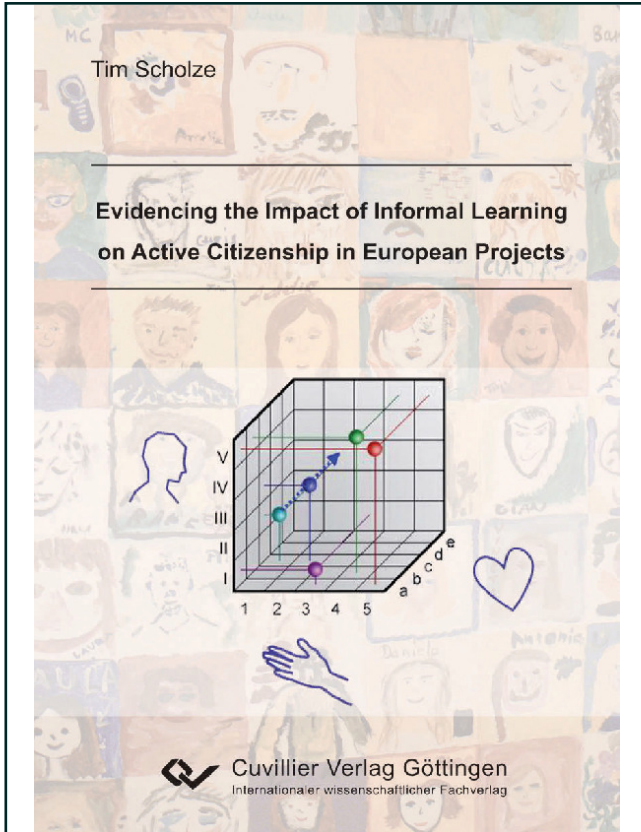




Tim Scholze (Autor)
**Evidencing the Impact of Informal Learning on Active
Citizenship in European Projects**



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3.4.6.1	Knowledge Visualisation vs. Information Visualisation	56
3.4.6.2	Application of Knowledge Visualisation	56
3.4.6.3	The Knowledge Visualisation Framework.....	57
3.4.6.4	Visual Metaphors in the Communication of Knowledge.....	59
3.4.7	Visualisation in a Historic Scientific Context.....	60
4.	Process Description/Development Process.....	62
4.1	The Challenge of Cooperation in European Development Projects.....	62
4.2	Procedure (Development Process).....	64
4.2.1	Project Work Plan.....	64
4.2.2.	Meetings and Milestones.....	65
4.3	Collaboration Methodology	67
4.3.1	Web-Aided Communication.....	67
4.3.2	Communication in Transnational Projects	67
4.4	Project Outcomes: The ACT Evaluation Approach	69
4.4.1	AC Model	69
4.4.2	Reference System - Evolution of the Cube	72
4.4.3	Inventory of Competencies.....	75
4.4.4	ACT Evaluation Procedure.....	76
4.4.4.1	Project Description Patterns	77
4.4.4.2.	Inventory of AC Topics and Competencies.....	78
4.4.4.3	Reference Systems	79
4.4.4.4.	Assessment Toolbox	80
4.4.4.5.	Individual Reference and Rating Pattern	80
4.5.	IAS Cube and Software	82
4.5.1	The Cube as Visual Evidencing System.....	82
4.5.2.	The IAS Software	84
4.6	Networking.....	88
4.6.1	Network Theory.....	88
4.6.2	Social Capital, Networking and Innovation	89
4.6.3	Properties, Advantages and Driving Forces of Networks	91
4.6.4	Research on Networks	92
4.6.4.1	Complex Systems Research.....	92
4.6.4.2	Social Network Analysis	93
4.6.5	Development Dimensions of Networks.....	96
4.6.6	Networks in Education.....	100
4.6.6.1	Functions of Educational Networks in Lifelong Learning	100
4.6.6.2	Funded European Educational Networks	101
5.	Results and Experiences.....	103
5.1.	Summaries of Micro-projects	104
5.2	Results of the ACT Evaluation Approach.....	115
5.2.1	Results of Micro-Projects	115
5.2.2	Application of the ACT Approach in the Micro Projects.....	119
5.2.2.1	Feasibility and Usability	119
5.2.2.2	Effort and Acceptance	122
5.2.2.3	Pre-Knowledge and Skills of Staff.....	123
5.2.2.4	Transferability	125
5.3.	Collaboration in the framework of the ACT Project.....	127
5.3.1	Results of Internal Process Evaluations	127
5.3.2	Analysis of the Networking Processes in the Project.....	137
6	Interpretation of Results: Reflection and Impact.....	144
6.1	ACT Evaluation Approach in Informal and Non-Formal Learning	144

6.2	ACT-IAS System Components	145
6.2.1	Selecting Competencies - Inventory	145
6.2.2	Creating Reference Systems	146
6.2.3	Evidencing – Impact Assessment System (IAS):.....	149
6.3	Interpretation of Usability and Quality of the ACT Approach.....	152
6.3.1	Feasibility and Usability	152
6.3.2	Efforts/Pre-Knowledge and Skills/Transferability.....	152
6.3.3	Scaling of the Cube	154
6.3.4	Quality Criteria.....	155
6.4	Collaboration.....	157
6.4.1	Partnership Composition	158
6.4.2	Communication and Collaboration	158
6.4.4	Action Research and Grounded Theory	163
6.4.5	Informal Learning in European Projects	164
6.4.6	Knowledge Visualisation in European Development Projects	168
6.5	Valorisation	172
6.5.1	ACT Products	173
6.5.2	Valorisation Strategy	177
6.5.3	Validation of Informal Learning Projects.....	179
6.5.4	ACT Counselling	182
6.5.5	ACT Training	183
6.5.6	Follow-Up Projects	185
6.5.7	Dissemination.....	186
6.5.7.1	Visualisation in the Valorisation Process	187
6.5.7.3	Dissemination Material and Media.....	189
6.5.7.4	Conferences and Events	190
7	Conclusion.....	191
	List of Figures	194
	List of Tables	195
	List of Works Cited	196

1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Until 2005, existing projects, networks and research studies on active citizenship rather concentrated on formal education in schools or on an academic level and mainly address to 'active citizens' belonging to mainstream groups in society².

They often only gave little space to NGOs, which are the main facilitators of informal learning for citizens in practice.

This led to research designs in which major stakeholders were not directly involved - for instance those organisations working with "difficult" target groups, those which do not have the resources (either financial or skills) to carry out intensive evaluation and those in which the "activity" of the educated citizens is very difficult to discover (e.g. in closed groups as socially disadvantaged youths, victims of violence, back warded communities etc.) but also self organised learning activities.

It can be concluded that despite multitudinous research activities on Active Citizenship in most of the cases the beneficiaries (learners) as well as "their" NGOs were not involved in research and thus being mainly regarded rather as research subjects than as research partners.

The subject of this survey, the ACT approach, aimed at offering an alternative approach to the issue by actively integrating grass-root projects in evaluation and research activities.

There are certain system built obstacles concerning the remit to evaluate the impact of informal learning on active citizenship because of a rather unclear terminology and understanding of central concepts like Active Citizenship and Informal Learning.

This was a rather unexpected discovery since Active Citizenship and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning are seen as vital in improving social inclusion and in increasing economic productivity and thus range at the top levels of the political agenda and in the programme documents of the Lifelong Learning Programme³.

Consequently, an additional remit evolved to investigate relevant literature and local and regional projects to clarify the meanings and uses of the terms Active Citizenship and informal, non-formal and formal learning to clearly describe research design and its basic assumptions.

Active Citizenship

Having researched a large part of European literature about the issue, it must be stated that meaning and scope of definitions concerning Active Citizenship vary largely with the backgrounds and the motives of authors and the intentions of the awarding authority. They may be politically influenced, relate to formal or rather informal learning environments, follow utilitarian approaches (inclusion in working environments) and strongly depend on either communitarian or liberal positions of the authors.

For ACT, this instable explanatory model was a major problem since the large variability of meaning also limited a comprehensive description of citizenship competence. How can Active Citizenship Competence be evaluated if the concept varies to a large extent, especially in a not-formal learning environment?

In contextualised learning, in real life, beyond the walls of schools or universities, relevant citizenship competence can only be regarded in connection with the living context of the individual. From

² For instance in: University of Surrey 2001-2004: The ETGACE-Study.

³ Official Journal of the European Union (2006) Decision of the European Parliament and the Council establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning; (13): "adult education" means all forms of non-vocational adult learning, whether of a formal, non-formal or informal nature; There is a need to promote active citizenship (35); Leonardo da Vinci objective d: to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning; also mentioned in Article 33, Transversal programme".