



## Tacit Key Project

Information about findings from  
other European projects



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## 1. Introduction to the Tacit Key Project

This project has analysed how far it may be possible to promote the labour market relevance of tacit competences by strengthening workers in relying on their “tacit” or “implicit” knowledge / skills which they actually have at their disposal, often through informal learning and training, but are not aware of. The research work of this project was structured by three main strands of theoretical and empirical work, which all have aimed at realising a maximum of comparability based on a clear common understanding and common methodological standards for the empirical research work.

(1) During the first period of the project considerable work has been invested in review of literature and development of a theoretically based as well as practically interested common understanding as basis for the further empirical research work. The results of this first work section have been published by a first common report, that has outlined the various starting points of the discussion on tacit competences in literature and in the partners countries.

(2) The second period has concentrated on extensive empirical work by carrying through in-depth interviews with 40 interviewees in each country based on a common guide for the interviews and common agreement on target groups according to the proposal of this project: one represents a sample of CVT students of both sexes whilst the other one consists of women having had long interruptions in their working career.<sup>1</sup> *The objectives were to find out about their tacit competences, their awareness of them, the degree to which they make use of them in their learning process and the self-assurance they draw from them.*

(3). In a third work section interviews with teachers/trainers, prospective employers, human resources managers and regional development staff as well as representatives of the social partners have been carried through, all partners were able to realise group discussions or individual interviews and have reported back the interpretations of the first individual interviews to the interviewees of this group. By this the awareness of employers for the usefulness of tacit competences of job applicants and particularly of women returners could be strengthened significantly.

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<sup>1</sup> The sample has been defined more precisely in the first common report, where the common work base has been described.

Both parts of empirical work were equally of importance and our final recommendations could be based on this extensive data base.

It is remarkable that the interview results in all partners countries have shown great *commonalties* in many aspects which are relevant for our project and are worth to be mentioned and to be outlined more than the still existing factual differences between the countries in many respects:

- Commonalties with respect to biographical features of women returners, although there have to be stated a structural difference between the northern and southern European countries;
- Commonalties with respect to the assessment of the importance of tacit competences for the labour market in the view of the individuals and of trainers. This does not mean, that all individuals were aware of their tacit competences or all trainers were aware of them – particularly the UK report remained quite sceptically in its conclusions in this respect - but the interviews could clearly show, that many interviewees – when having been asked – got aware of their personal competences and abilities which are usually not asked for. And it became clear, that many interviewees referred to them when looking for a new job and taking over new work tasks;
- As further commonality turned out the still important role of the social situation, including particularly the financial situation and obligations with respects to bringing up children, with respect to the degree of self-consciousness and self-confidence from the awareness of own tacit competences. Still interviewees of the middle class (here especially women who have represented the majority of interviewees) usually were more aware of their own competences than those of the working class or with a lower qualification level. That means that there is obviously a higher need for helping the latter ones to find their way on the labour market by more individual vocational guidance;
- The assessments of those trainers, who had a differentiated understanding of tacit competences were similar in the different countries and they have valued them as important for facilitating re-integration in the labour market, as the detailed reports on the interviews have demonstrated (compare common reports 2 and 3). Particularly good examples of practise as special CVT course for women returners or

experiences with job club examples have significantly demonstrated the efficacy and need for more individual occupational guidance. Examples of good practise in all partners countries, particularly to be mentioned the Portuguese examples, have demonstrated possibilities of new ways in CVT and individual guidance;

- The need for “new” competences has been stressed with respect too by employers, emphasising the need for more social competences and non-technical personal competences. As the interview results have shown, expectations of many employers have shifted to a broader understanding of abilities and competences as well of employees as of job-applicants. Often there was expected more self-responsible work and competences to adapt to new work environment and to cope with organisational change. Although those requirements were not without contradictions expected competences from employees have fit to a high degree to the developed starfish-model of the project partners.

It has to be emphasised that the empirical results of this projects have been laid down in three **common** reports. While the first *workshop* report was important for the project work as starting point for a common understanding of the research questions, the contributions in the following reports followed a more integrative perspective. The partners have agreed to a common research design including a common guide for the empirical research and have passed on the workshops a common disposition for the presentation of the research results. This final report of the Leonardo project “Tacit forms of key competences for changing employment opportunities” presents core results of the projects. This has been done by presenting important aspects of the *common* research results by the partners and not only by addition of national results and national views.

**Chapter 2** will recall the main objectives of the project and will inform about the way these objectives have been met in the course of the project. Resulting from the fact that the empirical research took more time than expected – particularly the individual interviews with participants and former participants of CVT measures – all partners have concentrated on identifying models of good practice for CVT courses and employment advice that take more into account the tacit competences of the individuals than on developing *own* curricula for CVT training. Although it has turned out that the empirical work was very important for the common understanding of the research questions and has to be regarded as crucial condition for improving CVT

practises and employment advice there remains a need for additional research for developing new models of CVT which refer more to the personal prerequisites of people. The partners have applied for a follow-up project that will deal with the development of methods for self-evaluation of competences as integrative part of CVT courses. This new project was a direct outcome of the common research and will refer to the present European discussion on accreditation of non-formal acquired competences.

**Chapter 3** presents the theoretical framework of the project. The existing different approaches of the tacit knowledge concept are summarised and the own understanding of the project partners of tacit competences as “bottom-up” approach is shortly outlined. Particularly the differences of the cognitive view and the tacit knowing view and the consequences for the project research have been outlined by the German author *Wolfgang Hendrich*. Helping people in getting more aware of their tacit competences not only aims at opening better labour market chances “but to enable them for shaping their own life”.

In **chapter 4** the common starfish model of key competences has been presented by the colleague from UK, *Karen Evans*, “as basis for heuristic investigation of biographical experiences”. This has been done by referring to recent trends on the labour market, changing qualification needs of employers and the European wide theoretical impact of key competences. She emphasises a need for understanding *processes* by which skills are ‘transformed’ from one setting into another

**Chapter 5** summarises the most important national features as background for the common research work by reporting those economic, labour market problems or problems or restructuring vocational training in the partners countries according to the relevance which have been given to them in the view of the partners. Thus the accents are something different with respect to the importance of tacit competences in the partners countries. E.g. for UK has been emphasised the restructuring of training for young unemployed and women returners. For Germany the importance of the “Berufs-centred” model of vocational training, its recent criticism with respect to economic innovation and possible ways of modernisation that take more into account the idea of key competences and flexibility for related occupational fields have been discussed. For Greece has been emphasised the problems of transition from traditional societal structures to modern industrial structures of the labour market

including present problems of mismatches between the educational system and the labour market. And finally has been outlined for Portugal its still lasting problems of economic competitiveness, existing lacks in qualification of people and the present relevance of approaches for validation of non-formal acquired competences.

**Chapter 6** presents selected important research results of the project. This has been done not by national contributions but by trying to discuss core themes of the project exemplary in the view of the partners who illuminate aspects of the common research project from a specific point of view but with respect to common aspects of the research.

Starting with the Greek contribution this essay, written by *Dimitra Kondyli and Nikitas Patiniotis*, has emphasised more the **weight of traditional economic and societal structures of the labour market** and the difficulties of shaping intervention by means of pedagogics. These authors emphasise the existence of a present transitory modernisation period. Because modern production systems pose increasing demands on the qualifications of the labour force in direction of a “flexibly-specialised” work force, not only education in general is getting more important as key for labour market chances but “social skills and personality characteristics are the critical differentiating points which differentiate those who are employed and those who are unemployed”:

The German-UK researcher *Bettina Hoffman* has focussed on the labour market problems of women returners in her contribution. She has based her article on carefully investigated data of women occupation in the UK, has highlighted the specific problems of **working mother and women returners** and discusses the contribution of training for improving the labour market chances for women. Although she states serious changes of labour market chances for women during the past 20 years she still states “substantial differences between women’s and men’s employment opportunities”.

While the Greek contribution has more emphasised the gravity of traditional structures the Portuguese colleagues, *Eva Dias de Oliveira, Isabel de Castro Guimaraes and Eduardo Figueira*, have explicitly tried to sound about possibilities of changing structures and “**moulding occupational activities**” by new models of **vocational training**. Although they don’t overlook the importance of economic and labour market problems for them training can be regarded as means for stimulating

“self-efficacy”. In the view of the common project the overview of the authors about “Facilitators and inhibitors of skill transfer” and the synopses of characteristic features of traditional (formal-shallow) training and new training models (passionate-relational training) are very important and probably equally valid for all partners countries.

The next contribution, explicitly written on the background of a vocational training model that refers to the idea of *Berufe*, points out the main characteristics of the *Berufsmodell* and the relationship between this type of vocational training, informal learning and tacit competences. As the author from Germany, *Wolfgang Hendrich*, argues, a modernised form of vocational training, still combining work-place learning and learning at school might be a good model for coping with societal change, although “a more formal recognition of tacit competences may facilitate a higher permeability of the educational and vocational system and labour market chances for the individuals can be seriously improved”.

Finally *Sue Saxby-Smith* from UK presents important common research results of the interviews with trainers and employers. Starting with the common interview guide she reports on the view of trainers and their awareness of tacit competences as key for personal self-confidence and labour market success. Indeed building confidence and self-esteem has been considered as “implicit agenda” of further vocational training by many trainers. Although important dimensions of tacit forms of key competences have been identified by most trainers clear curricula concepts for improving the awareness and use of tacit competences are still more exception than normality. Obviously there still remains need for improving existing CVT structures and curricula of training.

**Chapter 7** summarises main results of the national research based on the two common reports which present the empirical research results in detail. The structure of this chapter follows the chronological process of research by presenting first the results of the interviews with the individuals (participants and former participants of CVT courses) and secondly the research results of the interviews with trainers and employers. This summarising chapter is finished by a short résumé of possible benefits of tacit key competences for new occupational field and for managing the own biography.

In the last **chapter 8** lessons from the project are discussed by *Gerald Heidegger*. This has been done on the one hand by reviewing essential research questions of

the project in face of the empirical results of the project, particularly with respect to the core research questions if or to what extent it is possible at all to make tacit competences explicit and how far CVT students can draw benefits from them. On the other hand this chapter presents general recommendations for improving CVT courses for unemployed and other job-seekers taking into account the respective cultural setting in the partner's countries. Thus the suggestions for different cultural setting contribute to improve the European process of mutual learning.



## **8. Lessons from the project “Tacit key”**

### **8.1 Answers to research questions about tacit forms of key competences (TKC)**

**Gerald Heidegger<sup>2</sup>**

The research questions are represented by the objectives listed in the proposal, section D.2, which could be kept nearly unaltered in the course of the project. In this summary the theoretical questions about the relation of tacit key competences and hidden or implicit competences is not outlined because this is dealt with in the introductory chapters. We use here the expression “tacit key competences” within the theoretical framework which is described there. The objectives aiming at suggesting concrete improvements with regard to the esteem of tacit key competences in CVT courses and in the labour market are taken up in the sections about recommendations.

With respect to the research questions, it can in general be started that the differences between individual persons and various settings of re-integration in the labour market within one country appear to be greater than the cultural differences although, of course, these play a significant part when it comes to devising peculiar improvements. This will be highlighted in the section regarding suggestions for different cultural settings. In all cases the result of the project is that for the research questions there cannot be a clear answer “yes” or “no”. As a general outcome the leading hypothesis of the project has been substantiated: Tacit forms of key competences are much too little recognized by the individual workers or students, by CVT practitioners and in the labour market.

This appears to apply even for the new movement towards identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Europe (Bjørnavold, 2001). The close connection of tacit key competences and non-formal learning is obvious although tacit key competences can be and are acquired also during processes of formal learning and, the other way round, non-formal learning can often lead to explicit competences. Nevertheless, for procedures for identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning, tacit key competences should be taken into

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account in much more a comprehensive way. The question how to accomplish this methodologically needs much further research because this is very difficult to achieve. In the other hand it may become very important because of the possibly extraordinary significance which the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning could gain not only for the labour market, but for the personal development of the individuals as well.

### **8.1.1 Degree to which unemployed workers are conscious of their tacit key competences**

It was substantiated that unemployed workers are in most cases rarely conscious of their tacit key competences which they obviously dispose of. Unfortunately, the people least successful during their previous working career appeared to value their TKC to the lowest degree, independent of gender. In this way, their disadvantages in the labour market and for personal development are aggravated.

Labour market agencies and CVT providers should, with this in mind, design special measures for these people. This appears to be the most general outcome of the project which at the same time has the most important far-reaching consequences. In all countries, there are however examples of good practice.

### **8.1.2 Amount of self-assurance resulting from TKC, including a gender perspective**

In view of the outcomes reported in section 1.1 it is obvious that most people concerned could not draw a great amount of self-assurance out of their TKC. There are however remarkable exceptions for both sexes. These are people who have not been out of work for a long time and are active in constructing their further working biography. Also women wishing to return to the labour market after a family phase are sometimes well aware of the TKC they have acquired during their life span of being managers of a family household. But this holds only if there was and is a clear planning regarding the sequence of different phases and conscious expectations about the further career. On the other hand, most “women returners” revealed very little self-assurance with respect to their TKC.

This points to the great necessity of expanding and strengthening special courses for women returners, particularly taking much more into account TKC. Examples of good practice do exist, however, in all countries.

### **8.1.3 Possibility of making TKC explicit**

According to the theoretical framework employed it is in principle feasible to make tacit key competences partly explicit. For instance, a woman managing a family household may become well aware of the key competencies she developed and may also be able to outline them in general terms, even if she cannot describe the procedures in great detail just because their “logic” is tacit, similar to chess grandmasters, the favourite example taken by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986). Cases could be detected where this was successfully accomplished and it appeared to improve the ability of these people to focus on new occupational challenges.

Obviously, because competences are always embedded in a specific context they cannot be simply transferred to another one. Therefore the concept of “portability” of competences, even key competences, appears to be a little misleading. It may be more appropriate to talk about “transformative transfer”. This means that (tacit) key competences are indeed useful within a new context, but they have to be recontextualized. For this, however, it appears to be useful to support people in making their TKC more explicit.

### **8.1.4 Degree to which continuing vocational training (CVT) students make use of TKC**

In this case, too, there is to be found a great variety. Obviously people who are aware of their TKC, maybe even in a rather explicit form, are better equipped in making use of them during their studies in CVT courses. And, indeed, these students could often not only gain self-assurance in this way but were able to apply their TKC successfully to their new tasks. They sometimes were able to point rather exactly to the capabilities they had gained during previous learning, often in non-formal settings.

This makes a strong case for taking into account TKC much more in CVT courses, not only for the unemployed and women returners, but also for CVT aiming at enhancement of occupational abilities in general. On the other hand, the majority of the interviewees, those with a less successful previous working biography, reported no advantage from their former, especially non-formal or informal learning. This shows the great necessity of supporting these people in CVT courses particularly by making them aware of the TKC they possess. Again the group of women returners provides a convincing case. Many of them reported a successful management of

their family household. Nevertheless they could not recognize any possibilities to make use of these (tacit) key competences during the CVT courses.

### **8.1.5 Degree to which CVT students are supported by CVT teachers/trainers in making use of TKC**

This degree depends crucially on two factors. The first one is the structure of the course, that is if it aims at supporting the self-esteem and self-assurance of the students and tries to assist them in detecting personal strengths, particularly (tacit) key competences. Very often, if not even usually, the course structure is however mainly designed from the point of view of anticipated labour market requirements and takes much too little care of the threats the students feel by being confronted with them. This is leading very often to failure. Examples of good practice do exist and have been detected in all countries participating in the project. There are especially outstanding examples of good practice for women returners, although their number is of course much too small.

The second crucial factor is the personal engagement of the respective teacher or trainer. The Portuguese partner, for instance, reported distinctive examples of teachers/trainers who just fulfil their obligations and, conversely, others who are engaged far beyond. It was shown that the latter were very efficient in helping people to actually achieve a very successful transition to the labour market, often through self-employment. It has to be paid attention, however, to the danger that these outstanding teachers or trainers become worn out by their heavy workload.

### **8.1.6 Design methods of (continuing) training for CVT teachers/trainers regarding TKC of students**

An important consequence of the arguments presented in section 1.5 consists in designing new methods of educating, including particularly continuing training, of CVT teachers and trainers. Only very rarely special courses have been introduced for preparing the teachers and trainers for supporting the target groups of unemployed people, women returners and other job seekers.

Some CVT teachers and especially trainers are recruited from the labour force in companies and have received no pedagogical training whatsoever. They may have very good knowledge of the requirements of special work places and the world of work in general. But they often lack the understanding for students who have been

out of work for a longer period or are forced or wish to focus on an occupation completely unfamiliar to them. Here continuing pedagogical training is of utmost importance making them sensitive for this particular situation of their students and enabling them to support the students with respect to their specific strengths, that is especially their tacit key competences.

CVT teachers and trainers with an educational background tend often to tie themselves too closely to curricula which are related to specific fields of occupations. As a rule, they should get the opportunity to make themselves familiar with the situation of the target group. Here again it is important for them to gain knowledge about tacit key competences and to train to become aware of them and build their courses on these strengths of their students.

Their engagement which is often focussed on special contents related to occupational areas should be partly shifted to more general competencies, particularly tacit key competences. Teachers and trainers who feel secure with regard to the demands of the target group may meet the challenges more easily, in this way evading work situations which are, in the long run, too heavy a burden for them.

#### **8.1.7 Amount of esteem of TKC in the labour market**

This amount is, as a rule, extraordinary small. One special survey, for instance, carried through in Germany as a part of the project, shows that the respective sample of employers has only very vague ideas about this theme. Their ideas are, above that, very much in variance, and sometimes they boil down to “doing a decent job”. These employers are, due to their daily obligations, preoccupied with the “official” task-specific requirements. A similar survey carried through in England, however, revealed views of employers which were more consistent. This may be due to the less regulated system of VET in this country which therefore acknowledges non-formal learning to a higher degree. Nevertheless, in this case too the appreciation of tacit forms of key competences appeared to be in general not adequate. These differences are dealt with in more detail in section 3.

This outcome means that employers do not make use of an important part of potential of the human resources of their workforce or of job applicants, respectively. Interestingly enough, this appears to apply also for employers in Portugal and

Greece although the long, strong and fruitful tradition of non-formal and informal learning in these countries might one lead to expecting a different attitude. But the urge to meet modernisation requirements, particularly in the context of European competition, may be the cause for neglecting these specific strengths. Formal qualifications, particularly certificates from the general school system, become increasingly highly valued.

The labour agencies, too, tend to stick very much to formal qualifications. As Björnavold (2001) reports also the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning is usually closely geared to formal certificates which means that TKC are not valued sufficiently. On the other hand, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning contribute to transparency in the labour market and support individual workers in making use of prior learning, also with respect to remuneration. But for the target group the *identification* of competencies gained during prior learning, formal, non-formal and informal, appears to be the first and most important step which could be initiated through specifically designed CVT courses, taking into account particularly the tacit key competences of the students.

To raise the esteem of TKC in the labour market appears to be a very difficult task. The more towards assessment and recognition of non-formal learning which is to be observed all over Europe may become an important measure for raising the esteem, by making employers and labour agencies more aware of TKC, too. In this way the criteria for selecting people for jobs which are applied by HRD personnel in companies and by labour market agencies could be altered so that they may include (tacit forms of) key competences, even if these are not formally assessed and officially recognized. That is, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning may be expected to increase the esteem of TKC in an indirect way, just by raising the importance of non-formal learning, even within settings of formal training.

#### **8.1.8 Importance of TKC for self-employment**

In countries with a strong tradition of self-employment this is an obvious choice for the unemployed and for women returners. In the course of the project it could be shown that people who are successful in opening up a small business are particularly aware of their competences. It was detected that these are closely connected to (tacit) key competences as many of these people had chosen an occupational field

so far unfamiliar to them. Again impressive examples have been reported from Portugal.

This shows that strengthening the awareness of TKC can contribute considerably to reducing unemployment. It was revealed that initiatives embedded in co-operative measures, supported by labour market agencies, are particularly successful.

## **8.2 General Recommendations**

The outcomes of the project as outlined in section 1 lead to general conclusions which may be applicable all over Europe.

The extraordinary importance of tacit key competences for being able to focus on an occupation so far unknown to job-seekers has been firmly established through the project. Therefore it is strongly recommended to strengthen the consideration which is given to TKC in CVT courses for the target group, but even for CVT courses carried through for other students.

Secondly, measures have to be designed in order to raise the esteem of TKC in the labour market. Both aspects, already mentioned in section 1, are to be described in somewhat more detail.

### **8.2.1 Improving CVT courses for the unemployed and other job-seekers**

In most CVT courses the focus is on content related to a particular occupational area for which the students are to be trained. The training programmes are mostly carried through according to a concept which is borrowed from initial vocational education and training (VET). Even for the latter case this focus on content has been heavily criticized because it does not take into account personal learning processes of the individuals in a sufficient manner. This criticism is to be strengthened when it comes to the learning of adults, and it is particularly important for CVT courses for the unemployed and other job seekers. For these students special care has to be taken of the threats they feel by being confronted with the anticipated labour market requirements. This is especially true for “women returners” as they are usually not aware of the TKC they have acquired during their unpaid work of managing a family household so that most of them lack self-assurance with respect to returning to paid employment.

In particular, all courses should take into account tacit key competences to a much greater amount because it has turned out that this reinforces the ability of students to face the challenges presented by occupational areas so far unknown to them. In the “positive cases” this applied to a high degree. But it is especially important for the students least successful during their previous working career and, in addition, to most “women returners” in order to support their self-assurance by way of making them aware of the TKC they do possess. The courses should aim at making these



TKC more explicit as far as this is possible in order to support the transfer of competences through transforming them via recontextualization.

It is suggested to employ the approach of “situated learning in communities of practice” (Lave, Wenger, 1991) as it has been adapted in the Socrates Studies and Analyses project “Re-Enter” (cf. BIAT, Final Report, 2001). Although the concept developed there related to “improving transition for low achieving school leavers to vocational education and training” it appears to be applicable, to a high degree, also to CVT courses for adult unemployed, women returners and other job seekers. In particular it emphasizes the importance of motivation and engagement of learners, supported by learning in communities of practice. In addition, it proposes to combine *instruction* (by teachers/trainers) with the independent procedures by which the students are *constructing* their individual realm of capabilities, in this way fostering their potential of emancipation, that is becoming relatively independent from expectations forced upon them.

In both respects, it turns out to be important to connect learning in formal and informal contexts. For adult learners this means in particular to take into account the TKC they have acquired through informal learning, be it during their former gainful employment or while pursuing unpaid work, e.g. in a family household or even during leisure activities. In this way students may become more creative in combining “old pieces” of capabilities in a new way, focussing on new prospects for paid employment in the labour market.

In order to achieve the mentioned improvement of CVT courses, especially for the unemployed and other job seekers, the - initial and continuing – training of trainers and teachers has to be changed, especially by making them aware of the large potential of TKC of their CVT students. Trainers directly recruited from companies must become conscious of the particular situation of the target group. This applies to teachers and trainers with an educational background, too, as the usual education of teachers and trainers does not take this into account in a sufficient manner. The engagement should be partly shifted from the focus on special contents related to occupational areas to more general competences, especially TKC. This may in addition alleviate the burden which is sometimes felt by teachers and trainers when dealing with students of the target group. The effectiveness of these suggestions is supported by examples of good practice analysed by the research project.

The pedagogical recommendations outlined for CVT courses for the target group are sketched in table 1. For the reasons mentioned, funding of CVT courses for job-seekers who have been out of work for a longer period, including women returners who have been out of gainful employment, should not be so much geared to successful re-integration into the labour market. Instead, the reinforcement of self-assurance should gain at least equal appreciation.

**Table 1:**  
**Pedagogical recommendations for CVT courses and labour market agencies**

<u>customarily valued</u>	<u>to be higher valued</u>
explicit competences	implicit / tacit “competences”
subject / domain specific	“holistic” key “competences” (more than basic)
formal learning	non-formal learning
qualifications (accredited)	capabilities (not directly accredited)

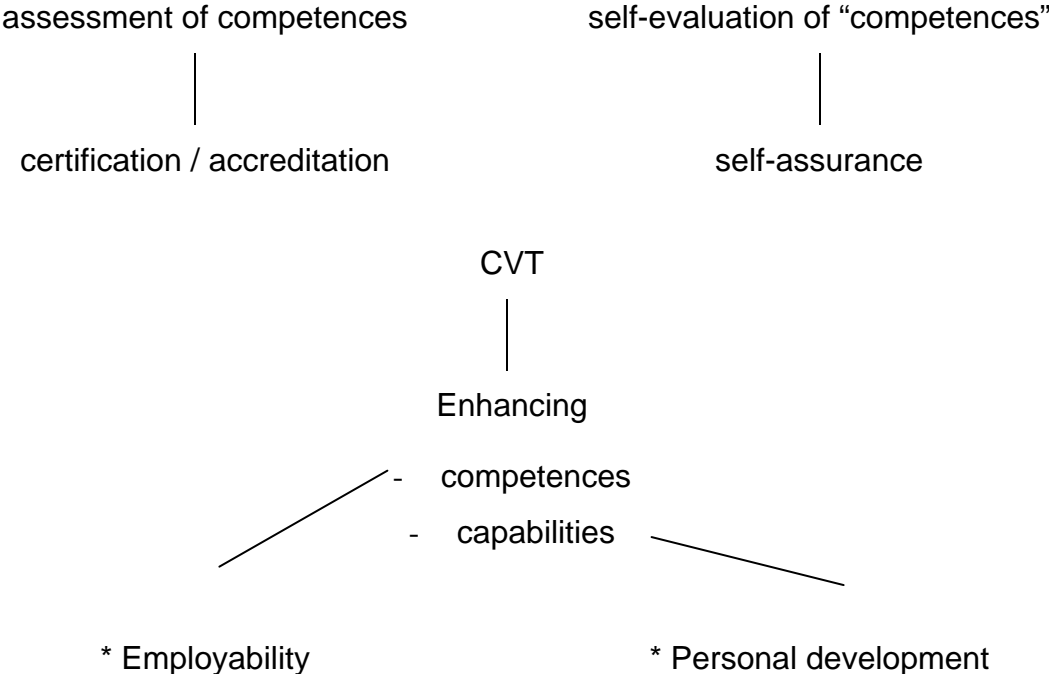
**8.2.2 Raising the esteem of tacit key competences in the labour market**

The appreciation of TKC in the labour market is in general very low and should be strongly enhanced. Necessary are vigorous initiatives aiming at informing labour market agencies, employers’ associations, employers and trade unions about the importance of TKC and the human resources which remain untapped when neglecting them. Apart from these general initiatives a strong means for raising the esteem of TKC in the labour market appears to be to strengthen the move towards identification, assessment and recognition of competences acquired through non-formal learning. This is a move which gains momentum Europe-wide (Bjørnavold 2001) and it is considered to become the most important single measure for raising the esteem of TKC in the labour market. This move may support the appreciation of TKC, even if they are not formally assessed and recognized, just by making the potential of non-formal learning more visible.

This appears to be important as it is obviously particularly difficult, from the point of view of methodology, to assess TKC, especially as far as they cannot be made explicit. It is, however, much easier to *identify* them in a informal manner, as has been demonstrated by this research project. This identification can be achieved by the individuals themselves by way of “*self-evaluation*”. But it should be supported by CVT courses which aim directly at this objective. The effectiveness of this approach has been firmly established by the project. In this way the target group can be supported, by enhancing their self-assurance, to perform more successfully in the labour market. For it has turned out that fostering personal development with respect to self-esteem, and supported strongly by the awareness of TKC, is at least as important as trying to further directly employability.

The relations between assessment of competences, self-evaluation of more general capabilities, that is necessarily holistic “competences”, represented especially through TKC, and appropriate CVT-courses is sketched in table 2.

**Table 2:**  
**Assessment – “Self-Evaluation”?**



One aim of these courses, direct support of employability, is more connected to assessment of competences and accordingly recognition through certification/accreditation. The other aim, strengthening personal development with

respect to the challenges of the labour market, is more related to self-evaluation of rather holistic “competences”, especially TKC, which may lead to more self-assurance. Innovative CVT courses should aim at a combination of these two aspects, particularly the second one which is often not valued sufficiently. They should not only enhance specific competences (in the Anglo-Saxon definition, that is those abilities which can be assessed according to performance). They should equally try to strengthen general capabilities which students already possess without being aware of them, that is especially tacit key competences, and they should support them in detecting these by way of self-evaluation.

In this way societal change, and especially changes in the labour market, may be addressed from the (micro-sociological and even psychological) point of view of the individuals by supporting them in coping with it in a more independent way. Similarly, the need for CVT (and VET) should be evaluated also more from the point of view of the individuals concerned. Taken together, this would represent a labour market strategy which is more oriented towards supply of the general potential of human resources. This strategy which could complement a demand driven approach is based on the expectation that a labour force where the individuals are aware of their (tacit forms of) key competences may contribute to economic growth to a considerable degree, including social inclusion and by that fostering societal well-being in general.

### **8.3 Suggestions for different cultural settings: mutual learning**

In order to devise concrete measures for enhancing the appreciation of tacit forms of key competences for coping with changing employment opportunities it is necessary to allow for the substantial differences between the various countries, with respect to the cultural and institutional settings. Obviously it cannot be the task of this project to recommend particular measures as they depend on the specific political circumstances and have to represent the results of negotiations between the various stakeholders involved. Rather, it is the aim of the project to contribute to *mutual learning* between different cultural and institutional settings. This mutual learning may stimulate the discussions about the value of TKC for coping with changing employment opportunities in the respective countries.

In order to support this mutual learning a cross-cultural matrix with respect to the relevance of TKC has been developed. The matrix (table 4) relates the relevance of TKC with regard to different dimensions of VET/CVT systems and features of the labour market to various cultural and institutional settings. The sectors of the matrix point out characteristics of a specific dimension within an individual cultural and institutional setting. In some instances the appreciation of TKC turns out to be already rather high. In other cases the relevance appears to be still not sufficient. It is for these cases that mutual learning may initiate measures for improving the situation.

It should be stressed that the validity of the details of this matrix may well be questioned because it is dependent on judgements which are influenced by the subjective perception of the author. On the other hand, the matrix is based on the outcomes of the project so that the validity is supported through a sound data basis which has been interpreted according to the theoretical framework described in the introductory chapters. Because only partners from four European countries have participated in the project the data basis is somewhat limited although characteristics of a wide variety of institutional settings are represented as all countries comprise various features within their labour market and VET/CVT structures. The dimensions to which TKC are related in the matrix are listed in table 3.

The first one is the VET system because it determines, to a lesser or higher degree, the relation of the structure of the occupational system to the various jobs on offer in the labour market. The value of TKC in the labour market represents the second

dimension which is connected with the third one, the general esteem of TKC in the respective cultural and institutional setting. Linked to these two latter dimensions, the fourth dimension is the appreciation of TKC in the CVT system. The other dimensions, employability, personal development, assessment and self-evaluation are to be interpreted according to the arguments explained in section 2.2 as visualized in table 2. That is, their role is here interpreted with regard to accreditation and recognition in the labour market or self-evaluation respectively, particularly in relation to CVT courses.

### **Table 3**

#### **Dimensions to which TKC are related**

- \* VET
- \* Labour market
- \* Esteem of TKC
- \* CVT
- \* Employability
- \* Personal development
- \* Assessment
- \* Self-Evaluation

When it comes to defining different cultural and institutional settings it has to be born in mind that all countries represent mixed systems even if specific characteristics may be more prevalent than others within one country. For instance in Portugal there is a well structured but quantitatively not very comprehensive system of vocational schools. At the same time the non-formal sector of occupational learning is still rather strong and informal procedures of recruitment are very important in the labour market. As another example, for the countries of Northern Europe with a strong system of vocational schooling, there are to be found evident moves towards employing features of the British NVQ-system even if so far more on the level of policy documents than in reality.

For the cross-cultural matrix we use a system of five *analytically defined “model structures”* with regard to structures of employment in the labour market in relation to systems of occupations, at least partly based on the VET systems and connected with different modes of providing CVT. These model structures have been derived from the five “country clusters” defined by Björnavold (2001) for the European Union (or the European Economic Area) and point therefore to groups of countries. But for the matrix no univocal reference is made to particular countries as this would mean an over-simplification, in view of the mentioned fact that indeed all countries represent mixed cases. That is, for each particular country the measures for improving the value of TKC for coping with changing employment opportunities should themselves be a mix of various initiatives depending on the relation to the model structures described.

The five analytically defined model structures are:

- A *strong non-formal sector* is determining, to a high degree, the modes of recruitment in the labour market whereas VET and CVT play only a minor role. It is important for the Mediterranean countries, including the South of Italy.
- In the *market-driven case* recruitment and related VET and CVT practises are strongly geared to demands in the labour market. Flexibility is the prevalent target whereas “occupational identity” is not an important aim of VET and CVT. Features like that are prevalent in England, Wales and Ireland.
- The system based on the *social construction “Beruf”* presents a strong regulation of the labour market which is closely geared to the VET system whilst the CVT provision adds flexibility. It represents the main features in Austria and Germany.
- The system based on *certification* is characterized by the high value of certificates, mostly obtained in the rather complex school system, and is complemented by a large sector of non-formal recruitment procedures providing flexibility. It characterizes important features in France.

**Table 4:****Suggestions for different cultural settings: Cross-cultural matrix**

<b>TKC relevant for / related to</b>	<b>Strong non-formal sector</b>	<b>Market-driven case</b>	<b>“Beruf” based</b>	<b>Certificate based</b>	<b>Broad Voc. Educ. based</b>
* <b>VET</b>	little (in voc. schools)	important attempts: NVQ	“key qualifications” implicitly built in	little (in schools)	some key competences (in schools)
* <b>Labour market</b>	very important	highly valued	not highly valued - resistance	so far less important	little acknowledgement
* <b>Esteem</b>	very much varying	high, according to “standards”	low, reluctance	still rather low	still low
* <b>CVT</b>	some important cases	attempts	mostly aiming at certificates	important: “bilan de compétences”	“officially“ little relevance
* <b>Employability</b>	very important	rather important	little, except for long term unemployed	not much	little
* <b>Personal development</b>	rather important	not so important	“officially” not so much	important in “bilan de compétences”	implicitly important
* <b>Assessment</b>	little, growing	approaches for performance based tests	very little	“bilan de compétences” important	NVQ method increasingly important
* <b>Self-Evaluation</b>	little, growing	approaches for valuing unpaid work	in cases of good practice	rather much in “bilan”	little



- The system based on *broad vocational education* in vocation schools, sometimes embedded in a unified system of upper secondary education, provides a broad basis for various occupations and aims at personal development and citizenship. Examples of these features are to be found in Sweden, Finland, and Norway.

The countries are mentioned just in order to give an idea of what is meant by the model structures. But they are not completely dominated by the respective structures, and some countries are not included because they are, from the starting point, characterised by a rather balanced mixture of the model structures.

In the following, some remarks are made about the features of these model structures with respect to the cross-cultural matrix regarding the relevance of TKC.

### **8.3.1 Strong non-formal sector**

TKC are of little importance in the (relatively small) VET system as it is rather dominated by traditional schooling. But they are very important in the labour market because recruitment (including advancement) for “middle-level” jobs (and even more so for low level jobs) is based on an informal assessment of non-formal prior learning. Nevertheless, the general esteem of TKC is very much varying because, in the course of modernising the economy, official certificates from the general school system become more and more important. Especially in Greece the problems of graduates from university in the labour market are a matter of great public concern whilst non-formal learning, in spite of its importance in the labour market, is decreasing in its appreciation. Besides rather conventional approaches the project detected important cases of good practice where TKC played a significant part in CVT courses which aimed at least partly at realising self-employment.

Because of the importance in the labour market TKC are very important for employability. With regard to CVT courses personal development can be, in the cases of good practice, appreciated rather highly. Assessment and self-evaluation of TKC gain more and more importance at least in Portugal where the French approach towards the “bilan de compétences” is influential.

In conclusion, the value of TKC for coping with changing employment opportunities could be supported through a higher appreciation of the strengths of this system, that is the non-formal sector of the economy, at least for the foreseeable future.

### **8.3.2 Market-driven case**

The prevalent system of the English NVQ's which are taken as the most prominent examples here represents important attempts to value key competences within VET. But because of the behaviouristic approach it is criticized, in the UK discussion, that the holistic (tacit forms of) key competences cannot in fact be appreciated by "atomistic" testing of performance. Because on the lower and middle level there is no clearly structured system of occupations TKC are highly valued in the labour market for recruitment and advancement. For similar reasons the general esteem of TKC is high according to "standards" published for job performance. Therefore there are also strong attempts to foster (tacit forms of) key competences through CVT although this is again hampered by the behaviouristic procedures of performance based testing.

Obviously for a market-driven system TKC prove to be rather important for employability whilst personal development is not a main concern of CVT courses although the project also detected important examples of good practice, especially for women returners. Assessment is closely geared to the NVQ system which again means that behaviouristic performance based testing plays a significant part which limits the identification of TKC because of methodological constraints. In the British case, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) published some years ago a guide for unemployed individuals, advisers and employers to foster valuing experience from unpaid work. But this initiative which aimed at a combination of assessment and self-evaluation proved not to be successful, possibly again because the methodology was dominated by performance based testing of atomistic competences.

In conclusion, although in the market driven case the conditions for appreciating TKC are favourable this is severely restricted by the prevalent behaviouristic approach towards identification and assessment of competences.

### **8.3.3 System based on "Beruf"**

The VET system based on the social construction "Beruf" focuses strongly on occupation-specific capabilities, to be acquired through formal learning. This means that holistic competences, especially TKC, are not explicitly highly valued. On the other hand, the prevalent apprenticeship system is supposed to implicitly foster "key qualifications". But because of the strong regulation of the occupational system TKC

for employment opportunities offered in occupational fields which are so far unknown to the applicants are not highly valued in the labour market although they play a significant part in the scientific discussion. The strong regulation of the labour market leads rather to resisting particularly the official recognition of non-formal learning, and there is a reluctance towards a higher general esteem of TKC.

Accordingly, CVT aims mostly at gaining certificates otherwise provided through the regular VET system. In this way, employability is indeed greatly raised for those students who complete these courses successfully. But for the less successful students this orientation towards certificates poses serious problems. There are, however, quite a lot of cases of good practice with regard to fostering personal development, through raising the esteem of TKC, for the long term unemployed and particularly for women returners. In line with these conditions assessment of TKC is more or less unknown, even by means of informal methods. Self-evaluation of TKC is also not common, but plays a significant part in the cases of good practice of CVT courses mentioned above, mostly carried through in an informal way during the course.

In conclusion, the appreciation of TKC for coping with the requirements of occupations so far unknown to adult job-seekers who have previously been less successful in the labour market should be raised substantially. This would foster their personal development and their employability and could be well achieved without interfering with the regulations of the VET system which are strongly supported by both social partners.

#### **8.3.4 High value of formal certification**

VET in this system is carried through in vocational schools the characteristics of which often emulate the general school system. Accordingly, (tacit forms of) key competences are usually not relevant for VET which is strongly criticized in the French scientific discussion for instance. Although non-formal learning outside this system plays a significant part in the labour market the prevalence of the value of certificates hampers its recognition. Therefore the general esteem of TKC is still rather low.

The related inflexibility of the labour market, often deplored, has led in France (which is taken here as the example of main features of this system) on the other hand to

the strongest move towards identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning all over Europe: the “bilan de compétences”.

The preparation for this bilan has gained more and more importance for the CVT system, besides other parts of this system which are still closely geared to the official certificates or to employers' requirements. The bilan de compétences is aiming not only at employability, but explicitly also at fostering personal development. It is carried through according to a great variety of methods and includes usually both, more formal assessment and self-evaluation. Depending on the methods employed TKC can gain rather great significance. Unfortunately, it is reported (Björnavold, 2001) that the value in the labour market is still rather limited although the number of people having gained the bilan is very big compared to other European countries.

In conclusion, the move towards the bilan de compétences is of great promise for a higher esteem of TKC, both for individuals and in the labour market. But its efficacy is still rather limited in a system strongly geared to traditional school certificates.

### **8.3.5 Broad vocational education**

The typical school-based strong VET-system aims at a broad vocational education which therefore includes key competences like problem solving, retrieving relevant information and critical thinking. But because the linkages to companies are usually weak many TKC as defined here are not supported very much because they can be acquired mostly through non-formal learning, especially in enterprises.

Because of the strong influence of the official VET-system there is little acknowledgment of TKC in the labour market and their general esteem remains still low. Similarly, because the CVT system is geared to the VET system TKC have “officially” little relevance for CVT. This is examined here from the point of view of the “model structure”, that is, in reality a variety of CVT, also geared to direct requirements of the labour market, has developed. Therefore, as far as the “model structure” is concerned, TKC do not play a significant part with regard to employability. But as personal development is an important objective of all vocational education and training it also influences CVT measures. Because these are usually based on experiences of prior learning, also in non-formal settings, TKC may be implicitly rather important for personal development in CVT courses. Because of the rather strong regulation of the labour market according to the system of occupations,

represented by the “streams” of the VET system, inflexibility is a matter of concern. Therefore influences of the British NVQ method are observed to become increasingly important with regard to assessment of competences. Accordingly, what has been said for the market driven case applies here, although to a lesser degree. Approaches towards self-evaluation are not very relevant as they do not fit in well with this model structure.

In conclusion, the move towards employing the NVQ system, although predominantly only for CVT for adults, provides a starting point for appreciating non-formal learning more thoroughly. But for valuing especially TKC for coping with changing employment opportunities the restrictions due to the behaviouristic approach towards assessment are still supposed to be very severe.

### **8.3.6 Conclusion**

The cross-cultural matrix shows that there are indeed ample possibilities for mutual learning between the five analytically defined model structures of the labour market and related VET and CVT measures, in order to enhance the value of tacit forms of key competences for coping with changing employment opportunities. The matrix points to features of the respective model structure where improvements suggest themselves. In this way, it may contribute to inform discussions about this theme within the individual countries which, as was pointed out, always represent a specific mix of the model structures defined.

### **8.4 Further research questions**

The project has generated clear outcomes with regard to the research questions (section 1):

- Tacit forms of key competences (TKC) are much too little recognized by the individual workers or students, by CVT practitioners and in the labour market. Therefore TKC are not used as much as it would be possible to support individuals in coping with changing employment opportunities.
- As a consequence, workers and students, including women returners, cannot get much self-assurance from the TKC they do possess and don't make use of them in CVT courses to a sufficient degree.

- They are often not adequately supported in making use of their TKC, neither during their CVT courses nor in seeking new jobs in the labour market. But there are examples of good practice particularly for CVT courses.
- Labour market agencies, CVT teachers and trainers and employers should be much better informed about the potential the individuals may offer via making use of their TKC.
- The (continuing) education and training of CVT teachers and trainers should take the potential of TKC much more into account.
- Assessment, if adequately designed, and recognition of non-formal learning could stimulate, via self-evaluation, the *identification* of TKC in the first place, in this way improving the appreciation of TKC in the labour market.

These outcomes lead to general recommendations, with regard to

- improving CVT courses for the unemployed and other job seekers, including women returners,
- raising the esteem of tacit forms of key competences in the labour market, including a gender perspective.

These recommendations have been presented in more detail for five “analytically defined model structures” of the labour market and related VET and CVT measures. For this a cross-cultural matrix has been developed in order to stimulate mutual learning between different cultural and institutional settings.

The outcomes as outlined here are based on the theoretical approach towards tacit forms of key competences as described in the introductory chapters and detailed in a further separate chapter.

With this in mind, there remain of course still a lot of questions for further research.

Some of them are mentioned here in conclusion:

- Should one try to support people in making their TKC explicit, as far as this possible at all? There are ethical questions connected with that: Would this mean to make people more “usable”, by exploiting the “whole person”, not only their directly job-related competences? Could a consequence of that be a loss of the personal sphere of life, resulting also in a decreasing ability to resist unreasonable demands in gainful employment?
- How far can TKC be made explicit, given the tacit logic of many of the hidden key competences meant here? Probably a continuum can be constructed between

completely explicit competences and entirely tacit key competences where every point on the continuum designates a specific mixture of both.

- Which TKC can and should be assessed? So far the methodologies developed for assessment of non-formal learning do not comply with the aims and quality standards to be applied here. Especially with regard to assessment for accreditation it remains questionable if valid and reliable methods can be designed.
- To what degree can key competences be transferred from one work situation to another one? Can they even support the “portability” of subject-specific competences from one domain of knowledge and skills to another one? Usually a distinction is made between “near transfer” between adjacent domains and “far transfer” to a rather new field of (key) competences. The latter case is especially important for the target group dealt with in this project. In how far could the appreciation of tacit forms of key competences support “far transfer”, by supporting the transformation of competences?
- How far is “self-evaluation” of TKC feasible? On the one hand, if supported through special modules of CVT courses, the validity may be rather high and the methodological problems related to external assessment are of minor importance. On the other hand, the introspection connected with self-evaluation may reinforce prejudices held about oneself, in positive and in negative respect.

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