



CREDNET- Network for the Accreditation of the Managerial Skills

Progress Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

The project CREDNET- Network for the Accreditation of the Managerial Skills aims to promote the certification and accreditation of the managerial skills and competencies acquired through informal and non formal learning.

More specifically, the CREDNET project aims to develop a certification methodology and criteria to validate informal learning. This methodology is aiming to be specific for the accreditation of the skills and competences of the managers acquired through informal and non-formal learning. This solution was promoted given the fact that most of the managerial skills are acquired through informal and non formal learning, however frequently the managers cannot demonstrate that they have them because there is not a certification and accreditation procedure.

In order to facilitate the managers in this process, the project has developed a draft version of a methodology with guidelines on how to certify and accredit the managerial skills acquired through informal and non formal learning. The methodology is going to be finalized after the testing which is going to take place in the 2nd half of the project.

In order to support this process, the project is also aiming to develop an online self-evaluation tool with which the managers will be able easily to measure their skills and competences and to see the results online and specific e-learning contents and training actions which will aim to familiarize the managers with the tool but also to develop their soft skills. The project has already developed a comparative report on the state of the art in the sector of validation of managerial competencies in the partner countries, a protocol of perspectives and trends, summarising the perspectives and trends for revision, application and improvement of European certification models for managerial competences and an online portal for the publication of best practices in the field of accreditation and certification of managerial competencies.

The user groups that are going to benefit from the results of the project are divided mainly in 3 categories: the first category includes the managers, the prospective managers and their associations which are going to increase their awareness of the managerial skills that they have to develop, they will be facilitated to develop these skills and finally, they will be facilitated to have these skills recognized and accredited. The second category includes the training and accreditation providers which are going to adopt new methodologies and expand the range of services they offer to their clients. Finally, the third category includes the employers and employers' associations which will be facilitated in the process of the selection of the managers since the criteria will be more transparent.

The project consortium consists of 8 partners coming from 7 different European countries with complementary expertise. The consortium includes two intermediary organizations representing a great number of managers, one Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Commerce of Latvia, and one SME Association (CNIPMMR from Romania), a Business Incubator from Italy (ARCA), 3 private SMEs (DANMAR from Poland, TALOS from Cyprus and Action Synergy from Greece) working closely with managers, a training organization (Baltic Bright from Latvia) and one official public organization for the validation of vocational skills (CPI from Slovenia). As it is obvious from the constitution of the partnership, the consortium

represents all the relevant stakeholders and has direct access to the final users. Several associated partners support the activities of the project.

The development of the methodology for the certification and accreditation of managerial skills is based on the transfer of expertise by the partners who are expert in these methodologies and on the extensive research on the needs of the managers. The workshops that are going to be organised in the 2nd part of the project are going to be based on this methodology and are going to contribute to its refinement.

At the time of the progress report the research and the protocol of perspectives and trends have been completed as well as the online tool for publication of best practices. The methodology has been developed in a draft version. The final version is going to be developed on the basis of the conclusion from the workshops and the feedback received by the participants. The training material will be ready in Autumn 2013 as well as the final version of the self-evaluation tool which is now available in draft version.

For more information and for access to the results of the project that have been achieved until now, please visit our website www.crednetmanager.eu

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1. Project Objectives

The general objective of the CREDNET project is to develop a common framework of competences and qualifications for the recognition and validation of managerial skills acquired through non-formal learning.

Considering the fact that generally the managers develop most of their skills during their job and they do not have any official qualifications for them, the important issue for their career is to be able to prove they have these skills and competences. The most effective way to identify these skills and competences is through self-evaluation and evaluation process acknowledged by third parties.

Therefore, the specific objective of the project with which it is aiming to fulfil the above mentioned general objective is the development of a certification methodology and criteria to validate informal learning. This methodology is aiming to be specific for the accreditation of the skills and competences of the managers acquired through informal and non-formal learning. This process is supported by:

- The development of an online self-evaluation tool with which the managers will be able easily to measure their skills and competences (acquired through informal and non formal learning) and to see the results online. This will enable them to identify their shortages and will motivate them to resolve them.
- Development of specific e-learning contents and training actions which will aim to familiarize the managers with the tool but also to develop their soft skills.
- Development of a comparative report on the state of the art in the sector of validation of managerial competencies in Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia and Romania;
- Development of a protocol of perspectives and trends, summarising the perspectives and trends for revision, application and improvement of European certification models for managerial competences;
- Development of a best practices online portal, on which the best practices in the field of accreditation and certification of managerial competencies are going to be uploaded in order to be visible by target groups;

The main community of users that the project is benefiting is the managers, the prospective managers and their associations. This target group is the most important for the project because they are the final beneficiaries and the target group that is going to benefit most from the project results.

At a time when the European Union is dealing with a serious economic crisis which has caused an increase in unemployment, even of qualified young people, and in the context of an ageing population, the validation of relevant knowledge, skills and competences has an even more valuable contribution to make in improving the functioning of the labour market, in promoting mobility and professional qualification and in enhancing competitiveness and economic growth.

The managers, through the workshops that are going to be organized, through the self evaluation tool and through the implementation of the methodology developed by the project are going to increase their awareness of the managerial skills that they

have to develop, they will be facilitated to develop these skills and finally, they will be facilitated to have these skills recognized and accredited. This will lead to the improvement of their qualifications and also of their employment opportunities since the soft skills are a very important part of the competencies that a successful manager needs. Also, with the use of the results of the project, the managers that until now were unavailable to prove they have the soft skills and competencies they have acquired through their managerial career, they will have available a procedure that would facilitate their recognition. In this way, the managers will have available new ways of demonstrating their skills which will be adapted to their needs. In this community of users they are included also important intermediary organizations such as manager associations, SMEs associations, chambers of commerce etc. These intermediary organizations are very important in order to facilitate access to the final beneficiaries. Of course the managers are not a unified and homogenous target group. The project is targeting different categories of managers including experienced managers and managers with small work experience. The outcomes of the project can be used also as a training tool for business school students aspiring to become managers.

The managers, their associations and the intermediary organizations are involved in the project in various different ways. First of all, two intermediary organizations representing a great number of managers, one Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Commerce of Latvia, and one SME Association (CNIPMMR from Romania) are directly involved as partners in the project and they are contributing to the project development with their feedback and suggestions. Secondly, many of the partners in the consortium are working directly with managers and have direct contacts with them. ARCA from Italy is a Business Incubator that is working very closely with managers and prospective managers, DANMAR from Poland, TALOS from Cyprus and Action Synergy from Greece are SMEs which are working with managers in their everyday activities in the framework of business consultancy. Baltic Bright from Latvia is also a training organization very active in the field of training and accreditation of managerial skills. Also several other SMEs are participating in the project as members of the stakeholders' network which have expressed interest to use the project's results and outcomes, fact which is very important for the exploitation phase. Managers, manager associations and related intermediary organizations are also the main target of the greatest part of the dissemination activities that have been realized in the framework of the CREDNET project such as direct e-mails and telephone contacts, indirect contacts with intermediary organizations, participation in events related with managerial training etc. The target group was also involved in the in the survey phase (interviews and focus groups) and in the validation of methodology devised by the partnership and will be directly concerned in testing the self-evaluation tool and accessing the training contents proposed. In each phase of the project, representatives of this target group, which are also members of the project's stakeholders' network, are asked to give their opinion and feedback on the activities and results of the project.

The second category of users is the training and accreditation providers. This community includes national (or other) entities involved in the process of recognising professional qualifications and in assessing and certifying learning outcomes, VET organizations which may decide to use the methodology in order to develop training materials or as a training need analysis and training providers. This category includes also any organization interested to recognize the skills of the professionals:

associations, higher education institutions, vocational training centres, chambers of commerce, HR departments, higher education organizations, regional authorities for education, training and labour policies, universities which are currently in the process of standardization of continuous training processes.

This target group is very important for the successful outcome of the project. The existence of procedures and tools for the accreditation of the managerial skills and competencies acquired through informal and non formal learning is important but ultimately, in order for the project to be successful, the involvement of competent organisations that will be able to adopt these procedures and organise the accreditation of managerial skills is a key issue. This target group will also benefit significantly from the project in different ways. The organisations that are dealing with the accreditation of competencies are going to be able to expand their offer and cover also the field of managerial competencies. This will increase the number of their clients and will contribute positively to their reputation related with innovation and usefulness to particular target groups. This could also pave the way for the accreditation of other skills and competencies acquired through informal and non formal learning. The training organisations that are going to adopt the methodologies, tools and training materials of the project are also going to expand their offer and attract new clients and new people interested in their services from the managerial sector.

This community of users is also involved in many ways from the beginning of the project. First of all they are represented in the consortium. The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education which is the official body for accreditation of vocational qualifications is partner in the project. Also, almost all the partner organisations are providing training services for managers and are organising training sessions online or offline. Also this target group is also the target of many dissemination activities of the project such as direct e-mails and telephone calls, Internet dissemination through the website of the partners' organisations, face to face meetings, dissemination workshops organised by partners, internal dissemination in the framework of the regular activities of the partners etc. Many organisations and individuals belonging to this community of users have been registered in the project's stakeholder's network and are asked to provide feedback and their opinion on the activities and results of the project.

The third category of users is the employers and employers' associations. This community includes SME Associations, Employers' Associations, employment services and of course individual employers. This community of users is also very important for the development of the project because they are the people that are going eventually to employ the managers who will have their skills accredited and they are the people who know the needs of their enterprises better than anyone else. The target group will be able to benefit a lot from the results and outcomes of the project because the accreditation would facilitate the process for the selection of a manager and it will also make more visible and transparent the skills and competencies of the managers. This will eventually facilitate the enterprise owners to select the managers that are going to be more competent, fact which will lead to an increase of the competitiveness of their enterprises.

This community of users is also involved in many ways from the beginning of the project. First of all they are represented in the consortium. CNIPMMR from Romania is the only national association of SMEs in Romania and represents a great number

of small and medium enterprises. Also this target group is also the target of many dissemination activities of the project such as direct e-mails and telephone calls, internet dissemination, face to face meetings, dissemination workshops organised by partners etc. Many organisations and individuals belonging to this community of users have been registered in the project's stakeholder's network and are asked to provide feedback and their opinion on the activities and results of the project.

2. Project Approach

The CREDNET project aims to produce results that are going to be mainstreamed and sustainable in the long run. That's why it has given particular attention to produce results that are realistic and fit perfectly the needs of the final users and the stakeholders of the project.

In order to achieve that, the project has decided to base the development of the methodology on targeted research activities which combined desk research and field research activities which have been realised in all the partner countries. The Desk Research activities have focused on the state of the art, the experiences that have been already implemented in the framework of specific initiatives, the legal framework, the relevant stakeholders involved in the process in each country etc. In the framework of the Desk Research activities, the partners have also identified a number of best practices in the field. The Field Research was realized through interviews (with the enterprises and relevant policy makers) which were realized on the basis of a semi constructed questionnaire and two focus groups in each country. The questionnaire dealt with the whole range of items connected to managerial training, from the motivation underlying managerial training to the choice of learning systems until the effects of validation and formal acknowledgement of competences, both at personal level (micro) and at company level (macro). The first focus group was with leading business from different fields concerning the state-of-the-art in the validation process of non formal and informal learning and the second focus group was with local and regional entrepreneurs concerning the needs of entrepreneurs in relation to the recognition and validation of managerial competencies.

The results of the research have lead to the development of the comparative report and the protocol for Perspectives and Trends for revision, application and improvement of European certification models for managerial competencies. Also, they have provided the material for the portal of the publication of best practices and they have formed the basis for the development of the methodology. Besides the research activities, significant input to the design of the methodology was provided by workshops which have taken place in all the partner countries. In these workshops, the managers and the stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on the first draft of the methodology in order for their input to be included in the next draft and express their needs in relation with the outcomes of the project.

Furthermore, informal consultation was made also with the stakeholders' networks of each partner country. All the partners have developed extensive stakeholders' networks in their countries which include managers, manager associations, SMEs, accreditation organisations, certification organisations, training providers etc. The networking activities have been an important part of the project. All the results of the project are decided after common agreement of all the partners and after consultation with the stakeholders. In many cases, several versions of the products have been produced in order to incorporate in them all the feedback from the partners and the stakeholders. On the basis of the desk and field research and the consultation with the stakeholders, the partner organisation responsible for the methodology (CPI from Slovenia) has developed the first draft of the methodology and the partner responsible for the development of the web tools (Action Synergy from Greece) has developed a proposal for the design/ adaptation of the web tools and has asked partners and stakeholders for feedback. On the basis of this feedback

the 2nd version of the methodology and web tools was produced and will be subject to piloting and further improvement on the basis of the feedback that will be received. The final version of all the products will be developed after the end of the piloting when the feedback from all the participants will have been received and the conclusions will have been made. The same procedure has been implemented for all the projects.

This approach has been decided in order to achieve the maximum consensus possible regarding the results of the project and also in order to ensure the sustainability of its results. The stakeholders of the project (external to the consortium) are organized in national stakeholders' networks and many dissemination meetings have been organized in order to disseminate the activities of the project to the stakeholders and receive feedback from them. This communication is realized through face-to-face meetings, workshops and e-mail/telephone communications.

The results of the project will be piloted for 7 months. This will assure the identification of problems and weaknesses and the taking of all the necessary corrective measures to achieve maximum quality for all the products.

All the approach that was described above has a very clear added value from a quality assurance as well as from an organisational point of view. From a quality assurance point of view, the fact that the final users and all the relevant stakeholders are continuously consulted on all the results of the project assures that the final results will fit exactly their needs, fact which will guarantee also the sustainability of the results of the project. From an organisational point of view, the fact that almost all the partners are actively involved in the development of almost all the results ensures their engagement in all the phases of the project. The partners would be more eager to support something that they have contributed actively to its preparation. The same is true also for the stakeholders. The practical implementation of the results for seven months will guarantee that the consortium has all the necessary time to take all the corrective measures that will be considered necessary. It also means that the impact to the target group will be greater.

The evaluation of the results and the processes of the project is another parameter that guarantees the quality of the results of the project. For the project CREDNET, evaluation is an ongoing procedure that is starting at the beginning of the project and is lasting for the whole period of the project. Both results and processes of the project are being evaluated. Main goal of the evaluation is to identify points that need improvement and take corrective actions. The evaluation identifies also if the results of the project have achieved the desired quality. It also shows the degree in which the cooperation between the project partners has been useful to the project, the partners and the beneficiaries.

In accordance with the Task Planning Document the Evaluation Plan and Quality Assurance Plan were created, in close cooperation with the coordinator and taking into account the other partners opinion. Plan contains detailed description of internal and external evaluation together with the adopted methodology and with detailed schedule. All the necessary evaluation tools (questionnaires) have been developed and distributed. The document presents the elements to be evaluated, the evaluation tools and methodologies and the performance indicators by work package. Internal evaluation is divided in two strands: (Project and Partnership). The project quality is

assessed by evaluating and monitoring of WP progress using formative evaluation process. One of the most important parts of the plan is Timetable for the evaluation including details of which element is evaluated, by whom and when. As attachments to the plan all the necessary evaluation questionnaires were made.

The WP coordinator Danmar Computers (P7) makes sure that each item (a meeting, work package, product, or process) that was designed to be evaluated, have been evaluated in accordance with the schedule and by the appropriate assessors.

The partnership quality is assessed by evaluation and monitoring of commitment and performance of the Consortium. All partners are engaged in evaluation preparing progress reports every 6 months. Evaluation also applies to partnership meetings, completed work packages and project management and outcomes of the projects. Basis for the assessment and evaluation of individual project activities together with the defined common methodology and approach towards particular activities that aim for the assessment and evaluation of the project and partnership were indicated in the Plan.

The results of the project are going to be evaluated both internally (from the partners of the project) and externally (by the project stakeholders).

All data collected during the evaluation process (internal and external) were used to develop Interim Evaluation Report. Results of the current evaluation (described in detail in the Interim Evaluation Report) show that the process of project management works properly, but it should be emphasized, that some of partners have reservations about the communication and information flow in the partnership. The previous project meetings were evaluated very positively. The report includes also the result of evaluation of WP2, research documentation (plan and report). Both the stakeholders and partners found that research was conducted properly and its results will be used to continue development work on the project.

Dissemination and exploitation is also a very important part of the project. The project is disseminating its results and activities to its main target groups (analyzed in the part 1 of the report) with a variety of different ways online and offline. Regarding the online dissemination, the project has developed a website (www.crednetmanager.eu), has linked the project's website with major websites related with managerial skills, accreditation and certification of managerial skills, entrepreneurship education etc. and has made a lot of posts in the facebook accounts of the partners. Logos and links of the project have been placed in the website of most of the partners as well as in other related websites.

Offline dissemination activities are also very important and have contributed a lot to raise the awareness of the target users to the project and involve them. The project has been presented in different occasions in national and transnational stakeholders, articles have been published online and many contacts have been made with stakeholders in a regional, national and European level. The emphasis of the partners' dissemination activities in the first half of the project was given to face to face meetings with relevant stakeholders and their involvement in the project's activities. These activities were established through face to face meetings, e-mail and telephone contacts, organization of special dissemination events, seminars and workshops. Furthermore, press releases have been sent for the project activities, newsletters have been sent to stakeholders translated to all the partners' languages and the project was presented in the framework of several meetings of other projects (including the kick-off meeting for the coordinators of the Leonardo projects

organized by EACEA in Brussels). In these meetings, some members of the consortium were vocational training centres, accreditation organisations, adult education centres etc. Some projects were directly related with some of the main themes of the CREDNET project.

The geographical coverage of the dissemination activities (mainly of the online activities but also some of the offline) is concentrated but not limited in the partners' countries. It is expanded in all the European countries. The aim of the dissemination activities of the project is to enable the use of the project results from members of the target group from all over Europe.

The project is giving particular importance to the development of networks and the participation in already existing networks. There is an active participation in Europe Enterprise Network, in social networks relevant with vocational training and accreditation of skills, regional and national networks for accreditation and validation of vocational skills etc.

The project's dissemination activities are going to increase when all the major results (methodology, self evaluation tool, training material) will be finalised, before the organisation of training workshops (in order to attract participants in these workshops) and after the training workshops (in order to disseminate the final results of the project). The main target groups of these dissemination activities will be the managers and accreditation organisations as well as the public and local authorities that will be able to sustain the results of the project after the project's end. At the same period also, the exploitation activities of the project are going to increase. These activities include agreements regarding intellectual property rights and copyright issues as well as contacts and pre-agreements with mainstreaming organizations and organizations interested in using the results of the project.

The dissemination of the project's aims, objectives and results is very crucial for the sustainability of the results of the project. Dissemination raises awareness to the target group, informs them about the project results and increases the possibility to use them. The dissemination activities contribute to the sustainability of the results of the project differently according to the type of the activity and the target group to which they are addressed. The face to face contacts with managers, management associations and accreditation organisations will facilitate access to the final beneficiaries and will help to the identification of those managers that would be interested to participate in these sessions. The publication of an article in the mainstream press would help to raise the interest in the native population and increase the recruitment of natives in the learning sessions. The publication of an article in a specialised magazine and the presentation of the project in a congress or conference would help to raise the issue of important stakeholders. It will also involve people outside the networks of the partners. The face to face contacts with local and regional authorities will help the mainstreaming of the project results into policies and the facilitation of the sustainability of the results of the project after the project's end.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

Four main results have been achieved until the progress report: the methodology for the accreditation of the managerial competencies acquired through informal and non formal learning, the portal for the publication of best practices, the Comparative Study regarding the issue of the accreditation of the managerial competencies and the Protocol for Perspectives and Trends for revision, application and improvement of European certification models for managerial competencies.

The methodology for the accreditation of the managerial competencies is a document which is addressed to training organisations, accreditation organisations, managers, SMEs and other stakeholders relevant to the field. It includes a presentation of the accreditation procedure, the transversal skills in which the managers should be accredited and the criteria for this accreditation. The selection of the skills upon which the whole accreditation procedure is based is valorising the work done in the previous Leonardo project called EMME (European Management Model Empowerment). The methodology document includes as an appendix the evaluation scale, the appraisal performance grid and a set of behavioural patterns. The methodology will form the basis for the development of the self evaluation tool as well as for the organisation of the piloting phase. It is still in draft version and it has been sent to various stakeholders for public consultation and feedback. The draft version it is also downloadable through the project's website. It will be finalised and translated towards the end of the project after the piloting phase and after being updated on the basis of the feedback of a big number of relevant organisations. Also, until the end of the project it will be ensured that the methodology will be fully compliant with the ECVET model even if the emphasis in the CREDNET project is with the transversal and "soft" skills.

The methodology was based mainly on the comparative study report which summarised the information from the national reports that each partner has made in its country. The national reports, also available to anyone interested through the project's website, have been developed with a combination of desk and field research. The comparative study report includes a general overview of the situation in the partner countries, best practice examples in the field of validation of competences acquired through a non formal or informal training and in the field of recognition of competences acquired through a non formal or informal training system and the needs for recognition and validation of managerial competences and the objectives for such recognition

On the basis of the research realized in the first phase of the project, another main result of the CREDNET project was produced: the Protocol with perspectives and trends for revision, application and improvement of European certification models for managerial competencies. The main purpose of the document is on the one hand to provide a summary of the perspectives and trends in the field of recognition and validation of managerial competencies acquired through non-formal and informal learning, and on the other hand to issue recommendations for revision, application and improvement of European certification models for managerial competences. It includes, among others, European highlights in terms of recognition and certification and a SWOT analysis of the recognition and certification systems.

The portal for the publication of best practices is also another important result that has been achieved until the progress report. The portal, which is available at <http://bestpractices.crednetmanager.eu> collects and publishes best practices from all over Europe (and also beyond) regarding the accreditation and certification of the managerial competencies. The 36 best practices published have been identified by the partners in the research phase of the project and a discussion is encouraged between the different stakeholders. The portal is available in all the languages of the consortium and aims to be constantly updated with new information. This portal aims to become a European Observatory in the field of Managerial Culture Development in the specific issues related with accreditation and certification of managerial culture even if it presents best practices also from non European countries.

All the above mentioned outcomes and reports are available from the project's website for anyone interested to read them.

The main result of the project will be the piloting of the methodologies and tools for the certification and accreditation of the managerial competencies that are going to be realised in the 2nd half of the project. However, three main outcomes of the project are still in preparation phase and are going to be available in the second part of the project

- Self Evaluation Tool. The self evaluation tool is going to be an online tool where the managers are going to be able to self evaluate their skills and competencies, on the basis of specific criteria described in the methodology and identify their strengths and weaknesses. A draft demo version is already available.
- E-Learning Training Material. The main purpose of the training content is to facilitate the managers to develop their skills and competencies in which they are weak. The identification of this weakness can be made through the self evaluation tool. Training content as well as links with other existing training contents available online is going to be available for each one of the transversal skills that are mentioned in the accreditation methodology. The training content will be uploaded in the e-learning platform which was adapted in order to match the needs of the target groups of the sector.
- National stakeholders' networks in all the countries of the consortium which will include all the relevant actors. The national networks will be interconnected. The development of relations between the different participants in these networks will facilitate both the piloting sessions that are going to be organised during the project but also the sustainability and mainstreaming of the project's results.

These results have not been piloted yet in order to be able to measure their impact on the target groups. The potential impact of the project's outcomes and results is analyzed in the section 1 of the present report. The impact will be clear at the end of the project, when the piloting will have been completed and the stakeholders' network completed. The interest shown by a considerable number of stakeholders is showing the great potential impact of the outputs of the project.

All the project outcomes and results are available through the project website www.crednetmanager.eu. This website provides access to all the reports published

until now for the project, links to the web tools that are ready and information about the project and the sector.

For more information you can contact the project's operational coordinator Mr. Konstantinos Diamantis- Balaskas at the e-mail euprograms@action.gr

4. Partnerships

The fact that the project is planned and implemented by a multi-country consortium offers a clear European added value. This European added value is specifically linked to the project's objectives as described in the part 1 of the present report.

The general objective of the project is to develop a common framework of competences and qualifications for the recognition and validation of managerial skills acquired through non-formal learning. Since the framework that the CREDNET project is aiming to develop is "common" for all the European countries and exploitable by all the interested organisations in Europe, the cooperation between organizations based in different European countries was more than necessary. A very important element for the development of the methodology was the cooperation and the transfer of expertise between different organisations representing different sectors and different countries. Relevant experience was transferred by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, which is the official accreditation body for Slovenia, by the Chamber of Commerce from Latvia, by an SME Association in Romania, a business incubator from Italy and 4 private organisations from Greece, Latvia, Cyprus and Poland. A particular emphasis was given to the representation of the SMEs in the partnership. The diversity and complementarity within the partnership has allowed the transfer of experience and points of view from a country to another but also from a sector to another.

The specific objective is the development of a certification methodology and criteria to validate informal learning. The methodology and criteria are common for all the European countries that are participating in the consortium and exploitable all over Europe. This approach highlights the need to face the issue related with the accreditation of the managerial skills which is common all over Europe. The fact that the project is developed by a European partnership allows to highlight the common issues that the managers face in this field.

The CREDNET project is also a Network project. It aims to develop a network between the stakeholder organizations in order to foment the cooperation between them and make this process sustainable. The project aims to create national networks with stakeholders in each partner country which, however, are going to be interconnected between them. Through this network, the project aims to promote the adoption of the project's outcomes by relevant organizations all over Europe and mainstream the concept of the accreditation of the managerial skills. It also aims to the promotion of the discussion between the various stakeholders in the different countries regarding their experiences, their views and their objectives in this issue.

Moreover, the European added value that the multi-country partnership is bringing to the project can be proven also by the following facts: All the results will be exploitable in several European countries: The methodology, the portal, the self evaluation tool and the training materials will be common for all the European countries contributing thus to the increase of transnational cooperation. Also, all the results will be translated in all the languages of the partnership and therefore they will be available to the people coming from the partnership countries independently of their foreign language skills. They will also be available for use from countries outside the partnership that will express interest for them. Finally, the whole design of the

methodology and tools, through the approach described in the part 2 of the report, drew on a range of transnational stakeholders with complementary experience.

Finally, the fact that the question that the accreditation of the managerial skills is a European question requires common European answers. The partners in the consortium represent all the relevant stakeholders, fact which brings added value to the consortium.

The experience of working together in a European partnership has proved to be very useful and exciting. All the partners have a great expertise in the issues examined by the project; however, they are looking at them from different angles and different backgrounds, fact which allows the maximum possible exchange of expertise and know-how between the partners. The skills of the partners are complimentary because it includes partners that represent the managers, partners that represent accreditation organisations, partners that represent the employers' side etc.,

This process is not beneficial only for the project itself, for reasons explained above, but also for the partners of the project who, in this way, gain useful expertise and experience for the development of their organization. This expertise that the partners have gained can be traced in various fields such as development of the network of cooperation, cooperation at a European level, development of new methodology and tools for accreditation etc.

The benefits of the partnership, however, are not limited in the transnational partnership that executes the project. They are also extended to the partnership with other (external) organizations that represent the target users and the stakeholders of the project. This is particularly important for the CREDNET project as it is a network project. Each partner country has created a national stakeholders' network which is consulted very often on the various activities of the project and which provides very useful feedback to the project. Even if the members of the different stakeholders' networks are different, very important organizations for the mainstreaming and exploitation of the results of the project participate in them such as SMEs, chambers of commerce, training organisations, employers' associations, accreditation organisations etc. The partnership with these external organizations has created benefits for the project (because it provides useful insight on the stakeholder's opinions, ensures that the project is consistent with the user needs and forms a basis for the sustainability), for the partners (because they extend their networks of cooperation) and for the stakeholders themselves (because they provide feedback on products that they will use, because they have the chance to meet and collaborate with European partnerships, because they can benefit their members, target groups using the results of the project). The development of this network is a very important activity for the project and it will be an important part of the activities in the second half.

5. Plans for the Future

The good work that has been done until now is going to continue and intensify until the end of the project. The methodology developed is going to be tested, adapted and finalized. An online self evaluation tool is going to be developed in order to allow the managers to self evaluate the skills and competencies that they have and identify their training needs. This tool is going to be tested in a great number of managers and perspective managers. Also, the training content of the project, which is going to be based on the development of the transversal skills for the managers as well as of the skills acquired through informal and non formal training, is going to be finalized and uploaded in the e-learning platform of the project which is already ready. The training material will be available in all the partners' languages.

The most important activity that is going to be realized in the second half of the project is going to be the testing of the methodology and the tools developed. This piloting phase will begin at the beginning of February 2014 and will consist mainly of a number of workshops where the managers will be trained on the use of the methodology and the tools developed by the project. However, since most of the tools of the project are online, the electronic piloting of the project is also very important. Managers from all over Europe are going to be reached through electronic means and are going to be asked to test the methodology and use the online self evaluation tool and the training content developed. During the piloting phase, the methodology is going to be tested also by relevant stakeholders such as vocational training centres, chambers of commerce, SMEs associations, managers' associations, accreditation providers etc. This testing is very important, as part of the networking activities of the project, in order to ensure the sustainability of the project results and the mainstreaming of the accreditation methodology. On the basis of the feedback that will be provided by the managers and the stakeholders of the project, corrective actions will be made and the final version of the methodology is going to be developed.

Before the beginning of the piloting phase, a very intense dissemination campaign (both online and offline) is going to be realized in order to attract as many managers and stakeholders as possible to use and test the results of the project. Before the beginning of the piloting sessions, workshops are going to be organised in order to train the teachers/ facilitators that are going to guide the managers and the stakeholders through the methodology and the tools. In order to record the results of the piloting, all the partners are going to draft national piloting reports which are going to be summarised in a comprehensive comparative piloting report.

The next project period will be also a period of intense dissemination of the project. As the results are closing to be finalized, dissemination will become more intense in order to recruit people to the piloting sessions, in order to inform the target groups about the results and products of the project and in order to promote the use, the mainstreaming and the exploitation of the results of the project.

Since the project is a network, the promotion of the networking between all the relevant organisations in the field is a very important activity of the project that is going to intensify in the second half of the project. The main goal of these networking activities is to ensure the sustainability of the project. After the finalization of the results of the project, all the issues related with the copyrights and intellectual

property rights are going to be settled and contacts and pre-agreements are going to be made with potential mainstreaming organizations that are in the position to use the results of the project after its end (vocational training organisations, accreditation organisations, national bodies etc.) and maximize the exploitation of the results of the project.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The challenges posed by the recent economic crisis in Europe has increased the need “to update and develop skills in line with changing economic and social circumstances”, as stated in the introduction to ET2020 Strategic Objective 1. This has created more pressure for adjusting and developing lifelong learning systems within each country and in the EU at large. ET2020 points out that “the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States”. CREDNET builds on ET2020 Strategic Objective 1 which emphasizes that “In particular, work is needed to ensure the development of national qualifications frameworks based on relevant learning outcomes and their link to EQF, **the establishment of more flexible learning pathways – including better transitions between the various education and training sectors, greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning, and increased transparency and recognition of learning outcomes**”. CREDNET project promotes the recognition of managerial skills gained through non-formal and informal learning.

Furthermore, Europe 2020 flagship initiatives «An Agenda for new skills and jobs » and « Youth on the Move », recent communication « Rethinking Education : Investing in skills ... » all urge to promote validation of non-formal and informal learning as a key element of lifelong learning systems and a practical step towards growth and jobs.

EU has developed a policy framework and tools to support the systems for validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, such as EQF, European Principles for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning, European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning, Europass and recently proposed European Skills Passport and others. These EU tools have provided orientation for implementation of CREDNET project.

In line with the recent EU Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (as a follow-up on European Guidelines ...) CREDNET project promotes involvement of stakeholders in the development and implementation of validation mechanisms: CREDNET partnership includes public and education policy level institutions, chambers of commerce, private companies and employers, non-formal education centres. In addition, being a Network project, CREDNET has created a European network of stakeholders, which is further deepened by local networks built around CREDNET partners within partner countries. As CREDNET aims to develop an accreditation methodology and a self-assessment tool of managerial skills, it deals with both: 1) specific elements/stages of validation process listed in the Council Recommendation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) and 2) developing and promoting validation systems in partner countries and in Europe at large.

The project also aligns with the Bruges-Copenhagen process, envisaging a common frame for transparency of competences and qualifications, a set of common principles to validate formal and informal education, to ensure greater compatibility between the approaches of different Member States at different levels and continuous vocational guidance tools, to enable citizens to benefit from a better access to lifelong learning. This is exactly what the CREDNET project is doing in the

field of managerial competencies. The project is taking also into account the EU Communication on *“Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning (2006)”*, where it is specified that entrepreneurship and managerial competence is developed in both formal and non-formal settings and calls for further development of tools for the recognition and validation of entrepreneurship-related and managerial skills acquired in non-formal learning.

