Creativity And Innovation In Europe: From A Shared Vision To A Common Action Plan

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Abstract

The message on the importance of creativity and innovation contained in the 2010 Manifesto of the European Ambassadors for Creativity and Innovation represents a call to rethink European development. It deserves to be followed up not simply with some unconnected appropriate actions in the different fields, but with a "framework for action" able to transform the principles contained in the Manifesto into proposals for activities at the policy, at the organizational and at the "grassroots" levels.

With the aim to contribute to the creation of such a framework, the MENON network, in the frame of the Learnovation Stakeholders Roundtable, has facilitated a consultation with the objective of providing, for each one of the seven priorities set by the Manifesto, a likely framework for action.

A first conceptual contribution deals with the centrality of creativity in the Lifelong learning process, considered as the organising principle of the new Europe where creativity and innovation can be fostered at all levels, among the seven priorities identified above. Second, for each of the above priorities, an attempt has been made to build a "framework for actions", in line with two principles. First, the need to differentiate solutions and actions depending on the different contexts. Second, the need to involve all relevant stakeholders categories in the dynamic of a genuine top-down and bottom-up dialogue: that is why we include both the policy and the organisational/grassroots levels in the frameworks. For each priority a set of main Orientations for action will be presented, together with some catalyst Initiatives are recommendations/suggestions for the short term, often instrumental to the implementation of broader and long-term recommendations.

1. The importance of creativity and innovation in European education and training

In the period 2008-2009, the LEARNOVATION project, supported by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, has worked to stimulate a consultation process aimed to lead to a collective and consensus-based new vision of eLearning (or technology-enhanced learning) in Europe. The rationale of the exercise is to assess how and whether learning is supporting innovation of the European society and how learning is innovating thanks to the exploitation of eLearning. The analysis and consultations carried out in this respect have led to a set of recommendations to policy and decision makers on urgent actions to be launched for a positive change to happen.

Learnovation has considered both the static and the dynamic dimension of innovation paradigms, by defining them as "interpretative models of an entire constellation, or a "coherent set" of trends of change that help to understand how change happens". Since LEARNOVATION focuses on innovation paradigms with specific regards to the use of ICT for Lifelong learning, this definition could be complemented as follows: "innovation paradigms are interpretative models of an entire constellation, or a "coherent set" of trends of change which help to understand how change happens in a specific e-learning territory, how this change foster lifelong learning and how it is (or it is not) enabled by ICT."

In the following pages we present the Learnovation attempt to move from isolated priorities to "frameworks for actions", in line with two key principles. First, the need to differentiate solutions and actions depending on the different contexts: that is why we propose frameworks for actions that are adaptable to national, regional and local contexts and to sectors specificities. Second, the need to involve all relevant stakeholders categories in the dynamic of a genuine top-down and bottom-up

dialogue: that is why we include both the policy and the organisational/grassroots levels in the frameworks.

In the following page we will present three tables, corresponding to the first three priorities of the European Commission Manifesto, organised according to three levels. Main Orientations for action directly connect to the priority and set the value/principle orientations of the suggested actions. Actions express recommendations for long-term intervention, with a systemic, although not necessarily comprehensive, vision. Catalyst Initiatives are recommendations/suggestions for the short term, often instrumental to the implementation of broader and long-term recommendations. Each table is also divided into a left side, containing those recommendations that require public policy intervention at all institutional levels, and a right side that is addressed to all kinds of organisations (educational institutions, but also companies, associations, the Public Administration as employer).

2. How to nurture creativity in a lifelong learning process where theory and practice go hand in hand

POLICY LEVEL	ORGANISATIONAL/GRASSROOTS LEVEL
Main Orientations for Action	
Put Lifelong Learning at the centre of policy concern in a knowledge society. Reward citizens' learning initiative and learning achievements and encourage learning processes in and by policy making.	The European workforce is being and will be required with continuous upskilling actions for Europe to be able to compete worldwide: innovators should be recognised and rewarded at all levels and in all sectors. Embed learning focus in any transformation process at organisational level.
Actions	
De-tax all investments in learning. Public administration should pioneer the principle "best jobs to best lifelong learners" by choosing leaders able to lead change. Implement micro-credit lending schemes for all types of learning.	Develop and sustain learning organisations benchmarks. Use ICT potential to generate and sustain inter-organisational communities of practice and project-based learning.
Catalyst Initiatives	
Generalise the practice of a lifelong learner self-assessment for all European citizens to strengthen their identity as learners and citizens.	Set up a European Foundation for Creativity (or a Unit on Creativity at the EIT) promoting the creation of community laboratories at local level within the Member States. Such laboratories should be open to the members of the community (regardless of their age) and provide the infrastructure and support for people to make their ideas come true.

3. How to make schools and universities places where students and teachers engage in creative thinking and learning by doing

POLICY LEVEL	ORGANISATIONAL/GRASSROOTS LEVEL
Main Orientations for Action	
Creativity, openness and flexibility should be enhanced by allowing freedom of expression and by valorising the creative profiles of individuals since the early stages of the learning path. Exploit all the potential that ICT and media developments can offer to support learner-centred education. Consensually maintain long-term objectives of Education and Training policy beyond political and government discontinuities: A really integrated Lifelong Learning system, easy to understand and access by all learners, should be a common policy aim across Europe. Put learning competences on top of the "PISA tower".	Bring education closer to the societal needs. Curricula and examination practices should be fundamentally revised, overcoming existing system resistances. Ways to identify and certify non-formal or informal learning should be found, building on what has been developed in the Accreditation of Prior Learning field.
Actions	
Teachers training should include creative and innovative approaches; ways of incentivising creative people to apply their creativity to teaching should be explored. Moreover, teachers and trainers should be supported in exploiting the potential of informal learning. Utilise virtual mobility to make international experiences accessible to all students and teachers, to build intercultural dialogue, to support internationalisation and to promote global cooperation between universities. Develop a European policy on Open Educational Resources and Open Educational Practices, able to take into account all stakeholders concerns and expectations.	Project work should be promoted as a curricular activity throughout all school levels. Examination practice should be transformed to allow differentiation of learning paths and recognition of skills and competences developed. More focus should be put on explaining and demonstrating processes such as problem solving, self assessment, information search and filtering, team work, evaluation, critical thinking, networking.
Catalyst Initiatives	
Introduce in the LLP funding streams for the design and implementation of training programmes to strengthen the educational competences of all parents. Open a permanent strand in Comenius for teachers training on creativity and innovation. Set up a "Young education policy makers club" at the EU level in order to get their views included in the discussion, thereby also exploiting the potential of "digital nativeness heterogeneity" in the process of educational policy making.	Set up a EU competition among national governments/regional authorities for the development of rewarding systems for innovative teachers. Set-up an Award for Universities/schools/VET establishments which apply the learning outcomes approach and are able to recognise achievements of prior learning.

4. Transform workplaces into learning sites

POLICY LEVEL	ORGANISATIONAL/GRASSROOTS LEVEL
Main Orientations for Action	
Promote a paradigm shift from the concept that skills development shall merely follow the needs of the labour market to the concept that the labour market shall support the achievement of societal aims such as equity and environment sustainability. Promote Mobility, Collaboration and Co-opetition within and among companies, flexibility (e.g. e-Working from home), openness, alliances (e.g. public-private, corporate-education), and Integration of Technologies.	Learning already takes place in workplaces through peer-to-peer interaction and problem solving. The issue is not only and not so much to promote learning, but to valorise the learning outcomes workers do achieve on the job and to set up mechanisms to facilitate exchange of work knowledge and experiences. Promote innovative workplace structures, top-down (e.g. competence development) and bottom up (e.g. empowerment), documentation of 'abilities' e.g. individual e-Portfolios, organisational e-Portfolios ('org-folios'), individual, group-based, inter-organisational, and inter-sectoral learning.
Actions	
Agreeing on EU-wide guidelines on recognition of workplace learning (e.g. project management) and disseminating them in the Member States. Encourage and support cooperation between stakeholders on encouraging learning at the workplace, keeping on fostering public–private partnerships. Introduce/generalize incentives for learning, including subsidisation of e-Portfolios costs, with a granular and customised approaches for different settings, e.g. large companies, SMEs, public sector, self-employed persons.	Support the use of ePortfolios and ePortfolios Management Systems by employees and make sure that they are accepted by the industry networks. Create conditions for (self-organised) learning, including Open Learning and Web2.0 oriented programmes. Foster social learning and communication, by implementing both managerial (top-down) and collegial peer (bottom–up) support.
Catalyst Initiatives	
Launch a permanent observatory on innovation skills in Europe, with the tasks of monitoring the progress of national governments and regional authorities in providing compulsory training and re-training actions for the unemployed.	Produce showcases of good practices, based on the logic 'Let learners tell their stories', based on individual statements and accounts of learners and of managers on barriers, solutions and benefits.

5. Conclusions

The two tables presented above are examples of the results of the Learnovation consultation work, which was able to consolidate stakeholders' opinions in some recommendations for actions at the policy and at the organisational level. The consultation process launched by Learnovation proved to be successful in mobilising stakeholders and getting their input to elaborate future desired scenarios of evolution of learning and in defining recommendations to let such scenarios come true.

Given the interest raised by the exercise and the relevance and potential impact of the resulting recommendations, the Learnovation Roundtable (www.learnovation.eu) commits to make open consultation a permanent exercise rather than an exceptional event, and will explore partnership possibilities with European and national stakeholders and networks thereof (directly and indirectly involved in learning) to make sure that open consultation becomes a mechanism for systematic bottom up policy agenda definition process involving stakeholders in the debate on the role of learning for innovation and creativity and for shaping the future of Europe.

References

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