

TOWARDS A NEW LLL PARADIGM? EU POLICY ON KEY COMPETENCES AND RESKILLING: FACETS AND TRENDS

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Abstract. Policy initiatives such as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009) and the EU Framework on “Key Competences” (2006 and onwards) aim at contributing on the ongoing re-conceptualisation of skills (gradually correlated to Reskilling, Employability, Sustainability and Competitiveness) and operate within the context of a changing balance between technocracy, pedagogy and politics. I.e. according to the EU cluster on Key Competences “major themes are applied throughout the Framework: creativity, critical thinking, initiative taking, play a major role in all eight key competences”. This explicit changing role of Creativity gains in political visibility and requires a contextually embedded and multidisciplinary approach. On such a perspective the present paper analyses the political context and interest politics’ impact on the transformations on LLL and reskilling within the EU

policy agenda and raises methodological and epistemological issues on the interface between educational and policy analysis.

Keywords: reskilling, key competences, creativity, Life Long Learning participation, educational policy, employability, indicators and benchmarks, EU policy agenda and policy initiatives

1. Preliminary remarks on EU policy in education and training

Focusing on the policy agenda for education and training, one can easily “trace” an obvious request for a new policy paradigm for Life Long Learning (LLL). The gradual involvement of interest politics reshape the Education Policy making procedures and the redistributive operation of the educational systems, while learning is getting gradually (co-r-)related to employability and competitiveness (Papadakis & Tsakanika, 2006). The EC’s approach on LLL policies¹⁾ highlights that national and supranational LLL strategy should take a systemic, coordinated view on E&T, covering all E&T systems (formal, non-formal) and levels, provide flexible learning pathways and includes effective transition points between levels, emphasising reskilling, creativity and innovation. It also involves the development of qualification systems and includes allocation of targeted financial means, promoting partnerships with all relevant stakeholders, including regional and local actors, while including dissemination and implementation. In the context of both the major, mutual depended, supranational initiatives (namely the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy), education and furthermore education policies are brought “not only at the forefront of discourse but also at the edge of political action” (Papadakis & Tsakanika, 2005) as the focal point of a two-pillar strategy.

The abovementioned strategy²⁾ aims at ensuring sustainability and promoting both employability and social cohesion within our post-industrial “risk societies” (in U. Beck’s terms). Indeed, any attempt to analyse educa-

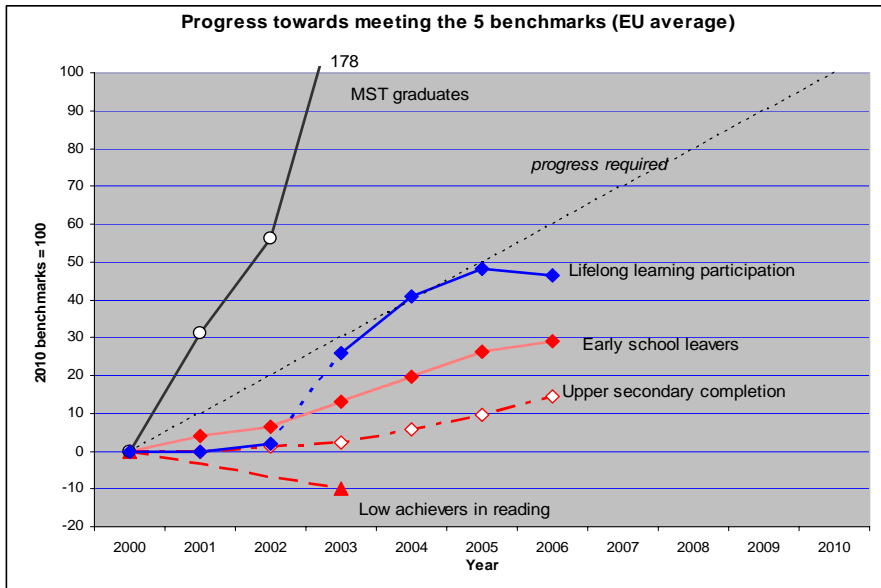
tion and its major determinants (namely learning and teaching) within the Lisbon Agenda, cannot overlook the effects of the new forms of internationalisation and the emerging transformations in economy and labour market (Lavdas et al., 2006). All the above mentioned changes reflect the *dominant policy rationality within the policy complex* and the macroeconomic articulation of educational policy as active employment policy (Hirst & Thompson, 1996, p. 74-75, Papadakis, 2006, p.203-235, Papadakis & Tsakanika, 2005 and Hviden et al., 2001). Europeanization, supranationalization of the public policies, the predominance of a new economic- developmental paradigm in the late modern capitalism and the multicultural challenge in the political systems and their civic culture, constitute the context of the major challenges for education today and subsequently redefine the role of learning and “skilling” in the educational process.

2. Benchmarking reality: facets of the state of play

Within such a context, reskilling is getting institutionally and operationally correlated to creativity, while creativity itself is becoming a focal notion- point of the relevant political agenda. The major parameters of the state of play regarding EU MS national LLL strategies (till 2008) are the following³⁾: (1) the benchmark on the MST graduates will be over-achieved; (2) there is some progress in lifelong learning participation; however, much of it is a result of changes in surveys in several Member States, which led to higher nominal participation rates and thus overstate overall progress; (3) there is constant improvement as regards early school leavers, but faster progress is needed in order to achieve the benchmark; (4) in upper secondary completion there has been only little progress, while results for low achievers in reading have not been improved.

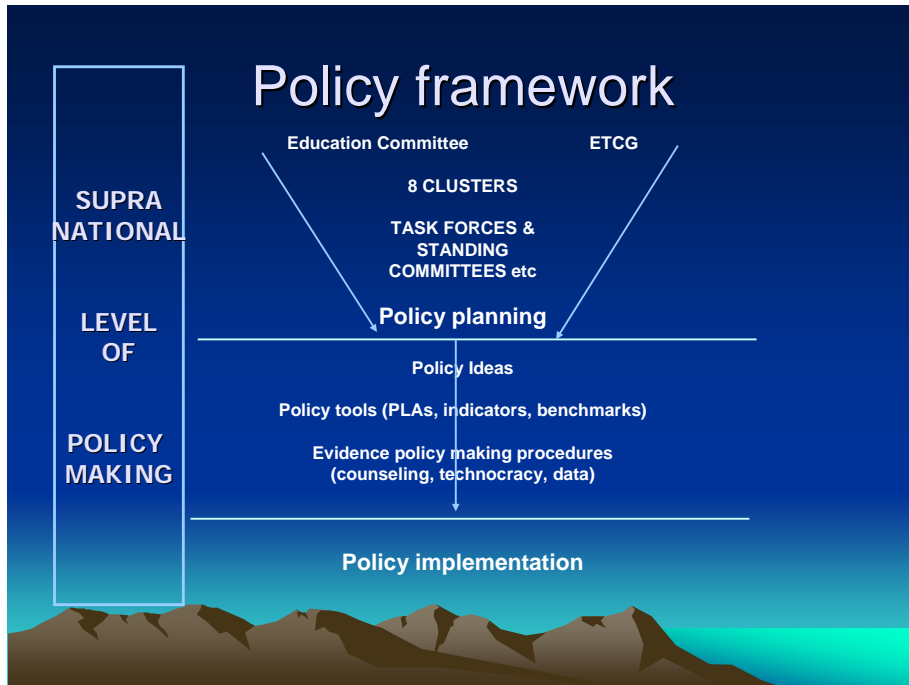
More specifically, regarding the LLL participation domain, “the percentage of the working age population who participated in education and

training (in the 4 weeks prior to the survey) amounted to 9.6 % in 2006. Since breaks in time series overstate progress the real increase was limited. Additional efforts are needed to reach the benchmark of a 12.5% participation rate in 2010. The Nordic countries, especially Denmark, the UK, Slovenia and the Netherlands currently show the highest participation rates”⁴⁾



Source: Council of the EU⁴⁾

Within this “statistical” context, what is also changing is the policy circle implemented itself. The ongoing policy-planning architecture could be represented as follows:



(Papadakis, 2008).

Obviously, policy making in LLL doesn't concern only LLL itself. In fact, it concerns many aspects and facets of the human recourse development (HRD) and subsequently has a certain impact on the ongoing transitions in economy, society and the relevant decision making processes, and the construction of a dominant knowledge paradigm (actualised within the knowledge-based economy context, Papadakis, 2008). The major trend regarding the above-mentioned policy procedure is the trend towards evidence-based policy making (Policy, Practice, R&D), that inevitably affects what the European Council (March 2007) has defined as the ideal knowledge triangle: education, research and creativity - innovation.

3. Fostering Learning Outcomes: “bridging” skills and competence- based learning with creativity and innovation

Creativity is embedded either as an explicit priority or as an implicit demand in all the major supranational policy agendas, such as the European Strategy for Employment, the Lisbon Strategy and its education branch (Work Programme Education & Training 2010), that have led in the abovementioned transformation of the education and training structures and methods. While the new public management and the transformations of the public policy complex redefine the priorities of the educational policy regarding skills (emphasis to the development of soft skills instead of the traditional manpower requirements approach), creativity is becoming more and more crucial at both institutional and operational level. Within such a context, creativity is becoming a key-feature in both the main policy documents and policy initiatives.

Taking into consideration the fact that the concept of competence and scope of creativity and innovation were broadened, the Council and the European Parliament adopted, at the end of 2006, a European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The Framework “identifies and defines, for the first time at the European level, the key competences that citizens require for their personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability in a knowledge-based society”³⁾

The Recommendation introduces eight key competences, namely eight fundamental set of skills. Key competences include not only the 'traditional' competences such as communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence, but also the more transversal ones such as i) learning to learn (related substantially to creativity); ii) social and civic competences; iii) sense of initiative (correlated to creativity) and entrepreneurship; iv) cultural awareness and expression.

Many of the key competences “overlap and interlock....many themes are applied throughout the Framework: critical thinking, creativity, initiative taking, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking and managing feelings constructively play a major role in all eight key competences.”³⁾

In order to promote implementation of the Recommendation and spread the key competences’ perspective, the Commission established the Cluster on “Key Competences and Curriculum reform”, within the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme and under the supervision of the EU Education & Training Coordination Group (ETCG).⁵⁾

The Cluster has undertaken three Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) in Belgium, (Flanders), Hungary and Greece, and number of meetings in Brussels, while it has also proceeded in two mappings (from 2004 and 2007) on how national policy agendas for lifelong learning and school curricula recognise the key competences. The abovementioned PLAs focused on “the implementation of key competences and in particular the cross-curricular or transversal key competences (learning to learn related to creativity and post-cognitive skills, social and civic, initiative taking and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression). Member States' experts have looked into policies and measures at national contexts that are needed to enable schools and other learning organisations to support the development of key competences among young people.”³⁾ Among the major findings of these PLAs, the following are of vital importance:

*“[I]n order to support the political intentions on schools as part of lifelong learning strategies, key competences should have an appropriate status in curricula and syllabi.... Teacher education, both initial and in-service, needs to reflect the paradigm change as it requires different approaches to teaching and learning,”*³⁾ emphasising alternative forms of learning that promote creativity through a cross curricular perspective.⁶⁾ The latest

should be supported by the proper learning material and pedagogical approaches focusing on the development of key competences.

No doubt - creativity is rising. Additionally, creativity placed in the agenda of several fundamental ongoing policy initiatives, attempting to draw up the actual LLL Framework in EU. The case of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation strengthens the abovementioned “hypothesis”. Within its context, the promotion of creativity and innovation is institutionally and operationally correlated to the request for efficiency and equity. According to the Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the MS (22 May 2008): more emphasis should be laid on creativity and the capacity to innovate, within the Education & Training 2010 and afterwards, correlation between cultural diversity and creativity should be highlighted and strengthened, partnerships within the educational community and between learning organization and society at large should be fostered, in order to increase creativity should be promoted and fostered, teacher institutions and teachers have a key contribution to support everyone’s creative potential and should contribute to this by “exemplifying creativity in their own teaching (more personalized and learner-centered approaches to education)”, while “all levels of E&T can contribute to creativity and innovation in a LLL perspective- the early stages of education concentrating on motivation, learning to learn skills and other key competences and subsequent stages focusing on more specific skills and the creation, development and application of new knowledge and ideas.”⁷⁾

To sum up - creativity is gradually empowered within the EU policy agenda, while it is gradually getting correlated to reskilling and LLL. Instead of being a marginalized issue, it becomes a fundamental topic for the new policy paradigm on education and training. And that is the major challenge, creativity faces: its contribution to the new LLL paradigm.

NOTES

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