



Skills Knowledge within Innovation Lifelong Learning System - S.K.I.L.L.S.

Final Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

The target audience of this report are people involved in cooperative organisations and enterprises requiring tailored vocational training and educational support services, academic institutions, NGOs and public authorities concerning the field of entrepreneurship development.

The SKILLS project “Skills Knowledge within Innovation Lifelong Learning System” has developed an innovative learning system, validating existent non formal and informal for training co-operators to become more aware and active in the cooperative enterprise. The project tried to answer mainly to the training needs of cooperative members (including management), which are often neglected. The particular nature of cooperative enterprises calls for tailored training support services. Being a member or managing a cooperative requires not only professional & technical competences and knowledge, but also requires acting in a cooperative ethical view.

The SKILLS project main objectives were to strengthen the democratic nature of cooperatives developing common informal and non-formal training programmes; validate professional experience in the cooperative sector developing innovative learning programmes and materials based on partners’ experience and cooperative learning methodology, supporting good governance of democratically run enterprises; build a network of cooperative trainers able to support adult learners; disseminate the results to be used in cooperative enterprises throughout the European Union involving all levels of co-operators i.e. potential and current cooperative members and board members, with the need to learn more about the uniqueness, strengths and advantages of a cooperative way of working, especially as a way to survive in the current moment of economic instability and social unrest. Besides co-operators, other end users are cooperative workers, the unemployed who may be investigating possibilities of work, university students interested in the cooperative model, and trainers.

The European partnership was chosen according to individual expertise and skills, so those who represented the cooperative movement (Italy, Sweden and Spain) have offered their long standing experience in the cooperative field; whilst the partners chosen for their background in training and vocational education (Sweden, Finland and Turkey) have offered their expertise in the field of learning and multimedia support services. An international partnership has also offered the ambitious perspective of cross border cooperation, improving the knowledge of international diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue.

A learning system has been designed to support co-operators and raise their awareness as active members, using both non formal and informal learning to introduce cooperative ethics, values and principles. This system aims to combine existent experience and new contents and approaches in an innovative way to construct a system for learning, validating pre-existent non formal and informal learning. An ICT based learning approach has been used to create didactic materials about contents and know-how learnt on the job in non formal and informal contexts, making them more accessible to adult learners.

Catalogues have been drawn up to present a training offer with customized processes that combine itinerant workshops in the partner countries, interactive meetings and ICT didactic materials.

An intangible quality of the project, that is difficult to describe, has been the recognition of the need to reinforce and spread awareness about cooperative identity, from trainers to representative institutions and co-operators themselves, which remains an ongoing process partly answered by the life long learning system of non formal and informal learning, but continually in need of validation and renewal.

Plans and prospects for the future are to build a network of cooperative trainers able to support adult learners using the curricula materials and to widely disseminate the resulting outcomes so they can be used to strengthen democratic member involvement in cooperative enterprises throughout the enlarged European Union. The SKILLS web platform helps understand the project and provides information and instructions for continued use once the project ends, in order to validate new non formal and informal learning processes and to participate in the training offer present in the catalogues.

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1. Project Objectives

Project aims/objectives:

The SKILLS project aims to improve the quality of the qualifications and cooperative competences for members by developing new curricula based on informal and non-formal learning and interactive education materials, exchanging and disseminating good practices in cooperation and validation.

The main purposes of the project are:

- to strengthen the democratic nature of cooperatives by developing common informal and non-formal training programmes for members and people who want to create cooperatives by increasing awareness of the cooperative identity, improving old learning opportunities and creating new training approaches;
- to develop a validation system for professional experience in the cooperative sector through a recognition and improvement of cooperative skills according to a 3-level model;
- to develop innovative learning programmes and materials that draw on the experiences of the partners and best practices in cooperative learning methodologies and training with an online learning system offering various learning options and a system of validation;
- to develop key democratic participatory skills through the use of informal and non-formal cooperative learning;
- to support the development of good governance in democratically run enterprises to strengthen local community and to reinforce cooperative identity to improve democracy in cooperatives and the relationship with the local community;
- to build a network of cooperative trainers able to support adult learners using the curricula materials, involving different trainers from different countries in the testing sessions;
- to widely disseminate the resulting outcomes to strengthen democratic member involvement in cooperative enterprises throughout the enlarged European Union - catalogues and web supports (and Moodle-based learning materials freely accessible).

Target groups:

The short term impact targets were co-operators of the countries involved, i.e.: cooperative managers, members and workers that want to improve the cooperative model and increase their awareness to become more active; potential future co-operators, such as the unemployed and university students, who could think of the cooperative as a possible enterprise to work for; trainers and teachers who work in the cooperative system who can use the learning system of non formal and informal learning validated and developed in SKILLS.

All of these co-operators took part throughout the whole project and were involved in all the tasks in order to define the key needs and points of interest, and to test the final products. A team of trainers from the different cooperative systems were also active part in testing the SKILLS project, planning and carrying out the testing activities.

The most important long term beneficiaries will be the organisations of cooperatives at local and national levels who will offer their members a service of training/learning. The impact will be to increase awareness of the need for training in answer to one of the most important ICA principles of cooperation and to have more active and aware people in their cooperatives.

The end users will be the same involved in the project who will continue to use the SKILLS system according to the exploitation plan designed. The number of end users evaluated refers to the knowledge and experience of the consortium in the field of cooperation and to references that were used for the identification of the short term impact targets (the studies and data from ICA and CCACE and EC documentation).

Twelve trainers (4 FTC + 2 KUS + 4 LANKI + 2 ABPSHE) developed activities for the SKILLS project, less than the original number foreseen in the proposal. The choice shared with the partners was to involve key trainers in the project as key people from cooperative training who would later make up the active trainer groups.

Trainers who want to learn and use the SKILLS learning system can find on-line instructions and materials on the project Web site (<http://www.skillcoop.eu/moodle/>).

Context and issues to be solved:

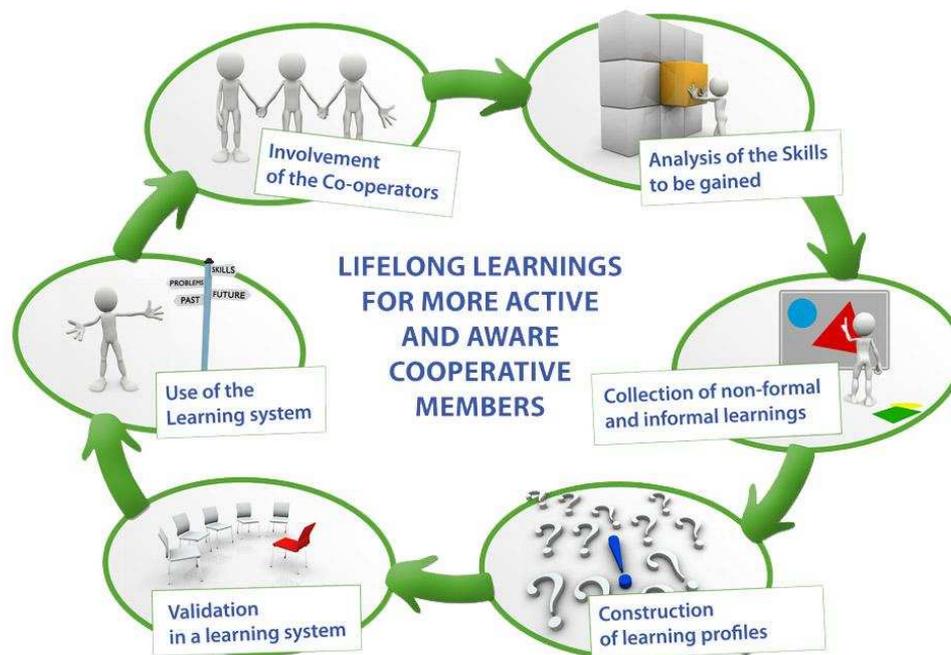
SKILLS developed an innovative learning system, validating existent non formal and informal learning and combining them with different methodological approaches and innovative contents for training co-operators to become more aware and active.

Generally, training of co-operators is not embedded at national and regional levels of the countries involved as people tend to work in cooperatives without a precise idea of social enterprises and without specific skills in accounting, administration and law. The learning system proposed responds to the need of training of these specific targets, analysing and validating the existent non formal and informal learning opportunities on the basis of a shared balance of skills and giving a general model for the validation of the pre-existent non formal and informal learning.

2. Project Approach

A global objective of the SKILLS project is to develop an innovative learning system, **validating existent non formal and informal learning and combining them with different methodological approaches and innovative contents for training co-operators to become more aware and active.** The aim will be to answer to the needs of validation and structure training for co-operators that is not embedded at national and regional levels of the countries involved as people tend to work in cooperatives without a precise idea of social enterprises and without specific skills in accounting, administration and law (these contents were omitted as more importance was given to ethical issues and the difficulties in working with different laws and administrative rules).

The SKILLS system will propose a model of intervention both to respond to the need of training of these specific targets, and **to analyse and validate the existent non formal and informal learning opportunities on the basis of a shared balance of skills.** In this way, the system will give a general model for the validation of the pre-existent non formal and informal learning in the cooperation world.



Picture 1. The process of development of SKILLS project

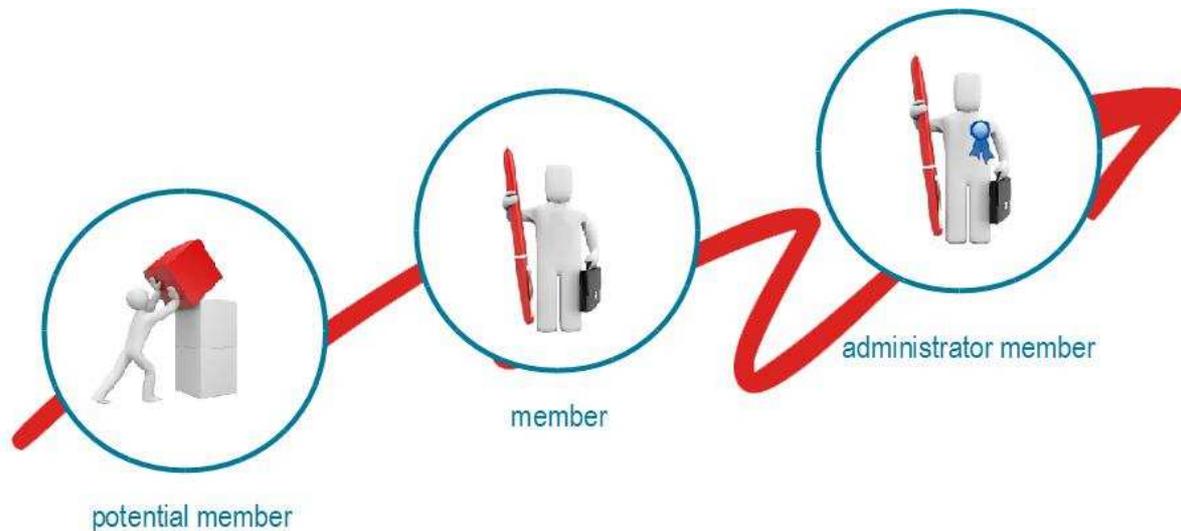
The development of the products followed different approaches according to their nature.

1. The European Qualification Framework (EQF)

This approach was reference for:

- common levels related to the learning outcomes gained with proposed learning system that combines non-formal and informal learning occasions. The learning outcomes identify what the co-operators have to know, understand and are able to do, in order to be aware and good co-operators. The curriculum proposes 3 levels that represent the whole life cycle of a co-operator: potential member (1), member (2) and board member (3);
- common principles to validate non-formal and informal learning occasions. The curriculum (and the validation and learning system) proposes the principles

emerging from the European Commission and CEDEFOP to work on the inventory of non-formal and informal learning and the related cluster¹, i.e. voluntary validation; respect of privacy; equal access and fair treatment; equal involvement of stakeholders; orientation and counselling for individuals present; quality guarantee; respect of stakeholders' interests; impartiality and transparency; professionalism of validators.



Picture 2. The three levels of the co-operator life cycle

Briefly the three levels can be described as:

- **FIRST LEVEL:** the potential member at basic level → knowing for understanding
This level is represented by all the people who have a first contact with a cooperative and are at the start of their co-operator life cycle. Potential members can be people without formal relationships with the cooperatives (potential consumers, clients, etc.) but also people already actively involved in the cooperatives (workers, volunteers, etc.).
- **SECOND LEVEL:** the member at intermediate level → first level + skills for discussing and constructing/developing the object of the 'skill'
This level is represented by all the people who evolved from potential to real members and who are active part of the cooperatives with different roles and rules according to their cooperative system of reference and their involvement. Their knowledge and understanding of the cooperative is different according to their experience and life in the cooperative (in terms both of time spent and of active participation).
- **THIRD LEVEL:** the board member at advanced level → first level + second level + decision making for the object of the 'skill'
This level is represented by all the cooperative members who participated actively, were particularly interested in the success and growth of their enterprise, and decided to be elected in the cooperative board with roles and duties defined by the specific cooperative system of reference.

1 CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2007), *[Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe. A snapshot 2007]*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg

2. OCN (Open College Network)²

OCN is an approach for validators, a Swedish model (taken from the UK), which is a concept based on the need to value, recognise and quality assure education and training outside a formal school system; a need to give recognition and appreciation to learning that takes place at work or in training organisations. It was point of reference for the organisation of accreditation with validators.

3. CEDEFOP portfolio

CEDEFOP definition of portfolio uses a mix of methods and instruments employed in consecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents or work samples showing individual skills and competences in different ways to approach validation.

The SKILLS project developed some different materials both to use on-line and face-to-face as examples of different methods and tools for validating co-operator skills, namely:

- **curriculum** - the description of work/life experiences that can be evaluated by the facilitator. The *Curriculum Vitae* collects the skills that the co-operator has acquired in their life as experience gained through informal and non-formal learning. In fact, a CV collects not only the formal education and formal life of a person, but also gives an idea about his/her experience, vision and expectations about life gained without formal learning and also collects voluntary education and training activities, memberships in social or cultural associations - all parts display different skills. A possible reference was the EC model <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Downloads.csp>
- **pre test- post test model** - powerful tool for validating the skills that should be acquired in quantitative and statistical data. The use of self-evaluation questionnaires with closed questions, multiple-choice, or open questions usable both on-line and F2F is proposed as example in the validation of the knowledge of the cooperative systems. Similar tools are also used as reflection on the attitudes and activities developed in the cooperative as a member.
In the specific case of the validation of attitudes, the questionnaires are about the attitudes towards definition, principles and structure of the cooperative movement. The scale used is: 1 – strongly agree, 2 – agree, 3 – undecided, 4 – disagree, 5 – strongly disagree.
The evaluation of the attitudes, knowledge and activities is very simple i.e. to check the correct and incorrect answers and a general comment about the total results of the questionnaire.
- **open questions (before and after)** – description (also with graphical representations) of the cooperative systems, the behaviours and the activities developed by the co-operators. These questions can be compiled both on-line and F2F. Their results are compared with key words, common definitions of reference and examples/case studies that help the general evaluation of the questions.
- **analysing case study focusing on choices made (before and after)** - analysis of chosen case studies that describe attitudes and activities developed in cooperative contexts. Detailed open and closed questions guide this analysis and can be compiled both on-line and F2F. Their results are compared with key words, common definitions of reference and examples/case studies that help the general evaluation of the questions.
- **structured observation of attitudes and activities in natural or simulated actions (before and after)** - structured observation of natural or simulation of actions (role

² See <http://www.ocn.se/>

playing, theatrical improvisation games, etc.) in the cooperatives relating to the specific contents of the learning unit.

A grid for a structured observation will guide the facilitator in evaluating the activities and attitudes of the co-operators in F2F occasions³.

This kind of actions is very important for validating co-operator attitudes towards the definition, principles and structure of the cooperative movement. They are combined with F2F interviews for clarifying the contingent influence of external factors or unfavourable groups⁴.

- **narration of attitudes and activities in natural or simulated actions (before and after)** - asking the co-operator to narrate her/his experience of the cooperative system relating to the local community using different tools (storyboards, fables, diaries, images, etc.). These tools would help the co-operators in the difficult tasks to describe and express their feelings.

A grid for a structured observation will guide the facilitator in evaluating the activities and attitudes of the co-operators in F2F and on-line occasions.

4. Training approaches

SKILLS started from the recognition of the need of active and participated learner-oriented training that encourages adults to improve their skills. The learning system proposed will combine different approaches, namely:

- the Cooperative Learning approach to introduce cooperation and the group as an effective way for learning and working together. This approach will guide the interactive meetings where the learners are the protagonists.
- residential training to offer the learners the possibility to stay in cooperatives and learn on-the-job. This approach will guide the itinerant workshops where the learners will have the possibility to share their knowledge and skills in various European contexts.
- the ICT-based learning approach to create learning materials that will support the training activities. This approach will support the construction of multimedia and video didactic materials about contents and know-how learnt in non formal and informal contexts, making them more accessible to the learners. The use of multimedia and video is a way of re-presenting the same language, images and metaphors present in the working context, and in the non formal and informal learning processes. These materials will be used for an initial balance of skills of the learners and to design a personalised learning process. The materials will also remain at the end of the activities as continued support for training and as a kind of tool-box to be used when needed.

5. Dissemination approaches

In order to develop solutions customised for each partner context and to promote and disseminate SKILLS results, some partners adopted specific approaches oriented at local, national and international level. such as publication of articles and newsletter, organisation of seminars and meetings, participation in international conference, update of the project website and use of the media.

3 The production of these activities for an on-line use will need the production of serious games or other interactive applications that could be difficult to design and develop.

4 An example could be the validation of the “willingness to compromise attitude” that can be influenced by a board that is closed and does not want an active participation of the members. Another example could be the validation of the “sense of responsibility attitude” that can be influenced by external conditions like the impossibility to use fair-trade products because of their absence on the market.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

Main products to be described are the ones that will be published, i.e.:

- **skills framework** as collection of the skills to be validated that highlighted the need to work on cooperative identity (ethical skills) in line with the present trends of the cooperative system;
- **learning framework** as collection and analysis of the existent formal, non and informal learning occasions present in the cooperative systems involved. Important moment of comparison of different contexts, training contexts and approaches, reference to already mandatory co-operator training. A lack of ethical training and attention emerged;
- **curriculum for co-operators to become more aware and active** as completion of the skills framework focusing on ethical skills and an introduction of a 3-level portfolio co-operator CV to reinforce cooperative identity;
- **system of validation** as a customised and focused 3-step model/guidelines of intervention to recognise, validate and further improve co-operator skills for a reinforced cooperative identity;
- **learning system** as collection of Web-based (usable on a Moodle platform) and F2F tools and activities developed according to a portfolio approach and aimed to recognise, validate and further improve co-operator skills for a reinforced cooperative identity.
- **catalogues** to present the SKILLS project.

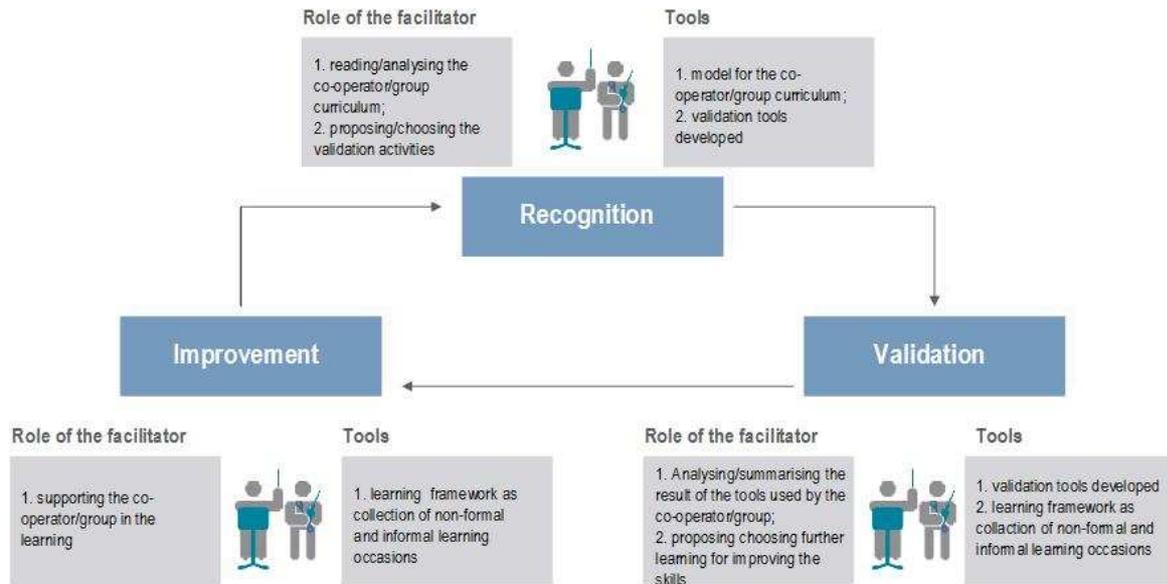
Web and contact details:

<http://www.skillcoop.eu/> → project Web site

<http://www.skillcoop.eu/moodle/> → learning system with interactive materials

Central product is the validation system as the process described and supported by the learning system to recognise, validate, and if necessary to improve co-operator skills. This model of intervention is presented in the following scheme as process that alternates F2F and on-line activities in this order:

1. RECOGNITION PHASE - enrolment of the co-operator as moment for the motivation and information that can be both on-line and/or F2F. The target can be: one or more co-operator/s (or potential/s) a cooperative and the definition of the validation objective during a meeting or with a collection on-line of information;
2. VALIDATION PHASE - planning of the validation activities according to the expectations and previous information collected about the co-operator/s involved and using the validation tools for collecting information about the skills of the co-operator/s involved;
3. (possible) TRAINING PHASE - training using the existent non-formal and informal learning occasions and the itinerant workshops.



Picture 3. SKILLS validation process

4. Partnerships

The European partnership integrates expertise and skills in the cooperative field offered by the Federation of Cooperation in Trentino (Italy), the Institute of cooperative research (Basque Countries, Spain), the Cooperative Development Agency of Skaraborg (Sweden) and in learning and vocational training sectors provided by Swedish TelePedagogic Knowledge Center (Sweden), Anadolu Bil Professional School of Higher Education (Turkey) and Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences (Finland).

Items considered in the construction of the partnership were:

- added European value of comparing different cooperative systems with different traditions and origins, development, realities, problems, training approaches and opportunities, etc.
- added value to have countries from North to South Europe also with the involvement of Turkey for developing products that can be usable at a general European level with minimum customisation on specificities of the cooperative systems involved;
- need and importance/strength of developing a common glossary and meanings for the key items of the project (validation, formal, non-formal and informal, etc);
- involvement of cooperative and non-cooperative organisations in line with the expertise identified as necessary for the project and the opportunity of a continuous comparison/discussion of levels and contents;
- visits as opportunities for exchange;
- more complex and enriched discussions;
- the planning of exploitation and the relationship with the local network was an important item for the future of the project products.

The combination of skills chosen has been a winning mix to combine all the skills necessary to meet the objectives of the project. Furthermore, all partners have experience in European projects, with each partner having the responsibility of a work package specifically linked to their skills and expertise.

All partner countries offer distinct characteristics and features based on their own histories and cultures, which together have offered a broader spectrum for more effective research and for a final product and understanding in response to the original objectives laid out by the project. An international partnership has also offered the ambitious perspective of cross border cooperation, improving the knowledge of international diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue.

5. Plans for the Future

An important outcome of the SKILLS project is a catalogue which summarises the learning offer tested within the project according to the innovative learning system developed.

This catalogue represents an important tool of presentation of the project products and their possible use in different contexts: not only in Europe but also in international contexts where cooperativism needs to establish itself. The catalogue was translated in all partners language in order to be easy accessible to a wide numbers of users such as trainers, facilitators, people involved in the worlds of cooperatives, researchers, etc

Each partner will implement an exploration plan focused mainly on the customisation of the learning system in terms of translation of the materials, enrichment of the contexts, planning and realization of training programme based on the products and methodologies developed in the project, in accordance with their needs, specificities and contexts.

The IPR subscribed by the consortium foresees a joint property of the Partners and warrants the future of the products with precise rules of use and development. The Project Outcomes are to be stored and published on Innovative Learning System. The Innovative Learning System is an open Moodle platform.

The Partners can transfer the user rights to their own students or clients or to their research and development work partners. The user rights include the right to amend, correct, update, and in any other way alter the material.

Dissemination will continue and will develop new strategies in order to promote the project results through the project website improvement and maintenance, publication of articles and newsletters. Organization of seminars at local and national level and as well the participation of partners in international conferences and workshops, will be other significant promotional actions. This will also allow to strengthen the network with other institution and cooperative organisation and foster awareness raising activities about the need to reinforce the cooperative identity.

6. Contribution to EU policies

256.000 cooperative enterprises with 5.44 million employees and 160 million members in 171 member organisations from CCACE (Coordinating Committee of European Cooperative Associations) and ICA Europe (International Cooperative Alliance) coming from 37 European countries are active in mainly all economic activities. They are contributing actively to European Europe challenges as employment, social cohesion, social responsibility and sustainable development.

The development of a learning system that collects practical guidelines and examples of using these guidelines for validating non formal and informal learning in cooperatives and that considers the important and necessary relationship between pedagogy, organisations, applications and technologies, proposing an innovative way for the validation in the this important economic field.

In order to better understanding the impact of SKILLS products on the EU policies, it is interesting to compare SKILLS actions with the Lisbon Education & Training Progress Indicators (LIS), the Lisbon Key Competences (KC) and the LLP Horizontal policies (C) of interest for the project.

LIS – B9 - Skills for the knowledge society: Adults with less than upper secondary education who have participated in any form of education or training.

SKILLS was addressed to the cooperative enterprises where members have different backgrounds and levels of education. Amongst them, a high percentage have less then secondary education level. Generally they do not have the opportunity to attend training programmes that fit with their specific needs. SKILLS proposed three levels that support co-operators in their activities but also gives them a qualification in the cooperative system of reference.

LIS – E19 - Open Learning Environment: Population aged 25-64 participating in education and training.

The training programmes developed in the SKILLS project are addressed mainly to cooperative workers, managers and members generally aged between 25 – 64.

KC5 Learning to learn: Working on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, with the aim of constructing a learning system for more aware and active co-operators, helped the learners in making visible the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual. In this way, they were aware of the different opportunities of learning that are not restricted to a defined space and time (universities, training organisations, periods of life, etc.) but are continuous processes including non-formal and informal learning. The construction of this awareness in the learners helped them in learning to learn.

KC7 Entrepreneurship: SKILLS involved both co-operators (cooperative mangers, members, workers, etc) and potential co-operators (the unemployed, university students, etc) in order to improve their entrepreneurship competences (technical and transversal), taking into consideration the specific characteristics of the cooperatives as social enterprises. These competences help them in being more aware and active but also provides them the tools to construct their future as entrepreneurs in cooperatives.

C promoting equality between men and women and contributing to combating all forms of discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation: one of the principles of the cooperatives identified by the International Cooperative Alliance is the “Voluntary and Open Membership. Cooperatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination. Working on the non formal and informal learning and the training in this field will be guided by this principle and there will not be any discrimination.