Gender equality

Report
02-16.09.2017
SAIL - Baltic University Network

Supervisor:

Jonas Edlund, Umeå University, Sweden

Group members:

Theresa Köhler, Ecology and Environmental Protection, University of Zittau, Germany
Lotte Suveri, Geography and Sustainable Development, University of Turku, Finland
Michaela Furdova, European Studies and Regional Development, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Slovakia
Hanna Alhawash, Electrical Engineering, Lodz University of Technology, Poland, Palestine
Vratislav Gorcik, Information and Communication Technology, VSB - Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic
Jan Rogowski, Finance and Accounting, Warsaw School of Economics, Poland
1. Abstract
Gender equality is one of the sustainable development goals of United Nations. United Nations (UN 2017) states that gender equality is a foundation for a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable world. This project examined gender inequality through design thinking methodology. Interviews about gender inequality were made. Based on these interviews a prototype to solve gender inequality problem was developed. Prototype is an educative program that would happen in all age-levels of education such as kindergarten, school and universities. Kindergarten program is an educative puppet show, for schools material book about gender equality is produced and for universities students need to do voluntary work in schools talking about gender inequalities by their experience. This should be obligatory for all university students.

2. Introduction
This project is part of the SAIL 2017 course organized within the framework of the Baltic University Program (BUP). The course consisted of 30 students and seven teachers covering altogether ten different countries. The course started in Poland, Szczecin on the 2nd of September and finished in Scotland, Edinburgh on 16th of September. The aims of the course are to study sustainable development and learn to sail. The students were divided into five groups and each group were assigned a project on sustainable development, each covering a specific topic. In general, each topic was supposed to be approached by employing design thinking methodology.

3. Background
This project is about gender equality. Gender equality is one of the sustainable development goals of the United Nations. United Nations (UN 2017) states that even though gender equality is not a fundamental human right it is a foundation for a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable world. For a sustainable world, to have a gender equal educational system is important. Another important part is to end discrimination and violence. Women and girls suffer from discrimination and violence worldwide and one of the most common human right violations is the violence against women and girls (UNFPA 2017). It is estimated that one out of three women in the world experiences physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime (UNFPA 2017). Gender equality means providing women and girls equal possibilities to education, health care and work as well as to have equal representation in political and economic decision-making processes (UN 2017).

When considering the question of gender equality, the emphasis is often on women’s rights since worldwide women and girls suffer from discrimination. It is important to distinguish sex
(biological) from gender, as the latter is the result of social processes. Gender is defined by society, laws, personal surroundings, and education. Gender defines how men and women should behave, be characterized, and judged (Korbik 2014).

Feminism claims that inequalities between the genders are based on patriarchal structures of the society. Most of known societies are patriarchal as all major social institutions such as the economy, political system, family and religion are dominated by men. According to Powell (2012), it is important that feminism expose how male values and views of the social and natural world become dominant and taken – more or less – for granted. Patriarchy perpetuates the everyday life of human beings. To move towards a more gender equal society, women’s perspective should be taken into consideration to make substantial social, political and economic changes (Powell 2012).

4. Methods and analyses
In this project, design thinking methodology was used. Design thinking relates to methods were creative thinking is developed by a step by step formula.

The first step is to understand and identify problems – both in relation to the topic and to the group work. The identified problems related to themes as: “talking about the topic can be very personal and depend on experiences of the individual”, “women have lower expectations in physical activities”, “women’s rights are different in different cultures” and there is “a general gender pay gap, suggesting that women earn less than men”.

In the next step, we constructed interview questions related to our topic. The questions asked were the following:

1. Have you experienced gender inequality? When, Where? (At work, in the university etc.)
2. In a relationship who should pay more, men or women? Why? (Restaurant, bills etc.)
3. Did you experience sexism? How?
4. What in your opinion defines gender?
5. How gender inequality should be solved?

13 people were interviewed, five men and eight women. To sort the data, all the answers were written on a big sheet of paper. To analyze the extent to which broader patterns could be detected in the data, answers were sorted according to question number four “What in your opinion defines gender?” This question was perceived as central to the topic by the group. When analyzing the responses, we found three different ways of defining gender:

1. “Biology”
2. “Mind”
3. “Biology and mind”

We begin with the first group. Interestingly, mostly men answered biology as the defining character for gender. They had experienced gender inequality related to gender quotas (places for women) in jobs or education. Also, another inequality related to night clubs, parties, etc., where women sometimes can enter for free. Sexism was experienced through jokes about women’s skills and the pressure of how women should look like. All people in this group agreed that when paying a bill in, say, a restaurant, it should be divided equally. To solve gender equality this group promoted the idea that the main way to reach gender equality is to stop talking about the subject and, over time, the problem will disappear.

The second group embraces those who answered mind as defining character of gender. The group was dominated by women. They had experienced gender inequality mainly related to jobs - men get paid more or more easily get a job. According to this group the bill in restaurant should be paid equally. Sexism was experienced by pressure of dressing in certain way, hearing jokes about their gender or by being commented on the street by their looks. All the people in this group agreed that gender inequality should be solved through education.

The third group consisted of a very limited number of people and it was not possible to detect any general pattern except that they think that bills should be paid equally, but if men want to pay more they can.

Next step in design thinking was to “Define”. The strategy chosen by the group was to make a persona based on our interview results. This persona should ideally represent “customers” of our project. The persona was created in the Point of View (POV) part where the following two questions were answered:

**What?** - *Break gender traditions and stop allowing sexism*

**Why?** - *Because there is still gender inequality and it is an injustice.*

Our next step was to brainstorm ideas that could solve gender inequalities. Many ideas were presented, and in the end the consensus of the group was that education should be the main instrument – prototype – to decrease gender inequality.

5. Results

As mentioned above, the outcome of the design thinking analysis was that a prototype related to education would be a suitable tool for solving gender inequality issues. We developed a prototype educational program for kinder gardens, schools, and universities. We believe that education should start from an early age since gender roles and behavior are learned in
childhood from parents and social surroundings. In addition, informing children on this topic can help to change opinions of their parents, especially in relation to home work.

Below follow some ideas about how these educational programs could be designed.

Kinder garden program:
- Puppet theater that travels around kinder gardens teaching about gender equality by short plays.

Schools program:
- Manual “Workbook Gender Equality”
- Passing a test related to gender equality

University program
- Voluntary hours to go schools and kinder gardens
- Passing a test related to gender equality

The puppet show was presented to people who – after the show – were interviewed. The remaining parts of the prototype were explained orally. The feedback given from the interviews concentrated on ideas how to improve the prototype. Here, we got suggestions that there should be more examples of untraditional fairytale stories mixing the hero and princess positions, as well as more examples of stereotypical male and female behavior where roles were changed. There were also suggestions on how social media could be used to connect students in gender equality related issues. Based on these comments we extended the puppet theater play. The group found it quite challenging to find examples of gender inequality that would be suitable to present for kinder garden children. Eventually, we selected topics related to household work, considering colors as gendered, and gendered professions.

6. Conclusions
Gender equality creates a base for society where everybody gets an equal chance to access education, health care and work. Especially in the developing world, to promote women’s rights are particularly important for a sustainable society. Also, gender equality in politics is vital for sustainable decision-making processes.

The gender inequality issues were an interesting topic for a group work and it included many challenges. Firstly, group members understood gender equality issues in different ways and the topic caused lot of conversation both within the group and between students in general. Using design thinking in such a work was a challenge because gender inequality is a large social
problem which is difficult to solve by designing prototypes. Generally speaking, design thinking was an interesting tool that might fit better into technical-problem-solving issues than large-scale social problems. Developing solutions to gender inequality was a quite interesting task, because of the different views between men and women also the different countries and experiences which every member made.

**Sources:**

