



Table of Contents

1.	ACT-NET Valorisation Strategy	2
2.	Products.....	3
2.1	LEVEL5 Approach - Evaluation Procedure	4
2.2	The LEVEL5-Cube.....	6
3	Valorisation	7
3.1	Introduction	7
3.2	Validation of Informal Learning Projects	9
3.3	Valorisation of ACT-NET, LEVEL5 and its products	10
3.4	Counselling	12
3.5	ACT-NET/LEVEL5 Training	13
4	Follow-Up Projects.....	16
4.1	VIP	16
4.2	VILMA	16
4.3	Cross-Sectoral Projects	17
5	REVEAL Network.....	17
5.1	Introduction	17
5.2	Rationale.....	17
5.3	Vision	18
5.4	Mission.....	19
6.	Services offered by REVEAL	19
6.1	Description	19
6.2	Value Proposition.....	20
6.3	Financial Planning.....	22

1. ACT-NET Valorisation Strategy

Valorisation is a relatively new strategy to disseminate the results of projects¹. It is aiming at transferring, disseminating and exploiting project deliverables and outputs in order to optimise their value and enhance their impact.

Output Levels in ACT-NET

The ACT outputs can be clustered in

- Project deliverables from the stock-taking
- Central ACT-NET products that form the “kernel” of the project outputs and
- Envisaged valorisation outputs (exploited and disseminated project outputs).

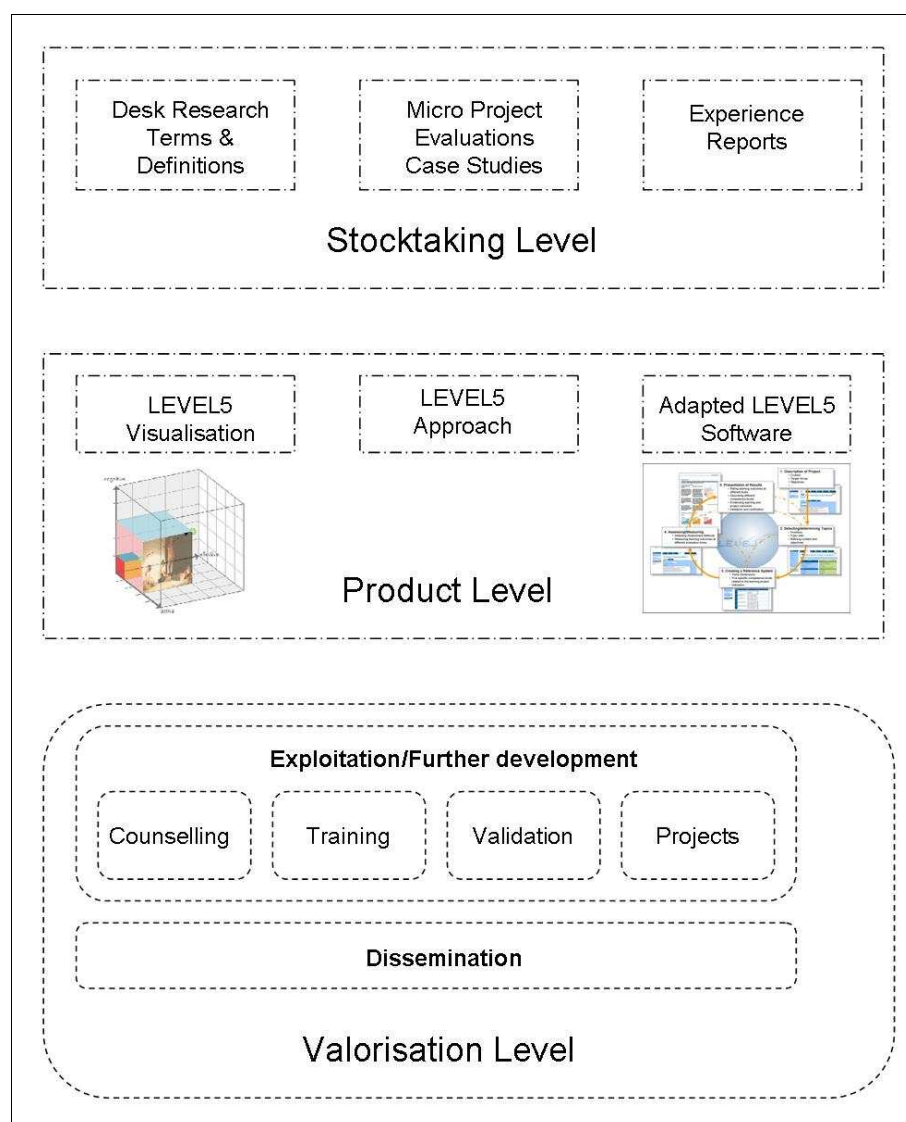


Figure 1: Output levels in ACT-NET

1 Originally a French term, the concept of valorisation is now widely accepted by the European vocational training community. “Valorisation” can be described as the process of disseminating and exploiting projects outcomes with a view to optimising their value, enhancing their impact and integrating them into training systems and practices at local/national as well as on European level.
(http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/leonardo/new/valorisation/doc/planval_en.pdf).

The comprehensive ACT-NET Evaluation System to assess and evidence citizenship competencies is the *kernel* of the ACT-NET -project (the core product).

It consists of three elements:

- A standardised evaluation procedure with description and pre-formatted instruments,
- A visual model (LEVEL5 cube),
- A perfected evaluation software to evidence evaluation results and document the micro-project and the procedure (LEVEL5 Approach).

There were three *scientific/research-practice project actions* that contributed to the development of the ACT system:

- Definition models on AC and informal learning delivering the theoretical background to the ACT approach.
- 23 finalised micro-project evaluations on paper and in the software.
- 11 experience reports consisting of a quantitative and qualitative survey.

The core project outputs, the case studies and the deliverables have been described and interpreted in the scientific report and in the manual.

Valorisation is a rather strategic concept to achieve a high impact of projects.

In ACT-NET valorisation bundles the activities of:

- Exploitation of the ACT-NET products:
 - Counselling,
 - Training,
 - Validation and
 - Development of and participation in new practice-science projects basing on the LEVEL5 approach, as well as
- Dissemination of products and procedures.

Before turning to the valorisation activities carried out in the framework of ACT-NET and the related projects, the main products shall be described from a user-oriented valorisation view.

2. Products

The central element of ACT-NET is the approach to evidence impact of informal learning activities. Thus, the valorisation (exploitation) is focused on this central outcome. The value proposition for potential customers but also for ACT-NET partners as suppliers is intrinsically tied to this key product.

The valorisation of the ACT-NET procedure has been a challenge as it related to an abstract and rather complex matter. In contrast to concrete products, the illustration of the value of a procedure either needs a lot of descriptions and argumentations or an elaborated visualisation concept to reduce complexity. This is why the project team illustrated the main outputs with the help of symbols, charts and visual metaphors right from the beginning.

In the framework of the valorisation two new brands have been developed to mainstream the approach and to set up an organisational basis (umbrella organisation) for the present and future partners taking part in the community.

In 2010 the ACT-NET partnership decided to call the approach and the software “LEVEL5”. The group of evaluators and experts that evaluate and validate along the LEVEL5 procedure and instruments will be called REVEAL (Abbreviation for Research and Evaluation Group for Validating, Evidencing and Assessing Informal and Non-Formal Learning).

2.1 LEVEL5 Approach - Evaluation Procedure

The attractiveness for clients (and the functionality of the system) is determined by the procedure and the inter-linkage of instruments enabling the users to evidence the impact of their work while, at the same time, keeping up their individuality.

Consequently, the evaluation procedure had to be transferred into a concrete product.

Three concrete outputs converted the abstract evaluation process into understandable products building the basis for further evaluation:

- Procedural description
- LEVEL5 cube
- Concept of visualising learning with hand, head and heart.

Procedural Description

To transform the approach in a product the developed processes in ACT-NET had to be described in a standardised way. Approach and sequencing had to be repeatable and the proposed instruments practicable.

For the product development the process had to be described in a kind of operating manual (Deliverable No. xxx).

The whole process, the LEVEL5 procedure, formerly called the IAS-impact assessment system, is displayed in the following flow-chart²:

² For this purpose ACT used process management charts that are also used to display the processes and workflows in quality management. A flowchart is a schematic representation of an algorithm or a process.

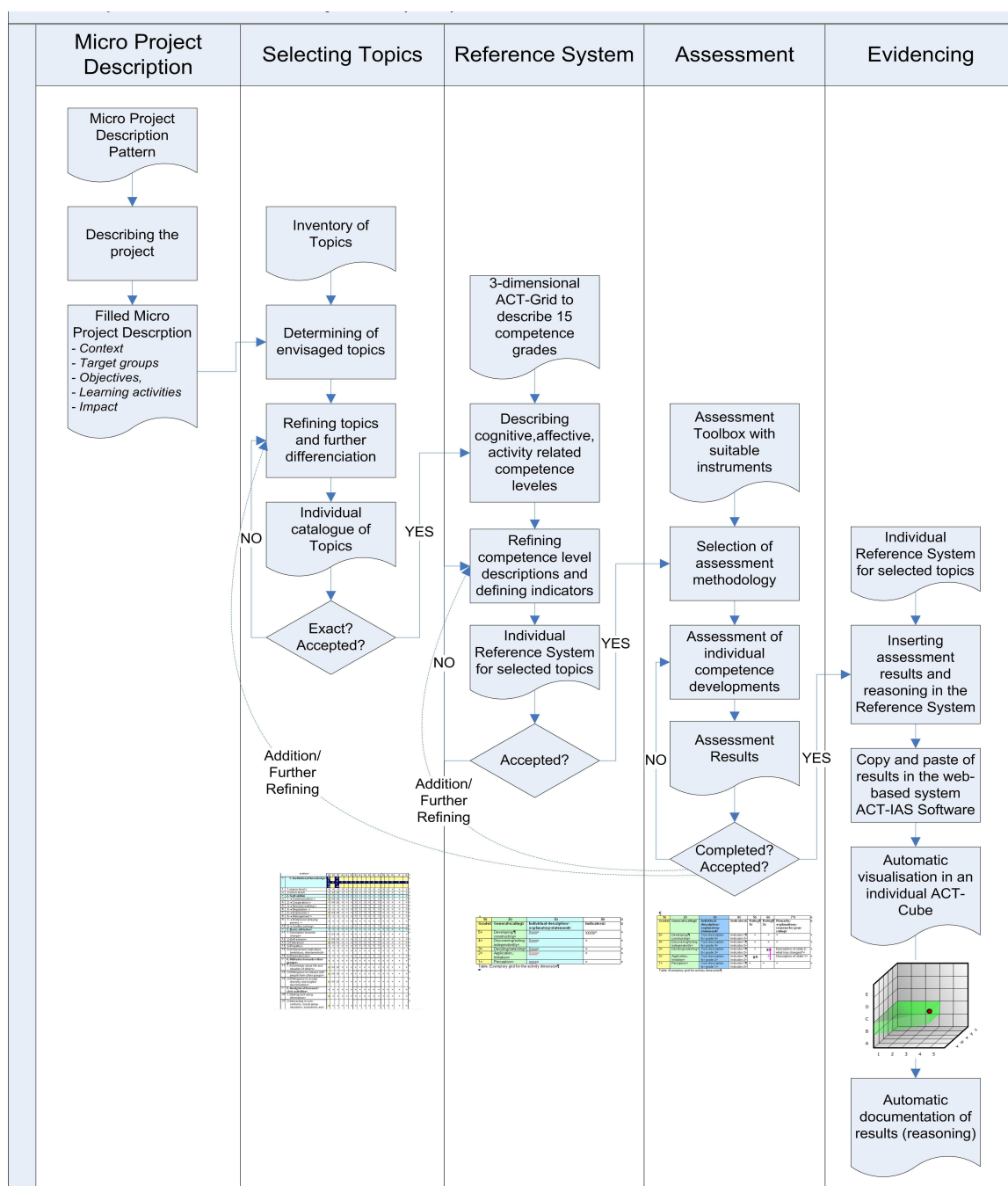


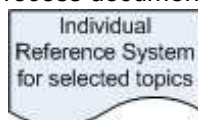
Figure 2: Process flow chart of ACT-NET ("LEVEL5") evaluation procedure

The following elements are depicted by three different symbols:

Procedural steps:



Process documents:



Decision rhomb



The whole process was divided in five segments ranging from "project description" to "evidencing".³

³ Further down the approach will be displayed again, but in a more cyclic chart.

2.2 The LEVEL5-Cube

The cube is the logical visual model for displaying three dimensions. As cited above, cognitive, psychomotor and attitude dimensions formed the basis for various descriptive systems⁴.

The innovative element of ACT-NET in terms of visualisation is to combine the three dimensions in relation to one topic, and to allocate the individual in the spatial model.

By visualisation the competence development the effect of learning becomes obvious:

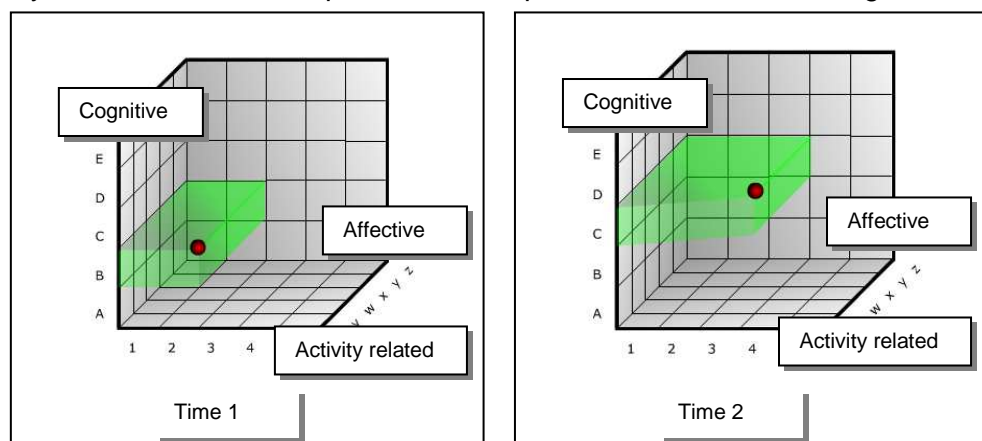


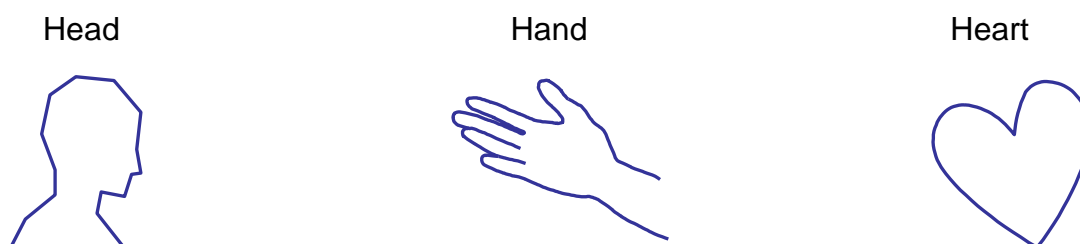
Figure 3: Cube model: 2 competence levels⁵

The ACT-Procedure and Cube model were combined in the evaluation software.

Concept of Visualising Learning with Hand, Head and Heart

As stated above the major problem of transferring the procedural facts and features into practice is the reduction of their complexity. Therefore, the rather abstract issue of interlinking cognitive, activity related and affective competencies has been transferred in symbols and thus “downgraded” to a simpler level. This way the basic principle should be made understandable and the “clients” should become curios and attracted.

Following the principle of didactic reduction the abstract (“competence”) and scientific terms (“cognitive”, “affective”) as well as the models are substituted by three symbols:



The cube and the whole web-themes was professionally developed and designed in order to achieve a corporate design and a corporate identity. This was done for the purpose of identification of existing and potential members with project and network and to give LEVEL5 a distinctive character, and to support the building of the REVEAL community.

⁴ European Commission, IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/basicframe.pdf>.

⁵ Screenshots from an animated flash model that was produced after completing the 3-dimension approach.

3 Valorisation

3.1 Introduction

Valorisation of project results is of major importance for the European Commission – there even is a special valorisation department in the DG Education and Culture⁶.

From the beginning of the project, the ACT-NET valorisation has been connected with a transnational valorisation structure, the blended learning institutions' cooperative (blinc), based in Göttingen.

The overall objective of valorisation is to extend the relevance of the project outcomes substantially beyond the project's lifetime. To achieve this goal, a profound knowledge about the requirements, motivations and expectations of potential target groups is required in general. It is widely acknowledged and highly recommended by the European Commission to integrate those target groups that are already involved in the project activities (European Commission, 2007).

This was done in ACT-NET already during the preliminary meeting when involving additional partners and projects (e.g. the project INTERTOOL or the IdA-Initiative in Germany) and systematically in the further project development by integrating grass-root projects in development, pre-test and feedback⁷.

This interlinkage of Action Theory and valorisation principles is turning out to be very fruitful because new findings and impulses from target groups could easily be integrated and thus lead to better (adapted) outputs. The cube model, which is one of the central outputs and a focal point in regard to the valorisation was constantly further developed together with stakeholders from the field and system design experts from university partners. Consequently the valorisation activities (such as guidelines, trainings and presentations and other dissemination activities) could be adapted and modified to their needs.

A special work group elaborated on a valorisation strategy for ACT-NET to ensure an effective dissemination and exploitation of results as recommended by the European Commission⁸.

It consists of four key elements, which will be described in the following:

1. *Designing* tailor-made products and for target groups
2. Elaborating a *value proposition* for these products
3. Transferring projects in practice ("*exploitation*")
4. User centred dissemination.

Concerning the *Design of products* it should again be emphasised that due to the consequent application of valorisation principles, namely integration of end users, ACT-NET has been creating products with a high impact for a large audience and at the same time adjust them to specific needs of grass-root projects (transferability vs. individuality). This has

⁶ European Commission, DG Education and Culture, Directorate Communication and culture, Unit C3.

⁷ The European Commission calls this "full 'customer' care: Effective dissemination and exploitation requires results to meet the needs of the end users identified at the start of the project and as it progressed. Plans should, therefore, outline how these target groups could become involved in project activities. That means constantly monitoring dissemination and exploitation activities and reviewing user needs. This includes possibly planning and devising pilot actions to involve them and test out products on them. This is an informative and structured way for any project to receive feedback about its activities." (DG Education and Culture, 2008)

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/valorisation/index_en.html.

a positive impact on the usability for grass-root organisations and exploitation potential for the suppliers.

*Value Proposition*⁹ should not be mixed with the term “commercialisation”. The value of a product is not only expressed in terms of money, generated by selling or service rendering. Commercialisation is sometimes even not desired – a product can be given for free or at a very low price and nevertheless achieve a very high valorisation impact because of the high transfer potential.

The value of a product should be determined first – commercialisation and exploitation can follow. Products should be transferred into a value related system as it is determined by the context (what is useful for whom?) and by the impact (benefit) for the users (customers/beneficiaries). Thus, an *added value* brings in an additional advantage in the client’s system.

A transnational sub-team has been working on the establishment of the value proposition. Specific target groups were identified (3rd sector organisations) and experiences were gathered while convincing the stakeholders of the micro projects.

Exploitation: the value of the ACT-NET approach in general and specifically the LEVEL5 approach and software has being determined by its systemic accuracy to fit in the context of the users. It has to provide an additional value for the specific users such as 3rd sector organisations and their beneficiaries¹⁰.

The basic idea is to provide an evaluation system that is easy to use and measures and proves the impact of the learning activity (micro-project). By means of the system the organisations that “deliver informal learning” may justify the outputs and quality of their work via the visualisation and documentation of the competence development of their beneficiaries.

Nowadays in most of the cases the quality of social services providers and 3rd sector organisations (including education providers) is assessed and documented in Quality Management Systems. Central recurring element of these QM-systems is a circular improvement principle based on the so-called “Deming circle” (Deming, 1986).

The four circular stages “Plan-Check-Do-Act” are reminiscent of Lewin’s “Look-Plan-Act” circle that he introduced in Action Research.

This circular element was consciously introduced in the LEVEL5 procedure – not only because it was necessary in many of the cases to fine-tune and modify some of the settings in earlier steps in the evaluation procedure¹¹ but especially because the circular element leads to a constant improvement of the process and the outputs, a principle which is also a key element in most procedural QM systems (e.g. in Sallis, 2002).

But in contrast to other quality assessment and management systems the LEVEL5 approach consequently follows a bottom up approach by assigning the central evaluation and assessment role to the experts from the field.

In this context the *validation of the informal learning activities* plays an important role in the valorisation of ACT-NET and LEVEL5.

⁹ A business or marketing statement that summarises why a consumer should buy a product or use a service. This statement should convince a potential consumer that one particular product or service will add more value or better solve a problem than other similar offerings.
<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/v/valueproposition.asp>

¹⁰ Again it shall be highlighted that ACT-NET is not only referring to disadvantaged target groups but also aims at all other, more or less informal learning groups and contexts

¹¹ For instance the level descriptions in the reference system have to be fine tuned in the process of assessment or the project description had to be specified as the experts realised during the evaluation that additional information added clarity.

The users (“clients”) in most of cases need (initial) coaching and guidance at least when applying the methodology for the first time. This is why following valorisation sub-chapters deal with the introduction of *counselling* and *training* activities.

Lastly, the further development and the application of the LEVEL5 approach have been subject to *new projects* and project proposals that were launched outside of the REVEAL community.

3.2 Validation of Informal Learning Projects

The topic “validation of informal learning” has become increasingly important in recent years. The Council of Europe (14 June 2002) adopted a work programme and the European Commission published funded calls for the development of ways to validate the respective learning experiences¹².

However, a comprehensive evaluation and validation approach for informal learning was not available by the end of 2008.

In informal learning a standardisation in regard to contents (*topics*), learning objectives and envisaged outcomes (*competences*) is nearly impossible due to the uncountable life situations and needs of the beneficiaries.

This is why most of the countries rather concentrate on validation of non-formal learning competences that can be put in relation to a kind of standardised learning outcome.

The most comprehensive compilation concerning validation of informal learning in Europe is certainly the ECOTEC inventory. In its 2007 revision 30 European countries were analysed concerning their efforts to implement validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The in-depth analysis of the country studies clearly shows that also in those countries that are advanced in relation to validating *non-formal* learning, validation of *informal* learning is not very common. In France for instance the authors claim a “culture shift” to allow greater value to be attached to vocational skills and to bring the formal education system and informal/non-formal learning closer together. This clearly indicates a rather utilitarian approach of learning in connection with vocational training.

In many cases, the issue is described as “Recognition of Prior Learning” (RPL). It is reported that in Denmark for instance, RPL is no new phenomenon. Especially in initial vocational education and training (VET), adult education programmes and tertiary education it is quite frequent. Nevertheless, here the authors state that more needs to be done to recognise competencies achieved at work and from taking part in liberal adult education as well.

Excuse: Informal Learning Validation in the 3rd Sector

The ECOTEC country studies from 2007 reveal that there is a great variety in the level of interest and activity in validation across the third sector. In some countries (e.g. Estonia, Hungary, Latvia) only very few (if any) examples of *third sector initiatives* were identified, whereas in others (e.g. Germany, Finland, the Netherlands) the third sector was found to be very active, either in delivering their own validation initiatives, or working in partnership with public and/or private actors.

A quotation from the Norway report (which is far ahead in terms of validation of *informal* learning competencies) brings us back to some of the basic questions concerning the evidencing Active Citizenship: Who and what shall be evaluated and which competences?

“In the third sector (in Norway) too, organisations have worked together to develop validation tools, to enable individuals to recognise the skills and competences they have attained through voluntary work or other third sector activities.” (ECOTEC 2007) This is of course a very positive development but only the social workers are being validated whereas the (final) beneficiaries who were taking part in the social programmes were not subject to the evaluation and thus did not profit from the validation.

¹² E.g. in the 2009 Lifelong Learning Programme Call.

The 3rd sector study concludes that “there is a strong need for procedural and methodological approaches and frameworks in the field of validation.”

ACT-NET and the LEVEL5 approach and software were designed and refined to contribute to this necessary development process. It delivered a perfected procedure (which still has to be fine-tuned with regard to quality criteria) and a complete web-based documentation and evidencing system.

It has been innovative as, in contrast to the approaches mentioned above, the ACT-NET evaluation approach specifically targeted the “learner oriented validation”.

The authors of the ECOTEC 3rd sector compendium state that “...declarative and competence portfolio methods are prevalent in the 3rd Sector and it remains to be seen if more complex methods are devised and the extent to which these are linked to formal standards and frameworks.”

With regard to “citizenship competencies” the ACT-NET approach is heading in the opposite direction. The dissertation on hand showed that formal standards and frameworks are not appropriate means to measure and evidence the effects of informal learning on civic competence development.

In this respect, the ACT-NET project has been treading new trails because it is explicitly aimed at validating skills and competencies of the beneficiaries of third sector informal learning offers.

Validation means that a product or a service satisfies the needs of the stakeholders. It “confirms that something ...(e.g. ... a service (the author)) consistently fulfils the requirements for a specific use”¹³.

A basic consideration behind the ACT-NET (LEVEL5) approach is that the experts in the field know best the situation and the demands of their beneficiaries. Here, based on action research principles and in contrast to other, rather externally driven evaluation approaches¹⁴, experts from the field define the goals, context, priorities and the reference systems of the evaluation.

Consequently, a validation in the framework of ACT-NET should show (and document) that the learning activity or the learning success fulfils the requirements of *both learner and informal learning provider* (e.g. an NGO or another 3rd sector organisation)¹⁵.

Thus the evaluation approach is not aimed at proving standardised *contents* but is an open standardised *procedure*.

Therefore the last step of this procedure concerns the *validation* of the informal learning activity or the learning project as well as of the competence development of the beneficiaries¹⁶.

3.3 Valorisation of ACT-NET, LEVEL5 and its products

In view of its valorisation the evaluation system shall be comprehensively presented with its *objectives, processes, requirements* and *deliverables* in the following short description:

Objectives:

¹³ <http://www.answers.com/topic/validation>

¹⁴ In which standards are posed on 3rd sector organisations in a top-down way.

¹⁵ Ideally their objectives also correspond to the objectives of funding organisations (such as public bodies or donors) but these fundamental issues already have to be tackled in the project description.

¹⁶ Independent of their context, background and abilities.

Evaluation in ACT-NET is aiming at delivering a feasible instrument for grass-root projects to:

- Analyse, safeguard and improve their internal working processes
- Evidence the impact of the their work
- Compare their approaches with other organisations.

If applied in accordance with the developed instruments and guidelines, one can assume that the ACT evaluation approach leads to a good quality in the sense of good practice¹⁷.

Processes:

The central procedures in ACT-NET have been described above in detail in a sequential way by using flow charts stemming from QM procedural descriptions.

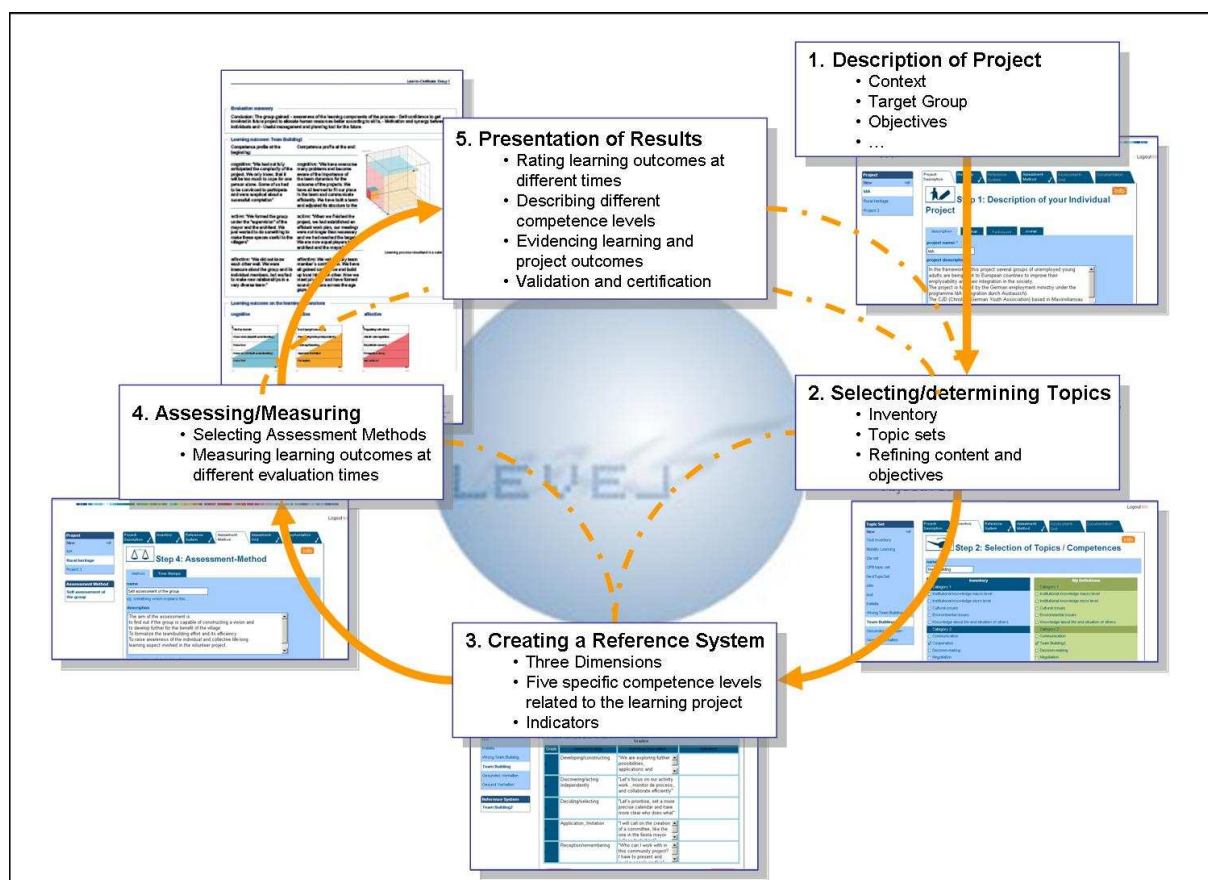


Figure 4: Cyclic LEVEL5 evaluation procedure

The procedure is clustered in the 5 central components:

- Project description
- Selecting topics from the inventory
- Building a reference system (competence level descriptions)
- Assessment (measuring)
- Evidencing (rating and documenting).

Each of the components is subject to a validation of good quality as all the steps and the prepared instruments are compulsory elements of the evaluation process.

Therefore in a final validation step (6)

¹⁷ European Commission DG EAC glossary: A good practice is an exemplary project (including results or processes) which has positively influenced systems and practices throughout its activities and results. Consequently, good practices are worth transferring and exploiting in different contexts and environments by new users or entities.

- informal learning projects can be validated against the objectives stated in the project description and
- learners' competence development can be validated against the competence levels established by the experts.

Requirements:

To validate a project the evaluation procedure must comply with the requirements of the ACT-NET approach (traceability criterion). Most of the requirements have to be met by each micro-project because of fixed procedures and applied instruments (inventory, reference and evidencing system, descriptive patterns). The elaboration of this approach already leads to an increase of awareness of central processes and can be regarded as an important step to ensure system quality. As the system is based on the idea to measure a process of competence development, also the "improvement" criterion¹⁸ is de facto fulfilled because it contributes to an adaptation (improvement) of the learning process.

Deliverables/Outputs:

At the end of the ACT-NET project 20 micro-projects were evaluated with the LEVEL5 method. As this procedure is an auto-evaluation, the validation also has to reflect its self-centred, subjective character. The procedure can thus be compared with the self-evaluation approach by the quality management approach of EFQM¹⁹.

In this approach the procedural quality of the micro-project²⁰ can already be documented. A label for good quality has been given to those projects that used or will be using the LEVEL5 system for evaluation and planning purposes.

The REVEAL network has also been implementing an external validation approach that is carried out by accredited evaluators. This validation has to be seen in connection with the consulting and training approaches of REVEAL.

3.4 Counselling

Bringing together all the components of the approach, the instruments and the software the ACT-NET partners realised during the development processes that the developed evaluation system has an additional impact on the practical level.

Evaluation is not a specific value per se, and many experts in the field are even reluctant towards any kind of evaluation because it is often associated with control and creates an uncertainty, since it could limit the freedom of the grass-root projects²¹. This also reflects a statement by Smith (2006): "Many informal educators such as youth workers and social pedagogues are suspicious of evaluation because they see it as something that is imposed from outside."

To avoid these negative effects and attitudes, the additional value for informal educators as potential customers had to be shaped out.

¹⁸ QM principle of constant improvement also displayed in the plan-do-check-act circle (PDCA, Deming circle). Most important requirement for QM in social organisations using ACT IAS is the ability of the staff to learn and to improve. To create this internal learning process the evaluation should not be entirely carried out by external personnel (e.g. consultants).

¹⁹ European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM).

²⁰ In contrast to QM systems ACT-NET is only heading to evidence the quality of the micro-project and not the properties of the educational institution.

²¹ Reflected by experiences e.g. of Dutch and German partners when convincing local grass-root projects. According to long-term professional experiences in professional training projects the author concludes that especially the social sector (nurses, health care professionals) severely suffer from quality assessments that do not reflect their professional practice.

Most of the 3rd sector grass-root organisations are dependent on public funding²². As resources are limited and the demand of funding exceeds the supply by dimensions the funding authorities from all levels²³ ask for quality evidencing to justify the co-financing with public funds.

Most of the quality assessment systems mainly measure the management quality (even if process-orientated) but not the performance quality related to the services offered by the organisations²⁴.

The effects of these services can be, in the majority of the cases, documented by the competence development of the final beneficiaries, the citizens. In so far the measurement of the impact of informal learning on Active Citizenship is gaining a very valuable impact for the organisations in the field as well.

Since these stakeholders had to be convinced to take part in the project a special workgroup with Romanian, Swedish and German partners developed a brochure for grass-root projects.

In the brochure the issue was described from the perspective of the responsible persons from NGOs, and the self-evaluation or consulting processes are presented in a less scientific way.

On the basis of the experience reports, a consulting strategy has been developed that takes the demands of support by the responsible project stakeholders into account.

The consulting offer has been developed in role plays among the partners and pre-tested in connection with the grass-root projects on the local level.

Consulting offers should be focused on each of the main procedural steps:

1. Selection of competences and refining
2. Building reference system
3. Assessment
4. Evidencing.

It is expected that the organisations from the field will need initial coaching when first carrying out an evaluation. Depending on the pre-knowledge and experiences, project personnel might need a coach at every single step of the procedure. This demand will surely decrease when evaluating the second project.

Consulting should be offered in a modular way, since support is needed in relation to the project setting and the context.

As the objectives and learning steps of consulting are similar to those of the training they will be described in the following chapter.

3.5 ACT-NET/LEVEL5 Training

In the framework of ACT-NET, specific course modules have been developed by a workgroup consisting of partners from RO, SE, NL, DE and PL. The learning modules were delivered in the framework of the conference Gothenburg in November 2009. Additional and

²² This refers to most of the voluntary (philanthropic or self-help) organisations but also to professional and confessional organisations. They may receive public funding or be supported by private donors. The micro-projects evaluated in ACT-NET have been examples of those 3rd sector organisations.

²³ E.g.: funding adult training institutes, welfare organisations like social care organisations, neighbourhood organisations, kindergartens, rehabilitation centres, homes for the aged etc. Public administrations, churches, foundations, national, regional or European programmes as well as other donors support the activities of those organisations.

²⁴ In contrary, it should rather be asked what is the effect of the offer on the final beneficiaries - be it the survivor of domestic violence, an elderly person in a community home service, the youngster in a self organised camp, the participant of an excursion to a modern arts exhibition or the self organised music group in a local community.

new modules based on other new micro-projects were presented in the future “active conferences in Belgium and Germany in 2010.

The modules are aiming at enabling European stakeholders (educationalists and personnel from grass-root organisations) to apply the LEVEL5 evaluation methodology on the basis of a profound introduction in practical evaluation.

Each module is passing through the whole evaluation procedure but put its focus on a different evaluation step:

	Project SE Uplifting long term unemployed (reading and writing difficulties)	Project RO Empowering victims of domestic violence	Project GER Environment and youngsters	Project NL Active Citizens in a neighbourhood project (“Can Do”)
Focus:	Inventory	Ref. system evidencing	Assessment	Evidencing
	Presentation, Films, Developing topics in a debate	Presentation, Films, Developing reference system and ratings in collaborative learning	Role Play with different assessment methodologies	Telling a story with key observations; participants rate the learner according to the presented evidence system

Table 1: Focus of exemplary micro learning projects

This way the micro-projects become demonstration projects in the framework of the training thus valorising their experience in a large European practice.

Each learning unit (or procedural step) is being introduced by a theoretical input about the evaluation step and the applied methodology. The micro-projects serve to deepen the knowledge and transfer it in a practical example.

The following table describes one of the fine tuning of one of the modules with a simplified planning grid focusing on assessment methodology.

Project DE: Environmental Management in a Youth Group:

	Topic/Contents	Objectives	Methodology/Activities	Material
0	Introduction:	Understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target group Learning process Learning objectives etc. 	<i>Presentation and discussion</i>	PPT/photos
1	Inventory			
	Selection of topics/competencies	Understanding the idea of the inventory and what were the core topics of the project	<i>Presentation and short discussion</i>	ppt
	Refined topics/competencies			
2	Creating an individual reference system			
	3 dimensions per topic/competence	Deeper understanding of what kind of impact the environmental issue has for the learners.	<i>Discussion with opening questions: -> what do they have to know, what can</i>	

	Topic/Contents	Objectives	Methodology/Activities	Material
		-> This topic has 3 dimensions	they do and how could they feel concerning environment?	
	The scales and the grades per dimension	Understanding the 5 scales (stages) on each of the axis (dimensions) Understanding how the scales can be contextualised (What does each stage mean in the very context?)	<i>Discussion:</i> How can different grades be displayed? (Minimum-Maximum) <i>Presentation</i> of a filled pattern	Description on paper (pattern)
	The cube model		<i>Presentation</i> of the flash model	Flash model
3	Assessment methodology			
	Selection of assessment methodology (Why)	Practical insight in assessment	Introduction role play with different assessment methodologies	
	Assessment in the project			
4	Evidencing the success of informal learning			
	Evidencing on paper (table)	Understanding how growing competencies can be documented in the pattern	Interview with projects executives, presentation of an exemplary environmental pattern (1 person)	Evidencing pattern
	Changes in stages ("growing competencies")			
	Visualising changing competencies ("cube") and the related descriptions in the software	Having an impression how the topic "environment" and the related competences can be displayed and evidenced	Presentation in the software	
	Synopsis/reprise		Discussion	

Table 2: Exemplary micro learning-project with focus on assessment

Complete ACT-NET Training Course in Blended Learning Methodology

At a later stage the learning units will be combined to a perfected course and delivered to a European Audience²⁵.

The course is planned to be developed in blended learning methodology with a 16 hours preliminary phase (approximately two months) in eLearning modality before the 5 days face to face (f2f) phase and a 16 hours follow-up phase.

The theoretical background will be delivered in the preliminary phase in asynchronous and synchronous web-based learning (LMS, blogs and ePortfolios and online conference rooms). The activity related competencies (=> applying the evaluation methodology) will be conveyed in the f2f-section. The follow-up phase will offer opportunities to accompany the projects of the participants and exchange experiences via online conferencing.

²⁵ To be thoroughly developed in the framework of a Grundtvig project (VIP) for a perfected European Grundtvig 3 training course.

	Preliminary	F2f	Follow-up
Functions	Opening Getting to know each other	ACT-Evaluation steps	Transferring of knowledge in skills in own context
Contents	Participant profiles Project descriptions Evaluation theory	Micro-projects 4 Evaluation modules	Application in own projects
Method	eLearning	Frontal, role plays, simulations, observations, group work, etc.	eLearning learning by teaching
Materials/media	ePortfolio online rooms blogs LMS	PPT, films, evaluation materials and instruments (grids/patterns), IAS system	instruments (grids/patterns), IAS system
Duration (hrs)	16	40	16

Table 3: Envisaged training plan for an ACT-NET blended learning course

The training course is an important valorisation element.

Parallel to competence development for European stakeholders it is aiming at a series of side effects:

- Validation of various micro-projects and creation of comprehensive case studies²⁶
- Enlarging the ACT-NET network
- Income generating opportunities for ACT-NET partners
- Learning from new experiences to be fed in data pool and web-portal
- Fine tuning and further development of the evaluation approach and software development.

The ACT course will be planned in detail and delivered on the European level in the framework of the follow-up project "VIP".

4 Follow-Up Projects

By the beginning of 2009 the approach has been exploited in a series of new practice-research projects.

4.1 VIP

Validation of Informal Learning in Grundtvig Projects and Partnerships

The project responded to the 2009 call for Grundtvig multilateral projects, fitting in priority 4 of the call: "validation and certification".

The project will be aiming at evaluating and validating informal learning of transnational project partners participating in Grundtvig multilateral projects.

In the framework of the project well-proven evaluation approaches will be applied to assess and evidence informal learning in the collaborative learning context of European adult education projects.

Like in ACT-NET, the validation activities in VIP will be further developed.

4.2 VILMA

Validation of Informal Learning in Mobility Actions

The project refers to the growing demand of evaluating European mobility actions. Like for the youth sector also in adult education mobility actions are becoming more and more popular. Those mobility activities are to a large extent informal learning activities. Most of

²⁶ According to the ECOTEC study there is a substantial lack of case studies of validation of informal learning projects (ECOTEC, 2008).

them are lacking a sound evaluation since, as in most informal learning contexts, an approach to identify relevant learning topics (contents) and clear reference systems to identify aspired learning outcomes and determine possible competence developments is missing.

4.3 Cross-Sectoral Projects

The evaluation methods are especially appropriate to assess, display and document the competence development of learning contexts and target groups that are not subject to any formalised concept.

This is why it shall be tested and further developed in the framework of non-educational projects. In this connection it will be applied in the environmental demonstration project “PROGRASS - Securing the conservation of NATURA grassland habitats with a distributed bioenergy production” in the field of nature protection in the framework of the LIFE+ project²⁷. The project deals with the invention of a technology to retain bio-energy from mature grassland from so-called “Natura 2000” sites. An important element of the project is the assessment of the acceptance and the competence development of local farmers to apply the PROGRASS procedure that will be carried out by using the ACT approach. Sintropher is a further environmentally driven project that aims at improving the European public transport facilities between rural areas and the national traffic hubs. Also in this project that started in 2009 the ACT approach will be applied to assess the competence development of major stakeholder groups.

5 REVEAL Network

5.1 Introduction

REVEAL - Research and Evaluation group for Validation, Evidencing and Assessing of informal and non-formal Learning.

REVEAL is a transnational community of European experts and practitioners working in 19 organisations from 14 European member states.

In the framework of three EU-funded projects our community has been developing a unique validation approach (“LEVEL5”) for informal and non-formal learning between 2005 and 2010. The approach, titled has been piloted and applied in more than 40 learning projects and scientifically evaluated in the framework of two international PhD thesis. It has been created to serve especially

- target groups that learn outside formal education contexts and
- their learning facilitators, be it adult learning providers, care organisations, grassroots projects and others.

REVEAL is the acronym for:

Research and Evaluation group for Validation, Evidencing and Assessing of informal and non-formal Learning

5.2 Rationale

“Informal learning is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills.” European Commission (2000).

²⁷ LIFE+ is the European Environmental funding programme, PROGRASS website: www.prograss.eu

Informal and non-formal learning is not only delivered by main-stream educational providers. All kind of social organisations and self organised entities may also deal with “informal learning” – and may not even be aware of it.

Thus informal and non-formal learning is a rather ambivalent topic: On the one hand it is highly recognised by educational experts but on the other hand there is not much consciousness about the value in the field and – as consequence – there are relatively few and rather scattered approaches to give evidence of this important modality/way of learning. This is the reason why “Validating of informal and non-formal learning” is currently one of the top priorities on the educational agenda of the European Commission.

However there are major systematic obstacles to a validation of informal and non-formal learning since the uncountable variety of learning contexts; contents and the lack of specified learning objectives are limiting a standardised evaluation.

One should also keep in mind that the goals of educational administration and funding bodies in regard to a validation of informal and non-formal learning (->standards) do not necessarily match with those of the experts working in the field, e.g. in grass-root projects (->individualism).

These fundamental target conflicts have to be considered when evaluating “informal and non-formal learning” especially in order to secure that it may serve those target groups that are already disadvantaged in the formal education system.

5.3 Vision

The core partner team gathered during the final conference of the first REVEAL-project ACT! in December 2007 founding the idea of a transnational network of experts from research and practice to create substantial contributions to the “Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning”.

Against the background that especially the adult or lifelong learning community should profit from these learning modalities we unite behind the following principles:

- Non-formal and informal learning should gain more attention in the European learning community
- It should be recognised on an individual and purely voluntary level
- It should reflect the living and learning contexts of the individuals
- It should ground on action research principles and include all stakeholders (experts from the field, the learners) in the evaluation process
- It should not only evaluate learning following a utilitarian approach, e.g. against the principle of employability; but should also recognise a free learning which is not directed to specific job-related competences.
- In the first place the validation of IL shall support the individual by highlighting the developed competences to raise motivation to learn in informal learning contexts.
- It shall also contribute to a recognition of good informal learning practice in terms of learning outcomes to motivate learning providers to increase their efforts to create good informal learning offers.

5.4 Mission

Approach

REVEAL offers a system for evaluation and evidencing of learning outcomes with the help of a well developed, unique approach that has been scientifically approved and applied in a large scope of learning projects in non-formal and informal contexts.

The specifically created LEVEL5-software that is incorporated in REVEAL facilitates the comprehensive documentation and visualisation of learners' competence developments in all kinds of learning arrangements

The REVEAL evaluation procedure is on the one hand standardised and enables at the same time grass-root projects to establish an individualised reference system for assessing and evidencing relevant competence of their beneficiaries in a process-orientated way. It also allows the learning providers to evidence the impact of their work according to a standardised procedure while, at the same time, keeping up the specifications of their informal learning projects in their individual contexts.

Networking and community building

REVEAL will contribute to the general goals by providing a stable European wide structure for support of learners and learning facilitators be it teachers, trainers, helpers, counsellors, accompanying persons, assessors, evaluators etc.

In this connection it will create a European wide community of experts providing help and guidance for stakeholders in the field (e.g. citizens' communities, grass-root projects but also providers of extracurricular activities etc.).

The composition of the REVEAL network reflects the idea of a mutual cooperation:

Executive members are being invited according to their specific expertise, to their area of work and to their geographical location. They take over commonly defined tasks in REVEAL. Community partners may join the network on basis of their informal learning projects and use the services offered by REVEAL.

6. Services offered by REVEAL

6.1 Description

REVEAL consists of European members and member organisations who are accredited evaluators and multipliers for LEVEL5. They show profound expertise in approach, methodology, instruments and quality assurance in regard to the system.

On the basis of more than 50 evaluated micro projects we came to the conclusion that the process of informal learning evaluation is much too important to leave it just as a documentation output.

It affords a lot of different skills, competences and experiences to learn and profit from this approach in order to find out what really matters, which components to be highlighted, how the competence development of the individuals can be made visible and how the impact of the learning can be evidenced and improved.

This is why REVEAL offers support for providers of informal learning in the following domains:

A Evaluation of learners

1. Auto-evaluation of learners' competence developments with LEVEL5 (by using the LEVEL5 software, quality assurance by REVEAL-evaluators; Internal certification)
2. External evaluation by accredited REVEAL evaluators

B Evaluation of projects

1. Validation of non-formal and informal learning projects (labelling and accreditation of learning projects)
 2. Evaluation of competence development in European projects (Project VIP; www.vip-eu.org)
 3. Validation of European Mobility Actions and Projects (Projekt VILMA, www.vilma-eu.org)
- C Planning of Informal learning
1. Development of regional informal and non-formal learning projects
 2. Development and collaboration in European funding project proposals
- D Networking and Support
1. Counselling (in-house, help-desk, online-Conferences)
 2. Training (regional and European seminars (funding possible))
 3. Networking (informal LEVEL5 community)
 4. Knowledge base for informal learning (literature database)
 5. Informal learning planning patterns (WIKI)

6.2 Value Proposition

A Evaluation of learners

Description:

In general the value of this offer is set up by the opportunity to evidence learners' competence developments and the learning outcomes on the individual level. Therefore the focus of this evaluation is on the achievement of the individual and the evidencing and documenting of the results.

Target group:

The offer aims at learners on the one hand and their care takers, "informal learning providers" or "trainers" on the other hand.

Services.

Like in quality management systems REVEAL offers two ways of evaluation, a self evaluation (like in EFQM) in which the project owners and experts in the field evaluate the learners and an external evaluation carried out by REVEAL evaluators in close cooperation with the project owners.

1. Auto-evaluation of learners' competence developments with LEVEL5 (by using the LEVEL5 software, quality assurance by REVEAL-evaluators; Internal certification)
2. External evaluation by accredited REVEAL evaluators

There will be two different levels of certificates since the external evaluation offers a bigger reputation, objectivity and reliability. However in some cases also the internal evaluation may be of bigger value, especially if the focus is on informality.

Value:

For the learners the evaluation with LEVEL5 offers for the first time the option to show results of informal learning and competences acquired in informal learning contexts.

For the learning providers the evaluation and learners' certificated offer for the first time the opportunity to give a value to these learning activities that could not be certified before.

It can be expected that informal and non-formal providers profit from the LEVEL5 evaluation and certification since there may be a higher motivation of learners to participate.

Economic concept:

B Evaluation of projects

Evaluation of projects refers to

1. Validation of non-formal and informal learning projects (labelling and accreditation of learning projects)
2. Evaluation of competence development in European projects (Project VIP; www.vip-eu.org)
3. Validation of European Mobility Actions and Projects (Projekt VILMA, www.vilma-eu.org)

C Planning of Informal learning

1. Development of regional informal and non-formal learning projects
2. Development and collaboration in European funding project proposals

D Networking and Support

1. Counselling (in-house, help-desk, online-Conferences)
2. Training (regional and European seminars (funding possible))
3. Networking (informal LEVEL5 community)
4. Knowledge base for informal learning (literature database)
5. Informal learning planning patterns (WIKI)