



VISIBLE
Validation IssueS Induct a Basis for Learning Evaluation

Progress Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

The main aim of the report is to clearly describe the activities carried out, the achieved results and the outcomes produced in the first year of the VISIBLE Project.

VISIBLE directly addresses the necessity, for the European Development Agencies (DAs), to mutually recognize organizational positions and related competencies.

This process starts from the position of Project Manager (PM) for reducing organisational barriers, thus exploiting the potential of staff exchange and even European job mobility.

The main objective of VISIBLE project is to develop an innovative approach to define a validation methodology for non-formal and informal learning for enhancing the quality of Vocational and Educational Training (VET).

The extension and the quality of the network are the ideal preconditions to identify effective solutions. 8 countries belonging to Europe and South-East Europe are represented (Italy, France, Belgium, Norway, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria). Different typologies of DAs are represented (Regional Development Agencies, Agency for Economical Development, Local Action Group financed by the EU LEADER+ programme, Sectoral Agency), with important differences in terms of size and territories represented, but with the same necessity to make the position of PM comparable and recognizable. Two highly qualified training providers are involved in the partnership.

The VISIBLE approach is based on a shared process that could be summarized in the following phases:

1. Identification of a set of "Preparatory tools";
2. Creation of a common vision of lifelong learning for the PMs where not only the settings and practices of learning are shared but also the key references and standards;
3. Elaboration and experimentation of a methodology of validation that will be played by PMs and assessed by Human Resources (HR) Managers of the involved organizations;
4. Dissemination and exploitation of the VISIBLE outcomes (Guide, methodology, tools) among European organisations including the position of PM and willing to experiment validation of non-formal learning of horizontal competencies.

The first project year has produced both tangible and intangible results, foremost of them are: the preparatory tools (Organisation Chart Model, Horizontal Competencies Glossary, Description of Position of PM, List of Key Horizontal Competencies for the PM, Case History Format), the innovative methodology of validation based on role playing, dissemination materials (leaflet, news, press office) and events (project meetings, thematic meetings, European network, local meetings).

The second year of VISIBLE Project will aim at experimenting the methodology inside and outside the consortium so to assess its success or failure and its transferability to different economic sectors and organizations.

This transferability will be assured in the close future thanks to a service of Technical Assistance. In order to facilitate the exploitation of the validation methodology developed in the project framework, Project partners will offer Technical assistance to potential users outside the Consortium. The service will be provided on national basis by each Project partner during a period of approximately 3-month and by SVIM for two years after the project end. All the tools produced in the project framework will be put at disposal of organisations that foreseen the PM position in their own structures.

The VISIBLE Project website (<http://www.visibleproject.eu/>), that includes static (Project, Partners, Preparatory Tools, VISIBLE Guide) and dynamic areas (News, Press, Contact), plus specific tools (Form for uploading the Case Histories, Blog for discussion of Case Histories, Form to request the Technical Assistance) is published in English (both sections) and Italian, French, Norwegian, Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian and Bulgarian (static section).

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1. Project Objectives

VISIBLE project **general objective** is to develop an innovative approach to define a validation methodology for non-formal learning for enhancing the quality of Vocational and Educational Training.

The strengthening of the VISIBLE learning process is supported by the following **specific objectives**:

- 1) **To identify common “Transparent Pedagogical Framework Tools”** for the sector of European DAs such as Organisation Chart Model, Horizontal Competencies Glossary, Description of Position of PM, List of Key Horizontal Competencies for the PM, Case History Format. These **Preparatory Tools** allow significantly to reduce the problem of transparency and recognition of positions among European organisations.
- 2) **To identify a non-formal learning process for the improvement of the PMs’ key horizontal competencies** based on the filling of the Case History Format.
The definition of a **non-formal learning process**, where the PMs of the different DAs autonomously progress by the simple generation of Case Histories organised on the same format, is a successful practice that allows the learners on one hand to be the author of their training, on the other one to have comparable learning experiences.
- 3) **To design and experiment a methodology of validation** of the above mentioned process **of non-formal learning**. Development of a **high-quality and cost-efficient validation methodology to be used at European, national and sector level**.
- 4) To transform this methodology into the **VISIBLE Guide**. The validation methodology of non-formal learning is tested twice by the DAs of the VISIBLE network. The Guide is completed by a Game based on role playing.
- 5) **To disseminate and facilitate exploitation of the VISIBLE Guide** by the HR Managers of the European DAs or of other sector where the position of PM is included. Real exploitation of the VISIBLE methodology is encouraged thanks to the **Theatre Based Workshops**, aimed at involving new users in the practice of non-formal learning and consequent validation in the most appropriate setting, that is a real theatre. Proper exploitation is guaranteed by a **service of Technical Assistance**, provided during the last 100 days of the project and then during 2 years thanks to the commitment of SVIM.

The project will impact directly on the participants covering the position of Project Managers and HR managers inside their structures. PMs, as end users, make visible their competencies, and benefit of an indirect non-formal training session. HR Managers, as target group in the short term, can weighting and valuate the competencies of their team, applying a transparent methodology.

2. Project Approach

VISIBLE project aims at developing and validating an innovative non-formal learning process that involves PMs and HR managers through the effective experimentation of different approaches of learning (Role play scenarios, Reflective practice and small group discussion).

The **First step** of the VISIBLE Project was *the identification of a set of “Preparatory tools”* (*Organisation Chart Model, Glossary of Horizontal Competencies, Definition of Position of PM, Key Horizontal Competencies for the PM, Case History Format*) which are the basis for any comparison between the organisations.

The Second step of the project is the *creation of a common vision of lifelong learning for PMs*. According to the VISIBLE approach, only if PMs start to make progress together and in the same direction, a process of mutual recognition can start.

These are the reasons why the position of the PM seems to be suitable for the experimentation of a common access to the *same system of non-formal and informal learning, based on the guided elaboration of Case Histories related to the key horizontal competencies*. Each VISIBLE partner, represented in the project by its Project Manager, will elaborate at least one Case History per each key competency. This process, facilitated by the uploading of the Case Histories in the same on-line database and by the participation of the PMs in the same web community has a double function. *On one hand, it creates the conditions for a homogeneous evolution of the PMs through a non-formal learning process. On the other hand, it provides the contents for the validation methodology that follows.*

The Third project step represents the solution of the fundamental problem of mutual recognition mentioned above. If European DAs have to become reciprocally transparent in terms of positions and related competencies, the fact that employees follow the same methodology of non-formal learning for the improvement of their key competencies and even exchange the learning contents generated by themselves is not sufficient. It is necessary, indeed, that the *DAs establish a common, structured and transparent system of validation of the success (or failure) of the non-formal and informal learning process followed by each employee*. At this stage, contribution of the VET providers belonging to the VISIBLE network (ECLO, NAAL) is crucial. **They have the pedagogical task to select a number of Case Histories generated by the PMs and to transform them into scenarios with different ends. In particular, one end corresponding to each progressive level of the competency is envisaged** (total number: 4 possible ends). *The designed scenarios are the tools used for the validation of the non-formal learning*. The validation consists for the PM in a **Role Playing Exercise, related to one horizontal competency, to be performed on the stage of a real theatre with the assistance of a trainer specialised in Role Playing**. The result of the exercise abstractly corresponds to one of the 4 scenario's possible ends, representing each a defined level of the related competency. The commission responsible for the decision of the level achieved consists of HR Managers of other DAs belonging to the network having established the methodology of validation. The real value of this process emerges at the **fourth step**, that concerns **dissemination and exploitation of outcomes**. First of all, a continuous relationship with local, regional and national authorities in the sector of VET is established, so that the validation methodology experimented and shared at stakeholders level is proposed for a formal integration in the official systems of

VET. Secondly, the validation methodology is promoted among long term beneficiaries, that are the organisations belonging to the network of each European DA reached by the VISIBLE project during the project life.

Furthermore, the VISIBLE methodology of validation of non-formal and informal learning could be extended to new competencies and positions if the basic principle of the central role of the learner (who is the author of the non-formal learning and offers the raw materials for the validation exercises) and the stakeholders are respected.

During the project life, a **significant dissemination and exploitation strategy is developed**. The first tool for dissemination is the **website**, that includes static (Project, Partners, Preparatory Tools, VISIBLE Guide) and dynamic areas (News, Press, Contact), alongside specific tools (Form for uploading the Case Histories, Blog for discussion of Case Histories, Form to request the Technical Assistance) and is published in English (both sections) and Italian, French, Norwegian, Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian (static section). The second one is the **press office**, active both at national and European levels, and both on paper and on-line. The third one is the project **leaflet** (the project will produce two leaflet versions: one initial and one final), that, together with the **electronic newsletter**, promotes the concrete exploitation of the project outcomes. The main outcome is the **VISIBLE Guide**, directed to the PM Managers of DAs and of organisations belonging to their network. This guide - whose contents will be available in EN, IT, FR, NO, SK, HU, RO, BU, NLD - provides the user with the whole VISIBLE methodology of validation of non-formal learning, by the presentation of the Preparatory and operational tools (the scenarios) together with the description of the process of application. It is accompanied by a **Role Playing Game**, that suggests a pleasant way to address the technical issues of the validation of non-formal learning of horizontal competencies. Crucial moment of this strategy is represented by the **Theatre Based Workshops**, that take place both at national and European level (in Brussels) and imply the practical demonstration of the methodology to short term and long term beneficiaries. The VISIBLE project allows the beneficiaries to exploit the methodology of validation of non-formal learning effectively.

A **Service of Technical Assistance** will be offered to the organisations willing to apply the tested methodology. Service is available during the last 100 days of the project in all the countries concerned by the project. Furthermore, SVIM guarantees 2 years more of availability of this service (only travel and food expenses of the specialists will be charged to the beneficiaries).

VISIBLE also includes a precise **quality control process**. Development of activities is planned thanks to a detailed **Gantt Chart**, indicating the responsible partner for each activity, starting date, duration, possible relations of dependence between the activities. On the occasion of each meeting, the Gantt Chart is controlled, validated and, if necessary, updated. Furthermore, a specific **system of external evaluation of the quality** of the project results is planned. In particular, the following elements or outcomes are evaluated: level of co-operation (Indicators: participation of the partners in the meetings, respect of deadlines for internal reporting, number of new initiatives of co-operation started), Preparatory Tools (number of Case Histories filled), VISIBLE Guide (number of requests of the service of Technical Assistance), Web communities (number of comments to the published Case Histories), Press Clipping (numbers of articles published on the press), Theatre Based Workshops (number of requests of the service of Technical Assistance), service of Technical Assistance (qualitative assessment by the beneficiary of the service).

The added value of VISIBLE Project is that the common methodology elaborated for the validation of non-formal and informal learning process is realized through the direct experimentation of PMs.

These PMs belong to different European Agencies so they will be able to consider their own experiences and needs and share them among the consortium for setting up a common and validated methodology.

This shared approach will allow them to identify a really useful procedure to be presented and exploited also in different sectors by meeting with local stakeholders and PMs.

The diffusion of the VISIBLE methodology will be supported by a well articulated communication plan whose tools will have specific target audience and objectives.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

In this first year of activities, the project reached a considerable number of outcomes, essential to carry out the planned project activities.

At the beginning of the project, starting from the kick off meeting in Sofia on December 2007, until the end of February 2008, the partners validated the “**VISIBLE Preparatory tools**”:

1. The **Glossary of horizontal competencies** (27 competencies elaborated by a previous European project: Ceda² RDA-Net) allows to establish a common vocabulary in terms of competencies, with particular reference to their progressive levels of development;
2. The **Organisation Chart Model** enables to identify the ideal structure of DAs, to focus on the relationships between the PM and the other positions, to realise his or her specific responsibilities and tasks and where the relations between the different positions are indicated;
3. **Description of PM position**, defining a common view and understanding of the specific tasks and responsibilities related to this position;
4. The **List of 7 PM’s Key Horizontal Competencies**, having defined specific activities and responsibilities related to each position, the project identified the set of key-competencies relevant to the PM position that reflect those behaviours necessary for the future success of the organisation (Networking, Result orientation, Organising, Communication, Decision Making, Methodical, Problem solving);
5. The **Case History Format** is a detailed account of the facts affecting the development or condition of a person or group being dealt with, training or study. The case study typically examines the interplay of all variables in order to provide an understanding of an event or situation as complete as possible. Case Histories show, with a concrete and not theoretical approach, the results obtained after a particular process.

From March 2008 until June 2008, each partner elaborated own **case histories**, one for each key horizontal competency at least.

At the main time ECLO, leader of the validation process, elaborated the:

- **VISIBLE competencies matrix**: a table containing the 7 key competencies, described in their general meaning and in 4 different levels of competency performance, where level 1 expresses the competency at the very initial level, while level 4 expresses the competency at its highest point of development
- **VISIBLE competencies evidence claim**: a detailed record of what the PM (learner) is claiming he or she can do now or what he or she wants to learn how to do in the future, it is looking forward and links to personal development planning.
- **VISIBLE competencies check point**: a single sheet allows the PM to see ‘at glance’ how much evidence he or she has and where he or she has future work to provide evidence.

SVIM and ECLO also designed the methodology of validation that was experimented for the first time during the second meeting in Debrecen (July 2008).

On the basis of a selected case histories, ECLO elaborated some scenarios and each participant took part in the role play.

The project partners elaborated also some outcomes for the dissemination:

- 1st VISIBLE leaflet
- VISIBLE Power Point presentation
- VISIBLE Agenda for the local meeting.

All the project results are available on the VISIBLE web site: www.visibleproject.eu

4. Partnership

The VISIBLE consortium was set up grouping three different kinds of partner: four RDAs, that have already cooperated in a previous European project (RDAs-net CEDA2) where they have experimented a basic non-formal learning methodology, two trainer partners, responsible for the learning activity, and three new partners, selected in the local development field.

In this way, the project, through the testing of the validation methodology on new partners, can verify the value of the developed validation instrument so to put the foundation to enlarge the partnership, making strong links with other subjects active in the local development field. During the project lifetime two partners withdrew so SVIM, the lead partner, had to look for new ones, taking into consideration the importance to maintain the same geographical and sectorial coverage. VISIBLE partnership covers 8 different European Member States, of which four from East Europe Countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia). This is a great added value for the project as the consortium reflects different experiences in relation to lifelong learning process and project management, and it is a good opportunity for sharing knowledge between the oldest partners and the new ones.

This heterogeneous partnership is also allowing a stronger diffusion of the project as all the main documents and tools (g.e. web site, preparatory tools, etc.) are translated in all the PPs languages (Italian, French, Bulgarian, Romanian, Slovak, Norwegian and Hungarian), plus English, thus favouring a capillary dissemination of the VISIBLE contents.

The common working language is English and, even though some difficulty, all partners have been involved in the elaboration of the VISIBLE documents and dissemination materials as well as the experimentation of the methodology.

The communication among the consortium was settled by the VISIBLE Communication Manual, worked out by the Lead Partner, about the more effective and efficient way to communicate; this aim is ensured through different tools:

- e-mails for favouring the exchange of documents and information
- VISIBLE website allowing the partners to share information and to interact, mainly through the Forum, that will give to the partners the opportunity to compare different ideas and points of view about the project
- transnational meetings exploited in VISIBLE project for brainstorming, control and active participation in the valorisation strategy

Furthermore, the partners already involved in existing networks of cooperation, have offered their experiences and contacts to diffuse the project results and to widen the project impacts at European level.

For example, ECLO has presented VISIBLE Project to its Executive Board with representatives from Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, UK and Denmark. A workshop, in the meeting framework, was held, calling on the combined expertise of the presents to support developing the concept of the Role Playing model and to provide guidance to the developers. Moreover a 2-hour plenary session was held at ECLO's International conference in Budapest, Hungary. Delegates to the conference came from 18 different countries, from

Russia to USA, from Norway to Saudi Arabia. This provided valuable feedback in different cultural frameworks and allowed further development of the role-play model.

BARDA disseminated information about the project through its internal information system “First Class” – with its special section dedicated to the project, easily accessed by BARDA members – 20 RDAs and business centres across Bulgaria.

The partners have also disseminated VISIBLE contents, objectives and results, outside the consortium, during meeting with local actors, planned in the project, in order to get feedbacks and inputs on the VISIBLE Methodology, tools and process, from main local actors of VET.

SVIM started its collaboration with VET actors in July, organizing the first local meeting involving 20 training regional actors as well as the Head of Employment, Training and Education Unit of Marche Region; he has shown a strong interest for VISIBLE objectives and expected results also in relation to the transferability of this experience to different economic sectors in the regional contest.

DEKUT organised and held the first Meeting with Local Actors in September 2008. This was the first opportunity to present the project to local/regional stakeholders. The meeting was successful with more than 20 participants.

SERDA hold the first meeting with VET actors for raising awareness among the target group as regards to project results and impact and for presenting the first steps in designing the validation methodology, on 11th of September 2008: 22 representatives of VET institutions from the South-East Region of Romania participated at the workshop.

LAG Ogliastra organized the meeting in Cagliari in November, and 10 local actors of VET participated. The held on workshop demonstrated that in this area the local VET providers are still trying to get familiar with the dimension of lifelong training, especially if developed according to innovative methods that do not imply teaching in a class and spending a significant budget. SVIM, as Lead Partner, participated in this meeting to present the main aims, contents and results of VISIBLE project

The involvement of potential users and other interested stakeholders guarantees the following benefits:

- a wide promotion and project visibility outside the project consortium;
- an objective view and assessment of the project results and impacts;
- an open dialogue and steady debate/feedback on the proposed validation methodology and the VISIBLE guide in order to improve them during the project implementation.

5. Plans for the Future

The second project year will have the aim to testing the VISIBLE methodology for verifying if it is possible to transform VISIBLE process (based on Case histories) into a non-formal and informal “patrimony” for the whole sector of DAs, and if these organizations could establish a common methodology of non formal learning of horizontal competencies.

All partners will be involved in a complex path to reach these objectives: the PMs will elaborate the second round of Case Histories (n. 10 for each, at least), that will be revised by the trainers that will give them advices and suggestions (from December 2008 until February 2009).

On the basis of these Case Histories the trainers will design the screenplays with different ends (March 2009) and, under their guidance, the DAs will experiment the methodology proposed, improved on the basis of the results of the first experimentation in Debrecen.

The second experimentation will offer the opportunity to further improve the methodology and it will be fundamental, on one hand for building trust among Partners on the methodology outcomes, and on the other hand because it allows an on-the-field training of the future validation evaluators (HR managers).

The whole experimentation process for the validation methodology will be reorganized into a Guide which contents will be presented to the consortium during the final meeting in Brussels (November 2009).

At the end of this internal process, VISIBLE consortium will present the elaborated validation methodology (process and tools) during meetings with the VET local actors and external organizations (from April 2008 until November 2009).

Relevant diversified “Reference Material” (“VISIBLE Guide”, National Theatre based workshops and VISIBLE Game) will be elaborated and then experimented outside the consortium. For that reason, not only reference materials will be distributed to a larger number of potential users, but also a Technical Assistance service will be offered, so to make the exploitation process starts effectively. It will be also possible to test the way to transfer the project methodology.

The attractive Theatre based workshops format will be used aiming at creating a framework for the effective exploitation of the results and instruments generated by the project, able to last after the project end. The trainers will lead this activity, having the responsibility of the final approval of the validation methodology outputs. The DAs have the direct responsibility to involve a further number of potential users in their respective countries, providing the Technical Assistance service, necessary for the effective exploitation of the project outputs.

At the main time the Lead Partner is carrying out the “**Quality and evaluation plan**” concerning planning, control, validation and change of the activities from one side, and evaluation of the project results on the other side.

In addition each partner will continue to create and implement information channels using some essential elements: web communication, Press Office, newsletter and leaflets.

6. Contribution to EU policies

VISIBLE project **contributes to achievement of aims linked to the Lisbon Education and Training Progress indicator** “participation rates in education” by promoting the validation of non-formal learning as key issue in making learning more attractive and inducing a permanence in education longer and more interesting. The instruments created by the project (preparatory tools, Case Histories, VISIBLE Game) and the GUIDE elaborated will diffuse the necessity of validation methodologies besides proposing the VISIBLE model and this will affect the wide target of the project itself.

The project is also fully implementing the European Strategy “Education and Training 2010” contributing to the development of a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal learning with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels as underlined by the Council **in May 2004 in the Conclusions on “Common EU principles for identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning”**. The VISIBLE methodology in supporting the promotion of validation as crucial aspect of the Lisbon Process, endorses the need of transparent assessment of PM competencies as a key element for the achieving of Objectives 3 of “Education and Training Systems 2010” launched in 2001.

It implies the active role of the stakeholders: “(They) should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competencies, systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.” This is what happens in VISIBLE: **the learners generate the contents of the validation grid, the VET experts transform these contents into role playing exercises** transparently recognisable, **the DAs** themselves (stakeholders) – represented by the Human Resources Managers, - **have the responsibility of the whole validation process of the non-formal learning.**

Moreover VISIBLE definition of an innovative validation methodology based on a set of preparatory tools designed with the aim of promoting the transparency of competencies assessment methods and training practices for non-formal and informal learning, responds to the need of developing common European criteria and principles, but still reflecting diversity. Hence the method will bring added value to the ongoing work at local, regional and national level and, according to the **Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002**, will strengthen the comparability of approaches in different countries permitting the maximum objectivity and combating all forms of prejudice among human resources competencies and levels of learning.

Finally VISIBLE process, that is tested twice under the lifetime of the project, perfectly respects the principles indicated in November 2003 by the Commission Expert Group “Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning” under the “Implementation of Education and Training 2010 Work Programme”: “Validation must be based on a dialogue between the individual employee and the enterprise, organisation in question”, “Validation schemes must be designed in such a way that potential users, be they individuals of institutions, are able to observe and judge the entire validation process”, “Development of validation criteria must involve all relevant stakeholders” and others.

