Italian Case Study "Good and bad practice in the Validation of NF and IF learning at HE level"

Background	Evidence, material
The reasons for this case study are the general situation of legal, cultural and institutional underdevelopment in the practice of validation of non formal learning in the country and the existence of two opposite institutional approaches: on one hand, isolated valid pilot experiences, inspired by European models and key concepts in LLL, aiming at valorisation of individuals' prior learning (case A); on the other hand, profit-oriented initiatives without any quality control, taken by some HET institutions and public administrations, aiming at recognition of individuals' workplace careers in terms of competence outcomes in view of HE awards (case B). The description of the features of the two so divergent approaches and of the positive or negative perspectives implied by them, can provide a good analytical starting point for a correct comprehension of the Italian situation in this field.	Information concerning the two contrasting experiences has been collected from the press, from Internet sources and a TV broadcast ("Report", may 2006), official documentation published by HET institutions, and, as far as the "ALPA" pilot experience is concerned, from internal documentation concerning the implementation of the Module and from the final publication of the DEWBLAM project: "*DEWBLAM* – The social and educational challenge of *WBL* in European HET. Results of a pilot experience", pp. 227-234.
Context A Sector : Higher VET for working adult learners aiming at qualification at HET level Organisation : The inter-university Consortium E-FORM, active in the field of educational innovation, e-learning, LLL, etc., in collaboration with the national educational training agency for public administrations FORMEZ The background of this case study is the pilot project in *Work Based Learning* conducted by E-Form in the framework of the DEWBLAM project (Grundtvig 1) in 2006, aiming at the valorisation of professional and technical competences possessed by employees in Southern Italian public administrations in the phase of admission to attend a teaching Module on G.I.S., awarding 12 ECTS credits recognized by local Universities. The approach to validation of prior experiential learning, adopted in DEWBLAM, was inspired by and compatible with the developments going on	**Context B** Sector : HET for working adult learners, mainly from public administrations Organisations : Public and private Universities offering special conditions for the delivery of HET awards to employees of public Services and professional organisations The background of this case study is the convergence of three main factors: the individual need for HET qualification as a requirement for personal internal career progression in administrations; the "clever" instrumental use of LLL key concepts such as VNFL and IFL, developed in the reform of EU HET; the attempt to increase HET institutions' budget resources through special agreements with sectors of public administration and professional organisations, establishing special enrolment fees for their members. As a result of these three factors, starting from 2002, an increasing number of HET institutions uses art. 5 of the HE Reform bill of 1999 (DM 509), extended

in other European pilot projects such as Trans.fine and Re.fine, etc.	by art. 22 of the 2002 Financial Law (L. 448), signing agreements with public administrations or professional associations according to which employees are entitled to receive "educational credit", i.e. recognition in terms of university credits (CFU), for competences acquired through work experience. The positive implications of this development running under the name of "Graduating experience" (in terms of valorisation of experiential and informal learning in the workplace) are rapidly overcome by the institution of enormous privileges for this category of working students (reducing the duration of a 3-year bachelor study programme to one year or less), on one hand, and on the other hand, by considerable financial advantages for Universities due to the enrolment of thousands of part-time students. From a methodological point of view, the process of validation of informal and non-formal learning is not based on individual assessment of the competences possessed by the learner, but simply or mainly on her/his career position or status in the Administration.
People 19 male and female (only 10 %) selected students attended the Module, coming from different geographical environments (Basilicata, Calabria, Molise), different school background and professional activities: territorial environmental services; fire prevention; municipal planning; forest administration; protection of archaeological heritage. 45 % of the learners were aged over 40 years; all participants had at least 3 years of professional experience in their respective position.	**People** Between 2002 and 2007 thousands of workers, mainly public servants employed by the State at national or regional level - Ministry of the Interior (Police, social security, fire brigades, ministerial employees), Ministry of Defence (Army, Carabinieri, Fiscal Police), regional government (Sicily) – and members of professional associations and/or trade unions – journalists, accountants, labour consultants, teachers - are given HE awards on the basis of validation of up to a maximum of 130 credits out of 180.

Validation of prior experiential learning was conducted during the "intake phase" through individual identification of prior accreditable learning against the learning outcomes defined for the GIS-Module. Up to 6 ECTS credits out of 12 could be allocated for prior IF and NF learning The procedure included:
- assessment of application file, including an "autobiographical itinerary" (personal reflection and self-evaluation of past educational experiences and motivations for enrolling in this Module) and a description of the workplace environment (personal role, activities, responsibilities, interpersonal relations);
- computer-based test concerning basic knowledge prerequisites related to GIS;
- individual interview with the selection commission, to verify generic competences (e.g. communication and IT skills) and subject specific competences acquired through previous experiential learning.

The result of this "learning review" was recorded in an individual chart defining:
- experience and position at work
- educational pathway and qualifications
- technical competences in GIS
- professional competences
- communication skills
- motivation

An essential feature of the learning module was represented by a negotiated individual or group project conducted in the learner's workplace according to the DEWBLAM approach; results of this work based learning was submitted to the teaching Commission for evaluation and credit allocation (max. 2 ECTS credits).

A personal case:
R. V., technical assistant in the regional environmental authority of Basilicata: 32 years old; secondary school qualification in natural sciences; working for ARPAB since 1997 (nine years); enrolled in the Degree Course in Environmental Sciences at the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Basilicata as part-time student since 2001. Her multiple work tasks and responsibilities gave her opportunity to collect experience and know-how in many areas in the field of hydrographical and hydro-meteorological services,

Study programmes cover a wide range of disciplines such as political science, administrative science, "strategic studies", management, health sciences, "intercultural mediation and euro-Mediterranean cooperation", communication science, investigation science, fiscal administration science, etc. In 2006-7 almost 7 % (11.874) of bachelor degrees in Italy were obtained within this framework; in the same period, a certain number of public and private Universities awarded a high percentage of degrees according to this scheme: Chieti – 53 % (3046); Siena – 47 % (1918); Kore – 79 % (462); San Pio V. – 73 % (645); Unitelma – 91,4 % (428), etc.

A personal case:
A.B., after taking her upper secondary school diploma ("maturità") in 1993, undertook part-time literary university studies in Rome during the academic years 93-94 and 94-95, taking only two exams (contemporary history, history of literature 1), while working in temporary jobs. In 1995 she successfully applies for employment in the Ministry of the Interior (public competition – "concorso") where she has been working since then for 11 years in the area of central ministerial services. During her workplace career she attended the necessary internal training courses, aiming at updating her knowledge of legal frameworks, computing skills and administrative innovation, required for internal career progression, reaching the position of vice-prefect. Considering that any further career progression compulsorily requires a University award, she is personally interested in the advantages offered by the Agreement signed between the private Roman University San Pio V. and the Ministry of the Interior: the agreement establishes the right for its employees with at least 5 years of work experience to enrol in the degree programme in "Political Science", getting recognition of a certain number of credits (Italian CFU, compatible with ECTS) for prior learning (certified University exams and non-formal learning) and experiential learning in the workplace, according to the career position reached by the applicant.

In 2006 A.B. therefore applies for enrolment at San Pio V. and, according to her position is enrolled in the third year of the degree programme in "Political Science", obtaining validation of a total number of 135 CFU, including 113 CFU for experiential and non-formal learning, plus 11 credits each for her University exams.

Her file is examined by the Director of the study programme who validates the applicant's non-formal and informal learning on the basis of a declaration by the employer certifying the applicant's career position (status), confirming

data assessment and processing concerning meteorological factors, creation of bio-climatic and radiation indexes, forecast maps related to flood emergencies, periodical publication of data related to hydro-meteorological factors, in particular of hydrologic Yearbooks, organisation of historical archives. She is familiar with complex tools such as forecast maps and on-line monitoring networks and relative software. She keeps personal relations with a wide set of actors inside the administration and externally (University, Civil protection Services, local public administrations. She was strongly motivated to develop her knowledge of the GIS theory and technology, as a tool for improving professional efficiency and career perspectives, and was particularly interested in the formal valorisation of competences acquired through informal learning due to professional activity, and in the opportunity of recognition of credits in the framework of her University career. She felt in fact that she had accumulated a lot of know-how, competences and knowledge through the informal learning processes stimulated and required by her work tasks, without ever receiving any acknowledgement for this professional and conceptual heritage. She therefore took part with enthusiasm in the Module, in particular in its initial "learning review" phase that was conceived by her as the very first concrete lifelong learning experience.

R. V. was among the few participants in the Module who were attributed the maximum number of credits for her prior learning (6 CFU – see Att. A); her project work was established in agreement with her administration and the University tutor, and was assessed very positively (2 credits, maximum grade: 30/30) as a contribution to the improvement of the services provided by her work organisation.

To sum up: **the process, tools, interactions, meaning**
Despite its limited dimension, this experience is significant in the Italian context for a number of reasons:
Experienced workers in Southern Italian public administrations were given an opportunity of valorising the competences acquired through experiential learning, contributing to their individual professional development and to the improvement of administrative efficiency in a less developed area of the country.
The implementation of the Module on G.I.S. according to the DEWBLAM approach to Work based Learning experienced close institutional interaction

that she attended the training required for reaching that position. Paying a reduced annual enrolment fee of 1 800 € (instead of 3.900), she is requested to pass courses and exams in seven 6-credit-courses ("Sociology of deviance (1 and 2)", "Sociology of cultural processes", "Social psychology", "Social pedagogy", "Psychopathology", "Geopolitical Strategies") and to write a final dissertation (3 CFU), while she is exempted from sitting all hard exams such as "Private law", "Public law", "Administrative law", "Compared constitutional right", "Economics", "Statistics" , Foreign languages.
A.B. gets prepared for her oral exams through individual study based on a reading list, without attending teaching courses, and after passing the exams distributed over the year (December 2006; February, April, June, July, September 2007), in December 2007 obtains her University degree in "Political Science" with a medium-high grade of 27 out of 30.

Personal case – the assessor's perspective:
Question: How does the University verify that the applicant actually possesses the competences to be validated?
Answer Prof. A.R. (Director Study Programme at University San Pio V.): Normally, according to the law, verification is made by an internal committee, but in the case of Agreement with a public administration, say the Ministry of the Interior, it's the administration that proposes the agreement that declares that the competences have been acquired.
Qu.: You will certainly receive a formal certification concerning the training activities attended by the individual, to be included in the file.
A.R.: No, the agreement explicitly establishes that the chief of the competent department in the Ministry certifies the existence of the required conditions. On the other hand, in a relationship based on mutual trust it's unimaginable to dispute the declarations made by the partner; moreover, alternatively, we would have to look into the individual files, element by element, person by person – there would never be an end! The agreement serves exactly for the aim of putting together two organisations, each of them with its proper competences. Who are we, to claim to control the partner's acts?

To sum up: **the process, methods, meaning**
Starting from two important European developments in the field of education – the reform of HET systems ("Bologna") and the adoption of the Lifelong Learning perspective – a system of access to HET has been set up that allowed

between the HET system, the VET system and the work field (public administration). Strongly innovative was the recognition by HET institutions of credits that originate (partially) from informal learning.

Validation of IF and NF learning was not carried out in an isolated way or as an aim as such, but was included in a learning path, i.e. finalized towards the reaching of a pre-defined learning outcome, as a personalized tool to facilitate qualification.

The methodology used for identification and validation of competences acquired through informal learning, mainly in the workplace, was a complex one including self-evaluation and self-reflection tools together with rigorous verification of possessed competences against learning outcomes defined for the Module. A central role is played by the "workplace learning project", conceived as a form of demonstration of acquired competences.

This kind of experience shows that conceptual, methodological and procedural tools are ready in Italy, but that validation will maintain an episodically character as long as there is no favourable national legal framework allowing more widespread experimentation.

several thousands of individuals to obtain a privileged treatment disguised as validation of prior learning and informal, experiential learning. From a methodological point of view, no verification whatsoever of the actual acquisition of competences was undertaken, since credits were attributed simply on the ground of status: the higher the position in career, certified by the Administration, the more credits are validated. Consequently, validation is practised as a collective process determined by general, pre-established rules, with no attention whatsoever for the personal learning portfolio possessed by the individual learner. Basic educational principles are being used as ideological cover for making considerable profit, offering substantial advantages to the members of certain professional categories (mainly in public administrations).

The most shocking aspects of this system that had degenerated in a real emergency (up to 140 credits out of 180 validated without any academic control) were stopped in autumn 2006, when the newly elected government approved a decree establishing that prior informal learning can be validated up to a maximum amount of 60 CFU out of 180 only. This typical "emergency measure", however, does not solve any of the substantial problems raised by this bad practice: existing agreements between Universities and Administrations were kept exactly the same, reducing only the maximum number of valuable credits (reducing strongly the incentives for potential applicants, anyway!). On the other hand, the numerical upper limit set for any possible validation of non-formal and informal learning, through an administrative decision, represents a serious drawback for the introduction of good practice in Italy, inspired by the European principles on VNF-IFL, since the abuse widely practised by several private and public Universities has engendered a widespread public suspicion against the idea itself that experience made by individuals can be valorised as an educational heritage in the LLL perspective.

Attachment A (Context A)

IDENTIFICATION and VALIDATION of non formal and informal learning

Applicant : R. V., A.R.P.A. Basilicata

Geographic Information Systems for environmental monitoring (12 CFU/ECTS)	
Learning outcomes / Sub-modules	Competences acquired through prior learning
Sub-module: Notions of Cartography and GPS technology	
• *leggere i dati cartografici, con particolare riferimento alla cartografia italiana*	x
• *conoscere e descrivere i concetti fondamentali sui sistemi di proiezione geografica, utili alla corretta georeferenziazione del dato territoriale grezzo*	x
• *conoscere i principi di stereoscopia e di restituzione fotografica ed il metodo della stereofotogrammetria*	x
• *conoscere e descrivere i principi fondamentali della fotogrammetria terrestre ed aerea, analogica e digitale*	
• *conoscere i principi del sistema di posizionamento globale (GPS) e le relative applicazioni*	
Sub-Module: Data structures for GIS	
• *definire le entità spaziali di base che costituiscono l'edificio di un progetto GIS*	
Sub-Module: Data-base structures and digital representation	
• *conoscere le caratteristiche dei modelli per la rappresentazione dei dati spaziali, della loro struttura*	x
• *conoscere la possibilità di integrazione e conversione dei diversi modelli*	x
• *utilizzare le funzioni di un data base relazionale ed elaborare dei dati attributo*	(x)
Sub-Module: Data sources	
• *conoscere i metodi e i problemi di acquisizione dei dati*	x
• *conoscere le possibili fonti degli stessi utili ai GIS*	x
• *conoscere proprietà e limiti di ciascun metodo*	
• *conoscere le tecniche e le fasi del processo di telerilevamento con GPS (raccolta, decodificazione ed elaborazione dati)*	
Sub-Module: Modes of data acquisition and editing	
• *effettuare la digitalizzazione e scansione dei dati utilizzando correttamente il software a disposizione*	
• *conoscere ed evidenziare sorgenti e tipi di errori nei dati spaziali e attributo*	x

• *conoscere e descrivere i metodi per la correzione degli errori, integrazione di informazioni su dati esistenti*	
• *essere in grado di rielaborare e gestire i dati*	**x**
• *ortorettifica e georeferenzia immagini acquisite da scanner o telerilevate rendendo sovrapponibili e confrontabili dati provenienti da fonti diverse*	
• *georeferenzia e rettifica i dati vettoriali acquisiti mediante digitalizzazione*	
Sub-Module: Spatial operations	
• *conoscere le funzionalità disponibili per le operazioni spaziali GIS*	(**x**)
• *essere in grado di distinguere i tipi di operazioni e di capire quando è opportuno applicarle*	
• *essere in grado di utilizzare correttamente i GIS per effettuare operazioni di analisi, modellazione e interrogazione spaziale*	
• *conoscere ed e descrivere le caratteristiche degli operatori di map algebra*	
• *saper distinguere ed applicare i diversi operatori in funzione del modello di dati adottato*	
Sub-Module: Digital elevation models	
• *conoscere i diversi approcci di modellazione spaziale tridimensionale*	(**x**)
• *conoscere i campi di applicazione appropriati per le diverse tecniche e metodi di interpolazione*	
• *essere in grado di applicare i metodi e le tecniche in generale*	
• *essere in grado di applicare tecniche di analisi spaziale per ottenere informazioni topografiche e morfologiche utili all'applicazione di modelli distribuiti di analisi ambientale*	
• *essere in grado di generare modelli digitali del terreno ed estrarne le informazioni topografiche e morfologiche*	
Sub-Module: Generation of thematic cartography	
• *essere in grado di definire le tematiche in funzione degli obiettivi*	(**x**)
• *essere in grado di preparare un layout di stampa prefissato con i dati provenienti da fonti diverse*	(**x**)
• *saper realizzare e stampare una cartografia tematica secondo le specifiche richieste*	
Total number of credits to be validated on the basis of prior learning	6

Project in the workplace	Credit allocation
"Indici climatici per l'individuazione delle aree a rischio di desertificazione nella Regione Basilicata"	2
Total number of credits allocated for non formal and informal learning	**8**

Notes

The applicant exhibits fairly solid notions in the more basic contents of the Module and partial knowledge, mainly based on professional practice, in a few other more specific subjects. She is aware that attendance of the Module will allow her to deepen her knowledge providing theoretical background, and will thus enhance her future professional practice. Her profile and knowledge background acquired through formal and informal learning experiences is entirely correspondent to the desirable pre-requisites for a profitable Module attendance.

The learning project conducted in the workplace provides demonstration of the full assimilation of the learning outcomes and confirms the learner's capability to apply the acquired competences giving a significant contribution to a "real" job problem occurring in her professional practice.