PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING: CERTIFICATION AND ACCREDITATION OF SKILLS ACQUIRED IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTEXTS

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The Center for Long-life Learning at the University of Bari (CAP)

CAP was created in 2012 at the University of Bari as experimental output of two research projects funded by the European Fund for the Integration of non-EU immigrants (EIF);

Since 2015 it is an official academic service supporting young people and adults in managing their vocational and professional career and in validating and certificating their prior learning, acquired in formal, non formal and informal contexts;

«Fondata sul Lavoro» «Work for you»

University as one of the main actor within the process of certification of skills
Our theoretical rationale

Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning

(Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004; Tynjala, 2008; Billett, 2004; Billett, Smith, & Barker, 2005; Collin, 2002; Collin & Valleala, 2005; Eraut, 2004)

Learning as a life-long process

Prior Learning (Formal)
- Structured, formally assessed with a final qualification
- Formal academic recognition

Experiential Learning (Informal)
- Experience-based learning
- Workplace learning (on the job learning)
- Unintentional learning

Life long career management
From theory to good practice: our main activities

**Prior learning identification:** recognition of prior formally and informally acquired learning in terms of competences linked to a standard that can be accredited;

**Assessment:** gathering of evidence on previous qualifications and experiences (both formal and non-formal) to apply for recognition by the regional body responsible for awarding credits or recognizing the positive outcomes of CAP assessment.
The services provided

**Information and guidance** to support people in the recognition of previously acquired qualifications for the purpose of further education and/or career planning and job search;

**Assessment** (through self/hetero-evaluation) of soft skills acquired in informal and non-formal settings useful for a better inclusion in the labour market;

**Translation of informally acquired on the job learning into academic credits**, possibly redeemable in university courses;

**Certification of prior learning** and connection with the regional qualification framework of professions;
# Assessment of soft skills

## The Big Five Model (McCrae & Costa, 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td>problem solving and decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concrete Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td>systemic vision, initiative/dynamism and leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td>Empathy, cooperation, use of such relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty Management</strong></td>
<td>stress tolerance, control, independence of judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process and Resource Management</strong></td>
<td>Planning/organization, goal orientation, conscientiousness</td>
</tr>
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The process of accreditation and certification

- **Profiling**: identification of the most salient educational and professional experience
- **Evidence gathering**: collection of all formal and informal proofs of the skills acquired and declared
- **Evidence assessment**: are these valid? Reliable? Sufficient?
- **Evaluation and accreditation**: fit between the subject’s profile and the formal qualification description
- **Conclusion**: feedback interview and definition of a life vocational and professional project
Some preliminary data about the service

- **229 immigrants** (66 women and 166 men, aged between 16 and 35), coming from the most different parts of the world
- **102** have requested the certification of the soft skills acquired both in formal and informal contexts
- **2** have gained a formal recognition of their professional experience and the consequent certification of foreseen by the Apulia Region
- **10** have won a grant financed by the Conference of Italian Deans, by the Ministry of Inner Affairs and by the Regional Agency for the Right to Study to start and/or continue their university study
Main results about the certification of soft skills

The cultural capital of those people is medium-high: they often have a degree and a master, though largely misrecognized by the Italian learning system;

Among the 229 people only 33 attended elementary school, 39 middle school and 98 high school, 57 have a degree and 2 a phd;

Most of them however tend to underestimate their skills;

They have a higher awareness of their relational skills (empathy, collaboration, etc)

They mostly show good abilities in managing uncertainty (continuity and persistence in engagement)

The area of greater misfit between self and hetero-assessment was Concrete effectiveness (decision making, planning, goal orientation)
The experimentation of a formal recognition of prior learning into professional qualification

- 2 refugees from Afghanistan requested that their long experience in the field as cultural mediation experts was recognized by the regional system of professional qualification even in absence of formal certification of skills.

- Connection with the Office for Vocational and Professional Training of the Apulia Region that recently published a repertoire of professional qualifications (a formal description of the activities, skills and abilities that need to be owed to exercise this profession).

- We collected and compared evidences from their professional experience with these skills domains and finally invited the refugees to show their competences in a formal exam. Both passed the exam and were recognized a professional formal qualification!
Where do we go from here...

The experimentation brought about by the projects has raised the possibility of introducing an integrated system of Recognition and Validation of skills.

The proposal to set up a unitary university Lifelong Learning service, useful in supporting not only the immigrant population but also a wider range of users, in the recognition of prior learning in non-formal and informal settings.

The definition of an agreement protocol between the University of Bari and the Departments of Youth and Social Citizenship (Immigration Office) and of Vocational and Professional Training of the Apulia Region.

The CAP collaborates with the network of the Center for Information on Mobility and Academic Equivalences, with the National Academic Recognition Information Centres and with the Mediterranean Recognition Information Centres for the recognition procedures of formal learning qualifications.
Many thanks for your kind attention!

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