New to the game: (Up)Skilling young people through gamified approaches

Final conference of the project "Competences for Effective Labour Market Entry (COMPETE)" (E7)

Barcelona, 31 May 2022

"New to the game: (Up)Skilling young people through gamified approaches" was the title of the final event of the "Competences for Effective Labour Market Entry (COMPETE)" initiative which took place on 31 May 2022 at the Palau Robert in Barcelona. The event was co-organised by the Region of Catalunya, REVES and VIVES University. It brought together 56 participants representing public authorities, social economy organisations, universities, research and training actors as well as civil society organisations/networks.

The objective of the event was to present main outputs and outcomes of the COMPETE project, compare them with realities and practices in other regions and EU Member States and discuss ways to integrate alternative learning approaches and multi-stakeholder alliances into existing training and education frameworks.

Welcome

Enric Vinaixa, State Secretary for Employment of the Catalan Region opens the conference with a reference to the building in which it takes place. Built initially for the use by upper classes, Palau Robert – managed by the Region – has nowadays become a place for information, encounters, discussions and the creation of partnerships. Vinaixa welcomes COMPETE partners highlighting the importance of skills development which, in the case of the Catalan Region and REVES is a crucial lever to promote the transition to a fairer, (socially) sustainable and more participatory society. In this context, Vinaixa points to the important role of the social and solidarity economy. He stresses, on one hand, the need to provide persons being part of enterprises and organisations of the social and solidarity economy with an opportunity to improve their knowledge and competences in order to strengthen their organisations and cooperate with others. On the other hand he is also calling for efforts to be made to promote collective entrepreneurship and related skills among persons that might not have been in touch with the social and solidarity so far (including young people, migrants and others). The Catalan Region is undertaking different type of initiatives in this regard.

Ana Umbelino, President of REVES and vice-mayor of the Portuguese city of Torres Vedras, refers to the importance of skills development as a fundament for society to tackle the various challenges and successfully realise the transition to a fairer, sustainable, more social and participatory world. Umbelino welcomes efforts that have been taken by policy-makers at European level to accompany this process by creating stimulating policy frameworks and initiatives such as the Pact for Skills which was also signed by REVES. According to Umbelino, it is fundamental, in this context, to open opportunities for training and skills development also and in particular to youngsters which are often facing major difficulties to access the labour market – also due to a lack of (soft) skills. Social economy – in partnership with policy-makers, VET providers and other actors, has a key role to play here.

The European framework: The Pact for Skills

Marie Boscher, European Commission, DG Grow, provides participants with a deeper insight into the European Pact for Skills. The Pact is the first of the flagship actions under the European Skills Agenda and is firmly anchored in the European Pillar of Social Rights. It promotes multi-stakeholder-based action for an improvement of existing skills (upskilling) and the development of new skills (reskilling) of the EU's population.

The Pact is based on commitments for the promotion of skills made by different type of actors and alliances/partnerships. Examples are the Sector Skills Alliance with organisations/enterprises from specific industrial eco-systems (one of them being the social economy and proximity eco-system), networks of cities, clusters, Vocational Centres of Excellence or Social Partner Arrangements.

Based on their signature of the Pact and declared commitment, the aforementioned alliances/partnerships then receive support by the European Union in realising their commitments. This includes support services, including capacity-building or the creation of networking hubs, but also information events, access to information on relevant funding, etc.

By signing the Pact, organisations commit to apply a number of principles, including:

- Promoting a culture of life-long learning for all;
- Working against discrimination, for gender equality and equal opportunities;
- Building strong skills partnerships with relevant stakeholders;
- Monitoring skills supply/demand and anticipating skills needs/

Marie Boscher invites participants to join the Pact, which is still possible.

She then provides an example of the work done in the framework of the Pact within the social economy eco-system. Several expert roundtables were held to discuss skills needs in this particular eco-system. The roundtables focused on specific topics, such as digital education and training or the role of cities and regions in promoting skills development in and for the social and proximity economy. During these roundtables experts generally agreed on the huge resilience potential of the social economy – not at least due to its human centric approach - and its fundamental role in reskilling and upskilling activities and local economic development in general.

Moreover, to launch the **structured stakeholder partnership**, a **focus group was set up** aiming to agree on the skills needs for this ecosystem and identify target commitments (KPIs) for the Pact. This group was composed of proximity and social economy stakeholders - representing industry and Member States - willing to engage more actively under the Structured Partnership of the Pact for Skills. It was led by Social Economy Europe and the European Venture Philanthropy Association (EVPA).

The Group produced a Declaration, which includes the specific commitments of the partnership and related KPIs: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1534&langId=en . It has been signed by more than 90 organisations. The partnership was officially launched in May 2022.

The COMPETE project

Laura Zambrini from the Italian cooperative Demetra Formazione, leader of the "COMPetences for Effective Labour MarkeT Entry (COMPETE)" project, provides participants with an insight into objectives, activities and outputs of the COMPETE project. First of all she clarifies an aspect linked to the acronym of the project, which is not supposed to hail competition as opposed to cooperation, but which makes allusion rather to the fact of addressing challenges.

The objective of the COMPETE initiative was to explore the potential of gaming approaches in tackling soft skills gaps among (graduate) students, thereby improving their possibilities to enter the labour market and be actively involved in work and social life.

Main target group of the project were thus students, but also teachers/trainers.

Soft skills were defined by the project partners as a combination of cognitive, methodological, social and digital skills. A number of studies show that their importance on the labour market is steadily increasing.

Project activities were based on four, mostly consecutive pillars:

- Field research at EU level among graduates and entrepreneurs, the results of which can be found in the project publication "Research on soft skills for employability" (IO 1);

- Desk research on serious games, game mechanics and key enabling factors, the results of which have been included in the project publication "Learning is a serious game" (IO 2);

- Game & Training package design and realization (IO 3 and IO 4), including publication of the "COMPETE toolkit: Training package and game guide"

- Piloting, dissemination and awareness-raising

The following assumptions on main success factors oriented the development of the game:

CREATING IMMERSIVITY: Immersivity refers to the subjective impression that when playing a serious game one is participating in a comprehensive and realistic experience.

INTERACTION WITH THE SERIOUS GAME: This can be ensured by the user interface, which has to be simple and provide all relevant information to play effectively (no manual or side instructions), with easy game controls and game status tracking.

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACKS: Developers can design various forms of in-game feedback. Ideally, all of them should be integrated in the serious game in order to foster engagement and learning: social, cognitive, affective, progress.

FACILITATOR'S ROLE: It is essential for a serious game facilitator to have certain attitudes and competences, and to be able to play specific roles in order to optimize players' engagement and, therewith, the learning process.

Laura Zambrini explains that UNIR - with the support of all partners - developed the COMPETE! serious game based on the outcomes of the preceding research outputs. At the moment of the final event the game is still being tested in different partner countries.

The COMPETE online game is based on an experiential learning approach. It contains two essential components of a serious game – storytelling and the use of metaphor.

Players are given the opportunity to assume roles that may be inaccessible in the real world, to observe and take decisions. This process is supposed to stimulate reflection which should, in turn,

enable the learner to draw conclusions and think about how this newly acquired knowledge could be applied in other scenarios.

The game is available in English (original language), Danish, Dutch, Greek, Italian, Lithuanian and Spanish. It can be accessed through the COMPETE website (on which also all other project outputs can be found): https://competeproject.eu/outputs/

Moreover, COMPETE partners developed a training package in which the game has a key role, but which foresees also didactic material that could, on one side, help professors and trainers introducing the theme of soft skills and their growing importance to access the labour market. On the other side this material can be considered as additional content material for graduates and students to enrich their abilities beside the game. The training package also includes a proposal for a complete training curriculum on the soft skills the COMPETE project focused on.

Concluding her presentation, Laura Zambrini presents some results of the tests carried out in Italy regarding the training package and game. These tests were carried out with different groups of students (39 in total). One group consisted of students attending the higher technical education and training course "Multimedia production technician for the digitalisation of cultural heritage" (with an age range of mainly 20-39), another group included apprentices following a start-up path that provides support for job insertion through training activities dedicated to skills useful to stay in work contexts (with an age range of mainly 20-29). Despite the initial difficulties in involving the students, the trainer found that, overall, the training went very well and everyone considered it an opportunity. In the final test phase of the training package the game was not re-proposed because in the trainer's opinion, the idea of proposing the game at the beginning of the training course makes sense and is functional as an icebreaker, offering a sort of first photograph of the person. It enhances the personal self-assessment regardless of the result itself and from there it is possible to take the opportunity to understand what to work on more, both individually and in the group. However, re-proposing the game at the end of the training process might be too risky, jeopardise certain achievements of the training process allowing to develop the different skills more deeply. Moreover, it might not leave any room for intervention afterwards.

The importance *of* and priorities *for* the promotion of soft skills: the COMPETE experience

Bert Hauspie from VIVES University Kortrijk (BE) outlines main results of the initial research phase on soft skills which led to the selection of soft skills the COMPETE initiative then focused on.

Before providing more details on the research carried out, Hauspie remembers participants of background figures and facts that fed the rationale of the COMPETE project:

- A youth employment rate of 15,9% in the EU and of 16% in the Euro area.

- A growing awareness that soft skills are critical to young people's success in the workplace and life in general

- the EU 2020 Strategy, which include the objective to increase the employment rate of recent graduates;

- a rapidly changing labour market leading also to a change of required skills (with higher requests also of skills other than the traditional hard skills, etc.);

- a need for the adaptation of the educational system and life-long learning, including upskilling of workers…

Hauspie explains that COMPETE research on soft skills had the objective to gain insights on which soft skills are most requested by the labour market and to detect for which soft skills the skill gap is the biggest. A specific focus lay on labour market *entry* of young graduates.

COMPETE research on skills was based on:

- Desk research;

- Interviews with employers from different sectors;

- A Survey among (almost) graduated students & employers.

Bert Hauspie recalls the definition of soft skills by Haselberger et al. (2012) which was taken as a point of departure:

"Soft skills represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills. Soft skills help people to adapt and behave positively so that they can deal effectively with the challenges of their professional and everyday life".

After a screening and discussion of already existing soft skills frameworks/lists (eLene4Work, MODES, UNIR) the consortium established its list of 20 soft skills which were to be analysed more deeply:

- Social soft skills (Team work, Communication, Negotiation, Customer orientation, Networking)

- Personal soft skills (Emotional intelligence, Adaptability, Tolerance to stress, Life balance, Leadership, Culture adaptability)

- Methodological soft skills (Creativity, Problem solving, Learning skills, Project management skills, Continuous improvement, Result orientation)

- Digital soft skills (Digital information management, Digital communication, Digital content creation)

COMPETE partners started to explore needs and gaps with regard to the aforementioned skills first of all in interviews conducted face to face or by phone. Interviewees were 69 persons – from Italy, Spain, Denmark, Greece, Lithuania and Belgium - having an insight about the needs of soft skills in their

companies or organizations. Their profile ranged from Human resources managers over directors to managers, but also entrepreneurs, coordinators and trainers were interviewed. Participants came from the profit, non-profit and public sector and different type of fields of economic activity. With 35 women and 34 men a gender balance in the sample was reached.

Interviewees clearly indicated skills gaps in particular with regard to teamwork, followed by communication, problem solving, adaptability/flexibility and a willingness to learn.

The majority of the participants thought the game was a good idea to develop soft skills, as:

- Games involve having fun while learning;

- Games offer the possibility to provide challenges or competition;

- Games can offer a safe environment to test and apply skills;

- Games are rather practical oriented than theoretical.

The aforementioned interviews were followed by a survey among 274 (almost) graduated students (average age: 27, different disciplines, 63,6% female) and 184 employers (companies of different size and different industrial sectors, different roles, but mainly HR managers, directors and other type of managing positions or trainers) from mainly Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, but also other countries.

With regard to the evaluation of skills, the survey gave the following results: Although both students and employers evaluated most soft skills positively, students gave themselves higher scores than employers. Most pronounced difference: a majority of students agreed on the fact they possess the soft skill "leadership", while only a minority of employers (30%) agreed with leadership abilities. Students and employers agreed on graduates' competences concerning following soft skills: digital communication, team work and cultural adaptability.

As for the **importance of soft skills**: Both students and employers understood the importance of soft skills in the context of entering the labour market.They both considered team work, communication, problem solving and adaptability as very important soft skills, while digital content creation was considered as less important.

Both for students and employers one of the biggest **soft skill gaps** was observed for tolerance to stress. According to both students and employers, there is no soft skill gap for digital information management and digital communication.

The general conclusions drawn from the first research phase are thus the following:

In general, both (almost) graduated students and employers are convinced of the importance of soft skills. Team work, communication, and problem solving are seen as the most important soft skills for young graduates when entering the labour market. Also tolerance to stress is considered relatively

important by (almost) graduated students and rated low in competence by both students and employers.

Gaming approaches – an under-estimated vehicle for the promotion of soft skills?

Alessandro Soriani, adjunct professor at the department for education studies of the University of Bologna (IT) and expert consultant for the Council of Europe shares results of his research and work on the relationship of games and learning. He focuses on the example of video games.

What has to be kept in mind here according to Soriani is that video games represent a medium which is very wide and complex (different genres, creators, perspectives, large market etc.). Moreover, according to different personal backgrounds and experiences of life, players might perceive one and the same game in a different way. Therefore, mediation – possibilities for discussion and feedback – is rather important, especially if games are used in an education and training context.

A distinction has to be made between game-based learning, gamification and serious games. ***Game-based learning*** is a teaching strategy which uses games (movement games, boardgames, card games, video games…) to teach a specific content or to reach a given learning goal. By playing the subjects gain and/or improve their knowledge. ***Gamification*** is the application of game mechanics (Charts, Progress bars, Points, Levels, Awards …) in non-game contexts. It is more structured, complex than game-based learning (which is limited in time and has a rather simple structure). Gamification can have some risks, linked for example to a lack of correct implementation, including motivational aspects (to what extent does the person play because of the fun or the challenge provided by the game and the satisfaction linked to it and to what extent does s/he do it due external factors such as pressure etc.).

Serious games – as opposed to pure edutainment where games are considered means to produce learning in an effortless and fun way - are specific games designed to teach a certain topic. They are designed for other purposes than (mainly) having fun.

Generally, a balance has to be found between the fact of including more fun in education and making games more serious.

Providing concrete examples of video games, Soriani illustrates different pedagogical approaches.

In the **direct approach** video games are used as such for their gameplay characteristics for educational purposes. Examples are "The Great Palermo" or "Assasin's Creed" where the player has the opportunity to visit a city or geographical zone or travel back in time in order to improve his/her knowledge on geography, history, culture… Specific skills – including those the COMPETE initiative focuses on – can be trained in video games such as "Keep talking and nobody will explode" or "Overcooked". Used in a direct approach, serious games can help to develop knowledge or specific contents. They can be conceived as simulators to train persons, test complex tasks and develop or improve skills.

In the context of the **indirect approach** video games to capture students' attention and encourage them to learn autonomously ('tangential learning'). An example for a video game used in this type of approach is 'Hades'.

Under the **critical approach**, video games such as 'Become human' are used to approach serious topics, current events, or one's own relationship with the medium in a critical way. The purpose is to stimulate players to reflect, discern, analyse, evaluate and finally take responsible action accordingly. Topics that have been addressed this way are, for example, violence against women, disability, minorities and their rights, reflections about current events, but also critical reflection about the production and use of video games as such.

In the context of the **creative approach**, video games (e.g. *Minecraft, Dragon Quest Builders, Portal Knights and LEGO® Worlds, together with Roblox, Little Big Planet, The Movies or Dreams*) are used to generate, modify and share with other players in-game content such as levels, maps, skins of avatars, items etc.

Concluding his presentation, Soriani calls on teacher, parents and others to contribute to the development of a genuine video game culture, including a pedagogical reflection on the use of video games and a perception of video games as a cultural tool providing not only fun, but also opportunities to learn, discuss and develop one's own skills and knowledge. The publication "Educating for a video game culture – a map for teachers and parents" of the Council of Europe would like to encourage and contribute to the development of such a culture.

Experience: Cooperative games in Catalan schools: VilaESSCOOP - The virtual and collaborative Escape room

To provide a concrete practice example for the use of gaming/gamified approaches for skills development Alexis Jiménez, Coòpolis (Barcelona), presents the 'Escape room virtual i collaboratiu'. This escape game had been developed during the Covid period to provide pupils with an opportunity to learn, in a creative, innovative and entertaining manner, more about cooperatives and experience cooperative values and principles throughout different challenges and tasks. The game can be played by groups of 2 or 3 students. It is accessible by computer, mobile phone or tablet.

As protagonists in a narrative provided by the Escape game and through a number of challenges the latter provides, players are given the opportunity to learn more about cooperativism, to reflect on current productive models and their alternatives, on agroecology, the care and welfare system and the model of proximity consumption. This way, the game encourages cooperative work among students, contributes to develop their problem-solving skills and critical thinking, but also stimulates their curiosity and willingness to search for new information.

The game lasts approximately one hour.

https://www.bcn.coop/vilaesscoop/

Gaming approaches to help skills development

In the first session of the afternoon, participants are given an opportunity to learn more about different practice examples regarding the use of gamification and serious games in skills development.

Pablo Moreno, UNIR (ES) provides an insight into the (methodological) reflections and the process that led to the creation of the **COMPETE game**. The latter had to be conceived in a way to foster the development of the four type of skills the COMPETE consortium decided to focus on after its research on skills gaps: Problem solving (and creativity), communication (including emotional intelligence), stress tolerance and teamwork. At the same time, the partners had to consider the limited budget that was at disposal to develop the instrument.

The consortium decided thus to create a single player game with simplified workflows, which should, however, be able to address and attract a diverse audience from different (cultural) backgrounds. This decision led obviously to a number of challenges, including the question of how to design a single player game to make it an instrument for the development of skills such as teamwork and communication.

This question and others were finally taken into consideration in the main features of the game:

The game simulates a multiplayer environment: The student is the leader of an heterogeneous and loosely coordinated team. The process is goal-oriented, with a focus on interactive conversations with virtual agents. The player has to go through a sequences of challenges, during which s/he has to choose and commit to follow the recommendations of one of the members of her/his fictional team.

Decisions for these main features led to the following game design:

The player acts as a senior "green activist" Climate Change project manager, who must coordinate a group of young activists in an effort to save the (fictional) island of Allpa Kawsay, providing sustainable growth without resorting to massive tourism and exploitation of its natural resources.

Over the next days, the player must work on fundraising and in the development of sustainable economic activities, balancing the local community interests with the environmental Climate Change perspective.

The player must make decisions confronting different stakeholders and requirements, with more than one possible solution for each scenario. Each in-game decision has an impact on competence scores (problem-solving, communication, teamwork and stress management) and on the overall stress level of the team.

Each decision must be supported by having different conversations with in-game virtual agents, each of them presenting different perspectives on how to approach the problem.

The player must achieve a specific score in terms of sustainability and overall island happiness. However, the game actually measures the progress in terms of the competences identified for the project.

The player is presented with a set of 10 challenges. For each challenge, the player receives:

- an initial description of the problem;
- a prompt to take preliminary action;
- a chance to get different perspectives from her team;
- the requirement to support the posture of one of the team members.

All answers are feasible and potentially correct. The goal is not to provide the best answer, but to reflect on the targeted soft skills.

The team of advisors which present different proposals of solutions to the player is composed of fictional persons with different profiles (e.g. the idealist, the realist, the money girl, the local activist, the tourism specialist…).

A two-tier scoring has been integrated into the game. It consists of a) a catchy surface scoring regarding the fictional impact of the decisions taken in terms of sustainability and island happiness and b) a muted background scoring commenting on the skills demonstrated (or not) by the player through her/his decisions.

Game designers also included Intentional dissociations to promote discussion: the best decision for the island may not be the best decision in terms of the soft skills.

As a conclusion, what should be stressed with regard to the COMPETE game is the following:

The game is not the training ! It is a vehicle to show examples of real-world practice and to foster discussion and reflection. These examples may be nuanced or trivial. Nuanced examples are most valuable when discussed from different perspective. This is the objective of the COMPETE training path and package in which the game is only one instrument among others.

The COMPETE game is accessible for everyone here: https://prerd.unir.net/compete/. Interested persons can play it either after registration or as a guest (user: guest / password: test2020).

Alessio Ceccherelli from the University of Rome Tor Vergata presents the **COOPCAMP gamified learning approach**. COOPCAMP, a training package on cooperative entrepreneurship for pupils of secondary school combines online gamification elements and experiental learning with more traditional learning and teaching methods.
It fosters the appropriation of relevant skills through a narrative and interactive process, based on specific on- and offline exercises and simulations that are carried out by a GROUP of pupils. This collective learning approach appeared to be a logical choice given the main objective of the training – the development of skills linked to cooperative entrepreneurship.

The content of the story used in the gamification is based on a pattern of meanings familiar to the pupils. The initial scenario refers to narrative situations reminiscent of teen dramas, a format that has become very popular in recent years.

As the story evolves, the narrative action shifts towards situations more related to co-operative themes, trying to meet the educational needs of the project without losing the main theme of the adventure. Pupils are invited, partly on their own and partly together with their teachers, to experience the possibility and effectiveness of using co-operative principles in the realisation of a specific mission, discovering in the different steps the meaning of the principles and their concrete application.

The training package also suggests complementing the virtual journey and face-to-face interaction with the teacher in the classroom by a series of short moments of immersion into the real life of co-operatives, i.e. through visits and meetings with co-operators.

COOPCAMP was developed by cooperatives/platforms of cooperatives from five EU Member States and training experts from the University Rome Tor Vergata under project leadership of REVES, the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy. The training package has been tested and evaluated by 73 schools and approximately 500 pupils from Belgium, Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden.
The training package, including the game, is accessible for free here: https://www.coopcamp.eu/

Gio Lodovico Baglioni from the Consortium Sol.Co Camunia (IT) provides participants with an insight into his experience of testing the COOPCAMP game with schools and students. The fact of the training being accessible for the moment only in an English version had been an initial obstacle for its test in local schools. However, with the support of English teachers experimentation could finally be started and resulted in a rather positive feedback by both pupils (many of which were not aware of the cooperative principles) and teachers. Baglioni encourages participants to test the tool and make it known among schools and other actors in the field of education and training.

Elsa Brander from Kooperationen (DK), a platform for the promotion of cooperativism in Denmark, shares with the participants information on the game "The Cooperative". The objective here is to invite the players to *reflect on* and *improve knowledge and skills needed for* cooperative entrepreneurship.

The game has to be played collectively, in groups, in order to increase the learning experience that is once again focused on collective – cooperative – entrepreneurship.

More specifically, through the immersion in a fictional setting based on story-telling, players are invited to jointly discuss and tackle dilemmas in front of which cooperative entrepreneurs might find themselves in the different stages of development of their cooperative and jointly make related choices.

Dilemmas and questions the players are confronted with relate to different stages of development of a cooperative (further development/challenge of what might already be perceived acquired competences) – thus different type of knowledge and skills to be activated/reinforced/developed.

Players are invited to take on the role of one of the co-operators of a cooperative operating in the knowledge-based – and more specifically Big Data – sector. The game describes each of the co-operators, from among which the player may choose, with a specific profile (including specialists regarding HR, Big Data/IT, civil engineering and relationships with local authorities and policy-makers in general, social analysis, rhetoric, sustainability …)

The game is built on ActeeChange, a concept especially developed to help people understand and manage change. As a dilemma game it is specially developed to increase players' knowledge of change processes and the organizational dynamics in the wake of any change a team, company or institution is subjected to.

Ideally, the game should be played in the framework of on-and offline moments, accompanied by trainers facilitating reflections and discussions within the group.

"The Cooperative" was developed in the framework of a transnational cooperation between universities, social economy organisations, other type of training organisations and civil society as well as trade unions.

The game can be accessed for free here: https://www.futureknowledgework.com/gamification

(Regional) alliances for skills development

In the closing session of the event representatives of public administration from three European regions – Catalunya, Region Örebro County (SE) and Emilia-Romagna (IT) – shared information on initiatives for skills development in their region, the importance and/or possibility of integrating other type of methodologies such as gaming approaches in existing pathways for education and training as well as on the potential and priorities for multi-stakeholder alliances in this context. Gabriele Marzano, Emilia-Romagna Region, considers gaming approaches also as an important instrument to motivate students/persons to take part in training programmes. It could therefore help to tackle a main problem training providers and public authorities are faced with regarding the implementation of programmes: mobilization of the target groups. Moreover, Marzano points to the need to teach and develop soft skills *for* and *in* all fields and sectors of economy.

Roser Hernandez illustrates the great potential of cooperation in the field of skills development with the example of the Catalan Ateneus Cooperatius. These are local alliances bringing together municipalities/public authorities, social economy players, organisations active in the field of education and training and others. Their objective is to promote the development of the social economy, also, but not exclusively to create and maintain stable quality jobs and ensure a transition to (socially) sustainable local development based on participation and empowerment in general. In total, 14 of these Ateneus exist today in the Catalan Region. The successful launch and implementation of different initiatives, including capacity-building, in fields such as production, social services, education and housing, energy or youth entrepreneurship in the field of social economy are a proof for the importance of cooperation between different type of players also when it comes to promoting (mutual) learning and skills development.

Anders Bro, County Örebro Region (SE) finally points to another fundamental element determining the success of (public) strategies aiming to foster skills development: The capacities of those developing the respective programmes and initiatives, including policy-makers and public administration. He provides the example of a network of Swedish local authorities that is currently being created also and in particular with the objective to stimulate peer-learning and skills improvement.

Photos: Gio Lodovico Baglioni

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