

EPALE Podcast

Greener Horizons: Exploring the power of sustainable and green skills

Transcript



Christin Cieslak: Welcome to our EPAL Podcast episode on “Greener Horizons, exploring the power of Sustainable and green skills”. In this episode I have the honour of talking to two experts in the field, Arine Huijboom and Narjisse Ben Moussa. Together we will delve into the importance of green skills and adult learning and education and the role in fostering sustainable development. So with the concept of green skills being discussed everywhere and throughout all areas, we want to explore the definition of green skills and their crucial role in addressing climate change, promoting environmental sustainability, and how ALE might be able to help with that. But first. I want to introduce our two experts for today: Arine brings over two decades of diverse expertise to our podcast today, with the background in management and the passion for empowering women, Arlene has led innovative programmes aimed at fostering social cohesion and sustainable integration, particularly for migrant women. She served as a programme manager at the Dutch Central Agency for the reception of asylum seekers and as a manager of client services at an IT company. In 2015, Arine founded Network Pro, a company dedicated to guiding women towards formal education, participation and employment, using a holistic learning approach and, since then, has contributed to various other European project.

Arine Huijboom: Thank you. Lovely to be here.

Christin Cieslak: With us today is also Narjisse Ben Moussa. She has lived and worked in Mexico, Spain and Bolivia. She led initiatives centred on green skills development and ecological transition and has worked with the French Agency for Ecological Transition targeting. The identification of green skills shortages. Currently, she is a project manager with a focus on sustainable development and European cooperation. Both a very warm welcome to today's podcast.

Narjisse Ben Moussa: Hi, thank you very much Christin.

Christin Cieslak: How is everybody this morning?

Narjisse Ben Moussa: Very good. It's sunny.

Christin Cieslak: You're lucky then. Perfect. I am so grateful that you're joining me today talking about green skills because obviously it is a very important topic and we would like to look at it from a very specific angle today, which is adult learning and education. So thank you very much for joining me here. So I would just jump straight in and I would love to give my first question so that we – and everybody

who is listening in – are on the same page on what it is that we're actually talking about. So Arine, what are green skills for you and why are they essential today?

Arine Huijboom: Well, for us, green skills are brought variety. It's not one skill of course and it's also about awareness and information. So green skills can be, being aware of the green around you and how you can integrate it in your daily life. So maybe if you feel a bit down, you can go walk in the park and the green around you can inspire you to feel better. The very simple example, but as we saw often in the COVID periods, green and nature is very important to feel better and more empowered. So this is what we embrace in our projects, and especially in our latest project “the Green Step”.

Christin Cieslak: That sounds very wholesome and also greatly oriented toward mental health and well-being. Narjisse, what is your idea of green skills?

Narjisse Ben Moussa: Well, I think green skills, the notion of green skills have been evolving during the recent years because at the beginning we were talking about the impact of green transition on professions and trades. So were be talking about green employment and employment that would be transformed into green ones. But now in 2024, I think we all agree that it's more about the green skills, which are something that we need to address. Which are actually exists in the whole professions. It's really about the transition of the whole model – the economic model. We reached the point that we are more aware that green transition would affect all the jobs that we are having, that we work in. So we need to expand the understanding of green notions, to be a little bit more about a broader range of competencies and skills that we need to implement to make our industries and our jobs more eco-friendly and more low-carbon economy. Green skills are more like all the attitude, the knowledge or the know-how.

Christin Cieslak: That is very interesting and I really appreciate that you already brought two very different perspectives into this discussion. So thank you for that. Narjisse you already touched upon how these green skills can contribute to the sustainable development goals. Can you elaborate a bit further how it is you think they can help to reach those goals.

Narjisse Ben Moussa: Sure. Probably. I would just say a word or two about my organisation. We are a network of local authorities committed to issues “employment integration” and we are linked to the economic and social development. So we support 200 members in France. So we have employment departments we have, also, employment support centres and we also do the social

integration place. On the green transition we've been working between 2021 and 2023 with the French "Agency of Ecological Transition / Green Transition" to identify skills shortages and sectors who are affected by the great transition. In some countries, for example in the Netherlands, they use more bikes because it's culturally something that has been very part of the lifestyle. Here in France, it's not like public policy but strategies and action to make biking in the city more easier. So that means that we will need people to fix bikes when they're broken. And that's one of the skills we will need. So it's not like something that never existed. But this is a skill that we will need to promote, because it goes within the frame of green transition in mobility. I'm not sure which is like clear or not.

Christin Cieslak: Of course, I'm just impressed how many different experts and interests you have to coordinate to work on a common goal. Obviously this is a very complex issue. But Arine to give that question to you: How do you think green skills contribute to reach the sustainability development goals?

Arine Huijboom: Yes, because it's a very big question, the topic is also very big. And I'm really impressed Narjisse how you work with your organisation and such a big network. "Network Pro", my organisation is focusing much with more in the grassroot approach, very locally in neighbourhoods, vulnerable neighbourhoods, and within these neighbourhoods only towards women. So it's a different angle. And so our contribution to the sustainable goals are also in that scale. So it's very people-orientated to make a change even within the persons themselves. So we are not guiding in examples or how to do this. We are trying to change and to make change within the persons. To make contribution to the sustainable goals.

Christin Cieslak: But it is very interesting that Narjisse was just referring to the Netherlands as a good example for using a bike on a more intuitive level. So, but even you, you say, have to further develop these ideas and have to look into how to improve things. Narjisse, your work is it possible anyways to see the effect on the individual or are you mainly working with organisations?

Narjisse Ben Moussa: I think for us, our members work with final beneficiaries, especially the employment centres. Professions related to the green transition primarily require qualifications of a lower level, with a green aspect to be taken into consideration for nature activities ect. So this was one layer of raising awareness within the job place.

Christin Cieslak: Perfect. I will just give back to Arine for a second. Please continue.

Arine Huijboom: Yes, what I wanted to mention is our approach, we focus on neighbourhoods. The last two years we did in the European project, it's called "The Green Step" and we developed a curriculum with several topics, which can be used in non-formal and formal adult education. Thinking about the topic as "Climate Action", "Responsible Consumption", "Zero Waste", "Green Jobs" and "Green Cities". And there's a lot of content, but it's more like a shop, you can pick and choose what you like to blend it in your organisation or in your curriculum.

We focused on green jobs, but our experience in this was quite difficult. And as you said Narjisse, our focus is also on people distant to the labour market or vulnerable women or women who don't really need a support in participating in local community. Our experience is mental health empowerment programmes. So we blended all the green skills, which we developed in a project, in our empowerment programme. So this means we have a win-win situation. Because a lot of women, in these neighbourhoods, have more challenges than the climate change.

Sometimes poverties, sometimes a range of issues, and climate change is not on the top of their list.

By providing a programme which address both topics; to win, to have a holistic approach in empowerment and awareness and information and make awake the green skills that they already have inside of them. Like you said Christin, we bike a lot and often they are not aware that they are doing a lot of green actions already, but they never address this to a positive green thing.

Christin Cieslak: That is an excellent jump-off point for me. Thank you so much. So I would like to use this opportunity to put the focus a little bit more on adult education and learning. More than you already did, both.

So what role do green skills play in adult education and learning? There's two perspective the learner, and the perspective of whoever is providing the teaching or the information needed. So what do you think about the role of green skills in ALE? Narjisse, do you maybe want to?

Narjisse Ben Moussa: Yeah. First of all, if we're talking about people who have been away from the job market, it could be a way to reintegrate them, because, for example, we have some of our members who organise work camps in sectors who are affected by the green transition. Like market gardeners and the focus of sustainable agriculture and food production, things like that. So mainly the beneficiaries will be involved in these work camps. They will not necessarily be employed afterwards. It's a work camp that would help them to get into the social and economic dynamics and integration dynamics in terms of jobs etc. But they will acquire the skills to encourage them to go a little bit further, probably choose a training that would help them to find a more stable job or to explore various trades.

And this is something many of our members who work with this with idea of work camps integrate people, to help them figure out what they're doing next and also to acquire green skills. So I think it's very, very important.

Christin Cieslak: That is quite interesting. Arine would you say that is also relevant for your target group.

Arine Huijboom: Oh, yes, yes, I know our target group very well. We've been working for almost 10 years in this field. To work in a green job is quite a big stretch. So we start much more closer –within themselves – what I have already mentioned. And we stimulate steps towards job market... but to also have a green job!

And what is a green job? It's always: Do you, for example, drink coffee not from a plastic cup, but from a porcelain cup? Is that making your job green, or do you really need to implement solar panels? I don't know actually. So we are bringing it, making this topic more smaller and towards what we can achieve and what our participants can achieve. So thinking green, choosing the bus, be aware of the green around you, making care of the green around you – which stimulates to participate locally, maybe to a local green centre. So we are more trying to create a change within neighbourhoods in these steps and eventually they will come in the next step of green jobs or working green, so our So our steps and our approach is really local but if you do it in many neighbourhoods at the same time, then...

Christin Cieslak: It becomes regional.

Arine Huijboom: Exactly. And working in within Europe on this topic, we see similar – with our partner organisations within Europe – we see a lot of the same challenges. It's a big topic, but for the many people it's a daily, daily thing to have to come around. To have money, to live, care for the children, care for your health. So we tried within our European approach, with the project we did, to start there and then to expand further. Yeah.

Christin Cieslak: Fabulous. Let's just throw the curveball right back to Narjisse: What is a green job?

Narjisse Ben Moussa: Thank you Christin! I remember when we started in my organisation working in the topics of green transition. We were organising working groups with our emembers and we were doing the research to provide a background on what is actually green skills. So we've been looking over the biography of the last five years. And the definition of green job has actually

evolved much because at the beginning we're like: "OK, just green jobs will be affected." So maybe jobs that are strictly linked to the green transition.

And then we're like: "Oh, no. Actually this is not about creating new jobs, but also transforming jobs that exist and who we would actually incorporate within the process environmental requirements."

And then we're like: "Oh no, actually it's wider than that."

So it's: green transition will affect everything and we will have green skills; and also some jobs will disappear. So what we will do? Now we will look back and say the challenge is that we will get to adapt to climate change, we will to mitigate climate change as well. So our economy should follow on that.

Christin Cieslak: I think that summarises it pretty well. There is no summary, especially not in 5 minutes. Arine, I don't know if you want to answer to that.

Arine Huijboom: Well, I'm happy to hear that you had also a huge discussions about the definition because we had the same in our team. Especially because you want to create a result of course and a change – and how can we achieve this with our target group, with our beneficiaries. But also not only beneficiaries, but we also work a lot with local employers and we have to attach those worlds so the employers, we also talk a lot with how they can change their onboarding programme. So we work a lot with local employer so they can connect with our beneficiaries also in this topic. So to stimulate local transport or to create jobs or opportunities very locally.

Narjisse Ben Moussa: I would love to add two things that it's OK. Just. Yeah. Now there already we're talking about local aspects. I think sometimes locally we have more jobs and more in this place, who are proper to our region or to a territory while in other territory – at least here in France – we would be more focussed on wine etc. Another territory would be more in wind energy.

The idea is also to look locally, what's going on and how we actually can bring the great transition without – I'm not saying like inventing the reality of the territory – just to adopt and to give some inputs on what they are doing and what their brand is.

For example, a territory was actually doing tourism, it would probably be trying to do more sustainable tourism and to give more skills, so people can do things a little bit right and to comprehend how we actually deal locally with these issues.

Christin Cieslak: I just love that you bring him like to all the different perspectives. Thank you for that. I would like to move on and think about how adult education

and training programmes can or should incorporate green skills to meet the needs of adult learners. Arine, I see you nodding enthusiastically. You have an opinion?

Arine Huijboom: Yes, yes. Ohh yes. First of all I'm really happy with the European chance we have within, for example, Erasmus+ programmes to develop these curriculums and to develop these projects. Often, with funding in the Netherlands, we have to provide the results and actions and it's difficult to develop some ideas or create new curriculums. And this is all possible within, for example, the Erasmus+ programme. So I'm really very happy we are able to do this with our European partners.

What we created is all on the on the Internet, on a EPAL, so everybody can use it, everybody can blend it in their own curriculum. And this is what we strongly advise, but also the start of the whole idea of our "Green Step" project is that, for example, language schools or integration programmes blends these activities in their current curriculum.

And in our opinion: you have to create a win win. People don't go to a sustainability programme. They also want: what's in it for them. So I think, the whole green thought and the sustainability they have to blend – like Narjisse said – current jobs, current curriculum, current courses. So it has to be a very common thing to do and it has not to be addressed like something outside of your world or your opinion or.

Christin Cieslak: And I think that also plays well into what you have mentioned earlier. Some things have to be not learned completely new, but have to be relearned. So replace something that's already been there.

Arine Huijboom: Yes. Going by bike is not "I cannot afford a car!". No, it's a green way of travelling and working locally is very positive. So there's many examples we praise, so it becomes a positive green action. And people are not aware of it. People are not aware of what they do or something's how green can be working for them.

Christin Cieslak: Yeah. And just to mention real quickly that everything we mentioned, all the project we will provide links in the description of the podcast, so that you can read about everything and get more information if something sparked your interest. So everything will be able to be found in the description down below.

Arine Huijboom: Ah, that's good. Perfect.

Christin Cieslak: Narjisse, do you have any thoughts about that?

Narjisse Ben Moussa: Yes, historically we've been working on the construction and energy efficiency in buildings. And one of the projects was the on-site training for creating skills related to how to make buildings more efficient. So one of the things was also in on-site training, to make the training accessible in terms of: people don't have to go to another place, to the training. So it's like on-site where the works are. And it's also hands on training. And that's very, very important, because adult learners often learn best by doing

And these programmes should provide more opportunities to apply the green skills in real world settings. So this is very important. And we have also another project experimentation, I would like to call that, where we have people coming to evaluate. It's like an assessment training to see if, for example, a person will be interested in a trait. And I think it's very, very important to have this hands-on training.

For now we have a lot of MOOCs on green transition, on green skills. This is one of the strategies. There are a lot of training providers and agencies are put in the loop and which is very important to have MOOCs also, but I think provide hands-on training, it's something that would be very complementary to that. Yeah.

Christin Cieslak: Yeah. I really, I really appreciate that you both – coming from different fields and different areas – are still agreeing on that we have to cater to the needs of learners and that we have to pick them up where they are and basically integrate into the learner's world. So I appreciate that a lot.

To slowly move towards the end of our podcast, I wanted to play Fairy Godmother and ask you: “If you would have one wish to fund something, that would be funded by the EU – and just with the magical whip of my wand, I could just make it come true – what initiatives and policies can the EU support to promote the development of green skills? What would you wish for Arine? Do you want to star?”

Arine Huijboom: I really would wish that EU funding would be a bit more increased to keep on developing on this topic. Because we had a start, but as we were – in the Netherlands, we localised it, our own project, we still had to localise. To because of the awareness of what we experienced the last two years, we had a better a better programme. So it's an ongoing thing, it's a topics we need to address, we need to be working with it, we need to experiment, to keep on moving and also changing. So I really would like to have more funding.

Yeah, to accept that we have to have actions in every level in society , level of Narjisse, level of us, and level of learners, education by employees – it's not one solution.

Christin Cieslak: So less silos, more collaboration.

Arine Huijboom: Yes, networking, collaboration, and a field to experiment and develop further in projects, yes.

Christin Cieslak: That is a very big wish. I see what I can do. Narjisse. How about you?

Narjisse Ben Moussa: Definitely. I definitely agree with that, with Arine. I think also it's difficult to project medium to long term and skills requirements. We don't have the visibility. We also have sometimes limited access to resources, EU or national ones.

We really need to have more resources and strengthen local initiatives for skilled forecasting and really have all the tools that would make us able to keep up with what's going on, to give the means where it happens. Meaning that we will need someone who actually working a full time job for one person, or two, would actually be there to do the companionship. For example, with the beneficiaries of the training, with the training providers, someone who actually coordinates everything and this is something very, very, very important. And these people will need money and their resources.

Arine Huijboom: Yeah, yeah, maybe accreditation and monitoring important topics. Because as you see, if you really want to change something, regulation is a good, also necessary to realise yes, yes.

Christin Cieslak: Yes. So I hear there's a lot of work still to be done. So we will keep busy for the next couple of years I assume. But on the other hand, you both are already doing a fabulous job, each in your respective field. And we actually already doing something about not just keeping in our own silos, through exactly what we just did, the last half an hour. Just talking about things, connecting, exchanging and learning from each other.

Yet I just love that you agreed either way to have the focus on the learner to cater to the learner's needs and see what they need from us in order to get a more wholesome approach to the fostering of green skills.

So thank you both very, very much. I know we could go on and on because this is an important and also quite complicated topic. So thank you very much to giving me your time today and letting the EPAL listeners know what it is that you're working on and what we need to do moving forward. Arine, Narjisse, thank you so very, very much.