European Observatory of Validation of non-formal and informal activities

Progress/Final Report   Public Part

Project information

Project acronym:	OBSERVAL
Project title:	European Observatory of Validation of non-formal and informal activities
Project number:	2007-1987/001-001 LE 3-NETWOR
Sub-programme or KA:	Leonardo da Vinci thematic Networks
Project website:	http://www.eucen.org/projects/OBSERVAL/index.html

Reporting period:	From	01/11/07
	To	30/04/09
Report version:		1
Date of preparation:		29.5.2009

Beneficiary organisation:	European University Continuing Education Network - EUCEN

Project coordinator:	Michel Feutrie
Project coordinator organisation:	EUCEN
Project coordinator telephone number:	0033-320 43 41 35
Project coordinator email address:	michel.feutrie@univ-lille1.fr

Executive Summary

The objective of this project is to establish a European Observatory on the validation of non formal and informal learning. The OBSERVAL **Observatory** provides stakeholders, policy makers, education providers, individual learners and other interested persons with a regularly updated database accessible through the Internet. This **database** contains documents and resources on the validation of non formal and informal learning in European countries produced by **a network of national experts**, including actors from learning and training organisations across sectors, who have a leading role in their countries and **a general vision of existing policies and concrete practices.**

The European Observatory provides **support for the implementation and development of the European Guidelines on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning** produced by the European Commission and Cedefop (2009). The Observatory provides access to documents and examples of good practice that are not normally in the public domain and/or not widely known or used, disseminating outside the country, region or institution where they were produced and presenting them in a common format to facilitate understanding and allow comparison.

This Observatory is not just an inventory presenting national or sectoral frameworks in each Member Sate. It is not just a website just presenting a collection of data, documents, practices or activities. The **added value of the Observatory** is

- To present information on practice coming from practising experts;
- To improve transparency by presenting information that is not easily accessible;
- To present information in a way that allows comparability;
- To provide a quality process and transversal analysis (transnational and transsectoral) provided by European experts;
- To open a space for discussion and debate;
- To contribute to the development of a common "culture" on validation beyond national learning cultures;
- To offer a support for the implementation of European Guidelines;
- To help to the promotion of validation at national or sectoral level;
- To identify in each Member state a group of experts likely to feed regularly the Observatory within and beyond the project with reflection on developing policies.

The project is managed by a Steering Group. This **Steering Group consists of experts**, well known at European level, working actively for years at institutional, national and international level on validation of non formal and informal learning issues, having published numerous books and articles on this theme

A country leader was identified in the initial proposal in nearly all Member States and the partnership includes three representatives from AELE eligible countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) and of Switzerland as associated partner. The country leaders come from a range of educational settings: . 10 are from Higher Education, 4 are from Vocational Education and Training or the central administration of Education and Training, and 11 are from NGOs or private organisations.
Five Member States (Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Poland and Slovakia) haqve not joined the partnership but a member of the Steering Group has taken the role of following policy and practice in each of these

Each **country leader is supported by a national group** made of representatives from different educational sectors: higher education, vocational education and training, adult education (third sector) or professional sector to assist in gathering relevant data and to guarantee the quality of these data. Currently **around 250 national actors are involved** in these groups.

During this first part of the project, partners have:

- set up National Working Groups involving the three sectors;
- collected categories of "formal" or "official" data: law and regulations, tools and methodologies, statistics, useful websites;
- prepared Case studies;
- prepared National Reviews;
- elaborated an annotated review of the most interesting reports, articles, books published in their country concerning validation issues.

To help and guide our partners, the Steering Group has devised **several tools:**

- a grid identifying a list of key issues likely to support the presentation of the process of validation of non formal and informal learning in a country;
- recommendations and a grid for the elaboration of case studies;
- a grid for National Reviews;
- recommendations for the preparation of the annotated review of publications.

In parallel, the Steering Group elaborated a structure of the Observatory on the basis of a feasibility study done by Navreme

For the content, we have collected

- **Case studies from 21 coun**tries, a first **transversal analysis** of these case studies has been done by the Methodological expert;
- **National Reviews from 18 countries**, two **analyses of these Reviews** have been done (one analysis by country and a transversal analysis identifying some key issues and common debates and problems;
- **Annotated reviews from 8 countries**;
- **Formal documents from 11 countries**.

The website presenting a **draft version of the Observatory will be opened for partners** on the beginning of July. After adjustments **a Version n°1 will be presented for reactions, comments and proposition during the European Forum in November in Sweden**.

Before summer the outstanding information from countries will be collected. Following the European Forum, taking into account the results of the discussions with potential users, the process of updating data will begin.

Two major events are scheduled during the second phase of the project:

- the **European Forum in Jönköping on 3-4 November in Sweden**;
- the **dissemination event in Belgium in October 2010**.

Table of Contents

1. Project Objectives

This project finds its origin in complaints expressed at meetings by actors involved in the real practice of validation of non formal and informal learning throughout in Europe about a lack of vision of what is actually happening on the ground in the EU. The general feeling was that the Inventories done by ECOTEC or for instance progress reports towards the Lisbon objectives were not offering a clear or comprehensive demonstration of the richness of practices, of the reality of debates and discussions at national and European level.

These informal discussions rapidly became a suggestion: create a database, regularly updated, available in a European Observatory accessible by Internet, of documents and resources on validation of non formal and informal learning in European countries, based on the production of a network of national experts (including actors from learning and training organisations in all sectors, from NGOs) having a leading role in their countries and a general vision of existing practices.

The perspective was to provide documents useful for a wide range of actors (decision makers at national and institutional level, social partners, human resources managers, people in charge of validation, populations interested in validation issues…) which are not normally in the public domain or not widely known or used; to disseminate outside the country or the Region or the institution where they were produced; and to present them in common formats to facilitate understanding and allow comparison.

The objectives expressed in the initial proposal were the following ones:

- To collect and analyse existing data and present them in a common format.
- To identify regulations, organisation, pilot projects and experiments, standards and reference frameworks, tools and methods, etc. These will be drawn from private and public learning and training institutions, companies and professional bodies and NGOs.
- To review national debates or discussions between the most influent actors (ministries, learning and training organisations, social partners, companies, NGOs) on validation issues.
- To situate the debates in a "learning culture" and in a European policy content.
- To review researches on the policy and practice of validation and create an annual annotated bibliography and literature review.
- To promote an annual European validation prize

Progressively during this first year and half, these objectives have been refined and enriched thanks to the contribution of partners (collections of data, presentation of these data, contribution in internal discussions,…). There is no change in the orientation of the project; the partners confirmed the relevance of these objectives; we have enlarged the perspective taking into account these first positive results.

Now we are able to clarify and elaborate these initial objectives:

o   To set up the European Observatory

The Steering Group agreed on a definition of the Observatory at its first meeting. The Observatory is not just a website presenting data. We intend to make it interactive and dynamic, encouraging debates at national, sectoral and European level. This means:

❖   To provide information on the past (looking back);

❖ But also to provide information on the future and trends (looking forward);
❖ To provide official as well as non official data;
❖ To be careful on the respect of diversity of sources;
❖ To ensure a quality process ;
❖ To provide space for debate, discussions;
❖ To encourage critical and self critical approaches;
❖ To encourage new initiatives, networking.

This Observatory will be made of five sections:

❖ one for official information, law and regulations, policy statements, statistics, etc
❖ one for tools and methodologies
❖ one presenting interesting case studies
❖ one on national review of analysis, debates, evaluations and transversal issues
❖ one on presentation of annotated bibliographies

These data will be available on a website. The access to the website will be restricted to partners and key actors for consultation during the period of testing. But, the objective is to make access open to all potential users by the end of this year. The final version taking into account the reactions of users will be available before the end of the project.

o To establish a network of experts on validation working in different sectors (higher education, vocational education and training, third sector and companies or professional bodies) and offering them the opportunity to meet, to discuss and contribute.

o To provide to these different categories of actors opportunities to meet, to discuss, to understand each other, to work together. We try to ensure a "benchlearning" process in the network. This implies to collect materials, to analyse these materials, to debate on them, to assess the use and to provide feedback.

o To better identify convergences and divergences between sectors, countries, to identify transversal issues and to start to work on them, to contribute in improvement of practices.

o To provide to national and regional decision makers, socio economic actors, educational actors,… elements for discussion and further developments.

o To offer the opportunity, with the European Validation Prize, to promote some interesting initiatives.

2.   Project Approach

<u>**Organisation**</u>

To reach the above objectives we have set up:

A group of European experts acting as Steering Group for the project.

This Group consists of experts, well known at European level, working actively for many years at institutional, national and international level on validation of non formal and informal learning issues, having published numerous books and articles on this theme.

This Group has met four times since the beginning of the project (on 16 November 2007, 6 March 2008, 24-25 November 2008, 5 May 2009). A detailed report has been produced after each of these meetings.

The role of the Steering Group is:

- to coordinate and manage the project
- to monitor progress in production of data by country leaders and national groups
- to draw up grids, tools documents for country collection of data
- to analyse data collected
- to design the website
- to prepare and organise the events scheduled in the project: meetings of country leaders, the European Forum and the Dissemination Event, to organise the awards of the Validation Prize
- to identify the conditions to meet to ensure sustainability for the Observatory and produce an analysis of the results for printed publication.

Members of the Steering Group have specific roles:

- Michel Feutrie is the scientific responsible of the project;
- Mireille Pouget is our methodological expert. She is in contact with all country leaders to guide them in collecting data, to review the content of the information provided before registration in the Observatory and prepare transversal analysis in relationship with the members of the Steering Group;
- Pat Davies, Ruud Duvekot and John Konrad are in charge of the contacts with the countries without leader, of the development of European and national policies regarding validation of non formal and informal learning, and of the preparation of the European validation prize. They contribute to the analysis of data;
- Audrey Frith is in charge of the contacts with third sector using the EUCIS-LLL platform as a resource;
- Michel Blachère is the external evaluator.

Country leaders

A country leader has been identified in the initial proposal in nearly all Member States. We have also included in the initial partnership three representatives from AELE eligible countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) and the Switzerland as associated partner. In five Member States (Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Poland and Slovakia) and in one AELE country (Liechtenstein) it has been impossible to find a partner able to contribute in the project, partly because there is as yet little experience or experimentation with validation of non formal and

informal learning. Consequently, the Steering Group decided to appoint one of its members to follow each of these six countries.

When choosing a country leader, we have tried to respect a balance between sectors:

- 10 are from Higher Education
- 4 are from Vocational Education and Training or central administration of Education and Training
- and 11 are from NGOs or from private companies/organisations.

The mission of a country leader is:

- To set up a national group made of representatives from different educational sectors: higher education, vocational education and training, and adult education (third sector) or professional sector to help him or her to gather relevant data and to guarantee the quality of these data.
- To be the national contact of the Steering Group and the responsible for the production of data concerning their country.
- To gather and prepare the data for the Observatory in relationship with the Steering Group.
- To identify interesting case studies
- To complete and update these data as far as new developments raise in their country
- To make propositions about future developments of validation processes.

We organised a first meeting of the country leaders during two days in Barcelona on 24-25 January 2008, just at the beginning of the project, to explore more in detail the proposal, to share the objectives of the project, to discuss on the work plan and to launch the process. All country leaders were present and contributed to discussions during the meeting in workshops on transversal themes issued from notes. Most of them prepared before the meeting a note presenting the national state of play in their respective countries.

The second meeting of the country leaders is scheduled during the European Forum in November in Sweden.

They have been some changes in the partnership due to withdrawal of several partners for different reasons:

- in Spain, the University of Reus has been replaced by the University of Valladolid. This university is particularly active on validation issues. They tried for years to convince Spanish universities to take an interest in validation issues,
- in Denmark, a National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning has been established. So it seemed normal to the country leader (who will work part time for this Centre) to move the project from the Danish Adult Education Association to this new Centre;
- in the Netherlands, the Hogeschool van Amsterdam has been replaced by the Inholland University, this is linked to the move of the country leader from the first institution to the second;
- In Bulgaria the first country leader withdrew; we appointed a new one who also withdrew. The problem in this country is double, on the one hand there are few developments regarding validation, on the other hand the salary rate prescribed by the EC is too low to encourage good experts to join our partnership. However we continue to address this problem.

National Working Groups (NWG)

The role of the national team is to help the project leader in identifying existing useful documents, good (or bad) practices which could be a basis for case studies, and in contributing to the elaboration of the annual national review of the state of play. The composition and the management of this team are of the responsibility of the project leader who reports to the Steering Group.

The status and composition of the national teams are different from one country to another. It is more or less linked to the level of development of validation of non formal and informal policies in countries and to the degree of availability of data concerning validation.

Until now nineteen national working groups have been set up and have contributed to the validation of the approach or/and the data collection. In six countries we have not yet a national team for different reasons (see above). In Bulgaria we have not yet a partner willing to contribute in the project. Luxemburg is a small country and our partner is a representative of the ministry who is in charge of the validation issues in Luxemburg. In the four remaining countries, our partners are from higher education and meet some difficulties to gather a multi-sectoral group. However, the groups are not fixed; they continue to develop and add members as necessary and possible.

In most of countries, the project has a specific group covering more or less the three sectors. It is particularly interesting to notice that this process offered the opportunity, in nearly all countries, for people coming from different sectors to meet and to work together concretely on the validation issues for the first time. This is a positive first result of the approach that we are promoting and as a basis for further developments. A second result lies in the fact that they are not often "officials", representatives from Administration or ministries; this offers some guarantee about the collection of data coming directly from the ground – bottom-up. But, it also explains the differences in scale, in type of institutions mobilised, in level of responsibility of participants of the National Working Groups.

In other countries, the country leader is supported by an existing "official" group or gathers a group of experts or of representatives from ministries. This is likely to be the case in countries where well established procedures of validation already exist.

In the initial proposal, we envisaged to give to these NWGs an important role. But we have been obliged to revise this for reasons associated with EC administrative regulations . Our country leaders cannot reimburse travel for meetings or the staff costs for contributions of external partners, unless they employ them (which is impossible in certain cases) or establish a subcontract. This restricts the participation and in contribution and explains why sometimes the involvement appears more limited than we envisaged.

External evaluator

The evaluator is a member of the Steering Group with a specific role. He works independently to guarantee the accountability of the process. He receives all documents and is invited to attend all meetings. He establishes direct contacts with country leaders/national teams. He presents his feedback at the end of each meeting of the Steering Group.

His role is to monitor: progress towards achievements of the project's goals, effectiveness and efficiency of implementation, quality of management and co-ordination.

A report of the external evaluator is part of this interim report.

External expertise (Navreme)

We have asked one of our partners, which was specifically appointed for that role in the initial proposal , to make proposals and recommendations on the structure of the Observatory and on its sustainability looking at other examples of such tools at European level. This report was produced by Navreme in November 2008 and discussed by the Steering Group. It is now at the disposal of the team in charge of the creation of the website.

Process

Our approach is to give a relative autonomy to country leaders. The objective is to gather the relevant data for the Observatory. The role of the Steering Group is to guide the country leaders and to verify that the data collected meet our requirements in quantity and quality.

During this first part of the project, we were expecting from our partners the following activities:

- set up a National Working Group covering if possible and if relevant the three sectors;
- produce a short country note presenting the process (or processes) of validation of non formal and informal learning at work in one or several sectors;
- collect 4 categories of "formal" or "official" data: law and regulations, tools and methodologies, statistics, useful websites;
- prepare Case studies;
- prepare a National Review, later regularly updated and completed;
- make an annotated Review of the most interesting reports, articles, books published in their country concerning validation issues.

To help and guide our partners, the Steering Group has devised several tools:

- a grid identifying a list of key issues likely to support the presentation of the process of validation of non formal and informal learning in a country;
- recommendations and a grid for Case studies. We specified that it could be a successful example of good practice but also (why not?) an example of a validation process that went wrong since these can be significant sources of learning. We made possible the proposition of written documents (following more or less the grid), but also of videos, interviews of candidates,…;
- a grid for the National Review;
- recommendations for the preparation of the annotated review of publications.

Initial country notes were presented during the partners' meeting in Barcelona (January 2008) in workshops and have been used to identify transversal issues emerging from the different national situations. This helped the Steering Group to devise the other tools for further investigations. On the basis of the presentations in workshops, a synthesis has been proposed to participants drawing methodological elements that country leaders will have to take into account in their further activities and productions.

From Barcelona up to now, the country leaders:

- have set up a National Working Group, except in the countries mentioned earlier;
- have provided formal documents when relevant and available;
- have produced case studies and national reviews (nearly all countries);
- have sent an annotated review of existing bibliography (in few countries for the moment).

During this period they have been guided by the Methodological expert, who was at their disposal to answer their questions, to help them to fill in grids, to give them feedback on their draft documents. This process has been built at the same time as a helping process in production and as a quality process in content.

The whole approach adopted by the Steering Group was based on a benchlearning approach. This means that our objective was not only to collect and compare data and materials, but also to learn from that. To analyse this production with partners, to debate the information provided, to take into consideration and understand the reasons, the context and period why, where and when these materials are produced, to assess their use in a country and, potentially, on a larger scale.

In parallel the Steering Group worked on the structure of the Observatory:

- a first document identifying documents that we expect to present in the Observatory has been drafted by the project leader and discussed during the second Steering Group meeting on 6 March 2008. A new discussion took place in the third Steering Group meeting on 24-25 November 2008, when we agreed on the final version of the structure of the Observatory to be transmitted to the webmaster that will be later in charge of the preparation of the Observatory. Concerning the structure of the Observatory, light amendments have been accepted during the fourth meeting of the Steering Group.
- Navreme was invited to work on the structure of the Observatory. After several exchanges with the director of Navreme it was agreed that Navreme will work on a feasibility study with perspectives on sustainability. The final document has been presented at the Steering Group meeting on 24-25 November 2009 and accepted by the Steering Group. This now is now used by the team working on the future website.

At the Barcelona meeting, the external evaluator informed partners how he intended to fulfil his role. In parallel, he developed a specific approach to gather information and feedback from partners about the project. The results of this consultation have been very useful for the Steering Group together with the Methodological expert's direct contacts to identify the needs of partners and the problems and difficulties met.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The outcomes and results will be presented by work package.

Work package 1: Management of activities

Steering Group

A Steering Group of 7 European experts on validation of non formal and informal learning issues was set up. This group was at the origin of the project and considered the creation of a European Observatory of concrete activities, experiences and productions in the field of validation as a key element for further implementation and development at European level.

The role of the Steering Group is principally to co-ordinate and manage the whole project, to monitor the overall performance of the project, to monitor progress in provision of data for the Observatory and to ensure quality control of these data, to manage the Observatory and to organise meetings and events..

Until now the Steering Group met four times in Lille during one or two days:

- 16 November 2007
- 6 March 2008
- 24-25 November 2008
- 5 May 2009-05-13

In addition all members of the Steering Group attended the Barcelona meeting with partners on 24-25 January 2008, contributed in presentations, transversal analysis and conclusions and lead workshops.

We follow, a little bit in advance, the planning presented in the proposal work plan.

Initially we planned to meet just before the first meeting with partners, but we decided to meet earlier in order to prepare this meeting and to start this meeting with concrete materials.

Minutes are drafted for each meeting and approved by members.

Meetings of partners

Three meetings of partners were scheduled; only one was planned during the period covered by the interim report. This meeting was organised in Barcelona in January 2008. All country leaders were present.

We received on the basis of the grid proposed by the Steering Group during its first meeting 17 country notes. Some of these notes have been presented in plenary and the others in parallel workshops. These country notes have been discussed in workshops and a transversal analysis presented on the second day morning. This gave them the opportunity to have a more clear vision of the project and of its objectives and to appropriate a common methodology.

This meeting gave the opportunity to the external evaluator to present his vision of the evaluation of projects and to present his methodology and tools.

And finally we took some time to clarify the administrative and financial issues.

Five categories of documents constitute the concrete products of this first period and of this meeting:

- the grid provided by the Steering Group to country leaders to help them to elaborate their country note;
- the country notes and/or presentations;
- the transversal analysis of country notes;
- a list of the vocabulary concerning validation of non formal and informal learning used in the country notes. The question of vocabulary is crucial in this type of project and has not yet been completely solved, even in using a glossary based on the CEDEFOP glossary. English is the working language of the project but all partners are not quite fluent in English. In addition practices and experiments in validation are very different from one country to another, in line with the national educational system, in line with the relationships between education and training and work. Each country has developed its own language linked to its learning culture. And the "national vocabulary" is translated in an "English" which tries to explain a local reality linked to a local culture. Systems have to reach a certain level of maturity and of mastery by actors to be easily translated in a common language based on a shared glossary. This is, from our point of view, an objective that we expect to reach in working on concrete products that experts have to make understandable by all;
- the methodology of the external evaluator.

The next meeting of country leaders is scheduled on 3-4 November 2008 in Jonkoping in Sweden.

Work package 2-4-5: Definition of the structure of the Observatory and Creation of the Observatory website

This work package is divided in three phases: definition of a draft structure, review of this structure after the European Forum in November in Sweden and presentation of the final version during the Dissemination event in November 2010.

Only the first phase is covered by this interim report.

Navreme, a private company providing expertise, consultancy and research, was invited to join the partnership to work on this part of the project. After some exchanges and discussions the Steering Group decided in March 2008 to concentrate the contribution of Navreme on a feasibility study to provide the Steering Group with advice on the structure of the future Observatory taking into account some experiences in Europe and on the sustainability of the tool. Our concern is that the work done during this project, the data collected, the money invested, will not be lost at the end of the project.

This feasibility study was accepted by the Steering Group in November and we decided to take into account a large part of the recommendations for further developments. But we decided to continue on our own in order to set up the website.

A general structure was adopted during the Steering Group of November 2008. The decision was to divide the Observatory in four sections:

- Formal information: official texts organising validation of non-formal learning in each partner country, tools used by institutions practicing validation (standards, dossiers, portfolios, grids for interviews,…), statistics, reports on results,…These documents

will be presented in national language with a brief comment in English explaining content and key points.

- Case studies presenting interesting or innovating initiatives and experimentations, good or even « bad » practices, difficulties met in implementing. These case studies will not be necessarily written documents, but also videos, reports of interviews with members of jurys, of human resources managers, portraits of candidates, etc.
- National Reviews presenting the state of play of the implementation of validation of non-formal and informal learning in the country, of debates and discussions, of the articulation of validation with European initiatives (European Qualification Framework and National Qualification Framework, introduction of credit systems, of learning outcomes as basis of presentation of programmes and recognition of individual pathways, the 2008-2010 Action Plan on adult education, the futures guidelines for the development of validation process in Member States,…). This short note will be written in English.
- An annotated bibliographical review of reports, books, articles, surveys published in a country on validation of non formal and informal learning issues. The objective is to identify each year five to ten documents contributing to significant progresses in reflection and practices and to present a short resume (1 to 2 pages) of the main results in English.

The case studies will be presented with key words identifying the type of institution providing these practices, identifying the target groups, the results,.. In the "National review" section the Steering Group will add a transversal analysis of the work done in the partner countries and will open a Forum of discussion.

EUCEN has been asked to appoint a technician, part time, to work on the future Observatory website. A private version will be available in July for partners in order to receive their feedback, demands for amendments, provision of additional data,… We expect that this "official" presentation to partners and the confrontation of results between countries will encourage those who are late or those who have to revise the data provided to improve the documents published on the Observatory.

 A draft version will be open in October for the people attending the European Forum in November 2009 in Jonkoping. On the basis of the comments, remarks and/or critics this initial version will be revised and updated until the presentation of the final version in Belgium in 2010. We expect to open the Forum for discussions in November.

During the last meeting on 5 May the Steering Group decided to add a fifth section identifying more clearly "tools and methodologies" to make more visible the richness of the processes currently at work in the partner countries. It decided too to clarify and to add some dimensions in the "Documents" section. It was agreed to adopt a wider vision of "official documents": laws and regulations of course, but also elements in laws or guidelines in official documents. We will add in this section glossaries trying to establish a comparison between "national glossaries" and a database of experts identified in partner countries.

Work package 3: collecting and updating data.

This constitutes the main activity of the project.

During the meeting in Barcelona (January 2008), the Steering Group explained to country leaders which data were expected for the Observatory.

Two grids were devised in March 2008:

- The first one to present case studies. We have asked partners to provide at least three case studies, if possible one by sector (higher education, vocational education and training and third or private sector).
- The second to present a review of the national situation regarding validation of non formal and informal learning

Currently we have received **case studies** from 21 countries. We have not yet received the required documents from Belgium, Bulgaria (no country leader for the moment), Portugal and Spain. For each of these countries we have explanations concerning the situation and we have promises concerning a close delivery. A first group of case studies has been analysed by the Methodological expert. This draft analysis was presented during the November 2008 Steering Group meeting. They are available on different formats: paper, video,…We will cover soon all countries, but we are not sure for the moment to cover the three sectors (higher education, vocational education and adult education) in all countries.

We have also received **national reviews** from 18 countries. The countries having not yet provided theses reviews are the ones that have not yet provided the case studies plus The Netherlands, Italy and Ireland.

As it seems difficult for country leaders to elaborate each year a National review, because things are not evolving rapidly, we decided to have a national review regularly updated, taking into account new developments or important changes.

At the last Steering Group meeting in May 2009, the Methodological expert presented a double draft analysis of National Reviews:

- an analysis by country
- and a transversal analysis

This transversal analysis helped the Steering Group to identify key issues that could constitute a starting point for a transversal reading of problems emerging from real practices. We have also identified debates and problems that are common to all countries whatever the level of development of validation practices. These elements will feed the Forum discussions on the website.

We are a little bit late in the production of annotated review. We have already documents coming from 8 countries. But we will meet difficulties to find useful articles, books or reports on validation of non formal and informal learning in some countries due to the low level of implementation of this procedure and to the low interest from searchers or authorities on this issue.

We meet some difficulty to gather what we called "formal documents". 11 partners have send information about this section. Have answered countries where validation is already well implemented. The most frequent documents received are linked to regulatory frameworks: laws, decrees, but also articles in general laws on education or on lifelong learning, but also guidelines. In only one country statistics on validation are available. Some countries propose validation procedures, but there is no formal regulation and practices are fragmented, scattered.

On the basis of our exchanges with partners, we have decided to create a new section in the Observatory on methodologies and tools. A large diversity of instruments (dossiers, portfolios, grids,…) are used in institutions practicing validation. Different strategies are proposed to guide candidates in the preparation of the documents provided to jurys or bodies in charge of assessment. Different approaches are at work concerning assessment. Different categories of staff are involved in validation processes. In some countries new professions

appear, especially in guidance. For the moment we gathered information from few countries but the information collected show that documents available are very rich. The main problem is that these documents are in national languages and partners have not enough money to ensure translation. In the limit of this project it is difficult to do more than to provide to people having access to this section a few words about the content.

We have also decided to give more attention in the "Documents" section to websites opened by states, administrations, institutions dealing with validation issues.

We will also work on a database of experts, building on the list of participants in national working groups.

A leaflet presenting the project and the partners has been devised. 3000 copies have been printed and partly distributed. All partners have received copies for dissemination in their respective countries. We use it in all official events where we have the opportunity to present Observal.

Work package 6: Creation of a Validation Prize

Two members of the Steering Group have worked on this project (Pat Davies and Rudd Duvekot). Pat Davies presented at the last Steering Group meeting, on 5 May, the final proposition for this Prize including the list of criteria, the line-up of the Awarding Jury and the process of awarding. The Steering Group decided to base our first European Validation prize on Case studies presented by national working groups.

The first awarding ceremony is scheduled during the European Forum in November in Jönköping.

Work package 7: Quality and evaluation plan

Concretely the quality and evaluation plan is based on two separated processes.

The first one is placed under the responsibility of the Methodological expert whose role is to verify, on the basis of the grids devised by the Steering Group, the quality and the relevance of the data provided by country leaders. Do these data fit in the requirements of the Observatory? We envisage this process as a continuous and formative process giving space for exchanges, improvement during the three years. We guess that the publication on the website of these data will encourage this process.

The second one is of the responsibility of the external expert. We have seen that this expert has created his own space of exchanges with partners on the basis of a questionnaire. This questionnaire will be soon updated and sent again to country leaders to analysis and assess the results of the processes developed in each country.

Work package 8: European Forum

This activity is planned during the second part of the project. The event will be organised in Jönköping in Sweden, during the Swedish Presidency of the EU, on 3 and 4 November 2008

Work package 9: Final dissemination event

This activity is planned during the second phase of the project. This event is planned in October 2010 in Belgium, during the Belgian Presidency of the EU.

4. Partnerships

The objective of this project is to gather information from the 27 Member States and from AELE countries about concrete activities and practices in validation of non formal and informal learning. So the partnership is a condition of success. Concretely 22 Member States have accepted to join the partnership plus 3 AELE countries. For the six missing countries, members of the Steering Group have been designated as correspondent.

In this project, the partnership has been established at three levels:

The Steering Group

This Group is made of representatives of different European countries having a huge experience in the domain and having complementary competences in different fields related to validation issues.

Between partners

The process was launched in the Barcelona meeting of partners in Januray 2008, but in general, this has not been a priority during the first part of the project because we wanted first to guarantee the collection of data. We have asked to our country leaders to work first in their own country, to concentrate their activities on identification and provision of data for the Observatory. As soon as the website will be accessible for all partners, this will give them a concrete vision of convergences and divergences, of proximities, similarities or possibly huge differences. The Forum for discussion is intended to become a tool for exchanges between partners and between partners and other key actors, especially on transversal issues emerging from local practices. We hope that during the second part of the project it will be possible to involve partners in transversal debates.

At national level with national working groups

To gather data for the Observatory and to guarantee (as required by the project) the coverage of all sectors, country leaders have set up a national working group nearly in all countries. As we said before the status of these groups is different from one country to another one. In some countries a maximum of data are available and officially published, so the need for a national group is not so crucial than in countries where sectors are never meeting, where data are developed locally and not well known at national level. In this case, a national group is helpful. But, we understand from the concrete processes developed in these countries that they have first to accept to meet and to learn to work together. However we register positively the fact that in a maximum of countries where no formal space for this kind of approach exists, actors interested in validation meet and sometimes undertake a work that they wish to continue even the project finish.

Nearly 250 external partners are currently involved in National working groups. Around 1/3 (32%) are coming from the vocational education and training sector or from ministries of Education, a little bit more than 1/3 (35%) are coming from higher education and the others are coming from adult education sector, private sector (companies, professional bodies, private vocational education institutions,…), are representing users and have a transversal mission in the country.

If we add to these external partners, the country leaders and their colleagues, it is more than 300 people who are involved directly or indirectly in this project.

5. Plans for the Future

The next steps of the project will follow the initial work plan.

Collection of data

Priority will be given before summer on the collection of the outstanding data:

- in the countries where we have no country leader (we have re-launched the process after the last Steering Group meeting);
- in the countries having not yet provided these data: Bulgaria (but we have first to find a new country leader, we have some contacts not yet successful), Italy, Portugal and Spain;
- in the countries where we have not yet all the information expected.

These data plus transversal analysis done by the Steering Group will be presented in the European Forum in Jönköping in November 2009.

After this Forum and until July 2010, country leaders will be invited to update their data taking into account the reactions and propositions of participants to contribute in discussions on the website. Steering Group members will continue to review these materials and produce transversal analysis. The Steering Group will explore in particular the impact and the contribution of this Observatory, in its provisional version, at national level and at European level.

Observatory website

We have now come to an agreement about the structure of the website. A provisional website – a version 0 - will be opened by the beginning of July for the Steering Group members and partners. On the basis of their comments, reactions, propositions, this version 0 will be revised during summer to become version 1.

The next draft - version 1 - will be presented to participants in the European Forum in November in Jonkoping to receive their feedback on the structure and the content. This version 1 will be reviewed on the basis of the comments or/and propositions of participants, mainly the representative of potential users.

A definitive version will be presented during the Dissemination meeting in Belgium in 2010. Before that, the Steering Group will work on the sustainability of the Observatory beyond the end of the project. This means to identify potential institutional solutions to keep and develop the Observatory and to explore the way to update regularly the website.

European Forum

On 3-4 November a European Forum will be organised in Jönköping in Sweden during the Swedish presidency of the EU.

We have four main objectives regarding this event:

- to present the results of the two first years of the project and present the Observatory;
- to receive, comments, reactions, critics but also propositions from external participants and potential users and to revise the work plan according to these contributions;

- to discuss on the sustainability of the Observatory and its potential contribution to the implementation of the EU policy concerning validation of non formal and informal learning
- to prepare the Dissemination event in October 2010 in Belgium.

<u>Dissemination event</u>

This event will take place in Belgium in October 2010, during the Belgian presidency.

The objectives of this final Conference are:

- to present the Observatory final version to a large audience;
- to investigate its contribution to policy developments in countries and at European level;
- to receive reactions and comments leading to recommendations for further development of the tool;
- if possible, to provide information about the future of this Observatory;
- to agree upon materials and plan for dissemination

This event will be largely open to representatives of the European Commission, of European networks, of national policy makers, participants in peer learning activities dealing with validation issues, and representatives of educational and training sectors.

6. Contribution to EU policies

Validation of non formal and informal learning has become progressively during the last 10 years a key issue in European policies.

It was at the heart of the Communication of the Commission "Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality" in November 2001) and since then all European documents referring to the Lisbon, Bologna and Copenhagen processes include this general preoccupation, reflecting the increasing political attention given to learning that takes place outside education and training organisations.

The Lisbon agenda has a strong focus on lifelong learning. One of the benchmarks is the participation in lifelong learning, considering the learning that takes place in all kinds of settings, in school rooms as well as at work, in voluntary work and during leisure time. This focus remains crucial in the perspectives drawn by the post-Lisbon draft papers.

The Bologna process focuses more on the recognition of prior learning. But the recent Communiqué in Leuven/Louvain la Neuve of the Ministers responsible for higher education establishing the priorities for the European Higher Education Area for the next decade, stipulates that "successful policies for lifelong learning will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes regardless of whether the knowledge, skills and competences were acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning paths".

In the Copenhagen declaration, the European Ministers of Education and Training stated that there was a need to "develop **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".

Validation of non formal and informal learning is also one of the five key messages of the Commission Adult Learning Action Plan.

This general convergence between action plans led to two important steps regarding validation of non formal and informal learning issue:

- the adoption of "Common principles" in 2004
- and now the publication of "European Guidelines for validation of non formal and informal learning" as a practical tool providing expert advice.

In parallel, to feed the reflection of European working groups, stakeholders, decision makers and experts active in this field, several inventories has been published several inventories consisting of national reports on the "state of art" in every European country covering Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education and third sector and of an overview of findings.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has probably been one of the most debated issues of education and training policies at European level.

It is impossible to mention all projects, conferences, initiatives and publications developed during recent years. EUCEN, but also Pat Davies, Ruud Duvekot, Michel Feutrie, John Konrad, Mireille Pouget have been important contributors in the debates at European level during this period. Michel Blachere played a major role in France to set up the 2002 law on validation of experience. Their observations and activities convinced them that the

Inventories were not taking stock enough of the richness and the diversity of practices, methods and tools developed in European countries, of the quality on intellectual production revealed by articles, books and reports. This was the origin of the Observal project.

We (and others), as experts, are coming to a more or less common agreement at European level on a general vision of the validation of non formal and informal learning approach. This is definitively reflected by the chart presented at different occasions in European conferences or meetings and published in the European guidelines draft document drawing the "routes from learning to certification". However, it is clear too that regulations and policies at work, and concrete practices show a less unanimous and a much more divergent reality. The successive inventories reveal progress in the perspectives of decision makers and new developments in regulations, but at the same time deep divergences in the conception of validation issues, fragmented approaches and scattered practices are apparent although not fully elaborated.

However, as actors working for years on these issues at local, national and European levels, we have the chance and the opportunity to meet people involved in very interesting and powerful practices, reflections or research, which are not known even at local or national level. Our contribution through the Observatory will be:

- To enrich of the reflection of decision makers at European level about the concrete contribution of validation processes in the implementation of the European policies through the Lisbon process together with the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. For instance, one of the five objectives of the Adult Education Action Plan is to speed up the process of assessing and recognising non formal and informal learning outcomes, in particular for disadvantages groups and its 2009 objective is to make an inventory of good practices and calls for a databank of good practices at European level.
- To inform these decision makers about difficulties, resistances, misunderstandings, which could limit the developments of policies carried on by European processes in the field of Education and Training.
- To help them to adjust their implementation processes and make if necessary the relevant corrections or impulsions.
- To provide to decision makers at institutional or national level evidences about the decisive contribution of validation of non formal and informal learning to the implementation and development of lifelong learning policies.
- To contribute to the implementation of the European guidelines. The Observatory is putting "flesh on the bones" proposed by the Guidelines. It has to be seen as a complementary tool linking principles and reality. The Guidelines will help us to map the practices registered in the Observatory.
- To provide decision makers at institutional or national level with a tool for benchlearning. Comparison may be a powerful tool when you need to understand which policies to define, which strategic processes to develop, or which technical approaches to implement. This may also reassure actors when they have to make choices and to take decisions.
- To contribute to a dialogue between sectors. This is claimed in all European documents or initiatives, particularly between VET and Higher Education. But we think that this dialogue must include the third sector, and the problem is that in some countries what is done by the third sector is not considered as serious or useful for the other sectors. To consider in the Observatory all practices at the same level of esteem is a challenge that could help to enhance a truly lifelong and a lifewide vision of learning, facilitating continuity and progression for individuals helping them to face rapid changes in their environment.

- To provide to actors involved in concrete practices opportunities to have access to a community of actors, to reassure themselves on their own practices, to encourage exchange and common work. This could be a way to develop later new European projects on specific issues, domains or tools.
- To provide tools for training existing and newly appointed staff in validation.