



Plate forme européenne de la société civile pour l'éducation tout au long de la vie
European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning

EUCIS-LLL, November 2009

**EUCIS-LLL gathers 19
European networks active in
education and training:**

AECEE: European Students' Forum

EAEA: European Association for Education of Adults

EAICY: European Association of Institutions of Non-Formal Education for Children and Young People

ECSWE: European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education

EFFE: European Forum for Freedom in Education

EfVET: European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training

EPA: European Parents Association

ETDF: European Training and Development Federation

EUCEN: European University Continuing Education Network

EUROCLIO European Association of History Educators

EURO-WEA: European Workers Education Association

EVTA/AEFP: European Vocational Training Association

FECCA: European Federation For Catholic Adult Education

FECC: European Federation for Education and Culture

FICEMEA: International Federation of Training Centres for the Promotion of New Education

IAEC/AIVE: International Association of Educating Cities

ISCA: International Sport and Culture Association

SOLIDAR: European Platform on Social Affairs, International Solidarity and Lifelong Learning

LIFELONG LEARNING, A KEY TO ACHIEVE EUROPEAN ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP?

EUCIS-LLL, in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee, organised a next public hearing on "*Lifelong learning, a key to achieve European active citizenship?*" on 22 September 2009 in Brussels. This event is part of a broader reflexion on how to promote active citizenship in education and training. EUCIS-LLL had already organised a workshop on this topic during the European Civic Days of La Rochelle in September 2008.

Apart from its role of imparting learning content, education and training have a crucial social and civic role to play. They contribute to the strengthening of democracy and of social cohesion. The results of the European elections, with a European turnout of 43.1 %, teach us a lesson. Most citizens do not feel their vote will change the way the EU functions and sometimes do not even know what is going on in Brussels. *How to create the conditions for a better appropriation of the European construction?*

During this event, participants were invited to share ideas and experiences on how to foster active citizenship in lifelong learning - taking into account the different contexts of learning, formal but also non formal and informal, from "cradle to death". The participants also outlined its limits.

If the concept of active citizenship is widely used today, it refers to different understandings. Some consider active citizenship as the active use of civic rights by EU citizens (voting at EU elections, participating in consultations...) others relate this concept to the feeling of belonging to a common project or identity. Participants tackled this issue by adopting a broad definition of active citizenship. *"How do we ensure that citizens do participate actively in the life of the EU?"*

1. Basic skills are a prerequisite to the active participation of citizens!

Each citizen should be able to participate in the life of the EU. In order to do so, it is important that individual acquire, refresh and update their skills throughout their life. We notably have to eliminate illiteracy that concerns around 10% of the European population. It is a matter of democracy!

More focus should be put on the development of transversal competences such as social and civic competences at all levels of education and training. Intercultural education is for instance crucial in societies that are, or become, more and more multicultural. *How can we concretely develop such competences?*

2. Learning about the EU in schools!

In order to foster European citizenship, everyone should be able to understand how the EU functions as a political system. This could be done by working on common guidelines to develop modules on European civic education. A system can only be democratic if citizens understand and play an active role in it. Today, a lot of work is done by civil society organisations, but systematic action can only come from national authorities.

At mezzo level, learning can also be achieved by implementing settings in which teachers and students become active. Schools have to be democratic settings themselves! Innovative projects exist around Europe (i.e. training students' representatives, etc.) that should be better supported and shared.

3. Enabling teachers and educators to participate in lifelong learning!

The professional development of teachers is among the key objectives of European policies and programmes. But, according to EUROCLIO, less than 10% of European teachers are able to participate in professional development or training events without suffering significant cost and 44% of educators feels that it is either very difficult or impossible to attend teacher training events due to costs or policies¹. They call on policy makers to engage in a concentrated effort to lift the obstacles such as unpaid leave or impossibility to take time off, insufficient or no financial support towards participation in such events, accompanied by lack of information about existing learning opportunities and support. The European Parents Association (EPA) also outlined similar problems. Parents also need to be considered as pedagogical partners of teachers and as such should be supported in their tasks².

¹ EUROCLIO, the European Association of History Educators, has launched a campaign "Let teachers learn", [link](#).

² EPA has published a "Resolution for the overall recognition of a legal basis for the parents as representative", [link](#).

4. Developing partnerships!

Teachers alone cannot solve all the problems! Innovative partnerships can lead to constructive solutions in order to foster active citizenship. Specialised organisations such as the CIDEM in France work with teachers in order to provide them with the necessary educative material (exhibitions, pedagogical tools, animations, etc.). They help them to tackle issues linked to the European construction in various ways. For example, some organisations work with European students that are in the local area in order to launch debates about mobility or cultural diversity. International organisations have also been developing tools for teachers and educators, but they remain little known.

Partnerships between the formal and non formal sector should be encouraged and supported by public authorities.

5. Recognising the role of non formal education!

Many civil society organisations in Europe aim to foster active citizenship and citizens' emancipation and development through the diverse activities they propose - for example citizenship through sports, citizenship through culture, citizenship through sustainable development, etc. This implies developing innovative pedagogies and methods. Learning by doing is a very effective way to develop civic and social competences but also to develop the appetite for learning. Sports gatherings, for example, attract young people from different social backgrounds. A great potential can be achieved when these events are linked with the use of non formal learning methods (i.e. fighting racisms and stereotypes...). There is a need to share these practices across the different sectors of education and training.

Most of these organisations are driven by volunteers. Their role is not always acknowledged in our societies. We thus support the decision to have the European Year 2011 on volunteering. It is an important step and we hope that concrete measures will follow.

6. European associations contribute to the development of active citizenship!

At European level, civil society networks are enabling the cooperation between the various actors working in education and training. The International Sports and Culture Association (ISCA), for example, gives the opportunity to those who are working in associations or clubs within recreational sport the possibility to participate in training sessions or conferences at European or International level. This is also the case for all the networks that are member of our platform. By organising encounters, exchanges, confrontations, they contribute to the

professional and personal development of various actors in lifelong learning. These exchanges are notably important in order to develop intercultural competences. Furthermore, the persons that take part in these networks are important multipliers at local level.

If every body agrees on the benefits of such participation, important obstacles remain such as the lack of sustainable funding, the limited budget of EU programmes for mobility, the lack of commitment of some hierarchies, the language barrier, etc.

7. EU mobility programmes are too small to have a real impact!

As we mentioned, the participation in European mobility programmes or working in EU-level projects has generally a very positive effect. It opens new ways of thinking. But today, the budget allocated to mobility programmes is very limited. Furthermore, some studies have shown that mobility programmes were often limited to a privileged few - even though most target disadvantaged publics.

The way the UE budget is used could be improved! A lot is spent on communication. But communication is not enough! Supporting European cooperation projects should be a top priority. Some representatives of our networks are often surprised by the money that is spent on expensive hotels during EU gatherings in which they are invited to participate. By reducing a little the standards of the hotels for example, we could easily save millions of Euros each year for mobility projects... This can seem anecdotal but it has a very negative impact on the image that is given to our citizens.

8. Enforcing a structured framework for EU civil dialogue!

In the Lisbon Treaty, new democratic principles can be found in article 11. It notably enables the direct involvement of citizens by giving them the right to petition. If a petition gathers more than a million signatures from significant number of member States, the Commission is requested to propose an EU legislation. These new principles should be implemented as soon as possible.

EUCIS-LLL, with other networks, has also been asking for the adoption of a European statute of association. It would recognise their right as European citizens to organise themselves and also acknowledge the existence of a genuine European civil society.

9. A shared responsibility!

Of course, promoting active citizenship is a collective responsibility. A lot has been said about the deficiencies of the media and of the political parties in informing citizens about EU policies and challenges. This is still a weakness today!

10. Investing in lifelong learning!

If we want to achieve active citizenship - by fighting against illiteracy, by ensuring a larger participation in lifelong learning, by encouraging innovative partnerships and projects, by enabling the whole educative community (teachers, animators, parents, students...) to participate in mobility schemes; by encouraging the emergence of a European civil society through the development of European associations, by building a structured civil dialogue - Member states have to invest more funds in lifelong learning!

EU citizens have to understand that Europe is something positive for them.

Gina Ebner,

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