

The lonesome rider...

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.

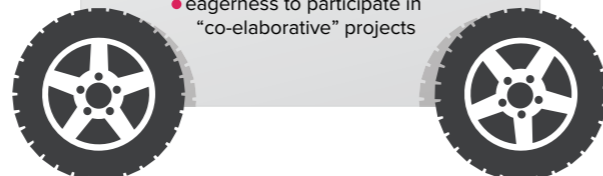
By the way, Istanbul is a great city and the seminar’s organisation was great too.

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



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.



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



Why would he build a box around himself?

These definitions are usually shaped by policy. Maybe Jack shouldn't accept a box that he is given by a policy maker. Maybe it's not one disadvantage that fits the political list: it could be many that overlap or intersect, or some that don't even have labels yet. The identity of a young person has multiple dimensions that relate to the different contexts at different parts of his or her life. Perhaps those labels make more or less sense at different stages for him; maybe his actions disregard any labels that others give him.

The identity of a young person is very important, and develops as he or she grows. If Jack is to be involved in learning mobility, it's vital that he knows himself before he can know others. He needs to understand his different layers of identity – the effects of his past that have made him the way he is, the sway of his peers, his cultural heritage or his different spheres of influence. Introspection, or being able to look inside and evaluate who you are, is a very important mobility skill.

And it's not the "one-size-fits-all" approach of going through identity theory. Supporting young people during learning mobility is about the space and the context they are in at the time, their current situation, what's going on in their lives, what's affecting them, what's pushing and pulling them... and then discovering their needs that the youth worker can help with. Has Jack been helped to think through who he is? Has he thought through the different dimensions that make up his identity, and their intersectionality? And has his youth worker linked that to his current reality and needs, taking his sensitivities into account?



photos by Marlies Pöschl

Should he be approached holistically: not just one disadvantage, not just one label on the list, or one political priority to be ticked off, but maybe he should be taken out of the box? He should be supported in the ways that he needs, to grow and develop and benefit from the learning mobility experience. We should not create boxes and limitations that he will want to escape from.

If we do insist on pushing Jack in the box, what will happen? Remember those childhood toys? He will spring out and hit us. It's a metaphor that can be taken in all sorts of ways. Think about it.

And while you are there, try the old adage of "thinking outside the box". Let's take Jack out of the box. Approach him in a different way to support him during his learning mobility experience.

Let's think about a different type of Jack. The little white ball in bowls is also called a Jack. Take that as a metaphor, where Jack becomes the centre around which the support and opportunities are offered, in the shape of bowling balls! In bowling, some balls are nearer to Jack – easier to reach and more relevant. Others are further away and harder to reach; they would stretch him out of his comfort zone. That's where the learning is. Sometimes the different opportunities and support will give him a knock, or take him to a different place than where he started from, perhaps intentionally, or at an angle he wasn't expecting.

It's a learning journey for him. Under his own steam as an actor in his own right, or with the support he needs. Hit the road, Jack. Leave that box behind.

