

Just a conversation on the Competence Model for trainers in the youth field to work international and recognition of trainers in non-formal education.

By Salvi Greco & Gabi Steinprinz

In December 2014 ca. 140 people participated in the conference Bridges for Trainers in Bonn to talk about this Competence Model and broader, on their view on trainership, the importance of being a trainer in non-formal education and its recognition. During this conference the both of us had an interesting conversation on the topic of recognition. It is obvious that recognition of trainers in non-formal education is on the European agenda. Stakeholders are identifying the concepts of trainers and Erasmus+: Youth in Action is busy developing the Competence Model for trainers. That is why this conference is important. During Bridges for Trainers thoughts were occupied with questions and the search for answers in arranged workshops and informal conversations. Erasmus+: Youth in Action and its trainers need recognition, but why and recognition by whom?

Talking to others helps to clarify the mind. Our conversation on the conference 'Bridges for Trainers' started with this question 'Where are we?', dancing between us.

Recognition by EC and other institutions

Where are we? It was not a philosophical question, but a very physical one: where are trainers in the new Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme and its new application forms? Where are trainers specifically mentioned and how are they recognized by Erasmus+? Where is it described what they specifically do? Why are trainers different from those who are defined as 'experts'? Where is the box to place the fee for them, just as for those 'experts' in the application forms of other Erasmus+ 'chapters'? In other words, where is the recognition? We were pleasantly surprised that this issue was already raised in the conference introduction, in a short, clear and effective speech by Paul Kloosterman. Good start!

"Bridges FOR Trainers" but could be also "Trainers ARE Bridges". Bridges between policies and young people. Bridges that in the past years had a key role in bringing quality in the EU programs for youth and the recognition of non-formal education. The European Commission made quite an investment in trainers and trainings through SALTO, through the National Agencies for Youth in Action, through other European structures.

One of the results of that investment is a newly made Competence Model. Reading and understanding the set of competences on the paper was quite clear and not difficult. It felt just like a dress to wear. Maybe this dress will make us more visible and that's nice. But sometimes, after you get a new dress and you

look at yourself at the mirror, you have some doubt if it really suits you, if it needs some adjustment and for which occasions it is more suitable. Is this Competence Model a casual-inclusive or an elegant-exclusive dress? You ask yourself how to make it 'your' dress.

We realized that this dress has always been hanging in our closet.

The competences mentioned in this Competence Model have always been there, they just were not written down and systemized. Trainers have been and are professionals that contributed massively to where Erasmus+: Youth in Action is now. Hundreds of trainers have been key actors in raising quality in European youth work, working with young people, youth workers, trainers, policymakers and Erasmus+: Youth in Action project officers for 25 years. In those 25 years how much have trainers been recognized?

Developing the Competence Model is a nice start, but knowing this impact, we feel that trainers are entitled to be seriously recognized by the institutions; have better working conditions, be more visible and have proper fees. The European Commission and the institutions should value trainers as professional key contributors to the quality of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme. Recognition for us is also to be concretely present in their communications and mentioned in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide and in the application forms in 2016!

Recognition by trainers themselves

Where are we? It was also a philosophical question. The conference rooms were filled with questions linked to this topic: How do we look at ourselves as trainers? How do trainers explain to others what they are doing? What does it mean to be a trainer, what are quality criteria and which competences does a person need to be a good trainer in non-formal education? The Competence Model is made for us to clarify these questions.

Working with the Competence Model during 'Bridges for Trainers' was a bit foggy at times. It felt like when you see a dress in the shop on a mannequin and looks perfect, but then when you wear it yourself and you look into the mirror you realize that maybe it doesn't fit you that well. But the dress looks so nice and you want it! Then you think about how to adjust this dress to make it fit you best. Trainers will start to put on their dress of Competences, look in the mirror and see the beauty, the complexity and the high quality of trainer craftsmanship in non-formal education. That sounds easy, but it is not.

Gabi shared an interesting experience about this why and how of recognition, when she was working with a business trainer within a Youth in Action training course: it was a new experience. It was exciting to work in a long-term training course with a professional trainer, a business trainer working for companies, banks, institutes and managers. Non-formal education is not the same business, although we work on similar topics, like leadership, competences, creative thinking, project management, but our target groups are different: youth workers, young people, policy makers and other trainers.

This new cooperation has been a meaningful experience with interesting sessions and trainings in which both contributed equally. It offered a good learning opportunity for her as a

trainer in non-formal education. It has been the same for the business trainer, which was good and somewhat surprising to realize. They were equals on the scale of quality, so why was she that surprised and why the instinctive reaction was that the business trainer sector is 'the' professional one, as if it was a sector with higher quality instead of only higher fees? Why did she automatically add 'professional' to his title as trainer, which she never did before with colleagues in non-formal education? Does that mean that we, as trainers in youth sector are really less professional? The brain answers a definite NO, but the heart whispers a YES.

This un-loud YES made her wonder how we recognize ourselves. Since Bridges for Trainers it became clearer that trainers should be the first ones to recognize the importance and quality of their work. Is that not exactly where recognition starts? Trainers need self-recognition more than anything else to explain to others why they do what they do and the value of their work. A piece of paper could more easily do the job, but there is no trainer's diploma and there are no high fees. Thanks to SALTO Training and Cooperation RC we now have the Competence Model, our 'piece of paper', which has been developed to support trainers.

That is not all! The Competence Model is just a tool. The tool is not the solution, the solution is within ourselves. We can't expect others to see the importance of our work, when we don't acknowledge it ourselves. We need to get ourselves together and start doing so! It is not easy. First step is to change our own attitude and make others understand that we are the key to quality of non-formal education. We are important and we need to feel that. The Competence Model can support us to fully recognize ourselves and more easily explain to other the complexity and quality of our work. So join us, dress up, feel and show the beauty!

In the end..

Where are we? is transforming into *Where do we want to go?* Recognition of trainers in non-formal education is on the European agenda. Hoping that trainers are an active part of the agenda, we are looking forward to see what that brings us.

You can find more about the Competence Model for trainers in the youth field here
www.salto-youth.net/trainercompetences