



The lonesome rider..

By Jacques Spelekens



When I received the first e-mail regarding the Istanbul EPLM Conference, in the early days of April 2015, I was not only surprised that people remembered me after my first speeches delivered at the Council of Europe and European Youth Card Association (EYCA) about “mobility in the mind”, but I was also very astonished that I got invited – as a representative of the “business world” – to a conference dedicated to “learning mobility” in the youth field.

Whether in Strasbourg or in Andorra, I’ve always felt I was a “lonesome rider”, a black sheep among hundreds of representatives of official European bodies, NGOs, associations, foundations and official institutions – all of them dedicated to thinking about similar issues and trying to suggest innovative and creative solutions, or at least guidelines towards innovative and creative solutions.

The world of “business” was amazingly absent at those gatherings, which always appeared to me as clusters of people sharing very similar thoughts, and very few action plans. And this in spite of the fact that the final outcome (and the main issue) was, and still is: how can we develop young people’s skills (pupils, students, trainees) through promoting mobility programmes (among other ideas) so that they easily meet the requirements of business? Getting young people to start a business or at least to work in a company is the final purpose of all these endeavours.

During both previous opportunities I had to focus on the need for closer relationships between the worlds of education, training, work and associations. I had the strong feeling that there was an overall consensus on the subject and that things would inevitably improve in the coming years. That was in the early months of 2013. Two years later, when I received the invitation to participate in a workshop on “learning mobility” in the youth field, I said to myself: “Great! They eventually understood the need for co-elaboration!”¹

To my great surprise, when I arrived at the conference premises near Taksim Square in Istanbul, the “revolution” I hoped to witness at the EPLM was merely an “evolution” (without the “r”). Indeed, when I had a glimpse at the participants list, things suddenly became clear to me (again). Once more, I would be the “lonesome rider” for another three-day conference!

I was certainly disappointed. But I’m a stubborn guy (being an Aries!) and I tried – little by little – to get in touch with the other participants. Amazingly enough, most of them were positively surprised to see that the “business world” was present, but most of them regarded me mainly as an external observer, not really involved in the core issues at stake. Most of them wondered why I came at all, even though their issues and mine were alike: youth employability as a path to sustainable and lasting employment, lifelong learning, development of soft skills and ad hoc behavioural capacities, making jobs attractive, creating strong links between training and industry, global mobility and flex-security, initiating partnerships with the “third sector” as the Brazilians call the associative world.

It was only on the third day (during the workshop I was supposed to co-moderate) that attendees came up with nice suggestions and creative ideas that really sounded like the ones I had been talking about for years. They indeed appreciated hearing that we (businesses, NGOs, ministries, sectorial bodies, etc.) should do more than co-operate, but rather “co-elaborate” new projects in which everyone’s talents, skills and expertise are needed to improve future working conditions in an economic environment (and paradigm) where everything changes very swiftly: demographics, technological discoveries, industrial (r)evolutions, an ageing population, intergenerational knowledge transfer, employee retention, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), sustainable development, large-scale migration and crises.

1. “Co-elaboration” is a fairly common term used in international contexts these days; it stands for a process of constructing meaning together.



Illustration by Siiri Taimla



photos by Mariles Poschl

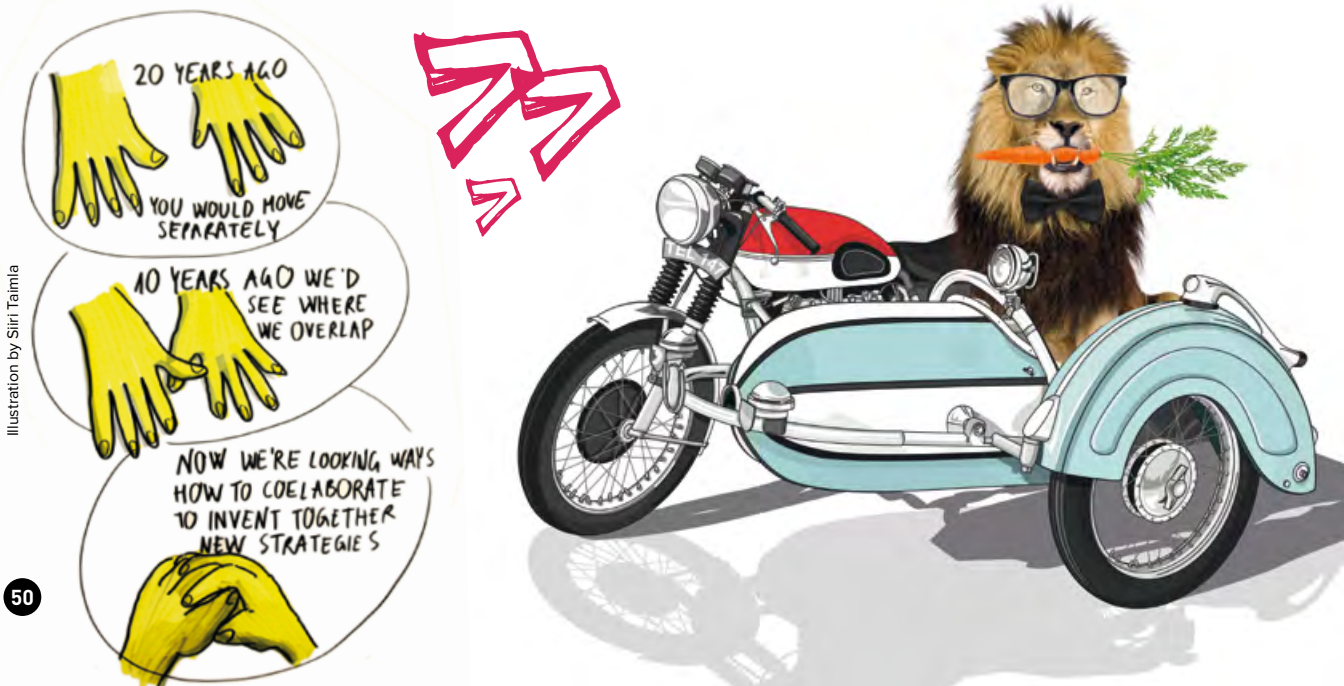


Illustration by Siiri Taimla

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We can only cope with these matters if all stakeholders understand each other, use the same vocabulary and join forces, regardless of the particular agendas they follow. All stakeholders need to develop (together) a new ecosystem in which sustainability and respect for diversity (or “alterity”) are key elements for a better quality of life (at work and at home), and where there are equal opportunities for all individuals. This is the core of most large companies’ CSR policies as well.

Working with academics and consultants (within my CSR department at ENGIE² in Belgium), we managed to measure the impact of a certain number of new habits of young people and businesses. Young students, trainees or apprentices who go abroad to study (as part of their curriculum or not) tend to adapt themselves better to the multicultural, international and diverse environment that modern companies now offer, and there is up to 23% less turnover (“employee rotation”) among young recruits within the first three years on the job. Mobility has become a true asset within companies, a key element for performance.

Companies offering lifelong training programmes and possibilities to develop international careers also tend to be more attractive to young graduates. Many joint programmes are currently being developed in Europe to promote these experiences through insisting on internships

and tutoring and focusing on mobility through European programmes for apprentices. Initiatives like the Alliance for Youth³ or the Pact for Youth⁴ work towards the same objective: putting as many students in contact with the real world, the world in which they will work later and prosper as individuals.

At the end of the seminar in Istanbul, I received quite a number of e-mails from mainly young participants reacting to the major points I had mentioned during my brief intervention, as if I managed to raise some awareness about the necessity to “co-elaborate” (my favourite word for the moment in this context!).

The only wish I can utter at this stage is that this is but the beginning of a new era in the relationship between different worlds. Mentalities seem to be ready for it. It’s now a matter of taking the right initiatives to gather people of good will (and with innovative ideas) to make sure that all the world’s “lonesome riders” work together to form an open club to change attitudes.

By the way, Istanbul is a great city and the seminar’s organisation was great too.

I hope to meet my fellow participants again soon somewhere in this vast world – at least those I didn’t scare with my somewhat unconventional approach to mobility, learning and (intellectual) prosperity.

A moving confirmation

QUALITIES THAT ARE HIGHLIGHTED THROUGH MOBILITY

- flexibility
- adaptability
- language literacy
- multiculturalism
- accountability
- open-mindedness
- tolerance
- social responsibility
- communication skills
- sense of initiative
- eagerness to participate in “co-elaborative” projects



Illustration by Sitri Taimla

INSTEAD OF CO-SHARE-HOLDERS
TO HAVE CO-STAKE-HOLDERS
TAKING PART IN COMPANIES



2. ENGIE: the former GDF SUEZ Group (www.engie.com).
3. Alliance for Youth: initiative by the NESTLE Group.
4. Pact for Youth: initiative taken by CSR Europe.



We need more bowling and fewer boxes for the learning mobility of young people

By **Susi Nicodemi**

Photos by Marlies Pöschl

Susi was general reporter at the conference and has constructed this article around themes she used during the final session.

Here’s a young person. Let’s call him Jack. It could, of course, be Jacqueline, or Jacques, or Jan....but for ease of talking today, let’s call him Jack.

Now who is Jack? Who identifies him? Is it an NGO with a plan? Is it a youth organisation that has outreach targets or policy makers with a strategy? What is it about him that makes him the “right” kind of target? What labels does he accept for himself?

Who is Jack? Has he even thought about it himself? Does he associate himself with the labels that other people give him? What are those labels, and who has defined them? There is a surfeit of descriptions for Jack these days.

It is necessary to have labels in life to shape the overload of information that we have to process on a daily basis and to categorise data, or put labels on them. Does Jack recognise himself in those labels, or sign up to the category where he is put? Does he agree with what those labels are? And would he put himself in a box with those labels? Good youth work is based on young people’s voluntary and active participation, engagement and responsibility.

