Validation and certification of informal and non-formal learning in Germany

The importance of validating and certifying informal and non-formal learning experiences has been a topic of discussion since approximately 20 years. Certificates, diplomas, recommendations or assessment letters can provide advantages in applications for internships, scholarships and jobs, and they can be considered to increase the general self-esteem of participants. In 2004, a feasibility study „Weiterbildungspass mit Zertifizierung informellen Lernens" ("Continuing education pass with certification of informal learning") was issued by the German Institute for Adult Education and the Institute for Development Planning and Structural Research at the University of Hannover[1], based on the state of existing systems[2].

Based on these results, the ProfilPASS was implemented in 2006 as a project of the Federal-State Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion (BLK) to make personal skills visible. It addresses the individual person who wants to collate and present their informally acquired skills and competences, for example, during training, volunteering, gainful employment, leisure time or family activity. As the identification of one's own skills and competences without professional support is limited, the ProfilPASS system includes professional support in the form of advice or a seminar offer.

The coordination and service point for this accompanying advice and qualification of counsellors lies with the German Institute for Adult Education. Through a process guided in this way, previously less conscious skills and competences can also be uncovered. The aim is to obtain a comprehensive overview of the different skills and competences. Depending on the biographical situation of the user, this guided process leads to a perspective planning that can unfold its benefits for professional development, the preparation of (re-)entry into working life, professional and personal (re-)orientation and future learning projects. There are currently 45 dialogue centres in Germany certified by the German Institute for Adult Education. Their task is to make the ProfilPASS system known, to form networks, and to offer qualification courses for counsellors.

The ProfilPASS system has been further developed to match the specific needs of different target groups: Besides the ProfilPASS for adults, there are additional versions for youth, for migrants (in easy language), for people planning to be self-employed, for people with cognitive impairments (in plain language) and for young adults who are neither employed nor in training[3]. The ProfilPASSes are available in multiple languages and have meanwhile been established - besides the Europass – as standard tools by individuals who want to also present their informal skills and competences.

On the other side, adult education bodies are also applying methods to validate and certify informal and non-formal learning experiences. Comparatively common methods and tools applied are performance or progress monitoring by facilitators or mentors, diaries (both in case of long-term educational methods), written tests, or group discussions on newly gained knowledge. Furthermore, for ex-ante and ex-post evaluations, questionnaires filled in before and after a training can indicate what and to which degree has been acquired and if expectations were met to a sufficient extent. Self-assessment forms may be used to reflect on gained competences, and peers can assess each other by mutual endorsements of learning progresses on specific topics.

A structured validation approach is the "Kompetenznachweis international" for young participants in international projects which systematically documents the skills acquired and demonstrated by the individual participants; however, organisations running these projects need trained coaches before

[1] https://www.die-bonn.de/esprid/dokumente/doc-2004/die04_02.pdf
[2] https://www.bibb.de/dienst/dapro/daprodocs/pdf/at_34101.pdf
[3] https://www.profilpass.de/

they can apply the system appropriately (https://ijab.de/en/resources-for-practitioners/nachweise-international-greater-visibility-for-community-engagement).

Also, with a focus on young volunteers in international workcamps, the I'VE method and digital tool for the validation of competences has been developed in an Erasmus+ project (http://www.ive-experienced.eu/the-system-outputs/) and also been applied in Germany. A couple of visionary unconventional suggestions include role plays, online tools, the world café method, or videos. The participants also suggested actions on LinkedIn to ensure that competences are being endorsed, movies, participant lists (of those who agree to be published) and articles about the educational measure would inform employers searching the internet about candidates for a job (http://www.ive-experienced.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/IVE-Field-Research-Report-Output-2-LAST.pdf)