



## The Interdependence of Social Inclusion and Non-Formal Learning

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### 1. Introduction

In Slovenia, research studies on participation of adults in education have been conducted in 1987, 1998 and 2004. All of the studies have shown a rather great degree of correlation between educational attainment and adult education participation; the lower the level of education of adults, the lower the participation in either formal or non-formal and informal learning, and vice versa.

The accumulation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired by some adults cannot compare to the amount of knowledge, skills and competences in others. And another thing that needs to be taken into account is that some adults add their knowledge to their already existing knowledge, while others (on average, of course) have less and less knowledge because they do not use it nor do they upgrade it with new learning and knowledge, which would ideally be added to the previously existing one.

### 2. Results of three studies in Slovenia and CEDEFOP's models/approaches of non-formal learning recognition

Results of these three research studies have also shown that lower participation rates in either formal or non-formal and informal learning tend to correlate strongly with the adult literacy levels reached. The first study showed that adults with higher educational attainment tend to be more involved in education of any form, and are more active in education [1]. Results of the second study confirmed the first studies' results and added that less educated individuals also tend to achieve lower literacy level and vice versa [2]. The third study agreed with the previous ones and showed as well that adults who on average do participate in education tend to be: higher educated, wealthier, younger, they live in urban environments and have more responsible jobs [3]. We can see that, over the time, in Slovenia, social stratification through the education is persistent.

On the other hand different countries have different approaches to recognition of non-formal learning outcomes. This is important because of what will be shown in the end. A CEDEFOP study [4] has identified five different models or approaches within European countries that have similar solutions in the field of recognition of non-formal learning outcomes.

These models are: 1. The dual system approach; where work-based learning has been most systematically integrated into education and training (through the dual system) have so far been reluctant to embrace this new trend. 2. The Mediterranean approach where huge reservoir of non-formal learning creates the basis for important parts of the economies in these countries and needs to be made visible. 3. The national vocational qualification (NVQ) approach with strong acceptance of an output-oriented, performance-based model of education and training. The general acceptance of learning outside formal education and training institutions as a valid and important pathway to competences is a basic feature in these countries. 4. The Nordic approach which cannot be called a model, because of great differences among Nordic countries. The mutual learning between these countries though is strong and has become even stronger over the past two to three years. 5. The 'opening up' diplomas and certificates with the France leading in setting the benchmarks for the recognition of non-formal learning at all levels. [4] It is important to realise, that non-formal learning, as it is suggested here, can and should be used as a tool for individual's (educational) progress.

### 3. Slovenia and recognition of non-formal learning

Slovenia was in 2004 not included in the identification, since it was at the time not a member of the EU yet. However, considering the main characteristics of our education system as a whole, of our vocational education and training and adult education, Slovenia could mostly be placed under: the national qualifications model, because the NVQ has also been adopted following the British model, and the Mediterranean model because of increasing respect general education is gaining in comparison with vocational education and training. Within our vocational education and training system there are, as has been pointed out before, possibilities for adults to have their non-formal learning outcomes recognized, but there are limitations and shortcomings to these possibilities. This is also necessary since Slovenian unemployment rate is rather higher. Besides that we have a lot of possibilities in under-educated adults yet to be addressed. (Compare: [5].)

### 4. Suggestions

An enlarged system is therefore suggested for recognising any kind of knowledge, which would foremost serve individuals to either return to education in order to climb "one step up the educational ladder" or to get recognition and credit for additional qualifications at their work place (a higher income, a more responsible job, promotion etc.).

One needs to however be cautious not to use the recognition of non-formal learning outcomes as a neoliberal tool which serves only the purposes of the economy [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], employers and the capital, but foremost for



the individuals themselves to be less socially determined by their social class and to gain more opportunities for their individual progress. Instead of understanding (and accepting) different tools and ways offered by a number of European documents [11] for non-formal knowledge recognition, certification, validation ... as a neoliberal tool to exploit people's competence for the benefits of the capital [12], these tools can be used to empower individuals to re-enter their education, either formal or non-formal, to start valuing learning for themselves and not for its market value. Valuing learning and the possibility that it potentially has more opportunities for individuals, puts fewer limitations to their personal and professional lives.

In order to achieve all of the above appropriate information, guidance and counselling have to be offered to as many candidates as possible. This would be a way to spread the culture of lifelong learning more and more, among other things, through different tools of recognition of non-formally gained knowledge. Perhaps we could, through this, limit these social phenomena which are increasing social inequalities in coordinated interaction. In terms of formal education, even assuming that we can capture broad population, and with its limits (duration, cost, entry requirements) it is difficult to be seen as the most successful tool to be used to reduce social inequalities (as we have shown above). On the other hand it is possible to use non-formal education, which is shorter, cheaper and usually has less restrictive entry requirements, and often occurs in the workplace itself, to add a special dimension of quality and open access to education. A widespread system of recognition of the knowledge, learning, competence that would otherwise have been unobtainable – could be the answer.

This proposal, if implanted correctly, should: 1) cutback the difference between actual and the reported formal (professional) competencies (the competencies and qualifications), 2) open doors for individuals to more complex and more responsible jobs, 3) increase opportunities for participation in formal education - under milder entry conditions without lowering educational standards, and 4) achieve partial reduction of social disparities arising from education and subsequently the income.

## 5. Conclusion

The presented possibilities, i.e. the neoliberal tool of non-formal learning outcomes recognition, which can be used as something else, as a shortcut to getting more educationally-deprived people return to any form of education and learning, have a greater potential impact and a long-range reach, than being merely of benefit to companies and employers. They might have some benefits for the society as a whole as well.

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