

EUROSocial Education programme

Fabio Roma
(ISFOL - Italy)

The Italian validation of non-formal and informal learning

Le dispositif italien de validation des acquis des apprentissages non formels et informels

CIEP
Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques

Paris, May 28, 2007

A GENERAL AGREEMENT IN ITALY

The establishment of a validation system for non-formal and informal learning has become a strong and widely shared priority in the last ten years in Italy.

All social and political stakeholders (Ministries, Regional Authorities, Trade Unions, Employers' Representatives, VET providers, Universities, Youth Associations and voluntary organisations), in fact, actually agree regarding the need of validation of non-formal learning through formalised recognition pathways or certification procedures.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The institution of a formal, non-formal and informal competence recognition and certification system that could be both *uniform* at the national level and sufficiently *flexible* (able to adapt to the regional specificities recognised by Italian legislation), is in a progressive, but quite slow and discontinuous implementation phase.

This is due to social, political and historical-cultural factors such as:

- the relevant formal and legal value of qualifications and diplomas obtained through formal education and training pathways;
- the traditional weakness of short-term and adult education and training.

The combined result is that the economic and social value of vocational education and training (VET), is not culturally perceived.

MICRO-EXPERIENCES

Nevertheless, numerous *local "micro-experiences"* implemented throughout Italy in different Regions and in a variety of sectors:

- promoted and led by various stakeholders,
- aimed at an several target-groups,
- experimented with numerous procedures and devices, supported at times by various pieces of legislation.

A MICRO-EXPERIENCE: THE EMILIA-ROMAGNA REGION

The law passed by the *Emilia-Romagna* Regional Authorities contains perhaps the ‘clearest’ statement of principle: it cites that “every individual has the right to obtain formal recognition and certification of acquired competences...” which can be used for the attainment of a “certificate, vocational qualification or other qualification”. The law also affirms the responsibility of the Regional Authorities to “promote agreements with stakeholders in the training system and Social Partners ... on the translation of competences acquired in the workplace to vocational training credits to be utilised in training pathways”. The same Article (Art. 5) “assigns the stakeholders in the training system the authority for recognition and certification”. Article 6 introduces the “*Libretto formativo personale*” (Personal Training Portfolio), which can be requested by those who enrol for post-compulsory vocational education or training pathways. The portfolio “lists the certificates, qualifications and other certifications earned” by an individual and certifies “attendance in non-formal education pathways, and training credits otherwise acquired and documented, as well as declarations of self-learning”.

Basic Topics for the Introduction of a VNIL System

1. The importance of *lifelong learning*: learning occurs throughout lifelong learning, not only in youth; this frequently implies an ‘overlap’ between periods of education, vocational training and employment. Lifelong learning requires reliable systems and devices for the recognition, certification and capitalisation of competences developed throughout one’s lifetime.
2. The importance of *life-wide learning*: an individual learns not in only formal settings (schools and vocational training centres are institutions of *formal learning*), but also in employment contexts (where mostly *non-formal learning* takes place) and in one’s free or volunteer time (where *informal learning* occurs). This implies the need to guarantee the “transferability” and “spendibility” of competences from one context to another while ensuring their value.

(In Italy this theme is stressed in several laws and agreement between State, Regions and Social Partners: Law 30 / 2003 - *Ministry of Labour*)

Basic Topics for the Introduction of a VNIL System

3. Increased *mobility* required in the labour market (geographical, sectoral, organisational, occupational): for reasons of social equity and the functionality of the economy and the labour market, measures must assure the “*horizontal transferability*”, “*accumulation*” and “*vertical capitalisation*” of competences however acquired.

4. The progressive *flexibility* of the labour market (especially for certain stakeholders - such as trade-union organisations - often related to *increased precariousness*): instruments and devices become indispensable for workers “*in transition*” (a state that is increasingly becoming “*permanent*”) so that the competences may be reconstructed, recognised, accumulated, connected, integrated and organised. This principle is particularly relevant to public employment services.

(In Italy this theme is stressed in several laws and agreement between State, Regions and Social Partners: Law 30 / 2003; Decree 276 / 2003 (known as the ‘Biagi Reform’); Agreement (2000) between the Government and the Regional Authorities)

Basic Topics for the Introduction of a VNIL System

5. The progressive tendency of training systems (undertaken in schools, vocational training centres, universities, enterprises) towards the *individualisation* and *customisation* of pathways for supporting learning, labour access, and professional development, in order to effectively ‘tailor’ training projects and actions (as stressed by the stakeholders): appropriate instruments and methods are thus required to analyse and validate individual competences and for the recognition of credits.

5. The progressive change in focus (among employers) in training and HR management processes, from “attitudes” to “*competences*”, which are specific characteristics (even if ‘individual’) crucial to professional effectiveness: this paradigm shift highlights the need for tools of analysis, development, evaluation, appreciation and recognition of competences on the part of corporate management.

(In Italy this theme is stressed in several laws and agreement between State, Regions and Social Partners: Law 53 /2003; Proposal on LLL Law 2007 (validation of non formal and informal))

Some relevant methodologies and tools in the Italian VNIL System

The validation of credits between different education and training pathways is something theoretically possible in Italy and it has sometimes also been practiced with different approaches in various contexts.

The lack of national standards regarding qualifications and competences is felt by various stakeholders as the main obstacle and may represent the main hindrance to the development of a national validation system.

Three main and widespread experiences of structured systems for the recognition of credits should also be mentioned:

- 1) the *IFTS* system
- 2) The University system
- 3) The "*Libretto formativo del cittadino*" ("*Citizen's training portfolio*")

The case of the IFTS system: a laboratory of the Italian way to lifelong learning

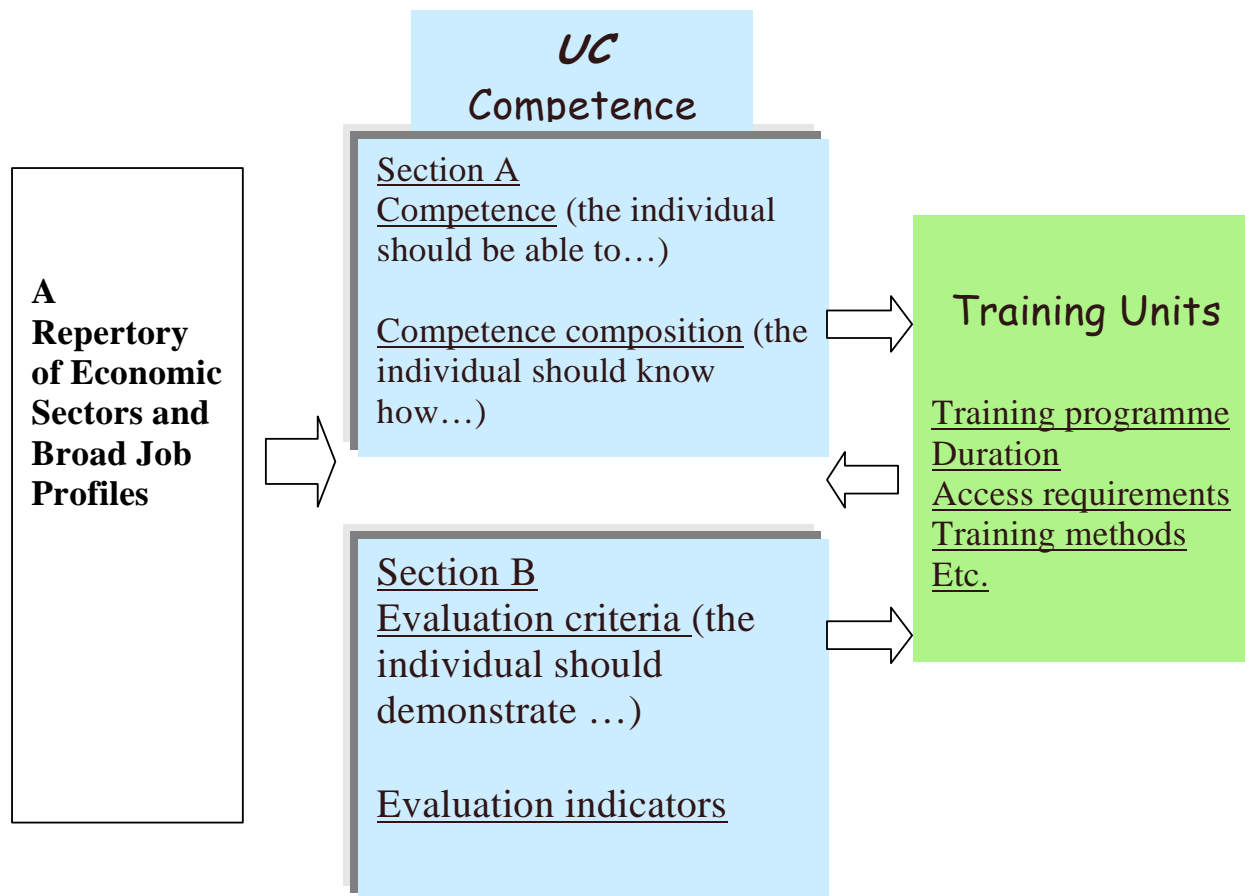
Decree No. 436 of 31 October 2000 signed by the Ministers of Education, Labour and the University envisages the regulations concerning *IFTS (Higher Technical Training and Education)*. Starting from this decree, the *IFTS* system has contributed to build a national system of competence-based standards over the 2002-2005 period.

The IFTS System

Structured in	Units of competence: a structured set of competences easily readable from all VET sectors, labour market, social actors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Collectable · Certification object · Clusterable in qualification profiles
Centred on	Competences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · basic · technical-vocational · transversal
Referring to	Basic requirements for employability Fields of action and organisational processes Behaviour of the individual in the job context
Perspectives	In the future, the Standard will also contain learning and training indicators (a range of contents, durations and training methods). (Training Units)

IFTS

The Technical Structure of the *IFTS* Standard System



Credits in the IFTS System

The access validation process in the IFTS System is designed in three sequential steps as follows:

1. Guidance/counselling aimed to let the individual actively participate in self-analysis and the identification of specific training needs. This step is carried out by a counsellor and produces a basic individual project;
2. Assessment aimed to collect the evidences in a systematic way and to ensure the possession of specific competences. This step is carried out by one (or more) assessor who contributes the individual to compose a dossier that includes all the evidences (certifications, self-declarations, documented information about training, work or other experiences).
3. Certification/recognition aimed to give concrete effects to the process producing a certification or allowing the access or a bonus towards a training pathway. This step is usually managed by a Commission in which all the education and training institutions involved are represented. After the evaluation of the dossier, the Commission formulates the decision in order to recognise the 'credit' for access.

The University system

The Minister of the University and Scientific and Technological Research launched the process for transforming the university system with:

- the Decree No. 509 dated 3/11/1999 "*Regolamento recante norme concernenti l'autonomia didattica degli atenei*" (Regulation Containing Provisions concerning the Teaching Autonomy of Universities), which was then implemented with the Ministerial Decree of 4 August 2000 "*Definizione delle classi di lauree*" (Definition of Classes of Degrees);
- the Ministerial Decree of 28 November 2000 "*Definizione delle classi delle lauree specialistiche*" (Definition of the Classes of Specialist Degrees - or Master of Science Degrees).
- The Ministerial Decree of 18 March 2007 "*Decreto ministeriale sulle nuove classi di laurea triennali e magistrali*" (Ministerial Decree of new Classes of Basic Three-Year and Specialist Degrees)

The University system

The fundamental characteristics of the new university training may be briefly identified as:

- Replacement of the teaching approach with a learning approach;
- Reorganisation of the curricula for the achievement of training objectives connected with specific scientific and job profiles;
- Rationalisation of teaching through modular curricula;
- Greater active participation of students;
- Greater consistency between initial cultural preparation and expected final objectives;
- The universities may recognise as university training credits vocational skills and knowledge certified in conformity with the standards and regulations in force (*Decree N. 509 of 3 November 1999*).

The “Libretto formativo del cittadino” (*Citizen training portfolio*)

A device:

- inspired by a general legislative recommendation (in Law 30 and Decree 276, both from 2003);
- defined operationally at the State-Regions Conference;
- currently in the experimental phase in roughly half of the Regions of Italy.

It is a document divided into two sections. One section contains a record of the professional and training history of the individual, while the other section lists those competences, legitimising these qualifications through certification, with a logic similar to that of the Europass portfolio.

Credits in the The Citizen Training Portfolio: *its structure and contents*

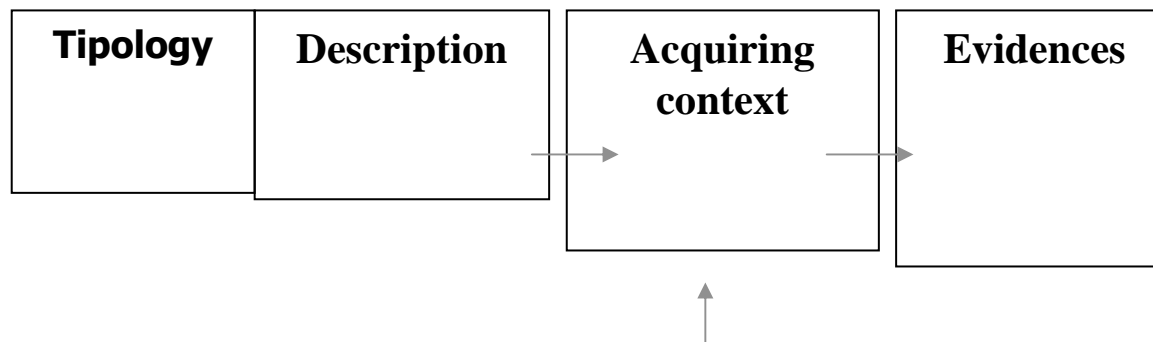
Section 1

1. Personal information
2. Working and professional experiences
3. Education and Training titles
4. Training experiences



Section 1 refers to personal data and provides a description of the curriculum, education, work and training experiences.

Section 2 Acquired Competences



Section 2 describes and document the competences acquired by the individual through his several learning experiences

Each section may be differently wide and a variable structure depending on the relevant and more significant information provided by the individual, thus depending on the kind of the user

The novelty of the *Citizen training portfolio*

The *Citizen training portfolio* is not merely a document or a repository of information with a format, but it is also a real device: a process that defines, in addition to the document itself, relevant stakeholders, roles, settings, procedures, competences, behaviours and relationships.

General overview of the Assessment Methods and Procedures

The most widespread methods for the assessment basically rely on three systems:

- 1 Individual interviews of a more or less structured nature, in which the self-declaratory components prevail (sometimes collected using grids).
- 2 Self-assessment of elements relating to personal characteristics using specially created tools.
- 3 Self-assessment using group sessions.

The outcomes are rendered objective by the practitioners, who act as external elements capable of interpreting what is declared or developed as a result of a negotiation process.

There is little recourse to objective tests or to the analysis of documents or testimonials by third parties.

Assessment Methods and Procedures: Problems and Questions

In Italy there is a strong need for procedural and methodological frameworks useful for comparing and 'accrediting' the different experiences developed so far.

It is not yet defined at institutional level how implement a validation system and procedures, who is responsible to legitimately offer this type of service, what kind of general requisites the procedures should have.

From this point of view, the Italian situation reflects many open issues raised at the European level on common principles for validation.

***The Italian "National Table" for the NQF
as a prerequisite to define a validation system***

On September 2006 the Ministry of Labour promoted a "National Table" aimed at defining and implementing a "National Qualification System".

The "National Table" was composed by Ministry of Education, University and Research, Regions and Social Partner.

It will allow to integrate - in a common and national framework (NQF) - the different titles, qualifications and diploma delivered by Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Regions and Universities and the classification adopted by the employment services.

The NQF would be also an important point for the evolution of Italian system toward the definition of national criteria and methodologies able to give transparency and visibility of skills and competencies lifelong achieved by trainees and workers in any context (formal, non formal and informal).

The definition of a National Qualification system has stated a national priority by the recent directive (2006) of the Minister of Labour regarding the national reform of the labour market and of the Vocational training system.

“Advantages” for the main stakeholders

Individuals

- ✓ The possibility to *reduce times* required to achieve formal certificates (greater *efficiency*) and *increase effective opportunities* to complete those certificates (greater *effectiveness*);
- ✓ The possibility to *increase the opportunities* for the recognition and certification of *experience* acquired through non-formal or informal learning;
- ✓ The possibility to translate certification and recognition into *economic gain*;
- ✓ The possibility to increase the opportunities for *re-motivation* and *re-orientation* that competence certification allows the individual;
- ✓ The possibility to stimulate individual *training and career design* among workers;
- ✓ The possibility to increase “*transferability*” of *competences* from one context to another through these practices and devices;
- ✓ The possibility to compile a *professional portfolio* through reconstruction, validation and certification devices to present to prospective employers and to the labour market in general.

Please, see also the Paper prepared for this seminar.

“Advantages” for the main stakeholders

Training providers:

- The possibility to *better evaluate the effectiveness* of training, requiring the certification of results in a transparent and ‘communicable’ way.
- The possibility to develop a *common language* among enterprises (in particular, an ‘inter-operational’ language of competences).
- The possibility to provide “*retrospective*” *evaluation of curricula* to include competences required for job insertion, thereby improving possibilities for beneficiary success
- The possibility to *encourage training re-insertion of dropouts*, through the recognition and certification of training experiences of any derivation
- The possibility to effectively practice *lifelong learning*.

Please, see also the Paper prepared for this seminar.

“Advantages” for the main stakeholders

Enterprises:

- The possibility to gain a *better understanding of the abilities of job candidates* (and thus improve the effectiveness and efficiency of *selection* processes and thus labour *productivity*).
- The possibility to enjoy more effective communication with education and training systems and employment services due to the adoption of an '*inter-operational*' language.
- The possibility to access a *more transparent*, better targeted, legible and qualitatively superior *training supply*.
- The possibility to develop *an awareness of the business's implicit training competences* as a place of *non-formal* and *informal learning* (*tacit knowledge*).

Please, see also the Paper prepared for this seminar.

“Advantages” for the main stakeholders

Employment services:

- The possibility to *improve ‘matching’* of individual and job profiles through a more effective and efficient vocational training system and the use of active employment policy tools.
- The possibility to *promote occupational mobility* between enterprises throughout Italy.
- The possibility to construct more effective *insertion, reinsertion and outplacement* pathways.
- The possibility to *integrate support policies for the weakest and most at-risk segments of the labour market* (e.g., for ex-convicts such as the certification of competences acquired through experience obtained during the period of detention).

Please, see also the Paper prepared for this seminar.

ACTORS INVOLVED

- 1) The National Government**
- 2) The Regional and Provincial Authorities**
- 3) The Social Partners**
- 4) Organizations**
- 5) School, VET and University Systems**
- 6) Intermediary Bodies (for example, Third Sector Organizations, Trade Unions...)**
- 7) Professional Associations and Registers**
- 8) Individuals**

Expected and actual results

During the last years (1996-2007) many initiatives have been launched by the national Institutions and regional bodies at local level to create innovative devices and regulations related to the implementation of a national certification system.

Nevertheless, a real and underpinning gap remains between sharing the principle and enforcing it in reality .

Considerable trust has been placed in the processes of implementation of the principles established by the regulations and in the manner whereby these processes will be able to acquire and integrate the experience already under way in the various pathways and Regions, through a co-ordination mechanism involving Ministries, Regional Authorities, Social Partners and training operators.

Options necessary to ensure the "productivity" and "solidity" of the reforms

- a clear need to generate consensus around the *classification of competence and their relationship with the impact on labour, career, sectorial contracts and classifications.*
- the need of **a common framework of standards** by which it could be possible to formulate or re-interpret the training supply, to identify and compare the various competence acquired;
- the relationship between **evaluation and certification of competence**, in respect to both the objectives and the parties responsible for the two operations;
- a the **mechanism of recognition of credits and the new perspective of the implementation of a National framework of qualifications**; the European proposal is now launching a concrete and interesting approach;
- transparency framework (**Europass**) may become an important opportunity to promote common languages and tools in this field.

Prospects

In Italy even if there is no structured and whole learning recognition and validation system, there is surely a continuous “work in progress” on this issue.

This situation is sustained by a large political consensus and commitment but has as a point of weakness a lack of concreteness in its implementation process.

The national government has surely a central role in the progressive design of a non formal and informal learning recognition system as it is seen as a real overall provision strictly linked to a fundamental right for all the citizens.

The Italian government aims to fix common national criteria and procedures that are able to guarantee citizens, professions, enterprises, VET agencies education providers.

The Regions, that are in charge for the concrete implementation of the system, seek for mechanisms easy to put in practice and not too strongly impacting their own existing VET and certification system.

The Social Partners are involved in almost all processes of the Italian VNIL, in order to guarantee a better realization of the Italian VNIL system.

Thanks for your attention