

International Open Space Conference

Skills, Competences, Inclusion

Developing Innovative Human Capital Policies and Projects in the Danube Region

Conclusions and Feedback

1

Before the Event

When preparing the conference and deciding for an alternative conference design based on open space technology, this was a challenge to all involved parties – to the organisers, the participants as well as to the facilitator.

When the invitation to an open space conference is issued, you have no idea who will turn up, how many people will be attracted, how committed they will be to the topic and whether they have had any experience with open space technology so far. Here is the main difference to a usual conference, designed for an arbitrary number of participants and a maximum number of famous speakers: a lot of things are really open, except the date, the general theme (which is crucial and has to be stimulating) and the venue (including enough space for whatever is going to happen).

So, of course, everybody was looking forward to the event and not without some kind of tension, but ...

2

Participants

After all, the Conference programme and theme had attracted more than 140 registrations (78 male, 64 female). 13 of 14 countries from the Danube Region were represented, each by at least one participant. 59 of the registrations came from Austrian stakeholders.

About 20% of the participants are based in Ministries, about 25% in NGOs and 12% came from research institutions, about 6% each from social partners, intergovernmental /supranational bodies and project implementing bodies and 27% came from other areas (companies, training institutions, funding institutions etc.)

Less than 10% had attended an open space meeting before and only about 25% had been to last year's DR conference.

3

Start

Although the size of the group and the shape of the room seemed to make it impossible to form one big circle, as suggested for the start of an open space meeting, there was plenty of open space in the middle and particularly on the bulletin board, which initially just showed the heading "Agenda", nothing else.

None the less, after the welcome and introduction to the conference topic by hosts Roland Hanak (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer

Protection, Austria) and Jürgen Schick (Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, Austria) and after a brief explanation on the principles and rules of open space by the facilitator/moderator Gabriele Stöger, it did not take long before the first participants came forward with themes, they wished to discuss and soon there was a long queue.

Since there were a lot more themes for the agenda than expected, it took more time to set the agenda – but even time is open.

Setting the agenda included to put the theme on the bulletin board, to choose the favourite time and to wait for other participants to sign in. It turned out that some of the themes had a similar focus, so it made sense to merge them into one.

The person suggesting a theme and time declared herself/himself responsible for the time of the discussion and had to make sure that the results will be saved.

There were 3 rounds of working sessions with facilities for 10 parallel group discussions (rooms, flip charts, felt pens, beamer in some rooms, if required).

4

Setting the Agenda

Participants had suggested 32 themes altogether. The discussion focussed on 24, some were merged into one, some themes did not find a follower and were left over (2)

First session: 8 (12),

Second session: 10 (13)

Third session: 6 (7)

Working Sessions Phase 1 (05/12/2013 11.00 – 12.45)

1. Developing multilateral projects in the field of higher education (Room 7)
2. VET – Worked based Learning (Room 8)
3. Linking formal and non-formal education (Room 4 + 5)
4. Sustainable and social ecological production for strengthening the Danube Region (Room 3)
5. Migrant workers and their rights – how to strengthen them (Room 2)
6. Mobility (VET) / Knowledge transfer (general further education) (Room 6)
7. Demographic change and migration at the local level – evidence based and multilevel approaches and policies (Room 1)
8. Entrepreneurship (room 9)
 - a. Programs for entrepreneurship development along the Danube
 - b. Creativity and entrepreneurship projects and ideas
 - c. Innovators for sustainability – and eco-social entrepreneurship programme for creating green jobs
 - d. Education and labour market – connecting employability
 - e. Learning journeys – implementing innovative non-formal learning approaches bases on peoples needs

Working Sessions Phase 2 (05/12/2013 14.00 – 15.45)

1. Inclusion of segregated groups (incl. Roma) via youth programmes (Room 6)
2. Ageing population (Room 9)
3. Preparations for establishing a youth Danube region network (Room 7)
4. EU-level cooperation between economy and institutions (in social matters) and between economy and official authorities – value creation through appreciation (Room 2)
5. Tools and skills for innovation (including social innovation) (Room 1)
6. How to use the existing financial instruments (e.g. ESF) to develop together social projects in the Danube Region (Room 8)
7. Make transition from school to the labour market easier (Room 4 + 5)
8. Cultural heritage as driver for economic growth through education and training (Room 9)
9. Coordination of stakeholders on national level for the PA9 agenda (not discussed)
10. Profiling new jobs/companies for Danube communities (not discussed)

Working Sessions Phase 3 (05/12/2013 16.15 – 18.00)

1. Roma – Non-Roma dialogue trans-national network (Room 1)
2. Sustainability of the projects aimed to integration of the Roma people through the labour market (Room 9)
3. SONDAR – sustainable operations network in the Danube Region – from soil to sustainability (Room 6)
4. Alphabetisation in VET and general further education (Room 3)
5. TVET: Adjusting/reorienting TVET towards competences for sustainable development (multilateral project LEONARDO, proposal 2014) (Room 2)
6. Develop joint projects on introducing dual TVET system for selected industries in Danube Region countries (Room 4 + 5)

During the working group sessions the two rapporteurs from ÖIBF, Veronika Litschel and Roland Löffler, as well as the facilitator Gabriele Stöger moved around to remind participants on the importance of keeping record of the main results and on their right to change groups if they feel unable to contribute anything relevant and perhaps find another theme more rewarding.

It was interesting to see, that participants hardly changed groups at first but did so more and more freely in the following working sessions. In one case the responsible person, who had suggested the theme did not turn up, due to a misunderstanding. In consequence, the group was forced to perform the rule of self organisation, which worked well after a short period of undecidedness, whether to move to another group and drop the theme or stay and make the best of it.

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Evening News

After the working sessions, participants were invited to meet again in the plenary room to exchange the main outcomes of today's work and to get a perspective of past and future discussions.

All flip charts were put on the walls in the room, so the group was surrounded by the impressive evidence of their own working progress. Everybody could take a closer look.

It was not intended to have reports from each group. As a conclusion of today's work and to find the best links for tomorrow's discussions, everybody was invited to contribute a statement, either to emphasize importance or new findings (signified by "exclamation mark") or to keep in mind open questions and issues that need further attention (signified by "question mark"). There was no demand that everybody should speak, only those who wished to contribute did so.

!	?
labour market -> education improvement of labour mobility	structural problems of labour market
respecting labour law (migrants)	Roma
pilot project on dual TVET	how to get people in DR to do a pilot project on TVET, dual system or WBL
institution responsible for Roma people	facilitating employment of Roma
"sustainability" as issue only in PA6, PA8 and PA9 – should go together	EU programme for DRS (ETC) "Danube" will start about 2015
further cooperation	youth
list of email addresses and themes of interest (summary) for follow up (networking)	elderly people
open space format	

After the evening session, the rapporteurs from ÖIBF, now with Peter Schlögl who had been invited to give the report in the closing plenary, put together all relevant information and clustered themes and questions for new working groups on the next day, which was very efficient and helpful.

6

Day 2: Morning Session

For the morning session people had made use of the law of two feet and partly came later than expected.

9 themes had been prepared the day before and participants found notebooks with documents on 9 working tables in the plenary room (4 + 5) and in basement 2 (room 9 + 10).

They were invited to choose one group, where they wished to contribute. Since the intention was to prepare a common report it was not appropriate (but possible) to move from one group to another.

The choices were:

Topic 1: Labour market and labour market policies, know-how transfer, recognition of qualifications

Topic 2: Educational systems: dual system, work-based learning and transition

Topic 3: Transition education and employment system (initial learning, LLL approach, further education, job training, green jobs, company based training)

Topic 4: Youth Platform on formal and non-formal learning

Topic 5: Elderly people (target group within employment system)

Topic 6: Respecting labour laws and mobility (migrants, vulnerable groups)

Topic 7: Integration of Roma population

Topic 8: Industrial relations

Topic 9: Entrepreneurship

Participants in the groups should add to the available document and discuss the issues as concrete and practicable as possible: What do we want to do? Who is responsible? Who has to be addressed?

Especially in those cases where project applications were an option, it should be clear at the end of the meeting, who would do what until when.

(For details see report by Peter Schlögl, Veronika Litschel and Roland Löffler)

7

Summing up of the open space experience

The morning session was not meant to lead into a coffee break but did so nevertheless (as a matter of self-organisation ...).

Before the closing session with guests from the European Commission, European Parliament and the Ministries of Education and Labour, however, the feedback and concluding session with participants had to take place.

For the occasion, we finally managed to make just one big circle, where everybody could see all others! Great success.

The "talking stone" (it also could have been a "talking stick") was handed from one to the other around the circle. Participants had the opportunity to give feedback and make a (really brief) statement or pass the stone, if they did not want to speak about: Inspirations, I take with me from this event / frustrations, I wish to leave behind.

In general the feedback referred to:

- stimulating working atmosphere
- Good discussions of relevant issues
- Optimistic perspectives on further cooperation
- Enthusiasm on the new open space experience
- Thanks to the hosts in general and in particular for choosing this format for the conference

8 Closing Session

Summing up the discussions for the speakers of the closing plenary, Peter Schlögl, Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training (ÖIBF) presented his report on the main themes and results of this conference.

First speaker from the international level was – via video message – László Andor, Member of the European Commission in charge for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion followed by

Rudolf Hundstorfer, Federal Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria, who had to interrupt the coalition talks for the forming of the new Austrian government, to speak to the participants from the Danube Region.

On behalf of Claudia Schmied, Federal Minister for Education, the Arts and Culture, a statement was presented by Hanspeter Huber, Director General for International Affairs in the Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, Austria.

Pierre Mairesse from the European Commission, DG Education and Culture, Director Europe 2020 - Policy Development and Country Analysis was the second European representative to speak followed by

Evelyn Regner, Member of the European Parliament, who gave a passionate plea and encouraged participants in their commitment to intensify cooperation in the Danube Region.

The closing words, on behalf of the Federal Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, who had to leave the conference after his statement, were given by Christian Operschall Director General for Labour Market in the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, who once again thanked all participants and the organisers.

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Finally, I also wish to thank the hosts and organisers for the preparation of the conference, the enjoyable cooperation and broad assistance during the event and the courage and trust when choosing open space technology for an alternative conference design.

It was a great pleasure to be part of the process!

Vienna, December 2013

Gabriele Stöger