

## Non-formal Education Providers in Open Schooling

### Key messages

- ⇒ **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**

**Local non-formal education providers are key stakeholders in open schooling. Non-formal education often already has a complementary role in the learning path of many students, and it makes them a natural ally. Non-formal education providers often have tools or methodologies missing from school, and provide a non-frightening learning environment. As they are embedded in the local community, they can also support the development of open schooling partnerships.**

Education is generally understood as a deliberate, intentional, purposeful and organized activity. Formal and non-formal educational opportunities share a main characteristic, namely that they have a lesser or higher degree of institutionalization. However, formal education is generally more traditional and to a certain extent rigid, offering a safe and reliable overall structure. At the same time non-formal education generally has more flexible structures, making them more suitable for innovative activities, answering immediate and diverse needs. A good partnership builds on the safety of formal institutions and the flexibility of non-formal partners for the overall goal of better learning provisions for diverse student needs.

When aiming at delivering on both global (Sustainable Development Goal 4) and European (EU2020, European Education Area) goals on quality, inclusive education, one of the main demands is to re-define responsibility for education as that of all, paving the way for a holistic approach and collaboration between formal, non-formal and informal education providers. Rethinking Education by UNESCO clearly demands for exploring new education ecosystems to be able to cater for diverse needs and educational goals. It also links all

education domains, including STE(A)M to well-being and humanistic approaches. With regards to migrant inclusion, the document demands for an open approach to alternative knowledge systems to ensure that Western cultures do not over-dominate education. This, in the reality of diverse societies, is only possible through a wide understanding of education providers and close collaboration among them. In their document, UNESCO proposes the establishment of learning space networks with the school being part with a well-defined role as a way to prevent them from becoming obsolete. The overall goal, according to this policy document, is to develop open and flexible lifelong learning systems from cradle to grave that are built in multiple learning spaces with formal, non-formal and informal education all acknowledged, valued and recognised.

### Inspiration #1 – Children’s Universities

Since the early 2000s, Children’s Universities were initiated at many universities around the globe. The initial intention was on low-threshold STE(A)M engagement, which enables encounters with role models at eye level, allows children to gain first-hand impression of the manifold forms of academic research and scientific thinking and links it with curiosity, interests and living environment of children. In the evolvement of the model, emphasis was put on social inclusion, acknowledgement of different viewpoints and critical thinking – and increasingly the impact on organisational development of universities and their role in the society around them (Third Mission) became evident. In reaction to that, the European Commission has supported the formation of a Europe-wide network (EUCU.NET), which now includes more than 80 partner organisations from 33 different countries.

Year by year, more than 500.000 children participate in CUs – and more and more universities are still embarking on a journey of opening their doors for children and enter in a dialogue. CUs are about exploring our world in an engaging and supportive way. Voluntary participation is key, irrespective of prior achievements in education or socio-economic background. CUs are perfect examples for learning at the overlapping edges of formal and non-formal education: some CUs work together with schools for



better reaching diverse groups of children; some integrate teachers in the didactical concepts or provide material for schools – and on the other end, the universities reacts to that paradigm shift as well, eg. when they integrate CU activities in curricula (eg. for teacher training students) or social skills trainings.

[\(More information\)](#)

The transformation of the educational landscape, the growing diversity of manifest needs, together with other factors, such as the impact of a global digital education market has resulted in an increasing recognition of the importance and relevance of learning outside formal institutions. Globally, we are witnessing a move from traditional educational institutions towards mixed, diverse and complex learning landscapes in which learning occurs through a variety of educational institutions – both formal and non-formal – and non-institutional providers. There is a need for approaching learning as a continuum, in which schooling and formal education institutions interact more closely with other, less formalized educational experiences from early childhood throughout life. While the role of formal education is to provide stability, non-formal providers are offering varied spaces, times and relations for learning to take place, and together they can establish a network of learning spaces where formal, non-formal and informal spaces of learning interact and collaborate for better learning outcomes. At the same time, non-formal providers' flexibility often makes them more capable to address specific needs, such as catering for rural as well as urban realities, diverse individual inclusion needs, or ethnic, cultural and traditional diversity.

### Inspiration #2 – Dragonfly

Dragonfly, an educational programme for elementary school children started in 2008 and it has cooperated with over 300 schools in Hungary, and Hungarian-speaking institutions in Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia, Slovenia and Serbia reaching thousands of teachers and over 10 000 students each year. The main goal is to provide schools with a visually attractive literary and ecological children's magazine for free and instructing the teachers about how to use it in their everyday work. The program's website provides over 6000 different auxiliary materials. Children and teachers have the

opportunity to take part in various creative competitions and quizzes. The programme fights for social equality by education, and has had several programs that targeted specific groups of disadvantaged people (disadvantaged teenagers, the homeless, the migrants, children living with disabilities). Based on a network of volunteers of several hundred teachers, professionals and NGOs all over Hungary and in the neighbouring countries, the programme is operated by Liget Műhely Alapítvány, a Hungarian public benefit organization.

[\(More information\)](#)

Countries approach partnerships between formal and non-formal education provisions in different ways varying from not prohibiting it to making it a desirable approach, and in many countries, there are legislative or financial incentives for formal and non-formal education providers entering into partnerships. The European Union funding opportunities have reflected EU policies on open schooling, and financial provisions are available for such initiatives.

*Sources: UNESCO, European Commission*

### ABOUT PHERECLOS

PHERECLOS is aiming to establish "Local Education Clusters" (LECs) of different design as examples of open schooling. All LECs will bring together schools and other relevant actors in the education ecosystem in a particular pilot region, supported by a peer mentoring programme. The LECs will be incubators for enabling a dialogue between various parties and help to set up joint activities in formal and non-formal education. The LECs will also help to develop collaborative learning environments as experimental testbeds for schools, and in parallel, they aim to impact on the quality of science engagement opportunities available in these areas.

**More information:** [www.phereclos.eu](http://www.phereclos.eu)



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