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Leonardo da Vinci

REFLECTIVE QUALITY DEVELOPMENT FOR CVT TEACHERS AND TRAINERS THROUGH SELF-EVALUATION

FIRST COUNTRY REPORT

GREECE

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1 Overview

The present study sets out to examine the possibility of reflective quality development for CVT teachers and trainers through self-evaluation. The study touches upon the concepts of quality assurance, self-evaluation, self-empowerment which are new in the Greek VET context and still under-researched. Critical role in the debate on improving VET quality we believe they hold the CVT trainers; however, in Greece this is still a new vocation, and very little are known about this professional group. We believe it is fundamental to understand first what our target group is –what is the identity and traits of this group, what are the elements which tie them together as a group- assuming that there is a vocational group that can be called CVT trainers, and they function as such. Once we understand our group, and sketch out its attitudes towards self-evaluation, then we will be in position to continue our study by examining the dimensions of self-evaluation that an electronic tool should include.

As mentioned, this study looks at the first part as we describe it above, i.e. concepts and systems of quality in Greek VET, and the identity and the role CVT trainers play in it. We start our study with an overview of the Greek VET system – we briefly discuss its origins and structure of formal and informal VET, the vocational foundations, their influence, and we briefly examine the trainees. We conclude that VET is characterised by a complicated structure, and uncoordinated activities, which fail to address the emerging needs in skills and competences of the business world. Furthermore, the abundant funding coming from the E.U together with the absence of a controlling authority, especially during the first years of the expansion of the non-formal VET development, have contributed in creating an informal network of actors, which serves the economic interests of few influential ones; this informal network proved to be so powerful that can resist to the formal quality assurance system which has recently started developing, and bend quality assessment results.

Next, we look closer the quality assurance system, which was developed to address the aforementioned problems of mainly the non-formal VET system; the responsible authority (EKEPIS) put in place a set of rigid criteria to assess as much the vocational institutes standards, in terms of infrastructure, staff, and training programmes, as much as the formal qualifications and experience of CVT trainers. It should be mentioned here that, EKEPIS acknowledging that these criteria do not guarantee that the person can train adults in vocational courses, they set up a training programme for the registered by EKEPIS trainers. Apart of this formal quality system which is being developed, quality relies on the good will and initiatives of each vocational foundations; it needs be stated here that our research shows that quality is not a well-established concept: the market has not associated quality with continuous improvement - or at least cost-savings - hence the occasions when vocational foundations develop a quality assurance system is only because they gain extra points in EKEPIS evaluations – thus they increase their chances of getting funding for their programme proposals. Furthermore, self-evaluation is a foreign concept to the dominant culture, which largely does not see other substantial reason for evaluating and improving quality.

Finally, the largest part of the present research studied the group of CVT trainers. The questions we set out to answer is whether they exist as one vocational group, i.e. CVT trainers, have a group identity as vocational educators and hence they would be interested in evaluation and self-evaluating as integrated part of their work quality. Our concern was that, if this group, which is a newly emerged group, with little known about their traits, bears no group identity it would be difficult to suggest a self-evaluation tool, especially in a culture largely reluctant to any form of evaluation, and ignorant towards quality concepts.

Our research brought to light some important findings; first, the majority of CVT trainers are secondary school teachers, a small number come from the business world, and only a 10% is occupied only or mainly on CVT programmes – i.e. they consider CVT as their vocational identity. This finding has severe implications on the CVT quality; it has been reported that especially secondary school teachers do not currently qualify to teach adults let alone disadvantaged groups-vocational modules, since they lack the empirical insights into the business world, and equally importantly, they carry a strong 'school' mentality, which affects the process of learning and their interactions with trainees. It is reminded here, that EKEPIS has started a programme of training the registered instructors on teaching adults, however, the process is still in the beginning, and there are some concerns as to whether a short term training programme alone can break deep-rooted attitudes. Other findings pointed out that the CVT trainer is a highly insecure job, characterised by short-term contracts, up to 2 years delayed payment, and collaborations based on personal acquaintances or reputation; these elements, together with the absence of a culture of evaluation and a motive for continuous improvement, indicate that CVT trainers do not bring elements of a group identity, since they lack bonds and commitment to their object of activity. The study concludes with raising concerns as to whether a tool of self-evaluation, at this stage of VET development, would survive beyond the pilot phase. At this stage, the research did not consider appropriate to further study specific dimensions of such a tool, however, this remains to be further studied and feed in the findings while the project progresses.

The Greek VET System

The Greek VET system has historically been subject to foreign influences, which attempted to apply ready-made systems, ignoring the needs of the Greek context and culture. As examples, we mention here the development of the Foundations of Higher Vocational Education and Training, after the suggestions of the World Bank, and the Apprenticeship Schools, after the German paradigm. The foreign interventions often aim at promoting the respective cultures, instead of responding to the actual educational needs of the Greek context (Patiniotis N. + Stavroulakis. D.1997). As result of the uncritical acceptance of these interventions was the degradation of Greek VET to a mosaic of coexisting patterns of various origins, with different educational goals.

It was only after the 1977 educational reform that relatively large numbers of young people started to enter vocational education. However higher education is still held in high esteem in Greece, and routes to higher education have a high status. In contrast, vocational education has been, and still is, to a large extend for the 'failures' of the school system. The wish of most families of those who graduate from Lykeion is entrance to a university. (Note that approximately three quarters of this cohort are holders of a high-school [Lykeion] leaving certificate). It is also necessary to take into account the fact that in Greece there do not exist from the lower classes the social prejudices that prevail in other European countries against higher education. This means that many young people from humble origins enter and are successful in higher education: in the post war period over 40 per cent of students in university or higher technological education have been labour or rural origins. This phenomenon, coupled with the fact that Greece had the highest university level participation rate for 18 – 24 year olds in the beginning of the new millennium of 20 OECD countries (OECD 2000), means that Higher Education does a very thorough job in recruiting those with the ability to benefit from Higher Education from across a wide social spectrum.

The social demand for higher education is satisfied in the educational structure of Greece. Nowadays Lykeion is accused of being nothing more than a stepping stone and a preparatory school for university. It has lost the profile of an autonomous educational grade, thus offering no worthwhile educational qualification for those 16 – 18 year olds who attend it and do not manage to continue into tertiary education, in which they would be offered the opportunity to get a specialised academic or technological profession. In the past few years parents and pupils fought hard in order to achieve the right for TEE leavers to give the right to sit in entrance exams for higher education. This is one of the reasons for the announced educational reform that is announced for 2006 and the creation of the ETEL + ETES institutions that will replace TEE.

That all school routs are so strongly towards entrance to Higher Education inevitably means that vocational education is almost universally seen as a residual option. The low status of VET is also reflected in the low status of teachers and trainers working in the sector. For this reason it is much easier for a teacher of general subjects to get employment in vocational rather than general education. The low status of formal vocational education is reinforced by its relative lack of engagement with training either, despite most occupations being learned on the job. Indeed experiences of formal vocational education and training has very little labour market utility, because of a lack of correspondence between the field in which people train and that in which they work.

Based on the relevant legislation, the State seeks to democratise education by decentralising it, by ensuring the participation of those directly involved in the educational process, by upgrading the quality of the services provided and by applying meritocracy in the selection of administrative staff for education. Two significant laws (2525/1997 and 2640/1998) have introduced reforms and changes in the Greek educational system (RESCU project, 2001).

The basic changes are related to the following fields:

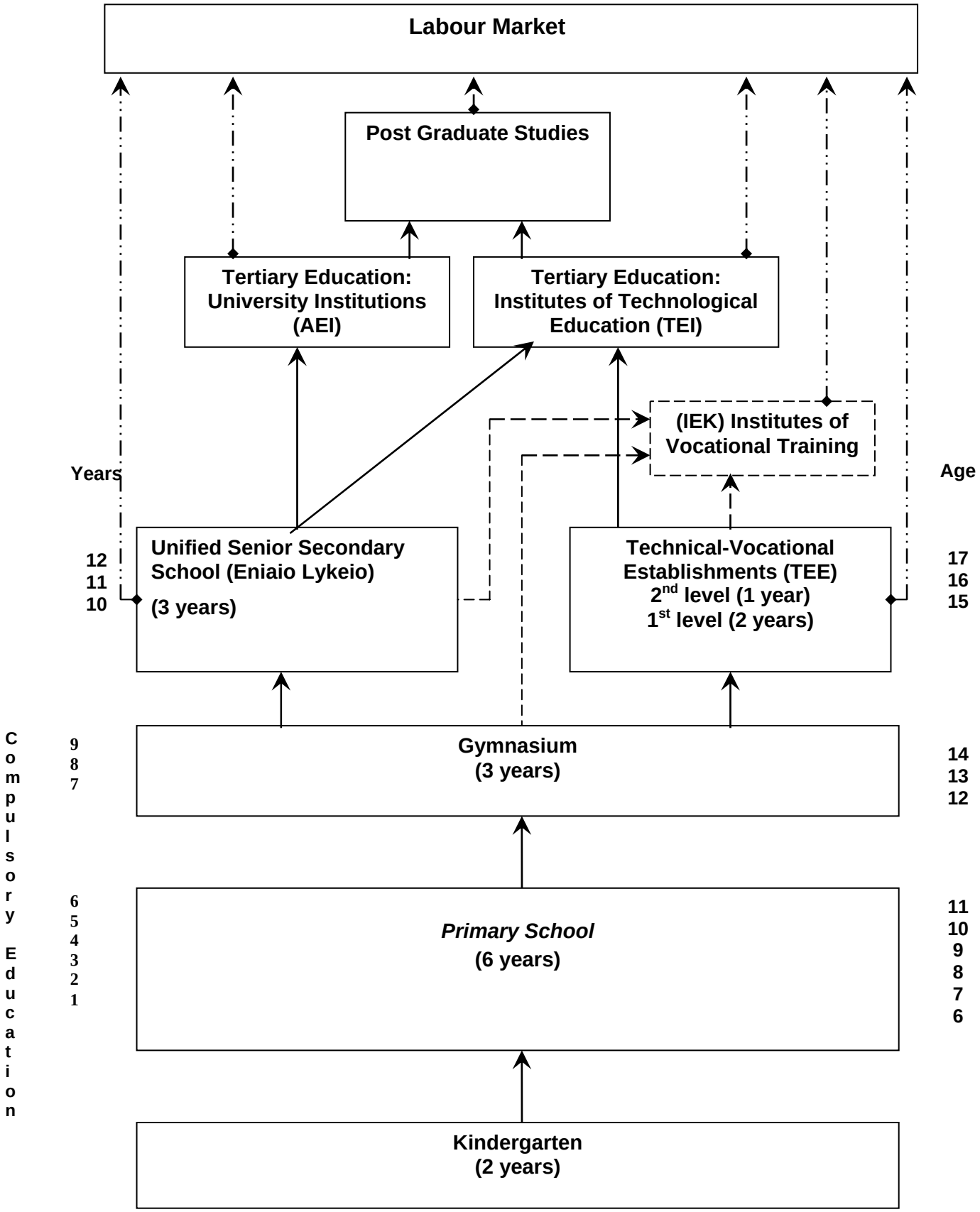
The Unified Senior Secondary School (Eniaio Lykeio) was instituted and is replacing all previous types of senior secondary school.

The admission procedure for enrolment in higher education has been modified: emphasis is now given on assessing the all round performance of students, as well as their performance on six particular subjects related to the educational direction they have chosen during their 2nd and 3rd grade of Senior Secondary School (Lykeio).

The creation of a unified system in technical and vocational education through the institution of Technical and Vocational Establishments (TEE).

The current educational system anticipates 9 years of compulsory education; after compulsory education, i.e. after Gymnasium, those who want to continue studying can either enter the Unified Lyceum (3 years) or the Technical-Vocational Establishment (TEE). Informal vocational training (leading to no qualification) is offered by "Institutes for Vocational Training" (KEK) which run training schemes subsidised by the Ministry of Employment and European Social Funds. According to the 1997-98 reform, education is structured in levels as can be seen in the Diagram 1 below.

The Structure of the formal Greek Education System



The VET System

Due to certain historical and economical characteristics of Greece [i.e. the industry has not been developed to the extent it has in other countries, which indicates a small demand for technical jobs], Vocational Education has traditionally been considered a second best choice for the youngsters (Cellorio, Faran, Patiniotis 1997: 32) ; on the other hand, the Greek education system has focused on providing general knowledge, leaving little alternatives for those who preferred a technical career through higher education. VET has been criticized for not achieving to make the link between vocational training and labour market, since the training programmes and provided skills do not meet the actual requirements of the economy. A public authority representative commented during our interview:

'Vocational Education and Training does not contribute to the economy, as it could and should do. I don't think it plays a substantial role, because it is not provided as it should be, the philosophy and culture is not supportive; and this is not only school to blame, but the whole system, the employers, the school, the Greek family and the dominant mentality regarding education – the issue is much deeper than it seems; whereas Vocational Education and Training in other countries is a key-force, in Greece it is perceived as the path for the children of a lesser god to have a chance in the labour market'

Formal VET system

The formal VET system provides education at second, post-second and third (higher) level and is regulated and supervised by the Ministry of Education, with the exception of certain Vocational Schools (e.g. Apprenticeship Schools, Military Schools, Master-mariner Schools, etc) which fall under the jurisdiction of the corresponding Ministry.

VET at the secondary level consists in Technical Vocational Establishments (TEE); TEE require 3 years of studies, which are split in 2 cycles, the first lasting 2 years and the final 1 year. The institutions provide vocational education after the compulsory secondary education in gymnasium. A further reform is scheduled to take place in 2006, when two new agents should replace TEE: the Unified Technical Vocational Lyceum (ETEL), where studies would last 3 years, and the Unified Technical Vocational School (ETES), where studies would last 2 years.

At the post-secondary level VET is provided in the Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK), which can be either public or private. IEK provide cheap, specialized labour and would have been welcomed by the employers, had not the latter the option to employ tertiary level graduates (because of their broader spectrum of skills and competences) for the same jobs and for the same minimum wages (this situation holds true for the majority of micro and SMEs, which total the 65% of Greek employers, and surprisingly, for big employers, as well). In order to enrol the student has to be lyceum graduate, and there is also applied a point-system of selection. The studies last from one to four semesters, plus a six month work experience placement.

The responsible body for accreditation of certificates and qualifications from TEE and IEK is *OEEK (Organization for Vocational Education and Training),* which falls under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education. OEEK also determines the vocational rights of graduates from VET of all levels, in collaboration with the respective ministers and social partners. The accredited certificate is a formal qualification for employment in the public sector.

Tertiary level education is provided by universities and by Technical Education Institutes (TEI). The students are accepted after Pan-Hellenic entrance exams, and the studies last 8 (10 or 12) semesters for the former (depending on the discipline), and 6 plus one given over internship for the latter. One of the major issues facing the third-level education institutes is the decreasing of training quality, due to the large number of students, in proportion to the infrastructure and the teaching personnel, as well as due to the centralized cost-control and cost-cutting educational policy. (Comparative research has repeatedly shown that Greece occupies the lowest positions in all categories pertaining to public expenditure for education (3,5% of the Greek GDP in 2005); when at the same time the private spending for covering the costs are substantial (around 3% of Greek GDP in 2005). Private expenditure try therefore to recover the absence of enough public educational expenses. It should be mentioned here that private expenditure in education is the highest in the E. U. member states. Not surprisingly, this situation reflects back to the education policy with discontinuities and wavering.)

The degrees and certificates from tertiary educational institutes qualify the graduates for employment in the public sector. The graduates can also register with their respective professional chamber or vocational association, and acquire the right to exercise the vocation.

It is worth mentioning here that the public sector is the major employer of tertiary education graduates, probably legitimizing and giving value this way to the same system that has constructed (about 58% of university and 46% of TEI graduates are employed in this sector; Patiniotis 2006). The businesses, on the other hand use different criteria for recruitment, beyond the formal qualifications and certifications, such as the trust in the candidate's personal references, and the latter's acceptance of the offered work package and conditions, signalizing this way the depreciation of formal education and the qualifications provided.

Non-formal VET

Non-formal vocational education in Greece is regulated and supervised by the Ministry of Employment, in the majority of the cases, and has been conducted in various forms and by numerous foundations often with overlapping responsibilities; the main weakness of the structure is that it remains highly uncoordinated, despite the need for regulating the funds coming from the E.U. The formal rhetoric proclaims the benefits of the structure, as being more flexible than the formal VET in responding to new demands and changes in the labour market, as well as providing easier access to gain some vocational qualifications to unskilled individuals (especially aiming at disadvantaged groups and communities with high level of unemployment). Beyond the formal rhetoric, non-formal VET was a response to European mandates and the ample funds which became available for its support, while it provides a legitimate way for decreasing unemployment rates, since participants in the programs are temporarily removed from the lists of unemployed population.

Unfortunately, with the exception of some public utilities, the majority of businesses remained indifferent to the opportunities offered in planning training programs. An increase in interest indicated lately is attributed to the financial compensation of the participants (offered to both the trainees and the businesses, which offer them short apprenticeships), whereas the main disadvantages are still the poor co-ordination of activities, the poor information regarding the available training programmes and participation criteria, and the lack of provision of a formal qualification title. Especially, the subsidized character of the training programmes and the lack of a structure for accrediting certification for acquired qualifications are obstructions in engaging the target groups in participating. The 2003 Report of National Certification Centre (EKEPIS) underscores these limitations, addressing strongly the need for more applied research and development of tools, which would enable the quality assurance of VET structures and programs, and eventually lead to providing participants with formal qualification certificates. It should be noted here that some initiatives have been recently taken by VET social partners, towards developing a system for accrediting knowledge and qualifications, regardless the way these have been acquired.

Non-formal VET foundations

The main foundation in non-formal VET *is the General Secretariat for Adult Education (G.S.A.E)*, responsible for designing, co-ordinating and supporting activities in the area of lifelong learning and training. To this purpose and under its authority lie 300 Training Centers, which fall under 54 Prefecture Councils for People Training (NELE). A second agent of G.S.A.E is the Centres for Adult Education (KEE), which provides immigrants with training in basic skills, social skills, and learning of Greek as second language. G.S.A.E targets mainly disaffected groups, such as unemployed, illiterate, women, minority groups, ex-convicts, ex-drug addicts, etc.

The Greek Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) is the main body for materializing the governmental policies on employment; it co-ordinates programmes for continuous education, which take place around Greece at the Centres for Vocational Training of OAED. The programs are addressed mainly to unemployed individuals, either unskilled or semi-skilled, by providing further training and specialization courses, which potentially will increase the participants' opportunities for a career. OAED, in an effort to link vocational training programmes with the economy, created two affiliated organizations: Vocational Training SA, and Employment Observatory Research and Informatics SA (PAEP). PAEP conducts research on current and actual employment issues, and provides Vocational Training S.A. the results of their work, in order to embed them in further actions. Vocational Training S.A is responsible for Lifelong Learning and Continuous Vocational Training, and in theory materializes into actions PAEP research results and suggestions. Finally, Centres for Promoting Employment are part of OAED structure, and responsible for recording unemployed people and provide counselling services on how to find a job.

This service involves an individualized interview with the unemployed person, through which the consultant tries to build the interviewee profile, and match their competences and interests with jobs and available training seminars, where they are directed. In reality though, more often than not the service works as a self-service: the unemployed fills in the relevant documents on their own, and decide 'on their own free-will' how they can further their career.

Various Ministries, through their Directorates of Education, are also active in planning and materializing training programs addressed so much to unemployed individuals as much as to their own personnel in various departments, in areas relevant to their respective objects of activity.

Other training programs are organized and run by the big public utilities (DEH, OTE, ELTA, OSE, etc) as well as by businesses in the private sector (e.g. banks), and organizations such as Chambers, Professional Associations, Trade Unions, etc, which, through their education departments or appropriate training structures, provide the employed with the knowledge and skills required in specific jobs.

Recently, main agents for non-formal VET have been proved the private-owned *Foundations of Vocational Training (KEK*), which are evaluated, certified and supervised by the National Accreditation Centre (EKEPIS). KEKs absorb funds from the government and the EU for the operation of their programs, and provide training both for unemployed and for business staff. KEKs are largely involved in developing and conducting training programmes, which target socially disadvantaged groups, responding to the calls announced by the Ministry of Employment each time. The training programme proposals can be submitted in collaboration with the business, universities, or research institutes. EKEPIS regulates the quality of the offered infrastructures (e.g. facilities, technologies) and the trainers' formal qualifications. However, the content and quality of the offered course relies on each foundation –the consequences of this are discussed elsewhere here.

Finally, in Greece also operate the so called "*Laboratories for Studies*"; these are private institutions providing post-secondary education. Some of these work in some form of collaboration (mainly franchising) with universities from foreign countries, and provide a degree from the respective institution. These degrees provide a valid proof of vocational qualification in the labour market, however, they are still not formally acknowledged by the State as equivalent to the Greek certificates of tertiary education, and hence are not accredited.

It is important to note here that the certificates provided by non-formal VET agents have no formal (i.e. by the State) recognition as proof of qualifications, hence based on this only, no place in the public sector can be pursued – with the exception of training programs run by some organizations, e.g. ministries, banks, etc, which are acknowledged within the same organization. Nevertheless, the businesses accept these certificates as sufficient proof of qualifications in the recruiting process.

Trainees

It would be a mistake to consider trainees a solid group of people, who participate for the benefit of acquiring knowledge and skills. 'Trainees' tend to be very diversified, with different motives for and expectations from participating in VET programmes; besides, the VET itself, as described above, is very heterogeneous.

In formal VET structures, participants at large expect, apart of the obvious benefit of learning vocational skills and competences, the benefits from acquiring a formal certificate of qualifications or a degree in the case of university. The degree is allegedly associated with occupations of higher status, whereas both degrees and certificates are associated with secure jobs, better salaries, and bonuses according to the occupation, at least in the public sector. However, as discussed above, the private sector is reluctant to recruit qualified employees, preferring those with work experience. Consequently, high unemployment leads many individuals from this group to seek further training in one of the informal VET structures.

Informal VET structures have been developed to address different needs for further training. Their various programs are addressed to employed, unemployed and people from disadvantaged groups, and receive affluent funding from E.U.

Already employed individuals prefer to participate in in-house training programs: according to EKEPIS report (2003) a 79% believe that through these programs they acquire skills and competences that are valuable for the company, whereas a great percentage believe that these skills improves their employability in the labour market. A 54% believes that, by participating in these programs, they improve their job security and opportunities for development. There has also been an increase in the number of employed individuals, who participate in other informal VET programs, mainly seeking to acquire or update their vocational knowledge and skills, or pursuing a change in their vocational career.

Nevertheless, the large number of informal VET programs are addressed to unemployed individuals and allegedly aim at providing vocational skills relevant to the needs of the business, and improve their employability; this group includes individuals with formal qualifications, who are currently unemployed, and individuals from disadvantaged groups (i.e. women, disabled, ex-drug addicts, ex-convicts, cultural minorities, expatriates, school leavers, etc), in other words, those individuals who suffer the marginalization from the labour market, and also from society.

EU has put these people at the focus of VET plans and policies; however in Greece the numbers show a negative picture. A study conducted in KEKs run by OAED (EKEPIS, 2003) reports 39% of those who participated in a vocational program were employed 6 months after the end of the program [note here that businesses receive subsidies for offering apprenticeships to participants for a short time, however the report does not elaborate on this factor], and only 40% in an area relevant to the training they had receive.

The programs have not been very effective in substantially improving employability, and indeed they do not enjoy a high status among businesses either, which report that the training provided is not flexible enough to meet the robust technological changes and business needs in technical skills –an argument, which indeed surprises, since in Greece most businesses are small-sized and use low level technologies. It emerges then, that the key motive for participation in these programs is the received subsidies, especially for those participants who do not receive unemployment benefits, whereas expectations for improving employability and finding a job come second. As an experienced instructor has pointed out during our interview:

'I have numerous cases of individuals who I keep on meeting in different training programmes, obviously, they don't come because they have an interest in the subject, but for the subsidies.'

1.1 Role of Quality Management

To begin with, it is worth noting the different approaches taken by Anglo-Saxon and German literatures to conceptualizing quality and self-evaluation: the former aim at improving employability, whereas the latter at a pedagogical change, focusing on the learners' rather than the employees' development. In Greece, these concepts are still new, as it will be explained below, while practices are developed to comply with European mandates, rather than created in context to address national needs and interests.

Quality

It is a difficult task to picture a national concept of quality; the operation fails early while trying to define what is commonly accepted as such. It appears that academics, quality gurus and policy-makers are reluctant to give a clear definition, preferring to assume it is common knowledge and proceed to expose issues, determine indicators, and suggest tools for its evaluation and assurance [the Greek National Accreditation Center (EKEPIS) is no exception here, nor the Greek Ministry of Education]. Munro (1995:130) contemplates that '*quality's elusiveness to definition appears to be part of its resources'*. Xu (2000) points out that precisely its elusiveness to define it makes it intriguing, and suggests that it should be viewed as a concept in relation to other concepts, practices, and tools, rather than in its-self, since without this discursive web it becomes an empty signifier.

Following then this suggestion, we recognize that the concept evolved through time and assembled through use, need and perspective five main concepts (Xu, 2000), which attribute it its 'commonsensical' meaning.

Hence a Quality discourse consists in: a system approach, which emphasizes the need for co-ordination; the articulation of principles, which regulates the successful behaviour; the necessity of control through standards of quality assurance, as the way to create certainty and convergence; an engineering way of thinking, which categorizes activities as input, process, and output –and arguably faces difficulties in dealing with non-technical aspects of organization, e.g. people; and participation and communication, as the solution to overcome the problems created throughout and as a result of quality control, or assurance or management, or total quality management, etc. We should add here, that since 'quality' has become an object not only for engineers, but also for marketing people, and managers, there is a shared view that promotes co-operation and integration of approaches and tools.

Evaluation and self-evaluation

The concept of evaluation has been an object of study and of methodology for many disciplines (psychology, education studies, management, development studies) and is certainly a fundamental dimension of any research program. The concept of evaluation provides the method and the tools to ascertain the quality of the programme or process under scrutiny; hence it is closely associated with the quality discourse, as discussed above. However, early approaches which define clear, specific, and measurable goals are proved inadequate to serve processes and programs with multiple, conflicting and developing or ever-changing goals. Whence, it emerges the need for more flexible forms of evaluation and most importantly, for self-evaluation.

Working on educational matters Mac Baeth (2001) defined the fundamental assumptions of self-evaluation philosophy as the following:

- Learning appertains to the human nature.
- Development and change are inner needs.
- Reaction is important for individual learning and the development of human organisms.
- Humans are devoted to their own creations.

In practice, this means that people who participate in creating something tend to feel more ownership of what they have created, make more use of it, and take better care of it. Active participants in self-evaluation procedures, therefore, are more likely to feel ownership not only of *their* evaluation findings, but also of the evaluation process itself (Rebolloso, Fernando-Ramirez and Cantón, 2005). Properly, sensitively, and authentically done, it becomes *their* process. In self-evaluation the external evaluator becomes a facilitator, collaborator, and teacher in support of training seminar-participants and staff engaging in their own evaluation. While the findings from such a participatory self-evaluation process may be useful, the more immediate impact is to use the evaluation process to increase participants' sense of being in control of, deliberative about, and reflective on their own lives and situations.

Empowerment

Guided self-evaluation has been also defined "participatory" or "collaborative" or "empowerment" evaluation. These different labels mean often different things to different experts. Some use these phrases interchangeably or as mutually reinforcing concepts (e.g., Dugan 1996; Powell et al., 1989; Whitmore and Kerans 1988). 'Empowerment' derives from an emancipatory discourse, aiming at supporting people to develop first themselves, and then the processes and programs they participate in, by using the knowledge they already have. The starting assumption therefore, is that people have valuable knowledge and competences, which can be articulated and developed through a reflexive process.

Notably, the concept has been widely used in action research, for its ability to involve people's knowledge as catalyst of change. So, for example, Whitmore (1988) has defined the participatory approach as combining "social investigation, education, and action with the ultimate purpose of engendering broad community and social change" (p. 3). Whitmore worked with a community-based team and contended that, through the evaluation process; participants not only gained new knowledge and skills but also created a support network among them and gained a greater sense of self-efficacy.

Adopting a different standpoint, Cousins and Earl (1995, 1992) have advocated participatory and collaborative approaches primarily to increase use of research findings: "*Unlike emancipatory forms of action research, the rationale for participatory evaluation resides not in its ability to ensure social justice or to somehow even the societal playing field but in the utilization of systematically collected and socially constructed knowledge*" (p. 10). Yet, the authors go beyond increased use of findings when they discuss how participation helps create a learning organization. Viewing participatory evaluation as a means of creating an organizational culture committed to ongoing learning has become an important theme in recent literature linking evaluation to learning organizations (e.g. King 1995; Aubel 1993; Leeuw, et al., 1993; Sonnichsen 1993,) "The goal of a participatory evaluator is eventually to put him or herself out of work when the research capacity of the organization is self-sustaining" (King 1995:89). Indeed, the *self-evaluating organization* (Wildavsky, 1985) constitutes an important direction in the institutionalization of evaluation logic and processes.

1.2 Role of Quality Management in the Educational Sector

In education the concept of quality management is not so new; there has been an increasing pressure on educational institutions to improve the quality and standardize their operations, at least as far as the management of their resources is concerned. As in other sectors, one can encounter a broad variety of reasons to explain this increasing pressure, ranging from genuine commitment to quality and education, to cost-cutting, or improve the institutions' position in a competitive 'market'.

However, the dominant concept which has formed the related practices emerges with the characteristics the shop-floor context and engineering understanding have attributed it. In other words, in quality discourse for education we encounter the web of concepts and issues as described above, (i.e. system approach; the necessity of control through standards of quality assurance; an engineering way of thinking; and participation and communication, as the solution to overcome the problems created throughout and as result of quality control, or assurance or management, or total quality management, etc), in spite of the fact that education lacks the hard measurable outcomes, which makes prevalent forms of quality assurance inadequate.

There has been recently a change towards other forms of evaluation – e.g. self-evaluation - however, the discourse does not show evidence of changing; only expanding to include other concepts in its web (self-evaluation, empowerment). The argument 'where you draw the line', i.e. what should be a subject of evaluation and based on which criteria - and who has the legitimate power to decide - is heard louder, still with no convincing answer. Hence, for the time-being, expanded and user-friendly quality systems are promoted as the appropriate planning and decision-making tool for practitioners.

1.3 Cultural and System-Related Perception of Quality Management

1.3.1 Cultural and System-Related Perception of Quality Assurance

In the last three decades Greece experienced ferment in education, which mainly took the form of a great opening of university education to young people, in order to satisfy the "*educational fetishism*" of parents. Tsoukalas (1986) explains the phenomenon as a remainder of older days, when the small number of university graduates had exceptional career options, and high social status. This opening, however, whose dimensions were most evident in the mid 90's, was not accompanied by respective feasibility studies, which are the model for the process of evaluation, since it was not the result of rational planning. A respective unreasonable development was also noted in vocational training, with the robust multiplication of training institutions so much in formal, as much as in non-formal VET systems.

Quality Assurance in formal VET

As already mentioned, formal VET is being regulated mainly by the Ministry of Education (exceptions are the Vocational Schools, which due to their training subject fall under the jurisdiction of the corresponding Ministry, e.g. Apprenticeship Schools under the Ministry of Employment, Master-mariners School under the Ministry of Mercantile Marine, etc). Generally, ministries are responsible for developing and approving training programmes, assuring shared content among educational foundations, and in collaboration with OEEK accredit vocational licences and are responsible for vocation rights. The accreditation of the vocational certificate entails written examination of the theoretical knowledge associated to the vocation, and where relevant, laboratory observation of the trainees' technical competences.

Special attention deserves the case of IEK (Vocational Training Institutes) supervised by OEEK, which have been developed to flexibly address the current and fast-changing business needs in low-level technical skills. The failure of the system is notorious, since it is generally acknowledged that employers are not keen to recruit IEK graduates – especially when they can employ a graduate of tertiary education for the same salary. The system has been criticized for its dominant 'school mentality' –mostly due, on the one hand, to the secondary school teachers who staff IEKs as employees and trainers, and do not allow space for new pedagogical methods, neither for insights from the business world, and, on the other hand, to the out-dated content of training courses; thus, IEKs role have been reduced from vocational training institutions to a low-quality post-school experience. It is also noted here a comment coming from our interview with an OEEK representative, that whereas 10 years ago the level of the students at IEK was 'reasonable', nowadays training often starts with simple arithmetic and basic skills – this may be explained as a consequence of the increased intake of the higher education institutions, and the subsequent fall of the required qualification to enter; hence the related fall in the required qualifications to enter an IEK.

The formal VET quality assurance system has been criticised for being greatly centralized and inflexible, since all decisions and practices have to be approved by the corresponding Ministry or OEEK. Control expands from the training programmes and content, to methods and tools for teaching, and teachers' qualifications. As discussed, the centralized structure does not allow the vocational institutes to flexible respond to the current trends of the labour market and the updating regarding the evolution of knowledge in the fields. Furthermore, it has contributed in creating a culture of resistance in any innovation that might affect the status quo, leading vocational agents to lose sight of the primary purpose of VET which is to develop qualified and employable professionals. Under these circumstances, it is well understood that evaluation of the vocational agents is not part of the quality assurance system, since the latter focuses mainly on numbers and results, rather than on the related processes.

Quality Assurance in non-formal VET

As response to the anarchical development of the non-formal VET system, and the primary need for co-ordination and control of vocational institutes, the National Accreditation Centre (EKEPIS) was founded in 1997, and is the responsible institution for asserting that VET foundations comply with the suggested quality standards, and for certifying the formers' function. To this purpose, it sets the quality standards and accredits KEKs in terms of:

- infrastructure (space, facilities, technologies, etc)
- the staff (minimum number, necessary posts, requested qualifications)
- on-going evaluation of KEKs performance

It also accredits:

- Trainers, as far as academic qualifications and necessary experience are concerned.
- Counseling specialists on working with people from socially disadvantaged groups, in terms of their typical qualifications and experience.

It is anticipated, after the new development of the vocational profiles and modularization of training courses, EKEPIS will be the responsible authority to accredit:

- Vocational profiles (once they will be developed)
- Training programmes based on the vocational profiles, developed within continuous VET

EKEPIS has developed a register to record the trainers who are accredited and hence eligible to work with KEKs, from where the training bodies can select their trainers. Recently it started providing the registered trainers and specialists with training on teaching adults – accrediting, this way, that they have the typical qualifications to teach these target groups. It should be noted here that the evaluation of the trainers, i.e. the testing of mastery of knowledge in the specific area, the ability to teach, etc. are not EKEPIS responsibility, but is undertaken by each KEK.

> *'there are various levels in quality in education; the quality that we assure is that all key-actors are competent, and have the typical as well as substantial qualifications, i.e. experience, we wouldn't accredit someone who has never worked before, we assure this, and we also know that this person is an adult trainer. This is as far as we go; we don't interview them, we couldn't do so, there are about 15000 trainers. There is this procedure now to assure quality, before EKEPIS there was nothing, there could be an economist teaching plumbers, there was no control'.*

It is hence KEKs responsibility to evaluate the trainers' performance in classroom, and decide if they will continue the collaboration in a future training programme. KEK are also responsible for the content and quality of courses, since the process of programme development expects KEKs to respond to the Ministry of Employment call for training programmes, by submitting proposals:

> *…for us (KEKs) the Ministry of Employment announces some 'titles' for seminars which are frankly horrific… and when you call them and ask for clarifications, i.e. 'what do you mean by…' they answer 'oh, we don't know, it's how you understand it!*

And there is no point of reference, where you could search the Greek actuality of vocational needs.

The process of proposal assessment involves the evaluation so much of the training proposals, as much as of the KEK who submits it –its infrastructure, staff, previous successful experience of training programmes, ISO accreditation, etc. KEK scores points for each of criterion, and accordingly the funds for training are allocated to KEKs –and programmes. Regarding the selection of participants for the training programs, this is conducted by OAED who determines the criteria for participation and sends the lists of participants in each program to the respective KEK. From the list KEKs can select through interviewing, if they think this is necessary, the trainees, and if they are short of candidates, they can make a public call to fill the availabilities.

The system has been criticised for imposing tight control over processes, however failing to include learning in the process of quality assurance. Not surprisingly, the structures developed in education and vocational training, are hostile to any form of external evaluation.

Self-evaluation has been gradually emerging in the sense that KEKs are proceeding to a form of evaluating their processes, either individually or as a system, like ISO 9000 anticipates, because the results of this assessment add extra points when their programme proposals are assessed. These points are taken up further below.

1.3.2 Cultural and System-Related Perception of Self-Evaluation

Evaluation is considered generally, as well as in relation to education and training, to be a new trend, which has not been sufficiently evaluated and analyzed, yet. This situation has led to the non-judicious adoption of proposal-models of evaluation regarding social policy and by extension VET policy, which are formalistic, epistemologically problematic and, as proven, ineffective. The evaluation policies are not something new in Greek reality; experience up to now shows its incomplete and unorganized character, the domination of private enterprises, and the absence of a public authority, subject to control by society, which will be responsible for the evaluation; these elements, although have driven the systems of evaluation in other countries into failure (Sanderson 2000), are still maintained in Greece because they are compatible with the structure of labour market.

In response to the issues that are raised as direct priority by the E.U, such as the ‘knowledge based society’, and ‘ineffectiveness’ and ‘quality’ in education and in vocational training (EC 2000, 2002), systems of accreditation and evaluation have been developed, which are structured within a specific theoretical framework The evaluation is supposed to cultivate competition on the one hand, by improving the quality of the provided services, and on the other hand to make the best use of the available financial resources, by connecting the education and training with the production (Fetterman 1995, Linney 1995, Rossi et al 1999). This means that, the main characteristic of these systems is in fact the direct connection with and incorpo-

ration into the existing labour market, within a formalistic framework, in which the citizen - user of the processes of education and training is customer - consumer without the possibility of an active participation in the specific process. This is also noticeable in the specific programs of self-directed learning in Greece, which have not been developed in order to cover needs in the framework of designing a new working policy, nor to meet individual needs, but only to absorb community funds (Illiadis 2000). Not surprisingly, then, as the Self-Evaluation project (2005) showed and confirmed the present research, self-evaluation in Greece is at an embryonic state: it has not been institutionalized yet but seeks to acquire its legitimization by society, and therefore, we cannot talk about the existence of such a culture.

ISO 9000

We suggest considering ISO 9000 a quality assurance system based on self-evaluation at the organizational level, i.e. the organization evaluates itself, according to principles of quality. ISO accreditation has recently started attracting the attention of educational foundations, since it is generally believed it turns them more competitive in the market; it emerges however, quality assurance is connected with increasing competitiveness, not via the improvement of quality which intends to assure, but via the reputation gained through the ISO certification. It has been mentioned already that, especially in KEKs case, ISO accreditation gives extra points when a training programme proposal is being assessed for funding.

ISO systems are built on the basis: 'quality is the satisfaction of the customer.' This definition is admittedly very glamorous, however very vague, hence it becomes subject to various interpretations; consequently, it does not achieve to reach the essence of quality, and give directions to subsequent practices. It follows then, the system sets some criteria, which become subject to each consultant's interpretation as to how they will be met. Generally, an ISO system sets up processes for recording suppliers and customers operations via IT applications, and evaluate them. However, many complicated ISO systems have sentenced quality processes to inactivity, since managers were never convinced it was worth the time to operate them after the accreditation.

The evaluation process expects the feed-back of:

- the trainee (who evaluates so much the programme, as much as the trainer)

- the director of training programmes

- the trainers (and in case of in-house training, the businesses)

- where the training programme anticipates internships, evaluation by the trainee's supervisor at the business.

The evaluation questionnaires are meant to assess customer satisfaction; in particular in relation to the trainees, the focus is to assess from the one side the extent to which the programme covered the topics it was supposed to cover, whether the programme helped the person substantially in acquiring new knowledge, and finally, if the person was satisfied with the way the programme was delivered and the available provisions.

As far as suppliers are concerned, criteria address the economic terms, the delivered quality, and the consistent and timely delivery. The supplier factor reassures the quality of provisions, and not of the training programme -which is assessed via the questionnaires mentioned above.

Nevertheless, the process of suppliers' assessment is not taken in serious, since relationships after some years of collaboration are based on mutual trust and they hardly change in case of occasional failure. Hence, supplier-assessments do not become a vivid part of the quality assurance procedure; we note here that, for a vocational training foundation a quality system assumes and treats trainers as suppliers -with all the subsequent problems due to the type of the relationship, as we have already mentioned, and will discuss further below.

1.3.3 Cultural and System-Related Perception of Self-Empowerment

Whereas self-evaluation is a process which only now starts to emerge in some form, there is no evidence of any sort of formal self-empowerment yet.

2 Survey

The study was conducted based on a qualitative methodology, since we felt it was more appropriate in order to research newly emerged concepts of a limited breadth. We remind here that in Greece the concept of self-evaluation is new and has not been formally adopted yet by VET agents. Hence, the aim of study was not to record and describe current practices –since they do not exist- but to discuss perceptions and possibilities for the implementation of such a concept. Furthermore, a substantial part of the research studied who the target group is; since there is too little known about the newly emerged vocation of CVT trainers, we felt it was appropriate to first identify the traits of the group, before we are in position to discuss the possibility of an electronic tool of self-evaluation. The methods used involved desk data and in-depth interviews with key-actors of the VET system.

The data collection started with the examination of desk data (reports, websites, papers) related to the Greek VET system and the current challenges it faces. This facilitated the identification of the key-actors and shaped the topics, which would be relevant to touch upon with each one of them. In total 9 in-depth interviews were conducted, min 1 ½ hour each, with Directors of Education and Training from the following institutions:

- Industry Confederation (SEV)

- Employees Confederations (INE-GSEE)

- EKEPIS, i.e. the National Accreditation Body for Vocational Training

- OEEK, i.e. the responsible body for accrediting theoretical knowledge in formal VET programmes

- Vocational Training S.A., i.e. OAED affiliated organization responsible for continuous training

- Q-Plan –Quality Assurance Consultancy

- 3 KEK (Centres for Vocational Training), which had long experience in developing training programmes for socially disadvantaged groups, and were aware of the concept of modularization

- 1 professional Trainer in IEK and KEK training programmes

The interpretation of data was structured, in the sense that the categories had been determined by the project partnership.

2.1 The Identity and Role of Trainers

We consider crucial for the purpose of the project to look closer at the CVT teachers' and trainers' identity; CVT teachers and trainers are a crucial dimension of quality in education, however little work has been conducted in this area in Greece, which would identify this vocational group. Given that the tool under discussion intends to address their own needs, we believe it is important to operationalize a conceptual framework, before we are in position to proceed to recommendations. Hence, we chose to dedicate a great part of our study to examining the traits of this group.

Admittedly, the instructors' level of qualifications have increased recently; the phenomenon is related to high unemployment, which affects the young university graduates –as explained above- and leads individuals to seek employment in the education system. However, the same effect has been the main cause for the deterioration of instructors' economic and social status, since it created a major surplus of labour in the education sector. Job insecurity, low wages, and poorly equipped classrooms, as result of the cost-cutting policy applied in the education, has lead many instructors to view their vocation as something temporary, until they settle in a more secure job with a steadily paid salary.

The recent turn towards supporting Vocational Training and the numerous training centres (IEK and KEK, public and private) have opened up opportunities for the instructors to add some extra money in their income, by teaching part-time at these institutions –money, which make a substantial contribution to their income, once they are paid. Hence, many chose to teach in vocational programmes, keeping the role of trainer as their second job, or in a few cases (about 10%) make vocational teaching their primary source of income. The question that rises is whether this vocational group has achieved to develop a professional identity, hence, consider themselves teachers and trainers, and commit to the cause of education, or they only see it as an occasional occupation –with no further commitments. We argue here that if the trainers had developed a professional identity, then they would probably be more interested in further improving their teaching via self-evaluation tools and practices. The answer to this question bears significant implications for the quality in education system and the subsequent tools to develop for its support.

Formal VET institutions require by their instructors at least a university degree or a third level technical education certificate. Especially for IEK, since many of the modules they teach do not necessitate strong theoretical basis (e.g. gardening, plumbing) instructor may be anyone who has a proven expertise in the area. It is striking a striking finding that the majority of the trainers at formal VET institutions are secondary school teachers. For most of them (around 80%) being a trainer is their second part-time job, the rest of the trainers come from the professional word (especially from big public utilities firms e.g. DEH, OTE, etc) and a small percentage chose to teach in VET as their main and only occupation. However it emerges that very few of the trainers see teaching as a temporary job (until they find something else), whereas some 70% stay on vocational training permanently.

The trainers sign employment contracts for a semester (as long as the training programme lasts), and the average trainer teaches 4-5 hours per week. It is worth mentioning here that the payment may be delayed even up to 2 years after the completion of the programme, hence this may be a cause that make people reluctant to see it as their main or only occupation.

As we said above, the great majority of IEKs trainers are full-time teachers at secondary schools, and choose to teach in IEKs in the evenings, as a way to add in their annual income. It is reported that these people have no experience in teaching adults, neither in teaching vocational courses, since their main occupation is teaching youngsters in secondary schools. It is also striking that these trainers undergo no preparation training programme in these issues – something that EKEPIS has started now doing for the trainers in non-formal VET. Consequently, the pedagogical methods they adopt and the mentality they carry are not suitable for vocational training, since they lack empirical insights into the business world, and equally importantly, they lack the training in teaching adults; furthermore, it is reported that they resist in adapting to the demands of the transforming VET system. Moreover, even though OEEK acknowledges the contribution of IEK trainer register would have upon improving the quality of training programmes, the current structure does not anticipate this innovation, hence the selection of trainers by IEK directors relies on personal acquaintance and mutual trust which develops through years of collaboration.

The quality system suggests the evaluation of trainers by the directors of each vocational foundation in the classroom, however, there is no motive which would break steady collaborations and would establish a culture of on-going evaluation –a practice which is mistrusted and generally avoided after the suspension of the former evaluation system in formal education system, since the early ‘80s, for its extensive discrimination of instructors on the basis of political beliefs and gender.

Informal VET trainers have many similarities with formal VET trainers, as far as their background and employment conditions are concerned. Contracts are again short-term, dependent on the length of the training programme they participate, and trainers are paid by the hour for the amount of hours anticipated by the programme. The nature of insurance is flexible, as the institution provides the national insurance one prefers (IKA, TEVE, etc). It is noted though, that some training programmes do not anticipate national insurance for the trainers. As with IEK, payments are delayed and can reach up to 2 years after the completion of the training programme.

Trainers have to fulfil the requirements regarding academic qualifications and teaching experience as set by EKEPIS and be a member of the EKEPIS register (OAED Vocational Training S.A keeps a separate register for their own instructors). The requirements to register and be certified expects from trainers to have completed 150 hours of teaching per year for 3 years. The register was an EKEPIS initiative in order to control the quality of the instructors employed at the training programmes, since the collaborations so far were based on personal acquaintance and trust, and as mentioned above, there was a strong culture of avoiding any

sort of on-going evaluation. EKEPIS, thus, via the register, attempted to break to some extent cases of collaboration which were not fulfilling the minimum standards.

There are about 15.000 qualified instructors registered with EKEPIS; however, similar problems encountered at IEK appear in KEK training. An experienced trainer comments:

'…the register EKEPIS has developed is not appropriate either to assure quality in training, as far as trainers are concerned; imagine, out of 10000 registered trainers, some 6000 come from secondary education and furthermore, the majority are teachers of Informatics. Now, that you teach informatics at school does not mean that you know what a business needs and expects from the employee'

Hence, the effort to create a register that would provide Vocational Training Institutions with qualified trainers who can teach a) adults and b) vocational issues, fails, since the registered members are the same teachers who teach in the secondary education, and bring their mentality and attitude with it. An attempt to break this mentality is the EKEPIS compulsory programme for training the instructors in training adults, which is about to start, however, it is questionable whether the short training that are about to receive can break deep-rooted attitudes that are reinforced daily by their primary work as secondary school teachers.

The on-going evaluation of trainers at KEK relies again on each foundation director. As discussed when examining quality assurance, the system anticipates the evaluation of trainers' evaluation at an intermediary and the final stage of the training programme. Furthermore, even though trainers are supposed to go through the same selection process, as trainees do (CV, interview, etc) this stage is often 'forgotten', since recruitment relies either on personal acquaintance and favours to friends, or steady partnerships and trainer's reputation. Even though at least in the last case there are obvious reasons for omitting the process, still it is against the rationale of quality, which claims that no previous experience reassures that next time all will perform as usual. It can safely be assumed, then, that there is no culture for evaluating the trainers. A quality assurance consultant succinctly sums up the general view:

> *'I believe that if the trainers' selection and evaluation were conducted properly, then, things would be different –lots of trash would vanish; first of all the trainers themselves would be more competitive, and would try slightly harder to their jobs'*

Under these circumstances, which are not favourable for the trainers, i.e. short-term contracts, delays in payment, job insecurity (the demand of specializations depends on the current training programmes each time), it is not surprising the development of a strong informal network of collaboration which provides the job security which is not reassured by the system. As expected, this informal network collides with the principles of quality management, and the culture of evaluation.

In sum, it emerges that this professional group does not exist as such, since it has no opportunity to develop a shared and steady identity. It is largely perceived as a secondary occupation, which some people enjoy to do, or for others it provides some extra money –in the long run. Our interviews pointed that a professional identity has been developed only by a very small percentage of people (a 10% of the population) whose vocational training is their main occupation, and like to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population.

However, some concerns have been expressed in regards to this group as well, as to whether they are really committed to the cause:

> *'some trainers perceive themselves as trainers, however, only for marketing purposes –actually, they are businessmen; they have not realize that education is not business, and that they are supposed to be doing something different'*

2.2 Cultural and System-Related Requirements for Self-Evaluation in Further Education and Training

(Brief introduction)

2.3 Perception of Quality Concept

2.3.1 View of Practitioners

The concept of Quality has been developed tightly with procedures –and rigid procedures do not always support creativity and innovativeness, which are integral parts of quality. ISO may certify that a vocational foundation has the expected processes in place –however it cannot control and certify the quality in the way the foundation is doing things, and the critical strategic decisions taken.

2.3.2 View of Institutions Concerned with Quality Assurance

> *'Quality is a great illusion; which quality can you assure! What the quality assurance systems actually do is organizing –it is about management, not about quality; ISO states that quality is about 'satisfying the customer' –do the organizations need you to tell them so? Don't they know by themselves that they have to satisfy the customer?'*

There is a strong shared view among actors in quality assurance that quality is not a rigidly defined concept, hence cannot be operationalized as such. The concept of quality has various levels and a quality assurance system can only standardize management practices according to set criteria. However, quality in education is a more complex process, which cannot be assured by the current technological approaches –it needs new concepts and new methodologies. Self-evaluation is a step towards this direction, yet the operationalization of the concept needs new approaches in order to break the dominant culture, which is reluctant to any sort of evaluation.

2.3.3 View of Experts

Quality is a vaguely defined, hence, highly political concept, which cannot be standardized and easily controlled; the existing quality assurance system, even though has been making progress in including dimensions which have been escaping so far, still fails to address the political games enacted for the control of the funds available for vocational education. It is often the case, even when a decision has determined the dimensions to be evaluated, there have not been set solid and shared criteria for one to proceed to evaluation. Hence, for example, the actual evaluation of instructors relies on the quality 'guru', who has developed the quality assurance system, and more essentially on the discretion of the vocational foundation director, who recruits instructors. The political games enacted in the quality area are not evident only at the individual level, but also at the organizational, where various vocational foundations compete over funds for training programmes; it has been reported that the current system has allowed the development of influential vocational foundations which can influence final decisions and bend negative evaluation for their benefit.

2.4 Criteria for Quality Assurance

2.4.1 View of Practitioners

Furthermore, EKEPIS sets the standards in which KEKs are expected to respond in order to get accredited. However the system currently accredits the quality of final results. The problem in this situation is that each KEK interprets differently the set criteria, and end up doing something differently, hence the process forms hundreds individualized actions, and provides no motives for collaboration and sharing of best practice. If a KEK respond to the set quality criteria of infrastructure, personnel, etc, then it receives a quality degree, which acts as indicator factor when a training program proposal is submitted –this indicator is reassessed periodically.

Finally, the current quality assurance system pays limited attention to whether trainees are finally absorbed by the labour market –the indicator for this criterion so far is very low in assessing a KEK. It would certainly be useful to record the vocational path of the trainee for sometime after they have finished the training programmes –the moves in the labour market they make, the interview they get, the positions they fill at the end. It is acknowledged that a great part of the value of a training program –and hence foundation- is its success in building trainees' self-confidence and motivates them in getting out in the labour market and assertively look for a job. However, this final part relies on each KEK to follow and support at that final stage their trainees. More often than not, KEKs keep telephone contact with trainees for about 6 months after they complete the programmes in order to record their path, rather than offering substantial support in getting the trainees in the labour market. It appears then, that in the current system this final stage of supporting trainees to finding a job is taken on a limited extent by KEKs, when recording career paths for 6 months, when it is suggested that the task

of supporting unemployed in getting a job in the labour market falls in OAED's tasks, since this is the national responsible body for employment.

In sum, the qualitative dimensions of quality in education (i.e. dimensions that are hard to measure and compare) are not assessed by the current formal quality system –they rely on internal quality assessment procedures conducted by each training agent.

2.4.2 View of Institutions Concerned with Quality Assurance

It is suggested a double quality assurance system, which combines external and internal evaluation processes. Quality standards are set to externally assess:

- the vocational foundation infrastructure
- qualifications of support staff
- content of training programme
- instructors' formal qualifications, experience, and training in teaching adults

An internal assessment system, i.e. an evaluation conducted by each vocational institution, would aim at capturing qualitative elements, which escape external assessment, would assess:

- trainers in terms of their ability to communicate, mastery of knowledge, and use of pedagogical methods

- content and delivery of the training programme

- absorbance of participants by the labour market, after the completion of the programme, in a relevant to the programme area.

2.4.3 View of Experts

The technical features have been set with detail from the current quality assurance system. However, more attention needs be paid to the selection of the appropriate staff, who will teach in the training programmes. Since the question is quality in VET –with emphasis on the vocational-, it is suggested in regards to criteria for trainers' quality assurance:

- a good trainer should be trained in teaching adults

- it is important to know and be able to teach not only the theory of the subject, but also have and be able to communicate practical insights into the subject, i.e. to focus the teaching to the expectations and requirements of the businesses.

- Great important is paid in methods of teaching and the role of new technologies can play in order to improve the communication with the trainees. The ability to present is essential.

- Continuous updating on the current issues and trends of the market.

2.5 Requirements with Respect to the Target Group

(such as sensible learning contexts, reasonable duration of modules)

2.5.1 View of Practitioners

n/a

2.5.2 View of Participants

n/a

2.5.3 View of Institutions Concerned with Quality Assurance

n/a

2.6 Possibility of Quality Development Through the New Self-Evaluation Tool in Further Education and Training

2.6.1 View of Practitioners

In relation to the issue of evaluation and self-evaluation, it is reported that it is very difficult to convince an established trainer, with long experience in teaching in these programs that s/he can be helped and improve via the use of an electronic tool. This tool may be easier introduced to newcomers, who are in the process of establishing a professional work-identity and still flexible and open to new ideas.

2.6.2 View of Institutions Concerned with Quality Assurance

It was mentioned that it is not unusual for a trainer to distribute in the classroom assessment-sheets for personal use –i.e. for own records. This shows that there is a group of people who, for various reasons (either because they perceive themselves as educators, or as professionals, or other) have an interest in self-evaluation and improvement. An electronic self-evaluation tool looks like it could work for this group, and, considering their interest in their field and in teaching, be used by at least half of the trainers' population. There is currently a similar tool being developed by University of Piraeus together with OEEK and is running in a pilot programme. The difficulty with such innovations is how to disseminate the tool in the population –how you raise awareness about it. It has been a common remark among our interviews that most electronic tools do not survive after the pilot stage.

2.6.3 View of Experts

The question that emerges is why a trainer who is not identified with his professional identity and career with training in VET –like the majority of the CVT trainers-, and who participates in a system which neither expects nor encourages continuous improvement through quality, would make an extra effort to self-evaluate and improve their qualifications and teaching methods.

A tool which would assist trainers in self-evaluating, identify their weaknesses and in order for them to improve seems essential; however the system, context and actors do not seem mature enough to adopt such a device, since self-evaluation is a distant concept, with which trainers cannot identify. Nevertheless, our interviewees consider it essential indeed in order to reinforce the role VET could play in linking the economy with the education, -as pointed out, it is a role which cannot be played on the rules and forms laid down by the formal education.

2.7 Make-up of a Good Self-Evaluation Tool

2.7.1 View of Practitioners

n/a

2.7.2 View of Institutions Concerned with Quality Assurance

n/a

2.7.3 View of Experts

n/a

3 Conclusions

3.1 Requirements on the Planned Tool

(such as dimensions the tool needs to consider)

n/a

3.2 Cultural and System Specific Requirements to be Considered

As we have already discussed, the concept of quality and the related practices have been quite new in the Greek context –let alone in the Greek VET system which admittedly suffers from low-esteem, inefficiency, fragmentation of practices, and failure to serve the VET aim, i.e. train people in vocational skills, useful in the labour market. As already presented, EKEPIS was founded in 1997 to respond to this need for quality improvement in VET, and has to be acknowledged that major steps have been made, starting with a rigid quality assurance system, which complements and guides individual initiatives, and which continues to identify areas for further improvement –acknowledging that there many things still to be done.

In Greece, the development of a coherent quality concept and of practices based on the related concepts (i.e. evaluation, self-evaluation, and self-empowerment) encounter a number of difficulties, so much cultural, as much as structural: lack of a quality concept, established political games, and equally importantly, the subsidized nature of CVT largest part.

A quality assurance consultant, during our interview, commented:

'it is very rare that someone has a view on quality, and if they have, it's most probably mistaken, since it has been developed through what the person has heard in the grapevine'

It emerges that there is no specific view in the market regarding quality. The vocational foundations appear interested in getting the ISO certification, not so much because they realize the benefits of assuring quality in their services, but rather because the certification looks good and give extra points in EKEPIS evaluation. Hence, there are many occasions when even though the vocational foundation expresses sincere interest and commitment to the cause of quality, when the consultant develops the system and suggests changes the customer is frustrated, since they tend not to understand the purpose of this. One of the main causes is that there are many free-lancers/consultants in the market, who act like gurus and promote their own understanding of what a quality system is about –and this adds in the confusion.

On a relevant note, we have already discussed the lack of a culture of evaluation –to be more precise the resistance to any form of evaluation- and the complete absence of the concept of self-empowerment. In a disorganized system as VET has been for years, there have been developed powerful informal networks, based on personal acquaintances, trust and mutual interests, which are difficult to break by introducing new concepts and technological practices, since these initiatives are meant to disturb the current power relations.

It has been clear through many interviews that the abundant European funds, which were meant to improve VET and the lack, at least in the beginning, of a regulatory authority, left space for the development of influential actors who determine the nature of VET for their own benefits; these actors have been proved so influential that can bend the current quality assurance system.

Trainers are part of this political network as well; the question that we mainly tried to answer in this research is to understand who these people are, and what their role is in VET –before we are in position to proceed to suggestions regarding a tool to assist in improving the quality of their work. Evidence showed that, due to exceptional work conditions (e.g. delay of payment, job insecurity, contracts based on reputation and personal acquaintance) vocational training is widely consider a part-time occupation for easy money, or by those who pursue training as their main vocation; it is their 'business'. Hence, no professional identity of 'educator' had the space to develop, neither, considering the lack of a culture of quality, a general interest in self-evaluation is noticed.

These remarks are important dimensions of the Greek actuality that need be addressed when developing a self-evaluating tool for CVT trainers, and when discussing quality in Greek VET.

3.3 Considerations to Ensure Quality Improvement

All the above are not a peculiarity of Greek reality but an element which characterizes the modern liberalism of Western Europe. The pragmatism, which is typical in modern western societies, is also transferred to the evaluation systems, which develop a specific logic that characterizes them. The specification of the target, the designing of the policy, the implementation and the evaluation are the four stages of policy (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier, 1993). When the beginning of the policy is the pursuit of the goal, then evaluation too will be orientated exclusively towards the specific goal, performing an instrumental function (Colebatch 1998). By extension the logic of evaluation will be non-political, but from the point of view of evaluation, neutral as 'scientific' and therefore subject to political power. Then its main target will be the promotion of control from the top to the bottom and from the center to the periphery and therefore the preservation-consolidation of the present political-administrative structures (Henkel 1991; Kettunen 1994). At the same time, it can be used in order to settle issues of public dispute or to narrow the focus of discussion of political issues. Indeed the systems of evaluation often operate as an apologetic mechanism of authority, since they are used in order to legitimize changes which have already been accepted as necessary but have not been applied yet (Valovirta 2002).

Naturally the cause of all the above-mentioned is not the use of the concept of evaluation itself, but the functionalist theory which has affected its implementation so far.

When evaluation is based on the release of the organism-object from the institutional and social framework in which it exists, when the influence of authority and the concept of power are ignored, when basic elements such as inequality, conflict, sovereignty and control are concealed (Thomson and Mc Hugh 1995), then political phenomena are restricted to the level of individual behaviours and individual action is defined as the result of a decision of assessment, which was taken in terms of interest or benefit and not as product of structures, roles, and relations. (Cronbach et al, 1981).Then evaluation cannot be free from its instrumental role and in no case can it contribute to the design of a better policy of a better society.

As the 'Self-Evaluation' project (2005) showed and it was confirmed anew by the present research, the specific framework characterizes almost all forms of evaluation in Greece. Vocational training programs as they are elaborated in Greece are mainly a procedure which aims at the short-term survival of the working people in the mechanism of the labour market, without the latter being re-orientated. On the contrary, neither the structural deficiency, regarding accesses to the labour market, nor sideline occupation, nor multi-occupation are questioned, while additionally the flexibility of the market is increased. The consequence of all these is on the one hand the fact that no attention is paid to the support of the social identity of working people, on the other hand the fact that the state even though has recently created an independent mechanism for the evaluation of VET key-components (actors, organizations, programmes), this mechanism is vulnerable to the existing and powerful political games enacted so much at the individual as much as at the organizational level, in order for the established actors to rip the abundant funds. This deficiency is due to the fact that the prevailing mechanisms of evaluation of vocational training procedures are still to a great extent informal, non-established, flexible, and based on private initiative; hence, they are not easily controllable by the mechanisms of the state and they concern procedures which are isolated from social development and orientated towards individual behaviour.

The experience of other countries, however, has shown that the evaluation, structured according to the above-mentioned model, has failed (Pawson and Tilley 1997), doubt is cast on its instrumental utility, the optimism that accompanied rationalism, as far as the operation of the systems of accreditation are concerned, has vanished (Hellstern, 1986), while the social need for evaluation has increased (Albaek 1995).

According to the above-mentioned scientists, what undergoes a crisis is the positivistic-functionalistic foundation, which scientifically determines how the systems of evaluation will operate. The absolute character of only a unique logic of evaluation, which is based on global values-criteria, has been the object of severe criticism from the point of view of the relativity of values (Brockriede 1974). This provides a solution of support regarding the criticism of the proposals-conclusions of an evaluation, either by the projection of other values more important than the value we evaluate (e.g. support and upgrading of the training programs of the periphery, in relation to the value of their efficiency), or by the social definition of the concept of evaluation, that is by its re-orientation according to the social framework, which includes it (Owen and Rogers 1999).

The result of this criticism is the expression of the need to design again the systems of evaluation and to upgrade the concept of evaluation as a process of control from the bottom to the top, as an answer to the continuously increasing problems, which have been recorded so far in the operation of these systems. This means firstly the acceptance of the flexible and socially orientated evaluation, which however will not be a process of shift of the central control but a process of judgment of the problems regarding structures and relations of an organism from the individual's - agent's viewpoint. This is an evaluation with the prevailing role of inner- and self-evaluation, without absolute and non-judicious criteria-values. Self-evaluation, which will not legitimize intentions for a policy, nor will it be a disguised self-control but it will be able to operate supportively, in order to imprint the social identity of the working people and in this way to operate in the direction of redefining the labour market, with the ultimate purpose of making it friendly to Greek working people.

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