Background Note

_We shall not cease from exploration_
_And the end of all our exploring_
_Will be to arrive where we started_
_And know the place for the first time._

T.S. Elliot, *Little Gidding, V.*

Introduction

This conference has the ambition to stimulate mutual learning in vocational education and training. The conference is the first event where a well-established international VET research network joins forces with the European Training Foundation in coming together for a broad and open discussion on VET research questions of shared interest for researchers and ETF staff. This is an important step towards establishing ‘communities of practice’ which can ensure both a deeper understanding of the realities of VET reforms in transition and development countries for VET researchers and the creation of a better and evidence-based platform for ETF staff in carrying out tasks in partner countries. The conference is built in a sequence and an accumulation of research and learning related to the VET and Culture research network. The theme, venue, programme and working methods invite participants into critical cross-cultural and comparative thinking and discussion. Connections to previous meetings and experiences, reflections on the process and conclusions for the future will be included in all activities. Participants will get access to in-depth information on the work of the European Training Foundation and flagship publications of the ETF still in the pipeline will be discussed and reviewed. The emphasis on experience sharing, cross-fertilisation and nurturing a culture of mutual learning will hopefully enable future networking and more constructive interactions between VET research, policy and practice in the coming years.

Facing the challenges of ‘the two cultures’

Globalisation has gone hand in hand with a trans-nationalisation of education, which has altered the landscape of education policy-making processes. In education, scholars like
Arnove & Torres\(^1\) as well as Steiner-Khamski\(^2\) have developed a global versus local perspective which has been a valuable resource for understanding international trends in education. Through these and other contributions, not least by the ETF related to its facilitation role for VET policy reform in transition countries\(^3\), policy studies in education have come to recognise the importance of studying the growing phenomena of policy borrowing and policy learning.

Another aspect that has come to the fore is the role of research in education policy-making and the solving of everyday problems facing education systems. Increasing attention has also been paid by the scholarly community to understanding the role that international organisations have come to play in national policy-making. Thus a debate on the functions and utilisation of policy oriented educational research is re-emerging. This is obviously not unproblematic. As politics come to rely more heavily on science, the criteria of relevance for research will be defined more narrowly in terms of what is perceived useful for policy.

The distinctive nature and purpose of the policy community on the one hand, and the academic research community on the other, and therefore the tension between the two, must be recognised. This is maybe best captured by ‘the two cultures’ hypothesis.\(^4\) In summary, theorists and researchers are motivated towards developing knowledge that is objective, factual and truthful, whereas politicians have to ultimately be concerned with being elected and maintaining power and practitioners are geared toward what works given the task at hand and the contextual circumstances of what needs to be done. In reality, these relationships are of course much more complex. Among other barriers, there are questions on the limited extent and effectiveness of communication between theorists and researchers, on the one hand, and policymakers and practitioners, on the other, which needs to be further analysed.

The differences between the two cultures often lead to a perception of what is referred to as a research-policy gap in which there is a serious mismatch between the interests of researchers and the agendas of policymakers as well as practitioners. The conference is a first attempt to bridging this gap.

**Research for VET policy and practice**

It seems that the most ‘stable’ feature of today’s VET policy-making is ‘change’. Education, incl. VET, tends to be the answer to almost all societal challenges these days. Effectiveness, quality and evidence-based policy are high on the agenda of the reforms in vocational education and training all over the world. The European Training Foundation, which is an EU Agency, is located right in the middle of these changing policy frameworks by having the task to promote and facilitate VET reforms in its 30 partner countries in the regions of the Western Balkans and Turkey, Eastern Europe, the

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\(^3\) See ETF Yearbooks 2004-2011.

Caucasus, Central Asian, and the Southern Mediterranean countries. This requires advanced expertise in a highly specialised expertise triangle of mastering (i) VET and labour market policies, (ii) EU policy frameworks and (iii) an increasing demand for deep country insight to facilitate sustainable reforms which fit into national cultural and social contexts.

While the ETF is not a research institute but a centre of expertise in development of vocational education and training in a lifelong learning perspective, the Foundation must always work knowledge-based in carrying out the often very complicated tasks in countries of transition. More generally, the issue of what educational systems are supposed to achieve constitutes what has been called a complex and ill-defined problem. There is a demand for research and useable knowledge in educational policy-making, which is not being met as well as it could be. The challenges are of course much bigger in countries in transition or under modernization. Transition implies a substantial change of life – it involves the dismantling of the old and the emergence of a new social structure. The transition process has turned out to be a much longer, more complex and contradictory social process and with more painful social consequences than expected. The VET and labour market reforms take place within a deep-going transformation where the important drivers in ETF partner countries have been and are the movement towards the basic characteristics of the new social order: private ownership, a market economy, multiparty parliamentary democracy, civil institutions, human freedom and rights. This all requires a deeper knowledge base and a developed knowledge management system in ETF.

Evidence-based policy-making

It appears that a new ‘hit’ word now dominates the discourse on public governance and regulation. Only a few years ago terms with ‘quality’ – quality management, quality assurance, quality auditing - were the dominant assumptions on how the educational sector could be improved. These terms seem to have almost disappeared and have been replaced by demands for outcomes measurement, documentation of the effect of interventions, and evidence-based practice and policy. More conceptual work is of course needed to clarify these ‘big concepts’ but it is beyond doubt that the ETF has to be able to robustly document ‘what works’ in its facilitation of VET reform in partner countries. The Foundation cannot build its work on ‘impressions’ and ‘Meinungen’, but must ensure that available, evidence-informed knowledge forms the foundation of its work.

Policymakers, also in partner countries, are increasingly interested in what education delivers – and hence with what educational research can tell us about this. This is an even more acute need in countries in transition where donor driven VET reforms have radically changed systems. Given the scarce resources for education reform, the public interest in education, the importance it holds for national policymakers and the diversity of opinions and approaches within the technical assistance community, the ability to assess what works in VET is critical. The increased priority for making use of policy analysis and structured information from policy research is a result of this need for informed policy-making.

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EU and international policy initiatives

International and inter-EU cooperation in linking knowledge to policy and practice has developed considerably in recent years. The EU has been instrumental in the production and dissemination of educational research through its successive research framework programmes, its expert agencies in the VET field (CEDEFOP\textsuperscript{6} and ETF), an information network on education in Europe (EURYDICE), and the educational research centre (CRELL\textsuperscript{7}). The Commission has also created two expert networks (EENEE\textsuperscript{8} and NESSE\textsuperscript{9}), to strengthen the knowledge base in education and training.

The German Presidency of the Council of the EU in March 2007 organised a major conference on ‘Knowledge for Action in Education and Training’. As was emphasized, the creation and diffusion of knowledge is not enough; for evidence in educational policy and practice we need to reduce the application gap and to devise new mechanisms for implementation of research findings by policymakers and administrators. The EU Commission has published a Staff Working Document\textsuperscript{10}, concerned with the relationship between research, policy and practice in education and training and setting out an agenda to strengthen the creation, application and mediation of knowledge for policy-making in this field. It is stated here that “Evidence-based policy and practice should be the driver of reform in education and training systems.” To contribute to achieving this goal, the EU uses the Open Method of Coordination, based on solid research, evaluation and the collection of other evidence, in particular by using the results of peer learning and the exchange of good practice, and the development of indicators and benchmarks.

The Torino Process

Although all ETF activities and projects are using evidence-informed policy development as a principle of action, a targeted effort was made to enhance this approach through the Torino Process in 2010. This process is an ETF participatory instrument for VET analysis and policy assessment that will be implemented in partner countries on a bi-annual basis. The Torino Process has documented the vision which policymakers have for VET, captured evidence to assess the integration of VET policy within the broader social and economic development, and assessed the internal and external efficiency of VET systems. The results of the first round in 2010 pointed out both a shortage and a limited use of evidence combined with limited institutional capacity - but also a strong commitment by policymakers in partner countries for progress in this type of policy development. To stimulate that knowledge is taken forward into action ETF has launched the ‘Torinet’ platform in order to enhance country capacity to carry out objective policy assessments throughout the policy cycle according to the specific needs of each country. ‘Torinet’ will be a partnership between ETF and countries and will build upon the Torino Process with country specific actions.

\textsuperscript{6} European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.
\textsuperscript{7} Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning.
\textsuperscript{8} European Expert Network on the Economics of Education.
\textsuperscript{9} Network of Experts on Social Sciences in Education.
\textsuperscript{10} "Towards more knowledge-based policy and practice in education and training" (Brussels SEC(2007) 1098).
Research of VET policy and practice versus research for VET policy and practice

Today, the evidence base regarding the effects of reforms and whether the effects are intended or unintended is relatively poor, although there is an increasing emphasis on documentation of what works, how and why. Within this context, it could be useful to consider more closely the distinction between different types of policy research: research of educational policy and educational research for policy. The former type of research tends to be ad-hoc, conceptual, backward looking and critical, whereas the latter tends to be forward looking and concerned with solutions to practical problems. ETF’s role is always to focus on concrete development and to be practically involved in facilitating VET reform processes, and our interest in developing the knowledge base is therefore stimulated by increased collaboration with research communities involved with the latter type of research. The focus is always oriented towards the solution of problems in specific contexts. Development activities and action research, understood as generating knowledge in and from practice, will in ETF always have to be governed by finding solutions to concrete problems and being directly applicable. Knowledge is thus broader than what is produced by (fundamental) science, but is also an output of society’s other functional systems, which embody a knowledge-production of their own. ETF needs to have much stronger links with both types of knowledge producers in the coming years. ETF staff have advanced experience and capacity within the specific VET expertise triangle, but the Foundation still has relatively weak links with the external VET research community. However, the strengthened emphasis on ‘evidence’ as the guiding principle for work will require more consolidated VET research-policy-practitioner networks, with VET research communities preoccupied with research of policy as well as with research communities concentrating on problem-solving or VET research for policy.

The VET and Culture Network–ETF conference: Networking the networks?

This conference provides a unique opportunity for researchers to acquire insiders’ interpretation of transnational policy processes and for the ETF staff to receive critical feedback on their policy-facilitating approaches.

The conference also challenges researchers to confront their approaches and arguments with expectations and imperatives from transnational policy processes. It provides an opportunity for the VET and Culture network to sharpen its intellectual agenda in asking:
- What is happening to VET and VET research?
- What is happening to ownership and agency in VET and VET research? and
- What is happening to negotiations about VET and VET research?

VET and Culture network members and ETF staff are asked for contributions, which promote discussion and debate about relations between research, policy and practice, about differences between research on practice and policy-making and research for practice and policy-making. They can extend from philosophical and pedagogical reflections to research and VET political analyses and from individual to group accounts. However, contributions, presentations and discussions should try to connect with current developments in VET, VET research and VET policy. The conference finally provides an opportunity for all participants together to develop material for and critically discuss the concept note of the next ETF Yearbook on “How to monitor and evaluate VET system development?”
**Aims and expected outcomes**

**Objectives:**
1. To analyse and discuss the links between VET research, policy and practice through the double perspective of ETF problem-solving needs and the ‘intellectual agenda’ set by the VET and Culture Network.
2. To establish a mutual learning platform for VET researchers and ETF staff through joint conference presentations and workshop discussions of research abstracts.
3. To critically review the concept note of the ETF Yearbook 2012.
4. To nurture stronger networking between ETF specialists and the VET research community.

**Expected outcomes:**
1. Increased awareness of contemporary VET research priorities, EU policy frameworks and VET policy facilitation in ETF partner countries.
2. Bridges built between the two culture of research and policy and steps taken towards closing the research-policy gap in VET enabling more solid evidence-based policy and practice in ETF.
3. Shared learning platforms created with longer term potentials for strengthened networking links.
Day 1 (Wednesday 31.08.)

09:30-10:30 Arrivals and registration

10:30-10:45 Welcome

Presentation of ETF as an Agency of the European Union
*Henrik Faudel, Head of Geographical Operations, ETF*

10:45-12:15 **Theme 1: What ETF wants from research: narrowing the research-policy-practice gaps**

*Plenary presentations:*

Chair: Sören Nielsen, ETF

“Strengthening the evidence-base in VET policy facilitation in partner countries”
*Dr. Manfred Wallenborn, ETF*

“Use of the current best evidence – promises and illusions, limitations and contradictions in the triangle of research, policy and practice”
*Dr. Lorenz Lassnigg, Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, Austria (VET&Culture Network)*

Discussion

12:15-13:00 Lunch (Villa Gualino)

13:00-14:45 **Workshops 1st sessions**

Presentations and discussion of research papers (abstracts) in 3 groups

15:00-17:30 **Excursion:** “Il Centro Storico FIAT”, via Chiabrera 20, Torino
*Lida Kita, ETF*

Evening

Come together:
Guided tour in the city of Torino
Day 2 (Thursday 01.09.)

09:30-11:00  **Theme 2: The Torino Process from the perspective of the VET research landscape**

*Plenary presentations:*

*Chair: Dr. Manfred Wahle, Technische Universität Dortmund, Germany (VET&Culture)*

“The Torino Process”  
*Dr. Manuela Prina, ETF*

“Compiling a landscape of knowledge: a platform of key questions of VET research”  
*Dr. Philip Gonon, University of Zürich, Switzerland (VET&Culture)*

Discussion

11:15-13:00  **Workshops 2nd sessions**

Presentations and discussion of research papers (abstracts) in 3 groups

13:00-14:00  Lunch (Villa Gualino)

14:00-15:30  **Theme 3: Trans-national evaluation or cross-cultural understanding?**

*Plenary presentations:*

*Chair: Dr. Sue Shore, School of Education, University of South Australia*

“Monitoring and facilitating development of national VET systems OR deconstructing transnational agendas for VET?”  
*Dr. Anja Heikkinen, Tampere University, Finland (VET&Culture)*

“The ETF policy learning approach”  
*Sören Nielsen, ETF*

Discussion

15:30-18:00  **Workshops 3rd sessions**

Presentations and discussion of research papers (abstracts) in 3 groups

Evening  
Network Meetings  
Social programme/Dinner in city or Villa Gualino
Day 3 (Friday 02.09.)

09:00-10:30  **Theme 4: How to improve the dialogue between research, policy and practice. Why and how to collaborate: the potentials in EU 2020?**

**Plenary presentations:**

*Chair: Anastasia Fetsi, Head of ETF Thematic Expertise Development*

“What do policymakers expect from researchers and what can VET research contribute to improved policy and practice – an insider’s view”

*Dr. Vibe Aarkrog, Danish Ministry of Education & DPU, Aarhus University (VET&Culture)*

“European cooperation in VET to support the Europe 2020 Strategy”

*Sören Nielsen, ETF*

Discussion

10:30-12:15  **Workshops 4th sessions**

Presentations and discussion of research papers (abstracts) in 2 groups

12:15-13:00  Lunch (Villa Gualino)

13:00-15:00  **Short plenary followed by work in 3 groups**

“Peer Reviewing the concept note of ETF Yearbook 2012 on ‘How to monitor and evaluate VET system development?’”

*Sören Nielsen, ETF*

15:00-16:00  **Lessons learnt and ways forward**

**Workshops 5th sessions**

Lessons learnt

16:00-17:00  **Conclusions and feedback from groups and discussion in plenary**

*Chair: Dr. Anja Heikkinen, Tampere University, Finland (VET&Culture)*

“The challenges of VET research for policy and the contribution from the VET and Culture Network”

*Katrin Kraus, Pädagogische Hochschule FHNW, Basel, Switzerland (VET&Culture)*

”Working together in future on the Intellectual Agenda defined as a cornerstone of the VET and Culture Network?”

*Dr. Madlen Serban, Director of ETF*

Evening  Farewell party
## Day 4 (Saturday 03.09.)

Informal programme and meetings (academic apprenticeships)
Departures

### Time-table for Workshops

**Wednesday 31.8.**

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<th>Workshops 1st session, 13-14.45</th>
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<td><strong>Chair:</strong> Lida Kita (ETF)</td>
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<td>Ida Juul</td>
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<td>Sue Shore</td>
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<td>Jens Johansen, ETF</td>
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<td><strong>Chair:</strong> Dong Seob Lee</td>
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<td>(VET&amp;Culture)</td>
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<td>Stefanie Stolz</td>
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<td>Peter Koudahl</td>
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**Thursday 1.9.**

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<th>Workshops 2nd session, 11.15-13</th>
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<td><strong>Chairs:</strong> Anja &amp; Philipp: invitation paper (VET&amp;Culture)</td>
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<td>Mikiko Eswein 1)</td>
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<td>Hakon Host &amp; al</td>
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<td><strong>Chair:</strong> Liv Mjelde &amp; Manfred Wahle (VET&amp;Culture)</td>
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<td>Ritah Edopu</td>
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<td>Stefanie Robak</td>
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<td>Liv Mjelde &amp; Richard Daly: Kyambogo papers</td>
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<td><strong>Chair:</strong> Beatrix Niemeyer (VET&amp;Culture)</td>
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<td>Jelena Rakovic</td>
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<td>Lida Kita et al</td>
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<td>Marion Fleige</td>
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<td><strong>Chair:</strong> Håkon Host (VET&amp;Culture)</td>
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<td>Katrin Kraus</td>
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<td>Samo Pavlin</td>
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<td>Julian Stanley</td>
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**Friday, 2.9.**

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<th>Workshops 4th session, 10.30-12.15</th>
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<td><strong>Chair:</strong> Manfred Wallenborn (ETF)</td>
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<td>Beatrix Niemeyer</td>
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<td>Mikiko Eiswein 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chair:</strong> Liv Mjelde &amp; Manfred Wahle (VET&amp;Culture)</td>
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<td>Richard Daly: Kyambogo papers</td>
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<td>Gabriele Molzberger</td>
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<td>Daly, Mjelde &amp; Wahle</td>
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<th>Workshops 5th session, 15-16: lessons learnt</th>
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<td><strong>Chair:</strong> Philipp Gonon (VET&amp;Culture)</td>
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<td>Soren Nielsen, Lida Kita, Manuela Prina, Madlen Serban (ETF)</td>
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<td>Håkon Host, Askeir Skolhold, Manfred Wahle, Stefanie Stolz, Ida Juul, Mikiko Eswein, Peter Koudahl, Julian Stanley, Ritah Edopu, Stefanie Robak, Liv Mjelde, Katrin Kraus (VET&amp;Culture)</td>
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*Obs.* Abstracts/Papers of researchers from Kyambogo discussed in relevant contexts during workshops

Inquiries: Soren Nielsen (sni@etf.europa.eu) or Anja Heikkinen (anja.heikkinen@uta.fi)
Information at the VET and Culture-website:  
http://www.peda.net/veraja/uta/vetculture/conferencesandevents/conferences/turin  
Information about ETF, location, travel and accommodation options:  
Annex: Detailed North-South workshop programme

VET and Culture Research Network
Torino Conference 2011

Workshop: VET as a Pedagogical Issue. Contradictions from “North” and “South” Perspectives

Tutors: Prof. Dr. Liv Mjelde (Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences [HIOA], Oslo, Norway)  
PD Dr. Manfred Wahle (Technische Universität Dortmund, Germany)

Session 1: Thu 01.09. Noon

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<th>Topic</th>
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<td>11.15 – 11.30</td>
<td>Liv Mjelde, Manfred Wahle</td>
<td>Introduction On the subjects of the workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.30 – 12.00</td>
<td>Ritah Edopu</td>
<td>Strategies for promoting technical and vocational education and training (case study Uganda)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.00 – 12.30</td>
<td>Liv Mjelde, Richard Daly</td>
<td>Kyambogo papers: John Opuda-Asibo, Ali Katenda Kyakulumbye</td>
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<td>12.30-13</td>
<td>Stefanie Robak</td>
<td>Balancing further vocational education and training and cultural education in transnational enterprises</td>
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Session 2, Fri 02.09. Morning

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<tr>
<td>11.30 – 12.00</td>
<td>Gabriele Molzberger</td>
<td>Pedagogical Quality in VET – (ac)countability in an ambiguous area of research and practice</td>
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<td>12.00 – 12.15</td>
<td>Liv Mjelde, Richard Daly, Manfred Wahle</td>
<td>Summing up and way forward</td>
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