



Workshop 2

Skills and lifelong learning for democratic societies

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Report

Ms Raffaella Kihrer, Vice President of the Lifelong Learning Platform and Deputy Secretary General of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), opened the workshop by bringing attention to the European Year of Skills (EYS). But the framing of the EYS reveals a vision that positions education as the sparring partner of the labour market, and that focuses on the outcomes of learning rather than on the learning process itself. On the contrary, education has proven to be a key tool in our belt to build inclusive societies, active and critical citizens, as well as democracy itself. And - she concluded - even if we want to adopt such a reductionist approach, several studies show that the skills that we really need for the future are not job-specific skills, but rather those same key competences and transversal skills that are useful in all walks of life.

After this insightful introduction, **Mr Theodor Grassos**, Secretary-General of EVBB, started the panel discussion by praising the role of a democratic society within Europe in these times of challenges. And how to ensure that our democracy stays like this? Through education, he stated. He then went on to introduce the panellists.

The first discussant, **Dr Nazik Behishenaly**, Researcher at the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) discussed the theory of 'democratic spill over and looked at the extent to which the practice of democracy in education environments and the workplace is an important feature to instil notions of democratic decision-making systems in learners. In her view, there is a mutual relation between key competencies and democracy in that the former reinforce the latter, and *vice versa*. Democratic structures - whether in schools or cooperatives - foster critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperation and teamwork while also showing they work best to represent a common interest in our society.

On this topic, **Ms Tatjana Babrauskiene**, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee, offered an overview of the debate within the EESC leading to the adoption of the Opinion on the European Year of Skills. She praised the involvement of stakeholders such as LLLP in the process, as well as the transversal support to enlarging a narrow-minded and labour-market oriented vision. She highlighted the hope that the same involvement of stakeholders could also inform the whole EYS but, judging from the way national coordinators were appointed, this challenge is to be left unmet. Finally, she brought in an example of a horizontal and democratic education system: that of Singapore.

Mr Grassos asked the next speaker, **Mr Carlo Scatoli**, Senior Expert on the EU Skills Agenda, European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, what opportunities to develop transversal skills are in place at the moment. Mr Scatoli passed on to describe the new Commission's initiatives such as the Individual Learning Accounts - which give people of working age a budget to spend on training to improve their skills and employability - and Micro-Credentials- which certify the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, for example a short course or training.

After a short exchange with the panellists, Mr Grassos invited **Mr Andrea Lapegna**, Deputy Director of the Lifelong Learning Platform, to take the floor for an interactive session. Through the means of Mentimeter, he proceeded to poll the audience about skills and their role in building inclusive and democratic societies. Participants took the exercise in an interactive and informal way. As part of the main outcomes, participants expressed the view that skills are chiefly important to help citizens navigate their own society; that provisions for key competences should be held in higher consideration than job-specific skills; that informal and non-formal learning environments are best-placed to develop such competences; and that civil society and social partners should get to have a say in EU policies.

Mr Grassos then turned to **Ms Astri Liland**, Board Member of Cooperatives Europe and Head of competence and training at the Norwegian Agriculture Cooperatives association (*Norsk Landbrukssamvirke*). She invited the public to talk together, interact with one another, and start listening to each other: it is through social interaction that we can build meaningful structures and democratic values, as well as to bring the sought-after change in our societies. Cooperation starts with common visions and common goals, but this is shaped through human dialogue, and the keys are education and skills development.

The workshop produced the following recommendations:

1. Education and training are not a matter of government only.

We must adopt a holistic and cooperative approach on education and training. To face our current challenges, we need to shape skills provision in partnership with civil society and all social partners who have political capital, concrete knowledge and understanding of the current needs and shortcomings. Introducing reforms in a holistic manner is the only option. By listening to those on the ground, building bridges across partners and by leaving no one behind, we will build truly inclusive and sustainable learning societies.

2. Transversal competences are the key for citizens' conscious and active participation in society.

While education and training policies often focus on job-specific skills, transversal competences are the true backbone of a participatory and deliberative democracy: cooperation, critical thinking, problem-solving, democratic and collective management, conflict-resolution. These competences are based on common European values: democracy, solidarity, inclusion. They allow citizens to consciously participate in society and actively engage in our economy. We must focus on these transversal skills through formal and non-formal education, we must practise these in the workplace and take example on alternative governance models like cooperatives for example. But above all, we must work on boosting and recognizing these competences, otherwise they will remain invisible and so will our efforts to adapt to this fast-paced world.