Open Schooling Policy Recommendations

Introduction

In November 2017 European leaders proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights and committed to delivering on its 20 principles, the first of them on education: "Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market." The policy and public discourse have long been about the best way towards such provisions, and it has just been amplified during the school closures of 2020-2022.

Open Schooling as an approach that creates an engaging environment for children's learning while strengthening links to local communities has proven to be an effective approach to address the challenges of the Global Learning Crisis that has also been addressed by recent EU policy. Local expertise and experience incorporated into learning at school, making links to the real world offers ways to learn more meaningfully and leads to better motivation of learners, but also of teachers. Thus, Open Schooling approaches can contribute to the creation of an education environment that provides the quality and inclusion demanded by the commitment EU Member States have made. This commitment is also present outside of the European Union as it is in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Non-formal education providers play a very important role in successful Open Schooling programmes being the interface between the community and school - given that they are often more deeply embedded in the local societal context than formal education providers - and have the pedagogical expertise to more easily engage with the professionals at school than informal educators with non-educational background.

In the PHERECLOS project, 15 partners from different European countries and one non-European one, have come together to promote Open Schooling, the benefits of such approaches in the STEAM domain, and to promote the crucial and possible coordination role of non-formal education providers, especially Children's Universities.

The work done in the PHERECLOS project is based on the science capital concept, building on the sum of all the science-related knowledge, attitudes, experiences and resources that an individual builds up

through their life. The concept, developed at the King's College London identifies the elements of a person's science capital making it clear that it is built everywhere and at all times, making the case for the collaboration among the learning venues: the home, the community, the local informal and non-formal learning provisions and possibilities, and the school.

The basis of the policy recommendations that follow are built on the step-by-step approach of PHERECLOS. The foundation is a thorough analysis of research on Open Schooling and science capital, accompanied by a review of international, European and national policies. Based on this, six main advocacy areas have been identified, and described in a series of Policy Briefs. The PHERECLOS partners have collected and analysed Open Schooling case studies and this analysis formed the first round of bases for policy recommendations. The model of Open Schooling with schools in the centre, but the activities coordinated by non-formal education providers - in this case Children's Universities - was piloted in six different educational and geographical contexts in so-called Local Educational Clusters. The consortium also published an open call for establishing Transnational Education Mentoring Partnerships, and ten such partnerships, coordinated by various non-formal education providers, not only Children's Universities, were established in order to have a wider sample that can validate the approach.

Based on these experiences, the PHERECLOS partnership has developed the following recommendations for policy on European, national and local levels:
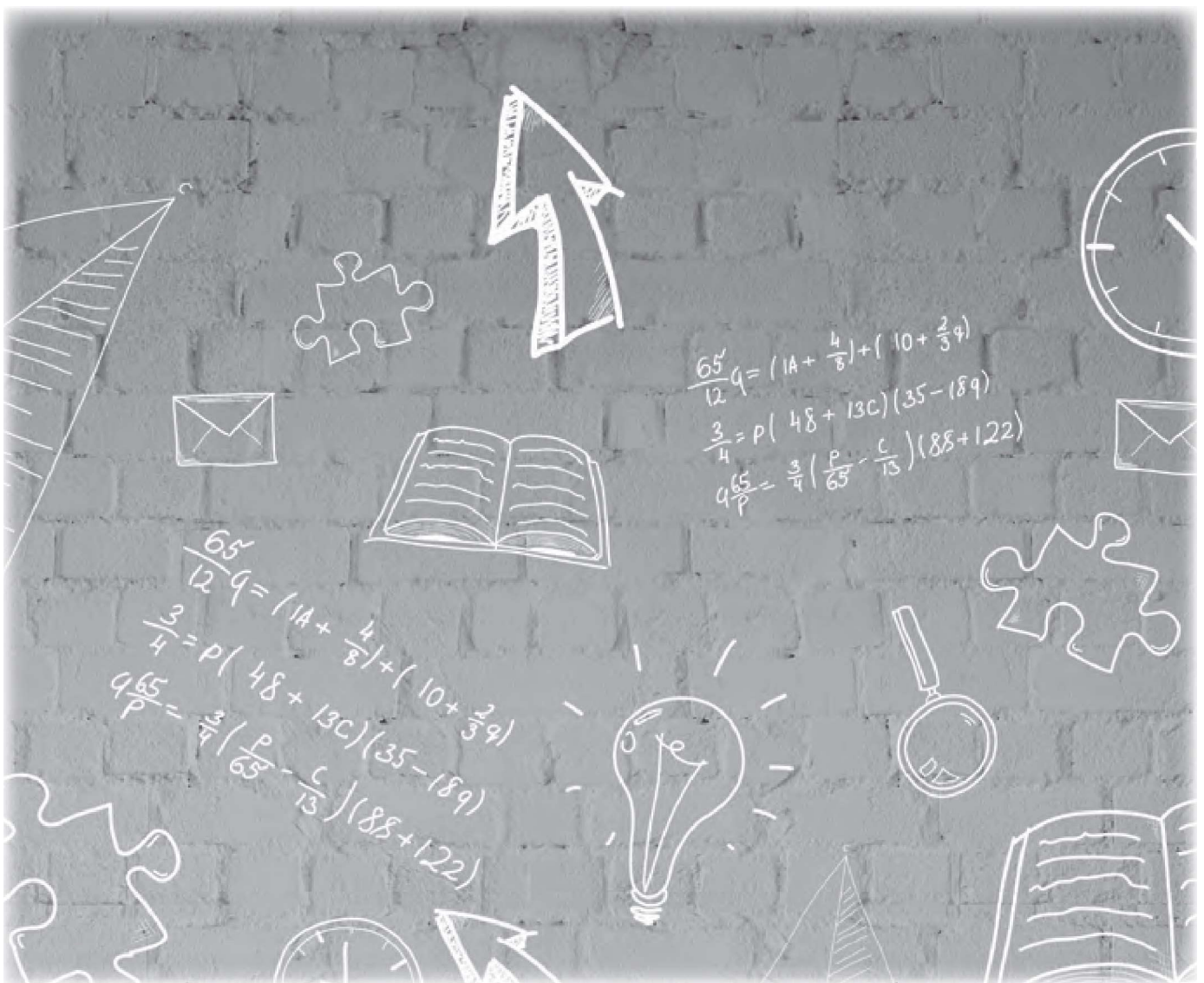
First Policy Recommendation:

Make the benefits of Open Schooling on STEAM learning known and acknowledged

What we know:

- Open Schooling can support STE(A)M learning better for the majority of students than traditional methods
- Open Schooling brings the benefit of active citizenship through community engagement into STE(A)M education

How we know it:

The Scientix Observatory report *STEM Education Practices in Europe* (2018) has established the need for student-centred methods in the STE(A)M classroom and the limitations of using such methods in formal education alone.

An analysis of inspiring cases from all over the world was undertaken by the PHERECLOS consortium, and the outcome clearly shows the benefits of Open Schooling as well as the participatory nature of it. The analysis states that "Open Schooling enables individualised learning for school students because Open Schooling takes care of learning needs of the individual, but also of the group - team work as an appropriate education method supports the understanding of each team member and the learning from each other. Discussions in the group and with the stakeholders foster an atmosphere of questioning, thinking and also critical thinking.

An important benefit is to learn to have an own and valuable opinion and to learn to think critically. In a lot of school systems and also family systems obeying, following and reproducing stand in the way of the learning process."

In PHERECLOS, 6 Local Education Clusters (LECs) were implemented with diverse foci and methodologies. However, individualised learning as well as active participation were at the core of each LEC. The final report introduces these approaches and how they were suitable for supporting the diverse learning needs of students. The outcomes of LEC

activities reinforce the benefits for individual learning as well as for active participation.

What policy can do?

At European level:

- Continue financing opportunities for educators to learn about the benefits and forms of successful Open Schooling programmes, especially by upscaling and mainstreaming the outcomes of successful projects.
- Create opportunities and incentivise mutual learning, especially between professional educators working in formal education and non-formal educators by making mobility available for all active stakeholders of Open Schooling, not only teachers.

At national level:

- Foster the exchange of experiences, especially among formal education professionals, non-formal providers and families through regular events and communication such as press publications, newsletters, fairs, etc.
- Create opportunities for showcasing inspiring practices within the country and beyond.
- Create national funding opportunities for the capacity building of educators, especially non formal educators and parents as currently EU-funding is hardly available for them

At local level:

- Assess, promote and showcase local science capital
- Local policy makers should facilitate collaboration among key stakeholders in order to share experiences as well as concerns

Second Policy Recommendation:

Enable school autonomy and ensure stakeholder engagement for successful Open Schooling

What we know:

▶ Successful Open Schooling initiatives in STE(A)M education require a certain level of autonomy in formal education
▶ Various stakeholders with different roles and responsibilities are to be engaged in designing, implementing and evaluating Open Schooling initiatives

How we know it:

Since Open Schooling is an approach that reflects on the individual learning needs of students, decisions on provisions are best made as close to the student as possible. This means that decisions are best made at the class and school level. This is only possible if the school has the necessary autonomy – with regards to curriculum, methodologies, and finances – to make these decisions.

One of the core elements of Open Schooling is that the education offer is designed collaboratively. Various education stakeholders have different competences and experiences in STE(A)M education provisions and thus need to be engaged from design to evaluation.

The PHERECLOS inspiring cases analysis clearly showed the need for both autonomy and stakeholder engagement. One of its key conclusions is that an Open Schooling approach requires "a relatively high level of autonomy for the school leader to choose their partners and also for teachers to choose teaching tools and methods". An analysis of policy in the PHERECLOS partner countries has also shown that in most countries schools enjoy wider or less wide autonomy already. At the same time, stakeholder engagement is less typical. Non-formal providers, students and parents rarely take part in decision making, although their voices are considered to a larger or smaller extent. Another key conclusion on stakeholder engagement

states that "change processes and Open Schooling need well-meaning and open-minded stakeholders, facilitators for change. Well-disposed, emphatic and goal-oriented collaboration between the stakeholders is a requirement to reach the goal, the stakeholders should be team players and should trust each other. The common goal is focussed upon the project, not the personal interests."

The PHERECLOS LECs, being based on a non-formal provider at the core, were all designed to engage a range of stakeholders. They operated within the reality of national legislation, but in all LEC countries some autonomy is already provided at school level. However, curricular autonomy is not present in most LEC countries that resulted in successful actions and increased STE(A)M engagement, but often as an extracurricular activity. It clearly shows that curricular autonomy is also an important part of successful Open Schooling activities as they are not only to support better learning outcomes in general, but better learning related to schooling.

What policy can do

At European level:

▶ Provide funding schemes for mutual learning with special focus on exchange programmes for school leaders, non-formal education providers and parents
▶ Introduce a showcase of initiatives, similar to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships that rewards successful practices
▶ Ensure that key stakeholders are always engaged in European level policy actions, eg. as members of the Working Group on Schools

At national level:

▶ Create a legislative framework that provides the necessary autonomy for schools
▶ Accompany the legislative framework with capacity building and counselling programmes

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At local level:

▶ Offer local support to schools to collaborate, to be aware of all local Open Schooling opportunities and how to navigate them

▶ Offer logistics solutions (eg. school buses) that autonomous schools can use in implementing Open Schooling

▶ Facilitate an exchange of experiences and capacity building of stakeholders locally

Third Policy Recommendation:

Raise awareness among school leaders and teachers about Open Schooling and provide appropriate capacity building opportunities for them

What we know:

▶ Teachers and school leaders need professional autonomy for successful Open Schooling programmes

▶ Appropriate training and support as well as remuneration are necessary factors for any education innovation to succeed

How we know it:

The European Education Policy Network on Teachers and School Leaders researched the attractiveness of teaching professions in 2019. Its research outcomes clearly show the need for appropriate professional support as well as a feeling of being overworked without proper remuneration as keys in personal decisions to remain in the teaching profession or leaving it. Teacher and school leader burnout has also been identified as a main challenge schools are facing by the same research as well as numerous others. Teachers also report that a growing percentage of students require special attention and science results of standardised tests in general show a decline. These are definitive signs of the need for professional support for formal education providers.

In the PHERECLOS inspiring cases analysis, a set of key conclusions is about capacity building and lifelong learning. It has found that "capacity building and training are important to reach and sustain professionalisation, it is "a must do" in our quickly changing world. In principle all stakeholders of Open Schooling projects/processes are requested to train and learn new and appropriate skills, not just the students at school." It also concludes that "as far as formal schooling and the connection with informal learning outside the school is concerned, the potential for long-term implications of Open Schooling lies in the teacher training perspective." The analysis of practices especially highlighted capacity building needs with regards to including the Arts element as an addition to STEM for appropriate and attractive STEAM provisions.

The LECs have summarised 12 success factors based on their implementation experiences. They have highlighted teachers as the key actors in Open Schooling STE(A)M success and emphasised their need for capacity building. Most LECs included such activities in their programme with great success. However, they also have found that being engaged in activities also builds capacity in itself.

What policy can do

At European level:

▶ Promote school autonomy and related capacity building needs by further disseminating outcomes of European-level education Working Groups

- Utilise the Open Method of Coordination to facilitate the exchange of inspiring policy practices

At national level:

- Curate and facilitate an appropriate continuous professional development offer for teachers and school leaders that has elements of Open Schooling at its core
- Issue legislation that acknowledges and properly remunerates school leaders and teachers

for Open Schooling activities and the extra effort it requires

At local level:

- Celebrate successful Open Schooling collaborations and share it in local media
- Create a local pool of professional support to make capacity building during school time possible for teachers and school leaders with time off while their professional duties at school are covered

Fourth Policy Recommendation:

Make arrangements for non-formal education providers to be systematically engaged in Open Schooling provisions

What we know:

- Non-formal education providers are to be considered as main partners in Open Schooling for better learning outcomes and catering for diverse student needs
- Non-formal education offers more flexibility through its own structures while schools play a main role in setting safe frameworks

How we know it:

The Science Capital approach, PHERECLOS promotes, considers STE(A)M learning happening in all walks of life, especially emphasising the importance of learning happening in non-formal (and informal) settings. UNESCO had promoted a similar approach to education since the publication of their document "Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?" (UNESCO, 2015) that considers education as a common good, the responsibility of all. These combined, require a systemic approach to recognise and celebrate learning happening everywhere. And as professional education institutions that children must be enrolled in in many countries, it is relevant for schools to take the lead in this.

The PHERECLOS inspiring practice collection brought together 63 successful cases, whereas 43

of them built on regular and organised collaboration between formal and non-formal education. The analysis of the cases has found that "non-formal education can be seen as an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education. It has generally more flexible structures, making them more suitable for innovative activities, answering immediate and diverse needs." As one of the main goals of Open Schooling is to provide for diverse learner needs, the flexible and innovative nature of non-formal providers is a great asset for formal education. This is reinforced by the fact that 35 cases were also highlighted for their inclusive approach. Non-formal provisions also make the transition from school subjects to more complex STE(A)M easier according to experiences, which is another great asset in STE(A)M.

A children's university, a non-formal education provider was at the core of each PHERECLOS LEC. Similar starting points, but very different approaches, methods, topics and arrangements were experimented within the various LECs. In their implementation phase, they demonstrated the vast possibilities for Open Schooling provisions that build on or strongly and systematically collaborate with non-formal providers. Some LECs, especially the ones in Poland, Italy, Portugal and Colombia, successfully engaged other types of non-formal providers in their clusters. Another rich proof for the benefits of engaging non-formal education providers

is the experiences of the PHERECLOS-financed Transnational Education Mentoring Partnerships (TEMPs) some of which were built on collaboration with non-formal providers other than children's universities. In the TEMPs not only transnational mentoring has proven to be a successful approach, but – as in the case of LECs, too – the role of non-formal providers as capacity-builders of formal educators was also recognised and highlighted.

What policy can do

At European level:

▶ Provide funding arrangements for non-formal education providers to actively engage in mobility actions together with their formal education peers

▶ Use the Open Method of Coordination for sharing policy experiences for inspiration

▶ Use major European education events for showcasing inspiring practices

At national level:

▶ Create financial and professional incentives for Open Schooling initiatives that are built on collaboration with non-formal education providers with special focus on systemic rather than ad hoc ones

▶ Organise fora for exchanging experiences between non-formal education providers

▶ Arrange for non-formal providers to train and coach school leaders in collaboration with them

At local level:

▶ Create a catalogue of non-formal provisions available locally and keep it updated

▶ Offer matchmaking provisions between schools and non-formal providers

▶ Promote non-formal provisions to the general public making it possible for school leaders, teachers, parents and the students themselves to make the match with their schools
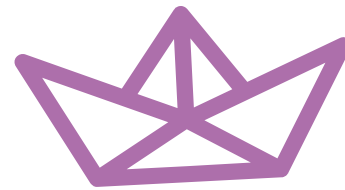
Fifth Policy Recommendation:

Ensure stable, long-term financing for Open Schooling and ensure that these provisions are available within the realm of free general education

What we know:
▶ Open Schooling initiatives need continued funding from their initial phases throughout the life of the programme

▶ Funding can be allocated with the school or other actors of Open Schooling programmes, and need to ensure that families do not have related financial burden

How we know it:
One of the starting points of the PHERECLOS project was a policy inventory, identifying key policy areas for successful Open Schooling actions. Based on the analysis of international policy documents and treaties, and having an accompanying reality check, one of the main red flags raised was the lack of regular, systematic financing for these actions. Organisations that have successfully applied for EU-funding and wish to further the use of tools developed have long advocated for making funds available for mainstreaming and upscaling. The overall success of inclusion efforts largely depends on sustained funding (it was made obvious by school systems being shocked again in 2022 by refugee influx while funding was present to prepare them for such an event during the 2015 refugee crisis.) Provisions can be channelled to the school (making autonomous decisions possible, but with the potential danger of having too little funding available for a programme if schools are not acting in clusters, but individually), to the child (that makes parental engagement in decision making an absolute necessity) or the non-formal provider (creating a "market" that needs to be adjusted to

schools' needs rather than the offer leading schools). This means that good and sustainable funding is strongly linked with previous recommendations on autonomy and the engagement of stakeholders by co-decision-making.

A Europe-wide survey of parents done in 2015 and repeated in 2019 clearly shows that out-of-school activities as well as activities with external actors in the schools – the two main types of Open Schooling activities – mean a financial burden for families in most European countries. In some countries, these activities are already included in the free provisions of the school, in some countries external funds are available for parents who struggle paying for these programmes, but in the majority of cases the provisions are not universally free.

In the inspiring cases analysis, one of the key components was funding and it was also identified as a main obstacle to implementing successful Open Schooling programmes. In most case studies, the funding identified was temporary, namely project funding. In other cases, the sustainability of programmes depends on short term operational funding available for 1-3 years that also makes long-term planning and mainstreaming difficult with the constant uncertainty about the renewal of such funds. Also, in some cases the funding is totally detached from the school that makes the choice for the most appropriate programmes more difficult, resulting in schools opting for those funded externally.

One of the biggest challenges the PHERECLOS LECs and TEMPs are facing is sustaining their activities after the funding period. The TEMP-funding ended about half a year before the current document was created, and in some cases, collaboration could be maintained – but without funding. All actions that were initiated in LECs and TEMPs largely depend on the availability of further funding. One inspiring example used throughout the PHERECLOS project is from Denmark - that makes the availability of services provided by the Danish project partner UCPH ensured -where funds were made available by national policy for each school for their Open Schooling programmes.

What policy can do

At European level:

▶ Promote the regulations of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union that require Member States to provide free education

▶ Include appropriate funding and free access as one of the core elements of inclusion in education in all policy documents on inclusion

▶ Prioritise upscaling and mainstreaming of successful evidence-based Open Schooling STE(A)M projects developed using EU-funding to make them sustained and financed programmes with at least as much funding made available as the amount assigned for innovation

At national level:

▶ Assess and monitor the real costs of education by regularly consulting schools and families

▶ Set up a specific fund accessible for schools and/or non-formal education providers to ensure free access to quality non-formal provisions in a systematic way, discouraging short-term provisions and encouraging co-decision-making of schools, families and non-formal providers.

▶ Include regular funding for Open Schooling activities in school budgets

At local level:

▶ Monitor the changing needs of local schools and learners, set up an alarm system to flag changes that affect access

▶ Engage with local businesses and make it possible for them to collaborate with non-formal providers and schools for more accessible Open Schooling programmes

▶ Celebrate and showcase successful long-term collaborative Open Schooling programmes

Sixth Policy Recommendation:

Remove physical and legal barriers to student participation in Open Schooling

What we know:

▶ Accessibility is a complex issue of legal and physical considerations should be the highest priority in Open Schooling

▶ Open school provisions need to have a universal design approach so that they cater for the needs of all students

How we know it:

Education as a common good – as promoted by UNESCO – acknowledges that learning happens everywhere, and everybody is responsible as a learner and as an educator. This means that basic rights must be ensured to allow all students to benefit from all available provisions, and within Open Schooling this must happen within the realm of "schooling", but not necessarily in the school building. Research – for example the recent outcomes of the Child UP project - also shows that children have a much higher level of agency, and are able to make more complex decisions for themselves and others than most adults, including policy makers assume.

The policy analysis undertaken at the beginning of the PHERECLOS project has identified access as one of the key barriers to Open Schooling. Apart from the financial provisions, two more factors have been identified within this realm: physical barriers and legislative ones with regards to the personal interaction of minors and Open Schooling providers external to the school. The former can be removed by implementing a Universal Design

approach, not planning education provisions for some kind of "average", but considering the diverse needs of students, be it their physical or learning disability, restricted knowledge of the main language of instruction, learning style and others. Legislative barriers are being set up by more and more countries thus not only violating child rights and backtracking on their commitment made at the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also making Open Schooling much more difficult. In the analysis of Open Schooling cases attitude has been identified as one of the main barriers that includes a limited understanding of child agency.

The implementation period of most LEC activities coincided with restrictions countries introduced, quoting Covid-19. The lack of access was manifested in many countries in the form of preventing non-formal providers from operating properly, especially by banning access to school buildings. LEC experiences show that in some cases virtual access can be part of the solution, but not a replacement to in-person participation. Another helpful solution in this exceptionally difficult period that can inspire providers in less turbulent times is moving activities outdoors – that also requires free movement during school hours as well as physical accessibility provisions (including ramps, safe crossings, maintained outdoors spaces, etc.)

What policy can do?

At European level:

▶ Promote child rights and risk mitigation in Open Schooling as part of the EU's commitment to ensure the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

▶ Organise peer learning activities for making Universal Design in Education (UDE) known by professionals and incentivise including the topic of UDE in initial teacher education as well as continuous professional development

▶ Make provisions for UDE innovations and their upscaling/mainstreaming

▶ Make child agency a focal topic of the Open Method of Coordination

At national level:

▶ Revise national legislation that may prevent Open Schooling programmes inside and outside of school with special emphasis on legislation on who can enter schools and how minors can leave the school building

▶ Remove age restrictions on minors being on their own, and promote co-decision of parents and children in this area

▶ Make provisions – financial and training alike – available for UDE

▶ Introduce a "trusted and inclusive provider" badge or similar to guide schools and families

At local level:

▶ Assess potential physical barrier of participation and invest in accessibility

▶ Incentivise the mutual learning of community stakeholders to build trust and confidence for Open Schooling activities inside and outside of schools

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                IN REGIONAL CLUSTERS OF OPEN SCHOOLING

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Consortium: **KINDERBURO UNIVERSITAT WIEN GMBH (KUW)**, Austria

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                UNIVERSITAT WIEN (UNIVIE), Austria

                EUROPEAN SCHOOL HEADS ASSOCIATION (ESHA), Netherlands

                KOBENHAVNS UNIVERSITET (UCPH), Denmark

                STICHTING INTERNATIONAL PARENTS ALLIANCE (IPA), Netherlands

                SNELLMAN-INSTITUUTTI RY (SNELLMAN), Finland

                POLITECHNIKA LODZKA (TUL), Poland

                UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO (UPORTO), Portugal

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