Rationale and Impact

Informal learning takes often place outside educational establishments and occurs in a broad variety of places. Many social organisations and self-organised entities may deal with "informal learning" – and may not even be aware of it.

"Validating informal learning" is currently one of the top priorities on the educational agenda of the European Commission. However, major systematic obstacles to a *validation* of informal learning arise from the uncountable variety of learning contexts and contents. In addition, the lack of specified learning objectives limits a standardised evaluation.

One should also keep in mind that the goals of educational administration and funding bodies in regard to validation of informal learning (->standards) do not necessarily match with those of experts working in grass-root projects (->individualism).

These fundamental goal conflicts have to be considered when evaluating "informal learning" especially in order to ensure that it is for the benefit of those target groups that are disadvantaged in the formal education system.

On the one hand the ACT-NET evaluation procedure is standardised and on the other hand enables grass-root projects to establish an individualised reference system for assessing and evidencing relevant competences of their beneficiaries in a process-orientated way.

The ACT-NET system allows users to evidence the impact of their work according to a standardised procedure while, at the same time, keeping up their individuality as informal learning projects in their specific contexts.

ACT-NET - Concept

The ACT-NETwork

We strongly believe that there is a growing demand for an exchange of experience in regard to evaluating, evidencing and validating learning on the European level.

In the framework of our projects we have been organising European conferences focusing on specific topics of interest in informal learning settings:

- During the *Göttingen* (DE) events in 2007/2008 the ACT-prototype was presented to an audience of 100 experts from 15 countries.
- In *Gothenburg* (SE), November 2009 a conference will put the main focus on difficult target groups and validation aspects.
- In *Alden Biesen* (BE) in spring 2010 a conference will concentrate on European projects as informal learning spaces.

Interested colleagues from all educational fields are warmly welcome!

In 2010/2011 we will extend our community and transfer the approach to new educational contexts. At present more than 30 micro-projects and European Courses have been evaluated and we are heading for a validation of both projects and participants.

If you are interested – don't hesitate to contact us and become a part of our ACT-NETwork!

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ACT-NET

Evaluating the Impact of Informal Learning

Education and Culture DG
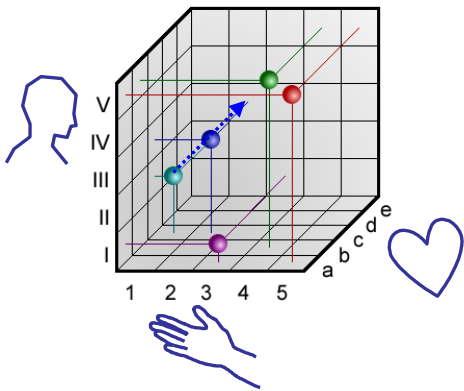
Lifelong Learning Programme

ACT-NET

ACT-NET is a transnational community of European experts from grass-root projects, educational institutes and universities, working on the issue of evaluating informal learning.

ACT-NET works with an evaluation system that was developed between 2006 and 2008 and is based on assessing:

- cognitive,
- activity related and
- affective

competences of learners in informal learning projects.

Individual or group competences are evaluated in a process orientated way, visualised in a 3-dimensional cube model and fully documented in specific software system.
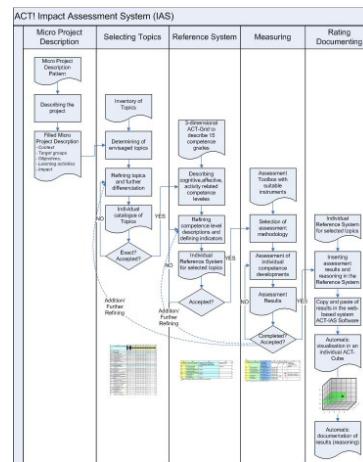

The approach is especially suitable for non-mainstreaming target groups like disadvantaged citizens, marginalised groups or self-help projects like youth clubs.

By 2009 approximately 30 micro-projects have been evaluated by means of the approach.

ACT-NET Approach

The evaluation approach is based on a four level procedure:

1. **Micro Project Description**
   - Describing the basic properties of the informal learning project in a preformatted pattern
2. **System Building**
   - Selecting relevant learning topics from an open inventory
   - Developing an individual reference system on the basis of a 3-dimensional (cognitive, affective, activity related) rating system with five individualised stages
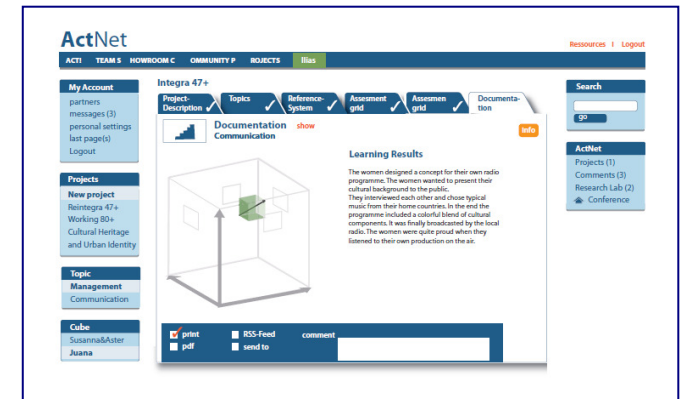

3. **Assessment**
   - Assessing competences by means of an evaluation and assessment toolbox offered as help tool for stakeholders from the field.
4. **Rating/Documenting/Visualising**
   - Inserting ratings in the individualised reference system and displaying ratings in a 3-dimensional evidencing system (ACT-Cube) by substantiating and documenting them in the software.
   - Recording results internally and/or connecting them with learners' certificates.

ACT-NET Software

The internet-based software reproduces the complete ACT-NET evaluation procedure. It enables the users (evaluators, informal learning project coordinators) to set up their tailor-made reference system and to include all data in a web-interface related to their projects, target groups, settings, evaluation times and outcomes.
The software displays individual competence development in an animated way and serves as documentation database.

Result may be, on a voluntary basis, given to the learners and connected with personal e-portfolios offered in the ACT-NET community.

The software will be online in January 2010.

Perspectives

- By 2010, ACT-NET will validate a series of new micro projects for disadvantaged learners and European projects against valid quality criteria.
- As a next step the integration of planning elements, so called informal learning patterns will further increase usability and attractiveness.
- Experts from ACT-NET will offer training and external evaluation services from 2010 onwards.