



Valuing prior Learning, Building Qualifications



Piloting of the Valbuk Model in Switzerland

Valbuk – WP5
2012-1-CH1-1-LEO05-00381
Deliverable 15

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30. July 2014

1. Introduction

The piloting of the Valbuk model in Switzerland took place, as foreseen, in the framework of the PROGREDIR initiative, jointly launched by UNIA and ECAP, focusing on qualification of migrant women active in the cleaning sector, and in other complementary jobs. *ProgreDir* training path aims at preparing migrant women active in the cleaning sector for undergoing qualification procedures, according to art. 33 of VPETA, 2004. The Valbuk model has been tested from November 2013 (recruitment phase of participants) to June 2014 (conclusion of Modules in which the model has been piloted, and evaluation of the pilot learning path by stakeholders and participants).

The Piloting involved 15 migrant women (expected 10) experienced in the cleaning service, interested in achieving a recognized qualification, according to art. 33 of VPETA, 2004.

The Piloting has been developed according to the following road map:

1. Using the VQTS Matrix in order to structure the qualification procedure, linking it to contractual agreements recently defined at the regional level (see below)
2. Using the Matrix also to define EU compatible units of learning and assessment, in order to enable the workers have a recognition which could be spent in different countries (considered the high level of mobility existing in the sector)
3. Valuing the Matrix to plan access to training and recognizing existing competences (definition of organizational profiles, articulated in learning outcomes to be achieved, and designing individual profiles against them, providing recognition of existing competences)
4. Designing and testing a system for the assessment of learning outcomes, independently from their nature, on the basis of profiles already defined by the draft Modular model (a specific Module, one day of duration, including a half day of observation on practical work, integrated by an interview)
5. Testing the potentialities of the Model in the framework of *ProgreDir* learning path, under the lens of expectations and results achieved by participants.

The Piloting has been conceived in order to prepare dissemination and exploitation: a final event (August 2014) has been organized by SFAL/SVEB together with ECAP, aiming at making the Model visible, spreading information at the national level on the basis of the results of the testing. UNIA developed a negotiation platform embedding the Valbuk approach to support bargaining of new contractual agreements in the German speaking Switzerland. The results of the piloting have been shared with the other partners at the European level, and spread in articles and scientific workshops.

2. Aims

The piloting was expected to play a key role in order to reach the main operational objectives of Valbuk (www.valbuk.ch), namely:

- to adopt the VQTS Matrix in order to compare existing qualifications in the cleaning services sector, articulating them in **units of learning outcomes** (areas of competences) and **steps of development** (levels) of the competences on the basis of complexity of knowledge and skills, autonomy and responsibility, related to activities included in the Matrix (in other words **use ECVET principles to make qualification paths more flexible and close to the reality of the workplace**, recognizing the prominent role of partial qualifications);
- to define **Guidelines, and related procedures, for the completion of a flexible and modular qualification pathway** based on the Matrix, including criteria and standards for the assessment, transfer, validation and accumulation of learning outcomes achieved in formal, informal and non-formal contexts, according to Professional regulations and Guidelines for Validating learning existing in Switzerland and in the partner countries (including means for gaining complementary learning needed for achieving a whole qualification);
- to develop **operational partnerships involving stakeholders and key actors of the above mentioned sector, in order to test and consolidate units and assessment procedures** (Guidelines) in the framework of adults qualification pathways (based on validation of prior learning outcomes interlaced with formal training modules and workplace learning opportunities).

The last objective, accomplishing the general aims of the project, was of the utmost importance. The involvement of social partners and federal / cantonal authorities was thought bearing in mind some key aspects of the new Federal law on continuous training (approved in 2014, and now in the implementation phase), pursuing coherent objectives, such as the recovery and development of basic skills of low qualified workers and the recognition and valuation of learning outcomes deriving by informal and non-formal learning in formal qualification pathways.

Therefore, in order to reach the overall objective of the project, a joint steering group has been created at the local level, with the aim of accompanying the testing phase, validating each steps of the piloting. This group met 4 times during the project lifespan, focusing on:

- the use of the Matrix as organizers for designing and implementing qualification paths;
- the development of didactical plans coherent with existing regulations, but inspired by principles and methods developed by the project and shared by the partners;
- the results of the piloting itself, under the lens of opinions and remarks of the learners.

3. Methodology

The piloting has been coordinated by ECAP R&D, actually involving on field ECAP Vaud (Lausanne), the Trade union UNIA, the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SFAL/SVEB) and the local training centre of the cleaning sector “La Maison Romande de la Propreté” (a bilateral body, active in the French speaking regions of Switzerland, jointly managed by entrepreneurial organisations and trade unions).

The piloting aimed at testing the sustainable integration between non formal learning and formal preparatory training. *Progredir* is in fact a comprehensive training path aiming at preparing the learners to pass the exam for achieving the IVET qualification (3 years training). *Formation Catégorie E2* is a specific training offer for not qualified workers of the sector, promoted by MRdP, whose learning outcomes has been recognised in 2014 by the French Swiss collective agreement of the sector. In the framework of Valbuk we tested the possible integration of the 2 training paths, using the Matrix in order to define common learning units, corresponding to a logical development of competences. Both the initiatives proved to be useful:

- *Progredir* provided us a solid training setting, to which apply ideas and methods developed by Valbuk, in order to test their effectiveness;
- *Formation Catégorie E2* provided us a with a good and sustainable example of non formal learning path, useful to make the idea of a more flexible qualification visible and accepted by the social partners, preparing the political ground for making the whole qualification system more user friendly and flexible.

Fig. 1 – The structure of Progredir learning path



The pilot path included:

- an introductory guidance module, aiming at making an inventory of competences already achieved by participants through experience and informal learning (24 hours);



- training modules aiming at improving basic skills (literacy, local language, math, elementary ICT skills) and technical skills related to the profession (80 hours);
- the testing of an assessment session (16 hours).

Participants completed at the end of the testing phase a certain number of units of learning included in the reference qualification profiles of the cleaning sector. A part of them obtained at the end the recognition of the E2 level; another part went further, having the requirements for a whole qualification; through the completion of additional learning modules, based on innovative combinations of training and workplace learning opportunities, they are now continuing their preparation to pass the final exam foreseen by federal IVET regulations (actually alternative qualification procedures are not yet implemented in the sectors).

This report is based on suggestions and remarks discussed by the Swiss Steering Group of Valbuk, and on the results of a qualitative survey addressed to participants involved in the piloting. The goal of this study was to identify experiences and biographies of the learners, focusing on their migration stories and their expectations towards the project and the qualification. Furthermore learners' stories had to be used in order to detect strengths and constraints of the Valbuk Model, based on the idea of modularizing training, taking in account competences of the learners and the possibility of gaining also a partial qualification (intermediate).

The survey has been based on open narrative interviews, realized in French and Portuguese, recorded and partially transferred in a text (relevant aspects and statements). An independent interviewer produced a synthesis of 2/3 pages (in French) for each interview. After a short introduction to the project (what is Valbuk about...), followed by a clarification about the aims of the interview and on privacy rules, the interviewer focused on the following aspects:

1. *profile of the interviewee*: women presented themselves very freely and openly;
2. *relationship between the interviewee and the world of education, training and learning* – interviewees were encouraged to look back to when they were at the school: which kind of choices do they remember, which have influenced their future, what kind of feelings, interests, issues easy to be understood and at the opposite difficult moments, which reminded them significant experiences of learning and the factors that produced learning –
3. *life and work history*: starting from the transition from school to work, interviewees were asked to identify the salient steps of life and professional careers, inferring skills developed along the path and the underpinning learning process (how do they learned) - in this context also the role played by external dimensions has been taken into account, particularly focusing on family and migration; interviews particularly focused on the situation of the learner just now, in relationship to the work in the cleaning sector (what do they think about it, how did they catch this opportunity, how did they see their future at professional level)
4. *intake steps*: how did they discover Progredir, why did they decided to undertake this training and qualification path, how their initial expectations are satisfied by the learning path or not?
5. *recognition of prior learning*: did they feel their competences and skills have been taken in account and correctly evaluated during the initial phase of the course (Bilan des Compétences), what did they remember - with pleasure or discomfort - of the initial theoretical and practical analysis of skills and competences: did they feel to be examined, or helped recognize and give a value to their skills and competences, how this phase facilitate also the recognition of additional training needs?

6. *training process* (this part allowed us to better identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and constraints of Progredir, and the potential usefulness of Valbuk) –

- what did they think about the training path, considering contents, rhythms of the lessons, competences of teachers and trainers, approach to training?
- Did they feel that they were just repeating or refreshing things they already knew and were able to do, or did they feel that the learning provision really added something to their competences and skills, as they were actually applying them at the workplace?
- did they feel step by step more comfortable thinking about the final exam, or they were still feeling anxious and afraid?
- Which kind of problems could hamper the conclusion of the training forcing them to quit it or simply to renounce at the exam?

7. *results achieved so far (pilot phase)*: what was actually changing – if anything - thanks to their participation at Progredir? What could be improved in the way the training path is actually managed? Which kind of concrete results did they feel to having achieved, on professional level, but also at personal one, such as more self-confidence, integration at the local level, etc.? What were the most important obstacles and difficulties faced by the women, at any level (work-life balance and training, complexity of the training, poor values assigned to their existing competences, difficulties of passing the entire examination, etc.)

4. Results

Thanks to the piloting, we achieved some important results, contributing to the improvement and the validation of the Model. The results will be presented in chapters, considering the different objectives of the testing phase, dealing with the transfer of the Model into practice and with the possible impact of the project at the political level.

The Matrix: a useful tool

Some limited needs of adaptation of the Matrix emerged during the piloting, but competence areas and steps of development, designed during the initial phase of the project, proved to fit very well the reality of the sector, linking effectively workplace requirements and existing qualifications pathways and profiles:

- local qualification systems - including the «entry level» corresponding to learning outcomes of the modular training E2 recognised by the CC Agreements of French speaking Switzerland – has been mapped using the Matrix (see deliverable 6)
- this approach provided interesting hints envisaging the use of competence based descriptors in vocational training regulations of the sector, and mainly in order to design a qualification profile to be adopted for validating prior informal and non formal learning
- the piloting showed the importance of introducing some adjustments in the final version of the Matrix, considering the «2» and «3» years formal qualifications:
 - 2 years qualification: an intermediate step of development (between 2 and 3) should be created, postponing to higher steps the responsibilities of planning and instructing people
 - 3 years or full qualification: reduce some responsibilities facing the clients (at step 3 or 4), actually not included in the profile of qualification

In general the members of the Swiss Steering group in charge of accompanying the piloting found the Matrix an adequate and helpful tool, in order to redefine qualification systems in the sector, according to the needs and processes described in the following chapter. The Steering group discussed about the opportunity of flexibilising and modularising existing qualification paths, linking non formal and formal training offers, particularly considering adult workers not having a qualification. Some Cantons (Neuchatel, Geneva...) already set up Modular paths to achieve a complete qualification, according to art. 32 of the VPETA (2004). A modular plan for the cleaning sector (*Nettoyeur en Batiment- see annex*) has been designed in the French speaking regions. Other Cantons, however, still applies rigid conditions.

The Matrix has been considered useful in order to improve existing qualification paths:

- It can help rethink qualification profiles: not qualified workers (about 85% in the sector) are not all equal; different specialisations and tasks – requiring specific competences – have to be taken in account, defining intermediate qualification levels; the Matrix is absolutely useful at this purpose; the development of subcontracting creates new specialisations (based on units of competences and learning)
- Modules have to be conceived in terms of learning outcomes, and correlated to activities – the Matrix prepares the redefinition of training curricula on the base of work processes, and related knowledge, skills and competences; it helps think in terms of competences, independently from the way they have been achieved by the learners
- Tasks require always personal and social skills normally underestimated by job descriptions and qualification profiles; the Matrix embeds personal and social skills in competence descriptors; it facilitates the recognition and valuation of professional as well as personal and social skills and competences, creating the basis for differentiating the workers, in terms of positioning and recognition of their competences
- The Matrix is clearly coherent with EQF and ECVET principles, articulating steps of development of competences according to indicators of autonomy (presupposing a good professional knowledge), responsibility (against outcomes and team members) and communication skills characterizing each level of mastery of any competence area
- The Matrix could be finally used also for comparing qualifications achieved by formal or non formal means in different countries, a result that the trade unions consider very important in a sector dominated by the presence of workers with a migration background.

Valbuk and the Swiss qualification system

The piloting helped a lot understand how the Valbuk model (and the whole Transfer of innovation) could work in practice in the receiving country. According to data collected during the preliminary study (WP2), about 65.000 workers (and 1.900 companies) are active in Switzerland in the different branches of the cleaning sector; 85% have no formal qualification, 2/3 of are women, mostly working part time in small and medium size companies, and sometimes in family businesses. As in the other European countries, the sector knew a good trend of growth during the last decades, due to the outsourcing of cleaning activities and the consolidation of sub-contracting of cleaning tasks by large public and private organizations both to micro-companies and medium/large size ones. Similar patterns characterize the human resources management policies, facing from one side the need of reducing costs and asking flexibility to the workforce (dramatically reducing the

attractiveness of the sector) and from the other side the need of increasing quality and productivity, promoting commitment, professional and personal competences of the workers.

IVET qualifications have been achieved only by a very small part of the workforce, and even less visible are formal careers linked to the possession of higher PET certifications. As usual in Switzerland, formal qualifications are defined by comprehensive and holistic profiles, mainly positioned at level 3 EQF (4 to 5 in the case of PET diploma), defining knowledge, skills and competences related to the complete set of tasks of a cleaner, including:

- Deep cleaning at the end of construction or maintenance works
- Cleaning of windows and glass facades
- Extra-ordinary and periodic cleaning activities, including washing of textiles, carpets, etc.
- Maintenance cleaning and restoring activities.

A lower level of qualification is in addition defined – as in any other professional field, by an initial training of 2 years, leading to a Federal Certification of skills and competences. These profiles reasonably includes some learning units overlapping qualifications of the same EQF level, related to other similar professional profiles (more or less specialized, defined by different regulations) including the provision of cleaning activities, such in the case of operators active in building service maintenance, specialized operators working in healthcare units and hospitals, employees active in domestic services and services for the households, room cleaners in Hotel, etc.

Qualified cleaners must have a deep knowledge of work processes and services marketed by their companies; they are expected to be capable of relating with clients, working in autonomy and taking full responsibility for their work. No surprise, therefore, that the need of fully qualified workers still remains very low, and is expected to be kept low by the companies; on the other hand the workers are interested to value their competences also beyond the possession of a whole qualification. Normally workers try to achieve a qualification when they have the motivation of progressing in their careers, and above all envisaging the possibility of launching their own small business. A relevant role in differentiated the workers in categories is however played by contractual agreements, providing additional criteria and indicators for valuing skills and competences achieved by experience at the workplace.

The role of collective bargaining

Therefore, apart from formal qualifications, the reality of the cleaning sector in Switzerland is defined by the way in which collective bargaining – actually managed by the social partner at a regional level, on the basis of different agreements in the 3 linguistic areas of the country – identify and classify functions and roles of the operators. Collective contractual agreements define a typology based on 3 main levels, crosscutting qualifications, basically considering the duration of work experience in the profession.

Despite the presence of a unique comprehensive qualification, cleaning workers are classified by Contractual Agreements in 3 levels, on the basis of criteria and indicators related to their positioning in the hierarchy of functions, as:

- generic cleaners (*Agent d'Entretien*) estimated to be 85% of the whole workforce, mainly women, immigrants, working part time, with lower levels of incomes, often belonging to the working poor areas – see Rieger, Pfister, Alleva - 2012);

- specialized cleaners, (Nettoyeur), not more than 10% of the workforce, active in specific and specialized tasks, normally men, working as full time employees, gaining a middle-low level salary, having sometime the perspective of a career in the sector (i.e. creating his/her own company)
- Technicians and team responsables (Encadrement), a very limited area of workers, leading a small team, and /or working in complex technical positions, with tasks of a certain responsibility.

Specialized and generic cleaning works are defined on the basis of technical contents and mastery in using tools and products, as well as level of responsibility and autonomy of the workers. These criteria crosscut the presence of formal qualifications: the workers are classified by contractual agreements on the basis of roles / functions, and in their respective categories at different qualification levels. Fundamental categories are:

N: *Nettoyage*, in addition split in :

- *Nx* : having a full IVET qualification
- *Ny* : having only the initial partial qualification (corresponding to a 2 years training)
- *Nz* : workers without any recognized qualification.

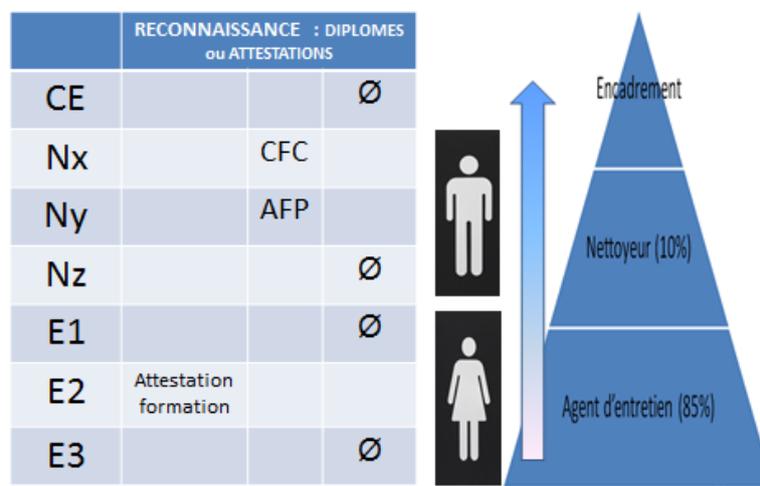
These workers are assigned to specialized tasks, including the mastery of complex machines and extraordinary cleaning and maintenance works. They work in an autonomous way, independently from their formal qualification.

E : *Entretien*, related to simple and repetitive tasks, in addition split in :

- *E1* : including workers using in a constant way specific machines and tools, for accomplishing in a repetitive way relatively complex tasks
- *E2* : having at least a non-formal training, provided by training centers of the sector
- *E3* : generic workers, without any qualification, basically trained on the job

The following graph provides a synthesis of the overall characteristics of the cleaning sector in Switzerland on the basis of categories and qualifications.

Fig. 2 – Categories and qualifications in the cleaning sector in Switzerland



According to the scheme, existing formal qualifications play a role in determining the positioning of specialized workers in the 2 upper categories Nx and Ny, when the upgrade from these categories to CE is clearly determined by other factors, related to human resources policies of the companies, even if higher vocational qualifications can be formally achieved via training and exams. Non formal training, leading to certifications of single competences, enable workers to progress in lower level categories.

Transferability of the Model to the Swiss context

The piloting demonstrated how the Valbuk Model could fit to this complex and articulated qualification system, in which formal paths (art 33, VPETA) are strictly interlinked with human resources policies of the companies, and with collective bargaining.

The Swiss qualification landscape in the sector is characterized by a range of opportunities:

- the traditional, formal, way to achieve a IVET qualification is represented by the final professional exams as defined by the art. 33 / VPETA; in a sector in which practically apprenticeship is unknown (due to the lack of interest both of companies and youngsters), professional regulations provide the opportunity of qualifying adult workers; this chance is underestimated, and preparatory training offers are still very rare (*Progredir* represents a pioneer experience), even if the need of qualification is slowly upgrading; in any case this path is steadily working and it is available all over the country
- the same article of VPETA (33) provides the opportunity of developing alternative qualification paths based on Validation of Prior Learning; the lack of basic conditions (such as a profile of qualification approved by the social partners and by the federal authorities, and standards, criteria / indicators for assessing learning) hampered however – at least until now – the concrete implementation of these paths, relegating validation of prior learning in the area of merely theoretical possibilities
- in order to give an answer to emerging needs of qualification, a Modular path (15 modules) leading to intermediate qualifications, according to art. 21 of the Collective Contractual Agreement of the cleaning sector for the French speaking regions of Switzerland (in force since 2014); this additional opportunity of qualification, based in any case on a final assessment of learning outcomes, is actually recognised only by the a regional CCT (Romandie), and it is still in the first phase of implementation; it should be concretely exploited, enlarged in the area of application (other regional CCT) and integrated with already existing formal qualification paths.

The Valbuk approach is particularly useful in order to build up coherent Modules, based on the reality of work processes, and in order to integrate formal, non formal and informal learning, identifying the following elements:

- Learning units corresponding to competences identified by the VQTS Matrix for the cleaning sector (units have to be identified according to the national qualification framework, on the basis of professional regulations and existing examples of modules); the ensemble of units will design a qualification profile (organisational profile, according to VQTS Glossary)

- Assessment procedures, criteria and tools to verify the achievement of corresponding learning outcomes (independently from the nature of the learning path)
- Modular learning opportunities, addressed to learners who would like to complete their qualification path, having achieved only a part of competences related to a specific organizational / institutional profile.

The voice of the learners

The survey of participants to the Piloting, developed in the framework of *Progredir*, provide us with a vivid impression of how the Valbuk approach could contribute to bridge preoccupations of the companies, perspectives of the social dialogue in the sector and expectations of the workers, in terms of professional development and social recognition. Considering *Progredir* as an ideal laboratory to understand challenges and triggers of a qualification path, narrative interviews clearly show that motivations and biographical profiles of migrant workers trying to reach a qualification in the cleaning sector are largely heterogeneous. The age of interviewees vary a lot – from 27 to 49 years old – as well as their origin: Portugal, Italy, Poland (both old and new emigration countries are represented). A relatively good educational level is an important driver, despite the reality of a daily work providing poor opportunities of qualification and largely perceived in a negative way.



Often participants at *Progredir* have a good remember of their school years, having quit initial or further training due to economic difficulties of their families, more than facing educational failures. Potentially they feel to be good learners, and they are linking access to continuous training to their migration projects, as a means for achieving a better social and professional status. Always supported by community and parental networks, sometimes shared with other family members, the choice of migrating has been influenced by the occupational crisis of their countries of origin, but reflect in any case a tension towards the improvement of their work and living conditions. In this framework – despite its negative image - the cleaning sector

appears to be a useful solution, perceived as a shortcut to realize a quick integration in the local job market: low entry barriers, good demand, satisfactory also because work conditions are hard but ensure a certain flexibility in the management of work and life balance.

Expectations of the learners are heterogeneous as well, even if some common patterns can be recognized. “Getting back to school” is generally perceived as an opportunity more than a constraint. Make it in the hosting country, envisaging a certification, enhances self-confidence, and paves the road to social and professional recognition. In some cases access to training at an older age represents a revenge, for people who have been drop-out from school.

A good attitude towards training seems to play a relevant role, both considering professional issues, and the chance of improving linguistic skills, in order to increase integration opportunities. The shifting from the idea of looking for better work opportunities outside the sector in the short term to a more pragmatic consideration of professional careers is also important. Access to training is driven mainly by expectations addressed to an internal career in the sector: 70% of the women, aims at professionalizing in the cleaning sector, and upgrade in their position; 30% considers a qualification as a trampoline towards other sectors. Access to training and the perspective of achieving a certification are strongly correlated: *Progredir* makes sense because it opens the door to an official qualification, and the Valbuk approach – based on the recognition of partial qualifications - proves to be coherent as far as it reduces the risk of being forced to abandon the learning path (for a variety of reasons) without achieving any tangible recognition.

Apart from the explicit objective of achieving a qualification, other drivers come to the fore in motivating the learners. The collective dimension of learning in a classroom is appreciated as a means for improving and developing social networks. Personalized learning, made possible by the consideration of competences already built up by participants thanks to their work experience, doesn't lead to an individualized vision of learning as a solitary exercise, based on the elicitation of skills and competences, and the completion of additional and fragmented learning units. Participants seem to be more attracted by a comprehensive and holistic vision of the learning process. Moreover, the Valbuk approach – stressing the importance of the European dimension – is seen as very promising, in order to achieve a qualification which could be spent all over Europe (thanks to the convergences between national qualification systems).

Opinions and ideas of the learners underscore some unexpected positive aspects of the Model, above all providing evidence of how adult learners aims more at integrating, than at distinguishing multiple learning diverse spaces and dimensions of learning: formal training, informal and non-formal learning. Recognition and valuation of prior learning are conceived as an entry door and a component of training. Formative and summative assessments represent means to reinforce learning and self-confidence. Learning “revising” tasks practiced at the workplace is not perceived as a loss of time (boring repetition) but as an opportunity to link experience to theoretical inputs producing new insights and increased awareness (*you always learn something new*). Practical tests and skills audit sessions enhance self-confidence, and help prepare the final holistic exam (reduce fears and anxiety).

On the other hand, theoretical inputs, recovery of basic skills and language training work better if they are embedded in the whole path, interlinked with professional training and practice. VPL as *valuation of skills and competences* is perceived as a good pedagogical solution, also to personalize the learning path (i.e. with exemptions and credits). Struggling for achieving an official *validation of prior learning* is at the opposite perceived as a hard pathway, less worthy (in terms of costs and benefits) of a preparatory training to the final exam. From this last point of view, the piloting provided evidence of the extent to which both mistrust of the social partners, complexity of procedures, controversial evaluations on costs – benefits ratio and, last but not least, also the representations of the learners converge towards a perspective in which training pathways should be innovated and adapted in an andragogical sense, taking into consideration experiential learning and already available competences and skills, avoiding however a rigid contraposition between routes of qualification, based on preparatory courses to a final exam from one side, and on validation of prior learning from the other side.

5. Final remarks and perspectives

The piloting developed in Switzerland clarifies which kind of actions should be undertaken in order to improve human resources management and qualification paths, during the next years, according to the Valbuk Model.

Official recognized qualifications have to be complemented, in a continuum, by partial qualifications recognized by collective bargaining, in order to define a flexible professionalization path, encouraging the workers active in the sector progress in their careers. Different criteria, less related to the mere technical sphere (tasks and machines), should be considered when classifying the workers, including the valuation of personal and social competences, in terms of:

- autonomy and initiative
- relational and communicative competences (the workforce – active on field, in the front stage towards clients and final “beneficiaries” of cleaning activities – represents the ideal “commercial interface” of the cleaning company)
- responsibility, achieved through qualification and practice (actually in many cases the exercise of coordinating functions is not recognized by the achievement of a higher qualification).

From this point of view learning pathways existing in the sector have to be rethought, pursuing a strong integration between learning spaces and dimensions, from experiential development of skills and competences at the workplace to the recovery of basic skills, including language learning, and the acquisition of solid knowledge in the framework of formal training units. The modularization in units of existing qualification pathways is strongly recommended, because it enables the personalization of learning, independently from the means of final assessment and certification of learning outcomes corresponding to a structured profile of qualification.

ECVET principles (apart from the definition of a complex system of credit points, which seems to be far away from the local learning culture) help a lot define the guidelines of such a reform of qualification pathways. It should draw in fact on the definition of profiles in terms of learning outcomes, on transparent criteria, indicators and procedures for assessing learning outcomes independently from the learning path, on the principle of competence building through accumulation and integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes corresponding to different work processes and tasks. The VQTS matrix is a useful tool for designing qualifications paths based on coherent units, and for comparing qualifications with organizational profiles (needs of the companies) and personal profiles (set of competences already achieved by the learners). In this sense the Matrix can be exploited both for preparing training paths and for levelling qualifications against the EQF and the NQF. At the same time it could be used also for defining a consistent attribution of the workers to categories corresponding to their competences and responsibilities.

A new way of conceiving training comes to the fore, interlinking flexible training and the recognition and valuation of skills and competences deriving from practice:

- improving literacy, mastery of local languages, math and ICT skills, needed to develop any professional career
- defining modular training pathways, addressing specific tasks and vocational contents
- integrating workplace learning and constantly assessing informal learning in order to embed it in formal training paths.