

Report about the Danish experience in validation of Real Competencies – Validation of the non-formal and informal learning

Denmark has a long tradition of individual competency evaluation. It has been practice in the vocational training since 1997, in Basic Adult Education since 2001 and in Vocational education and training programmes since 2003. But from 2004 to 2014 this has been developed much more.

The word “realkompetencevurdering”, equal to real competencies evaluation, is taken over by Denmark from Norway, where Sweden normally talk about validation of prior learning in non-formal and informal sector. There can be a difference in the access and interpretation of the understanding of the content. The Nordic countries have in general been frontrunners in the field, and different joint Nordic projects have been carried out during the years.

To understand the Danish access to the question it has to be understood in the context of the Danish Society Model, with an active citizen's participation on all levels, with many civil society organizations playing a strong and direct democratic role and culture, the long tradition with non-formal and informal education and learning in these organisations, in Folk High Schools, in Adult Education Organisations running democratic and cultural activities, evening schools, study circles etc. This kind of activities have played a crucial role in building up the Danish society as a very democratic country with democratic learning/ training dressing the people to take an active role in organisations, trade unions, political parties, democratic institutions etc. and to build up a welfare society with a very high degree of economic and social equality. Vocational and education centers are primarily publicly and funded by the state.

For many years this kind of non-formal and informal learning culture did compensate for limited formal education and skills, and real competences were in many fields seen as important as the documentation from formal education and skills and gave low skilled, unskilled and skilled workers a chance to social mobility in job career, in organisations and in politics.

But reality has changed. New technology, harder global competition and more well-educated people have increased the demands for more competencies and higher qualifications for those with no or low formal education. The demand is that all have to get an education. In Denmark a high level of competencies and qualifications is in today's Europa and world seen as the main precondition for the welfare society in the future. Where registration and validation and documentation of competencies earlier in the history was not so important, it has now become important.

Denmark is because of changes and industrial restructuring, getting 200.000 low skilled and unskilled workers who do not fulfill the demands for competencies needed to get at new or keep a



recent job, and there will lack skilled and more educated workforce in the future. In the EU as a whole millions of workers are in the same situation. The challenge for Denmark and the rest of the EU countries is to lift the level of education. In this respect it is important that all real competencies of people are recognized, in the respect of the people, and in respect for the challenge. There is no reason and it is not meaningful to let all start from the beginning to qualify themselves for a job in the future. Here the question of evaluation, validation and recognition of real competences and prior learning understood as all knowledge, skills and competencies a person has, regardless of how they were obtained and learned through work, non-formal and informal education and learning, leisure, cultural, NGO, trade union or political activities.

In 2004 Denmark increased the focus on the importance on recognizing prior learning. It was backed up politically by a broad majority. It resulted in the report: “Whatever you can do counts”

In 2005 the Ministry of Education published a discussion paper about recognition of prior learning: “Your skills – finding Denmark’s hidden competencies”. It was a discussion paper to qualify the initiatives to be taken by all stakeholders.

Focus was mainly on the recognition of prior learning/ real competences in connection with the formal education system, which was very job- and labour market oriented. A new legislation was decided in 2007 making it obligatory for the following educational areas to fulfil the right of adults to ask an educational institution to assess their real competences to get them recognized in the adult and education system:

- Vocational training
- Single course subject in general adult education and general upper secondary education
- Basic Adult Education
- VET – Vocational education and training programmes
- VVU-degrees and diploma degrees

Each individual got the right to get his or her real competences recognized but also personally to deliver the necessary documentation for this. It gave the individual person the right to:

- Qualify for education programmes
- Tailor Educational programmes or receive credit for certain classes
- Obtain a “skills certificate” if the skills are the same as those obtained by completing part of an educational programme.
- Obtain a “programme certificate” if the skills are the same as those obtained by completing an entire educational programme.



The role to make this evaluation and/or validation was solely by legislation given to the mentioned vocational and educational centers to carry out and to do it with the aim to recognize competencies in relation to the specific educations they can offer. The social partners do play an active role in the educational committees in all vocational centers, tailoring the education securing that people get educated for jobs with the competences and qualifications needed in the companies and in the public sector.

This has in the debate in Denmark been criticized for being to limiting the evaluation of people's real competencies, because the only things recognized are what are relevant for a specific education. The ideal form for evaluation of people's real competencies is a neutral evaluation, but the question is off course who should take this responsibility, but the vocational and educational centers. The third sector could be relevant taking such, but cannot without financial means take this role, and in case it will probably lead to a double recognition system, and also moving the focus from the main missions of the third sector organisations.

Each individual can use the individual tool "My Personal Competence Portfolio" on the internet delivered as a consequence of the legislation. It includes certificates and other information on finalized education, Employer contracts and statements, list of offices in trade unions and NGO's, from Folk High School and evening schools, statements from leaders in NGO's, including cultural and sport organisations.

A National Knowledge Center for Validation of prior learning was established in late 2007. A handbook for prior learning assessment was produced in 2008 by the Ministry of Education and a campaign on lifelong learning washed carried out in cooperation with all stakeholders.

The Danish Adult Education Association DAEA, or in Danish, DSF, has been working very seriously with the question. In this sector and in all other third sector organisations it seems fair to say that there still is not a systematic work in place to document the real competences the volunteers and members. Some tools are developed, but not systematically implemented in the organisations.

To conclude Denmark has a long experience recognizing real competencies/ prior learning. It is now implemented in the formal education system and beneficial to a lot of people, for society and businesses. But the third sector is lacking behind in documenting the real competencies.

Denmark is closely following and participating in the EU cooperation in the field. One can say that the EU policy and the Danish policy in the field are to sides of the same coin. The EU role can in a Danish context can be to intensify the role of third sector organisations in Europe and on national level.