Lifelong Learning Validation For Sustainable Rural Development: A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Pan-European System of Lifelong Learning Validation For Sustainable Rural Development

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Project Coordinator:

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Pan-European System of Lifelong Learning Validation

For Sustainable Rural Development

Lifelong Learning Validation for Sustainable Rural Development – A Good Practice Guide

This Guide is based on written reports provided by the partners of the Euro-Validation project. The first draft of the Guide has been produced by PRISMA - Centre for Development Studies (Myrto Adamantiadi, Fouli Papageorgiou) and edited by Jessica Barnes to produce the final version of the text.

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Abstract

The Euro-Validation project was designed to raise the issues of validation and certification of lifelong learning with a specific focus on skills and competences that would assist sustainable rural development. Reviews of certification systems relating to non-formal and informal learning and of various different sectoral needs for qualifications were performed in 11 European countries. These formed the base for the development of a flexible methodology of evaluation and validation of prior learning. The methodology was based on the Learning Pathway and utilised a Core Tasks and Competence Matrix. It was pilot tested in several European countries. This guide reports on the experience gained during the project. It is concluded that the tools developed need to be flexible and capable of adaptation to particular situations and that both individuals and organisations can benefit from their use. They were used to greatest effect in countries that emphasise a mostly formal education system and/or where concrete needs were addressed. The importance of personal guidance is also stressed.

PART ONE: Project Summary, Terminology and Structure of Guide

1.1 Introduction: project summary

In the knowledge economy, developing and using human resources to the full is a decisive factor in maintaining competitiveness. In this context, certificates and qualifications are an important reference point for employers and individuals in the labour market. Innovative forms of certification for non-formal learning could widen the recognition spectrum. Many individuals have extensive knowledge obtained through non-formal learning and there is a need for a comprehensive European system to cover the accreditation and validation of this prior and experiential learning (APEL). This is especially true in the rural context where validation and certification of non-formal learning could contribute greatly to rural development.

The Pan-European System of Lifelong Learning Validation for Sustainable Rural Development "Euro-Validation" was a three year project co-funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Programme of the European Commission and implemented between 2005 and 2007 in 11 European countries: Finland, Hungary, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. The Euro-Validation project was developed to address and recognise the importance of lifelong learning in a rural context, including all forms of learning that contribute to capacity building for sustainable development and thus to ensure equality of access to qualifications by all people.

Comprehensive in scope, the Euro-Validation project was delivered by a large partnership of 16 organisations including research institutes, universities, educational institutes, local authorities, a Development Agency, a Chamber of Industry, professional associations, training centres and NGOs.

All stakeholders involved in lifelong learning were targeted. These included education and training providers, certification bodies, employers and students (both employed and unemployed). Using a wide network of relevant organisations across Europe, the Euro-Validation project promoted policies and practices relating to the validation and certification of lifelong learning and specifically the skills and competences necessary to enhance sustainable rural development.

The Project achieved the following specific aims:

- To review the policies and methods of valuing, validating and certifying non-formal learning across Europe.
- To relate the above to the needs of people working in rural areas, construct a "competence map" across different economic sectors and relate this map to existing certification and accreditation provisions.
- To propose a flexible system of competence validation and accreditation, addressing all forms of learning, which would be largely based on the Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) route and which would address post experience qualifications focusing on the core theme of sustainable rural development.
- To try, on an experimental basis, to implement the above, with the cooperation of universities, training institutes and non-formal training providers, in the context of the present Network.
- To disseminate widely the results of the project and invite universities, training institutes, social partners, local authorities and rural development practitioners to discuss the issues of competence development and recognition in a rural context.
- To build a dedicated Website as a principal communication medium and enlarge the Network across Europe.

This Guide presents the main results achieved by the Euro-Validation project. It includes an introduction to the Learning Pathway methodology and the Competence & Task Matrix tool which were developed by the project to address the evaluation and validation of prior learning. A separate Guide to this tool "Learning Pathway Guide: How to make LPW for yourself" has also been published.

1.2 Definitions of key terminology

The guide refers to various different types of learning. The Glossary of CEDEFOP (2004)[1] gives the following definitions:

Formal learning is defined as learning that occurs in an organised and structured context (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.

Non-formal learning refers to learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification.

Informal learning is defined as learning resulting from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

While it is useful to differentiate between these different types of learning, it is likely that an individual's learning experience consists of a combination of formal, non-formal and informal aspects.[2]

Given that a major part of this report is dedicated to analysing existing systems of validation in each of the participating countries it should be stressed that the overall aim of validation is to make visible and give value to the full range of qualifications and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where these have been acquired. It is the individual who is the reference point of lifelong learning.

The purpose of validation may be formative (supporting an ongoing learning process) as well as summative (aiming at certification).

1.3 Overview: structure of the Good Practice Guide

The rationale, scope and methodological approach of the Project were summarised in the Introduction. In Part Two national policies and systems of validation, certification and accreditation of informal and non-formal learning across many European countries are reviewed. This is followed by a report on the validation, certification and accreditation needs in six activity sectors in rural areas. Part Three covers the creation of the Learning Pathway and the competences/tasks Matrix together with an introduction to the Portfolio system. The experience gained whilst pilot testing the Learning Pathway and Matrix and finally the lessons learnt through piloting the Learning Pathway are also included in Part Three.

[1] CEDEFOP. (2004) Terminology of vocational training policy: a multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe, [Online]. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Available from: http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/img/dynamic/c313/cv-1_en_US_glossary_4030_6k.pdf [Accessed: 10th October 2007].

[2] Colley, H., Hodkinson, P. & Malcolm, J. (2003) Informality and formality in learning, London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.

PART TWO: The European Experience: Current Practice, Policies and Need for Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

2.1 Validation of non-formal and informal learning provision across Europe

2.1.1 Introduction

Significant progress has been made by the European Union in placing lifelong learning (including informal and non-formal learning) on the national agendas of member states. Strategies and practices remain largely a national matter and are dealt with differently by each member state. The Euro-Validation project therefore considered it appropriate to review the methods and systems of validating and certifying informal and non-formal learning in the enlarged European Union. It was hoped that this review would provide a solid basis for understanding how the four steps of the "Evaluation – Validation – Certification – Accreditation" scale operate in different national environments. To facilitate a comparative analysis the review was guided by the following questions:

1. Who formulates policy regarding the delivery of non-formal and informal learning?
2. Who delivers non-formal and informal training, and to whom?
3. How far in the evaluation-validation-certification-accreditation scale has the country progressed in relation to non-formal and informal learning?
4. What are the available certification options?
5. What are the certification criteria?
6. How is certification granted, what are the minimum conditions e.g. skills audit, knowledge-based, portfolio-based, other?
7. Which are the certification bodies?
8. What are the needs covered by the existing certification options for employees (e.g. career development, mobility, other)?
9. What is the value of qualifications (formal recognition of skills) for employers?

Research into these questions was conducted by each national team. Teams also conducted several interviews with key officials (on average 15 per country) using a semi-structured questionnaire. A summary of the main findings of the 11 national reports and an overview of the national systems / conclusions are provided below.

2.1.2 National reviews

Finland

In Finland non-formal education covers the general adult education opportunities provided by adult education institutes. The essential features of non-formal education (i.e. liberal education) are diversity of curricula, voluntary nature of participation and use of learner-based methods. The main providers are the Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA); the Open University; Summer universities; Folk high schools; Adult education centres; Third age universities; advisory associations such as the Finnish Craft Association and the Youth Academy which provides young people with valuable skills for their professional lives.

The Finnish public authorities have been developing national initiatives for the recognition of informal and non-formal learning since the early 1990s. Validation activities are largely decentralised and education institutions have a significant level of freedom. Recognition and accreditation of prior learning follows three main routes:

1. Procedures for accreditation of prior learning as applied in initial education.
2. Recognition and accreditation of prior learning during higher studies.
3. Recognition procedures based on competence-assessment and similar qualifications.

The competence-based qualification system came into force in 1994 and competence-based qualifications are regulated by the Act on Vocational Adult Education (1999). Applicants design individual plans aimed at the completion of competence-based qualifications. They are guided in this process by educational institutions and employers. The system is founded on co-operation between the main labour market organisations, employers' organisations and educational institutions. The Finnish Committee for Lifelong Learning sees the competence-based system as the start of a more extensive system in which people can demonstrate and validate their skills and knowledge.

Germany

Labour market needs in Germany have largely been met by the formal education and training system which has traditionally provided the requisite highly qualified workforce. Apprenticeship, which combines work and theory and leads to accreditation, plays a significant role within this formal system. Until recently, alternative ways of learning which took place outside this formal system were seldom used. Recent economic, technological and societal changes, however, pose new challenges to the German education and training system. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) is working to adapt the current system to incorporate the concept of lifelong learning. Although there is as yet no legal framework, non-formal and informal learning as part of the lifelong learning initiative are gaining momentum in this context. A number of bodies at various levels are responsible for ensuring that the provisions of the recent Vocational Training Act are promoted and enforced. The Federal Government is responsible for in-company vocational training. At regional level considerable powers are exercised by autonomous industry organisations, including chambers of trade and industry, chambers of handicrafts, and the appropriate professional boards for the liberal professions.

There are several initiatives currently studying and pilot testing different "passes"—competence-based qualifications incorporating non-formal, informal and formal learning that are assessed "on the job" or through the simulation of job tasks. The "qualification passports" are awarded by a variety of organisations. The diversity of the procedures leading to these passports and the large number of denominations (90 at present) creates some confusion. Passports targeted at the individual's development are rare as qualification passports are closely related to labour market requests. There remains a need to establish counselling structures and procedures.

Greece

Certification of learning is primarily based on exams that follow formal education uptake and this is strictly regulated by the Greek Ministry of Education. An overall framework for the validation of non-formal learning has not yet been developed although the foundations for creating such a framework have been set. Recent legislation, the establishment of a new institution (EKEPIS) for the accreditation of continuing (non-formal) training structures (KEK), the certification of training curricula for a set list of vocational occupations and the certification of trainers that may teach these curricula are important steps in this process. Significant legislation introduced in 2003 and 2005 outlines a system linking vocational education and training to employment, although this has not yet been implemented. It acknowledges the importance of lifelong learning and endeavours to co-ordinate initial and continuing training more effectively. Currently only non-formal learning related to languages or computer competence can be validated: *the State Certificate of Language Proficiency and the Computer Driving Licence State Certificate*, both of which are exam-based, have recently become available. The Ministry of Agriculture has also announced the *Green*

Certificate. This will be aimed at farmers and other rural entrepreneurs and will be based on a variety of flexible learning opportunities. The *Green Certificate* will be awarded on the basis of exams in the training centres of the Ministry. Competence-based certificates are rarely issued officially and usually address particular technical professions (e.g. electricians) as a necessary condition for their professional licensing.

Hungary

In Hungary private businesses provide the greatest proportion (53–60%) of non-formal training with the majority devoted to language tuition. Civil organisations are also involved in the provision of non-formal learning under the umbrella of the Budapest Centre of the Association of Hungarian People's Colleges. Some of the public organisations involved in formal adult education are also involved in informal or non-formal training. The Act on Adult Education awards responsibility for vocational training (formal and non-formal) to the Ministry of Employment and Labour. The Ministry therefore plays the chief role in the supervision of vocational training, definition of criteria for awarding professional qualifications and the elaboration of the system of language certificates. The National Board for Accreditation of Adult Training Programmes is responsible for the certification of training curricula and training institutions. A modular system is in place for the acquisition of professional qualifications. The qualifications, which are listed in a revised list of 800, are obtained through state exams.

The Netherlands

The Dutch government established the *Commission on the Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills* (1993) and created Knowledge Centres of Vocational Education *(Kenniscentra Beroepsonderwijs bedrijfsleven)* (2003). These were aimed at promoting the application of the Validation of Prior Learning system. Two approaches on Validation of Prior Learning exist: the summative, which has certification as its only target; and the formative, which focuses more on the learning opportunities available to the individual. With SMEs the emphasis still lies on the summative approach, as there is too little time for the intensive formative approach. Most of the Validation of Prior Learning procedures from the Knowledge Centres include a portfolio, an interview with the candidate and a practical exam. Persons from the knowledge centre, the company, and the Regional Education Centres (ROC) guide the candidate through the process. Awarding the certificate or diploma is mostly determined by the ROCs. The Minister of Education has delegated responsibility for formal accreditation to the educational institutes. In addition the Industrial Branches (professional associations) have their own accreditation systems, some of which are recognised by the sector/branch because of their practical value. Individual organisations can also issue certificates which meet their standards. An example of this practice can be seen in voluntary organisations who certify volunteers according to their own unique system which is not connected to the formal accreditation system.

Norway

Non-formal training in Norway takes place within the public educational system, adult education associations, folk high schools, distance education institutions as well as in other private institutions and in the workplace. Recognition is offered by educational institutions and sector organisations in different ways. For sector certificates and other national qualification certificates, competence is generally recognised in the workplace through official, accredited, independent third party organisations. In addition, a national system for validation and accreditation *RealDoc* has been introduced which recognises informal and non-formal learning under the VOX Institute. VOX is a National Institute for Adult Education whose main purpose is to initiate, co-ordinate and document research and development projects on adult education. The Norwegian

government has established VOX as a central tool for the implementation of its new Competence Reform, a reform that aims to meet the need for new or changed competences in society, in the workplace and at individual level. The *RealDoc* system includes all formal, non-formal and informal learning acquired by an individual from all different learning arenas—the educational system, working life, voluntary work and home activities. Prior learning is documented in a "competence testimonial" which is compiled by the individual employee through self-assessment. This document is assembled in the workplace and is signed and verified by the employer. The process is based on trust and on the social capital that is developed in the workplace. Voluntary work is also documented by each individual through self-assessment. Methods and tools that have been developed for validation of non-formal learning include the discussion-based method, assessment of portfolio and demonstration of abilities in practice.

Poland

Little validation of non-formal and informal learning exists in Poland. Validation was introduced by the general reforms of education (1999) and continuing and vocational education (2002-2004). The current Continuing Vocation Training (CVT) system has a very broad scope, encompassing public and non-public establishments and functioning within, as well as outside, the school system. Centres for Continuing Education are an important element of the CVT system. These are multifunctional public educational facilities offering further education and training to adults both within and outside school. They also award qualifications.

External examinations confirming the acquisition of vocational qualifications represent one of the links between the system of initial vocational education and training and the continuing education system. Qualifications attained in the out-of-school system (including qualifications acquired in the process of work) may be validated by taking examinations set by State Examination Commissions. There are also examination boards appointed by employers (e.g. Chamber of Crafts) which certify equivalent qualifications. Such qualifications can confer the title of journeyman or master craftsman in a profession. In addition, in certain occupations (e.g. security worker; engineers and technical staff in the electrical power sector; work safety and hygiene technicians and officers), the validation powers are delegated to related sector bodies and professional associations. There are various certificates offered by private and third sector organisations (e.g. in voluntary work, computer competence, rural leadership etc), which are not official and thus not recognised by the State although validation is possible through distance learning. Correspondence courses do award formally recognised certificates or give the possibility for formal recognition.

Crossing the barriers established by the State and the syndicates and creating a system of competence-based validation in Poland requires a much wider change of social values, attitudes and norms. Such a change could bring about a new culture of learning that enables and encourages individuals to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions and demands of the labour market.

Romania

Non-formal learning in Romania has both public and private providers. The Ministry of Education and Research develops courses adapted to companies' requests and to the labour market. The National Agency for Employment and Professional Training also develops and finances education programs by their professional training centres that provide qualification and re-qualification courses aimed mainly at the unemployed or at those at risk of unemployment. Private professional training centres also provide authorised and non-authorised courses specific to particular activity areas. These courses are organised under the aegis of some Chambers of Commerce and Industry, unions, companies, non governmental organisations and centres of culture. The training providers can organise authorised

training programs that ensure certification with national recognition if they are authorised to do so by the National Council of Adults Professional Training.

Professional Competences Evaluation Centres are responsible for validating professional competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning. In 2005 17 Evaluation Centres throughout Romania were authorised to certify the 57 occupations included in the National Register in the following areas: radio communications, banking, social assistance, commerce, fire-risk, IT, project management, mechanic, services, mail, education and agriculture. The National Council of Adults Professional Training (NCAPT) authorises and monitors the evaluation centres and certifies evaluators of professional competences and internal and external verifiers.

This evaluation process is voluntary, independent of the training process and follows the criteria officially established in the Occupational Standards of Professions and is based on the work experience.

Spain

Non-formal and informal learning is viewed positively in both the public and the private sector in Spain. A new Law on Qualifications and Vocational Training has been introduced which aims to develop an integral system of vocational training, qualifications and accreditation. This system intends to respond to social and economic demands through diverse training and to address different expectations and personal situations. The first step towards the introduction of professional qualifications has been made by the creation of the *National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications*. This will cover the professional training necessary for each qualification. The National Institute links the administration and the social partners and is responsible for the elaboration and updating of the National Catalogue for Vocational Qualifications. At present, many courses of non-formal learning do not lead to a qualification. This is a point of conflict between the State and the professional organisations/unions—although there are different initiatives towards establishing methodologies for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning. Due to the private training sector's lack of interest in publicity it is difficult to know the actual range and expansion of training provision and the validation needs of their products. The initiative for validation and certification lies with the public administration. The Central Government is responsible for the regulation and co-ordination of the National System for Qualification and Vocational Training. The main conflict in the certification process is that there are two parallel certification authorities that are not connected: the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs awards certificates of vocational training, while the Ministry of Education and Science regulates formal education and awards qualifications through exams.

Sweden

Non-formal learning has always played an important pedagogical role in organised liberal adult education in Sweden. Several different options are available. Work-based learning (in close co-operation with training providers) is a popular choice for adults. Some third sector associations issue certificates which have limited recognition. Such certificates include language certificates, hunting certificates and driving qualifications for boats. The validation process has been operating in education sectors for many years but recent years have seen a surge in activity and certain sectors have seen an increase in intensity. Surprisingly, despite all the initiatives and activity, there is still no national system for validation, although the Swedish National Commission on Validation (established in 2003) is tasked with developing methods for validation and addressing quality. Responsibility for validation in Sweden is divided between the education system and the social partners. Decentralisation of the education system means that local authorities also have important validation responsibilities and progress in validation at the local level varies between different municipalities.

Motivation for validation in Sweden has two distinct points of origin. The first is *Kunskapslyftet*, which is a national ambition to raise the educational standard of the population to the level of upper secondary school, and the other is to assist in the professional assessment of immigrants. Several different work-related certificates are currently issued, for example, vocational education certificates (awarded for 78 trades) and Journeyman and Master certificates (awarded for 115 trades). Vocational certificates are also awarded by trade branches.

An important and useful achievement in Sweden has been the formulation of ten criteria referring to general competences which may be reformulated and developed to match the conditions of different trades and added to the standard vocational competences for each trade. The ten criteria are: managing information; linguistic and communicative competence; competence to solve problems, plan and organise; competence to carry out tasks and solve practical problems; competence to co-operate; competence to use equipment; consciousness of quality; aesthetic attitude; ethical attitude; and direction of development.

United Kingdom

Non-formal and informal training is provided widely in the United Kingdom, mainly through Community Education and Development, but also through work-based schemes. Both Community Education and work-based learning can be certified and validated through accredited schemes. The key drivers are employability, mobility and transferability of an individual's accredited core skills, within an economically competitive United Kingdom. A National Qualification Framework sets out the levels at which qualifications can be recognised, allowing comparison between the levels of different qualifications and identification of clear progression routes for a chosen career. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) are work-related, competence-based qualifications based on national occupational standards and are achieved through assessment and training. Learners are encouraged to develop a Personal Development Plan which includes "skills profiling" as well as a recording mechanism for qualifications and to keep a portfolio of evidence for their own achievements. They are supported by guidance experts. Awarding bodies are appointed throughout the country to deliver accreditation of SVQs (Scotland), NVQs (England and Wales), Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (Scotland), and Recognition of Lifelong Learning (Learning & Skills Council, England). This system of competence-based qualifications aims to provide a working, realistic interface between non-formal and formal learning and accreditation in the United Kingdom. Distinction does, however, need to be drawn between practices in England and Scotland. While England appears to be much more accreditation-centred, Scotland, in contrast, adopts a learner-driven approach. There is growing evidence that the learner-driven approach is more self-sustaining. As a result of guidance learners choose to stay in learning longer. Barriers to accreditation do exist and include costs for individuals, SMEs and micro-enterprises; access to transport and to centres where non-formal learning is being delivered. The existing learning culture, especially in relation to the non-traditional learner, can also be an obstacle to accreditation. Community planning is being tested within the new structural funds in Scotland where money has been ring-fenced to support rural community education and training. The potential of e-learning for rural areas is being tested in many areas and is thus still under investigation. Some remote areas do not have Broadband which is a further complication.

2.1.3 Conclusions

The reviews of the policies and provision of informal and non-formal learning in the 11 countries studied demonstrate that these represent three important groups in the European Union and neighbouring states, namely:

- Northern/central countries: Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom
- Southern countries: Greece, Spain
- New member states / eastern countries: Hungary, Poland, Romania

Non-formal and informal learning is offered by a variety of organisations at differing intensity and range across the sample of reviewed countries. We can distinguish between:

- Countries with a long tradition and a rich market of mostly public provision of non-formal learning: Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom
- Countries with limited public sector provision but with a developed private sector catering for labour market needs for specialist or new competences: Germany, Greece, Spain, Romania
- Countries with limited private and public sector provision of non-formal learning, accompanied by an emphasis on formal learning and state control of most education and training: Hungary, Poland

An analysis of the qualifications offered in the various countries revealed that the types of certification and accreditation offered within a country reflect the model of their formal education systems. Countries can be placed along a continuum. At one end lie countries that are characterised by "open" formal education systems. These systems allow the combination of formal and non-formal or informal types of learning, under a flexible system of qualifications which recognise prior learning (competences and knowledge resulting from any form of learning) rather than curriculum-based knowledge. The Validation of Prior Learning has been widely applied, especially from the 1990s, in a range of countries, including Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom. Flexible validation systems are based on the portfolio method and on-the-job observation. These countries also offer a large range of non-formal training opportunities that can lead to a certified qualification. The awarding bodies are either centralised or de-centralised.

At the other end of the continuum lie countries with "closed" education systems favouring formal qualifications which are usually based on exams. In these countries, non-formal and informal learning is not validated or accredited (Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Spain). An exception to this is the licensing of technical trades and professions offered by social partners or the state.

The continuum illustrates the flexibility of national validation and certification systems for non-formal and informal learning. The positions of the various countries along this continuum are shown in Figure 1 below:

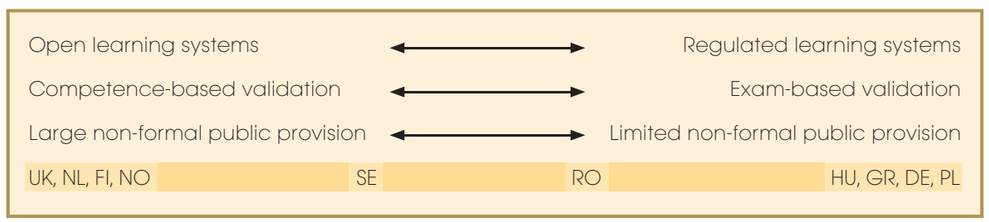

Figure 1. *Educational Systems Continuum showing positioning of countries*

Flexible validation systems provide opportunities for personal development and for building a lifelong learning career. A comparative analysis of the national reviews indicates a need to transfer the good practices of flexible validation and certification that are present at the left end of the continuum to the countries lying at the right end of the continuum. In most countries (with the exception of Sweden and Norway) prior learning must be validated and certified in order to be acknowledged and accepted by employers. Transferring these standards and attitudes to traditional education systems with intrinsically strong protectionist attitudes (usually espoused by Ministries of Education) is not a simple process. It will depend on a wider social change of values and attitudes that will be reflected in new policies and, in particular, on the promotion of a new culture of learning which will allow individuals to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions and demands of the labour market.

Specific examples of good practice that could be transferred include:

- In the Scandinavian countries the term Realkompetanse has been established to deal with all aspects of validation (Nordic Council, 2001). Realkompetanse covers the entire scope of learning outcomes, from formal to informal and has, in some cases, been criticised for being too broad. The concept is important, however, for addressing the totality of qualifications and competences held by an individual.
- In England and Scotland a centralised system of publicly awarded NVQs or SVQs are delivered by a network of authorised bodies and supported by the provision of guidance to learners.
- In the Netherlands a flexible and liberal system of Validation of Prior Learning accepts all learning whether it is based on formal, informal or non-formal education and training. Credits are awarded by a network of Knowledge Centres on Identification, Recognition and Accreditation of Competences.
- In Sweden the state has formulated ten criteria of general competence which are applied together with more specific vocational competence criteria. Competence-based validation for general and vocational competences is provided by a decentralised system operating through the municipalities, as no national system exists.

2.2 In-depth study of validation, certification and accreditation needs in six activity sectors in rural areas

2.2.1 Introduction

Studies into the need for validation, certification and accreditation of non-formal and informal education and training were conducted in 11 European countries. The studies covered six activity sectors with relevance in rural areas. The six sectors studied were: farming, manufacturing, tourism, education, health and social care and other services. A common questionnaire was created as the basis for the studies and a combination of face-to-face, telephonic and electronic interviews were conducted in each country. Thirty interviews (an average of 5 per sector) of several public, private and trade organisations in each sector were conducted per country. The surveys aimed to shed light on the following issues:

1. Is it necessary to recognise post-experience informal or non-formal learning across sectors?
2. Are existing recognition models sectorally defined or do they cut across sectors?
3. What types of needs does recognition serve (e.g. career development, mobility, employment sustainability, capacity building for sustainable development)?
4. Is there the necessary demand and experience to establish recognition of informal and non-formal learning in each sector?

The findings were compiled into 11 national reports covering all sectors, these were then fed into six horizontal reports (one for each sector) across the 11 countries taking part in the survey.

A summary of the key findings and conclusions of the six horizontal sector reports is provided below.

2.2.2 Sectoral reports

Manufacture

Current recognition models for learning in the manufacturing sector are largely dictated by the general education system of each country. In this sector, more than in all other sectors, recognised education tends to combine work-based elements (such as apprenticeship) with institution-based learning although employers place greater value on skills acquired through previous experience.

In some countries, for example Greece and Poland, the public sector has considerable power over the recognition of vocational education and the prospective employment of workers without formal qualifications. To meet sector market needs, public and private groups need to review and update concepts and principles on validating non-formal and informal learning.

Entrepreneurs in this sector report a considerable gap between the education system and market needs. As the examples of the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and Spain suggest continuous technological changes create a need for new qualifications that are often unavailable and, more often, for workers with qualifications in particular skills for which there is no learner demand. The lack of interest by learners in specific courses can be a contributory factor in the disproportionately high cost of course delivery. In countries such as Romania, Hungary and Poland market changes caused by recent accession to the European Union are another contributing factor to the increasing need for a qualified manufacturing workforce.

Intra-European immigration from newer member states to older ones since 2004 has had a great impact on the sector throughout Europe. Newer member states (Poland, Romania, Hungary) have experienced considerable losses in their qualified workforce as they migrate to older states and older member states have had an influx of workers. These workers are prepared to work for lower wages and are thus often preferred by employers who are not concerned about their qualifications. Obligatory qualifications are seen by some countries such as Poland and Romania as a tool to combat the extensive practice of grey market employment.

Education

Education and training in the education sector is, by and large, rooted in the teaching profession. Teaching can take place in formal settings such as schools and in non-formal settings such as training centres. It covers children (in schools) and adults in colleges or through adult education.

Vocational education for school teachers and other formal education institutions is inherently formal and formal qualifications are the only route to a permanent job. In most countries teacher training takes place at degree level and within formal tertiary education institutions. The importance of on-the-job training differs between countries: for example, in Sweden high school teachers require several years work experience whereas in other countries no practical experience is necessary. Of the 11 countries reviewed, only Poland and the Netherlands (the latter using a Validation of Prior Learning system) suggest that non-formal learning can lead to acquiring a teaching job.

Formal education dominates learning for education professionals and there are few reported exceptions to this. Exceptions usually relate to support functions within schools or to the tuition of non-formal courses such as computers, languages or personal development courses. These non-formal courses do not lead to qualifications.

In most countries such as Sweden, Poland, Germany and Spain non-formal training is available to teachers already in the profession who wish to upgrade existing or acquire new skills. Such opportunities

are generally welcomed by teachers and a desire for more such opportunities was expressed as they enrich the whole sector. There are also non-formal education opportunities relating to the acquisition of support skills which are not strictly vocational but may concern social, technical or organisational competences necessary to perform the job. Some countries, mainly Scandinavian, reported that these skills are gaining in importance and their validation should be encouraged.

One of the key problems for a number of countries (the Netherlands, Romania, the United Kingdom and Poland) is the shortage of qualified teachers. There were suggestions that this is due to low salary levels in the sector. Generally, the importance of non-formal and informal learning and of the concept of life-long learning is widely recognised. There is also agreement that the recognition and validation of expertise and previously acquired skills needs to be improved.

Farming

Significant cross-country differences were observed, both in the importance and structure of the farming sector as well as in the stage of sector development reached. This is naturally also linked to the education levels and needs of farmers and to the need for validation or certification of non-formal and informal learning.

Basic-level vocational training within the agricultural sector is well organised in many countries (Germany, Greece, Hungary, Finland, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden). Unlike other sectors, however, formal education is not necessary to become a farmer and few choose to gain a recognised qualification. In some countries, such as Spain, Romania and Poland, farmers have often received only standard school education and have acquired their skills on-the-job. In addition, the Polish report suggests that many in the farming sector do not value formal education. This is a significant challenge for the sector.

There are, however, employment areas where the validation, accreditation, or certification of previously acquired skills is desirable and/or obligatory. This could apply to specific professions such as animal keepers, animal husbandry and tractor drivers. In other cases non-formal learning is triggered by a need to respond to technological advances in the sector. In addition, general competences, such as the use of ITC are becoming increasingly important. Such competences are mostly obtained through non-formal training.

Across Europe the farming sector is undergoing a considerable structural shift from family farms to commercial enterprises and reviewed countries find themselves at different stages in this movement. This change in the structure of the sector has a strong influence on the attitudes and needs of education and on the possibilities for validation. Increased complexity and competition fuels the demand for agricultural entrepreneurs. Within this environment formal education in agriculture and recognised business skills become essential, particularly amongst the larger agricultural enterprises, as reported by the Netherlands.

Another motivating factor for the acquisition of formal qualifications within the sector stems from the funding available to farmers by the EU. Eligibility for this funding is based upon the completion of accredited training. This is regarded as unnecessary by many—which is not surprising given the lack of value placed on formal education mentioned in the Polish report.

Migration of workers from newer member states to older member states is a characteristic of the sector. In some countries, Greece for example, unskilled positions in the sector are covered mainly by such workers. This is an important point as it increases the need for the validation or certification of prior learning relevant to this section of the workforce.

Tourism

Tourism education and training whether formal, non-formal or informal, is extremely important for the improvement of tourism

services. Education is seen as the route to a competent labour force that will enhance the tourism product and add quality to tourism services.

Understandably, education and training provision in tourism is, to a large extent, dependent on the relative importance given to the sector and thus its development stage in each country. Countries whose economies do not depend on tourism (Finland and Sweden) or who do not have a tradition of tourism (Poland) have not experienced as great a need for (and therefore tend to have less) developed tourism education provision.

Formal education in the sector ranges from vocational training through to higher academic levels. The majority of formal qualifications are acquired by attending courses, sitting for exams and obtaining practical experience. Although formal qualifications are not a prerequisite for private sector vacancies they are the norm, especially in larger establishments and higher end positions (Greece, Spain, Sweden, Hungary and Poland). In countries with a significant state presence, the state plays a major role by issuing licences for specific tourism activities. In other countries the state restricts public sector vacancies to state approved qualifications.

There are also examples of entire tourism professions that are regulated by syndicates or other sector organisations. These lead to closed/protected professions (e.g. tourist guides in Greece). Free and open validation may help to overcome this kind of protectionism.

Formal education in many target countries is not sufficiently flexible and does not respond to the needs of a constantly changing tourism sector as reported by Greece and Romania. This is evidenced in many countries by the lack of formal qualifications in specific forms of tourism, such as nature and rural tourism. Another example of the inadequacy of formal education relates to the use of new technologies in tourism. While the use of various forms of IT has had a great impact in the global practice of tourism, IT competences related specifically to the tourism sector have not yet been adequately translated into a formal education package which can equip the workforce with relevant and applicable skills.

In some countries, particularly in Greece, a further limitation of formal qualifications can be seen in the shortage of qualified managerial staff. Because the education system concentrates on technical not managerial skills these formal qualifications are not valued by employers who do not see them as meeting their needs. Employers prefer staff who have studied tourism in institutions abroad or who have an economic and business administration background.

These gaps are often filled by informal and non-formal education and training providers who offer a more flexible and responsive form of training (Sweden, Hungary, Greece). In Greece, for example, in certain tourism professions, non-recognised certificates provided by highly valued training providers are in great demand. Similarly, employees with work experience in high-end tourism establishments such as 5 star hotels and restaurants are highly valued. There is room for the further development of such non-formal and informal learning opportunities. Furthermore, the German report drew attention to the need for the recognition or validation of skills gained though work experience or internships, a practice which is very common among students.

There is high intra-European mobility of professionals in this sector and thus a great need for tools aimed at the validation of prior learning as suggested by the Dutch report. Such tools should be developed in order to facilitate the recognition of skills, including language competences.

Health

The health and social care sector is broad and spans many different occupations and educational backgrounds which are linked to different sub-qualifications. Due to the increased responsibility carried by the sector and its professionals, in the majority of cases formal qualifications are obligatory for entry

to the profession. This is not universally true, however, as can be seen in some countries such as Romania, Greece and Poland where this is only true for health-care and not for social care professions, where standards are significantly lower. In fact in Eastern European countries much of the social care is handled by untrained staff and not necessarily even within the official economy. Respondents from the social care sector in these countries highlighted the need for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Health and social care professionals acquire vocational knowledge and skills predominately through tertiary education supplemented by a certain amount of practical experience. Practical experience tends to be more extensively used in the lower end professions and by specialists. Such practical work still needs to be validated through exams to be accepted by employers.

In most countries, health and social care professionals also need social, organisational and, increasingly, language and computer skills. Although the national reports do not specifically address these skills, information from other sectors allows us to assume that training in these competences is most likely provided by non-formal courses (either requested by the employer or attended voluntarily) and informal learning.

Validation of previous learning in this sector is not popular, yet, more than in other sectors, professionals continue to expand their knowledge through publications, trade magazines, lectures, seminars, conferences, the Internet etc. Validation of Prior Learning as a form of optional certification, as practised in the Netherlands, is a very useful tool of empowerment, employability and recruitment.

Another common practice in this sector is on-the-job training organised by the employer and leading to a certificate. The courses are very popular and widely acknowledged in countries such as Germany, Finland and the Netherlands, but less so in countries such as Greece and Poland.

It appears that the current or predicted shortage of qualified staff in certain health professions (although mostly in social care) in countries including the Netherlands, Hungary, Norway and Poland is a significant challenge for the sector. Contributing factors mentioned in the reports include poor wages and increased stress associated with the profession that leads to many leaving the profession before pension age. As in other sectors, in newer member states, the shortage of qualified staff is also caused by massive emigration levels.

In other countries, for example in Greece and Spain, the availability of qualified staff is not the main problem. They are more concerned with maintaining and updating the skills of the workforce through training—particularly in the public sector. Continuous on-the-job training is crucial for the maintenance of high standards in health and social care services.

In a sector where formal qualifications are usually obligatory state monopoly of vocational education, as experienced in Poland and Greece, is limiting. There is a need for an objective, performance-based and independently measured certification system. Respondents reacted positively to the possibility of validating non-formal and informal learning. Again, the free movement of labour between countries within the European Union points to the need for a European system of validation in this sector.

Other Services

Over 40 rural enterprises and institutions engaged in other services were also investigated as representatives of their sectors. Organisations involved in craftsmanship; industrial and commercial services; public and communal services; construction and repair services; farmers' advisory services; financial services and voluntary work were surveyed, although clearly these are not the only other sectors operating in rural areas. Services such as these provide substantial employment opportunities to rural areas and offer valuable services to local citizens.

Existing recognition models in the

reviewed countries cover a wide range of qualifications and accreditations that generally follow the national standards in their respective fields. The need and demand for training and further education at vocational, post-secondary and higher education levels quite naturally differs depending on the sector under discussion. For example, the learning need for craftsmanship in rural Spain does not focus on formal qualifications, but is mostly addressed through on-the-job training.

Cross-country comparison across sectors is difficult due to the range of sectors analysed by each country under 'other services.' It appears, however, that a common practice across the reviewed countries is the provision of certificated non-formal training by large business networks (e.g. superstore chains in Germany), large enterprises (e.g. Hellenic Railways in Greece), chambers (e.g. IHK in Germany) and NGOs (e.g. Scouting Gelderland in the Netherlands). This training can lead to the employment of workers either within their organisations or in similar organisations.

Although studies in some sectors of the more economically developed countries showed that there is no need for qualifications as qualified staff are available in sufficient numbers in the rural service sector, technological advances and the increasing speed of innovations affect rural services in a complex way. Lifelong learning, validation, certification and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning can play a pivotal role in rural areas enabling people to keep abreast with social, economic and technological changes.

2.2.3 Conclusions

Studies of the validation, certification and accreditation processes in each country showed that there is a significant need for cross-sector validation, certification and accreditation of formal, informal and non-formal learning in all participating countries. The level of need largely depends on specific sector requirements as well as on the growth of each sector at national level. In certain professions, for example in the healthcare sector, formal learning and qualifications are necessary to safeguard standards in a way that non-formal learning alone cannot.

Most sectors favoured a mix of learning sources with different emphases placed on non-formal, informal and formal education. Despite placing the greatest emphasis on formal learning, both teaching and the health and social care sectors regarded upgrading and extending skills as important. The only sector which placed little value on formal education was farming, although with Europe-wide changes in this sector this is likely to be changing. Several sectors favoured a combination of institution-based and work-based learning. This is true of the manufacturing and the health and social care sectors as well as the teaching sector in Sweden. Furthermore both the manufacturing and tourism sectors placed great emphasis on skills acquired through previous experience. The need for new skills, such as IT, applies to all sectors due to technological advances which are not sector-specific.

Given that gaps between the educational system and market needs were reported in more than one sector (e.g. manufacturing and tourism) and taking the shortage (or predicted shortage) of staff in several sectors (teaching, health and social care) into consideration as well as the varying emphases on non-formal and informal learning we can conclude that the desire and/or need for the validation of this non-formal and informal learning cuts across all sectors. This is even true of the farming sector as European Union funding demands outweigh farmers' relative lack of interest.

The role of the state in the education sector of each country is one of the core defining factors for the recognition of non-formal education. The study demonstrates that countries with less state involvement in the education system have better developed systems of validation of non-formal and informal learning which benefit both employers and employees. In other countries,

state involvement in education approaches a monopoly and is linked to all public sector vacancies. In such countries recognition or validation of skills acquired through non-formal or informal routes is still in its infancy.

Market trends and conditions and employers' needs form one of the key driving forces behind the need to validate informal and non-formal learning. There is a discrepancy between the provision of formal education and the skills required by employers. Non-formal learning can be a powerful mechanism to supplement the knowledge and skills acquired through formal routes as well as a method of keeping up-to-date with technological or other changes that occur in each field. Non-formal education often focuses on social, organisational, language or technical skills and competences that supplement the core vocational knowledge of the learner/ employee and such skills are being increasingly valued by employers. In the absence of formal learning and the quest for non-vocational skills employers turn to non-formal learning and see the validation of informal learning as a way to tackle this gap. This is a mutually advantageous arrangement that will benefit both employers and employees and therefore validation should be encouraged.

Non-formal learning plays an important role in filling in the gaps of formal tuition as it can respond to market needs. Examination of such courses can give formal education institutions an insight into market trends and lead to the development of new qualifications. The creation of a flexible and responsive vocational education system necessitates better co-operation between employers and education providers.

As discussed above, a final contributing factor driving the need for validation arises from the mobility of citizens across European countries. This mobility has caused staff shortages in some countries and an influx of a cheaper workforce in others. Amongst this migrant population are highly qualified staff whose qualifications or work experience are not recognised in European countries outside their own. As intra-European migration is becoming more popular a European-wide system of validation should be considered for the future.

PART THREE: Towards the Development of a Flexible System of Validation, Certification and Accreditation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

3.1 Development of the Learning Pathway methodology

3.1.1 Background and rationale

To maintain competitiveness countries need to develop and use human resources to the full. The working life continuously presents new requirements for improving professional and vocational competences and the only way ahead is through learning. Formal learning has traditionally constituted the most valued and recognised type of learning. In the early 1990s the concept of lifelong learning became more widespread with the specific and somewhat new emphasis on adult learning. CEDEFOP (2003) has defined lifelong learning as "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons".[3]

As part of the shift towards continuing education, more attention was paid to the importance of informal and non-formal learning as parts of lifelong learning and continuous competence development. Since 2000 several documents have been published within the European Union signalling the increased recognition of non-formal and informal learning as well as the need for their validation. In addition the first national systems for the evaluation, recognition, validation and certification of competences achieved through informal and non-formal learning were created.

This emphasis on competences rather than formal qualifications and skills is critical as it allows people to be valued on the basis of actual competence. It is perhaps the unemployed who show the importance of this most clearly as assessment of their competences can be decisive in gaining employment, reintegration into society and the development of a positive attitude towards lifelong learning. It is also important to society as a whole that people are valued according to their actual competence. This encourages education providers to tailor their educational programmes to meet the needs of learners and increases the potential for mobility in the employment market.

The importance given to lifelong learning and the acquisition of competences has increased the need for the evaluation and recognition of skills and knowledge. Employers and individuals alike need to prove acquisition of the required competences. To this end innovative services and tools are needed to support the validation and recognition of skills and competences. New forms of certification for informal and non-formal learning are needed to widen the recognition spectrum regardless of the type of learning methods used.

The key aim of the Euro-Validation project was to promote best practice for the validation, certification and accreditation of informal and non-formal learning, with special emphasis on the skills and competences necessary for sustainable rural development. Statistics point to a lack of skills in rural areas but this is not necessarily valid. Statistics emphasise knowledge obtained by formal methods of learning and do not always recognise the combination of skills possessed by people working in rural areas. These skills are of great value in sustaining the economic viability of such areas. The need to recognise the contribution to rural economic development made by informal and non-formal learning and the consequent importance of validating and certifying such learning in a rural context has been a crucial focus for the project.

In response to the challenge set by the validation of prior learning, the Euro-Validation project developed a methodology referred to as the Learning Pathway. The Learning Pathway methodology relates to the evaluation, recognition, validation and certification of competences acquired over the lifetime of an individual. All learning is valued and can be acquired formally, informally or through non-formal means. Learning can take place in many different spheres—hobbies, everyday chores, voluntary work, participation in social life, work experience, training courses and programmes. It can also be associated with degrees, certificates and diplomas. The Learning Pathway is in essence an individual process aiming at personal/professional growth and is not necessarily connected to any formal study or accreditation process. It is important to note, however, that should the objective be a formal degree or competence, the creation of the Pathway will need to take their requirements into consideration.

The first step for the development of the Learning Pathway methodology, in the context of the project, was to adopt a model of professional competences. The second step was to define the occupation that these competences would serve and the tasks associated with the performance of this occupation.

3.1.2 Key professional competences: a model

In the European Union extensive work within education has been conducted for many years. This has been driven by many contributory factors ranging from continuing globalisation within the world through to changes in social development which are causing a switch to a more knowledge-based economy. In addition, the movement of citizens between member states is increasing which gives rise to a need to harmonise educational structures between the Union's members. Acknowledging that people are Europe's most important asset for growth has increased insight regarding skills that will be needed in the future. In the past, the skills that have usually been considered as basic are reading, writing and mathematics but many other skills will be required in the future. These include computer and business skills, social and communication proficiencies as well as skills applicable to a knowledge community. In many cases, although these skills are already held, they have not been clearly defined as competences with a particular value.

Several guidelines, frameworks and models of competence recognition and validation were studied at this stage. Special reference should be made here to the work carried out by the European Commission. The work program Education 2010 has done extensive work in the development of documents relating to skills required by a knowledge-based society and a European reference tool for key competences has been compiled. In this work, the Commission of the European Communities has established the central areas of competence that are necessary for personal development, social cohesion and employment potential in a knowledge-based society. "Competence" is defined by CEDEFOP (2004) as the ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a habitual and/or changing work situation.[4] The Commission of the European Communities (2003) sees key competences as a transferable, multifunctional package of knowledge, skills and attitudes that all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, inclusion and employment.[5]

[3] CEDEFOP. (2004) *Terminology of vocational training policy: a multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe*, [Online]. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Available from: http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/img/dynamic/c313/cv-1_en_US_glossary_4030_6k.pdf [Accessed: 10th October 2007].

[4] CEDEFOP. (2004) *Terminology of vocational training policy: a multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe*, [Online]. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Available from: http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/img/dynamic/c313/cv-1_en_US_glossary_4030_6k.pdf [Accessed: 10th October 2007].

[5] European Commission. Directorate-General for Education and Culture. (2003) *Implementation of Education & Training 2010 Work Programme Working Group: Basic Skills, Entrepreneurship and Foreign Languages. Progress Report*, [Online]. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/basic-skills_en.pdf [Accessed: 10th October 2007].

They have compiled eight key competences for life-long learning as a European reference framework:

1. Communication in the mother tongue

2. Communication in foreign languages

3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology

4. Digital competence

5. Learning to learn

6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, civic competence

7. Entrepreneurship

8. Cultural expression

One of the models researched by the Euro-Validation team was a competence model developed in Sweden by the PRIM-Group.[6] The Euro-Validation project decided to base the Learning Pathway methodology on the 10 competences set by this Swedish research group in 2006 as they seemed particularly relevant to the sustainable rural development context of the project. Further reasons for the choice of this model were based on two significant factors. Firstly, this model can be applied internationally. There is a strong likelihood that many of these competence requirements will be very similar between different countries in the European Union. Furthermore, the borderless nature of competence certificates should increase trans-national mobility. Once the competence requirements have been formulated, there is an increased likelihood that all validation activity will expand and be applied in a fair and equal way to all individuals regardless of nationality. Secondly, as the eight key competences proposed by the European Commission are included in the basic design, it will also be possible to formulate the competence requirements that individual professions will need in the future.

The basis of a competence profile consists of the following ten overall competences:

1. Competence to handle information

In order to function in working life and as a citizen, one must develop a capacity to handle information i.e. to seek, gather, analyse and organise different types of information. This may apply to information that exists in writing, as images, drawings, in nature or in interpersonal interaction. This has become a necessary area of competence, not least due to the development of information technology. To remain critical and be able to objectively evaluate information gathered is a necessary condition of this information handling.

2. Competence to act verbally and in writing

An increasingly important ability in our society is to be able to formulate and communicate ideas and information verbally, in writing or by other means. Communication competence also encompasses the ability to meet different kinds of people in specific situations.

3. Competence to perform tasks and solve practical problems

This competence involves the ability to put plans into action and to complete what has been planned. It also involves the ability to deal with problems that occur in the process in such a way that the task can be completed with good results.

4. Competence to solve problems, plan and organise tasks

The problems and tasks one faces in the real world are often complex and unstructured. The ability to plan and organise actions according to the problem can be described as a capacity to analyse what the specific problem is, identity the

[6] The PRIM-group is a Research Group for the Assessment of Knowledge and Competence in Sweden. The PRIM-group was tasked by The Swedish National Agency for Education to develop national testing for high schools. The group consisted of representatives from the Stockholm Education Institute and The Institute of Pedagogy at The University of Växjö. As a result of this work, the Competence Profile was developed. The Swedish National Agency for Education retains copyright on this material.

resources needed to solve the problem, and judge whether the chosen solution is the best under the conditions. It also involves being able to draw up a plan for one's own work that is realistic in relation to the work's content and time frame.

5. Competence to co-operate

In an increasing number of fields, one must be able to work with others in groups or work teams. To be able to co-operate means that one can contribute to the group's work, and is willing and able to accept the thoughts and ideas of others. In order for a group or work team to function, its members must be prepared to take different roles within the group and work to develop the cooperation.

6. Competence to use equipment

Most fields are built on an interaction between people and equipment that is often technical in nature. The ability to use and operate relevant equipment is thus necessary for one to function in the workplace.

7. Quality awareness competence

To be quality aware is to be keen that both processes and products retain a high quality. High quality is a condition for continued commission, whether services or products are in question.

8. Aesthetic behaviour competence

Aesthetic aspects are becoming important in more and more fields. This includes everything from the aesthetic of actions to services or products that are supposed to be aesthetically pleasing for those at whom they are aimed.

9. Ethical behaviour competence

Every field of activity has underlying ethical values that should be followed. To be competent therefore implies to be able to act with ethical awareness.

10. Developmental inclination competence

This implies a readiness to be able to contribute to improving one's own professional activities. The condition for this competence is a questioning and testing attitude toward a given task, goal or other working condition. It also implies a capacity for alternative thinking.

3.1.3 Definition of the occupation: Functions and tasks of a Rural Animator

The professional competence of a Rural Animator was used to illustrate the phases of constructing and applying the Learning Pathway. The choice of this profession related to the Euro-Validation Project's focus on sustainable rural development. The fact that this competence had not yet been accredited anywhere in Europe presented the Project with opportunities as well as challenges.

The Euro-Validation project defined the **functions** of a Rural Animator as follows:

The Rural Animator initiates and sustains community activities related to the local economy, the re-establishment of social bonds and the reinforcement or re-establishment of local identity, leading to sustainable rural development. The Rural Animator stimulates everyday economic and social activity using a bottom-up approach. This confers authenticity as it is based upon grass-roots definitions of local needs and the means necessary for their fulfilment. The role of rural animator is closely linked to the concept of social capacity traditionally associated with rural communities and utilises the power of mutual help, strong neighbourhood ties and local social capital. The Rural Animator is a trusted person who can protect and develop the interests of the community and address local development issues including the enhancement of quality of life. Intensive modernisation of rural areas, as a result of urbanisation or the industrialisation of agriculture makes the re-definition of rural development and its agents an important issue. The Rural Animator is an agent of change that contributes to this re-definition.

A contemporary Rural Animator can be distinguished from other animators

(e.g. animators working with underprivileged communities in cities) by his/her knowledge and understanding of the idea of the sustainable rural development paradigm. This gives the Rural Animator the ability to work within the political and cultural context of social, ecological, economic and cultural changes in rural areas.

The Euro-Validation team also defined the **processes** in which rural animators are involved and included the following:

- building and maintaining mutual trust in the community,
- supporting the creation of development plans,
- participating in the implementation of development plans, and
- fulfilling the function of an intermediary between different stakeholders.

These work processes were then broken down into four **core tasks**. Taking individual sets of skills as the basis for definition these four core tasks are outlined below:

1. Social communication: building trust, ability to interact easily with every member of the community, conflict resolution, stimulation of innovative thinking, stimulation of positive attitudes towards community and himself/herself, self-presentation awareness and skills, rhetorical skills and skills covering the explanation of complicated issues. This core task also covers **information processing** skills such as: handling library, newspapers and Internet queries; targeting informal sources of information; grouping, categorising and the synthesis of acquired information; writing and publishing in articles, forums, Web pages etc., as well as IT skills

2. Recognising the community's needs and problems: gathering knowledge about the community through simple surveys and polls, reporting, recognition of individuals' attitudes towards common action and community through interviews and observation, the ability to perform qualitative data analysis and to compile synthesis reports

3. Managing and coordinating group actions: projecting different kinds of actions, sources of financing, basic information about procedures, motivation techniques, group management, knowledge about primary groups' structures and actions, idea of cooperation, pre-selection of potential leaders

4. Updating knowledge and understanding of sustainable rural development: covering new trends in rural development, sustainable tourism, idea of sustainability, practical knowledge of the functioning of the local network of institutions and organisations (self-government, NGO's, regional bodies, national bodies)

3.1.4 The Competence and Task Matrix

Based on the key competences (described in section 3.1.2) and core tasks of the Rural Animator (described in section 3.1.3) the team built the Competence and Task Matrix in order to set clear standards. The core tasks were cross referenced and reviewed against each of the 10 competences taken from the Swedish model. The Competence and Task Matrix is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Competence and Task Matrix assessing Competence in terms of the Core Tasks of a Rural Animator

COMPETENCES	CORE TASKS			
	1. Social communication and information processing	**2.** Recognising community's needs and problems	**3.** Managing and coordinating group actions	**4.** Updating knowledge and understanding of sustainable rural development
1. Competence to handle information				
2. Competence to act verbally and in writing				
3. Competence to plan and organise tasks				
4. Competence to perform tasks and solve problems				
5. Competence to cooperate				
6. Competence to use equipment				
7. Quality awareness competence				
8. Aesthetic behaviour competence				
9. Ethical behaviour competence				
10. Developmental inclination competence				

3.1.5 Assessing competence: the way forward

Taking the Matrix as starting point, each individual using the Matrix can, under appropriate guidance, identify his/her level of competence relating to each task. In addition to formal qualifications these can cover competences gained through work experience, recreational activities, activity in the community and volunteer work. In this way gaps in learning become obvious and individuals can then seek learning opportunities to fill these gaps.

The individual then needs to judge how much and what kind of formal validation would be needed in order to prove the acquisition of the competences. For example, should the skills be demonstrated in practice or should there be a recommendation letter? Is there a need for formal certification, a diploma or a qualification as proof of competences to be able to work as a rural animator? Can on-the job training provide the necessary competences?

A piloting system was devised to test the Matrix. This pilot process and its results are described in section 3.2.

3.1.6 Documenting competence: the use of portfolios

As the individual takes responsibility for his/her own Learning Pathway they will need to keep track of competences and integrate skills gained through non-formal, informal and formal means. A portfolio could be a useful tool for documenting the full range of competences. A competence portfolio can be used to analyse and describe the activities and competences of a person and can include many different types of information. Information can range from the informal (e.g. pictures) through to formally accredited descriptions such as awards, certificates and diplomas.

A portfolio can assist greatly in the reflection process and in the analysis of present and past situations and can therefore be a useful tool when creating a Learning Pathway or Personal Development Plan. A portfolio helps to demonstrate (and thus to validate) individual experience, competences and skills. It can be used when applying for a job, seeking a new position within an organisation, enrolling for a course or simply as a vehicle to introduce oneself. It must be stressed that the person is the owner of his/her portfolio and can choose which sections to share with others as he/she deems appropriate.

The Europass is a good illustration of the benefits of a portfolio. The Europass consists of five documents: Europass curriculum vitae (CV); Europass Language Passport; Europass Certificate Supplement; Europass Diploma Supplement and Europass Mobility. The first two are completed by the individual and the remaining three are completed and issued by competent organisations. Europass is supported by a network of National Europass Centres. Using Europass, people can translate their skills and qualifications into a format that can be clearly and easily understood throughout Europe (European Union, EFTA/EEA and candidate countries) and can move anywhere in Europe.

The European Portfolio for Youth Leaders also demonstrates the potential benefits of portfolios. This Portfolio provides youth leaders and youth workers in Europe (volunteers and professionals) with a tool which can help them identify, assess and describe their competences against European quality standards. The use of this portfolio will not only contribute to the recognition of the experience and skills of youth leaders / workers but could also support efforts to increase the recognition of youth work and non-formal education and learning.

3.2 Pilot testing the Learning Pathway: national results

The Learning Pathway was piloted to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its application. Seven out of the eleven participating countries were selected to test it and were asked to report on their findings. Below are the methodological approaches adopted in each case as well as the results achieved. These are followed by some generic conclusions on the application of the Learning Pathway and the Matrix.

3.2.1 Finland: the Learning Pathway is effective with people who are motivated

Scope and methodology

The University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute Seinäjoki Unit recruited seven persons from three Local Action Groups (LAGs) to participate in the pilot.

The interviewees were all women living in rural areas and most lived in villages. Five of them either had or were studying towards advanced degrees. Academic and vocational backgrounds as well as work experience varied greatly and ranged from factory and office work to research and teaching. Rural development knowledge and experience was as follows: five of the seven had or were studying for a post-graduate degree related to Rural Development, two of the interviewees were executive managers of the LAGs, two were planning officers, one a project advisor, one a project manager and one filled the role of village and youth spokesman. All had been working in the LAG for at least three years. They shared a desire for self-development and were keen to learn and try out new ideas and to use this to support their work. The majority of the interviewees did not limit their work to office hours. Development activities and community support continued during their spare time with involvement in associations and sports clubs. Several also functioned as elected officials in the municipalities or in the church.

The participants were an ideal pilot for the evaluation and development of the Learning Pathway methodology. As rural animators, they are professional rural developers working in the field, both at the grassroots level of their rural communities as well as interacting daily with policy making, administrative, financial and even legislative levels. As individuals, they constantly face a challenge as they strive to maintain a balance between fulfilling official, professional requirements, following laws, regulations and programmes, while at the same time keeping their developer's mind open to new, innovative and sometimes radical ideas that originate at grassroots level. These then have to be taken further.

Preparatory work was done before the first interview. Before the first interview took place participants were asked to send CVs and other relevant materials to the guidance provider to give her wider background information on each person. Participants received the Core Tasks and Competence Matrix along with the descriptions of how competences and core tasks of rural animators were depicted in this model.
The first interviews commenced with a general discussion of how the core tasks and competences of a rural animator related to the participants' work. The Core Tasks and Competence Matrix was discussed in detail and the participants' expressed training needs were reflected against it. Summaries of these first interviews and of the training needs that had been expressed by the participants were sent to the participants and their comments processed before the start of the second interviews.
The second interviews dealt with participant's training choices in the creation of their Learning Pathways. The participants began by checking a summary table of their training needs that had been set into the original Core Tasks and Competence Matrix. They were able to elaborate on their initial comments and add new training needs. Next they examined the selection of training courses set against the Matrix and chose those that were both interesting and relevant to their training needs. The courses in the course pool included courses and modules that were parts of degrees or qualifications as well as continuing education courses with only a certificate from the training provider.
A document introducing larger training programmes targeted for rural developers and certain other training opportunities (with module content discussed and evaluated on interest and relevance) was produced as a complement to the Course Matrix.
At the end of the second interviews participants were asked to evaluate the Core Tasks and Competence Matrix and its relevance for them. They were also asked what they would regard as ideal training and what course of study they planned to follow in order to translate their Learning Pathways into action. A summary of the training needs expressed is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Training needs as expressed by Finnish Rural Animators

COMPETENCES	CORE TASKS			
	1. Social communication and information processing	**2.** Recognising community's needs and problems	**3.** Managing and coordinating group actions	**4.** Updating knowledge and understanding of sustainable rural development
1. Competence to handle information	Methods of information processing Intermediating information Public performing	Methods for group work Analyzing skills Making relevant questions	Leadership and management skills Knowing different funding resources	Recognising and utilising silent knowledge
2. Competence to act verbally and in writing	Voice control Improving versatile communication skills; both literal and verbal	Ideation methods	Methods for group work Leading meetings with the right procedures Language skills (English, Swedish etc.)	
3. Competence to plan and organise tasks			What is a learning and innovative organisation like	Project leadership and management
4. Competence to perform tasks and solve problems	Recognition and working with different types of persons Administration, funding and economic management Accounting	Knowing laws and regulations	Leadership and management skills Negotiation skills Problem solving skills and methods	Creative problem solving skills Awareness of the silent knowledge
5. Competence to cooperate	Cooperation skills Methods for group work		Communication and interaction in networks Negotiation skills Developing methods to improve internal communication of the group	
6. Competence to use equipment	Photo processing and editing Updating skills in using office solutions			
7. Quality awareness competence			Quality management Evaluation of the quality of services	
8. Aesthetic behaviour competence			Customer service skills	Customer service and marketing skills
9. Ethical behaviour competence	Laws and regulations about concealment of confidential information	Communication in marketing		Sustainable development
10. Developmental inclination competence				Creative methods Understanding the connection of rural development to a larger framework

Results

Participants were positive about the Learning Pathway process. For many it was their first opportunity to examine and analyse their own work, tasks and competences in such detail. They saw the process as valuable and felt it had brought previously unidentified training needs to their attention.

Some interviewees expressed disappointment as they had hoped for "eureka" moments. They felt that too much energy had been spent trying to understand the Matrix and how tasks and competences connected. They also felt that some issues were repeated in different areas.

Participants found the discussions very valuable and stressed the importance of personal guidance when using the Matrix. They found it helpful to share their thoughts with someone and discuss elements of the Matrix—the exact meanings of each competence, how they fitted together and how it related to their daily work. Working with a guidance provider enabled them to make sense of it and to recognise training needs. They felt a useful method would be to let the owner of the Learning Pathway (the person whose pathway it is) speak freely whilst leaving the guide to ask questions and translate the answers into the Matrix to arrive at recognised training needs.

In general, participants found the core tasks and competences of the Matrix appropriate but expressed a need for greater simplicity or clarity in the descriptions and explanation of each task / competence. As used in the Finnish pilot and in its present form the Matrix was too complicated, lacked clarity and working through it was very time-consuming.

When asked to evaluate the Learning Pathway's potential use for specific purposes participants thought it would be useful when recruiting employees, as part of supervision at work, preparing for development discussions and as a part of the quality assessment of the services of LAGs.

Analysing personal development needs and interests is a process that requires sufficient time in addition to a specific purpose and objective. The Finnish study found that other commitments meant participants were unwilling to commit themselves to a Learning Pathway. This leads one to conclude that a Learning Pathway is probably most useful when it is related to another, more immediate development objective e.g. career change, a particular qualification or perhaps in the creation of a development plan on organisational level.

3.2.2 Hungary: a new qualification for professionals serving local development in micro-regions

Scope and methodology

The pilot testing of the Matrix in Hungary took place at a very opportune moment. From 1997 the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development had established a new network of 167 rural development offices across Hungary. The creation of these new offices created a demand for professional rural animators and developers, but no suitable training for these positions was available.

The West Hungary University, Faculty of Forest Engineering, Environment and Innovation Centre, Association of Rural Area Managers in Győr-Moson-Sopron and Vas Counties decided to pilot test the Matrix with three women and one man working as rural managers in local rural development offices in the West-Transdanubian Region. The other participant was a student, newly qualified with a Master's Degree in Environmental Engineering specialising in regional development. She wished to be employed in one of these new offices. The rural managers all had university degrees and 3-4 years of work experience although the idea of a Rural Animator's qualification was unfamiliar to them. The ages of participants ranged from 23 to 30.

All participants were interested in piloting the Learning Pathway method. They were keen to discover learning needs related to the tasks of the Rural Animator and create their own learning pathways to achieve the relevant competences.

Following individual and group sessions with the participants four different competence Matrixes were completed and four individual Learning Pathways were created. Working in groups, participants were able to evaluate their present competences and recognise those that needed improvement in order to gain a qualification as a Rural Animator. The Hungarian pilot testing process was a valuable and interesting one as it dealt with professionals who came from different educational backgrounds. Participants thought initially that they possessed all the knowledge that was necessary to perform the duties of their new job. As they worked through the process of constructing individual Learning Pathways they realised that they lacked important skills and were keen to study and acquire them. The individual Learning Pathways also helped to determine what form continuous training should take. It seems that needs will best be served through a combination of courses offered by different universities. This will allow flexibility to select courses according to people's individual background and gaps in skills.

Results

The main achievement of the Hungarian experiment was that it raised awareness of the need for a qualification amongst professionals serving local development in the decentralised system of micro-regions. This is particularly valuable in the context of the LEADER Initiative and the staffing of the LAGs. There are now efforts being made by the piloting partner to convince the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture to confer the formal qualification of Rural Animator on these flexible combinations of courses.

3.2.3 Norway: a competence assessment tool can facilitate the process of building an individual learning pathway

Scope and methodology

Norway already has a system for the validation of prior learning (VOX) which made it difficult to recruit participants. Eventually Rogaland Training Centre (RKK) managed to recruit three participants. All worked as business managers or salesmen and were actively involved in local development through associations and other social and political activities. All lived in rural Norway and had between 12 to 24 years varied work experience. Educational levels ranged from a university degree to no formal degree.

The VOX competence mapping system has been officially developed and calibrated in Norway and covers similar concepts to the Matrix. The Norwegian pilot project decided to use VOX as it is a recognised system. It was felt that this would be easier than using an unfamiliar, unrecognised tool. Participants were aware of the VOX although they had not used it before and chose to focus on their actual working situations and future

possibilities rather than on those of a Rural Animator. All agreed with and used the ten key competences described in the Matrix. They examined each one in terms of its relevance to their fields of work and removed aspects they deemed irrelevant.

The Learning Pathway process took place over three sessions. The first was a group session where individual participant backgrounds and thoughts about the skills and competences needed by Rural Animators were mapped. Although unsure of all the definitions and possible functions of a Rural Animator they agreed that it was essentially someone acting as a catalyst for certain processes in their local community. Although the position of Rural Animator does not exist, participants saw themselves filling this role in their local communities.

The second and third sessions consisted of one-on-one meetings followed by a short discussion and evaluation of the process between the guidance worker and the participants.

The second round of meetings explored future educational/training needs despite the fact that none of the three was intending to participate in any training at that time. During these meetings participants' education and background was analysed and a training plan put in place.

The third set of meetings focused on the role of a rural animator in Rogaland County and on different courses that had been arranged previously. It also concentrated on the educational needs of the participants.

Results

The immediate benefit for the participants lay in the support they received during the process. This support assisted them as they focussed on their own situations and future possibilities, reflected on the needs of their local communities and learnt from the process. Although time constraints and other responsibilities meant that none of the participants were willing to continue and attend any courses during the pilot period participants felt better equipped to initiate their learning activities as and when it became necessary. All planned to take this approach to their regional development boards and to try to make more use of the available VOX system. They intended to spread the word about it in their local communities as, although awareness of VOX is high, there is always a need to motivate new individuals to go through the process.

In Norway, as in Sweden, every professional employee has a personal development plan constructed in his/her workplace. This meant that a more sophisticated, systematic needs identification tool had to be used in conjunction with the Learning Pathway Matrix developed by the Euro-Validation project in order to make it worthwhile for the test participants. This led to the use of the VOX competence assessment tool to carry out the competence evaluation part of the Learning Pathway. The Norwegian Pilot noted that people do not readily recognise the value of instruments such as the Learning Pathway in Norway. This is largely because they do not experience a personal need for it. This is because southern and central Norway has 99% employment, and because the norm is that employers are directly involved in improving employees' skills (through training if necessary), and do not expect employees to take the initiative alone.

3.2.4 Poland: a successful experiment which led to the development of a curriculum to serve individual learning pathways

Scope and Methodology

The Euro-Validation Unit at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun (NCU) hoped to introduce new flexible forms for the validation of prior learning to the university education system, especially as an award for students from NGOs' and / or students who are active in voluntary work. The Unit therefore decided to pilot test the Matrix among students attending a 3-year study programme on European Rural Development Policies organised within the Institute of Sociology, NCU.

Prior to the pilot testing a special "Euro-Validation" course was created within the European Rural Development Policies curriculum program. Students who received positive evaluations for their individual Learning Pathway duties were credited with 3 ECTS points and an official Internet account was created to give participants access to their progress within the course.

From an initial group of 11 students five were chosen to participate in the pilot testing. Participants were chosen on the basis of their experience in rural development practice, NGO activities and leadership in general; non-formal education in the field of rural development as proven by non-formal certificates and declarations and informal experience in rural development. The selection process involved interviews with candidates in addition to curriculum vitae analysis. Candidates were asked to promote themselves as a candidate for the pilot test and to explain why they would make a good leader of rural initiatives. They were also asked for their opinions on the training of rural leaders in Poland and whether their non-formal and informal experience should be validated.

Once the participants had been selected the pilot testing began.

The guidance process was organised on an individual basis, but before that two group meetings were held to explain the project and the proposal of validation. Good examples of practices collected by the Euro-Validation Team were also presented. The Matrix covering the core tasks of rural leaders was introduced and the matrix concept and structure was discussed within the group. The group suggested several courses and training for inclusion in the proposed Inventory of Courses and Training and also reflected their experience against the Matrix.

The Inventory of Courses and Training was prepared by the project co-ordinator, using feedback and information from the participants and the networks to which they belonged. This included 22 courses offered by the NCU (three of which were distance learning courses) and 19 training programmes offered by nine institutions in the region (e.g. Regional Employment Agency in Torun, European Centre for Financial Advisory in Torun, Rural Advisory Centre in Minikowo and Przysiek, European Centre for Youth Cooperation in Torun). Each course or training programme corresponded with one or more core tasks in the Matrix. Courses ranged from one-day courses and seminars to a course of 90 hours.

One-on-one meetings were then held with participants to create their individual Learning Pathways. They were asked to try to link the Matrix to training courses in order to address the training needs that had been identified in the

Matrix. The impression gained during the interviews was that participants' view of the validation of informal and non-formal knowledge concentrated on certification rather than on the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

Participants demonstrated very high levels of commitment and cooperation in the Learning Pathway construction process. Although they agreed with the proposed structure of the Matrix, they did feel that some of the core tasks overlapped and that some covered competences beyond a rural leader's tasks and abilities.

Generally, participants felt that too much emphasis was placed on social skills and insufficient attention given to legal matters. They also believed that the most important skill was the Developmental Skill inclination, which was actually absent from the university degree profile. In addition they pointed out that there can be cultural differences in the meanings ascribed to different concepts such as aesthetic behaviour. After the group meetings the Matrix was amended to address the overlap.

Table 3 below shows the Polish Rural Animators' training needs translated into the amended Matrix.

Table 3 Training needs as expressed by Polish Rural Animators

COMPETENCES	CORE TASKS			
	Social communication and information processing	Recognising of community's needs and problems	Managing and coordinating group actions	Updating knowledge and understanding of sustainable rural development
1. Competence to handle information			Innovative and learning organisation How to make a successful project Leading people as a superior	Symbolic culture Body language
2. Competence to act verbally and in writing	Public performing Communication skills Power Point: how to make a good presentation			
3. Competence to plan and organise tasks			Project management	Entrepreneurship skills Co-op movement in Poland
4. Competence to perform tasks and solve problems	VAT Public procurement Economic law: basic regulations	Methodology of field surveys	Conducting group work as a leader or coordinator	Project work and quality management
5. Competence to cooperate	Moderation of group discussion		How to lead personnel Team and interaction skills Leading and managing an expert and service organisation	Public – private partnerships (PPP)
6. Competence to use equipment			Leadership through the use of the internet	Telematics
7. Quality awareness competence			Evaluation processes	Planning and managing marketing
8/9. Aesthetic and ethical behaviour competence	Specifics of work with rural community	Methodology of field surveys		
10. Developmental inclination competence		Regional and national networks related with RD	Social capital and development networks of regions Promotion of innovation activities	Regional development and politics Regional strategies and strategic development Regional competitiveness and the future of development Rural social change New trends in rural development

The pilot showed that the Matrix can be a good tool for the creation of a Learning Pathway, but not without guidance. The Matrix is complicated and occasionally lacks clarity—at this stage it would be impossible for an individual to create a Learning Pathway without assistance. Successful Learning Pathways leading to the validation of an individual's informal and non-formal knowledge can, however, be created using the Matrix as part of a detailed process of assessment, advice and guidance.

NCU moderators observed that there were relatively high levels of differentiation between participants' definitions of the core tasks of a rural animator but that when participants were given the Core Tasks Matrix there was more consensus and a common awareness of those core tasks. The Matrix therefore plays an important function in clarifying the definition of the social role of a rural animator.

NCU moderators also observed that participants' initial enthusiasm for validation procedures was relatively low. This is probably because there is strong prejudice against any new form of certification of knowledge in the relatively inflexible Polish education system. These initial attitudes changed and enthusiasm increased as the Learning Pathway creation process progressed. At the end of the process students shared their positive attitudes towards validation with their colleagues, partners from LAG's, NGO's, administration officers etc. Indeed the participants expressed the hope that validation of prior learning would be introduced into the system of vocational education in Poland and especially into the field of voluntary work for the community.

Results

The process of constructing Learning Pathways proved valuable and raised students' awareness of learning opportunities. Students became very active in looking for suitable courses to improve their competences, for example they discovered and took an entrepreneurship course.

The main achievement of the Polish experiment was, however, the development of an accredited course for Rural Animators. The curriculum for this was developed by the students upon completion of their Learning Pathways and it was then accredited by the University. This new product will lead to a postgraduate Diploma whilst learners without prior university education can receive a certificate from the university. The new accredited course fills a very important gap in the qualifications needed to manage LEADER at local level in Poland which opens a huge education market for the university as the Nikolaus Copernicus University intends to offer the course to all 16000 employees of LEADER LAGs in Poland. This qualification opens the door for the profession of Rural Animator to obtain recognition and thus puts pressure on the government to acknowledge the profession.

3.2.5 Spain: Learning Pathway leads to a learning "menu" offered by the private sector to cater for specific, distinct competences

Scope and methodology

There were two participants in the pilot testing run by the Mediterranean Institute for Sustainable Development (IMEDES). In Spain the Rural Animator is not a specific recognised

occupation. There are, however, many other recognised occupations whose tasks, competences and skills overlap with those of rural animators. Examples of such occupations are: environmental educator, rural tourism operator, community animator, social development agent, trainer for community services, promoter for job placements, social development agent, local development agent etc. Clearly the term Rural Animator is a much broader concept and only part of their necessary competences and skills are recognised within the other existing occupations in a rural context. For this reason in Spain the Learning Pathway was applied to participants' particular circumstances and aspirations as they related to the occupation of a rural animator.

One participant had been working in IMEDES as a consultant in environmental issues. Her main tasks in IMEDES were the development and implementation of the actions included in the process of an Agenda 21. She had decided she no longer wanted to work as a researcher but would prefer a more practical and dynamic job within the environmental sector, perhaps as an environmental educator for children.

The other participant had been working for 3 years in a large company managing health and social public resources as a training and quality expert. She was interested in working as a tourism development agent instead. She felt that this pilot process would be very useful as she wanted to sit for a State exam.

The public administration has developed an e-learning training system for those who wish to sit the State exam. There are both theoretical and practical modules and it is designed to equip the student with sufficient knowledge to sit the exam and obtain the required qualification. The learning process can take between two to three years depending on the qualification. The objective of the Learning Pathway pilot was to establish a parallel private process which would be as effective as the current public one but more efficient as it aimed to shorten the process.

After determining the participants' objectives and motivations the next task was to collect as much information as possible about their chosen occupations. The following areas were covered: general information; competence profile; educational profile; personal characteristics and required skills; existing training plans; technical and technological tools; work risks and the labour market. A reference document was then created covering the particular tasks and skills necessary. This is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Tasks / Skills of Environmental Educator in Spain

AREAS	TASKS AND SKILLS
General information	The environmental educator plays an important role in the sector of natural spaces and parks and in the rural tourism sector. Most of the natural spaces have their own observatory and interpretation centres, sea rooms, etc... which are managed by environmental educators. These professionals develop itineraries and routes for the interpretation of the natural environment and accompany participants during their visit to the natural protected space. Environmental educators can also be found in educational areas within public administration which specialise in environmental issues.
Competence profile.	Design and development of environmental communication campaigns and ecological awareness for the implementation of public plans aimed at the conservation and the improvement of the environment: recycling actions, Local Agenda 21, energy savings and use of alternative energies, conservation of natural spaces, urban environment, water saving etc. Design and planning of environmental education campaign activities: itineraries and routes for the interpretation of natural spaces, posters and environmental signs, workshops, games, expositions and conferences. Development and graphic design of modules and educational materials to support the development of educational environmental activities: guides, brochures, etc. Organisation of environmental conferences in towns, schools, associations etc. Study, analysis and revision of teaching methodologies. Preparation of environmental training courses for different groups: business people, workers, students, politicians and teachers. Study and analysis of learning pathways for pupils (especially for school students), as well as their interests and motivations. Final report of projects and activities carried out. Evaluation of activities carried out.
Educational profile	Qualifications: University degree, University diploma (3 years), Vocational secondary education, Secondary education. Once the sector has developed a request will be made for a job title specifically covering those who work within the environmental. Other training and knowledge: Botany, Zoology, Horticulture, Socio cultural animation, First aid, Patrimony , Interpretation, Communication techniques, Cartography, Pedagogy , Graphic design, Environmental legislation
Requisites, personal skills and characteristics.	Teaching skills Group work Initiative and capacity for taking decisions. Negotiation and communication techniques. Redaction skills Use of Office tools Managing and leadership skills.

Participants assessed their skills and competences against the identified job requirements. This was then reviewed at a face-to-face meeting with the guidance advisor where participants were able to identify their competence and skills gaps. With the support of the guidance advisor, the participants then searched for education tools (courses, seminars and so on) that could address these needs. It is important to note that at this stage the learning opportunities were collected not according to the type of recognition they would lead to, but mainly on the knowledge and skills they would provide. It is worth noting that in most cases courses were offered by private providers.

Results

The guidance advisors felt that perhaps the most important reason for the success of the process lay in the interest and above all the involvement of the participants in the execution of the process.

Comments in the satisfaction questionnaire and in the closing interviews showed that participants were positive about the process as they felt that it had made their goals more attainable. It was difficult to collect information about the skills, knowledge and aptitudes required to work in their chosen occupations but they found that breaking down the profession into its constituent tasks and associated necessary competences made it easier. They found this structured approach extremely helpful. Using the Matrix to organise the information was also deemed most valuable.

Individual competences were certified, rather than the profession as such. These competences were related to the needs of the labour market and the expectations of employers when they appointed new staff. Those involved in the pilot found the Learning Pathway tool very useful for the learner's personal development. It is also potentially of great benefit to organisations. Using the Learning Pathway to improve employees' knowledge and skills will enable them to be better prepared to face challenges at work as well as increase efficiency.

3.2.6 Sweden: Learning Pathway had to offer more than the employees' existing personal development plan

Scope and methodology

As all employees in Sweden have a personal development plan jointly created and updated annually with their employer, the reason for going through a different development plan was not immediately apparent and it was difficult to recruit participants to test the Matrix.

Two participants were recruited, both with Bachelors degrees in State Science. One had seven and the other nine years of work experience after completing their degrees. Both worked in rural development and one was a mother who had been a pioneer in starting a small enterprise in a rural area.

As the two participants already had personal development plans they needed an additional incentive to be convinced to take part in the Learning Pathway construction. This incentive was found in the form of the eight key competences defined by the European Union and these were added to the Learning Pathway. The assumption was that rural development professionals coming from diverse educational backgrounds could enter into a final test of the eight key European competences to make sure that they possessed all the competences necessary for the performance of their jobs.

The structure of this Matrix meant that face-to-face guidance with each participant was necessary and three personal meetings were held with each participant. Initially, the participants were presented with the Matrix. This was followed by a catalogue of courses offered for free by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) as well as information about other education opportunities. The definitions of the Rural Animator's core tasks were agreed on and written up. Participants found this initial stage fairly easy.

Secondly, guide and participant worked together to identify the participant's

particular training needs. The third stage was to judge how these identified educational needs would impact on the ten competences. Written and personal guidance was available throughout the process.

Both participants found areas where they could benefit from added training and selected courses related to their individual careers and private programme. Participants selected courses in practical information techniques, interior design, rhetoric, presentation techniques and business development. Other sources of informal learning that might be used to acquire the additional skills were also discussed. As working people do not have the time to attend structured courses, books, magazines and the Internet were preferred sources. Since the work culture in Sweden accepts and values informal proof of competences (e.g. as demonstrated during the course of work) participants did not see a need for a qualification covering the additional competences. Both participants found it difficult to relate the Learning Pathway process to the achievement of sustainable rural development.

Results

The Swedish pilot testing concluded that the particular structure of the Swedish system meant that there was not a great need for the Matrix. In Sweden most people in skilled employment have individual career plans and because of this it is hard to see how the Matrix can add value to their existing learning plans. In addition SLU offers a large number of courses for rural animators many of which are free of charge. Nevertheless the pilot testing exercise was not without benefit as participants found the described competences and core tasks relevant to the work of a rural animator. The Matrix helped them identify and distinguish between core tasks and competences they possessed and those for which they needed some additional training or education. Based on this they were able to choose suitable courses for themselves from those offered by SLU.

3.2.7 Scotland (UK): method of approach to the learner is crucial for motivation

Scope and methodology

Moray College, UHI Millennium Institute is a further and higher education institution with more than 7,000 students mostly from rural areas in Scotland. As Scotland joined the Euro-Validation project at a later stage it did not follow the same framework for piloting the Learning Pathway and Matrix tool as other partner countries. Instead, two surveys were conducted: one aimed at Rural Animators and one at students who had enrolled for the UHI Introduction to Rural Development module. This is a level one module and successful participants receive the Cert (HE) Sustainable Rural Development. They can also study further to obtain the BSc (Hons) Sustainable Rural Development. An assumption was made that people wishing to obtain formal qualifications as Rural Animators would enrol on this module and would therefore be interested in participating.

Student survey

The purpose of the student survey was to gauge students' views about the chosen module, their motivations and the potential usefulness of the Matrix as part of Student Guidance. Students participated because they were interested in looking at ways to improve access to UHI modules and in ways in which people could be encouraged to work within their rural community and achieve relevant training and accreditation.

Telephonic interviews were conducted with 32 students out of the 60 who had enrolled for the Introduction to Rural Development module. 17 of the respondents were working towards the BSc (Hons) Sustainable Rural Development and five were studying it as a stand alone module. The majority were part-time online distance learners.

The student survey was designed to ascertain their motivation and determine whether:

- the information and quality of pre module enrolment was sufficient
- their experience lived up to their expectations of the module
- the module helped them in their current work or to obtain work
- the Matrix would have been helpful in the selection of the correct modules.

The survey found that the majority of students (with one exception) were very happy with their chosen mode of learning. More than half of the respondents took the module because they were interested in the subject and 32% took the module because it was compulsory for their degree.

While no students were completely dissatisfied with the content of the module 12.5% were not entirely happy with the content. The majority of students (66%) were satisfied and 13% were completely satisfied with the module content. Only 16% of the students said that there were topics contained in the module that had not been of use to them, the majority found that all topics were useful. Only two students felt that the module could have benefited by spending more time on community land ownership and working with communities.

Of the 32 students, 27 passed and five did not complete the course. At the start of the course nine students were already employed in rural development and on finishing their studies a further six students found employment in the field of rural development. 18 students felt that the module had helped them in the development of their career and eight believed that it had helped them find a job in the rural development field.

Face-to-face contact with a member of the College staff was crucial to ensure that students study the correct subject. A total of 17 students found the pre-course guidance extremely important. Only three did not consider it to be of importance and five received no pre-course guidance at all.

Only 15% of the students who answered the question relating to the usefulness of the Matrix in course selection felt that the Matrix would have been helpful. The majority wanted more written information online, 10 wanted more information in the leaflets and four would have liked more face-to-face contact. This is interesting as rural animators who were interviewed felt face-to-face contact was the best way of motivating potential rural animators towards obtaining a qualification.

A further question was asked to gauge the effect of staff personalities versus Learning Pathways. Of the 25 students who answered this question, 52% felt that the personalities of the staff were an important factor in influencing them to enrol for the course.

The student survey showed that students are oriented towards a formal qualification and found it difficult to understand that an individual might construct his/her own learning pathway.

It was concluded that the Competency Matrix would be a valuable tool in the hands of student guidance counsellors once the language has been modified appropriately. Due to the complex needs of the College's student population, the Matrix alone is not sufficient to address the many issues that mature students have in relation to their choice of course.

Rural Animator survey

In addition to the students, eight people working with different development agencies and village organisations in rural Scotland whose work may be partly described as that of a rural animator were approached. They did not label themselves as rural animators but defined themselves according to their basic studies or profession, for example as an accountant or an ICT specialist. They were however excited by the idea of a new profession, that of Rural Animator, which was closely related to what they actually did.

From the discussions it became obvious that those who study for a rural development qualification are not the same as those who have been identified by the rural animators as people who are able to and should be encouraged to play a role in the rural community.

Three people agreed to test the use of a matrix for potential student guidance. This was done using face-to-face interviews. Participants were shown the Matrix and asked to comment on its usefulness. All three felt that without guidance it was too complex to be used and the language was too confusing. They suggested that a flow chart with structured questions that could guide the student along a learning pathway would be a more effective tool for people in their communities.

Students felt that it was critically important that the Matrix had the facility to indicate levels of qualification and the order in which they should be tackled. The general feeling was that in its current form the Matrix could be intimidating and could put off potential rural animators.

Results

Experience gained from the UK pilot test centred on the approach that needs to be taken in order to convince people to start creating their own learning pathway. Guidance by experienced counsellors is necessary, and face-to-face contact is imperative. Participants to the pilot tests could not really use the Matrix by themselves and called for support and explanations. Clear, simple, language is seen as crucial. The Matrix, however, may well be an excellent tool for use by student guidance officers.

The process of building the Learning Pathway proved to be more constructive than the results as people became aware of opportunities, both educational and professional.

3.3 Conclusion, Lessons Learnt and Future Prospects

3.3.1 Usage of the Learning Pathway and Matrix tool

As evidenced by the various pilot tests, the Learning Pathway and Matrix tool can be used in many different ways. Experience gained from pilot testing suggests that the Learning Pathway and Matrix need to be seen as flexible tools that can be adapted to a given situation: a job, target group or an organisation. Skills and tasks need to be developed in relation to the particular situation as does the language and the level of support and explanation required to complete it.

The pilot tests demonstrated that the effectiveness of the tool is increased when:

- one-on-one guidance is offered by an 'expert' such as a career advisor, HR manager or a field expert. Close support, direction and clarification by a guidance expert are absolutely essential, especially when dealing with individuals with complex needs.
- the individual takes ownership of the tool. Greater insight and results are achieved when the individual participates in constructing the Matrix, looks for courses and takes charge of his/ her own future.

There are many tools available in Europe to assess competences and skills but the pilot testing of the Learning Pathway and Matrix under the Euro-Validation project demonstrates the importance and benefit of using a system that is participatory and interactive. Most people involved in the pilot testing felt that its success was in no small way due to the two-way flow of interaction from the learner to the guidance advisor (bottom-up) and from the guidance advisor to the learner (top-down).

3.3.2 The concept of Rural Animator and usefulness of the Learning Pathway

The profession of Rural Animator is not universally recognised in the European Union which proved a source of difficulty in some cases but also led to some interesting results. In Spain the pilot test found that people might not want to spend time creating a Learning Pathway for an unrecognised profession. A similar lack of interest was experienced in Sweden, where a well-defined career path exists and many

free relevant courses are already provided. Despite unfamiliarity with the term of Rural Animator, individuals in many countries found it empowering and inspiring to give a name to functions that they had been performing. It made people feel valued and acted as a motivating force.

Pilot testing showed that the Learning Pathway and Matrix tool experience can be very useful for universities, education institutions, ministries or government departments in order to create new flexible learning courses that meet the demands of the labour market.

The Polish and Hungarian pilot tests clearly demonstrate how linking the Learning Pathway to real job market opportunities (with the recruitment for LEADER LAG staff) increases the effect and value of the Learning Pathway and the Matrix tool.

3.3.3 When is the Learning Pathway more effective?

Countries with more formal education cultures are likely to benefit more from the use of the Learning Pathway and the Matrix tool

The Learning Pathway approach and use of the Matrix is of greater benefit in countries such as Spain, Poland and Hungary, where education is based on more formal routes (not competence-based) and there is no non-formal / informal learning culture. Certain countries have already introduced Learning Pathway systems and systems of assessing competences in the workplace and in these cases fewer benefits were perceived.

A concrete reason for undertaking the Learning Pathway and Matrix is crucial to its success

The Learning Pathway and Matrix are more effective when the individual has a concrete reason to undergo this process. This motivating factor is usually employment-related and can include the need to find a job, improve one's prospects, change career paths or to look for suitable courses. It is possible that a personal desire for self-awareness and self-improvement may also be the driver. If, however, an individual is already in a job and not seeking a change there is less need for the tool.

The Learning Pathway and Matrix tool are more effective within a specified context

In cases where the Learning Pathway was linked to specific market needs (such as recruitment for LAGs) it proved invaluable for both the employer and the individuals. Support from education institutions further increases the benefit of the Learning Pathway in cases where courses can be customised.

The Learning Pathway as an employers' tool

Pilot testing (in Sweden and Hungary) revealed that the Learning Pathway could be a very useful tool for organisations committed to supporting the training skills of their staff, although this was not directly tested. It must be noted that supporting staff development and improving the organisation's skills levels will benefit the organisation itself. Such benefits include satisfied personnel, lower staff turnover, more efficient and effective staff and higher productivity.

The Learning Pathway as an individual's empowering tool

It can be argued that the value of the Learning Pathway and Matrix tool lies in the process and not the results. The individual benefits from an increased awareness of his/ her skills and competences or lack thereof. This is in itself empowering and motivating when planning one's own career progression. Using the structured and holistic approach of the Matrix and Learning Pathway to analyse oneself makes gaps in knowledge more easily identifiable. This makes it easier to clarify objectives and create a strategy to achieve them.

3.3.4 Conclusion: Euro-Validation in context

Against the background of rural development the Euro-Validation project

focussed on the validation and certification of skills within the rural context and aimed at opening dialogue on this issue. Within the various pilot tests different stakeholders were engaged and the comparative analysis provided an opportunity to exchange experience and good practice. Although results and uses differed from country to country, developing and testing the Matrix has added to existing knowledge on skills and competences that employers in rural areas require. The innovative Learning Pathway approach (taking the individual learner and his/her needs as the reference point and combining all forms of learning into a personal "learning career") proved very effective. Looking at the evaluation-validation-certification-accreditation continuum holistically and in terms of competences was extremely constructive as it showed that a sector approach (in this case rural development) can be useful across Europe. The national pilot tests have demonstrated the need for recognition of the special requirements pertaining to rural areas in terms of skills, competences and qualifications.

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