This report is about all the Nordic countries and I am supposed to deliver a summary of a publication about a Swedish way of working with validation, that is both actual and of interest for the colleagues in Europe. Instead of doing a summary I have chosen two short chapters in the report that deal with the use of concepts in the field of validation. In many countries there is an ongoing discussion about different concepts used in the context of validation. Chapter two is about definitions of validation, while chapter three is about perspectives on validation. These two chapters are presented below with exact wording as in the report.

2. Different concepts and definitions of validation

In the five countries studied in this Report, different concepts are used for what we describe as "validation". This is not only due to the fact that the countries have different languages but also to the fact that each country focuses somewhat differently in their ways of defining the phenomenon.

Denmark, Norway, and Iceland mostly use the concept "reell kompetens" (real [actual] competence; prior learning) – in Danish and Norwegian "realkompetence" and "realkompetanse" and in Icelandic "raunferni" – which means that, within this concept, one focuses on the object of the validation, the competence that might be the target for evaluation. In these countries every competence is included, independent of whether it has been gained in formal/non-formal education, at work, or in everyday activities[2].

In Icelandic the term "raunfærnimat" is also used, which means real competence evaluation. This Icelandic expression includes a validation process in five steps: information, mapping, analysing interviews, verification, and documentation. However, the process may be concluded after the mapping, e.g. if it turns out that the competence in the area concerned is not sufficient in relation to the formal requirements. The result then becomes a kind of "non-formal validation".

In Swedish policy validation has been defined as "a process that includes a structured assessment, valuation, documentation, and recognition of the knowledge and competences that a person possesses regardless of how they have been acquired" (Ds 2003:23). In addition validation is defined as an *exploratory* (as opposed to a *controlling*) process with the aim of getting the existing knowledge assessed and recognised. The Swedish National Commission on Validation has emphasised that mapping as well as assessment, valuation, and documentation are parts of the process with assessment as the central part.

In Denmark there is no comprehensive expression that corresponds to "validation". The real competence can be recognised ("anerkendelse") in relation to an education by different kinds of competence assessment. The current initiative of the government, according to its title, deals with the final result: recognition of real competence in the education ("anerkendelse af realkompetence i uddannelserne"), but the current bill also deals with the preceding process to which the individual should have a right, namely the assessment ("individuel [real]kompetencevurdering"). The basis for the assessment ("vurdering") may be a competence clarification ("kompetenceafklaring"), an individual competence assessment ("individuel kompetencevurdering"), and/or documentation in a competence folder (portfolio).

In Norwegian the validation activity is called documentation and valuing of real competence ("dokumentasjon og verdsetting av realkompetanse"). The documentation implies a certified document showing the real competence that a person possesses. An official documentation is a document that has been valued in relation to the requirements of the public education system and may be a competence certificate, "vitnemål", or "fag/svennebrev". A competence certificate will be issued after an evaluation ("verdsetting") of the real competence. A valuation of real competence ("verdsetting av realkompetanse") in turn implies a process in which the person gets his competence valued and recognised in relation to a certain type of usage e.g. working life, civic life, or the public education system.

In Finland validation is described as "valuing what has been learnt". The expression in Finnish is "aiemmin opitun tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen", which can also be translated as recognition and validation of prior learning, but the Finnish word "validaato" is also used. This includes identification, recognition, and validation of prior learning.

3. Perspectives on validation

In this chapter we introduce a number of concepts that provide a perspective on validation as a phenomenon and that also constitute the basis for our analysis of what the attitudes of the Nordic countries are to validation. In connection to this we formulate a number of questions that help clarify how the different perspectives place the focus on different matters in the analysis. The concepts we highlight are 1) convergent and divergent, 2) summative and formative, and 3) formal, non-formal and informal.

Convergent – divergent
A validation, as well as other forms of assessing knowledge and competence, might be designed in a convergent and/or divergent way. Convergent means that the validation implies an assessment *if* and to what extent the knowledge corresponds to certain demands determined beforehand – goals, criteria etc. However, a divergent validation aims at determining *what* an individual knows, from a more unbiased point of view. Any method of validation most often can be placed somewhere on the continuum convergent-divergent. In other words an assessment of knowledge is rarely absolutely convergent or divergent. In relation to this we ask ourselves what type of validation is advocated in the different countries. Are there differences between different sectors? The question is really what type is dominating, or, at least, if there exists any tendency regarding the type of validation used. Another option is that a model is used to the effect that during the process of validation one proceeds from a divergent approach to a convergent one.

Summative – formative
A summative validation is primarily retrospective and its main purpose is to sum up prior learning, to document and value/assess what a person already knows. A formative validation, on the other hand, is primarily looking ahead with the purpose of being the basis for how the continued learning process

should be designed. What is the purpose of the existing types of validation that are recommended in the different countries? A validation could both be given summative and formative functions but this is not necessarily easy to combine, since the different purposes put different demands on the method. A summative assessment is chiefly intended to give a reliable picture of what a person already knows, whereas the formative assessment is primarily intended to make the continued learning as effective and meaningful as possible.

Several possible ways of relating validation to continued learning could be seen here dependent on to what extent validation is seen as a separate phenomenon or something that is integrated in a well organised learning process.
- An entirely summative validation means that continued (organised) learning after the validation is not self-evident.
- An entirely formative validation is first and foremost intended as a basis for further studies or learning.
- Validation may be integrated in the learning process itself i.e. an individual is not *first* validated and *then* the individual proceeds with his/her learning, but instead an education/learning process is constructed in a manner that the continued learning is based on the prior learning and where the subsequent assessment is based on all that the individual knows at that moment.

Formal – non-formal – informal
We use the concepts formal, non-formal, and informal to characterize different kinds of educational and learning processes but also different assessment and validation processes.
Formal education is used to describe education in the official education system – essentially schools, adult education, and universities. The "formal" learning by that becomes the learning attached to the formal contents, the curriculum, in such education. Non-formal education implies organised learning outside the formal education system, e.g. in popular adult education, further training, and other organised competence development in working life. Informal learning is the learning that takes place in everyday life, volunteer organisations, and working life, etc., and which is not organised with the primary aim to learn.

Concerning assessment and validation of knowledge and competence the formal assessment is the one leading to a documented result on the basis of an officially established standard e.g. a certificate, a professional qualification, or a license. A formal assessment may also lead to a non-formal documentation. For example a person who does not satisfy the requirements for obtaining a certificate or a license may still get a written certification of his or her real competence. A non-formal assessment/validation is made in an organised way but the result is not formalised in the same way as in a formal assessment. This may be the case when a divergent mapping is made resulting in an individual CV not based on any official patterns, or when a participant receives a certification without an official status. An informal assessment, however, is not organised as a special activity but is an informal part of another activity. This may be the case when an informal, formative assessment is made as part of a learning process – something that a teacher may do unnoticed but which affects the continued teaching and learning process.