

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



European inventory on validation of informal and non-formal learning Croatia

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1.0 Introduction

The issue of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Croatia is only beginning to surface. However, some developments have been made in recent years, mostly driven by the process of European integration and initiatives from the private and the third sector. The Strategy on Adult Education adopted in 2004 claims that, while at first sight there is a rich and diversified range of education institutions in regard to non-formal education, actually it hides 'an incoherent, voluntary 'system' of educational infrastructure, unclear spatial and human potential and an unresolved financial status, caused by various ad hoc factors'. One of the current priorities in the public sector regarding adult education is the institutional building of the governmental Agency for Adult Education. The Agency will be responsible for the development of the system of adult education, which also includes non-formal education. However, it has been established recently, and is not yet fully operational. Apart from that, work on the development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) started in 2006 and the Baseline for framework was adopted in July 2007, which is seen by some interviewees as a precondition for further development in certification and validation of prior learning.

The Strategy on Adult Education stresses that "there is hardly a single state in Europe which is not participating in an international project on adult education such as SOCRATES, Grundtvig, Leonardo, or CARDS – except for Croatia". However, since the adoption of the Strategy three years ago, Croatia has signed the contract for the CARDS 2004 Adult Learning Project (in June 2007) and the Agency for Adult Education began with its implementation in September 2007. Also, it is important to note that Croatia recognises the importance of joining the above-mentioned programmes, now integrated in the Lifelong Learning Programme, and is intensively preparing for full participation in 2009. This is relevant to the issue of validation since in many European countries the development of new methodologies for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the private and the third sector has to a large extent been developed through participation in the aforementioned Community programmes. In Croatia this has not been the case until recently, however a few very valuable initiatives in the field of validation have appeared through the activity of the third sector.

In the past, there was a lack of interest in the private sector for involvement in the drafting of new legislation and in presenting the needs of the sector. This problem is now being resolved by planning for the participation of stakeholders in the implementation of all relevant strategic documents: the National Employment Policy; the Joint Assessment of Employment Priorities, Measures of an Active Employment Policy, the reform of the system of employment services, etc. At the same time, the private sector in Croatia is

indirectly creating pressures for change with respect to validation of non-formal and informal learning through advocating employers' needs for specific skills and competences and by self-organising into professional organisations and developing systems of certification and standardisation.

To sum up, while recent government documents claim that the building up of a system to accredit skills acquired through non-formal or informal learning or work experience is important, few concrete activities have been undertaken in this direction so far. However, an important motivation for regulating and introducing models of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Croatia is the process of accession to the European Union and the possibility of participation in EU funding programmes, and therefore it can be expected that improvements will be made in the near future. Also, initiatives from the private and the third sectors are driving the process of change forward as well.

2.0 Public Sector

2.1 Key public sector stakeholders in the validation process

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is a new issue on the governmental policy agenda in Croatia. Therefore only broad outlines of a network of key stakeholders exist, while the remaining task is to design a clear division of mandates and responsibilities in the field of recognition, accreditation or assessment of qualifications, and in this process to transform the existing system. The Agency for Adult Education was established recently with the mandate to introduce and manage the European Commission Integrated Lifelong Learning Programmes and the Youth in Action programme for Croatia.¹ The Agency for Adult Education and other relevant bodies have yet to define their roles in the validation of nonformal and informal learning. However, the establishment of statistical monitoring of adult education institutions and programmes by the Agency for Adult Education will be an important step in the development of the system of adult education, in that it will allow for data collection, monitoring, analysis and evaluation in the field of nonformal education..

Another government body that deals with issues of recognition and validation is the Agency for Vocational Education and Training. Further details on the work of this Agency can be found below.

The Directorate on Secondary Education in the MoSES houses the Department for Adult education, which is in charge of certifying programmes that lead to formal qualifications. Legally speaking, adult education programmes fall under the Act on Secondary Education. In other words, adults can take formal qualifications at technical and vocational schools and the said Department is in charge of certification of these programmes. Every education-provider that wants to offer a course that will lead to a formal qualification must apply for certification to this Department. A course that has this certificate legally becomes part of the formal system of education and can be entered into the individual record of achievement of qualifications and work experience. This individual record is kept in a booklet called 'radna knjižica', which originated in the former Yugoslavia as a way of recording a person's qualifications and years of work experience for the purpose of establishing entitlements to the public pension system. In fact, any educational

¹ Currently, the part of the Agency for Adult Education in charge of the Lifelong Learning Programme and Youth in Action Programme is in the process of becoming an independent Agency, called 'Agency for Mobility and EU programmes'. The establishment of this new agency is expected to be finished in November 2007, after which the process of preparatory measures for the implementation of the LLP will follow in the course of 2008.

programmes can be entered into the radna knjižica. Every working individual, with a labour contract (not people working on short-term contracts) in Croatia possesses one. However, while there is no formal requirement that only accredited programmes can be entered into the radna knjižica, in practice the local government offices which do enter items into the knjižica normally accept only certified education programmes.

There are also attempts from secondary schools to provide courses of various types for the adult population.

The Croatian Employment Service is the government agency for job mediation, vocational guidance and provision of financial support to unemployed persons. One of its tasks is the activation of the long-term unemployed through active employment measures, and therefore it provides vocational training and retraining, upskilling of unemployed persons as well as offers employers pre-selection, selection and referral of candidates. In the profiling of the unemployed it has moved from registering only formal qualifications, and registers other relevant skills (such as IT skills and language skills) as well as any prior work experience that lasted for longer than six months. This type of activity represents a type of portfolio method through which the individual is encouraged to create a record of all previous work experience for purposes of new employment. However, as yet a standardised profiling method has not been developed and the system is not aligned with the current European trends. There is a need for further work in this area in relation to methodology.

The Employment service is also a good source of all types of non-formal and informal training, as it registers all types of verified and non-verified courses attended by the unemployed. This source is crucial for a deeper analysis of the actual supply of non-formal training in Croatia but to date has not been used for this purpose.¹

2.2 Key public initiatives or laws that enable/encourage validation of informal and non-formal learning in Croatia

Regarding the existing normative framework in Croatia, several relevant documents have been produced in the last few years: The Strategy on Adult Education (2004), the Act on Adult Education (2006), the VET White Paper (2006) and the Act on Volunteering (2007). According to the Strategy on Adult Education, Croatia strives to develop flexibility in finishing education, and aims introduce recognition of non-formal education. Since there is quite a lot on offer in terms of non-formal education, recognition would possibly result in a better picture of the educational structure of the population. The newly adopted Act on

¹ Information provided by a representative of the Croatian SME and entrepreneurship policy centre, CEPOR

Adult Education contains a provision in Article 11 according to which 'adults shall have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities, regardless of the means by which these were acquired, by taking an examination.' This provision represents the necessary legal grounds for validation of non-formal and informal learning. However, according to the staff in the MoSES Department for Adult Learning, legal ground for a type of validation of prior learning has already been in place prior to the introduction of this new Act. An individual who is applying to an adult learning course that leads to a formal qualification is allowed to provide proof of relevant work experience, and this is taken into consideration when putting together a programme of coursework that the individual must complete. For instance, according to them this is commonplace for gaining the qualification of a bookkeeper. However, in practice this has only worked with prior practical work experience, or in other words with informal learning, while validation of non-formal learning when registering for a qualification course has not been present – only prior formal learning is recognised.

The Agency for Vocational Education and Training (AVET) is a key stakeholder for VET in Croatia with a mandate for planning, development, organization, monitoring and evaluation of VET system in Croatia. AVET's tasks include:

- developing modern curricula based on learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and competences;
- defining pedagogical standards in VET;
- developing VET management informational system (VETIS), and collecting and analysing data that can help in successful planning of the system;
- coordinating activities of development and reviewing occupational standards and VET qualifications and cooperating in the development of the Croatian qualification framework;
- organising and conducting in-service education and training of VET teachers, and exams for probationers;
- following up the work of VET teachers and promoting VET teachers into professor – mentor or professor– adviser posts;
- organising and conducting student competitions in the field of VET;
- implementing international and EU funded projects in the field of VET.

Within the system of vocational education and training there are craft programs called “unified model of education” (UME) which have taken the place of the former dual system of crafts occupations. There are 56 of these programmes. The MoSES is responsible for the general education component, while the work practice (apprenticeships) is a joint responsibility of the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship and the Chamber

of Crafts. An apprenticeship has two components: a vocational-theoretical part which is carried out in schools and practical one which is carried out in licensed craft firms.

Within this system the title of a Master craftsman can be obtained, after finishing secondary school in UME programmes and after 2 year of work experience, by proving, in front of a commission of independent experts which is usually arranged by the Chamber of Crafts and Trades, that one possesses the necessary skills, rather than being obliged to attend a formal training course. This type of practice could be classified as the validation method of simulation and evidences extracted from work.

According to the 2006 White Paper on VET education, learning programmes should give recognition to formal, informal and non-formal learning. AVET has begun the process of developing a new system of qualifications which will be based on learning outcomes, and will reflect labour market needs. For this purpose a methodology of developing standards of occupation and qualifications was developed in cooperation with experts in the CARDS 2003 VET project. This is being carried out through the work of 13 Sector Councils which were founded by the Agency as tripartite bodies with representatives from the economy (employers), unions, the education sector (secondary and higher), government institutions etc. According to the White Paper the system of VET qualifications should not be linked to a period of study time or an age of student or the type of provider since many qualifications are applicable to people of all ages and can be gained through a variety of learning approaches including informal and non-formal, as well as formal learning.

At the beginning of 2006 the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports formed a working group which began preparations for development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF). A proposal for the CROQF was completed and during November and December 2006 it was presented to and discussed with all the relevant stakeholders at three conferences organised by the working group. The CROQF is comprised of eight levels, with an additional seven sublevels reflecting the particularities of the national education system. Levels six, seven and eight correspond to the three cycles in the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA (European Higher Education Area). So far, the levels have been described only through credit ranges and qualifications gained after the completion of studies within a certain level.

Based on the work of this working group, the Croatian Government adopted the Baseline for the CROQF in July 2007. The Baseline determines the glossary of terms, outlines the CROQF aims and principles (which follow the guidelines in the proposals and discussions for the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA and the European Qualifications Framework) and sets out the credit ranges and qualifications gained. The national committee for establishing and implementing the CROQF was established in September

2007, and all relevant stakeholders are represented in the committee, including the academia, representatives of the employers and representatives of the trade unions. It is one of the main tasks of this national committee to build the description of competences (in the wide sense of the term) and general learning outcomes for each level of the CROQF."

In higher education, recognition of prior learning which was based on formal study is performed by respective higher education institutions as a basis for allocation of credits and continuation of study. There is need to further improve recognition this process, as well as recognition of prior informal and non formal learning. An important role in this will be played by the Bologna Process, entrance into EU programmes, and other national reforms in this general area.

The requirements for entry into higher education depend on whether the person is interested in enrolling into university or professional study programmes. The legislation stipulates that higher education institutions are autonomous in setting the requirements for entry into their programmes. In practice, all persons who want to enrol into university study programmes must have completed 4-year secondary schools or taken exams to achieve the equivalent of 4-year secondary school. The minimum requirement for entry into professional study programmes is normally completion of either 3- or 4-year secondary schools. In addition to that, universities administer entrance exams and based on these two criteria (exam results and secondary school grades) they rank and enrol students. The school-leaving exam, MATURA, is being currently prepared, most likely for the generation that will finish secondary school 2009/2010, or the year after that. The school leaving exam will be the first externally administered final qualification exam in Croatia, and is expected to replace entrance exams to university, at least in part. Regarding using the MATURA for validation of prior learning currently the team that is running the MATURA project is against making it possible to take the MATURA without completing the formal 4-year programme. However, this has not yet been legislated and the information is based on opinions of relevant stakeholders.

As has already been mentioned, the topic of validation of non-formal and informal learning has only recently appeared on the agenda in Croatia, provoked in large part by the European integration process and the demands put before Croatia in order to participate in the funding programmes of the European Union. Croatia is planned to start participating in the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes from 2008 (implementation of preparatory measures, followed by full participation in the Programme in 2009), which should have a positive effect on developments in the field of validation. Also, it is important to acknowledge that Croatia is currently making significant reform efforts in all segments of its formal system of education, which is straining its administrative, management and planning capacity. Therefore, it is to be expected that the issue of

validation of non-formal and informal learning will climb up the governmental policy agenda in the coming years in Croatia.

3.0 Private Sector

Since Croatia has a dual system of training for crafts occupations, several social partners are directly involved in the issuing of qualifications and formal certification. As has been explained, the Chamber of Crafts and Trades holds the central role in apprentices' and master's exams, where it coordinates the practical and school part of the programme among the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship, the MoSES and the participating employers. In that sense it acts as an interface between the education system and the private sector.

According to the Strategy on Adult Education formal education in Croatia always finishes with issuing a public certificate, while in the sphere of non-formal education, especially regarding learning of foreign languages and ICT skills, apart from private certificates there is a number of international certificates that can be obtained in Croatia – for instance from the British Council, the Goethe Institute, the ICC or Microsoft, ECDL, Xpert, the European Computer Passport and others. Growing numbers of people attend such training since it is becoming essential for gaining employment. In that sense the private sector in Croatia is influencing the recognition of specific skills and competences. Especially regarding ICT skills and the knowledge of foreign languages the situation is such that regardless of the formal qualifications if such exist, employers validate actual skills and competences through the selection process for employment.

A Zagreb-based company that specialises in job advertising, recruitment and selection for employment, Selectio Group Ltd., as part of its mission works on raising awareness among employers and employees in Croatia to focus on the development and validation of real usable skills, knowledge and competences rather than formal qualifications. It runs numerous projects to promote this objective, among which are Career Days for students and employers at universities, a web portal for job seekers MojPosao, as well as a specialised web portal for first job seekers – MojPrviPosao - which promotes internships, volunteering and other forms of job activation. Through these activities which have gained public attention in Croatia (though primarily in Zagreb) they are educating employers and employees in self-profiling, job application and self-presentation.¹ Their websites contain CV templates which suggest to employees the types of skills, competences and experience to include in putting together a job application. Apart from that, in the last few years Selectio Group Ltd. has undertaken several surveys to find out more about

¹ There are a number of other job portals in Croatia (the Croatian Employment Service has the widest coverage as well as demand and supply, others are local and have a much narrower coverage)

employers' needs and expectations.¹ According to one survey from 2005², more than half of the surveyed employers emphasised that they look for specific skills in workers, such as project management, teamwork, presentation and communication skills, as well as language and IT skills.

The same survey asked the employers to judge how well the formal system of education has prepared their employees for work, and the results were quite disappointing. This is particularly the case for administrative and legal positions, and for positions that require good knowledge of economics and finance. According to another survey from 2005³, employers predict that in the next five years employees will have to be technologically very advanced, know at least two foreign languages, and be prepared for constant re-training. Very indicatively for Croatia, employers are demanding more proactive workers, with can-do attitudes and initiative. Through its work Selectio Group Ltd. is voicing the needs of the private sector, where there is a strong awareness of the inadequacy of knowledge and skills acquired through formal education in Croatia for today's labour market demands. Employers in Croatia are shifting the emphasis from formal qualifications to actual skills and competences that an individual possesses. While specific methodologies for validating non-formal and informal education apart from the curriculum vitae do not seem to exist, an individual's skills and competences that are in demand are validated regardless of formal certification.

Another example of initiative from the private sector is the Association of Management Consultants (AMC). It is a voluntary, independent association established with the aim to promote standardisation in the delivery of management and business consulting services by qualified practitioners. Through its work the AMC is defining professional standards for Croatian management consultants, running training and, in some cases, administering certifications in accordance with international principles and practices. This is an example of a type of a validation initiative that appeared in a fast growing sector in Croatia with new professions where no formal qualifications are yet available. Management consultants in Croatia have in part grown 'out of the job' and not through formal training, and therefore this association is attempting to validate this knowledge and competences through a type of licensing and international certification in order to professionalise the occupation.

Similarly, the Croatian Financial Services Supervisory Agency organises exams for brokers, investment consultants and pension fund managers which certify them for employment purposes. While the agency offers training programmes, any individual that

¹ The Croatian employment service has a country wide employers' needs survey on an annual basis which also should be mentioned here

² MojPosao (2007) Poslodavci prvog izbora – rezultati istraživanja (**First Choice Employers**)

³ MojPosao (2005) *Na kakvog ste se zaposlenika spremni kladiti?* (**What Kind of Employee Would You Bet On?**)

conforms to the requirements can take the exam without going through their programme, which means that they can validate prior learning through examination regardless of whether knowledge was acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning.

Other similar examples of certification through examination in specific professions exist in Croatia.

The private sector provision of education services has expanded visibly over the last ten years, especially in management at college and university level. Not all of these courses are validated but they have attracted sustainable demand for their services.

A third type of training is directed towards the corporate sector, offering mostly soft skills, business skills such as marketing , finance, logistics and coaching for top management. Language and IT skills are particularly widely available at all levels and for different target groups.

Generally speaking, the growth of private sector training services has been more dynamic than the regulatory framework, with the result that quality of services is not easy to ascertain and the market is not transparent. There is, however, a growing demand boosted partly by the inadequacy of the formal educational system to supply key competencies which are required by the labour market such as language, IT skills, soft skills and management skills. This demand will soon extend to higher order occupational skills as the economy picks up - skill gaps are already visible across the country.

4.0 The Third Sector

Since 2001 momentum has been gathering in Croatia for public recognition and affirmation of voluntary work, driven primarily by nongovernmental organisations that rely on volunteer enthusiasm. In 2001 the National Committee for the development of volunteering in Croatia was established and put in charge of drafting the Act on Volunteering as a first step in regulating volunteer work in Croatia. Since then the draft Act has gone through many revisions and has finally been adopted in May 2007. This legislation is very important since up to now no normative framework for volunteering existed in Croatia. This resulted in numerous problems such as the inexistence of data on volunteers and the scope of volunteer work in Croatia, as well as the lack of efficient mechanisms for establishing the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

The newly adopted Act on Volunteering creates a good starting point for developing validation initiatives related to volunteer experience since it establishes an obligation on the part of the employer to issue a written confirmation of volunteer work experience. This provision is the result of initiatives from the third sector, especially the network of volunteer centres in Croatia which exist in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek. They had advocated for the introduction of a volunteer booklet that would serve as a public document to testify to the experience that a volunteer acquired through volunteer work. They proposed that the employer would be responsible for recording the period of work, type of work done as well as any education and training that the volunteer has taken part in. As such the volunteer booklet is an example of the portfolio method, which is often used as a tool to help further academic or career development of an individual.

The volunteer booklet was not legislated through the Act as such, however the Act specifies that the employer is obliged to issue the volunteer a written confirmation of work, which must include the following information: time period spent volunteering, short description of activities, and education and training provided. Article 34 of the said Act also specifies that an employer may issue booklets, cards or other forms of documents for this purpose. In that sense the Act now provides minimal legal requirements regarding recording volunteer experience.

According to information obtained through interviews, volunteer centres in Croatia have through the last 4-5 years developed the practice of issuing volunteer booklets regardless of the existence of the legal provision. All five mentioned regional centres issue and promote the same type of volunteer booklet, introduced by the Split volunteer centre, Association MI. As they state on their website, the volunteer booklet is their original product which started life as an internal way of rewarding and recognising work of their

volunteers. Eventually, it gained interest among other nongovernmental organisations and institutions and is now more and more widely used. The booklet collects all of the individual's volunteer experience in one place, specifying time period spent working, activities undertaken, trainings and education, and it requires that each experience is verified by seal and signature of employer. The volunteer booklet is an example of a validation method developed, promoted and introduced within the third sector in Croatia.

5.0 Conclusion

The public sector in Croatia is only beginning to consider validation of non-formal and informal learning, largely in response to requirements of the European integration process and specifically the requirements for participation in EU funding programmes. There are no legal obstacles to the development of validation initiatives, but the institutional framework and capacity for such development is only beginning to take shape. One of the chief institutions envisaged to be responsible for monitoring, analysis and evaluation in the field of non-formal education - the Agency for Adult Education - was established recently. The Agency for Vocational Education and Training has begun a process of developing new qualifications which is taking into account non-formal and informal learning. Apart from that, work has started on defining the Croatian Qualifications Framework, which is understood in Croatia as an important prerequisite for validation of non-formal and informal learning because, alongside of the goal of making the Croatian system of qualifications comparable to the European one, within this framework protocols, procedures and responsibilities for quality assurance and the validation of qualifications should be established. Also, it is to be expected that Croatia's participation in the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes of the European Community will give impetus to validation initiatives.

As was noted in the introduction of this text, the public sector has largely introduced change in this area in reaction to the European integration requirements, and also partly in response to the initiatives from the private and third sector. The private sector is indirectly influencing change by valuing and emphasising skills and competences instead of formal qualifications. Also, some of the new professions in Croatia such as business consultants or brokers have started organising into professional associations with the aim to develop standards and offer training and certification procedures. The third sector on the other hand is largely responsible for the fact that volunteering has finally been legislated in Croatia, which is an important positive development for validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is through the initiative of volunteer centres in Croatia that a new validation method, the volunteer booklet, has been introduced and is becoming accepted practice in documenting volunteer work in Croatia.

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