

LIFELONG LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES

LLLP - POSITION PAPER - 2020



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LLLPL designs its positions through different activities, but it also relies on the expertise of partner and member organisations with special knowledge on the topic. Experts from the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI), Gaia Education and LLLP Pool of Experts contributed their views during a series of online meetings in August 2020. We would like to thank the participants listed below:

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has been a year like no other in recent decades. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruption to societies around the world, at the same time as the human-induced climate crisis continues to cause devastating effects through extreme weather events around the world. This is also a year of transition on many fronts as it marks the beginning of what the United Nations has called the “Decade of Action”¹ for Achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and an important moment for the European Union (EU) as its institutions, policies and programmes have just undergone or will soon undergo renewal. It also marks the year of the European twin transitions: green and digital mainstreamed throughout European strategies. For education and training in Europe it’s also the year of an ambitious agenda for Achieving the European Education Area by 2025. All these developments serve as an important backdrop for reflections on the future of education in Europe and beyond.

«If still more education is to save us, it would have to be education of a different kind: an education that takes us into the depth of things» E.F. Schumacher

The COVID-19 crisis has severely impacted education and training systems due to sudden lockdown measures propelling a shift to remote and online learning that most educators and learners were ill prepared for. This has led to heated debates on issues such as inequalities in education, investment in teacher training, digital infrastructure and learners’ physical and mental well-being². However, the ongoing crisis also offers a unique opportunity to think critically about the relevance of education for modern societies. Is what and how we learn relevant to our lives and the world around us? Is what and how we learn adequately preparing us for the array of global challenges facing human civilisation? Perhaps the inadequate preparation also lies in the fact that many of us are not learning enough, or at all, after we leave the compulsory education system.

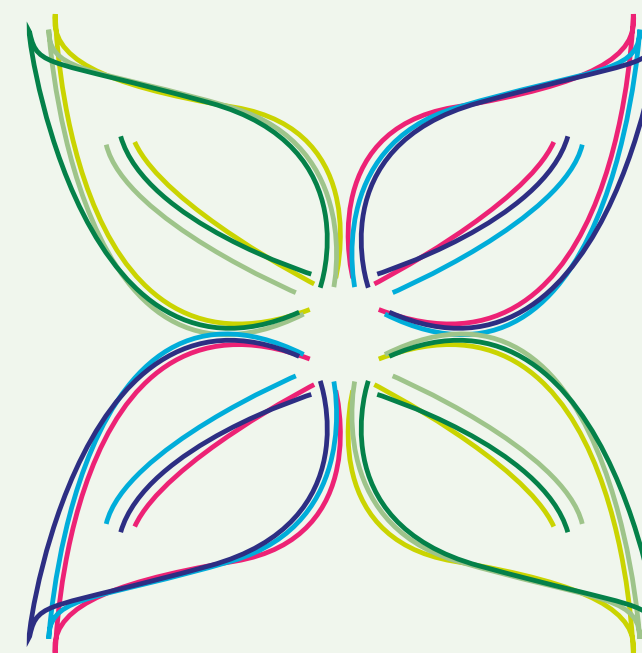
«The volume of education continues to increase, yet so do pollution, exhaustion of resources, and the dangers of ecological catastrophe» E.F. Schumacher

These questions trigger a reflection on the sustainability of our ways of living and learning and how this relates to broader society. This reflection should be framed

within the ongoing debate on sustainable development informed by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 4 calls for countries to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. This goal has been highlighted as a key enabler for all the other SDGs by UNESCO as well as the EU in various texts, including the 2018 Council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning³. Indeed, each of the SDGs has at least one target that indicates some form of education, training or learning. After all, learning in its various forms is able to empower people and engage them with worldwide issues and challenges in ways that other sectors cannot.

This position paper seeks to encourage a debate and provide recommendations on the strategic role of education, training

and lifelong learning in paving the way towards a sustainable future for Europe and beyond, including how this may be reflected in the implementation of the European Skills Agenda, European Education Area, Digital Education Action Plan, European Research Area, European Green Deal, EU Recovery Plan and other EU strategies. We believe the EU should be the champion in implementing the SDGs and in demonstrating the valuable contribution that learning in all its forms, supported by holistic and long-term policies, can make to achieving them. Sustainability should not just be an aspiration for countries of the Global South but a guiding principle for the EU and its Member States as part of their global collective responsibility towards the planet and the well-being of their people.



¹ United Nations (2020) Decade of Actions: Ten years to transform our world.

² LLLPlatform (2020) Statement: COVID19 - Mental health and well-being of all learners come first.

³ Council of the European Union. (2018). Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR POLICY-MAKERS



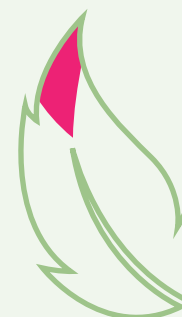
Education is a human right for all throughout life and therefore, we call on Member States to put in place lifelong learning entitlements providing all citizens with learning opportunities for both personal and professional development. Thus ensuring all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development at all ages and at any time in their life.

Policy coherence and alignment has never been so crucial in making sustainability a priority which is mainstreamed across Europe and the world. Europe is a key player but cannot be successful in its actions unless its internal policy areas are coherent and aligned with the international agenda, such as the SDGs. It's all about connecting the dots between policies and strategies within Europe and globally. This alignment should consider thoroughly the four dimensions : economic, social, environmental and democracy.



Incorporate Sustainable Development in education and training policies and programmes such as the European Education Area, Digital Education Action Plan, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal target 4.7 among others. This means mainstreaming sustainable development education and training in Erasmus+, ESF+, Horizon Europe and creating synergies between these programmes. Developing strategies and instruments in order to scale up existing programmes and multi-stakeholder networks at community level.

Make lifelong learning the primary guiding principle for policies related to education and training, as learning does not only have transformative potential at one level or within one sector of education, but across all forms (formal, non-formal and informal) and all levels (from early childhood to adulthood and into old age). Transform learning and training environments in order to integrate sustainability principles into education and training settings.



Promote a green mindset in skills, education and training programmes, beyond the labour market, as an important area of citizenship competence. This should be accompanied by further support for learning aimed at promoting climate and environmental literacy, sustainable lifestyles and understanding of human-nature interdependencies. The EU should upscale and broaden the scope of initiatives addressing these issues and provide further support for learning providers active in this field.

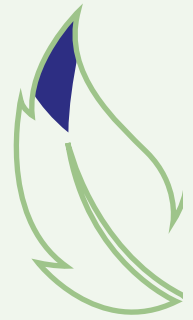
Provide long-term support and training for educators across all sectors in adopting pedagogical approaches suited to sustainable development education, including active, participatory, deliberative and learner-centred methods. This is based on viewing learners as active agents of change rather than passive recipients of pre-defined knowledge. This way, the development of transformative learning, pedagogy or andragogy, in the case of adult learners, can be supported. This would result in empowering not only educators but learners too, so they can critically assess beliefs, values, and knowledge in order to create new knowledge together, aiming to radically transform education systems.



Provide continued support for the development of the “learning to learn” competence across all sectors including further research into learning motivation and the practical implementation of the new LifeComp framework (for the personal, social and learning to learn key competence), with particular attention to the crucial foundation of learning established in early childhood.

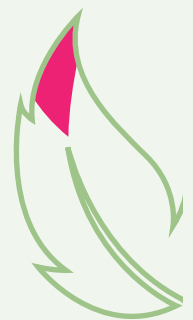
Promote cooperation between different learning sectors and generations of learners (family and intergenerational learning) in order to foster a long-term holistic view on learner development and thus lay the ground for more innovative and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning.





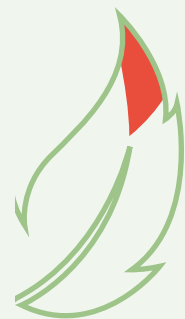
Ensure adequate, long-term funding at both European, national, regional and local level, including through the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027) and NextGenerationEU, in order to unlock the full potential of sustainable development education across all learning sectors. This could include targeted resources from schemes such as the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, Just Transition Mechanism and Recovery and Resilience Facility, to name a few. Attention should be given to building closer and more operational synergies between funding programmes and instruments so that innovation in learning is not lost to siloed-thinking and bureaucracy.

Research and science are pivotal to sustainable development, but to succeed new ways of conducting research are needed. It will be of key importance for the EU policies to build bridges between research, science and education that enhance innovation for a sustainable future for all. A transformation-oriented science-policy interface will need to be reinforced.



Citizens active participation is unquestionably linked to sustainable development. Promoting equitable, inclusive, and fair societies involves generating processes for citizen participation that imply shared decision-making and an assumption of responsibilities in favour of global sustainability. Civic education needs, therefore, to be mainstreamed through all education from early ages to later on in adult life. Recognising the role and value of civil society in creating democratic spaces for all and especially the most vulnerable needs to be part of the equation.

Considering global and local contexts for building sustainable societies in all policy initiatives. We need to invest more and further support community based lifelong learning as a gateway to experiential learning that best addresses the needs at local level and has the potential to prevent impacts at a more global level.



SUSTAINABILITY AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LEARNING



Sustainability is a concept with multiple dimensions, environmental but also social, economic and democracy. In simple terms, we can understand it as responsible use of resources or behaviour in the long-term. This is reflected in the definition of sustainable development as *“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* first set out at the UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm 1972). The role of education in this endeavour, or education for sustainable development, has attracted growing attention in the last decades. UNESCO defines it as education that *“empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education”*⁴. Much more than the transmission of sustainability-related knowledge and principles, it represents in its broadest sense *“education for social transformation with the goal of creating more sustainable societies”*⁵. Education for sustainable development

may be understood as an umbrella term for education approaches centred on the wellbeing of the planet and people, including environmental education, climate change education, consumer education and global citizenship education⁶.

Education for sustainable development reached a new milestone upon inclusion as an integral part of SDG4 in the form of target 4.7: *“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”*⁷. Although Education for sustainable development has gained this new recognition and strong foundation in global discourse, implementation of the target remains weak. Overall it is still seldom included in national education policies and curricula and the methodology for monitoring the global indicator remains unclear⁸. In addition, education for sustainable development is

⁴ UNESCO (2014) Roadmap for for Implementing the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development, p. 12

⁵ UNESCO (2012) Shaping the Education of Tomorrow: 2012 Report on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, Abridged, p. 12

⁶ Ivi, p. 65

⁷ SDG 4, Education 2030.

⁸ Education International (2019) Off Track: Educators Assess Progress Towards SDG 4

largely absent from EU policies on education and training or has only recently started to gain attention through the Erasmus+ programme (e.g. climate and environmental goals as horizontal priority in the 2019 work programme⁹), the new Skills Agenda and the European Education Area 2020.

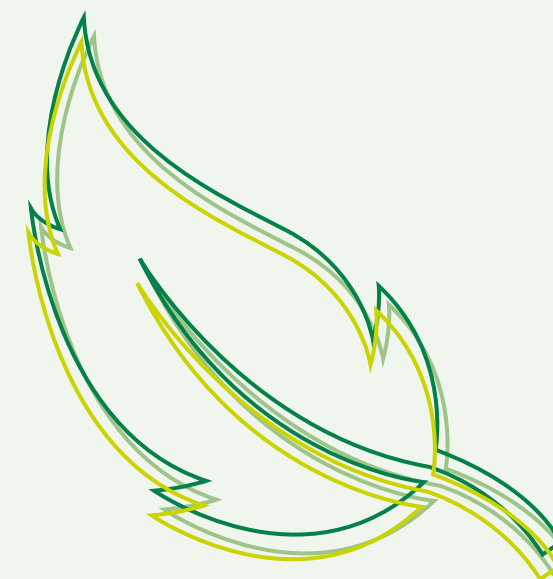
The **European Green Deal** proposed by the European Commission (EC) in December 2019 brought a new impetus to discussions at European level on sustainability-related challenges. It refers to “activating education and training” through providing support materials, facilitating exchange of good practices and the aim to prepare “a European competence framework to help develop and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development”¹⁰. Building on this, the **European Skills Agenda** published in July 2020 emphasises the importance of upskilling and reskilling to support the ‘green transition’, outlining the aim to define new tools and indicators to monitor the development of ‘green skills’ linked to professions as well as integrate environmental and climate considerations into school, higher education and vocational education and training¹¹. In addition, the **European Education Area** launched in September 2020 as part of the Education Package calls for a Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability in 2021, a European Climate Education Coalition and the greening of education

infrastructures. Furthermore, the **European Research Area** also launched in the Education Package includes investments and reforms in research to support the Green and Digital Transitions as its first priority, to support the EU’s recovery. While these are all welcome and much needed initiatives to pursue, they are just some pieces of the puzzle. They must be part of a broader, more ambitious vision on how education contributes to sustainable societies beyond its albeit important role in helping to ‘green’ the economy and labour market.

This vision must have at its heart a profound shift in the way we approach education. Mainstreaming sustainable development education across all education sectors is a significant step in this shift but it should also be framed within the imperative to make our education and training systems themselves sustainable. During our 10th edition of the Lifelong Learning Week¹², Professor Stephen Sterling outlines the concept of ‘sustainable education’ which, more than integrating sustainability-related topics and principles into curricula, denotes a shift in educational culture based on critical awareness and “*deep change in educational values, assumptions and practices*”¹³. This echoes the theory of transformative learning which means learning to “*negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others—to gain greater control over our lives as*

socially responsible, clear thinking decision makers”¹⁴. In other words, are we learning to preserve current systems, with a few tweaks here and there, or are we learning in sufficiently reflective and critical ways in order to build new sustainable systems? ‘Learning to Transform Oneself and Society’ is highlighted by UNESCO as the fifth pillar of education for the 21st century, building on the influential 1996 Delors report ‘Learning: the treasure within’¹⁵. Hence, just as the Green Deal sets forth a vision of “*deeply transformative policies*” to support the green transition, transformative policies for education are needed to harness the full transformative potential of learning. In joining the Bridge47 network in 2018, LLLP has strengthened its work in raising awareness on the importance of including SDG 4.7 in all EU policy priorities.

Such policies must take into account a number of important factors, which will be explored in this paper, but the primary guiding principle is the need to consider learning in all its forms: lifelong learning. Learning not only has transformative potential at one level or within one sector of education but this exists across all forms - formal, non-formal and informal - and across all levels - from early childhood to adulthood. Learning can happen anytime, anywhere¹⁷. In this sense, lifelong learning - learning ‘from cradle to grave’ and across all aspects of life - must be at the centre of the debate on achieving sustainable societies and all learning sectors should have a voice in this debate. Cooperation between these sectors is likewise key to unlocking the innovation required to tackle the related challenges.



⁹ Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme Implementation 2019

¹⁰ European Commission (2019) The European Green Deal, 11 December 2019. COM(2019) 640 final, p. 19.

¹¹ European Commission (2020) European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience. COM(2020) 274 final.

¹² Lifelong Learning Week 2020 - Launch Event

¹³ Sterling, S. ‘Sustainable Education – Towards a Deep Learning Response to Sustainability’ p. 66, in McCloskey, S (2015) Policy and Practice – A Development Education Review, Centre for Global Education, Belfast.

¹⁴ Mezirow, J. (2000) Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress; Jossey Bass: San Francisco, CA, USA.

¹⁵ The four pillars outlined in Delors report are 1) learning to know, 2) learning to do, 3) learning to be and 4) learning to live together. The fifth pillar ‘learning to transform oneself and society’ was later introduced by UNESCO

¹⁶ Bridge47 Envision 47 Policy Papers

¹⁷ LLLPlatform (2019) Position paper: 21st-Century Learning Environments.

GREEN LEARNING

ADOPTING A GREEN MINDSET IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Environmental sustainability remains an important area where lifelong learning can contribute to building a sustainable future, although this has gained little recognition to date. First of all, there is evidence that a higher level of educational attainment equates to increased concern with the environment. According to research for the UNESCO 2013 'Education for All Global Monitoring Report', across 29 countries 25% of people with less than secondary education expressed concern for the environment compared to 37% of people with secondary education and 46% of people with tertiary education¹⁸. Lifelong learning also contributes to the acquisition of skills which may help to facilitate the green transition, commonly known as 'green skills'. There is no clear or commonly agreed definition of green skills and evidence of such skills needs is generally lacking¹⁹.

The International Labour Organisation explains that green skills may include technical occupation specific skills (e.g. engineering), semi-technical transferable skills (e.g. project management, research)

and soft skills (e.g. problem-solving, communication, creativity)²⁰. Indeed, discussions about green skills are often centred around 'green jobs' and the 'green economy' and this is the predominant focus of the European Skills Agenda. However, besides supporting necessary shifts in industrial sectors, lifelong learning in all its forms is an equally important vehicle for instilling climate and environmental awareness or 'literacy' and the sense of responsibility, initiative and motivation to change behaviour and take action in daily life. This 'softer' dimension of green skills and how it relates to active citizenship deserves further attention in the European and national policy landscape and should be further researched so as to better understand its potential. After all, awareness of climate change and its underlying causes, support for sustainable lifestyles and a readiness to take responsibility for the environment are outlined as areas of citizenship competence in the European key competences framework²¹. This is also underlined in the NECE (Networking European Citizenship Education)²² 2020

Declaration on "A watershed moment for citizenship education in Europe" that LLLP has supported.

Furthermore, learning providers should model environmentally sustainable practices as far as possible in their own internal strategies and operations. This means responsible choices in areas such as infrastructure, heating, electricity, transportation, food waste as well as indirectly through investments linked to fossil fuel industries²³. In this respect, learning sectors have their role to play in reducing linear patterns of production and consumption, thus contributing to a circular economy. A 2019 report on circular economy strategies and roadmaps in Europe²⁴ found that education, when addressed explicitly in currently existing strategies, is more often treated as a specific 'economic' sector, consuming resources and producing waste and pollution, rather than a 'horizontal' sector through its role in dissemination, knowledge-sharing and awareness-raising. Both approaches are clearly needed yet the latter deserves far greater attention than is currently the case.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) argues that consumer education or what it terms "education for sustainable consumption" should be integrated as a significant dimension of education for sustainable development. This involves

fostering individuals' awareness of their place in shaping society and empowering them to opt for more responsible, sustainable lifestyles through opportunities to learn about processes and systems linked to consumption; and the development of analytical, reflective thinking skills²⁵. Education for sustainable consumption is not only aimed at teachers and students, it constitutes "an important part of informal lifelong learning and is carried out in the family, the local community and informal educational settings"²⁶. EU initiatives on the topic exist such as Consumer Classroom but these should be reinforced, upscaled and their scope extended beyond school education²⁷.

Crucially, learning can encourage a deeper shift in our relationship with the natural world. This dysfunctional relationship is the root cause of much environmental degradation in recent decades and the COVID-19 pandemic has further underlined its far-reaching consequences, as conservation experts attribute the emergence of the virus to wildlife exploitation and habitat loss causing it to jump from animal to human²⁸. Learning can open the door to a more harmonious human-nature relationship by promoting awareness of these interdependencies not only at an intellectual level but in practical, experiential ways.

Outdoor learning is a powerful tool in this

¹⁸ National Centre for Social Research (2013). Education and attitudes towards the environment. Background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/14

¹⁹ Cedefop (2018). Skills for green jobs in the United Kingdom: an update [Unedited proof copy]

²⁰ ILO (2018). Skills for a greener future: A global view. Geneva: ILO

²¹ Council of the European Union. (2018). Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union.

²² NECE Declaration

²³ European Students Union (2019) Statement on Sustainability

²⁴ European Economic and Social Committee (2019) Circular economy strategies and roadmaps in Europe: Identifying synergies and the potential for cooperation and alliance building

²⁵ United Nations Environment Programme (2019) HERE and NOW! Education for Sustainable Consumption Recommendations and Guidelines, p. 9-12

²⁶ Ivi., p. 20.

²⁷ Consumer Classroom

²⁸ BBC, Coronavirus: putting the spotlight on the global wildlife trade

respect, with evidence suggesting the positive effect it can have on children's pro-environmental attitudes in adulthood as well as on their health, well-being and overall competence development²⁹. This is a key component of several non-formal education approaches, such as Scouting. Moreover, academic literature and pedagogical practice are growing around the notion of nature as 'co-teacher' where the natural environment is no longer only a backdrop upon which learning happens but an active agent in teaching and learning processes.

The ability to revise our relationship and interdependencies with the natural world is thus an important green skill which learning in its various forms can help us to develop.



²⁹ Malone, K. and Waite, S. (2016) Student Outcomes and Natural Schooling. Plymouth: Plymouth University.

Best practice - EVTA: LIFE FOSTER

The project aims at reducing waste in the restaurant industry. It focuses on these main fields: training and education, prevention and communication. The interconnection between environmental, social and economic dynamics identifies training and education as key instruments to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the UN (SDG 2 Zero Hunger; SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production). LIFE FOSTER consists entirely of direct and indirect actions aimed at raising awareness about the problem of food waste and optimal food storage.

Best practice - WOSM: Scouts in Denmark

A new strategy for environmental sustainability will help Scouts in Denmark ensure a common direction and more ambitious initiatives within sustainability. The strategy is made as a half-year review process, where new actions will be discussed and implemented at sustainability dialogue meetings, where everybody is welcome. The strategy is an outcome of a process starting with identifying which Sustainable Development Goals to tackle. Goals 12 about responsible consumption and production, and Goal 13 about climate action, were chosen as a main focus for the Danish strategy.

Best practice - EAEA: Know your lifestyle

The project had the purpose to introduce global education in the second chance courses, to create an innovative pedagogical approach for discussing sustainable consumption and globalisation with second chance students and to establish a strong thematic network among Adult Education Centres and NGOs about development education. The final aim of the project was to make learners acknowledge the link between local personal consumption and the resulting global impact, and thus give them the opportunity to look critically at their own consumption and to develop alternative courses of action.

Best practice - ESU: Green Erasmus

Green Erasmus is a project on the topic of the environmental impact of the Erasmus+ Programme, in particular, the higher education part. The aim of Green Erasmus is to improve the environmental sustainability of the Erasmus+ Programme, whilst also contributing improvements in environmental sustainability across Europe.

Best practice - AEGEE: Circular Economy Sustainable Competences for Youth (CESCY)

The project gathers partners working in Estonia, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain as well as at EU level. Their first product has been a Mapping of National Status Quo on Circular Economy and Sustainability implementation generally and for youth. The research shows that although there are several circular economy initiatives, there is a need for a more strategic circular economy related to youth work in Europe.

Best practice - ECSWE: Ecological education in Waldorf Schools

Topics such as sustainability, environmental protection or the production of healthy food are on everyone's lips and affect everyone. To bring the children at the Waldorf School in touch with these issues from an early age and to give them differentiated access to the living organism: «earth», ecological education plays an important role. Throughout the school year pupils engage in different activities such as tilling the soil, composting, sowing, pricking, planting, harvesting, recycling the harvest and grafting fruit trees. From the first school year, the children's imagination and powers of observation are stimulated by stories about nature. While in the third school year, the children cultivate, harvest and bake, and from the fourth grade onwards, they examine the mutual relationships between the nature kingdoms. Older pupils do internships in farming and forestry, in doing so they learn to recognise living interrelationships in a thoughtful way, in order to gradually develop a genuine partnership with nature.

INNOVATION

INNOVATION IN LEARNING, INNOVATION IN DIVERSITY

The transformative potential of lifelong learning for sustainable societies does not only require attention to what we learn but how we learn. The emphasis on preparing learners as responsible citizens, creative thinkers and resilient problem solvers calls for active, participatory, deliberative and learner-centred pedagogical approaches. A report on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 explains: "In some contexts, the inclusion of Sustainable Development or Education for Sustainable Development in curricula seems to be causing a coevolution of pedagogy. ESD's presence goes hand-in-hand with a rethinking of the kind of learning necessary to address sustainability issues"³⁰. This learning cannot be based on the outdated view of learners as passive recipients of knowledge but rather as active agents of change³¹. The recent literature review published by the Joint Research Center highlights the importance of *creativity as a transversal skills for lifelong learning*³² and its linkage to sustainable development.

In addition, there is growing recognition that learning for sustainability needs a strong interdisciplinary dimension in view

of the interlinked challenges that society is confronted with: "Reorienting education to sustainability requires us to work increasingly at the interface of disciplines in order to address the complex problems of today's world (...) understanding and solving complex problems is likely to require intensified cooperation among scientific fields as well as between the pure and mathematical sciences and the social sciences, the arts and the humanities"³³. This demonstrates the relevance of cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning such as STEAM (A for Arts) that help to foster creative and other transversal competences and lay the basis for the development of innovative solutions. Therefore, while subject-specific knowledge will always have its own essential role, curricula should look beyond disciplinary boundaries with a view to incorporating sustainability as a cross-cutting topic.

Mainstreaming these approaches and methods sounds good on paper but it will be impossible to implement without adequate, long-term support for teachers, educators and trainers at all levels. They require high-quality initial and continuous

³⁰ UNESCO (2012) Shaping the Education of Tomorrow: 2012 Report on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, Abridged, p.29.

³¹ LLLPlatform (2019) Position Paper: 21st Century Learning Environments.

³² JRC 2020 Creativity - a transversal skill for lifelong learning

³³ UNESCO (2002) Education for Sustainability - From Rio to Johannesburg: Lessons learnt from a decade of commitment, UNESCO, Paris, p. 22

training, resources, toolkits and guidelines in order to bring these practices effectively into their daily work with learners. The latter cannot receive quality sustainability education if educators do not have access to the training required to deliver it³⁴. **The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the lack of investment in training for educators sharply into the spotlight as many lacked the tools and competences needed to adapt, to remote, online and blended teaching and learning on such a huge-scale**³⁵. This reinforces the need to improve the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for educators so that they can deploy pedagogies and adrogogies suited to education for sustainable development through analogue, digital or blended means, keeping in mind the fact that digital tools only bring added value if incorporated in a carefully planned and purposeful way³⁶. This kind of support should be available not only to school teachers but to the full range of educators and trainers, including in non-formal and informal sectors where civil society organisations have a wealth of experience and expertise in facilitating learning about sustainability-related issues.

The cross-cutting nature of education for sustainable development and the challenges that it addresses not only call for cooperation across academic disciplines but also across learning sectors. Fostering synergies and collaborations between different levels (from early childhood

education to adult learning) and different modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) helps to promote a holistic, long-term view on learner development that goes beyond specific environments or age ranges, thus laying the ground for more innovative and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning³⁷. While the tendency to look at education strictly in its separate categories seems difficult to overcome, it will be impossible to achieve coherent policies on lifelong learning and its contribution to the sustainable development agenda if they are not guided by this integrative perspective.

This perspective already informs several practices in education such as those based on the 'whole-school approach' involving close networking and cooperation between schools and local communities (e.g. parents, NGOs) and which is closely linked to mainstreaming education for sustainable development³⁸. Family and intergenerational learning is an equally important part of cross-sector cooperation as learners of different ages and generations can support and learn from each other, sharing their knowledge, skills and experience. Moreover, it contributes directly to the sustainable development agenda in light of its promotion of solidarity between generations. Adaptation to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the value of this type of learning³⁹.

³⁴ Education International (2019) Off Track: Educators Assess Progress Towards SDG 4.

³⁵ LLLPlatform (2020) Statement: COVID19 - Mental health and well-being of all learners come first.

³⁶ LLLPlatform (2017) Position Paper: Reimagining education for the digital age.

³⁷ LLLPlatform (2019) Position Paper: 21st Century Learning Environments, p. 30-31.

³⁸ UNESCO (2012) Shaping the Education of Tomorrow: 2012 Report on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, Abridged.

³⁹ UNESCO (2020) Unlocking the potential of family and international learning, COVID-19 Education Response Notes, Issue Note no. 2.3 - April 2020

Experiential learning - a pedagogical approach whereby learners develop their understanding and knowledge through experience - has a great, and to a certain extent untapped, potential in the context of sustainability education particularly in non-formal and informal learning pedagogies. This approach moves past the cognitive side of learning, by leveraging hands on, action-oriented learning which is based on experiences, especially important at an early age. In education for sustainable development, this can involve getting in touch with nature, activities which engage a community, and mobility-related activities, among other opportunities. A driver for innovation, already fostered by a variety of learning providers across education sectors, experiential learning should be further explored and supported as a way

to engage learners and empower them to be active members of the community and, as such, should enter the education and training policy debate in Europe.

Best practice EucA: ADeAPTIVE

This transnational project aims to improve and implement innovative learning ecosystems where:

- Students will find a student-centred learning paradigm thanks to adaptive online learning applications.
- Professors will have at disposal easy-to-use online platform with automatic evaluation systems which will make teaching more efficient.

Best Practice - ALL DIGITAL STEAMonEdu project

The project aims to increase the adoption and impact of STE(A)M education by investing in the community of stakeholders and the professional development of educators. The approach of the project is to nominate educators as the pillars of implementation of STE(A)M education policies and support their professional development either by blended training or by their participation in a community of stakeholders. The exchange of experience, collaboration and creative work of this community is supported by an online peer learning and crowdsourcing platform. expected outputs of the project is a STE(A)M education framework, which will include competences, policies, methodologies, educational objects, etc.

Best practice - EUCEN: Add Life - ADDing quality of LIFE through intergenerational learning via universities

The project aimed to explore different models of intergenerational learning, collaborative learning between older and younger learners, and intergenerational collaboration on designing new modules. It also had the purpose to develop learning opportunities that will promote participation of individuals in European civil society as promoters and facilitators/mentors with others.

Best practice - Learning for Well-Being Foundation: The Act2Gether initiative

This initiative is a global movement to create partnerships between generations, across all sectors, such as Health, Education, Governance, Art, Sports, Religion, Welfare and Justice. Setting the example of a holistic approach by including the transformative power of children. Act2Gether consists of: 1) 2GetherLand: Gatherings for all ages to play with the serious challenges in our world today; 2) 2GetherLearn: Training that helps children and adults to be better partners; 3) 2GetherLink: Online Platform for a global community sharing stories of partnership

Best practice - EPA: Creative Thinking for Parents

A transnational project involving partners from 5 countries aiming at developing the creative thinking skills of parents, of school age children, through the delivery of face to face workshops, combined with digital microlearning. Specific objectives are:

- To develop a training programme on creative thinking for parents
- To develop a mobile application that will bring creative thinking education in their houses
 - To develop a parents' guide on creative thinking
 - To organise workshops for parents
- To disseminate the project results and to create an online community of practice of parents to promote creative thinking

LEARNING TO LEARN THROUGHOUT LIFE

Promoting sustainability education will have little impact if people are not engaged in learning in the first place. This is linked to learning as a competence in itself - 'learning to learn' - which encompasses the motivation to learn and one's attitude towards learning throughout life⁴⁰. This competence will be crucial to achieve the ambitious new targets for participation in adult learning presented in the European Skills Agenda⁴¹. It is not possible to promote meaningful participation in learning if people are not motivated to do so or lack the skills to do it effectively. Furthermore, recognising and valuing all learning is also a prerequisite for the motivation to learn. To a certain extent, making processes of learning enjoyable or 'fun' may help to foster motivation and a positive mindset. This can be supported by dynamic and innovative pedagogies, andragogy and cross-sectoral approaches that bridge learning and everyday life, as discussed above. However, it also requires a careful look at the

factors that drive people to learn, ranging from financial incentives and improved career prospects to personal leisure and curiosity, which are inherently complex and personal⁴². Furthermore, learners should be consulted and listened to in order to better understand their needs and enable education for sustainable development to be tailored to these needs, this is particularly relevant in times of crises. Ultimately, the choice to participate in learning comes at the moment when personal benefits exceed personal costs⁴³. Further research on the motivation dimension would be helpful to inform policies aiming to promote learning throughout the lifespan.

Learning to learn may be defined broadly as the *"ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups"*⁴⁴. This competence is critical to ensuring individuals' resilience - that is their

⁴⁰ Council of the European Union (2018) Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union.

⁴¹ European Commission (2020) European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience. COM(2020) 274 final.

⁴² Nesta (2019) What Motivates Adults to Learn? A rapid evidence review of what drives learning new skills in the workplace

⁴³ Kantar Public & Learning and Work Institute (2018). Decisions of adult learners. London: Department for Education.

⁴⁴ European Parliament & Council of the European Union (2006). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union.

ability to adapt effectively to change - as it is a prerequisite for acquiring all other competences and sets the foundation for lifelong learning. This also means it is a key ingredient to achieving sustainable societies: *“Learning to Learn can unleash potential for change in individuals and communities, contributing to the common good of society, and empowering them to thrive in a rapidly changing world”*⁴⁵.

Until now, however, this area of competence has largely been neglected in analyses of issues related to lifelong learning and in policy development⁴⁶. A notable exception is the new LifeComp framework published in January 2020 which elaborates on the *personal, social and learning to learn competence* of the European key competence framework⁴⁷. Although it offers useful insights into the components of this competence, additional action is required to support its implementation on the ground, namely the development of practical guidelines for educators across all sectors. This will be important to help individuals concretely identify the learning methods and environments best suited to their needs and to continue adapting them as necessary.

Supporting people in the development of their learning to learn competence is vital at all ages, yet the earlier it is addressed the better. Debates on lifelong learning tend to neglect the strategic importance of the early years of the lifelong learning continuum. Besides its contribution to children’s overall health, well-being and development, high-quality and inclusive early childhood education and care helps them create the foundation and capacity to learn throughout life⁴⁸. If we live in an increasingly complex world where learning for sustainability is an increasingly urgent priority, then this foundation becomes even more critical. This is why access to and support for learning in all its forms should be a cornerstone of the upcoming European Child Guarantee⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ Hoskins, B., & Deakin Crick, R. (2008) Learning to Learn and Civic Competences: different currencies or two sides of the same coin? Joint Research Centre, European Commission. Cited in Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M. (2020), LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence, EUR 30246 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Cornford, I.R. (2002) Learning-to-learn strategies as a basis for effective lifelong learning. International Journal of Lifelong Education 21(4): p357-368.

⁴⁷ Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M. (2020) LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence, EUR 30246 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

⁴⁸ Council of the European Union (2018) Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems. Official Journal of the European Union.

⁴⁹ European Child Guarantee

Best practice - EPA: Sequences

Sequences aims to provide European ECEC private and public services with adequate tools for self and external evaluation of quality, with the direct involvement of providers and relevant stakeholders as quality development partners. Furthermore, it looked to gather a set of indicators in order to assess quality in 5 areas (access, workforce, curriculum, evaluation/monitoring, governance/funding) also with a focus on digital competences as well as to develop a culture of quality at ECEC service providers level, mainly through a bottom-up approach which directly involves providers and relevant stakeholders in self and external evaluation.

Best practice - ECSWE: Personalised and Formative Assessment Practices

The project has collected several examples of sensitive and creative approaches developed by teachers and school leaders to encourage pupils to explore how they learn rather than only ‘test’ what content they have absorbed. The main goal of the project is to find and support practices that unfold the unique potential of each and every child/youngster through contextualised, individualised, participatory assessment processes that give learners a feeling of agency and self-efficacy.

Best practice - Learning for Well-Being Foundation: INTESYS

The project focuses on piloting new approaches to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems in Europe with a view to ensuring that children and families in vulnerable situations have access to high quality ECEC provided by services that are better integrated across the different sectors (education, health, welfare, etc.), professions and across age groups and governance levels.

Best practice - OBESSU, AEGEE, YEU: European change-makers academy

The project aims to empower young people to become changemakers in their own community, fostering active participation on the local level as well as belonging to the European community.

More specifically the ECMA project is focused on building stronger youth organising on the local community level, while at the same time reinforcing its connection transnationally and to Europe. It focuses on a methodology based on mentoring as a learning offer that lasts over time and with the mutual motivation between mentor and mentees as a pillar.

INVESTMENT IN LIFELONG LEARNING

Mainstreaming sustainability education across all learning sectors, supporting individuals to become effective lifelong learners and exploiting the potential of these endeavours to contribute to sustainable societies will be difficult to put into practice without adequate, long-term funding. European and national policymakers have long paid lip service to the importance of investment in education and training. The average EU expenditure on education decreased constantly from a share of 5.5% of GDP in 2009 to only 4.7% in 2018⁵⁰.

These developments run counter to the growing evidence base around the positive spillover effects of investment in education, including higher levels of institutional trust, engagement with society and participatory democracy, as well as social progress indicators such as higher employment rates and wages and poverty reduction. These benefits, in terms of personal development and societal harmony, go beyond what any mathematical index of growth or econometric model can measure⁵¹. Moreover, it can have a positive

lifelong effect on health, including mental health and health literacy⁵². The COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated the relevance of lifelong learning in this respect as people without adequate literacy and numeracy skills struggle to correctly understand official health information or decode the unofficial health information that proliferates during pandemics⁵³. Together with earlier arguments on its contribution to tackling environmental challenges, they make a strong case for robust investment in lifelong learning.

This is why the next generation of EU funding programmes and instruments, including the COVID-19 recovery plan (NextGenerationEU), should target lifelong learning in all its forms. The Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, which is the investment pillar of the Green Deal, and the Just Transition Mechanism could make lifelong learning a clearer priority as it only receives a brief mention at present and exclusively in the context of workers' upskilling and reskilling. Its contribution to a sustainable recovery should also feature

strongly in National Recovery and Resilience plans that Member States are obliged to submit to benefit from the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Moreover, as sustainability development cuts across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries, the EU and Member States should seek to build closer and more operational synergies between funding programmes so that innovation is not lost to siloed-thinking and bureaucracy. The European Commission must offer comprehensive implementation guidance and assistance to the Member States in this process. Importantly, the effectiveness of these funding programmes in supporting education for sustainable development will likewise depend on the meaningful participation of beneficiaries - learners, educators and their representative associations - in the design, implementation and evaluation phases so that they continue to address genuine needs and problems on the ground. All public policy interventions ought to be designed on a robust impact evaluation methodology that stresses the importance of relevant stakeholders' involvement from its first designing steps. Education policy interventions are difficult to assess in the short term, therefore, it requires longitudinal studies that go beyond political mandates at EU and Member States level.

The question arises as to what the exact objectives of investment in lifelong learning should be. Improving infrastructure and training for educators is an evident priority and this must apply across the formal, non-formal and informal sectors. However, we must consider how funding can directly

reach and empower individual learners as well. This has been the focus of the debate on **Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs)**, state-subsidised accounts that citizens can use to access training regardless of their employment status, on which the EC is currently assessing the possibility of a European initiative. Such accounts have potential as an innovative financing tool which should continue to be explored, building on lessons learnt from the limitations of existing schemes which have so far struggled to boost learning participation among under-represented groups and people with low skill levels⁵⁴.

The idea of universal entitlement⁵⁵ to training can be key in this transition to a greener and sustainable society. Yet, the implementation of such rights can only be effective if the investment in quality training opportunities and sufficient offer is ensured. Given the interconnection between cities, regions, countries and continents in this globalised society there are already several existing good practices that could be shared and upscaled. The European cooperation in this field has never been so important. We can't afford to have a Europe with multiple speeds in times of environmental crisis. However, further initiatives should be designed and implemented in close cooperation with and taking on board the concerns of learners and learning providers⁵⁶.

⁵⁰ LLLPlatform (2020) Europe's share of GDP for education and training has never been this low: a comparative analysis.

⁵¹ UNICEF (2015) The Investment Case for Education and Equity; European Commission (2019) Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2019: Sustainable growth for all: choices for the future of social Europe, p138-140.

⁵² Eurohealthnet (2020) Making the link: health, education, and inequality. Policy précis.

⁵³ Lopes, H. and McKay, V. 5 (2020) Adult learning and education as a tool to contain pandemics: The COVID-19 experience. Int Rev Educ 66, p575-602.

⁵⁴ OECD (2019) Individual Learning Accounts: Panacea or Pandora's Box?, OECD Publishing, Paris,

⁵⁵ ILO, A review of entitlement systems for lifelong learning

⁵⁶ LLLPlatform (2020) Statement: European Skills Agenda - a step further to true Lifelong Learning?

Best practice - EARLALL and EAEA: FINALE project - Financing Adult Learning in Europe

The Finale project was created to provide a comprehensive analysis of financing adult learning in Europe, a sector which is often underfunded, compared to other sectors of the education system. The Finale project brings together nine partner organisations from eight European countries. Over a period of two years, they have analysed existing funding opportunities and developed recommendations for ensuring sustainable funding in the future.

Best practice - ESU: FINST project Financing the Students Future

The project focuses on financing and in particular on students' view on financing of higher education in European countries. The main aims of FINST are increasing the knowledge on the different higher education financing systems in Europe, what effects they have on students and enhancing the capacity of our members, the National Unions of students with regards to active involvement on higher education funding reforms.

Best practice - SOLIDAR: Progressive Lab for Sustainable Development

The Lab is an initiative that aims to open a discussion on approaches and solutions to fight inequality, promote education for all and mobilize domestic resources. The main objective is to open a reflection on how the embedding of the 2030 Agenda into the EU policies could contribute to reducing inequalities and mobilising domestic resources for sustainable development.

NOTES





LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM

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