



Italian Case Study 2: “Validation of IF learning in Higher Vocational Education and Training”

<p><u>The case study</u></p> <p>This case study reports an example of validation of experiential learning in a vocational learning pathway, which occurred in the Tuscan VET system, that is symptomatic of the potentialities of the Italian system of producing professional competences where and when good practice in the perspective of lifelong learning is made possible at regional level, benefitting from significant institutional opportunities and appropriate legal regulations. The case of A.C. also illustrates how the individual benefit reached through validation by the learner in the VET area can represent the decisive incentive for further professional training at higher education level.</p> <p>It must however be stressed that the described learning pathway would have been possible in a minority of regional contexts in the country only, such as Tuscany, Emilia Romagna, Lombardy.</p>	<p><u>Evidence, material</u></p> <p>Legal background concerning the creation and implementation of a national system of certification of professional competences, starting from the Agreement between State and Regions (18/2/2000) and subsequent Decree N° 174/2001 issued by the Ministry of Labour.</p> <p>Regulations concerning the implementation of the National “system of higher technical education and training” (IFTS) through Art. 69 of Law n° 144 of 1999 and the inter-ministerial Decree n° 436 of 31/10/2000.</p>
<p><u>Background to the case study</u></p> <p>Giving application to the national Agreement between State and Regions of 2000 and the subsequent ministerial Decree of 2001, the regional parliament of Tuscany approved a General Law concerning Education and Training in 2002, placed in the perspective of lifelong learning, envisaging the creation of a regional Repertory of vocational qualifications and laying the foundations for a regional system of certification and recognition of competences referring to that classification tool. Starting from 2003 (“Operational Regulations” N° 47/R followed by Ministerial Decree n° 4768 of 2005 and by the General Integrated Development Plan of 2006) such a regional Repertory was progressively implemented and updated, identifying, on one hand, professional profiles defined through minimum standards of competences and developing, on the other hand, the principles and procedures for recognition and certification of competences. In particular, new standards were introduced in 2009 (Presidential Decree n° 28 of 5/6/2009) in order to adopt the “EQF for lifelong learning” Recommendations emanated on 23/4/2008 (2008/c III/01) by the European Parliament and Council, and more explicit reference was made to the validation of informal and</p>	<p>Regulatory framework at regional level:</p> <p>Tuscan Regional Law n° 32 of 2002 founding an integrated regional system of education and instruction followed by the corresponding Operational Regulations (N° 47/R of 2003 with subsequent updates), by the definition of the Regional Repertory of Professional Profiles (2005, updated in 2009), and by the Integrated Regional Development Plan for and training (“<i>Piano di Indirizzo Generale Integrato</i>”).</p>

non formal learning in the VET systems. In the meantime, increasing resources were invested by the Regional Government in the implementation and diffusion of the new approach to higher technical training, represented by IFTS courses, that had been launched in 2000 through the Agreement between State and Regions, progressively widening the regional offer of such courses covering all professional subject fields and geographical areas.

The context

One of the most important areas of commercial and economic activity in Tuscany is tourism in its different expressions. Due to the variety of services to be offered to tourists and the permanent innovation taking place under the pressure of competition, on one hand, education and training for occupation in the field of tourism covers an extremely wide range of roles and competences and, on the other hand, professional experience can often be highly formative for the individual worker.

For this reason Tuscan regional authorities give regular support to educational initiatives aiming at professional specialisation in tourism-oriented qualifications; simultaneously increasing awareness is emerging about the legitimacy and feasibility of granting recognition for experiential knowledge and competences acquired in this field through informal and non-formal learning.

One of the main channels in which higher professional training takes place and where it is possible to recognise and certify learning and competences through a specific set of minimum standards is the IFTS system (*Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Superiore*). The system is structured in the acquisition of “capitalisable units”, and credit recognition occurs through the validation of “incoming credits”, the certification of competences acquired both during the training process itself and outside the classroom training, thus facilitating the total or partial recognition of competences acquired.

This context of institutional opportunities, supported by regional financial resources, and potential openness towards validation of IF and NF learning constitutes the organisational and conceptual framework within which the personal story of A.C. takes place.

For Regulatory reference see below, p. 4 f.

Personal profile and motivations for a decision

A.C., born in January 1967, after 8 years of compulsory school (*Scuola dell’obbligo*), since September 1980 attended the upper secondary school for vocational training in the field of commerce and tourism “Istituto Professionale per I Servizi Commerciali e Turistici” in Livorno obtaining the school leaving diploma (GCE-A-levels) in the area “Tourism Services” in June 1985.

In order to get professional experience, instead of working in the family tourism business (a small bed-and-breakfast on the sea-side) in which she already collaborated during the school period, she prefers to undertake a

Supporting evidence

Institutional and individual documentation concerning the organisation, implementation and attendance of the IFTS-course for “Higher technician for the organisation and marketing of integrated tourism”, carried out in Livorno in 2009. See also:

<http://www.indire.it/ifts/2003/azieprog.php?idallegatoc= 3201& form=8>

From the announcement of the IFTS course:

“The “higher expert in organisation and marketing of integrated tourism” is in charge of relationships with public and private subjects as well as with

two-year apprenticeship in the administration of a medium-size international Hotel in Forte dei Marmi, thus getting familiar with the practice of human resources management, organisation and promotion of tourism services. After a 3-year period in which she then took over most of the management of the family business, she got married in 1991 and together with her husband established an ecological agro-tourism establishment of their own (8 rooms offering restaurant and other tourist services, with local agricultural products) in the surroundings of Viareggio. Apart from the time dedicated to the birth and growth of her son, for years she was thus engaged in the management of this small tourism business, developing continuous relationships with local authorities and with national and international tourism agencies, gradually introducing computerized procedures for the profession and accounting. Nevertheless she increasingly becomes aware of the limits of her mainly experience-based competences and perceives the need of more systematic and organic knowledge, especially in view of the possibility of getting more engaged in the future in the field of tourism promotion and marketing even beyond the family business. She therefore feels strongly attracted by the announcement of the regional IFTS course for the training of experts in the field of "organisation and marketing of integrated tourism" (*Tecnico rofess per l'organizzazione e il marketing del turismo integrato*), to be held from October 2009 to May 2010 in Livorno, i.e. precisely in the secondary school she attended as a young girl, delivering a final vocational training diploma with national value.

sectoral associations aiming at the profession of an integrated offer of tourism services. His/her activity is mainly characterized by project initiatives, with particular attention to the analysis of the territorial reference contexts, in view of contributing to the integration and valorisation of touristic development in the territory. "

Specific professional activities identified **at regional level** for the proposed qualification:

"The expert is in charge of planning territorial marketing and of developing programmes and events linked with the territory. He/she designs and coordinates networks between local actors in order to carry out initiatives of touristic marketing related to the outstanding features of the territory, valorising local traditions."

On the basis of the features identified at regional level, the course project points out a few specific functions of the professional profile coherent with the social and economic system of the Province:

- "1. He/she carries out analyses of the reference territory, identifying the key factors for development;
2. He/she develops the planning of interventions starting from the analysis of the available data and from feedback with territorial actors;
3. He/she works out strategies capable of developing the touristic offer in a given territory acting in synergy with private and public actors;
4. He/she engages in promotion and diffusion of the offer over the territory;
5. He/she undertakes privileged relationships with territorial authorities, companies and all realities within the territory, in order to receive rapidly any information concerning his/her tasks, as well as entertain any relationship of common interest;
6. He/she organizes, manages and develops statistical data related to tourism in order to develop operational strategies based on reports and analyses concerning the sectors of reference;
7. He/she is in charge of economic and financial aspects of a company referring in particular to price determination, budgeting and development of strategies on the basis of the available financial resources.

The legal validation context and its application

Art. 3, par. 2 of the interministerial Decree n° 436 of 31/10/2000 regulating

	<p>the application of Art.69 of Law n° 144/1999 establishes that “in view of access to IFTS educational pathways, accreditation of competences consists in the certification of competences acquired by the learner, also through work and life experiences, in order to determine the duration of the individual learning pathway”.</p> <p>Art. 6, par. 2 establishes that “The recognition of credits occurs:</p> <p>a) in the phase of access to IFTS pathways.</p> <p>b) inside the IFTS pathways, aiming at abbreviating the individual pathway.”</p> <p>The course programme is structured as follows (in brackets the validation in terms of classroom hours granted to A.C. on the basis of prior experiential learning):</p>																																																												
<p><u>The validation perspective and pathway</u></p> <p>When getting better informed about the structure of the course, A.C. comes to know not only that she fulfils the formal prerequisite for admission having obtained the upper secondary school diploma, but also that competences due to her professional experience may be validated to a certain amount in view of exemption from part of the teaching activities and the compulsory work placement. A.C. thus submits her application for admission to the course at the end of September 2009 and passes the selection procedure (written test in English, general culture and behavioural suitability; oral interview) at the beginning of October.</p> <p>During the interview with the selection Commission, A.C. has the opportunity of explaining and illustrating her request for validation of a certain number of competences acquired through experiential learning based upon her long-lasting professional activity. The subject fields, included among the teaching subjects, in which A.C. applies for recognition of prior learning are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English for tourism - Basic Computer science - Business organisation and business plan - Economics of the tourism company - Marketing and touristic communication - Psychology of tourism - Communication competences. <p>In addition A.C. asks for validation of the compulsory 240 hours work placement.</p> <p>The teaching commission, on the basis of the evidence provided by A.C. during the interview and through her CV, decides to accept the principle of validation of informal learning, referring to Articles 3 and 6 of the IFTS regulations establishing that recognition credits for prior learning is permitted both in the phase of access to the course and during the course itself, leading to an abbreviation of the individual learning pathway. Considering the long-lasting and qualified work experience exhibited by A.C., the entire work placement is validated; on the other hand, the Commission estimates that some of the teaching subjects for which A.C. applied for</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Teaching subject</td> <td>classroom hours</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>English for tourism</td> <td>50</td> <td>(25)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Basic Computer science</td> <td>30</td> <td>(30)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Basic Spanish</td> <td>44</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Business organisation and business plan</td> <td>30</td> <td>(15)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Il Sistema Turistico</td> <td>24</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Labour right, gender culture, labour safety</td> <td>20</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>National, European and International tourism legislation</td> <td>30</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Economics of the tourism company</td> <td>30</td> <td>(30)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Territorial Analysis</td> <td>30</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Marketing and touristic communication</td> <td>70</td> <td>(35)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Integrated tourism</td> <td>50</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Touristic Project Management</td> <td>32</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Psychology of tourism</td> <td>30</td> <td>(15)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Basic principles of Statistics</td> <td>30</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Monitoring and Analysis of integrated turismo</td> <td>24</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Communication competences</td> <td>36</td> <td>(36)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>560</td> <td>(186)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Work placement</td> <td>240 hours</td> <td>(240)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total validation (exemption)</td> <td></td> <td>426 hours</td> </tr> </table>	Teaching subject	classroom hours		English for tourism	50	(25)	Basic Computer science	30	(30)	Basic Spanish	44		Business organisation and business plan	30	(15)	Il Sistema Turistico	24		Labour right, gender culture, labour safety	20		National, European and International tourism legislation	30		Economics of the tourism company	30	(30)	Territorial Analysis	30		Marketing and touristic communication	70	(35)	Integrated tourism	50		Touristic Project Management	32		Psychology of tourism	30	(15)	Basic principles of Statistics	30		Monitoring and Analysis of integrated turismo	24		Communication competences	36	(36)	Total	560	(186)	Work placement	240 hours	(240)	Total validation (exemption)		426 hours
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exemption (English, Business organisation, Marketing, Psychology of Tourism) cannot be recognized as a whole, but only by 50 %. As a result of this estimation, A.C.'s individual learning pathway is reduced exactly by one third of the total number of classroom hours, i.e. from 560 to 374, and the overall amount of exemption due to validation of informal learning is 426 hours out of 800 – in other words, more than half the overall amount of learning workload foreseen for the course.

During the implementation of the course, regular contact was put in place between A.C. and her learning tutor, aiming at monitoring her learning process and especially at preventing her from meeting difficulties in the teaching subjects in which she had been granted entire or partial exemption. After the period of classroom activities (from October 2009 to April 2010), all participants engaged in work placements; in order to compensate for the validation of this kind of learning activity, A.C. was requested by her tutor to submit a report concerning her work experience in her agro-tourism establishment. In September 2010 A.C. took part in the final (written and oral) exam, restricted to the subjects in which she had taken part in the classroom learning activities, obtaining the "IFTS specialisation certificate", valid at national level, referring to the regional qualification of "Expert in promoting services and activities for associated tourism".

The Higher Education perspective

On the basis of a formal agreement between the organisation in charge of the training course (Cooperativa Sociale Lavoro Toscana in Florence) and the University of Pisa, successful attendance of this vocational course grants individual learners who wish to proceed to Higher Education recognition of 30 university credits (CFU compatible with ECTS credits) in the Bachelor Degree Programme "Tourism Sciences". Given this additional opportunity, A.C. decided to engage in this Higher Education pathway, and enrolls in this Degree Programme starting from the academic year 2010/11, obtaining during the access procedure validation of one sixth of the overall 180 credits required for the degree.

Such a recognition of prior certified learning occurred at non-university level is still granted by the present H.E. legislation, but might be practically cancelled in the future in the case of approval of the actual government's reform bill (see National Report).

Agreement between CSL and the University of Pisa

Credits granted by the University of Pisa for non-university learning accomplished in the framework of the IFTS vocational training course for "Higher expert in organisation and marketing of integrated tourism", for students enrolling in the Bachelor Degree Programme "Tourism Sciences" (*Scienze del Turismo*):

- Work placement (9 CFU)
- Economics of the tourism company (3 CFU out of 6)
- Business organisation (3 CFU out of 6)
- Tourism marketing (3 CFU out of 6)
- Tourism legislation (3 CFU out of 12)
- Statistics of tourism (3 CFU out of 6)
- Computer lab (3 CFU)
- English for tourism (3 CFU out of 12)

To sum up: a model experience with symbolic value

The case of A.C., a 42 years aged lady working in a family-led tourism establishment who at a certain moment in life decided to engage a learning pathway in order to acquire special professional knowledge in addition to the competences she already possessed, was chosen because, despite of its rather exceptional dimension and peculiar individual features, it seems to be able to illuminate and illustrate well the extent to which and in which way the Italian legal and institutional framework may allow significant practice of validation of informal learning.

Its meaning can be correctly understood only if we are aware of the fact that the more than evident bulk of competences acquired by A.C. mainly by means of work experience and work based learning would not have had any weight whatsoever if the Regulations concerning the channel of higher technical education and training IFTS had not contemplated the possibility (however generic) of validating such prior learning, and if the regional government of Tuscany (together with a couple of other Italian Regions) had not provided institutional frameworks and practical opportunities for the implementation of such an educational innovation. In the context of generalized underestimation of the importance of lifelong learning in the country, accompanied by vast ignorance about the opportunities nevertheless offered to individual learners by a partial, incomplete, contradictory legal framework, this case study is meant to show that the quite exceptional combination of illuminated policy actions (at regional and local level), explicit commitment to lifelong learning approaches and objectives by an appropriately trained teaching staff, and the conscious, proud claim for valorisation of acquired competences by the individual learner can produce significant experiences in the field of validation of prior learning.

The positive perspective that a case like that of A.C. indicates is the attempt to be made by operators in the field of lifelong learning to make the most extensive possible use of the existing legal and institutional opportunities, in order to multiply significant examples of valorisation of experiential learning. No doubt the situation, on the other hand, will not substantially improve until public and social awareness of the importance of lifelong learning in the knowledge society will not expand in the country and become one of the ideological pillars of Italian society, and until a corresponding coherent national legal framework will not be instituted in this field.