

Report of the **INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON INNOVATION IN PUBLIC POLICY**

MENON Network, 15th November 2011, Brussels

On the 15th of November 2011, EURASHE Communication Officer, Francesca Operti, participated in the Seminar titled “**ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING AS A LEVER FOR LIFELONG LEARNING: LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE NEW OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE, PORTUGAL**”.

The Seminar was organised by the [MENON Network](#) in collaboration with the [UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning](#) and with [CEPCEP, Universidade Catolica Portuguesa](#). It focused on the “New Opportunity Initiative - Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades”, which is a successful policy promoted by the Ministries of Labour and Education of Portugal. The seminar was also an occasion to present the extensive evaluative research exercise conducted by a Portuguese Catholic University’s team, which aimed at explaining the massive enrolment of NOI and how this Initiative contributed to Lifelong Learning for low-educated people.

The seminar started with a presentation *tour de table*, in which high-level policy makers, European Commission policy officers, representatives from European networks in the LLL field and researchers/experts in the specific field tackled by the policy introduced themselves.

The first speaker was *Arne Carlsen*, who presented some key messages concerning Lifelong Learning.

He was followed by *Roberto Carneiro*, director and editor of the research, and *Ana Claudia Valente*, a researcher, who set the Portuguese background, introduced the Initiative and explained the starting points of the research.

With more than one million low-skilled person, Portugal had lived with a big sense of urgency that brought the Portuguese leadership to think of an innovative policy. The New Opportunities Initiative (Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades, NOI) was a flagship programme announced by the Portuguese government in 2005, and actually implemented from 2007, to recognise and accredit prior learning (RPL, APL) and to upgrade low-skilled adults to secondary levels of qualifications. The Initiative addressed both the initial qualification of youth, curbing the high rates of failure and drop-out from initial education and training systems, and the re-qualification of adults, improving access and encouraging participation of the labour force into training programmes and vocational education.

During the seminar the Initiative was presented as an exemplary case, a significant policy benchmark but most of all a success story. Indeed, only five years after its announcement, about **450 New Opportunity Centres (NOC)** were put in place to implement the Initiative on the field level. These NOC hired over 10,000 adult education experts, register a record 1.6 million enrolments and have topped 500,000 certifications (9th and 12th grades, equivalent respectively to lower and upper secondary).



The **research** was thought as a independent and evaluative study with the purpose to investigate the reasons behind the achievement of such high participation. It was conducted in a **three-years period** (2008-2010) and involved **55 cases** for a total of **150 interviews**.

Thanks to this academic analysis some interesting features were underlined:

- Most of the persons have been involved for personal fulfilment instead of an economic recognition.
- The process is fundamental to achieve the learning goal: it should be tangible (by establishing key competences standards) and based on a learner-centred approach.
- The Initiative was effective, since the learning outcomes improved substantially.
- The people involved were willing to learn more.
- Formal education is preferred to informal education.
- This Initiative was a way to fight gender discrimination: women engaged were the majority (56%) and most of them were victim of cultural prejudices.

A remarkable finding of the research on the persons' motivations who took the "New Opportunity" was then presented: the **key role played by the family**. Although it is not so surprising that life conditions, attitude to schooling and human relations were important variables in the process of enrolment, it has been stressed that the family served as a unexpected source of recruitment.

During the discussion several questions were addressed to the speakers, mostly of them were referred to two topics: the transferability of the policy and its concrete impact in employment.

One of the reason for the success of the Initiative was the **brand modelling** which was used to launch and promote it. As results from the research conducted on this theme and explained by *Carlos Liz*, the marketing strategy, namely the words used and the designs showed, has been winning. The concept of a political body viewed as a brand is new in the marketing literature and can serve as an inspiration for the future.

Another presentation dealt with the real impact of the Initiative examined on the basis of the S-D Logic theory. *H. Lopez* highlighted how the policy has strong and positive effects on the persons who got involved.

The last speaker introduced a new method of accreditation of the structures involved in this process, namely the **New Opportunity Centres (NOC)**. Due to the fact that the Ministry of education in Portugal is very small, 160 organisations were created both on a public and a private basis, which helped in implementing the policy. *Rodrigo Queiroz e Melo* underlined how the self evaluation and incentives linked played a key role resulting in a higher success rate than with the previous methods used for the CAF.

During the seminar a book containing seven research papers and a final comment by the external/international panel of expert evaluators on the research undertaken by CEPCEP was distributed. This publication is physically available at EURASHE Secretariat and downloadable [here](#).