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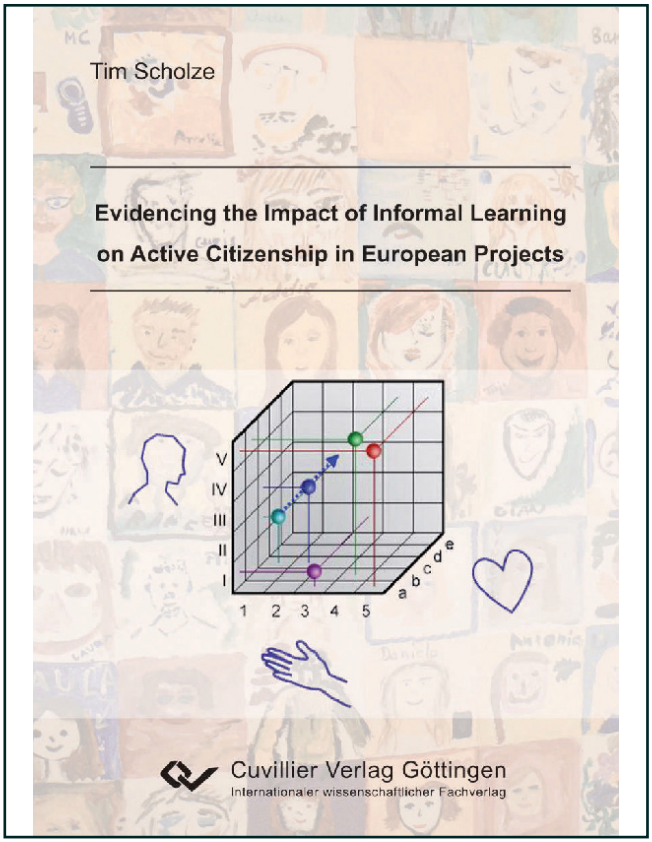
Evidencing the Impact of Informal Learning on Active Citizenship in European Projects



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2.2.1.2 Non-Formal Learning

"Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as in youth organisations, trade unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations)." (European Commission, 2000).

Obviously the European Commission did not consider Evans' criterion of non-intentional learning/provision and rather concentrated on learning location (non-formal learning providers, e.g. in vocational training, training on the job etc.).
It introduced the criterion of certificates to display the degree of formalisation[11].

2.2.1.3 Informal Learning

"Informal learning is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills." European Commission (2000):

Watkins and Marsick proposed the following explanations and differentiations in their "Theory of Informal and Incidental Learning in Organisations" in 1992:
"Non-formal learning" is the collective name for all forms of learning, happening in the entire environment out of the formalised education system. There is a wide range of partly varying definitions for the term "informal learning".
This ranges from a characterisation as unplanned, casual, implicit and often unconscious learning to learning activities as they are developed by the learners themselves without any educational support and up to the equation with "non-formal learning", i.e. the definition for all learning as it is (consciously or unconsciously) practiced out of the formal educational system.
This means: informal learning is a form of instrumental learning, a means to an end. The end is not – in contrast to formal learning – the learning itself, but the better solution to an extracurricular exercise, a situation request, a life problem by means of learning.
Informal learning is the generic term, which also comprises this casual and unconscious learning as well as a conscious deliberate learning out of schools – whereupon the transition between both ways is smooth in practice.
As formal education is largely context-free learning, informal learning is bound to a specific context; it mostly means enacting within a reality context which leads to concrete challenges or tasks and to feedback proceedings that are natural ("situated learning").

In an action-theoretical context this leads to more precise definitions:

Normal Form of Informal Learning
According to this a reflected learning activity in an environment outside school ("*action with reflection*") is the normal form of informal learning.

Special Form of Informal Learning
A non-reflected learning activity in this environment outside school ("*action without reflection*") is the special form of the casual informal learning.

The idea of action with/without reflection is also reflected in Bunesco's differentiation:

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[11] This criterion is also introduced by Dohmen (2001).

"*Explicit and informal political socialisation* is at work when civic norms and values are conveyed in a (quasi) explicit and deliberate way in parents' talks or by radio and TV broadcasts which do not belong to specially formulated programmes of civic education."
"*Implicit and informal political socialisation* takes place in situations as follows:
When children casually and informally listen to opinions about politics expressed by parents or other adults who are not intending to convey those opinions to the children…."

Consequences for the ACT-Project:
The project was aiming at the measurement of the impact of informal learning on Active Citizenship.
To measure the impact of "non-intentional" learning or "incidental learning" on Active Citizenship is impossible since:

- an aim, objective or aspired competence is missing,
- there is no learning process in the sense of guided instruction and
- there may not even be a measurable output because one cannot evidence it.

Referring to the European Commission's definition one could add that informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning but the impact of informal learning can only be measured in intentional (learning) arrangements[12].

2.2.1.4 The Development of the Concept of Informal Learning

As this study is focusing on evidencing *informal learning* it is important to describe the construct of "informal" learning in terms of its development, different structural levels and different understandings and traditions in the European context.
In contrast to English speaking countries, in Germany the term "informal learning" was only discussed (Overwien, 2005) recently, evolving from the terminology of "development education" of the early seventies that was mainly funded by international organisations like the World Bank or UNESCO (Sandhaas, 1986).
Recent societal developments, especially the development of the Information Society and its influence in working life, led to a development that put more emphasis and consideration on informal learning processes[13]. Non-formal and informal learning have become increasingly important for the working life in our societies - Kirchhöfer (2001) for instance stated that learning as an integral part of the working context is an important constituent of value and profit development.
However, in most of the cases informal learning is still regarded as a part of vocational learning though it often takes part in very different contexts, e.g. during leisure time or in the family. Knowledge and competence from non-vocational spheres are in most cases still interpreted against the background of their "usability" in vocational life.

This utilitarian view becomes obvious in the large scale ECOTEC studies (2005-2007) investigating the validation of informal learning in Europe. Validation of "pure" non-vocational learning is still the exception in most European countries. Against the studies' results one could suspect that informal learning becomes another time "vocationalised" and thus "economised" and that civic learning in informal learning context could be shifted in the background (Welton, 1995).

The Development of the Concept

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[12] Cf.: Overwien 2003: „Das inzidentelle oder implizite, also eher unbewusste Lernen aus dem informellen Lernen herauszunehmen ist aus analytischen Gründen sinnvoll. Unter dem Aspekt der Planbarkeit von Lernen erscheint es auch am wenigsten beeinflussbar. Wenn es allerdings um die Gestaltung von Lernumgebungen geht, ist es wiederum in entsprechende Überlegungen aufzunehmen, da es als Lernpotential nicht unterschätzt werden sollte."

[13] Cf. European Commission: Lifelong Learning Programme, General call 2008-2010, Update 2009, Strategic Priorities, Priority 4: Improving validation of non-formal and informal learning, p 25.

At the beginning of the 20th century John Dewey already accentuated the term informal learning in contrast to formal learning. For him informal education was the basis for formally organised learning processes necessary in an increasingly complex world.
The discussion evolved as the educational systems are subjected to processes of change due to societal change. At the beginning of the 40s, with the beginning of development policies, educational development was thoroughly aiming at the development of schools. The movement of educational activities in sectors outside school (e.g. the development sector) led to the differentiation presented in the previous chapter.
The origins of not-formal education can be located in the 1950s and 60s in connection with the independence of former colonies and international organisations started to deliver "educational aid" together with "development aid".
This referred among others for instance to "literacy", "farmer education", "agricultural education", "family planning" and other "self-help activities" and also included international mobility actions. Sandhaas (1986) concludes that not-formal education was practised even before the term was invented and that there had been diverse concepts and a rich experience in informal and non-formal education.
The discussion on and the development of not-formal education was stimulated by the report: "The World's Educational Crises: A System's Analysis" (Coombs, 1968) that for the first time doubted the function of formal education and the paradigm:

More schools -> more education -> more development.

In the early 70s the FAURE Commission of the UNESCO estimated in a large scale publication that 70% of the learning processes take place in informal learning (Faure, 1972). Faure was explicitly pointing at interconnecting informal and formal learning processes against the scientific and technological revolution and increasing flows of information.
Another movement that supported the increasing importance of not-formal education was initiated in the 70s by Illich (1973) who generally doubted the relevance of school education for development processes. He stated that "learning is not the result from manipulation but of participation in a meaningful learning environment".
Freire (1973), in a variation of the "learning funnel"-metaphor, compared school education with the banker's principle, filling learners (as objects of pedagogic efforts (Overwien, 2003)) with knowledge as if they were empty cages. He formulated his "Pedagogy of Freedom" as a counter-concept that should merely create consciousness among the learners and enable them to act as subject.
Learning is seen as a continuous process taking place in the environment and context of the individual. The resulting changes do not only refer to the learner but also to the context.

In the following years informal learning was discussed mainly in the context of development aid and is by now a fixed term among education experts on the international level.

In 1996 the ideas of the FAURE Commission were revitalised by the Delors-Commission and the OECD to mobilize inactive competence of citizens (Overwien, 2005).
Since the late 1990s informal learning has been increasingly discussed in connection with vocational training and adult education, some years later the issue was internalized by pedagogues from youth research, social and environmental pedagogic.

Development of the Definitions and Explanation Models of Informal Learning:
Definition of informal learning has always been a complex and challenging process since it has been evolving from different contexts during the last decades.
Informal learning developed some derivates, for instance the concept of "situated learning" (lay people learning with experts in vocational contexts – often applied in development aid) and certain properties were included from some authors while others focused on others:
Watkins and Marsik for instance included incidental learning in the definition while Livingston (1999) pointed at other aspects like self-learning as a major trait in informal learning.

Furthermore it was modified according to the societal situation - during the years the focus of research work and explanatory models shifted; in their early work Watkins und Marsick, Volpe and Atkins, for instance, pointed at emancipation aspects of informal learning while later (in 1999) they put the learning context and the conditions for learning in the foreground.

According to their revised model informal and incidental learning is characterized by the following factors:

- Integration in work and daily routine
- Internal and external impulse
- Not a conscious process
- Often introduced by coincidence
- Contains an inductive process of reflection and action
- Often interconnected with learning from others (group learning)

Informal learning can be supported by different means:

- To deliver room and space for learning
- To check the environment in respect to learning opportunities
- To link the attention to learning processes
- To strengthen ability to reflect
- To create a climate of cooperation and trust

Another perspective is delivered by Dehnbostel (2000), who describes informal learning in vocational contexts.
In "training on the job" situations[14] he differentiates between "organized (formal)" and "informal" learning. In its organised form learning is intended with fixed learning contents and objectives. It delivers theory and delivers acting competence and acting knowledge.
In contrast, the informal learning strand is not intended; there is no explicit learning objective.
Dehnbostel (2002) further differentiates informal learning in "reflective" (experience driven) learning and implicit (unconscious) learning whereas both modalities are influencing each other.

The missing of an explicit learning objective is a criterion that could be found in most of the informal learning situations evaluated in the micro-projects by the transnational AC -partners.

Overwien (2005) states that generally, when reflecting informal learning processes, at least 2 perspectives have to be considered:

1. The learning subject takes initiative in learning and discovers new contents and circumstances – or seen from a different angle - tries to explain own questions arising from its (everyday life or specific) context
2. The second aspect is related to the learning environment and context that decisively influence the learning process[15]:

With regard to the definitions invented by the European commission Overwien doubts that the triple differentiation in formal – non-formal – informal will be of much use in practice since especially in the non-formal area certified/accredited and non-accredited courses are combined under the same heading. Thus he favours a continuum model between formal and informal education and meets the position of a team of researchers having worked at the Study of the Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Leeds, in 2003: "Formal, non-formal and informal learning are not discrete categories, and to think that they are is to misunderstand the nature of learning. It is more accurate to conceive 'formality' and 'informality' as attributes present in all circumstances of learning" (Colley, 2003).

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[14] "Betriebliches Lernen".
[15] See also Lewin's Field Theory in chapter "Action Research" (3.1.1.).

To back up with these arguments, the researched micro projects were mainly situated in informal learning contexts on the grass-root level but consciously integrated projects in the evaluation with rather non-formal (European instructors' training on Blended Learning) and formal (curricular, TR) backgrounds.

With regard to informal learning the following hypothesis was formulated:
As *only a reflected activity* can be measured and evaluated against certain criteria, the pure incidental, non-reflected informal learning activity was excluded from the scope of the observations.

Consequently, evaluation of non-formal and informal learning activities needs the following requirements:

1. An aim or objective (in contrast to formal or non-formal learning not a learning objective (competence) but an activity-related objective)
2. There must be a process with describable activities
3. There should be a recordable output

2.2.2. Catalogue of Patterns for Informal Learning Activities

To forge a bod between a system for description of instructional models and patterns of informal learning, a so-called "catalogue of informal learning patterns" was developed and is attached in the appendix to this dissertation.
Instructional or didactical models are basic forms of organised teaching and learning as it has been developed for at least about two and a half thousand years in institutions like schools, universities and centres for professional training.
At all times human beings learned (and are still learning) outside such institutions as well, in the sense of incidental learning in everyday-life situations.
For more than 30 years now, in societies with a profound and widespread system of formalised education, there has been increased attention for and interest in informal ways of learning and teaching. This leads to a continuous specific attention for and interest in the methodological questions of these ways: what are the new devices, media, resources, and explanations etc. that lead to fruitful results of informal learning?
The Göttingen Catalogue of Didactic Models described didactic ground models in formal and non-formal education (Haller, 1997). As counterpart for informal learning, the catalogue of informal learning patterns can be used as an inventory to recognise learning arrangements in informal contexts. At the end of the project, it consisted of 42 ground-patterns collected and defined in the framework of ACT to describe typical informal learning modalities.
The inventory can be used either for evaluation or for planning purposes.

No.	Pattern	Description	Stakeholders	Learning activities	Your project? Pease give a short description	Evaluation of learning effects
12a	ePortfolio 	Establishing an own profile and giving information Presenting own skills	learners	The conscious development of the profile is the learning activity Interlinking persons with same interests Writing contributions in the blog	ABCD: ePortfolios were used to bring the group together and to enable the participants to present themselves	observation of profiles
21	Performance (theatre, cinema, concert) 	Seeing a complex situation as play, often with a clarifying intention (epic theatre, e.g.)	Participants coaches (films, critical incidents, integration	When producing multimedia learning materials the participants	ABCD: On the basis of a project called "INTEGRATION" the participants received a very short introduction and some exemplary films. They were asked to build up their own film sequence in the team	essay, discussion, observation, questions
24	Teamwork 	Learning in a situation with common production processes	Participants Coaches give tasks according to the development process	Participants formed a team of developers and construct their course in a period of nearly 1 year	ABCD: Teamwork was one of the 3 major modalities in the non-formal course	essay, discussion, observation, questions

Table 1: Excerpt from the catalogue of informal learning patterns in one German project (ABCD)

The complete catalogue is added in the appendix of this dissertation.

2.3 Comparison of National Educational Activities on AC in Europe

2.3.1 "Learning AC" in Formal Education in Europe

In the framework of ACT, national approaches of the partners' countries with regard to the topic "learning active citizenship" with special regard to non-formal and informal learning environments were compared. However, to present a fundamental comparative approach the question how Active Citizenship is learnt in formal education, namely in schools, could not be neglected as the approaches and applied concepts are necessary to understand the national background concerning Active Citizenship.
Therefore, basic inquiries about formal education on Active Citizenship were carried out, mainly on the basis of the IEA study and on country reports compiled by the council of Europe.
As far as AC and educational science is concerned, the main sources for scientific research on AC and education are the Civic Education Study by the IEA (International Education Association, Lehmann et al. 1999, 2003) and the Eurydice report on Citizenship education (2005). The studies mainly stated the differences in national approaches and ideas. Eurydyce, at least, stated some similarities between the countries such as "democracy and human rights, equality and tolerance, active participation, social responsibility, solidarity and social justice".

In the first project phase a work group of ACT partners described the general systems and characteristics of each country. For this purpose a template was developed and filled. The resulting catalogue was placed on an interactive website with editing tools to enable new partners to continue the work on the descriptions of the developing country profiles concerning Active Citizenship.

Comparing the different countries with regard to AC, one has to take into account special historic, cultural, socioeconomic and European aspects.
Four European countries that accessed the EU at an early stage (SE, DE, NL and IT), four relatively new members (PL, LV and BG, RO) and one candidate country (TR) show significant differences concerning the development of the idea of democratic citizenship.
There have been massive societal changes since the end of communist times, but the "old" European states have also been challenged by citizenship-issues like unemployment, changes of the social systems as well as a growing number of immigration. Italy, for instance, is facing the relatively new phenomenon of immigrants from former communist countries and from poor African countries as well as federal tendencies in northern provinces
Especially, in former communist countries civic education had been an official school subject for partly more than 20 years (PL and BG), serving mainly the indoctrination and stabilisation of the political system. Therefore, there is a development from obedience to free thinking, from pretending to be democratic to dialogue, cooperation and tolerance.
Changing governments influence the development of the idea of "Democratic Citizenship" in Turkey as there were national committees on the issue in 1997, 2001 and 2004.
Only Sweden and Turkey have national curricula on civic education, in other countries CE is part of other subjects like history, politics, social sciences and religion. In Latvia CE shall be integrated in history, geography, sports and household and in 2005/2006 it was also implemented as a new subject in the programs of compulsory education in social studies.
Germany has a federal system and therefore no national curriculum as educational affaires are issues of the "Länder" (the federal states).
The National Ministry of Education in the Netherlands develops the key issues, the so-called "key goals". The Ministry and the Parliament base their policy on an advisory committee, the National Education Board (Onderwijsraad), which published an Explanatory Memorandum (2003) with recommendations and statements about citizenship education. In the Netherlands, CE recently became a special subject only in secondary education after a study conducted in the mid 1990s showed that many of the secondary students did not meet minimal requirements for a sufficient and satisfying democratic citizenship.
Authors of the IEA study state that the "young" democracies are still suffering from communism – rejected old values have not yet been replaced by new ones, which leads to a vacuum of values. Romania and Bulgaria are (unlike Poland) still in the reforming process, but CE are priority issues in the educational development.
In Italy, the authors are complaining about a severe lack of reforms in the public sector and catholic churches. Extracurricular projects on AC themes are carried out autonomously (e.g. in environmental and peace education).
Concerning the contents most of the countries have similar subjects: democratic values and skills, promotion of equality and counteracting discrimination, solidarity, national identity (which is particularly emphasised in studies of post-communist countries), social cohesiveness and diversity, local and environmental issues. National and European citizenship are emphasised in NL and PL.
In Poland, there was a high American influence in the development of civic education; there were several US-funded projects and the development of materials and media was primarily sponsored and supported by US-donors and partners.
In Turkey, civic education is integrated into the courses of "Life Studies" in the 1st to 3rd grades and "Social Sciences" in the 4th to 8th grades. In the 9th to 11th grades, beside Democracy and Human Rights lessons as an elective course, civics education is part of other subjects such as sociology, geography, traffic and first aid, public sciences, human relations, national security. Some private schools are also developing additional programs such as Tolerance and Diversity Program.
In Italy, lower and upper secondary schools have a specific subject called CE in conjunction with history, but there seems to be a lack of affective-experiential approaches to learn citizenship.