

Grass-Root Initiatives in VNIL. The Bottom-Up Approach

What is a bottom-up process?

In VNIL processes, members of civil society - such as local organisations, NGO's, professional groups - play an important role in taking the initiative to develop actions in response to identified needs. These actions are implemented through the strong and active role and involvement of practitioners or institutions and are aimed at valuing citizens' competences for (re)entering the labour market, increasing mobility, shortening training programmes and dealing with legal constraints in the formal educational system.

Bottom-up processes may question, influence or destabilise existing systems (legal or educational frameworks). They can also lead to establishing new frameworks. Thus, bottom-up and top-down processes can hardly be separated from each other; in a way, they are related to each other and both together build a dynamic and circular system.

Perspectives and challenges

- A key success factor is ownership: transparent roles and tasks (leader, coordinator, financial and political support, scientific expertise, political/institutional endorsement) within the bottom-up - VNIL - initiative. Moreover, transparency and constant negotiation between the partners involved throughout the process seems to be essential.
- Experiences between VNIL stakeholders (including candidates) is shared: bringing together areas with different levels of progress and experience with VNIL is useful as it allows the participants to learn from one another, reduce isolation and re-inject dynamism into the process.
- A bottom-up approach may occasion heterogeneous practices that might lead to a fragmented and non-cohesive range of experiences. Thus, a lack of political will to manage a legal or organised framework will maintain the situation in its original form without taking advantage of different practices' richness. This is why, even though too many regulations hinder local and creative initiatives, a legal framework is crucial to stabilise and secure the bottom-up process in order to ensure the sustainability and transferability of VNIL processes and procedures.

Be inspired by 3 cases of Best Practice

Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer. Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz (AUSTRIA)

BACKGROUND: The Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer developed a competence portfolio model to ensure that students recognise their skills, get to know different knowledge fields and visualise informal learning processes. In addition to that, the competence portfolio model should improve the employability of students and support them during a lifelong learning process.

ACTION: An innovative competence portfolio model. Since 2008, the University offers workshops and individual coaching where participants learn to identify, reflect on and communicate their skills & competences.

RESULTS: The model has been used for various target groups and in different occupational fields. It has been applied by different institutions (in cooperation with the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer) and in different contexts. As a substitute for a traditional CV, the portfolio model has proved to be an important tool for writing job applications, applications for further education, job interviews, and most important, for the validation of informal learning.

Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich - wba (AUSTRIA)

BACKGROUND: As there is no standardised formal education for adult educators (i.e. trainers, advisors/counsellors, educational managers and librarians) in Austria there was a common consensus that a means of qualification was needed. Most adult educators brought a proof of their work to wba. The main goal of wba was to acknowledge relevant prior learning outcomes and summarise them into a specific and widely recognised qualification with a final degree.

ACTION: after a 3-year conceptual phase wba started a new approach recognising acquired competences of adult educators, acknowledging prior learning outcomes and offering guidance for the acquisition of skills identified as missing.

RESULTS: wba set up standards and fostered the professionalisation of Austrian adult education. wba does not offer further education programmes itself, it accredits suitable further education programmes offered by various adult education institutes throughout Austria.

Burgenländische Volkshochschulen (AUSTRIA)

BACKGROUND: It was identified as necessary to reduce barriers to gainful employment for women who lack the formal qualifications that make them immediately employable in South and Central Burgenland. 21% of the residents of Burgenland aged between 25 and 64 have no higher educational degree, only compulsory studies.

ACTION: Two initiatives started. (1) 'Wissen, was ich kann' - "I know what I can" - where participants create a personal competence portfolio in which they learn to establish, assess and evidence their competences and merits from various areas of activities, verify learning processes, draw conclusions, etc. (2) 'Du kannst was' - "You have skills" - connected to the validation of competences acquired in informal learning leading to the acquisition of a certificate of apprenticeship.

RESULTS: The achievement of the status of a certified/qualified skilled worker means an improvement for the employees concerning labour law provisions and it enhances the opportunities/prospects on the labour market.

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