


Learning Pathway Guide

– How to make LPW for yourself



Learning Pathway Guide – how to make LPW for yourself
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1. Introduction: What is a Learning Pathway?

A Learning Pathway is a tool to use if a person is:

- changing careers
- applying for a new job with a different work description
- unemployed
- considering studying a new degree but doesn't quite know which parts of it one is familiar with already
- evaluating his or her vocational skills and competencies in general to find out if there is room for some self-improvement
- recruiting a new employee
- a superior making development plans with the subordinates
- a teacher or a counsellor who should evaluate the skills and competencies of students or customers

An individual Learning Pathway is both a mental and a practical process one creates and follows after deciding to change one's present (work) situation to something else (more comfortable, motivating, challenging). The Learning Pathway consists of the steps one needs to take to achieve the objective/s set after mapping and assessing the present situation and its different aspects. The object or goal to be achieved may be a degree, a new job or a new or improved skill or competency. On the Learning Pathway all learning counts and is valuable no matter where it stems from - hobbies, everyday chores, voluntary work, training courses and programmes - and if it is honoured with degrees, certificates and diplomas. A Learning Pathway is a personal process aimed at personal growth, and it doesn't have to be connected to any formal study or accreditation process. If the objective is to achieve a formal degree or a qualification, the demands of completing that need to be considered carefully when the Pathway is created. So, depending on what is being pursued, the pathway may be short, simple and straight - or could be more complicated and take longer to complete. In all cases, though, it is individual and one's own.

In addition to introducing the Learning Pathway method, this guide introduces one tool - the task and competence Matrix.

The guide has three main parts:

1. A description of how the creation of Learning Pathways relate to the issues of recognition, validation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in European countries. This on-going debate relates to the competitiveness of economies, changing demands of working life and changes needed in the educational systems and the way we value learning - all learning, not just the type achieved in study programmes or on courses run by training organisations.
2. The task and competence Matrix is introduced as a tool for helping to map out relevant skills and knowledge acquired so far and evaluating them against the competences needed for achieving the learning objectives. After filling in the Matrix it is time to start planning the further steps of the Learning Pathway. Those steps may include participating to formal validation processes to get prior learning validated or studying further some subjects or learning and practising certain skills.

In the guide the qualification of the “Rural Animator” has been used as an example, though it doesn’t yet exist anywhere in Europe as a recognised qualification as such. Its potential was tested while piloting the Learning Pathway method in seven European countries.

3. Evaluations and suggestions for the use of the Matrix are given based on the piloting experiences.

The Matrix tool and the Learning Pathway methodology were developed in a three-year project called “Euro-Validation – a Pan-European system of lifelong learning validation for sustainable rural development”. The project was co-funded by the European Union (Leonardo da Vinci Programme) and its network consisted of training providers, including universities, social partners and consultants in rural development from 12 European countries.

The key aim of the 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 to enhance sustainable rural development. The project recognised that it is crucial to highlight the importance of validation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in a rural context, along with its contribution to rural economic development. This is because the lack of skills in rural areas, as depicted by statistics, is not necessarily true. Statistics place emphasis on knowledge obtained by formal methods of learning and do not recognise the combination of skills possessed by people working in rural areas, which is valuable for sustaining the economic viability of such areas. The recognition of new occupational profiles, supported by appropriate valida-

tion methods, may be necessary to motivate rural residents to improve and expand their competence profiles and their employability status.

During the project, policies and methods of valuing, validating, certifying and accrediting informal and non-formal learning were reviewed across Europe, leading to a typology of the different methods used for recognition of informal and non-formal learning in rural areas of the enlarged European Union. The innovative Matrix for evaluating the skills and competencies of Rural Animators was introduced as a practical tool and the Learning Pathway methodology was developed and piloted in seven partner countries.

2. Valuation, validation and certification of learning – why is it an issue here?

The Learning Pathway methodology relates to wider discussion and development efforts for valuation, recognition, validation and certification of competencies achieved through informal and non-formal learning over the lifetime of an individual. As the familiar phrase says ‘nothing in life is certain but change’ and this may apply more than ever today. Life challenges us to maintain our skills whilst simultaneously acquiring new ones. Developing and using human resources to the full is a decisive factor in maintaining competitiveness in the knowledge economy. Life, but particularly working life, sets new challenges all the time, which result in the need to maintain and develop professional and vocational skills. The only way to cope is to learn.

Most simple learning is just unconscious adjustment to the immediate situation. This could be done by learning from the behaviour of peers, or by trial and error. More advanced learning consists of a more conscious effort to look for information or to try out a new skill. It involves using one’s prior knowledge, studying or practising the new technique and then melding this into one’s skill set to improve overall performance and ability. Learning may take place at home, work or in hobbies (informal learning¹). The impetus to learn may come from a simple desire to be able to do the task at hand well, or may stem from a more organised learning situation such as study courses with a wider, constructed set of learning objectives (formal² and non-formal learning³).

Formal learning has for a long time been the most valued and recognised type of learning, but an interest in the wider perspective of learning was initiated in the early 1990’s. Around that time the change in the Western countries from the industrial society to information or knowledge society became more and more obvious and the variety of challenges set to working life competencies and maintaining competitiveness needed to be

¹ Informal learning

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.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

² Formal learning

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.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

³ Non-formal learning

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.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

analysed. Towards the change of the millennium it was declared that, in the knowledge economy, people are the most important asset for growth and the efficient use of all their knowledge and skills and improving them throughout their life cycle is a key factor of competitiveness (e.g. the Lisbon strategy of European Union in 2000).

Parallel to this change, the concept of lifelong learning was also introduced in the beginning of the 1990's covering "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, competences and qualifications for personal, social and professional reasons" (CEDEFOP 2004) with the special and somewhat new emphases on adult learning. At the same time growing attention was paid to the importance of informal and non-formal learning as parts of lifelong learning and the role of that experience in the continuous development of skills was recognised. . National systems started to be created for valuation, validation and certification of competences achieved through informal and non-formal learning.

On individual level it is important to be valued for one's actual competence. For example, this can have a decisive importance for unemployed people with regard to the chances of gaining employment, being re-integrated into society and gaining 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 gives an opportunity for education providers to make better individual adaptations to their educational offers, and those in turn will be more effective and beneficial for the learners and save resources of society. Validation increases also the potential for mobility in the employment market.

As a result of this progress it has become more and more important to employers and individuals alike to be able to not only accredit and recognise skills and knowledge but also to prove that one has the required competences, certificates and qualifications. Innovative services and tools are, therefore, needed to support the valuation and recognition of skills and competencies. Also, new forms of certification for informal and non-formal learning are needed to widen the validation spectrum regardless of the type of learning methods used.

2.1 Validation of informal and non-formal learning in the European Union

The level of engagement in questions of education and training has been high in the European Union and several documents have been published within the European Union since the year 2000 that directly or indirectly concern the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning:

- One of the extensive early documents, from November 2001, is The Commission White Paper entitled “A new impetus for European Youth” (European Commission White Paper, 2001). The document signalled a new framework for European co-operation on youth affairs, and stressed the importance of non-formal learning and education
- “The Council Resolution on Lifelong Learning”, from June 2002 invites the Member States to encourage co-operation and effective measures to validate learning outcomes. (Council of the European Union, 2004a)
- Another document underlines the fact that the acknowledgement and validation of competences and qualifications is a prioritised task at European level. (European Trade Union Confederation, 2002)
- A principal governing document is The Copenhagen Declaration of 2002. The document is the result of negotiations between European Union education ministers and the European Commission. It states that: ‘the promotion of enhanced European co-operation in vocational education and training acknowledged that priority should be given to developing a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels.’ (The Copenhagen Declaration, 2002)
- The Joint Interim Report of 2004 declares that the development of common principles can support national development in a useful way. Even where the common principles are not binding for member states, they provide support for change and development. The report emphasises the urgency in developing common European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. (Council of the European Union, 2004b)

Strengthened by the Copenhagen Declaration, work has continued to find common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. A mixture of separate approaches to and practical applications of validation have been developed in different member states. This work has also given rise to a diverse array of implementation activities of validation. In addition to the traditional institutions of education and vocational training, various employment sector organisations are also involved.

One of the important steps in the development of validation is the European Union’s establishment of eight key competencies for life-long learning. This extensive work to develop documents relating to skills that are necessary in a knowledge-based society has been done within the work program Education 2010. It has defined the central areas of competence that are necessary for personal development, social cohesion and employment potential in a knowledge-based society. Within the work program, competence is

seen as “a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are adapted to a given situation”. Key competencies are those that promote personal development, social integration, active citizenship and employment. (Commission of the European Communities, 2005).

The eight key competences for life-long learning, compiled as a European reference framework are:

1. Communication in the native language
2. Communication in a foreign language
3. Mathematical ability and basic scientific and technical competence
4. Digital competence
5. ‘Learning to learn’
6. Interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence
7. Enterprise
8. Cultural expression

3. How to create a Learning Pathway

This part of the guide explains how a Learning Pathway can be created. As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, the purpose of the Pathway and, therefore, the objectives individual learners set for themselves will vary. Some may want to use it to evaluate their current competencies to assess areas that might need to be developed (e.g. through work circulation), whilst others may use it when making a detailed plan to achieve a new qualification. In a situation where one is considering a new job opportunity and it is desirable to map its demands against one's current competencies, the Learning Pathway method and its different phases can support the process of identifying clearly the demands of the new job and comparing them to the current skill set.

It is recommended that the LPW method is used with the help of peers like friends or members of the family, colleagues or superiors or if possible guidance experts like teachers or counsellors. The individual learner is the owner of the Learning Pathway process and has the best knowledge of the situation, but discussion with a trusted person is usually fruitful and gives new ideas and perspective to the situation.

The initiative to use the Learning Pathway method probably more often comes from a teacher, employer or superior, a counsellor or an employment officer in order to assist with and evaluate the studying, working, guidance or job seeking process at hand. Constructing Learning Pathways may also be a shared process for a group of people like e.g. the staff of a micro-enterprise, or a department within a larger organisation.

There is no single, right method for creating a Learning Pathway and the example used in this guide is chosen because of the objectives of the Euro-Validation project in which the method was developed. The phases of the Learning Pathway are illustrated through the qualification of a Rural Animator, which, as mentioned before, has not yet been accredited anywhere in Europe as such and for which it was an objective of the project to map a trans-national study programme aiming towards a certified qualification. But all Learning Pathways don't have to lead to a certification or a degree and it may provide a beneficial journey for many other purposes as well.

3.1 The 7 phases in creating a Learning Pathway

There are two key questions following that occur through the whole path:

What are the objectives of the learner ?

What is the current state of his or her competencies?

How can the competencies be best improved?

These questions may be pitched at too high a level to be answered easily so they have been broken to seven phases. In the case of designing the Learning Pathway for the competence of the Rural Animator these are:

1. Description of the function of the Rural Animator by the individual learner
2. Description of the work processes of the Rural Animator
3. Description of the core tasks of the Rural Animator
4. Use of the competence Matrix against the cores tasks of the Rural Animator
5. Identifying the learning needs and setting the learning objectives
6. Description of the concrete steps on the individual's Learning Pathway
7. Taking the fist step

Phases 1-5 relate to valuing and describing the present competencies and phases 6-7 to improving and validating them. Each of the phases are described in detail in the following section.

3.1.1 Description of the function of the Rural Animator by the individual learner

In the first phase it should be considered what are the overall objectives of the learner for wanting to create a Learning Pathway. The objectives need to be mapped out in the relevant contexts (present job, new work opportunities, additional qualification) and through that becomes visible what kind of aspects relate to the LPW. Additional information and discussions with other people who already have experience and knowledge of the objectives may also be useful.

In Euro-Validation project the functions of the Rural Animator were described like this:

“The Rural Animator’s role is defined to start and sustain community activities leading to re-establishment of social bonds and reinforcement or re-establishment of local identity. The Rural Animator mostly informally and through a “bottom-up” approach stimulates common life, which gives this action advantage of authenticity based upon “grass-roots” definitions of local needs and means to fill these needs. The concept strictly links with traditional rural community social capacity based upon power of mutual help, strong neighbourhood and first of all influence of “special individuals”, who have some kind of charismatic authority in the community. Trusting a person a status of the Rural Animator appears then often as a “natural” (coming from non-formal, personal needs) answer of the community to fight cultural and social breakdown of rural communities caused by intensive modernization of rural areas through ur-

banization and industrialization of agriculture and demonstrate willingness of endogenous improvement of quality of life with the help of socially appointed” champions.

A Contemporary Rural Animator can be distinguished from other animators (e.g. working with underclass in the cities) by their knowledge and understanding of the idea of a sustainable rural development paradigm. This gives them the ability to work within the political and cultural context of social, ecological, economic and cultural changes on rural areas.”

3.1.2 Description of the work processes of the Rural Animator

After compiling the list of functions larger work processes need to be recognised comparing them to the personal objectives. What kind of processes there are at the moment? Or, what kind of processes the person would be involved with in a new job? Or, what kind of activities or work processes would he or she perform if using the improved competencies in hobbies or in participating social functions?

In the case of the Rural Animator the work processes would include building and maintaining mutual trust in the community, supporting the creation of development plans, participating in the implementation of the development plans and mediating between different stakeholders.

3.1.3 Description of the core tasks of the Rural Animator

The work processes consist of different tasks. Like work processes, tasks vary from job to job. Break the work processes down to their constituent parts and try to identify the core tasks.

The following four tasks were identified as being the core functions for the Rural Animator. These have been broken down into a set of skills:

1. **social communication** (building trust, ability to easily interact with every member of the community, conflict solving, stimulation of innovative thinking, stimulation of positive attitudes towards community and himself/herself, rhetorical skills, self-presentation awareness and skills, explanation of complicated issues skills), including: **information processing** (skills such as: library, newspapers and internet queries; targeting informal sources of information; grouping, categorizing and synthesis of information acquired; writing and publishing – articles, forums, web pages etc.; IT skills)
2. **ability to recognise of the community's needs and problems** (gathering knowledge about community – simple surveys, polls, reporting; recognition of individuals' at-

titudes towards common action and community through interviews and observation, ability to analyse qualitative data and to collate synthesis reports)

3. **projecting and managing (co-ordination) of group actions** (projecting different kinds of actions, identifying sources of funding, basic information about procedures, motivation techniques, group management, knowledge about primary groups, structures and actions, encouraging of co-operation, pre-selection of potential leaders)
4. **sustainable rural development – general background** (new trends in rural development, sustainable tourism, idea of sustainability, practical knowledge on functioning of local network of institutions and organisations (self-government, NGOs, regional bodies, national bodies)

3.1.4 Use of the competence Matrix against the cores tasks of the Rural Animator

The three previous phases have prepared for the fourth one, in which the task and competence Matrix is introduced (see the Matrix on page 16). Now it is possible to cross-check the core tasks that has been identified with the given set of 10 competencies.

Each task should be taken in turn and thought through from the perspective of each of the competencies. How does the competence relate to the task? How is it implemented – what does it mean in real life? Some tasks and competencies may overlap and even feel repetitive. This is normal and to be expected. One way to work through the Matrix is to take each competence in turn and connect it to the tasks. Another is to start from the tasks and analyse them in connection to the different competencies. It is suggested to try out different approaches to find the most suitable one for the person creating the LPW.

This phase may seem difficult, even if analysing a function the person already performs. The purpose is to think through the details to be able to notice both the small and the large steps involved in completing the Learning Pathway. It can be especially helpful to discuss this phase of the Pathway with someone else to help to reflect or to get more information for noticing the possible connections between the contents of the tasks and competencies.

The examples from phases 4-7 about the use of the Matrix, which identify the training needs and create the steps for learning in the pilot used in Euro-Validation project, are described in chapter 4.

It was decided in the Euro-Validation project to use the 10 competencies set by a Swedish research group in 2006 to cross-analyse the core tasks of the Rural Animator.

A research group, The PRIM-group, was tasked by The Swedish National Agency for Education to develop national testing for high schools and the 'Competence Profile' was presented as a result of this work. The Swedish National Agency for Education retains copyright on this material (PRIM-gruppen, 2006), (Skolverket, 2006a).

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

1. Competence to handle information

To be able 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. It is important to be able to find relevant information and to be able to evaluate it objectively.

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. This competence also encompasses the ability to interact with 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 successfully.

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, identify the resources needed to solve the problem, and judge whether the chosen solution is the best given 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. The ability to co-operate means that one can contribute to the group's work, and that one 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 co-operation.

6. Competence to use equipment

Most spheres of work depend upon 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, regardless of whether services or products are in question.

8. **Aesthetic behavior competence**

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

9. **Ethical behavior competence**

Every field of activity has its 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.

Competencies	Core task 1: Social communication and information processing	Core task 2: Recognising the community's needs and problems	Core task 3: Managing and co-ordinating group actions	Core task 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 co-operate				
6. Competence to use equipment				
7. Quality awareness competence				
8. Aesthetic behaviour competence				
9. Ethical behaviour competence				
10. Developmental inclination competence				

Table 1: The Task and Competence Matrix

3.1.5 Identifying the learning needs and setting the learning objectives

By this phase the ground work for creating a Learning Pathway has been done and the next step is to identify the actual learning needs of the individual. When going through the Matrix again it is possible to find the points that need to be improved to be able to achieve the objectives. As there are different ways to start improving them, the best ones should be chosen together with the learner: is some self-study or practise needed to help widen the knowledge or skills and perform better at work? Or is formalised studying more suitable, or should participating to a training

programme be the solution? Or maybe participation in some social activities, getting involved with an association or starting a new hobby would provide the person what he needs?

There are many different ways to meet the learning needs. These may include just one, or all of, informal, non-formal and formal learning options. The learning needs and objectives are now set, so the possibilities for attaining knowledge and skills need to be explored and then decided what might work best. The next question to consider is what kind of proof is needed to prove that the learner has achieved the new competence, skill or knowledge.

So far the prior learning has been valued against the objectives one wants to achieve and it has been noticed, that there are competencies and skills the person already has, but that there are also some that need to be improved or gained. Some of the competencies and skills may have been achieved through previous formal studies, but a proportion of them will be the result of informal or non-formal learning; from work, hobbies, short courses etc – and there is not any formal proof of that. Now the question is how to validate the competences – how much and what kind of formal validation is needed to achieve the objectives and to be able to prove, that the person is competent? Is it enough if he or she just shows the skills in practise or has a recommendation letter e.g. from an employer or a teacher stating that the individual has certain competencies? Or is a more formal type of certification needed, e.g. a certificate of qualification? Maybe the learning need can be met through a short course, or is a formal degree required? Or is there some other kind of validation process available one could participate to?

If the learner needs a degree or a formal qualification, now it is time to find out what kind of methods there are available for formally validating the informal and non-formal learning. The methods vary from country to country, between levels of training and also from one occupation to another. Experts in e.g. a Job Centre or other employment office or a training organisation that provides adult training should be able to provide needed assistance.

3.1.6 Description of the concrete steps on the individual's Learning Pathway

The learning needs and learning objectives are now set and the individual learner has defined what are the areas he or she has chosen to study or practice and how this can be done. These decisions have probably been influenced also by the needs to validate and certify prior learning formally.

What is needed next is a plan of practical steps for the pathway for achieving the objectives: schedule for the work and the resources that will be required (this may include things like time to travel and study, funding, what kind of support from the

peers and employer can expect). Some more discussion or research may be needed e.g. to find out what kind of learning offers are available to meet the training needs (such as: books, CDs, internet materials, e-learning courses, training courses, workshops, training programmes etc.) and how they can be used to meet also the validation needs.

3.1.7 Taking the next step

Now the plan for the Learning Pathway has been made – and actually the first, crucial steps have already been taken since the moment the creation of the Learning Pathway begun. A lot of work has been done when engaging the process, but from now on the path should be clearer. It may take longer than was thought and there will be twists and turns as always in life, but now the learner has the objective, the plan and the steps and just needs to continue from here.

4. Lessons learnt and suggestions for the use of the Learning Pathway method

In general the Learning Pathway method was found to be an interesting and a useful tool in the pilots undertaken in the seven partner countries. The 10 competencies described in the Matrix were found to be relevant, especially when discussing and defining the role of the Rural Animator. In particular, the Pathway was shown to help those participants who were clearly functioning in their current role as Rural Animators, because it allowed them to become aware of and analyse their work and functions in new ways.

Person to person guidance with a competent person is preferred instead of trying to go through the Matrix only by oneself. In addition it was found, that professional support is needed for finding proper information about the studying and learning opportunities to match the training needs. For an individual learner it is a time consuming and thankless task to start looking for the relevant training from the maze of opportunities.

The importance of valuing and validating informal and non-formal learning carried a different weight in the discussions of the pilots depending on how advanced the national systems were and how well known the concepts were. That situation also influenced the way in which the LPW method and the Matrix were evaluated. All participants in the pilots supported the principle of valuation using different systematic approaches and tools and that of arriving at formal validation of recognised competencies and skills.

The method proved to work well with motivated people when piloted in **Finland**. The main achievement of the Finish pilot test was the construction of a well thought out and well articulated learning needs matrix by the participants to the LPW experiment. The process of constructing this matrix was proved very valuable, raising the participants' awareness of their existing skills and their gaps in desired skills. The method worked well under guidance and this was one of the key findings of the test. Also, because the whole process of creating the LPW needs time and effort from the individual, it works better when the individual is highly motivated. This proved to be the case with individuals who wished to change jobs and move to new and more challenging ones. LPW approach and the Matrix tool could be used in the validation processes especially when creating the individual plans for completing competence-based qualifications

A new qualification for professionals serving local development in micro-regions was developed in the pilot in **Hungary**. The main achievement of the Hungarian experiment is that it raised awareness among professionals that serve local development in the recently established posts in the decentralised system of 167 micro-regions, of the need for a qualification which is particularly valuable in the context of the LEADER Initiative and the staffing of the LAGs.

The pilot testing actually addressed these professionals and its strong point was that the four participants came from different educational backgrounds. All participants thought initially that they possessed all the knowledge that was necessary to perform the duties of their new job. Through the process of constructing their own learning pathway, they realized that they lacked important skills and they became very keen to study and acquire them. A combination of courses offered by different universities seemed the best solution to improve the skills of the participants, allowing flexibility to select courses according to their background and skills gaps. There are now efforts being made by the piloting partner to convince the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture to offer a formal qualification of rural animator to these flexible combinations of courses allowing then the participants to create their own learning pathways with the help of the Matrix tool.

In **Norway** every professional employee has a personal development plan constructed in his or her workplace. The learning pathway matrix developed by the project had to be complemented by a more sophisticated and systematic need identification tool, to make it worthwhile for the test participants. Thus, the VOX competence assessment tool was used, which has been officially developed and calibrated in Norway, to go through the initial part of the LPW, that of competence evaluation. This evaluation led to learning needs identification and learning sources exploration. It was noted that because of the 100% employment in southern and central Norway, people cannot easily recognize the value of such instruments as the LPW, because the norm is that employers will take care to improve the skills of their employees, through training if necessary, rather than expecting their employees to take the initiative on their own.

In **Poland** the piloting experiment worked very successfully all the way through and a curriculum was developed to serve individual learning pathways. The main achievement of the Polish experiment was the development of a flexible curriculum by the students, following the completion of their learning pathways. The curriculum was accredited by the University leading first to formal pass for one course, but will be developed to lead to a postgraduate Diploma. Participants, who had not prior university education, could receive an informal certificate from the university.

The process of constructing the learning pathway proved valuable for the learners, not least because it raised their awareness of learning opportunities. The students became very active in looking for suitable courses that would improve their competences. In addition to the university tailor-made course which they developed, they also discovered a 60-hour entrepreneurship course which all five of them attended as a part of their formal curriculum.

The pilot testing of the LPW in Poland created a new product, a post graduate diploma which the Nicolaus Copernicus University intends to offer to the active members of the 220 LEADER LAGs in Poland, who involve approx 16 000 persons. The new accredited course comes to fill a very important gap in the qualifications needed to manage LEADER at local level in Poland, opening a huge education market for the university. This qualifica-

tion opens the door for the non-recognised (but existing) profession of rural animator to obtain an official title, putting pressure on the government to recognize the profession. Important part of the piloting was also testing possibilities of using distance learning in VPL.

When piloting in the United Kingdom (**Scotland**) the emphasis of it was on the approach to the learner. Experience gained from the 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 counselors is necessary, and face-to-face contact is imperative. Two sets of people were contacted: professionals that worked in rural areas and students of the Moray College, UHI Millennium Institute. Participants to the pilot tests could not really handle the Matrix by themselves and called for support and explanations.

People that live in rural areas of Scotland, whose work may be partly described as that of a rural animator, are not aware that they actually perform the tasks of an “animator”. They perceive themselves according to their basic studies or profession (e.g. accountant, ICT specialist etc) and draw their professional identity often by their employer. They were however excited by the idea of a new profession, that of Rural Animator, which was closely related to what they actually did.

These people needed confidence building and making them understand that studying for a further qualification should be not feared of as they already have prior knowledge and learning to build on. Validation and certification of learning is not an issue in rural areas, and many people do not understand why this is needed. The process of building the LPW proved to be more constructive than the results. LPW made people aware of opportunities, both educational and professional.

The experiment with students showed that they are oriented towards the formal qualification, the “piece of paper” that comes at the end of studies, and they found it rather difficult to conceive that an individual may construct his own “learning pathway”. The qualification has not been sought by e.g. NGOs and that market needs to be developed further on its part to support the creation of the identity of Rural Animators.

The pilot lead in **Spain** to a learning “menu” offered by the private sector to cater for specific, distinct competences. The Spanish team focused their pilot testing on existing professions in a rural context due to the fact that the title of Rural Animator doesn't currently exist as a defined and recognised occupation in the National Catalogue and therefore has no direct market demand either. Instead many occupations, which cover some of the tasks, competences and skills of Rural Animator, are formally recognised; e.g. environmental educator, rural tourism operator, community animator and local development agent.

The two participants constructed their learning pathway for the professions they were interested in (environmental educator and tourism operator) and searched for suitable courses that would satisfy their learning needs, filling their skills gaps. A “menu” of suitable

courses that were offered in the training market by private companies were identified, each of them carrying a qualification. Thus, 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.

In **Sweden** LPW should offer more than the already existing practice of personal development plan for employees as all employees in Sweden have a personal development plan put together and updated every year. Employers are crucial in the compilation of these plans, which record the future plans and needs of the individual, and the employee and employer together can decide on further training needs.

The two participants to the pilot testing of the LPW had already their own personal development plans and they needed an additional incentive to be convinced to take part in the LPW construction. This incentive was found in the form of the 8 “standard” competences defined by the European Union (e.g. entrepreneurship, communication etc). Thus a new part was added to the LPW which included these competences. The assumption was that a rural development professional, who could come from many diverse educational backgrounds, could enter into a final test of the 8 “standard” European competences to make sure that he/she possessed all the necessary competence to perform their job.

The sources of learning that may be used to acquire the missing skills was left to the participants: books, magazines, internet were preferred sources, because working people are short of time to attend structured courses. A qualification for the additional competences was not considered necessary by the participants, because the work culture in Sweden places value on informal proof of competences, i.e by demonstrating them to one’s employer during the course of work.

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PRIM-gruppen (2006), Internet: <http://www1.lhs.se/prim/english/>

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Related websites

CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/>

ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_en.html

ECVET – European Credit Transfer in Vocational Education and Training
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/vocational_en.html

ETV European Training Village <http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/>

EURES – European Employment Services <http://ec.europa.eu/eures/index.jsp>

EURIDYCE – The information Network on Education in Europe
<http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice>

EUROPASS (CEDEFOP) <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

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European inventory – Validation of non-formal and informal learning
<http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/>

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ReferNet – the European network of reference and experts
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/index.asp?section=8&sub=3>

The European Qualifications Framework
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

Glossary

(see <http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/glossary.html>)

Certificate/diploma

An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following a standard assessment procedure.

Source: Cedefop, 2002.

Competence

Ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in an habitual and/or changing work situation.

Source: Cedefop, 2002.

Formal learning

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.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

Guidance and counselling

A range of activities designed to help individuals take (educational, vocational, personal) decisions and to carry them out before and after they enter the labour market.

Source: Cedefop, 2003

Informal learning

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.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

Learning

A cumulative process whereby individuals gradually assimilate increasingly complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) and/or acquire skills and competences.

Source: adapted from Lave, 1997.

Lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons. Source: Cedefop, 2003.

Non-formal learning

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.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

Prior learning

The knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired through previously unrecognised training or experience.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

Qualification

1. An official record (certificate, diploma) of achievement which recognises successful completion of education or training, or satisfactory performance in a test or examination; and/or
2. the requirements for an individual to enter, or progress within an occupation.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

Recognition (of competencies)

1. Formal recognition: the process of granting official status to competences, either
 - through the award of certificates or
 - through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained competences;

and/or

2. social recognition: through acknowledgment of the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders.

Source: Cedefop, 2003.

Validation of informal / non-formal learning

The process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences which people develop throughout their lives in different contexts, for example through education, work and leisure activities.

Source: adapted from The international encyclopaedia of education.

Valuing learning

The process of promoting participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning.

Source: Cedefop, 2001 in European Commission, communication Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality, doc. COM(2001) 678 final.

Vocational education and training (VET)

Education and training which aims to equip people with skills and competences that can be used on the labour market.

Source: adapted from ETF, 1997.

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Annex 1. Examples of the pilots of the Learning Pathway method

Finland

Responsible organisation: University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute Seinäjoki Unit
Who participated: Seven women, who worked in four Local Action Groups (LAG) in the region of Southern Ostrobothnia as executive managers, planning officers or project advisors and managers. They had worked in the LAGs for at least three years, were living in rural areas themselves and their ages ranged from 30 to 55. They all had at least vocational education, three had an advanced degree or they were studying for it and their previous work experience varied from factory work to research and teaching.
Why – the objectives of the participants: Some of the participants were at the time of the piloting studying for a degree on some level or participating to continuing education programmes and they hoped the pilot to give them ideas for how to take further their studies. Also other participants looked for ideas for how to develop themselves both for the needs of the working life and for their own interest.
Results: In all going through the LPW process was a good experience for the participants, as this was the first time that most of them had had the opportunity to go through their own work, tasks and competences on this level of detail and the value of the process was agreed. Training needs were identified that they had never considered previously. But as this type of studying of ones development needs and interest is a process, it requires proper time and also further purpose and objective e.g. it being a part of supervision of one's work and used in discussions with the superior creating together development plan for the employee. There is no value in just going through the Matrix without the motivation to use the results for one's benefit.

Competencies	Core task 1: Social communication and information processing	Core task 2: Recognising of community's needs and problems	Core task 3: Managing and co-ordinating group actions	Core task 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 co-operate	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

Table 1: Expressed training needs of the Finnish Rural Animators

Hungary

Responsible organisation:

West Hungary University, Faculty of Forest Engineering, Environment and Innovation Centre, Association of Rural Area Managers in Győr-Moson-Sopron and Vas Counties

Who participated:

Three women and one man, who work as Rural Animators (rural managers) in different local rural development offices in the West-Transdanubian Region, and one student, who got the Master's Degree last Summer as an environment engineer with speciality on regional development. For all three rural managers the qualification of the Rural Animator was a new one, but they had university degrees and 3-4 years of work experience. The student was looking for her first job. All participants were from 23 to 30 years of age.

Why – the objectives of the participants:

In the beginning of 2007 a new network of 167 rural development offices was established by the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Because of these new offices there was a demand for professional rural animators and developers, but no suitable training for these positions was available. The three rural managers, who now work in these rural development offices, and the student, who wants to be employed by such an office, were interested in participating to the piloting of the LPW method to be able to recognise their learning needs for the tasks of the Rural Animator and to create their own learning pathways to achieve those competencies.

Results:

Finally 4 different competence Matrices and 4 different individual LPWs were created. The immediate result of the process was that the participants were able to recognise their training needs. Through the work in the groups the participants were able to both value their present competencies and to recognise the ones that needed improvement for the qualification of the Rural Animator. LPWs, that were created, helped also to determinate what kind of continuous training should be organised for them by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development Education and Training Centre for Rural Development.

Norway

Responsible organisation: Rogaland Training Centre (RKK)

Who participated:

Three men, who worked as business managers or salesmen living in rural areas and being actively involved with local development through associations and other social and political activities. They all had versatile work experience from 12 to 24 years. Their previous education varied from a university degree to no formal degree.

Why – the objectives of the participants:

The participants were interested in the process of evaluating their prior learning and creating learning pathways, but they preferred using the official Norwegian recognising system (VOX) instead of the Matrix to gain also immediate practical value of the process.

Results:

The immediate benefit for the participants was that they were supported during the process to focus on their own situation and future possibilities, reflect upon the needs of their local community, learn from the process and be better able to initiate their learning activities if and when they were ready for it. Due to lack of time and other responsibilities, none of the participants were immediately willing to continue and attend any courses during the time of the piloting.

They all expressed that they would bring this approach to their regional development boards and try to make more use of the available VOX system, or at least spread the word about it in their local communities, as even though VOX is very well known there is always need to motivate new individuals to go through the process.

Examples of three possible learning pathways:**Svein**

39 years, married, 3 children

Works as head of salmon business and takes great interest in local community through political engagements and social activities.

Education - Technical university graduate

LEARNING PATHWAY ;

- needs more ICT skills to handle information effectively, both regarding planning and communication with customers and other people. Have used computers but only on a very low level.
- Co-operation skills could be better and would be interested in courses in listening skills, co-operative skills and wanted in that context an experienced mentor or coach.
- Ethical skills. A course in business ethics or a coaching period in business ethics

Kjetil

32 years, married, 3 children

Works as salesman for oil related mechanical business. Takes great interest in local community and has headed several projects benefiting all people in the community. No higher education finished; 1 year philosophy

LEARNING PATHWAY ;

- Would want a skilled certificate in sales. Was evaluated for his prior learning and found that he needed courses in business, economics, marketing and sales to be able to take the theoretical exam for his skilled certificate.
- He would need no more work experience for his skilled certificate
- Entrepreneurship course (no credits course)

Gustav

41 years, married, 2 children

Works as head of a local horse breeding place with summer camps for children.

Actively engaged in local politics and cultural life in small rural community.

No higher education

LEARNING PATHWAY ;

- Courses in sustainable rural development
- Entrepreneurship course (no credits course)

Poland

Responsible organisation: Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU)

Who participated:

Five university students, who participate to the 3-year study programme “European Rural Development Policies” organized within Institute of Sociology, NCU, Torun. They were chosen to the piloting with the idea of bringing to the university education system new flexible forms of validation of prior learning, especially as an award for those students, who are members of NGOs and / or are active in voluntary work. For piloting a special course called “Eurovalidation” was created for them within the “European Rural Development Policies” curriculum program.

Why – the objectives of the participants:

In addition for the participants to be interested in testing the LPW method those, who were positively evaluated with their individual learning pathway duties, were granted with 3 ECTS points.

Results:

Participants represented very high level of commitment and cooperation in the process of constructing their LPWs. They found the method useful and expressed their hopes for introduction of validation of prior learning at large into the vocational education system in Poland, especially on the field of voluntary work for the community.

	Core task 1	Core task 2	Core task 3	Core task 4
Courses	1.1. PR Techniques (15 hrs)	2.1. Methods and techniques of field research	3.1. Local government (15 hrs)	4.1. Euracademy – Thematic Guide 1 - DL
	1.2. Technology of scientific thinking (15 hrs)	2.2. Observation protocol – assessment	3.2. Self-employment and entrepreneurship (15 hrs)	4.2. Thematic Guide 2 - DL
	1.3. Telematics (30 hrs)	2.3. Attendance in one focus group interview	3.3. Cultural animation (15 hrs)	4.3. Thematic Guide 3 – DL
	1.4. ECDL	2.4. Microsociology (30 hrs)	3.4. Introduction to local administration (30 hrs)	4.4. Common Agricultural Policy – 20 hrs
	1.5. Writing essays during other courses - 2 essays to be proven	2.5. Attendance in one 4-8 hr training course provide by extension service proven by a certificate	3.5. Introduction to economics (30hrs)	4.5. New trends in rural development (15 hrs)
	1.6. Social communication (15 hrs)		3.6. Social action lab (30 hrs)	4.6. EU Structural Policy (20 hrs)
	1.7. Theory of argumentation (30 hrs)			4.7. Sustainable development (30 hrs)
	1.8. Media in education (15 hrs)			4.8. Report on chosen rural institution (essay)

Table 2: Examples of the topics of the NCU courses set to the Matrix

Scotland

Responsible organisation: Moray College, UHI Millennium Institute

Who participated:

As Moray College UHI, joined the Eurovalidation project at a late stage, instead of following the same framework for piloting as other partner countries, it conducted two surveys instead: one for Rural Animators and one for students who had enrolled for the UHI Introduction to Rural Development module, which is a level one module. Successful participants receive the CertHE Rural Development Studies and have the opportunity of studying further to obtain the BSc (Hons) Rural Development Studies degree. It was assumed, that people who wish to obtain formal qualifications to become Rural Animators will enrol on this module. 60 students had registered for the module and 32 participated in the phone survey. In addition eight persons working with different development agencies and village organisations who could be described as Rural Animators were approached and three of them agreed to be interviewed. The Matrix was discussed with all of the interviewees.

Why – the objectives of the participants:

The participants were interested looking at ways at improving 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.

Results:

From the discussions it became obvious that the people who studied for a rural development degree 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. To attract these people into a learning path will require far more than the Matrix – face-to-face meetings appear to be a key part of an induction process. Thus it would appear that UHI's traditional methods of attracting students work for the academically inclined person. People who do not consider following a learning path as an option, however, need far more human interaction and a Matrix will not be of benefit to them. Clear, simple, language is seen a crucial - academic language was seen as very off-putting. A Matrix, however, may well be an excellent tool for use by UHI student guidance officers once contact with people identified by the Rural Animators has been made. It is apparent that more research needs to be conducted amongst members of the rural community.

Spain

Responsible organisation: Mediterranean Institute for Sustainable Development IMEDES
Who participated: Two women, who have previously worked as an expert and a researcher, live in rural areas at the moment and are interested in passing new exams for working as an agent of tourism development and an environmental educator for children.
Why – the objectives of the participants: With the help of the LPW method they wanted to find out the different possibilities and paths to be able to pass the state exams for the particular qualifications they were interested in.
Results: The participants were able to recognise their training needs for achieving the qualifications they were interested in and they also found out potential courses they could attend to for preparing themselves for the exams.

	Needs	Course	Methodology	Hours	Recognition
Educational competences	Project management	Design and project management	Distance learning	45 h	Certificate of the organization
	Tourism marketing	Specialization course in tourism marketing	On line	80 h	Certificate of the organization
	Financing	Finances for non financiers	Face to face learning	45 h	Recognized certification
	Marketing (Techniques)	Tourism marketing	On line	50 h	Recognized certification
	Total			220 h	

Requisites, personal skills and characteristics.	Needs	Course	Methodology	Hours	Recognition
	Work in groups	Working in groups, what is and how to do it	Distance learning	90 h	Recognized certification
	Taking decisions	Taking decisions and solving problems	On line	60 h	Certificate of the organization
	Dealing and communication	Dealing techniques	Face to face learning	20 h	Certificate of the organization
	Office tools	Office course	Distance learning	80 h	Certificate of the organization
	Managing and leadership skills	Expert in managing techniques and leadership	Distance learning	50 h	Certificate of the organization
	Creativity	Creativity	Face to face learning	20 h	Recognised certification
	Total			320 h	

Table 3: Example of the Matrix of needed competences, training needs and training offers for the qualification of a tourism development agent in Spain.

Sweden

Responsible organisation: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)
Who participated: Two women with bachelor degree in the political science, who both have 7-9 years of work experience and either work as Rural Animators or function in other related activities.
Why – the objectives of the participants: They were interested in testing the LPW method, as in Sweden the employees and their superiors have an annual development discussion and this could provide input for that, too.
Results: Both participants were able to recognise both those core tasks and competences they were good at and those for which they needed some additional training or education. Based on that they also were able to pick-up suitable courses for themselves from the offer SLU had. Both the described competences and core tasks the participants though relevant to the work of the Rural Animator.

Euro-Validation Project Website:
<http://www.euracademy.org/euro-validation/background.htm>

