experience with the project showed that group discussions were very effective means to support target group involvement. Thus,

- Produce discussion provoking content or launch catalysing discussions in (social) media.
- Promote and moderate viewers' reflective feedback.

Use comprehensive approach to intervention

Our intervention included many different elements (fictional TV series and supporting printed and online educational materials, teacher training sessions), which complemented each other. TV series without comments and reflection could not fully realize their educational potential. Teacher training without supporting TV series where the messages were embedded in narrative form, could have remained less efficient. So, the complementarity and interrelation between different components of intervention is necessary. High interconnectivity characterizes cross-media interventions, multi-channel social campaigns and networks of interventions may also have desired effects if different components support each other.

Consider the viability of the project

For a sustained impact an intervention should be viable, connected to other projects with the same agenda by creating coalition of projects. Possible links to similar projects like Hypatia or Võrdne Tulevik (FB) in Estonia, or Career-rocket.eu in EU could enhance the positive effect.

Consider possibilities of follow-up projects, for example BREAK! could evolve further by producing the continuation to the TV series, elaborating on teaching materials together with high school and university students, involving teachers in producing and sharing additional teaching materials and alternative endings of the TV series, continuing teacher training courses, providing sustained support to teachers who may feel insecure teaching gender related topics elaboration of the existing teaching materials (for example, extracting relevant episodes from the series together with alternative endings to be used in teacher trainings and schools).

3. Recommendations for impact assessment

Choose your approaches carefully!

There is no single way to understand the social impact of a mass media multichannel campaign. There are multiple ways to gather quantitative and qualitative data concerning different levels of campaign effects – from immediate reactions of the audience in real time to long-term changes of social practices. However, considering that in-depth impact requires additional activities while long term impact will only be possible to cumulate over time and requires continuous exposure to educational and entertaining content, while the target groups are also exposed to other kinds of stimuli with same or alternative messages, measuring impact should always be done carefully and thoughtfully.

Consider the efficient-enough ways for teamwork

Heterogeneous team, comprising members from different countries and different disciplines, as well as different genders, ages and gender dispositions is an asset as it enables to enrich each other and to learn collaboratively. Special attention should be given to teambuilding and team management. In the beginning the participants' expectations to the project and to each other should be stated explicitly, the work process should be monitored and regulated in the way that empowers all participants, and final self-reflective feedback is necessary for process evaluation from different viewpoints. On the other hand, do not over-emphasise efficiency in the creative project. Thus, consider carefully your own limits for flexibility and uncertainty, then learn those that the team members are used to, and find a solution for planning and monitoring that is comfortable to everyone – and still supports getting the results.

Plan in advance: apply behavioural approach

Behavioural approach means proceeding in small steps, through validating intermediate results, and making corrections, if necessary. Pre-assessing the content and form of intervention materials from the viewpoint of the target groups and all interested groups is advisable. In our project, TV series script writer consulted the expert team members and his own children, and as a result, made many corrections in the script. Students as representatives of a target group were involved in designing cross-media products (photo exhibition, thematic notebook). In a LIFE project the method of co-creation with young people was used successfully and various additional educational materials were produced (a theatre production, educational videos and social media activation). Specificity of BREAK! project in which mass media products are accompanied by teaching materials and their probable use in school classes, any questionable solutions made in the TV series can be used as a raw material for classroom discussions, thus the mistakes can be corrected.

Acknowledge, respect and discuss contextual enablers and barriers

Take into consideration processes in the socio-cultural macro-context. Gender related topics are ideologically loaded: standing for egalitarianism, equal opportunities, social (gender) equality, respecting human rights and human dignity in everyone may become problematic in the context of rising right-wing populism with re-strengthening of gender stereotypes. Depending on the

context, different styles of messages may be appropriate (for example, straightforward and simple or more nuanced and ambivalent, serious or humorous, using business case as an argument or relying on equality discourse), tailored for different dispositional segments of population. Totally new strategies for promoting gender equality in the adverse macro context have been proposed, and it is probably useful to be aware of these, as well as discuss and use these in your work.