



State of the Art of competence pass initiatives in Switzerland

Short Report



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State of the Art of competence pass initiatives in Switzerland

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4. Summing up

1. Introduction

Validation and documentation of competences acquired in informal and non formal learning contexts are both issues that has been introduced in the Swiss debate on lifelong learning and education only during the recent years. During the last decade the use of tools nearby to the concept of a “*competence pass*” has been piloted in different local and national initiatives, however without replacing in any way the traditional role of recognised certificates and diplomas. Swiss VET system, very close to the German one in its structure and its philosophy, is characterised by a solid and socially shared certification *culture*, based on the definition of professional standards and examinations, to be passed in order to obtain any initial or higher qualification (Federal regulations). The mastery of a set of knowledge, skills and wider competences results in a *professional profile* and is normally established and attested by a complex system of certificates and diplomas. Instead of speaking of “*competences*”, the majority of Swiss institutions, located in the German speaking Cantons, uses to refer to *qualifications*. Made an exception for the French speaking Cantons and partially for the small Italian side, were the term is normally used, Swiss VET glossary seems to ignore the shifting from the concept of qualification to the concept of competence, even if the landscape of the regulations has been stressed during the last years by the new federal law on VET, fostering the definition of profiles through a *competence based approach*. These profiles – almost in a large number of cases - are still structured according to training pathways and contents, more than on activities and competences. The delivery of certificates and diplomas, and the testing of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills, occurs by mean of a global examination (*Prüfung*) which normally takes place at the end of the basic or continuous training period. The new federal law on VET admits also the existence of alternative qualification procedures, which could include the recognition of experiential credits, but postpone to the definition of further regulations the actual implementation of these procedures, delivering to the social partners and to the Cantons the responsibility of any final decision.

We can't say – however - that the mainstream of taking in account competences acquired in informal and non formal learning contexts is totally far from the Swiss VET culture. The dominant concept of vocational training in Switzerland, based on the dual system philosophy, presupposes a close relationship and interplay between formal training and informal/non-formal learning. In this sense we could consider that the system itself is “naturally” open to the concepts representing the mainstream in European policies concerning qualifications, implying a growing attention to issues like non formal – informal learning, validation of competences, transferability in a transparent framework (EQF – ECVET). This vision, today, is confirmed also in Switzerland by the increasing attention given at the workplace to wider competences (*Schlüsselqualifikationen, Compétences clé*), where skills are seen as being based on aptitudes and behaviours (personal, social) which may be acquired through professional and life experience and fostered by a broad general education and cultural background. So the attention given to complex processes of skills acquisition and to the documentation of competences grew in the country during the last decade, such in the experiences of the Geneva Canton (*Qualification '41 Project*) or of the *CH-Q Gesellschaft*, fostering experimental schemes for the documentation / certification of professional skills acquired in informal and non-formal learning situations, and as an attempt to promote access to adult continuous training programmes without formal qualifications.

In a few years we assisted to the diffusion of pilot projects and initiatives, and we are now faced to the first attempt to define a comprehensive model to recognise, validate and certify competences acquired out of traditional training pathways. This attempt is at the centre of our short presentation, such as the autonomous decision of Swiss government to join, as an external observer, the Copenhagen process, sharing the efforts made at the European level to foster mobility and transparency in the common job market, since also Switzerland decided – in the framework of Bilateral Agreements established with the EU – to open up its market to the free circulation of the workforce coming from the Member States. In a strict sense it remains quite impossible to find in Switzerland a coherent policy concerning the introduction of methods and tools directly promoted by the EU, such in the case of the Europass; but thanks to the above mentioned converging trends this introduction seems to be possible on a voluntary basis. Addresses, and also actual tools, deriving from the European debate should therefore acquire a growing space, as occurred some years ago in the case of the large diffusion of the ECDL, that quite completely replaced the local certification system (*Schweizerische Informatik Zertifikat*) as e-Skills pass.

This report mainly aims at summarising the state of the art of the debate concerning competence documentation in Switzerland, presenting some specific experiences and tools developed in this field. It is the result of a combination of desk research and an interviews with a limited number of institutional representatives dealing with the above mentioned issues, and some experts / practitioners active on field, in the management of documentation and validation of prior experiential and non formal learning. The experts interviewed are Michele Longprè and Marianne Ochsenbein (BBT) and Annick Weizmann (Canton de Geneve) on the institutional side, Glenda Gonzales (Association Effe, Bienne), Deli Salini (Swiss Institute for Vocational Training Pedagogy) and Nathalie Deyer (Swiss Occidental Leonardo) on practitioner/expert's side. Other direct information has been provided by CH-Q Gesellschaft (Anita Calonder) and has been used to complete the framework analysis. Also ECAP's direct experiences on field has been of course retained in the analysis, since our Foundation actively participated to the Swiss Platform Validation des Acquis and developed pilot initiative aiming at recognising prior learning.

2. Switzerland and Europe: cautious openings

2.1 The context: Swiss VET and certification system

As we've anticipated, Switzerland has a training system which is quite similar, in its philosophy and organization, to the German one; both are characterised by a strong link between education and structured learning processes occurring at the workplace. The entire system is heavily geared to the definition of training goals and *curricula*, to the needs of the economy in general and to the requirement of the employment market. One fundamental pillar of the system - as in Germany - is the provision of vocational training inspired by the principle of alternating formal education (in the classroom) with experience at work (both in the case of initial training - dual apprenticeship - in upper secondary schools, and in further training or even in some Universities).

One characteristic of the system is the complex decision-making and management process, based on a delicate balance between the prerogatives of Federal decision-making centres (professional regulations, systems of certification) and the autonomy of Cantons in the implementation of the educational framework (there is no Swiss Education Ministry). The Federal setup allows an interesting blend of various stimuli from the different languages and cultures of the resident population (with a majority of German speakers - about 70% of the total - which, in turn, is far from homogeneous, with numerous different traditions and social structures according to the different cantons).

Responsibilities for the educational and vocational training sectors can be found at various government levels. The main responsibility for education is with the Cantons. The educational system (and political system as a whole) is characterized by:

- federalism (sovereignty of the cantons);
- decentralized power (importance of local authorities);
- the subsidiarity of state measures (i.e. the principle by which the upper authorities of the Confederation and the cantons legislate and establish regulations and bye-law only where lower organisms are unable to do so);
- (semi-direct) democratic process, including the popular right to claim for referenda on a wide number of issues.

The Cantons have a key role in financing and implementing measures even where it is the Confederation itself which legislates (for example in professional training). Within the cantons, the duties associated with teaching are carried out generally by the Department of Education (under various names), which establishes curricula, official didactic tools and the size of classes. Co-operation between cantons and the co-ordination of schools is a function carried out by the Swiss Conference of Directors of Public Education (CDPE). The CDPE also creates study frameworks and stipulates agreements for the recognition of diplomas and schools. The basis tools of the CDPE are intercantonal agreements and recommendations; however, it can also oblige Cantons to work together on harmonization of the educational system (e.g. in the case of reforms, collaboration in the areas of planning, research and educational statistics).

Although the educational system is decentralized, the Confederation plays a key role in professional training, linked to the centralized qualifications system, which gives the Confederation a key role in University education as well (the Confederation directly manages two federal polytechnics and supervises the entire sector of tertiary education). The Swiss Confederation and Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Public Education (CDPE) jointly

manage the High School qualification, required for access to tertiary education (except in a few pilot schemes, such as in Geneva where access is admitted by presentation of an individual dossier). Looking to any issue concerning certification, qualification profiles, exams regulations and finally *competence documentation* we should therefore consider the role played by the Confederation in establishing Guide Lines and a frame policy or legislation, and the role played by the local Authorities in implementing and piloting innovation.

In addition, considering the issues focused by Europass+ Project, one thing to be borne in mind, discussing the possibility to introduce innovative competence documentation tools, is the complexity of certification systems existing in the country. In general, the system is based on the strong consensus of social and economic actors (who give value the certificates) and the coexistence of local and central/government initiatives and responsibilities. The Federal decision-making process and organization is under the umbrella of the Federal Department of Professional Training (art. 19 of the LFP) which guarantees the “professional” value of the diplomas and certificates issued at various levels of the education and training system, on the basis of central assessment – a process which involves the Trade Unions - of profiles and systems for verifying learning (exams). However, some diplomas and certificates are issued (and recognised) only at the canton level.

There are three levels of certification recognised by the Confederation:

Upper secondary school diplomas

Upper secondary school education is divided into general and professional training cycles. Schools for general training include grammar schools and schools for diplomas. Professional training includes apprenticeships (dual type) and full-time professional training schools. Generally upper secondary school education lasts for 3-4 years. 83% of young Swiss people finish this type of training and obtain:

- a diploma (grammar schools and diploma schools);
- a Federal Vocational Training Certificate (AFC - professional qualification).

Since the '90thies, the system has included the opportunity to obtain the upper school diploma for students with an AFC, after a full-time training course of one year (or an evening course for 5 periods of 6-months, alternating with work) in the same subject as their basic training. This Diploma (*Berufsmatura*) gives access to tertiary education in the same training area - a University, Federal Polytechnic, specialist school or University professional training school (SUP) - and, in general, any training at secondary school gives access to federal professional exams or upper school exams.

Higher vocational training certificates and diplomas

Tertiary training “non academic” qualifications are generally obtained after two years or work experience (which usually have to be demonstrated), and do not include University courses. Tertiary professional training is carried out in specialist schools, where professional exams are taken to obtain the qualification. At the Confederation level, currently, 70 technical schools and about 30 other schools are recognized. Professional associations are specifically responsible for professional and tertiary school exams and make sure they are carried out properly under the supervision of the Confederation, which approves the exam regulations. To date, there are more than 150 professional and 150 tertiary exams. The latter (exams to become craftsmen) ascertain whether candidates have the right aptitudes, skills and knowledge to run a small business or meet higher employment requirements.

Academic qualifications

In Switzerland, Universities are divided into two groups: on the one hand Federal Universities and Polytechnics, and on the other professional schools including teacher training institutes. The Confederation is responsible for the two Federal Polytechnics (and other related institutions) in

Zurich and Lausanne and for University schools in the technical, economics and Arts sectors. Cantons are responsible for Universities and some University professional schools. Canton Universities are financed by the Confederation. Universities, Polytechnics and University professional schools are working out a reform strategy based on the Bologna Declaration; several, and the two Federal Polytechnics, have already introduced a two-level study system in some Faculties, with *Bachelor* and *Master* degrees.

Continuous training has relations at various levels with the certification system described above. Firstly, professional training programmes and, partly, University training courses, are attended by adults who alternate study with work. These qualifications, and Federal professional diplomas or crafts-man diplomas are provided in the context of specialization.

2.2 Switzerland and the Copenhagen process

Make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy in the world by 2010 is the general aim of the so called Lisbon process. The Copenhagen process translate this general aim in specific goals to be achieved in the fields of vocational education and training, through the Declaration of Bologna – applied since the beginning by the Swiss universities - on the one hand, and on the other activating a complex series of measures aiming at enhancing the vocational training sector. In close cooperation with the EU, Switzerland is actively participating at expert level in this process.

Swiss government, and particularly the Federal Office for Vocational Training and Technology (BBT), decided to join the so called Copenhagen process, since the Swiss VET policies agree on the general aims at the basis of the Lisbon – Copenhagen process – devoting particular attention to the renewing and the enhancement of competitiveness and attractiveness of the federal training system in a framework of integration with the other EU member states. Some aspects of the process seems very important for the Swiss authorities:

- the *free choice* principle at the basis of the approach, not implying the subscriptions of binding agreements conditioning the structural choice at the local level;
- the focus put on transparency and transferability of the acquired qualifications, imagining that EQF and ECVET could represent in the next future an interesting tool for the people trained in Switzerland to better spend their qualifications abroad
- the consequent central role assigned by the process to the goal of enhancing mobility at the European level, clearly very important for a small country depending in a structural way from a strategic management of immigration flows (foreign workers represent about 25% of the workforce active in the country, with a very large articulation at the sectoral level and a growing demand of qualified human resources coming from the other EU member states).

Switzerland acts actually as an external autonomous “observer” of the Copenhagen process. The Confederation promoted in 2004 some guide lines concerning this participation, launching also an international Conference (Bern, 2005) aiming at promoting knowledge and a positive orientation towards EU policies by the social partners and the local Authorities. Considering the different aims and specific goals of the process, Swiss participation concentrates above all on the aspects dealing with mobility and transparency of the job and training markets. More in detail:

- benchmarking activities has been launched since the end of 2004, organising visits and exchanges in different EU states (of course the neighbour countries, and also Spain, Ireland, UK) and financing the “silent participation” of institutional and private bodies to pilot projects and networks in the framework of Leonardo or Socrates programmes;
- a general plan to define a National Qualification Framework has been launched in 2005, fostering the adoption of a coherent competence based approach in the descriptions of professional profiles which will be included in the new federal professional regulations according to the Federal law in force since 1.1.2004; this plan should be developed between 2007 and 2009, in parallel with the piloting of the federal “validation” system of prior learning (*Platform VA*) designed in a provisional version at the end of 2006, and now in the consultation phase (*Pilotprojekte für Entwicklung von Référentiels de Compétences*)
- In this strategic frame we should finally position also the partial introduction in Switzerland of some methodologies and tools elaborated in the context of Copenhagen process, and particularly the different components of the Europass *Berufsbildung*.

2.3 Europass: knowledge, diffusion, institutional support

Europass tools: formal support

Europass has been launched by the European Authorities at the end of 2004, according to the aims of the single transparency framework for qualifications and competences. Europass would provide the people with a series of instruments and documents making their skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe. Europass is “formally” supported in Switzerland as a component of the Copenhagen process, but the Authorities has not launched a global coordinate “campaign” to promote this instrument. Switzerland does not dispose of an official national Europass centre. Nevertheless many private and public bodies active in training and guidance are actually paying a growing attention to it. In addition Switzerland also belongs to the network of national information centres promoted to foster transparency and mobility (ENIC/NARIC), normally dealing also with the diffusion of the Europass tools. The National Centre of the network in Switzerland is the *Informationstelle für Anerkennungsfragen*, allocated by the CRUS, the coordination centre of Swiss academic institutions (a choice very similar to the Norwegian one, where this centre is the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU)).

The Swiss NARIC

A key function of the Swiss NARIC is to provide information on the Swiss and foreign higher education systems and on the recognition of qualifications. The Centre provide information on:

- the multilateral conventions on higher education of the Council of Europe and UNESCO
- the bilateral equivalency agreements between Switzerland and Germany, Italy, Austria and France
- the Recognition Directives of the European Union
- the admission requirements of the Swiss universities
- the networks of national information centres on academic recognition of the Council of Europe and UNESCO (ENIC)
- the recognition of universities (or non-recognition of private universities) in Switzerland and abroad
- the provisions concerning the protection of academic titles as well as the use of foreign academic titles in Switzerland

The Centre issues *non-binding* recommendations ¹ on the recognition of Swiss and foreign academic diplomas. It can issue recommendations of recognition for persons with foreign academic diplomas for work purposes. But if the holder of a foreign academic diploma wishes to continue his studies at a Swiss university (PhD, postgraduate studies etc.), he must contact the university of his choice directly. In addition we should notice that the Centre can only evaluate final degrees. In the absence of suitable terms of comparison, unfinished studies or individual courses cannot be treated ². Postgraduate courses, continuing education or language courses are regarded as further professional training and cannot be evaluated. In the absence of quality standards, such courses cannot be recognized academically or professionally. Information delivered by Swiss ENIC primarily concerns academic diplomas. Inquiries concerning non-academic professional diplomas must be addressed to the responsible public authorities, associations or institutions according to the profession in question, or will be referred to those bodies by our center. Depending on their legal status, these bodies may be able to make recognition decisions.

The Centre is not in charge to provide any service concerning the Universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*). In fields of technical training, economics and design any request must be addressed to the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology BBT/OFFT (Bern). Inquiries concerning studies at universities of applied sciences in fields of social work, arts, music, theatre, applied linguistics and applied psychology must be addressed to the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education EDK/CDIP (Bern).

Finally the federal level establish that the recognition of foreign upper secondary school-leaving certificates is not possible (not even for professional purposes). Holders of such a certificate who wish to study at a Swiss university must contact the university of their choice directly. The Swiss ENIC can provide information on the general admission requirements of the Swiss universities for holders of a foreign upper secondary school-leaving certificate. However, the Swiss ENIC cannot assess foreign upper secondary school-leaving certificates.

This approach clearly shows how far the Switzerland system remains from a proper application of principles related to the transfer of competences acquired outside formal training pathways. Also competences certified by a certificate or a diploma acquired abroad remain however very difficult to be spent moving to the country. In addition it allows to understand the institutional complexity of the system. So it's not surprising that Switzerland, although formally supporting the Europass philosophy as a part of the Copenhagen process, doesn't dispose of a national Europass Centre or reference point.

Missing a Europass Centre, Switzerland is interested more by a large diffusion of pilot initiatives and local proposals concerning the introduction of single tools related to the Europass (absolutely hard to collect and evaluate), than by a coordinate approach to the promotion and management of Europass documents. Nevertheless normally information and guidance centres, above all in the main cities and regions, are well informed about Europass and the Europass

¹ Recommendations of recognition issued by Swiss Naric information centre are not legally binding for the following reasons: Switzerland does not have national legislation which would provide for the assessment of academic equivalences in a consistent way (as long as they comply with cantonal legislation, the cantonal universities are largely autonomous in that area, and the same applies to the two Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH/EPF); the Swiss ENIC does not have a legal mandate on the basis of which official recognition recommendations could be issued.

² We should however bear in mind that many universities and high schools normally admit students on the basis of a dossier, considering also credits and debits acquired in prior learning; we will present this approach, open to the concept of work-based learning, in the next chapter.

documents. All Europass documents are available for the final users in paper versions, or via downloading opportunities (generally linking to the official EU sites), in 3 of the 4 national languages, and some of the centres provide also support to the use of these tools, both to the people and to the interested firms and training institutions.

Two of the five documents included in Europass are more or less largely diffused in Switzerland: the *Europass Language Passport* and the *Europass curriculum vitae* (CV); quite all the Universities adopt also the *Europass Diploma Supplement*. Definitely less diffused, are the other documents (*Europass Certificate Supplement*, and *Europass Mobility*), that should be filled in and issued by competent organisations.

Europass CV

This CV template, available in most European languages, has known a quick diffusion, particularly in the framework of the different initiatives financed by the Active Labour Market policies, aiming at fostering the reinsertion of unemployed people at the workplace. These measures are mainly concentrated in actions supporting the unemployed in an aware activation in the job search, providing them with guidance, counselling, help in preparing their personal dossier. Both public employment services and private providers acting in the same field (private agencies and/or suppliers acting on behalf of the public authorities) have largely adopted the European CV format as a basis. The compilation of the CV is in many cases assisted by a coach, or by a trainer in the framework of a class, where the persons are encouraged to reflect on their professional and personal experiences in order to synthesise them, distilling in their CVs an overview of their education, work experience, language skills and competence acquired outside the official educational institutions.

The Europass CV format represents also a reference point in many other experiences concerning competence pass initiatives, based on the elaboration of Dossiers, Portfolios, other documents fostered in the framework of apprenticeships learning.

Europass Language Portfolio

The principles of the Europass Language Passport (ELP), developed by the Council of Europe as part of the European Language Portfolio, are also well known in Switzerland. It also exist a Swiss version of the Portfolio, presented on the web (<http://www.sprachenportfolio.ch>). The site allows to download detailed information on the ELP, and to order the Swiss model both for young people and adults.

This tool, or at least the linguistic competence scale elaborated by the Council of Europe (*Europeische Referenzrahmen*), has been introduced by a large majority of schools specialised in language teaching not only in order to pay the learning process more centred to the learners, but also to provide the learners with wider possibility to certify the acquired skills, from the initial level to the upper ones, without recurring to a formal external examination. This competence level scale is used both in the form of the ELP, and to deliver ordinary attestations or diploma. In addition the use of the European linguistic Framework has been promoted also as a sort of “quality assurance” mean by the institutions financing courses targeted to unemployed immigrants lacking of competences in the local languages, and as a mean to verify effectiveness and efficiency of the social and linguistic integration courses financed by the Confederation and by Cantons to foster a quick insertion of new immigrants at societal and professional level.

The certificate supplements

Certificate supplements, intended as an addition to the original vocational certificate delivered at the end of a course, are not too much diffused in Switzerland at least in formal training, since they can't replace the force of a Certificate or Diploma formally integrated in the certification landscape synthesised before (referring to a specific professional profile). Certificate

supplements – or something like this – are used by some training institutions in order to allow a more detailed appreciation of the learning outcomes expected at the end of a non formal training, organised in modules, or as a global pathway. These supplements cannot of course guarantee any automatic recognition, on behalf of the job market or to enter further training at an higher level. They can however be valorised filling in an individual dossier or Portfolio.

The Diploma Supplement (DS)

The Diploma Supplement is available in Switzerland at all Higher Education Institutions (universities, Fachhochschulen/ Pädagogische Hochschulen) and for all bachelor and master diplomas and doctoral degrees free of charge. It is issued automatically to all students together with their qualification, in the language of the institution (e.g. German, French or Italian) and in English.

Both the universities and the Fachhochschulen/Pädagogische Hochschulen use the official model with the preamble and the eight categories of items.

Diploma Supplement Information is delivered by the Rektorenkonferenz der Schweizer Universitäten (CRUS) (<http://www.crus.ch/>) in German, French, English

The Europass Mobility

The Europass Mobility, recording experiences and competences deriving from a period of time that a person spends in the framework of a mobility scheme moving from one country to an other for learning or training purposes (work placement in a company, participation to an exchange programme, voluntary placement in an NGO...) is less known in Switzerland, even if the Confederation participates to different European mobility projects. Of course Swiss *stageires* could benefit of the Europass Mobility participating to an exchange with another EU country. But public and private institutions normally very active in Switzerland in hosting apprenticeship and people interested to a stage or an initial professional experience seems less interested in mobility issues and practices related to the European dimension. The knowledge of EU practices and tools is therefore poorly developed, and normally mediated by organisation such SOL (Swiss Occidental Leonardo) trying to foster exchanges and also the valorisation of tools like the Europass Mobility.

3. State of the Art of competence pass initiatives in Switzerland

3.1 Background

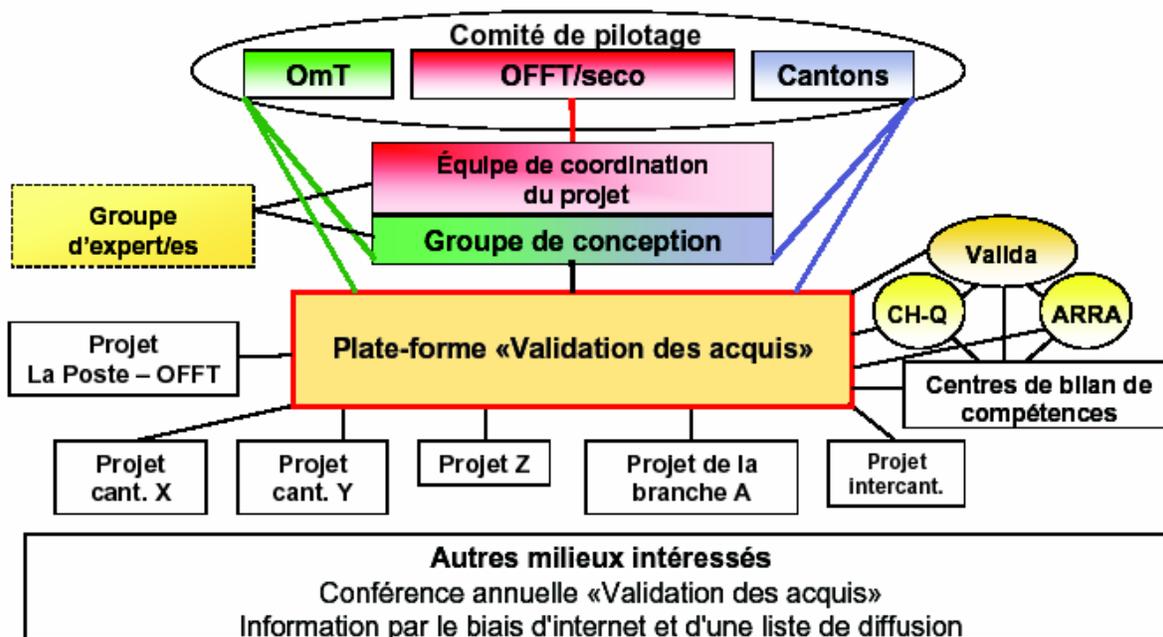
The new federal law on vocational training, in force since 1.1.2004, includes a double track system (see art. 33, replacing and making more flexible the previous article 41) aiming at providing professional qualifications to adults who have no formal qualification or want to obtain a new qualification in a different area of skill. According to the new law, professional qualifications could be provided at the end of continuous training programmes or according to an alternative qualification process. In both the cases, however, the certificate is delivered by the same official body in charge to deliver certificates at the end of an IVET path. In the alternative qualification process, the participants could obtain – if the national system at the moment in the consultation phase will be introduced - partial or global attestations concerning their competences, passing an assessment to ensure that the necessary skills have been acquired. These rules are based on the idea that the mastery of any competence should be attested through a “global” examination by independent “experts”, appreciating the aware capability of the person to perform all the tasks characterising a qualification profile.

Beyond these kind of certifications, a wider range of initiatives took the floor in the recent years aiming at giving to the system more flexibility. Attestations released in non formal training are more and more considered as a mean to enter formal training. The possibility to deliver official certificates directly by the institutions organising training pathways has been admitted – via a complex accreditation system - in modular training programmes recognised by the Confederation (a gradually expanding phenomenon at the tertiary level of professional training). More light and flexible models know also a growing diffusion, such in the cases of the SVEB *Bildungsausweis* or via the portfolio system, commonly used for languages (the European language portfolio) or for professional qualifications (CHQ / Swiss Qualifications Book). In addition a large number of schools in the commercial, language, management, healthcare and social services sectors issue certificates or “diplomas” whose “value” varies on the market, because finally (a very curious thing considering the rigidity of the system) there is no actual protection of “titles” such as Certificate, Diploma, Attestation in Switzerland, except for the fact that is always possible to distinguish between titles recognized by the Confederation or by Cantons, and titles delivered by public or private institutions without applying for a formal recognition.

3.2 Platform V.A. – towards a national validation system?

Following the approval of the new federal law on Professional Training, both considering the pionieristic example of Geneva and other experimental schemes promoted by Associations (such as Valida (www.valida.ch), CH-Q Gesellschaft or Effe – Espace Femme Formation Emploi) and by a limited number of Cantons, a nationwide Platform, aiming at coordinating different efforts, has been established in 2005 by the Confederation (www.validacquis.ch). The Platform is open to representatives of bodies, institutions and professional associations active in the continuous training field.

The Platform Validation des Acquis – membership and structure



S. Mühlthaler, Office fédéral de la Formation professionnelle et de la technologie

The final aim is the development of a Swiss system for recognition and validation of learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts (*Bildungsleistungen / Lernleistungen*), in cooperation with all the actors involved in the field. So we should say that, encouraged by the Copenhagen process, efforts are being made also in Switzerland - as in the rest of Europe - to define principles and structures to be used as references for validation of non-formalised learning³.

More in general the Platform works, based on exchanges and technical indeepenings on behalf of a restricted group of experts, are expected to produce:

- a comprehensive, nation wide system, including standards and procedures
- a shared glossary
- guide lines for the training and certification of trainers and assessors involved in the system.

At the moment the system proposed by the Platform has been released for consultation (expected conclusion spring 2007). Then it's expected the start-up of an experimental phase of 3 years, to test procedures and processes in a limited number of sectors and professional branches.

The validation system should be based on a path articulated on four main levels⁴:

1) *Information and consultancy (Accompagnement / Begleitung)*: permitting the people involved in the validation process to orient themselves in relation to the possibilities and methods to be

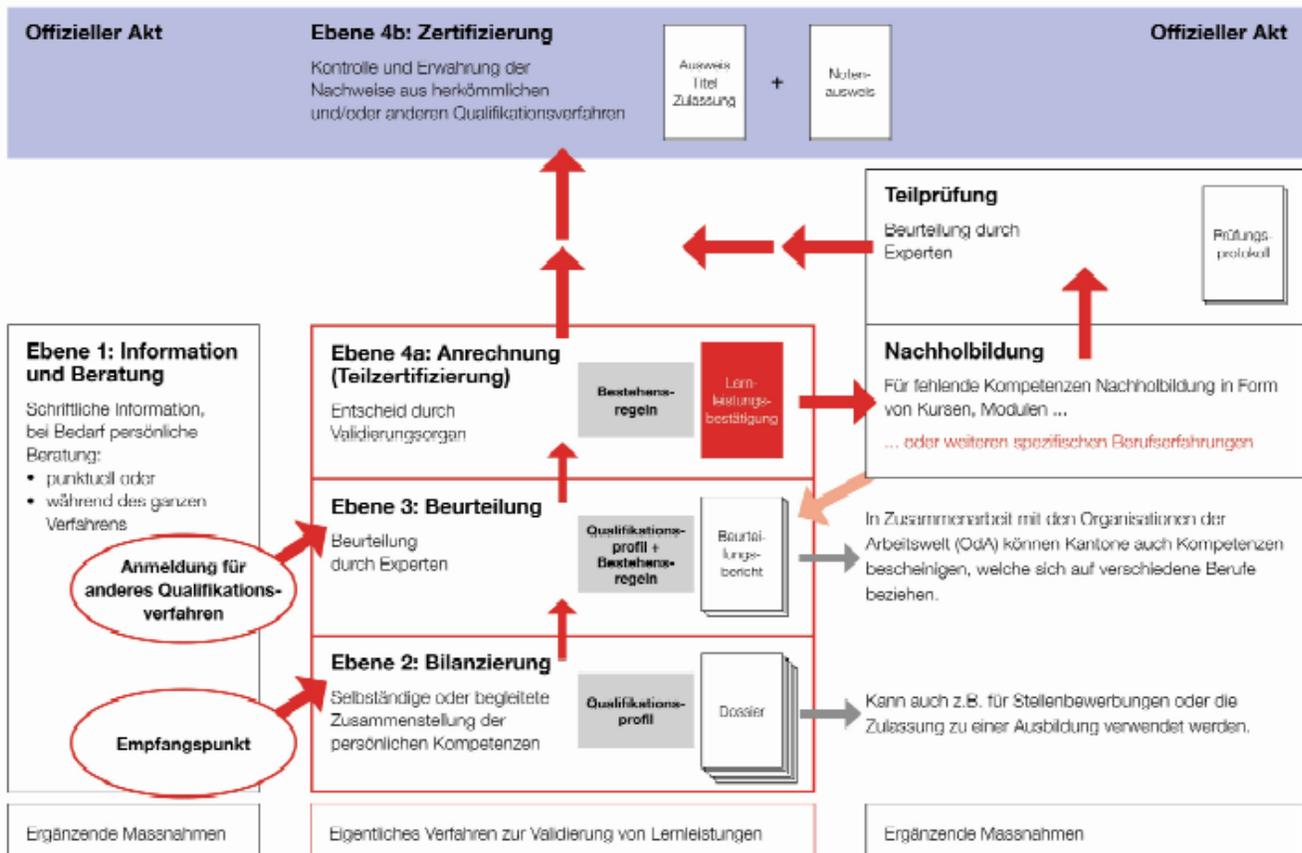
³ We use the term non-formalised learning³ to include the terms non-formal learning and informal learning.

⁴ The terminology used in various stages, and the reference structures, players and methods involved are still being developed by the work team and are therefore subject to change.

implemented. This stage might be entrusted to organisations or institutions concerned with training and orientation and to the professional world.

2) *Bilan (de Compétences)*: a process in which trainees, possibly supported by consultants and coaches, look over their own learning and recognise and evaluate their own skills to produce a specific file, which also explains the reasons for the particular path taken.

The Platform Validation des Acquis – provisional steps of the procedure



3) *Assessment (Evaluation)*: in this process people attempt to obtain accreditation of certain skills and identify any complementary training needed to achieve certification. In this process an official request (canton employment and orientation services, professional organisations and associations, etc.) complete the personal balance sheet with independent assessment attesting to acquisition of specific skills in a given context, establishing links between previously certified skills and the requirements for certification.

4) *Certification*: sanctions the conclusion of the validation process (including certification of learning acquired in an informal manner and certification of any complementary education) by issuing a diploma. This stage is performed under the control and responsibility of national institutions issuing diplomas and certificates.

During the experimental phase, the Platform will also constitute a centre for monitoring and evaluation, according to Quality standards already defined. It will provide the participants and a wider audience of interested people with information concerning best practices in this field, encouraging reciprocal presentation of experiences and procedures.

It's difficult to predict to which extent the procedures defined by the Platform could be generalised, or at least diffused, in Switzerland during the next years. First of all we should consider that only when the social partners, at the national level, would formally agree on the experimentations, pilot projects and initiatives could be developed at the cantonal or sectoral level. Then the popularity of the system will also depend by traditions, policy orientation and economic strength of different cantons, which may or may not opt to support and implement procedures of this type, normally considered rather expensive. The system will probably go further on in French Swiss Cantons, and it also could take off in Ticino; less probably in German speaking Cantons, with some territorial and sectoral exceptions.

3.3 Making competence visible: methodologies and tools

In this chapter we would like to introduce, although in a very schematic way, methodologies and tools aiming at making competences “visible”, through their recognition and documentation. There are approaches and actual procedures or instruments developed during the last decade in a large number of pilot projects. In the majority of the cases – above all in the German speaking cantons - the emphasis remains on “documentation”: the aim of the recognition process is to produce Portfolios or personal dossier as a mean to spend in a better way acquired competences to enter or re-enter the job market, or in the framework of a career pathway.

Approaches to recognition and documentation of prior learning: a map



In some experiences, however, the procedures are conceived in a more large perspective, closer to the one mentioned above; it means that the recognition is the first step to collect evidences in the perspective of an assessment, validation and certification of prior learning. The German speaking Cantons, and partially Italian speaking regions have been interested by experiences based on the experimentation of more “*structured and formalised*” tools (Portfolios / dossier), conceived to help the interested people to self evaluate, and document, their competences. The French speaking Cantons, influenced by the well known approaches developed in France, focused their attention more on institutional application of the “validation” concept, promoting public policies and services to support the people in their recognition and documentation efforts, both to gain a formal qualification, and for individual purposes (placement, career, guidance).

3.3.1 Procedures and approaches

Qualification Plus: the example of Geneva Canton

Considering the last approach, the most important and comprehensive example is provided by Geneva Canton “validation” system. The procedures adopted in Geneva could be considered the logical anticipation of the current piloting of the validation processes at the national level, since they are based on cantonal regulations, introduced before the current Federal Law. The *Qualification Plus* framework continues the pilot scheme *Qualification 41* and was introduced by the Canton of Geneva by implementation of the Law on carriers advisories, training and youth employment (art. 103b). It is the most highly structured application of *Validation des Acquis* in Switzerland, whose philosophy is shared by the Association *Valida*, created, after approval of the new Federal Law, to promote the extension of VAE throughout the country. The *Qualification Plus* framework is also based on the financial and operational provisions of the Canton Law on Continuous Training (1.1.2001) and the regulations implementing the law.

The Law aims to apply federal regulations, authorizing cantons to use a series of tools (art. 3):

L’Etat encourage la training continue :

- a) *par l’aide aux personnes sous forme d’exonération de taxes, d’allocations, de prêts, de remboursement de frais et subsides;*
- b) *par des chèques annuels de training continue;*
- c) *par des subventions à des actions de training dispensée dans le cadre d’institutions de training à but non lucratif;*
- d) *par des actions de promotion et l’encouragement à tout établissement d’enseignement public à ouvrir ces trainings aux adultes actifs professionnellement ou à la recherche d’un emploi;*
- e) *par un encouragement aux partenaires sociaux à convenir de congés payés, permettant aux salariés de participer à la training continue pendant les jours ouvrables;*
- f) *par le développement de training pour formateurs d’adultes.*

Point b) is particularly important, since it is basis for funding the recognition of skills. In addition, the law (art. 6) establishes the relation between the modular certification system adopted by the canton and the federal system for the issue of qualifications:

L’Etat institue un système de certification de la training continue par unités capitalisables qui conduit dans la règle à l’obtention d’un titre officiel.

Qualification Plus is therefore based on a number of legal pillars, which express its fundamental approach:

- adults have the right to recognition of their experience and skills, and the recognition and validation procedure of experiential skill is an integral part of the continuous training system, because they provide access to “non qualified” people to qualification and training opportunities;

- access to the continuous training of adults is financially supported by the state (this is not the case elsewhere in the country, where the view is that individuals are responsible for their own training);
- within the Confederation framework, as the body responsible for professional certification, the Canton may set up qualification systems and issue certificates and prepare candidates for access to a qualification recognised by the Confederation.

The *Qualification Plus* framework enables people to gain recognition for their experience and skills for the purposes of:

- obtaining certification at the Cantonal level (cantonal certificates of qualification - A1, for professions not regulated at the federal level, and Certificates relating to key skills, A2);
- gaining access to exams for the issue of a Federal Certificate of Professional Skill (officially recognized diploma or qualification issued after a period of work placement in the chosen profession).

Unlike the French VAE system (upon which it is based), this framework has limited range. The programme varies in the two cases (it is described in detail in documents made available on the web).

For certificates delivered by Canton (A1 and A2) the procedure has 4 steps:

1) *Preliminary careers advisory*. (Meeting with an expert of Qualification Plus): this meeting has the purpose of verifying if the individual project corresponds to the given procedure in the canton, and the skills the candidate wishes to certify are examined in the light of his/her career plan; the next stage is also discussed;

2) *Start-up of the procedure - balance*. The candidate is invited to the Balance Centre of the Geneva Canton (CEBIG) and the certification procedure begins. At the CEBIG the candidate is asked to identify a balanced series of professional skills and other key skills (*compétences clé*), on the basis of the kind of certification he/she is seeking (professional -for key skills);

3) *Validation test*. (Meeting / observation in the presence of independent experts). According to the certification being sought, independent specialists assess skills using tools which vary from sector to sector. They include:

- test;
- observation in real situations;
- visits to the company;
- analysis of documents and evidence of skills produced by the candidate;
- work placements.

In this way, the certificate issued is evidence of knowledge and skills actually possessed, whether these are complete or partial. An interesting new method is used for the validation of experiential skills, via the simulation of typical situations where certain skills are required;

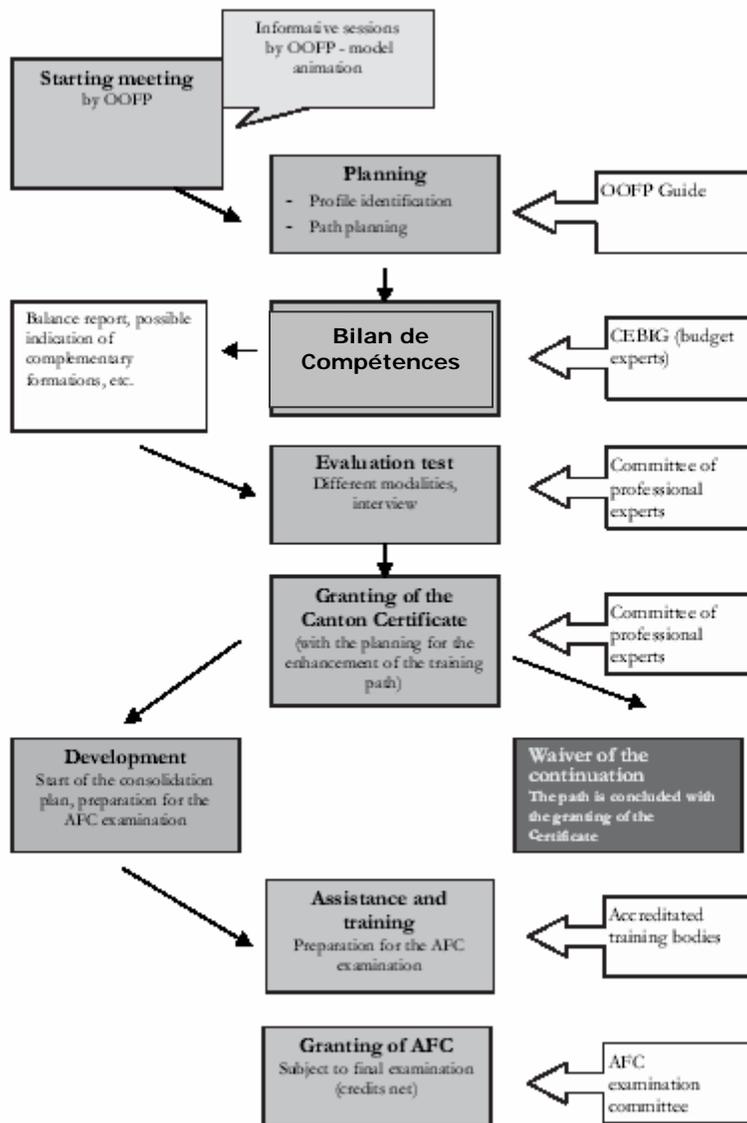
4) *Issue of certificates by the canton*. The Canton Department of Careers Advice and Professional Training issues the candidate with a certificate on the basis of the results of validation tests and other assessments of skills, and the certificate has local validity or may be used as a training credit (art. 6 of the Canton Law) for the development of further skills and procedures which, in turn, may be certified until a Federal certificate can be obtained.

In the case of validation for the purposes of obtaining a Federal Certificate of Skills (professional qualification recognised at the Federal level and regulated by Federal laws), the *Qualification*

Plus framework is a start along a long and complex route.

The process of validation for the AFC award (by far the most common in Geneva after the pilot phase in 2001) includes 4 stages, similar to those described above (Platform).

Qualification Plus procedure - to obtain the AFC (Federal Skills Certificate)



The scheme define the sequence. It works as follows:

1) *Careers advisory and training plan* (meeting with a specialist of *Qualification Plus* at the *Careers Advisory*). The meeting clarifies all the steps required to reach the AFC diploma, focusing on real motivations, aptitudes and experience; the following steps are also discussed,

with the institutions and people the candidate will come into contact with, the documents he/she will be required to produce and other evidence, etc. Q+ specialists follow the candidate throughout the process (accompaniment);

2) *Recognition of skills* (Personal and professional *bilan de compétence*). The Balance for the Validation procedure is one of the services provided by CEBIG. This balance allows candidates to ascertain the skills they already possess and to identify the further skills required (the Geneva procedure has a strong leaning towards training and aims to consolidate skills and establish new ones which are certified at the end of the process). The first phase involves recognition of the skills of the candidate, based on his/her ability to verbalize them and on the reconstruction of professional experience and experience from other fields - their nature and level – compared to the requirements laid down in the apprenticeship requirements for the profession. A written report is drawn up, following the opinion of experts, to provide the candidate with feed-back about his/her knowledge and professional skills, both those acquired and those still to acquire, recommending further training where necessary;

3) *Validation*. A commission of experts assesses the candidate's competences. This represents the second phase in the process: the final balance report and the individual dossier, drawn up during the previous phase, are examined by a commission of experts appointed by the State and professional associations.

Validation takes place using three methods, as follows:

- Interview to assess the candidate and his/her training;
- simulation of a situation requiring the demonstration of a number of skills;
- observation in real working conditions.

When providing feed-back, the Commission expresses its opinion about whether the required skill have been learnt (skills requiring both specific and general knowledge and cultural awareness) and specifies the further training steps required. The canton issues a certificate. Candidates take the recommended courses to obtain the AFC or go directly to the final assessment of the Certification Commission (see phase 4);

4) *Certification (issue of the formal qualification)*. The Examinations Commission appointed by the Canton issues the certificate on the basis of Federal laws. If the candidate has partial certificates of skill completing those required for the AFC, the certification dossier may be submitted to the Commission and the examination of the dossier may lead to the qualification, after verifying the skills. In practice, this does not happen often, since candidates rarely are able or ask to demonstrate skills acquired previously or elsewhere. The Qualification Plus framework is more useful, in practical terms, to identify the further skills and training the candidate requires: formal courses, work placements with accompaniment or other learning tools. After training, when he/she feels ready, the candidate takes the final examination based solely on the skills acquired since the recommendations of the Commission.

In the *Qualification Plus* scheme, the procedure is managed publicly by facilities including the Canton Careers Advisory (OOF) and the CEBIG; indirectly, in order to foster access to continuous training, the scheme has involved a number of training organizations, schools and public and private service providers in specialist courses. These organizations are recognized in the canton of Geneva within the framework of continuous training programmes.

The social partners, particularly employers associations, have been involved in certification (appointment of experts, discussion of individual schemes and overall systems). The University of Geneva (Faculty of Educational Psychology and Science - Prof. Alberto Munari). The *Qualification Plus* scheme - implemented in the canton of Geneva - has an important experimental element (later enshrined in the new Federal law), influenced by French *politiques*

(i.e. VAE) and by a government which is more active in the areas of employment and training policy than the Swiss government.

The key points of the system are maintained: the role of the Confederation in regulating professional training and certification, the role of Cantons, which guarantee their implementation. Both are called upon (by the new law) to stimulate social dialogue (the principle of co-operation between State and employment organizations, introduced in article 1 of the law) both at the regulatory phase (currently negotiations are a little bogged down in rewriting professional regulations), and for monitoring the system.

Enlarging experimentations: the example of Ticino Canton

Following the above mentioned example of Geneva, that has inspired during the recent years also other local experiments in the field of recognition and validation (above all in French speaking Swiss Cantons, such as Wallis - Valais), the new Federal Law on Professional training (LFPPr 1 January 2004) allowed the Cantons to regulate “alternative” qualifications systems in addition to the conventional formal training set-up. The Federal Act states (art. 9) “*Professional experience or experience gained elsewhere and specialist or general training gained outside the customary training cycles shall be properly recognized*”. In addition articles 17 (*regulating the startup of non-formal learning programmes*), 33 and 34, referring to the qualification procedure (*allowing qualifications to be gained after formal examination or equivalent procedure*) provide further conditions. These measures are enshrined in the Federal OFPr framework (Applying Regulations); see in particular art. 4 - *Validating previous training performance*, which states:

“The decision to validate prior performance is the responsibility of:

a) canton authorities where the professional company-based training cycle is reduced;

b) individual authorities where other individual training cycles are reduced;

c) relevant authorities where the prior experience is used as access to a qualification procedure.

Cantons provide consultancy services in order to help candidates collect the evidence of qualifications obtained outside normal training cycles through professional experience or experience elsewhere. This evidence is used to validate skills (or not), as per item 1 above. Consultancy services co-operate with organizations in the world of work and involve external specialists.”

Articles 30, 31 and 32 of the OFPr state that a professional training qualification may be obtained by examination or by equivalent procedure, including the validation of experiential skills, where local authorities (Cantons) may choose to use this method and, if so, regulate the procedure.

Applying the new law, updating its own legislation, also Ticino Canton has promoted, in 2005, the Institution of a Cantonal Service for Adult Qualification, whose implementation is in the start-up phase, following the road open by *Platform VA* experimentation. The example of Ticino Canton is interesting because local Authorities have decided to avoid the risk to promote an additional “experimentation” not coordinated with the decision making processes occurring at the national level. Rather they have decided to participate actively to the definition of the national framework, involving social partners and actors at the local level, supporting however pilot projects aiming at designing and testing instruments and procedures needed to perform the different phases of a “validation” procedure, carefully considering also the transnational dimension of recognition (it has been for instance the case for pilot projects promoted in the framework of Interreg Italy – Switzerland Program, such as ACTA and COGITO in industrial and building sector).

The new Cantonal service has been instituted by a Cantonal Act, updating local legislation (Lorform) to the framework established by the Federal Act, treat in force in January 2004.

According to the Cantonal Act, the new service will be operated in cooperation between the Cantonal Department for Vocational Training (*Divisione della Formazione Professionale*) and the Guidance Cantonal Office (UOSP – *Ufficio dell'orientamento scolastico e professionale*). Tasks and organisation of the Service has been originally designed according to the suggestions emerging from Geneva experiences, as formalised by the *Valida* Associations with particular reference to the fundamental steps of an assessment and certification procedure.

Information and animation activities has been conceived as the first phase of the process, according to the idea that access to the procedure has to be promoted and supported in a proper way (as it was, in the case of former art. 41 of the Federal law) in order to avoid selective effects penalising law skilled and less educated people. This phase should involve both Cantonal service and other NGOs or stakeholders of the system, allowing a wider promotion of alternative qualification procedures.

The second step has been designed according to a typical “bilan de compétences” procedure, based on the individual recognition of competences (including a self-assessment phase). Also this phase should be managed in cooperation between cantonal services and accredited consultancy and training bodies, mainly looking to the Centres promoted by professional associations and trade unions.

After the “*bilan*”, actually resulting in an individual dossier providing evidences of the achieved competences, to be evaluated by an expert, the third step has been planned as the crucial phase of the whole procedure. Originally named “validation process” (*convalida*), this phase has been designed around some core decisions:

- it should include the compulsory assessment of the coherence between individual competences and reference “profiles” defined by professional regulations (implying of course the definition of these profiles, yet lacking in many Federal regulations);
- it should be taken in charge by the same experts involved in “ordinary” examination procedures foreseen by the law, but using an adequate approach; “assessment” attitudes of the experts should therefore be enhanced considering the particular context of a “validation” procedure involving adult workers, taking in account informal and non formal learning outcomes.

A certain flexibility characterises on the opposite many other important aspects of the procedure, both considering the methodologies and the tools that could be used to assess the competences (according to the features of professional profiles to be evaluated) and looking to the form of the assessment (that could include the appreciation of the dossier through an interview, integrated by tests, simulations or observations in actual working environments).

After the above mentioned assessment phase, at the end of which the experts are expected to deliver a global or partial “validation” report, the last phase of the procedure has been designed, as in Geneva and in the other cantonal experiments, as the final formal certification step, involving the “judgment” of the Cantonal Commission responsible for the delivering of any Vocational Training Certificate (admitting in this case both the delivery of the Qualification as a whole or of a Certification concerning single competences, intended as a “credit” to be spent entering a formal qualification procedure, supported by additional training and examinations.

Taking in account work-based learning: experiences in the Swiss tertiary education

The possibility to give value to work-based learning (WBL) to enter an higher education pathway, or more in general as a mean to assess the possession of specific competences, is another relevant asset of Swiss experiences referred to competence recognition and validation. According to the main experiences made in this field in the UK, it means at least admit that:

- learning occurring *at, through and for work* plays a central role;
- *all learning modalities – formal, non formal and informal – should be taken in due account in Higher Education*, not only to determine the possession of the requirements needed to enter academic courses but also in instructional design and in the delivery of a certification;
- the *flexibilisation of learning paths*, should be pursued *combining blended learning approaches and WBL*, in the framework of a *trilateral learning agreement* involving learners, organisations and training institutions;
- a *key function should be assigned to reflective practices in learning*, since we can say that the second fundamental pillar of the model is represented by reflection and modelisation activities that the learners should be able to realise in order to successfully transform working experience in learning.

All these elements recall innovations and experiences developed also in Switzerland during the last decades, at least separately one from each other, and at different levels than in Higher Education. In spite of the obstacles hampering the adoption of a comprehensive Validation system, work-based learning features are for instance already present in a number of Swiss educational programmes. We would like to mention some of them ⁵:

“Trilateral” contract between students, institutions and enterprises or organisations.

This contract is common practice throughout the Swiss vocational training system at the secondary level. The young person undertaking a vocational training programme signs and contract and at the same time benefits from an agreement between his or her employer and the educational institute (in this case a state training institute) which provides formal training.

At the level of higher education, the same type of contract may be established between the organisation coordinating vocational training schools, the instructors who work there and need to specialise as teachers in schools of this kind and the training institution where instruction is provided (normally the Swiss Institute of Pedagogy for Vocational Training). Instructors wishing to specialise as teachers (and be authorised to teach) sign an *admissibility agreement* for this type of training, which is also signed by their professional supervisor and the person in charge of the training programme required for authorisation, who defines the formal features of the educational programme (the amount of time granted for the programme, how it is to be funded), and at the same time signs a training agreement defining the features of the educational programme itself (accreditation of the previous formal and, in some cases, informal programmes, obligatory and optional units, the programme’s goals).

In both cases this three-way contract subtends a two-way contract between the educational institution and the sending institution or organisation.

Many of the elements of the three-way contract mentioned for the WBL are also included, to a greater or lesser extent, in Swiss vocational training. Specifically, the goals and limitations of qualification, the role of the training process in the workplace, integration of the role of the schools and that of the enterprise’s own trainers, definition of the goals, content and timing of the study programme, the educational resources available and the students’ rights and duties. As for

⁵ See Salini D., *European Work Based Learning structure – comments and questions*, Swiss Institute of Pedagogy for Vocational Training) – Italian language section – Lugano, Dewblam Project, 2006.

professional profiles, a process of redefinition of all the professional profiles in various areas is currently underway with the goals of adapting them to the skills in demand on the employment market and updating the corresponding study plans.

Reflective learning practices

In the specific context of teacher training, for both vocational training and other types of schools, greater and greater importance is being assigned to reflective practice. Teachers and trainee teachers are regularly asked to review their professional skills, the way they were built, and the resources they have at their disposal. The proposed meta-reflective practices are based on a number of models for explicitly describing experience and analysing work, focusing on interviews which aim to explore the characteristics of the practices employed, analysis of film segments or writing of texts describing and exploring the practices used (journals, biographical narration, etc). After all, in all forms of vocational training, as the concept of skill is introduced as an yardstick for measuring professionalism, practices are being developed aimed at triggering metacognitive processes in trainees.

Portfolio instruments (variously referred to as training dossiers, skill dossiers, professional books, etc.) are being implemented in a number of different contexts as support for practices of this type.

Coaching

In the context of vocational training and training of teachers to work in this field, we are also seeing increasing use of the practices of coaching or tutoring in training. The figure of the tutor is emerging in the commercial context above all, promoting greater integration between school and business.

In the context of teacher training at ISFPF in Lugano, coaching practices are applied in three different forms:

- information and consulting services regarding educational programmes,
- in-depth study of the dimensions pertaining to didactics and pedagogy (analysis of different types of training situations, individually or in small groups)
- metareflective study of one's own learning processes and skills and the resources which have been or are being acquired.

The trainers who act as coaches are professional educators (pedagogists, psychologists, instructors in the teaching sciences) who base their approach on Schön, Agyris, Vermesch and Kolb.

These practices are supported by preparation of documents on the programme by the trainee teacher and regular redefinition of the training agreement established at the outset of the programme.

Other elements inspiring and underlying WBL, such as learning by doing, project learning and action research are well-known and commonly used in both education and research. For what concerns accreditation we should finally mention that a growing number of further training programmes, according to modular regulations, admit the possibility of an "equivalence assessment" of prior experiential and/or formal learning, in order to achieve partial qualifications: is this the case of the adult trainers modular training pathway (managed by FSEA), or of the Intercultural Interpreters certification. The possibility of accessing University Vocational Schools on the basis of a dossier (which differs in practice from one school to another) is also admitted, while in the "classic" academic context, the only possibility is accessing Geneva University on the basis of a dossier (with characteristics specific to each faculty).

The development of modular training: the case of the ICT sector

The development of a modular training system could be finally considered at the same time another area in which it's possible to find examples and innovative experiences of "competence recognition and documentation", and one of the fundamental requirements for the consolidation of a comprehensive validation system (based on a flexible and individualised access to training, in order to fill in competences gaps in a qualification procedure).

Under the impulse of the MODULA pilot program (launched at the end of the '90), a number of educational programmes in Switzerland have undertaken the task of modifying their curricula to implement a modular structure. After a decade we should notice, however, that the impact of these efforts remained limited. We actually have a restricted number of higher professional certifications and diplomas that could be obtained following a modular path (adult trainers, intercultural interpreters...), and a single example of a fully modularised path, leading from initial training to further education (Federal Diploma), represented by the ICT vocational training system, that is now in the implementation phase (www.i-ch.ch) .

Since the beginning of the decade, the ICT-VET system is interested in Switzerland by a comprehensive restructuring process, coordinated by *Arbeitsgruppe Informatik Berufsbildung Schweiz I-CH*, and supported by the Federal Authorities ⁶. The reform aims at simplifying the system in a more rational way, assuring transparency and flexibility, and developing a global modularised approach to basic education and continuous vocational training. As usual in Switzerland the reform has been prepared activating a partnership between private bodies and institutions, giving to the professional representatives the task to find proper solutions in a cooperative way. This purpose has been persecuted through the constitution of the I-CH cooperative, founded in September 2000 with the widespread support of the working world (mainly professional associations) ⁷. I-CH model tries to reach some general goals:

- *foster dual apprenticeship model, face to the new challenges of market evolution*
- *provide equal gender opportunities, increasing the percentage of women in ICT training*
- *develop the modularisation of basic and further education in ICT branch*

I-CH Model is based on an extensive plan of modules which try to attune the supply of vocational ICT training to *learning outcomes* expressed in terms of *activities* close to real working processes and conditions. The subject-related approach – typical in dual vocational training - is replaced by an orientation of contents and certification processes to activities and performances required by the firms, and referred to professional roles. The module plan and the allocation of the individual IT modules to fields of competence are a core element for

⁶ For some aspects the reform of the system has been anticipated in Switzerland by the pionieristic experience of SIZ *Schweizerische Informatik Zertifikat*; this certification system has been designed in the early 90s by a private body supported by entrepreneurial Associations, Trade Unions (KV-Schweiz, a specific „umbrella“ organisation of Clerks) and Training Bodies. SIZ model defined professional standards, structured in competences, and identified assessment procedures, aiming at organising proper and „selective“ examinations. To some extent we could consider SIZ certificate from one side the forerunner of the later and luckier implementation of ECDL, and from the other side one of the inspiration sources of the later modularisation processes promoted in ICT field by I-CH. SIZ developed a qualification concept based on the idea that IT users' competencies, more or less largely diffused in many working environments, represent the bedrocks on which specialistic competencies related to ICT applications management and development could grow. The concept of SIZ evolved during the last years, in front of the growing concurrence of ECDL, although saving the original idea: the first qualification steps deals with the issues related to the use of IT tools, namely Microsoft Windows applications, and prepare further specialisation steps in a formally modularised pathway.

⁷ Information and data has been provided by www.i-ch.ch

implementation of the reform. A module plan divided into fields of competence and competences of activity identified for each module serve as a basis for the development of the individual module descriptions. The module descriptions are designed in accordance with the conditions of the Swiss modular system (*ModuQua*), containing prescriptions related to module identification standards, proof of competence, supplier identification. In addition, module manuals are provided as a teaching aid. The norm of a module is usually 40 lessons, including specific and related general Knowledge (mathematics, business administration, quality, security, etc.). Associated with these contents are activities – mainly related to workplace learning - conceived to foster social and methodological competences.

Some aspects should be mentioned to understand the importance of the reform with reference to the issues we are dealing with:

- the modularisation of the pathway in different targeted specialisations, including a general range of competences in hardware and software management (6 “bedrock” modules), allows the people to certify their skills in a flexible way;
- work-based learning is strongly enhanced in the system, in relation to working processes, and is based on the development of tasks and projects with the coaching of firm trainers; it aims at fostering and validating personal effectiveness and key competences, such as time and resources management skills, client oriented behaviours, relational attitudes
- last but not least learning evaluation can be realised at the end of every single module, through tests and formal examinations but also taking in account -in a formative way- of progresses realised by the “pupils” during their learning path.

This flexibilisation doesn’t include, anyway, the elimination of the final formal examinations related to the delivery of any federal certificate. The new Swiss *e-Skills* framework (I-CH) innovates for sure the approach to competences and learning processes descriptions, providing guidelines for training institutions. It also establishes rules for assessment and certification that should result closer to real working conditions, assuring that the evaluation of learning processes could be made considering competences acquired by the learner and “*skills in action*”, more than abstract Knowledge. The wide extent to which the modularisation process has been brought, creates the base for the implementation of flexible approaches to validation of non formal and also informal learning. But consolidated values and cultures related to the importance of examinations (*Prüfungen*) in delivering certificates and diplomas, seem to hamper, at the moment, any application of the model outside formal training, although strongly linked to work experience. In addition we should notice that the whole system implies the definition of targeted *learning outcomes*, for sure consistent with the European *e-Skills framework* trends, but referring to a vision of learning in which Knowledge, skills and competences are the result of an apparently flexible *puzzle*, whose single pieces are indeed combined following precise rules, assigning defined roles to workplace and scholastic learning, more than fostering the individualisation of learning paths. It implies some hardly obtainable conditions: such as a fluid cooperative relationships between schools, training centres and firms in the management of an integrated learning process based on comprehensive work’s projects committed to the learners, or the presence of a competent “dedicated” coaching and training personnel in the firms (very often we are in front of small and micro-enterprises where tutoring roles are assured in an informal way by the entrepreneur himself).

This structured approach to learning – on the other hand – risks to hamper both the possibility to integrate in an original way practical and theoretical acquisitions reflecting on experiences made at the workplace, and the opportunity to validate individual learning processes, integrating experiences, formal and non formal training, as usually happened in the case of *lateral entries* in the sector. Finally, an hardly modularised certification system, providing examinations at the end

of every learning unit, allows for sure individuals to lighten their qualification efforts, but imply the risk to focus more on the possession of specific operational skills rather than on the demonstration of complex problem setting and solving capabilities. For this reason some leader firms of the branch – such as Siemens ⁸ – developed during the last years specific assessment systems trying to focus and certify, in a career management perspective, social and personal skills and competences whose fundamental importance (and shortage) they have paradoxically recognised after having reconverted their recruiting criteria, firing older workers and replacing them with young ICT engineers ⁹.

In general Swiss experience represents a significant effort on the way of flexibilisation and individualisation of learning processes. At the same time we agree with some remarks concerning the weakness points of an approach based on the construction of an articulated repertory, almost a *puzzle*, of short modules and learning units. As Ruffino and Tolomelli say on the basis of an Italian research ¹⁰, we have actually noticed in the ICT modular training system some constraints and risks of such an approach:

- it pays hard difficulties in ensuring the elaboration and updating of the modules, in front of the quick obsolescence of technologies and working processes;
- it refers too much to standardised procedures hampering the real contestualisation of Knowledge, skills and competences, related to concrete expected performances occurring in an actual working environment;
- it breaks above all the complex and interdependent unity of Knowledge needed to perform working's tasks.

Finally the choice made by the Swiss Siemens seems us revealing how the firms, adopting recruiting criteria based on the possession of formal qualifications, are forced to cope with the limits of a training offer focused more on the acquisition of targeted technical Knowledge and

⁸ *The Siemens Competency framework (SCF)* doesn't include any evaluation or assessment of ICT specific Knowledge or professional skill, but focuses the increasing importance of social and personal skills in ICT professional profiles. SCF aims at recognising and validating typical *key qualifications*, such as business and client orientation, learning by interacting, motivation of the workforce. SCF is a complementary tool of Siemens Leadership Framework (SLF), highlighting 4 fundamental leadership characteristics: Drive (initiative spirit), Focus (capability to develop winning strategies), Impact (partnership attitudes), Guide (team leading skills).

⁹ In Siemens at least two (in some cases three) generations of workers live together at the workplace: self-learned workers, 45/55 years old, work normally side by side with younger collaborators: the first informatic engineers of the '80s, trained in software's programming, and the young informaticians of the last decade, able to use in a performant way standard softwares to plan ICT solutions. The workers of the older generation have upgraded their informatic Knowledge mainly in an informal way, learning by doing or participating to firm's internal courses. Their competences in problem setting and solving derive from the experience, creativity, flexibility that they have mobilised to cope with the deep transformations in their working environment. Personal attitudes have been reinforced during the pionieristic phase of IT introduction in a traditional electro-mechanic industrial environment. Younger ICT specialists, hired during the last decade, have received instead a good and specialised training in the ICT branch, but pay some difficulties moving from a "technocratic" and engineeristic point of view, not always effective to solve the problems of the daily working life, to business oriented and innovative behaviours. SCF would answer to the needs determined from one side by the recruitment's strategies of the ICT firms (hiring of younger informaticians to cope with the diffusion of specialised tasks requiring a hard educational basis in ICT), and from the other side by the increasing of variances occurring in the working processes, impossibile to solve only applying "cold" Knowledge.

¹⁰ Ruffino M, Tolomelli C., *ICT: algoritmi e affetti. Apprendimento e saperi socio-economici nella produzione del software*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2002

skills (*know how*) than on fostering a real understanding of the meaning (*know why*) of single tasks embedded in a working process, implying an aware mobilisation of personal attitudes and social behaviours.

3.3.2 Tools

The Schweizerische Qualifikations Buch (CH-Q): documenting competences in a Portfolio

One of the most known and quoted tools developed in Switzerland aiming at supporting the people in documenting their competences is for sure the *Schweizerische Qualifikations Buch* (CH-Q). It's a *Portfolio*, designed and updated by the *CH-Q Gesellschaft*, a private “umbrella” organisation, whose members were originally both institutions, social partners and a certain number of the most important Swiss leader firms in manufacturing and services. The tool has been studied in the framework of a pilot project promoted by the association and supported by the Confederation. Aim of the project, in parallel with the already mentioned *Modula* program, was the implementation of a tool, that should have been “officially” recognised – nationwide – as a mean to identify and document competences acquired in formal, non formal and informal learning. This tool should have been intended as a complement of formal qualifications, useful both for the learners (for instance, applying for work) and for the firms (in order to foster transparency of the job market, easing recruiting processes, managing human resources).

The CH-Q is a competence management tool. The tool is targeted to all the people interested both in self analyse their experiences and skills, or in analyse them according to a competence based approach, supported by a guidance Centre or in the framework of a collective training course. It provides individuals with:

- records and spreadsheets helping to describe knowledge, skills and wider competences (personal, social, methodological..),
- a systematic structure to classify and conserve documents, providing evidences of the described competences (certificates, attestations, any other relevant document, and also written descriptions, evocating key experiences witnessing the competence on the basis of a short narrative approach)
- guide sections, introducing step by step the tasks to be fulfilled in the documentation procedure (including single examples of how to describe and/or document the competence you're dealing with).

The use of the CH-Q could be coordinated – for instance – with other tools, such as the Linguistic Portfolio. The final results should be a consistent and continuously updated personal Portfolio. It means that the CH-Q strictly belongs to the individuals, and it's up to them decide how to use single documents or sections, for any coherent purpose.

The CH-Q is actually available in paper and CD formats. As we have said it could be used individually, but in the majority of the cases it has proved to be an interesting tool above all in assisted pathways. CH-Q helps to coach the people in recognising and documenting their competences. From this point of view the CH-Q has been introduced, as a tool, in many different guidance and assessment activities, organised by private and public bodies. Trainers and counsellors, normally trained and certified by the *CH-Q Gesellschaft*, support the people interested in documenting their competences both in face to face sessions, and also working with groups. The Association provides training for the trainers and disposes of a web site, allowing to obtain information, introductory impulses concerning the use of the tool and the possibility to order publications or register to the training offers. The delivery of instruments and

documents is normally submitted to a fee. Some downloadable facilities are at the moment in the testing phase.

Initially the CH-Q knew a certain diffusion in the framework of adult qualification and guidance paths, partially in the framework of Active Labour Market measures. During the last years, however, many pilot initiatives has been developed to foster the diffusion of the CH-Q also in the framework of initial vocational training, introducing its potentialities to the apprenticeships ¹¹. Multiple aims are at the basis of these efforts:

- make the youngsters able to detect and describe competences acquired in their learning and working experiences, valorising them;
- enhance their capacity to apply for a job at the end of their apprenticeship;
- consolidate their attitude *vis a vis* the systematic collection of data and documents concerning their working experiences, in order to ease career management, transitions, access to continuous vocational training.

Nowadays the tool, after some adaptations, has conquered a space in the Swiss VET framework, but less ambitious as initially expected. It has not really “gained” a nationwide diffusion ¹², and actually the association seems more interested at the moment in operating in the Swiss German cantons (and at the EU level), than trying once again to “expand” its influence in other linguistic regions (as witnessed by the fact that the web site supports at the moment only the German language). In addition we have to consider that both the Confederation, the social partners and the majority of the firms involved in the original project seems now to play a very limited, or none role, in the implementation and promotion of the tool, as a proper and generally accepted “competence pass”. Anyway it remains a sort of reference tool in its field. The good relational network of the *CH-Q Gesellschaft* at the European level has also enhanced the “euro-compatibility” of the Portfolio, allowing to consider it a potential transparency instrument in the perspective of the application of ECVET principles.

ARRA – the « bilan portfolio de compétences - effe »

Complementary of the *CH-Q Gesellschaft*, ARRA is the Association integrating different French speaking guidance and training centres that develops a specific offer of tools and procedures aiming at recognising and assessing competences. ARRA qualify its activity adopting the *bilan-portfolio* model designed by the Association “effe”, operating since the '90 in Lausanne and Bienne.

The *bilan portfolio de compétences “effe”* ¹³ has been originally designed to foster the reintegration in the job market of woman having acquired experiences more in the management of parental life, than in the framework of formal learning or market economy. More than a tool, it

¹¹ A. Calonder Gerster, *Gestion de capacités et compétences personnelles*, Folio 1 / 2007

¹² Translations of the initial versions of the CH-Q has been realised both in French and Italian; the French version has particularly been at the centre of strength debate concerning the terms to be used, and above all the “concept” underlying to the use of the tool: more targeted to the final beneficiaries or to the trainer and counsellor in an extensive coaching

¹³ More details in effe, “*Bilan de compétences: histoire d’une pratique*”, Lausanne, 1998

present itself as a *process*, implying the use of different tools, in an assisted environment. The method is based on a sequence of steps, valorising different approaches and instruments ¹⁴:

- the first phase (*trajectoire de vie*), encourages the people to rethink their different experiences, through a narrative / evocative approach to their life and working events, aiming at supporting individuals in defining an inventory / repertory of the competences acquired in the life cycle;
- the second one, focusing under the lens a specific activity performed by the person (*analyses d'expériences sous la loupe*), enhances the potentialities of the same approach, but in a more targeted way (implying an adaptation of tools deriving from the techniques of the "*analyse de travail*"), in order to allow people to identify a set of actual "transferable" competences they are able to perform and document thanks to their activities
- the results of this path are collected in a *portfolio*, that allows to read the personal profile of the person ("*la banque de données personnelles*"), integrating formal and non formal learning outcomes, potentialities, motivation, expectations.

Effe strategy was originally based on the idea that the « *bilan-portfolio* » has to be mainly a strategic planning document for the people, far from a competence pass. In the recent years, however, ARRA's members devoted a growing attention to differentiate the use of the tool:

- they promote courses and coaching facilities on the base of individual contracts in order to produce targeted dossiers (*le dossier ciblé*)
- they have developed new tools (such as le *profil de competences*) aiming at documenting professional competences and life skills in order to compare them to a specific professional profile, easing a good matching between supply and demand
- Effe has finally gained a specific experience in the evaluation of soft and personal skills (*évaluation des competences-clés*) ¹⁵.

As in the previous experience (CH-Q), also in the case of ARRA method we have finally assisted during the recent years to a shifting from a strong concentration of the focus on the needs of adult people (above all unemployed women), to a wider perspective, including the valorisation of the "bilan-portfolio" in the framework of apprenticeships' learning, as a mean:

- to validate learning outcomes, alternative or complementary to the formal tools already existing to manage and assess learning in the firms
- to enhance reflective attitudes of the apprenticeship vis-à-vis their working and learning experiences
- to support the integration in learning processes of disadvantaged groups
- to provide in a more effective way guidance, taking in account both economic developments, and expectations and attitudes

¹⁴ Two of them, deriving from the French pedagogy, plays a very important role: *l'entretien d'explicitation* (P.Vermersch) and *l'analyse du travail* (Y. Clot).

¹⁵ More details in two publications : effe, "compétences et recrutement", 2005 et "du travail familial aux competences professionnelles", 2005.

The EMU Professional Passport – Europäischen Metall-Union (EMU) Berufspass

After two initiatives that have their solid roots in the local environment, we would like to quote a third tool, for sure already less diffused, that could however witness the emergence, also in Switzerland, of a possible "third way" to deal with the competences documentation issues, more linked to the European perspective. This way should be followed in the next future to introduce "competence pass" instruments enhancing the transnational cooperation between associations and training or guidance providers, aiming at establishing new conditions for the development of transparency and mobility in the job market. In this frame has a place the coordinate introduction in Switzerland, and in other 8 EU countries (Belgium, Germany, Luxemburg, Italy, Netherland, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary), of the Professional Passport designed by the umbrella organisation EMU in the metal and mechanic industry. This introduction occurred in the framework of a project jointly promoted by the sectoral entrepreneurial association¹⁶.

This approach looks strictly linked to the globalisation of the world economy and markets. For the Swiss firms a growing interest derives also from the opening of the local job market deserved by the Bilateral Agreements with the European Union on the free circulation of the workforce. Swiss engineering companies, such as their competitors and partners in the metal-working industry operate increasingly beyond the national borders. The qualifications of the professionals should be recognisable by all parties and in any case be recognised within the specific branches in the countries concerned. Objective of the EMU professional pass is the exchange of professionals/skilled workers in the trade involved and in the European countries should be converted into a real prospect on the basis of defined/comparable, recognisable and recognised qualifications.

The EMU professional pass¹⁷ is a personal identity card, which reflects the holder's practical experience with regard to both quality and quantity. It can only be acquired by trained professionals from the engineering branch defined by the EMU. Therefore the EMU professional pass is a personal document to prove the international practice of trained professionals. The EMU professional pass is issued by the national professional associations of the EMU and enjoys reciprocal recognition by these associations. Employers, course organisers as well as examining boards of the EMU member associations are authorised to enter endorsements. The European Metal Union (EMU), the organisation responsible for the EMU professional pass, is a pool of national employers' associations in a community of interests of the metal working industry. As a whole the EMU unites about 38,000 companies employing about 480,000 employees. The national association where the EMU professional pass is issued, keeps a register in the European databank. Only the details of addresses, basic training and the number of the EMU professional pass are registered. The personal data of the holder of an EMU professional pass are protected and can only be registered by the holder himself. The registry serves to allow reciprocal notices of jobs offered and wanted, as well as statistics purposes of the EMU.

¹⁶ Other similar pilot projects has been developed for instance in the framework of Interreg Program, between Switzerland, French and Italy. In the manufacturing sector the project ACTA (joint assessment center of the region Insubrica – Lombardy – Ticino) and in the construction sector (ECAP, entrepreneurial associations) the project COGITO, a validation procedure, including self evaluation and assessment tools for the qualification of bricklayers

¹⁷ More details in www.emu-pass.com

The management of the system implies the assumption of shared duties. The employer who employs an employee holding an EMU professional pass in his company, is obliged to draw up a job reference in accordance with the EMU professional pass concept and to enter this as an endorsement in the EMU professional pass at the end of his employment. Such employment should last for at least six months to entitle the holder to such endorsement. The employee's duties are referred essentially to the use of the 'Reporting Card' inserted in the EMU professional pass. It must be sent to the national association which issued the EMU professional pass by the holder of the EMU professional pass at the end of an employment. This serves statistical purposes and up-dating of address details.

3.4 Competences on line

Both experts and practitioners - interviewed during the research - agree on the fact that in Switzerland doesn't exist at the moment a significant presence, or at least "visibility" of informatic tools aiming at supporting recognition, assessment, validation or documentation of competences acquired in non formal and informal learning. This evidence results also by a systematic desk research we have realised surfing on the web.

A certain number of web sites, normally designed and put on line by public (Cantonal) or private Guidance centres, includes however references, and also examples, of simple or even complicated tools / guidelines conceived to help the individuals in self-analyse their competences or in filling in a CV form.

In some cases there are tools strictly related to the above mentioned approaches (CH-Q, effe, and so on). In other cases we assist more or less to the importation of tools from abroad. The Cantonal guidance office of Zürich, links for instance to www.jobwinner.ch. This site provides the individuals with a wide range of downloadable spread-sheets, tests and guidelines (more information and forms, than real interactive tools) concerning the planning and managing of an evaluation and documentation of competences. The same web site promote a German version of an evaluative and career planning tool imported from Scotland: *Insights*, developed by Insights Learning and Development Ltd, allowing the people to self-assess and collect their experiences and competences, producing an action plan to exploit opportunities in the internal and external job markets. Insights consists of fact sheets whose utilisation is explained through actual examples referred to an "imaginary" client.

Most of public and private guidance centres provide links to the EU Europass sites and/or to formats and examples of filled-in certificates / CVs. Someone looks more generous, and promises the direct access to on-line tools; but looking at these cases you normally discover that you were simply redirected to other European web sites, Validblog.ch – for instance – links you to the Profil-pass German web site.

A certain number of web sites finally allows interested persons to obtain first information and data concerning a specific offer of coaching facilities finalised to assessing and documenting competences. In these cases they seldom offer in addition the direct access to on-line evaluative tests and tools, submitted to the payment of a fee, normally through the registration to an organised blended or e-learning guidance module. A good example is represented by the web site of the Federal association of vocational counsellors, promoting the Swiss Manual for Quality in Guidance, including an on-line questionnaire for the self evaluation of the competences in guidance: the Swiss Counseling Quality SCQ: (<http://www.unil.ch/osp>)

4 Summing up

1. Which kind of competence pass initiatives do you have in the country (initiatives as well from ministries, institutes or even companies)?

The already existing initiatives are described in the previous chapters. Competence pass initiatives are in general promoted by private bodies or public-private partnerships, according to different aims:

- *implementing cantonal or federal schemes concerning recognition, assessment, validation and certification of competences (Platform VA);*
- *providing individuals with methods and tools simply finalised to prepare a personal Portfolio in which collect and document their competences*
- *developing transnational mutual recognition of competences (EMU Berufspass)*

Recognition and documentation of competences normally occurs in the framework of assisted organised pathways, even if some tools are conceived also for self evaluation and documentation

2. Are these initiatives for job apprentices?

Many initiatives, born in the framework of adult learning, know a growing diffusion in IVET, involving apprenticeship. The Europass mobility is one of the initiatives developed specially for job apprentices, but also other means and tools – such as the CH-Q - have been promoted in the vocational schools and in the firms to help the apprentices evaluate their competences, search a job and plan their career

3. Do these initiatives collect information about informal learning?

Quite all the initiatives aims at collecting information about informal and non formal learning. Formal learning remain normally certified by the possession of a recognised certificate or diploma

4. Are there guidelines for the “informal learning sections”?

Any tool includes guidelines, developed as part of the tool itself; in general, however, the use of the tools – and particularly the recognition of learning occurred in informal contexts, is accompanied by trainers and counsellors

5. Which special support do they give for filling out competence passes? Can you give details on specific questions and guidelines for these competence pass initiatives?

All the tools described has supportive documents like examples, guidelines and description of a recommended process (such as in Norway). The quality and usability of these supports seem to be variable, rarely fitting the needs of less qualified workers

6. Are there examples which help when filling in the competence pass?

See above

7. Are you aware of online-support instruments existing for competence pass initiatives?

On line supports are quite non existing at the moment, with the exception of some simple non interactive tools downloadable from the web. In many cases submitted to the payment of a fee.

8. Are there links to an NVQ or even EQF in these initiatives?

Switzerland does not yet dispose of a NVQ. The implementation should take place in the pilot phase of the national Validation system (2007 – 2009). A different approach is followed, however, in the academic sector, that adopted since the beginning the indications of the Bologna process, trying to implement a qualification framework for higher education. Many initiatives finalised to take in account prior learning and work-based learning have been individually promoted by the Swiss universities and Fachhochschulen (see previous chapters).