

Comment by Cristina Maria Coimbra Vieira

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(English)

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The paper entitled The New Skills Agenda for Europe, written by Dana Bachmann and Paul Holdsworth explains very clearly the most recent political priorities recommended for European countries that belong to European Union (EU) in order to increase the level of mobility of workers in the workplace. Several recommendations are made, either related to the increase of literacy levels of adults, or to the investment in their professional development by fostering the promotion of transversal competencies and skills. The paper is written in a very positive and optimistic way, discussing the challenges for the future in EU in order to not leave anyone behind in the education field and labour market.

Although the principles of such New Agenda are of very high level in terms of intrinsic values to build a better society for all, perhaps the goals are too idealistic because of several factors that I would like to expose, considering mainly the reality of my country:

- The emphasis in economy seems to somehow silence the intrinsic needs and interests of workers as learning subjects, as well as their prior learning experiences. We cannot simply adapt people to respond to new requirements of labour market without considering their propensity to enroll in opportunities of education and training. Such propensity may be affected by previous experiences as adult learners, by their self-concept as learners, by their stereotypes, by their goals in life, etc.
- The equality of opportunities to potentially access new career opportunities, to develop new competences for labour market and to increase the literacy levels, including digital ones, doesn't mean equality of opportunities for effective enrollment of adults in such offers, and as a consequence it does not mean equality of opportunities for success. Several aspects may be pointed here for such reflection, from economic and familiar ones (familiar responsibilities of women, for example, with dependent children or older persons) to geographic ones (accessibility to training centres using public transports; the division between rural and urban areas).
- The burden of intersectionality of factors (personal identities and contextual factors) may prevent adults from enjoying the new opportunities for increasing their knowledge, employability and competitiveness. Maybe this is the reason why the authors of this paper highlights the fact that the participation rate of low-qualified adults in opportunities for enhancing their potential as members of the society is lower than the figures related to higher-qualified workers.
- It is not enough to trace ideal politics to solve actual problems of countries if the emphasis is not based on a systemic view of necessary changes that should occur in the different stakeholders. Focusing the individual within a functionalist view - that suppose that 'equip' (sic) people with skills needed to respond to labour market changing requirements - is the best way to disclaim society responsibilities as a whole.

- The defense of mobility across countries in EU and the integration of migrant people in the receiving countries are major challenges nowadays due to recent political and diplomatic incidents between nations and the fears of terrorism, with the increasing appearance of nationalist movements within each country.

In fact, the new 'political geography of the world' is dragging Europe to unforeseen and undesirable scenarios, and this cannot be absent in the design and implementation of its policies, whether they relate to the labor market or other social rights of people.

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