



“COMETA” virtual thematic network

Partnership

COMETA evolution partnership gathers 8 committed organisations from 4 EU Countries.

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A virtual thematic network is a community of practice that profits of the opportunities offered by internet and social networks to exchange information and promote remote cooperative learning. One of the most important theorists of community of practices, Etienne Wenger, claims that communities of practice are a self-organized system that is developed in three dimensions:

- *Thematic field*: a topic that interests all participants and that can develop
- *Community*: element that encourages the sharing of ideas and interactions
- *Practice*: specific knowledge that is shared and kept

We are therefore talking about a virtual network, because it operates online, that is at the same time very real, because it is built on skills and knowledge developed by members in their daily work and shared within the community.

Nowadays many communities of practice and thematic networks, more or less informal, exists on a variety of topics. Several have been promoted directly by the European Union that, in the framework of the past Lifelong Learning Programme, dedicated an action specifically to the funding of thematic networks. Others are borne from EU-funded projects, as a mean of dissemination, sharing, peer-reviewing and exploitation of results obtained.

This is also the aim of COMETA virtual thematic network, that uses a LinkedIn group as a mean to share information, discuss ideas, compare tools and solutions concerning the application of ECVET to the care sector.

The ECVET IN THE CARE FIELD group currently gathers 28 members from different European countries and includes information regarding the progresses of the project, events about ECVET, useful documents. The group will be kept active also when the COMETA project will come to an end, exactly to allow those who will use the tools developed in the project to compare the results obtained, share their doubts and ultimately continuing the improvement of the tools themselves.

The group is open to the participation of anyone interested to the topic of validation of care skills at transnational as well as trans-regional level. Posts can be published in English as well as in Italian.

We are waiting for you! join us! <http://tinyurl.com/cometaVTN>



COMETA Pilot Testing phase: how are care workers judging and reacting to the tools?

COMETA testing phase has recently begun in the different involved countries and regions. The testing phase will see more than 100 care workers engaging with the questionnaires elaborated by the project; workers are being invited, in groups of a variable number, to specific meetings during which they take the test and then discuss with the facilitator and other participants issues that arose while taking the test. Given the length of the questionnaires and the language difficulties of most workers (a significant number of participants are in fact foreigners while the questionnaires are in project languages only); initial expectations were rather cautious. Yet, contrary to such early expectations, the tools are having a great success and are becoming very popular among workers.

Three things seem to be particularly appreciated by participants:

Firstly, questionnaires represent food for thoughts and give the possibility to debate interesting issues. In commenting on the aspects of the meetings that they appreciated, participants mentioned "having the possibility of thinking through day-to-day activities of their care work and realise that it is a very useful process and that things that are often given for granted are in fact very important particularly for final users". Participants (and particularly those involved in bigger groups) also appreciated the possibility of discussing with peers how day-to-day work situations could be handled and noted that this type of discussion is very useful and that it should be carried out regularly.

Secondly, scenarios were considered a fun way to engage oneself in new and stimulating situations. The core of the questionnaire is in fact represented by case-

situations where each respondent has the possibility to choose between two different behaviours. Some of the scenarios spurred lively and interesting debates among participants.

Thirdly and finally, participants were happy (and in certain cases proud) about participating and contributing to a project aiming at workers mobility within their sector. As many of them were foreigners they appreciated the idea that one day they might decide to move abroad (and maybe go back to their original countries) and see their qualifications and competences being officially recognized.

ECVET in the new EU programmes (2014-2020) programming period

European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is a tool that make easier for people to get validation and recognition of work related skills and knowledge acquired in different systems and countries - so that they can count towards vocational qualifications. ECVET gives a possibility to move between different countries and learning environments and increase the compability between the different vocational education and training (VET) systems in place across Europe, and the qualifications they offer. ECVET also increase the employability of VET graduates and confidences of employers that each VET qualification requires specific skills and knowledge. The new programme in which the ECVET system will be included is Erasmus+.

On November 23, 2011, the European Commission presented to the Council of the Union and the Parliament a proposal for the future European program in the field of education and training which will run from 2014-2020.

This new program, called "Erasmus for all" should replace the Lifelong Learning



Programme 2007-2013 and its present sectorial programmes (including Grundtvig for adult learning) as well as other current programmes such as Youth in Action.

The seven year programme will have a budget of €14.7 billion, a 40% increase compared to current spending levels, reflecting the EU's commitment to investing in these areas.

Erasmus+ will provide opportunities to study, train, gain work experience and volunteer abroad. Other area which Erasmus+ supports is the development of digital education and the use of ICTs. The programme included also language learning, recognition of skills (those learned outside the formal education system also), strategic partnerships that will foster quality improvements and innovation, knowledge alliances and sector skills alliances to address skills gaps and foster entrepreneurship, a loan guarantee facility for master's degree students to finance their studies in another country, teaching and research on European integration, exchanges, cooperation and capacity building in higher education and the youth sector worldwide, initiatives to foster innovation in pedagogy and progressive policy reform at national level, good governance in sport and initiatives against match-fixing, doping, violence, racism and intolerance.

More than 4 million young people and adults will have the possibility to improve their skills and competences through the opportunities which Erasmus+ offers. Over 125 000 institutions and organizations will be supported to work with peers in other countries, to innovate and modernize teaching, practice and youth work. The aim is to ensure that young people and adults get the skills they need to succeed in today's world. Erasmus+ replaces seven programmes with one, so it's easier to access.

The purpose of Erasmus+ is to equip the European citizens with the education, skills and creativity that they need in a knowledge society. Too many young people leave school permanently and stay under the risk of being unemployed. The adult workers with low skills are exposed to the same risk. Strong and well-performing education, training and youth systems can help deal with these challenges by providing citizens with the skills required by the labour market and a competitive economy. The education systems need to modernize and adapt to new ways of teaching, learning and embrace the new opportunities that exist. Education, training and non-formal youth learning are key to creating jobs and improving Europe's competitiveness. That's why Erasmus+ will make a key contribution to addressing these challenges.

Training in the Social Initiative Cooperatives in Spain

The social initiative is the provision of social welfare services they perform, among others, the social initiative worker cooperative, as part of the social economy. The social initiative cooperatives are characterized by combining three objectives: be non-profit, create jobs for their members, and provide social welfare services to the people.

The welfare services include a wide variety of activities; the main services are: social support services for daily life, leisure time education, employment and social integration of disadvantaged groups.

Training is a fundamental business development variable. Technical changes, the very expansion of the activities of the cooperative, or the breadth of the content of the tasks of the care sector people (in the homecare, or social revitalization, for



example) require special attention to continuous staff training.

Knowing the existing training in the field dependence is essential to propose measures to encourage the retraining of people working in the sector, as well as measures to facilitate labour market participation of informal carers, ensuring quality standards needed in care sector.

The investigations carried out by the Spanish Confederation of Worker Cooperatives on needs and training activities in worker cooperatives, it has been concluded that the social initiative cooperatives engaged in lifelong learning for their employees in greater percentage than cooperatives in other sectors of economic activity. In part, this learning intensity is given by the youth sector, more receptive to improving the management of human resources, so as the characteristics of the sector, which depends for its development largely to the qualification of its labour work

However, do not confuse this kind of training with certain formal training activities. In many cases, the training is limited to one or two sessions in which staff receive some explanations about general aspects of work: for example, on quality, on common security measures, etc ... It is, therefore, a training whose object awareness by the employee of certain risks or the need for certain tasks well done, rather than a theoretical and practical course that requires study and time commitment for the worker.

Another positive note is that training is not limited to minority groups within cooperatives, but extends to a large part of the workforce, as partners workers or to the employees of the cooperative, while it has to be noted that the lifelong learning is aimed more at women than men, with the result that this way is the best guarantee for the sector in the medium term to balance the presence of women in positions of

greater responsibility, giving a greater stability to the social initiative cooperatives.

The contents of the training received by workers are varied. The most requested and performed are those regarding the economic activity of the cooperative, the animator of leisure, childcare, basic social assistance, homecare, communication and social skills, courses in business management and administration, and specific courses oriented to quality and its control and the safety and health.

The support and dependency sector is a sector that is constructed as new needs arise; these needs come from both the market structure and its own management to try to meet existing demands.

The increasing demand for services, the existing socio demographic changes, the lack of manpower in general and especially prepared, etc. Are factors that make the sector should be reconfigured every day and therefore have to enable new training initiatives that empower working people to provide care services to people.

Peer Review methodology used in COMETA

The activities carried out within COMETA Project were evaluated using the peer review methodology.

Peer review usually considered the evaluation of activities made by one or more people of similar competence to the producers of the work (peers). According to the "*European Peer Review Manual*", Peer Review is a form of external evaluation with the aim of supporting the reviewed educational institution in its quality assurance and quality development efforts.

A Peer is a person

- who is an equal of or is on equal standing with the person(s) whose performance is being reviewed;

- who works in a similar environment (and/or in a similar institution);
- who is external (i.e. from a different institution) and independent (has no personal/institutional "stakes" in the evaluation process) and
- who has specific professional expertise and knowledge in the field (shares values, professional competence and attitudes, language, etc.);
- who can thus bring a degree of "inside" knowledge of the object of review into the process and combine it with the external view of somebody coming from a different organisation ("external insider").

He/her's core task is to come to an understanding of the particular situation of the reviewed to give critical and constructive feedbacks. The *European Peer Review Manual* states that recommendations and solutions to problems should only be given if expressly asked for by the reviewed.

The Peer Review activity foreseen in COMETA was meant to be carried out in the last months of the project implementation and aimed at reviewing the project process and main outcomes in order to:

- Maintain the standards of quality of the co-operation, such as stated in the Application Form and resulted from the Project Steering Committee Meeting decisions;
- Improve performance and provide credibility within the present Consortium and towards all the involved associated partners and stakeholders, at the local, national and international level.
- Support European co-operation in evaluation at VET provider level

It had a **formative function**, putting a particular emphasis on the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the

devised tools and methods for the transferring and validation of the skills, with reference to the main EU quality standards. It had a **development-oriented function**, putting a particular emphasis on the promotion of continuing quality improvement within the VET providers/institutions and in order to make the project results fully applicable, recognized and lasting. It had a **benchmark and sustainability function**, putting particular emphasis on assessing the quality and the potentials of the co-operation between organisations and institutions providing learning opportunities in the social and care sectors, enterprises, social partners and other relevant bodies, thus allowing further innovation and cooperation, at the national and EU level.

The tools and methods of the COMETA Evolution Project Peer Review and Evaluation were inspired by the European Peer Review Manual for VET providers/institutions. Out of the four "Core" Quality Areas that the Manual recommend to tackle, the present review focused on that of "Assessment".

The Peer Review focused on the three following areas:

1. the Process
2. the Outcomes
3. the Cooperation

The Peer Team was composed of a Peer Tandem, two professionals (one internal and one external Peer) with extensive experience in the social and educational field, as project managers and evaluators. Area of expertise: EU transnational projects and pilot programmes, field surveys, benchmarking and transferring of practices