

**Towards an inclusive and smart
approach to immigration:
The issue of competence recognition**
Hacia un enfoque inclusivo e inteligente a
la migración: La cuestión del
reconocimiento de competencia

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Abstract

The European approach to migration is traditionally characterized by a sort of “schizophrenia”, generated by the attempt to keep together two contradictory philosophies: the “economicistic” philosophy, and that of solidarity and equal opportunities. To overcome this paradox –which has been producing a condition of migrants’ structural disadvantage, while inhibiting the full exploitation of their skills, knowledge and competences (SKC)– a crucial shift must be promoted: from the perception of migrants as a workforce expected to fill contingent vacancies, to the conception of their human capital as a structural resource for economic and social development, in line with a smart and inclusive way to approach immigration. In this perspective, the issue of recognizing migrants’ SKC has both a practical and a symbolic value, as it can contribute to change such a perception.

Starting from the findings of the DIVERSE project (supported by the European Commission through the European Integration Fund and carried out in 10 EU countries), the article discusses some characteristics of the current functioning of the national systems of recognition, focusing on migrants as their peculiar target. The discussion is grounded on the cross-country analysis carried out on the documentations and reports produced by each country team on the basis of a multi-situated research conducted (also) on selected regional systems of recognition.

The analysis shows many differences among the systems of recognition especially related to: their level of “seniority”, degree of universalism and accessibility, friendliness of procedures’ in relation to migrants. Beyond these results, the analysis reveals that the difficulties faced by a migrant in taking up the SKC recognition opportunities mirrors the inadequacies and shortfalls of those systems, that is, their failure in realising the inclusiveness promise for all citizens. Therefore, the article draws attention on the paradigmatic value of migrants’ experience: developing the systems of SKC recognition giving specific attention to migrants’ needs can not only concur to recast the European approach towards migration and its role in the labour market, but also have profitable outcome on social cohesion, equality, and economic competitiveness.

Key words: economic migrations, competences recognition, social inequalities, lifelong learning, Europe.

Resumen

El enfoque europeo sobre las migraciones se caracteriza por una especie de esquizofrenia, generada como consecuencia de intentar juntar dos filosofías contradictorias: la filosofía “economicista” y la de igualdad de oportunidades. Para superar esta paradoja –que está produciendo una condición de desventaja estructural de los migrantes, inhibiendo el pleno aprovechamiento de las aptitudes, conocimientos y competencias de los migrantes– es importante promover un cambio de perspectiva, pasando de la concepción de los migrantes como mano de obra destinada a cubrir los puestos de trabajo vacantes a la conciencia de que su capital humano es un recurso estructural para el desarrollo económico y social, de acuerdo con una forma inteligente e inclusiva para abordar la migración. Desde esta perspectiva, el tema del reconocimiento de las competencias de los migrantes tiene un valor tanto práctico como simbólico, que puede contribuir a este cambio de perspectiva. Inspirándose en los principales resultados del proyecto DIVERSE (co-financiado por la Comisión Europea a través del Fondo Europeo para la integración y realizado en 10 países europeos), el artículo discute el efectivo funcionamiento de los sistemas nacionales de reconocimiento, focalizando la atención sobre los migrantes como su objeto específico. La discusión se fundamenta en el análisis comparativo realizado utilizando la documentación y los informes de investigación producidos por el equipo de cada uno de los países sobre la base de una investigación empírica de los sistemas de reconocimiento (también) en algunos seleccionados sistemas regionales. El análisis indica la presencia de múltiples diferencias entre los sistemas de reconocimiento, sobre todo en relación con el grado de antigüedad, de universalidad, de sencillez y de accesibilidad de los procedimientos hacia los migrantes. Además de estos resultados, el análisis revela que las dificultades encontradas por los migrantes en identificar y utilizar las oportunidades de reconocimiento de competencias son un reflejo de las insuficiencias y debilidades de estos sistemas, es decir representan un fracaso de las promesas de inclusividad para todos los ciudadanos, especialmente los más vulnerables. Las conclusiones del artículo llaman la atención por el valor paradigmático de la experiencia de los migrantes: desarrollar sistemas de reconocimiento que den atención específica a las necesidades de los migrantes puede, no solo ayudar a reformular el modelo europeo de integración, sino también a producir efectos positivos sobre la cohesión, la igualdad y la competitividad económica.

Palabras Clave: migraciones económicas, reconocimiento de competencia, desigualdades sociales, aprendizaje permanente, Europa.

1. Introduction¹

The European approach to immigration is traditionally characterized by a sort of “schizophrenia”, generated by the attempt to keep together two contradictory philosophies: the “economicistic” philosophy, and that of solidarity and equal opportunities. To overcome this paradox –which has concurred to produce a condition of migrants’ structural disadvantages, while inhibiting the full exploitation of their skills, knowledge and competences (hereafter SKC)– it is important to promote a shift from the perception of migrants as a workforce expected to fill temporary vacancies to the conception of their human capital as a structural resource for economic and social development. In this perspective, the issue of recognizing migrants’ SKC has both a practical and a symbolic value, as it can contribute to change such a perception and to exploit migrants’ potential.

Starting from the findings of the DIVERSE project *-Diversity Improvement as a Viable Enrichment Resource for Society and Economy²*, this article discusses some characteristics of the current functioning of the national systems of recognition, focusing on migrants as their peculiar target, and identifying them as a paradigmatic example which betrays the inadequacies and shortfalls of the systems, that is their failure in realising the inclusiveness promise, but also their potentialities as a key lever for both the inclusiveness and the competitiveness of the European development model. More precisely, this contribution derives from the cross-country analysis of the documentations and reports produced by each country team on the basis of the multi-situated research conducted on selected regional systems of recognition in the 10 EU countries³ involved in the project.

Section 2 illustrates the “schizophrenia” of the European approach, shedding a critical light on the process of social construction of migrants’ role within the labour market; section 3 focuses on the need of conceiving new modes of approaching migration and describes the theoretical premises of the DIVERSE project; section 4 discusses the relevance of the recognition of non-formal/informal learning together that of the formal one, consistently with the Lifelong Learning (hereafter LLL) European perspective; section 5 delves into the problematic of inclusiveness and friendliness of

¹ Laura Zanfrini is the author of sections 1, 2, 3, and 7; Rosangela Lodigiani of sections 4, 5, and 6.

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³ Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

recognition systems towards migrants; in section 6 the issue of “capability for voice” and stakeholders’ involvement is scrutinized; section 7 outlines the paradigmatic value of migrants’ experience.

2. The “schizophrenia” of the European approach to migration

Since its institutionalization after the World War II, the European migration regime has been characterized by a strong emphasis on the employment dimension. Contrary to those countries –such as the United States or Canada– which adopted the *Settlement Model* (where immigrants are viewed as free economic actors expected to reach a full societal membership), many European nations opted for the *Temporary Work Model* (Papademetriou & Hamilton, 1995). In this model, residence permits are pinned to employment and require frequent renewal, and occupational and sector mobility is severely curtailed. Exemplified by countries such as Germany and Switzerland, this model can be viewed as the most typical of the European legacy, as it has influenced the full relationship between immigration and the European hosting societies. In particular, this model –based on the idea of complementarity between autochthonous and foreign labour force– permitted to legitimize a differential treatment towards migrant workers, and encouraged their concentration at the bottom of the professional stratification, in low skilled and low-status jobs. Moreover, the rhetorical figure of the “guest worker” –that is the formal status of temporary worker– allowed European societies to limit migrants’ access to welfare systems, and to deny them political rights. In other words, it allowed them to “suspend” the problem of the migrants’ inclusion in the community of their citizens.

Despite these premises, European States, consistently with their historical focus on human rights, have formally extended a wide set of protective measures, rights and opportunities to foreign workers –including the right to settle and rejoin their family members–, thus transforming “temporary migrant workers” into stable sojourners, or *denizens* (Hammar, 1989). Furthermore, European States have experienced a progressive increase of arrivals of categories of migrants –such as family members and asylum seekers– not selected according to their working abilities and employability. Besides other consequences, these developments have concurred to make the migrant population more heterogeneous –in terms of gender, age, level of education, professional and family background, etc. – and to enlarge the incidence of those who are at risk of remaining at the margins of the labour market. Finally, Europe has discovered

to be a “diverse” society, definitively distant from the idea of common descendent and ethnic homogeneity on which the process of nation-building was based; this implies both the need to manage a pluralistic society, but also the opportunity to bear fruit from the “Diversity Value” (Zanfrini, 2015).

Actually, with time, the need to meet the question of the boundaries of the political community has become a matter of urgency, as the latter has lost its congruence with the community of residents. The ethics of systems of redistribution, protection and allocation based on the fiction of societies surrounded by national “fences” has become more and more disputable, and the practices of institutional discrimination have proved to be disruptive for the competitiveness of Europe. Hence the impressive debate about the question of citizenship (Zanfrini, 2007), the borders of membership (Ferrera, 2005) and the practices implemented by European education systems (Heckmann, 2008) and labour markets. A huge number of studies have recorded the ineradicable tension between petitions for inclusion and exclusion that characterizes the relationship among migration, citizenship, welfare regimes and the main institutions of European societies. In any case, despite a progressive accession to the system of citizenship’s rights –further reinforced by the adoption of anti-discrimination rules and positive actions–, migrants and their offspring continue to experience a condition of structural disadvantage.

This is due, first of all, to the conditions regulating their access to rights. Migrants, even when they lack a permit of stay or possess only a temporary stay-permit, *do have* rights, but their access to them is *partial*, in general limited at civic and (most) social rights, but with a substantial exclusion from political rights. Moreover, this access is not founded on a principle of equality embedded in a common universalistic and “natural” heritage (as in the case of citizens), but granted by the citizens themselves, “the owners of the State”, and in theory *always open to the possibility to be disclaimed*. Finally, this access is *modulated* according to various systems of “civil stratification”, based on different juridical status (regular/irregular; temporary/permanent and so on). In particular, in the contemporary Europe, the distinction between EU and non-EU nationals represents a fundamental institutional and political border distinguishing between residents and functioning as a filter for the access to rights and opportunities. As confirmed by our study, this border, as it is the mere outcome of a process of political construction, can provide no empirical evidence of the data on an observational level –in terms, for example, of level of integration or social distance–. However, Third

Country Nationals (hereafter TCNs) continue –differently than EU migrants– to be subjects to the legislation concerning the migrant status, with its limits and ambivalences, and are excluded from those opportunities reserved to individuals who possess the European citizenship.

Secondly, even where the political-social compromise has reached the most inclusive solutions –until favouring migrants’ incorporation in the community of full citizens–, people with a migratory background are generally over-represented in the categories at risk of exclusion. In particular, almost everywhere migrants face difficulties in fully integrating into the labour market and take considerable time, even if well-educated, to become established into it. They are more exposed than natives to negative occurrences such as precarious employment, unemployment and long-term unemployment (OECD, 2015). Moreover, as the main trend has been to resort to foreigners to fill temporary and low-skilled labour shortages, migrants are often over-qualified compared to the jobs they carry out (Huddleston & Dag Tjaden, 2012)

Hence, migrants result very useful for looking into “what is not working” in the policies of inclusion and of individual empowerment, revealing the ambivalence with which European societies tackle the question of inequalities, as well as the counter-intuitive effects generated by initiatives designed to promote greater equality. It would seem that migration does not cease to exert its function of *disturbance* (Sayad, 1999), becoming a metaphor for the broken promises that European societies had aspired to fulfil. At this regard, some points are to be highlighted.

Firstly, discrimination arises from the “normal” institutional and organizational behaviours more than from intentional decisions, possibly inspired by xenophobic movements. Within the theoretical picture delineated by the “post-assimilationist” approaches (Alba & Nee, 1997; Brubaker, 2001), focusing on the interactive nature of the integration process, the attention moves from individual and family deficits to the architecture and functioning of the main social institutions, which tend to reproduce social inequalities (and their intergenerational transmission), transforming what at the outset was a privilege into a “merit”.

Secondly, the study of migrants’ educational and working careers has permitted to ascertain how every organizational system embodies, often unknowingly, cultural practices and models, which may produce phenomena of *cultural discrimination* (Bommes, 2008) and disadvantages for migrants and minorities’ members.

However, the condition of structural discrimination might also be considered as an unintended and dysfunctional consequence of the way labour migration has been predominantly managed (or not managed, considering that a large share of migrants have acceded to the labour market through the “side door” of humanitarian and family migration, or through the “back door” of irregular migration). Indeed, as we will describe, the process of social and institutional construction of migrants’ role in the labour market continue to reflect, today as yesterday, the idea of complementarity. Finally, the European approach to immigration seems to be condemned to a sort of “schizophrenia”. On the one hand, the principles of solidarity and equal opportunities have encouraged both the settlement of migrants and their families and the progressive enlargement of the “membership’s borders”. But on the other hand, policies and practices continue to reflect an “economicistic” philosophy, until reproducing new versions of the old guest worker model.

Notwithstanding the variety of migration schemes adopted by the different countries, the entry of migrants has been traditionally conceived to face specific staff or skills shortages and therefore has been demand-driven, dependent on a prior job offer and often subordinated to the “unavailability principle”⁴. Besides, since the link between the right to stay and the working condition is deeply rooted in the public opinion, migrants have often been granted residence permits of limited duration. These methods have certainly contributed to filling skilled vacancies and professional areas with few eligible native-born workers; above all, they have identified and categorized jobs that natives are reluctant to take. Giving the employers the possibility to decide about the recruitment process, the entries have been largely restricted to specific sectors and occupations, leading to persisting phenomena of labour market segregation. An outcome even more exacerbated in those countries –such as Italy and Spain– which mainly have resorted to mass regularizations aimed at legalizing migrant workers who had acceded to the market without authorization (OECD, 2014).

Looking at the current situation, national policies largely confirm the traditional trends and ambivalences. A general appraisal of the legislation in force in the different countries inquired by the DIVERSE project (Zanfrini, 2015) suggests, first of all, how entry and work permits continue to be generally issued only if no native or already resident worker is available for the same job, which is congruent with the idea of

⁴ According to which a foreigner can enter only if there is no indigenous or already foreign resident worker available for the same job.

complementarity. TCN workers are perceived as a possible solution for meeting a series of challenges facing labour markets, thus confirming the assumption of a specific “need” for migrant workers, linked to their high adaptability. Indigenous population ageing represents one of the key arguments of the current debate, together with the presence of specific job vacancies/shortages, particularly in the healthcare sector. Sometimes legislations are even more demand-driven, and are drawn up to satisfy specific employers’ requirements, impeding any form of professional mobility. Occasionally a special attention is paid to highly skilled migrants, investors, and business owners, in line with the European turn towards “chosen migration”. However, discrimination in skills recognition and a wage gap compared to local workers represent strong barriers to attract these appreciated migrants. Finally, only in the case of the Eastern countries the arrival of TCN workers is welcomed in order to counterbalance the flux of out-migration of young and educated workers, and only in these nations migrants are openly expected to take on highly qualified or managerial jobs, and viewed as a crucial resource for the internationalisation of their economies and for fostering entrepreneurship. More frequently, non-EU migrants are perceived as a complementary workforce, to the point of linking the stay-permit to the original employer. And even in countries which have adopted a “liberal” migration policy, the possibility of entry continues to be subordinated to a specific employer request, probably related to the unavailability of another (indigenous) worker. Clearly, some of these regulations blatantly contradict the equal opportunities’ principle, reinforcing what we have defined the schizophrenia of the European legacy. Furthermore, this kind of approach tends to discourage the process of SCK recognition, or in any case to assign to employers a primary role also in the assessment of professional qualifications. Finally, a high tolerance towards undeclared employment somewhere represents the main cause of discrimination against TCNs and a waste of their human capital.

3. A smart and inclusive way to approach immigration

Given this picture, the need of conceiving new modes of managing migration and constructing its role in the labour market clearly emerges, starting from some basic assumptions.

First of all, migration can be certainly interpreted as the result of specific needs, caused by the difficulty to recruit native-born workers –according to the concept of complementarity–, but also as the expression of the competitive strategies and human

capital management practices. According to a “defensive” strategy, enterprises and local economies will use migration to contain labour costs, thus guaranteeing the survival of some productions –labour intensive but with low technological and innovative content– that otherwise would be liable for de-localization. If on the contrary they opt for an “offensive” strategy, enterprises will choose to bet on qualitative and innovative growth and to this end will mobilize and exploit all the available resources, including migrant labour. In this perspective, the latter becomes a structural factor for the functioning of the local economy, as well as an important element in competitive strategies that make good use of the various kinds of “diversity” among the personnel. Hence, the role of human capital and of the processes of workers’ professional development becomes decisive, such as the issue of SKC recognition. Finally, labour demand and shortages not only need to be properly monitored and assessed on a regular basis, but they also need to be “directed” by means of specific policies and “signals”.

Nonetheless, managing migration, with respect to smart and inclusive growth, implies, at the same time, sustaining TCNs’ integration and holding back risk factors that could turn them into a disadvantaged group. Instead of asking migrants merely to adjust to labour market (temporary) needs, the challenge is that of enhancing their long-term employability, by giving them a chance of professional reconversion through training, counselling, skills evaluation, a better access to information and so on. As the life career approach (Schmid & Gazier, 2002) teaches us, in the face of an unequal endowment in resources (human and social capital, job opportunities, etc.) not everyone succeeds in effectively combining all the various life spheres in one coherent whole. This would imply the implementation of some institutional conditions, i.e. of enabling and coordinating (employment, social, care) policies and services able to enhance the options at everyone’s disposal and reduce the constraints; so as to allow individuals –irrespective of gender, family condition, ethnicity or class affiliation– to develop their real capabilities and thus contributing to create a more cohesive and prosperous society. But this would also imply looking at the migrant as a sort of Ideal Type for testing new policies and approaches on the subject of individual activation and empowerment, and for evaluating their level of efficacy and inclusiveness.

Thirdly, on account of the demographic weight of people with a migratory background –which makes them a structural component of the labour forces–, their experience nowadays evokes a strategic question for the European social cohesion and economic competitiveness. In other words, the condition of structural disadvantage

which hits migrants, and their exposure to different kinds of discrimination, are not only a “migrants’ problem” anymore, but have become a real challenge for the quality (if not the survival) of the democracy and the development of knowledge economies.

On these premises, the project DIVERSE was designed to contribute to an overall and long-term aim of recasting the European approach to migration, overcoming its “historical” schizophrenia. In this perspective, three main levers have been identified: *a*) encouraging and supporting the recognition of migrants’ formal, non formal and informal SKC; *b*) enhancing awareness among different types of organizations as to the importance and potentialities of Diversity Management strategies, *c*) improving migrants’ social participation and civic engagement (and especially their participation in volunteer, non-profit organizations) in view of the construction of an inclusive European society and in order to improve migrants common perception.

Starting from the findings of the project, in the following sections we will focus the attention on the first lever: the issue of migrants’ SKC recognition. According to the project’s aims, this issue was intended as a crucial element of a strategy of promoting a new approach towards migration and its role within the labour market, since its concrete and symbolic impact. At the same time, as it will be analyzed in the next sections, this issue exemplifies the paradigmatic value of migrants’ experience, transformed it into an extraordinary resource in order to improve the European culture of SKC recognition, making our systems able to win the challenge of inclusiveness, intended as a pivotal lever for the competitiveness of European economy.

4. Recognition systems in the light of lifelong learning perspective: pursuing equal opportunities

In the framework of the LLL European approach, the recognition of formal qualifications and of SKC “wherever and however acquired”⁵ represents a real challenge in the contemporary landscape as it is expected to be a fundamental driver for

⁵ This terminology refers to the distinction among formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Quoting CEDEFOP’s definitions (2014), the first term refers to the learning that occurs in an organized and structured environment, explicitly designated as learning, intentional from the learner’s point of view, typically leading to validation and certification. The second one is intended as learning embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it is intentional from the learner’s point of view, and may, but does not generally lead to formalized certificates. The third one concerns the learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure; it is not organized or structured as learning activities, and, in most cases, it is unintentional from the learner’s perspective.

both individual empowerment and the democratization of work and life chances. As declared in the *Memorandum on lifelong learning* (Commission of the European Communities, 2000)⁶ and clearly expressed with the Lisbon Agenda (De la Fuente & Ciccone, 2002), then reaffirmed with Europe 2020 (Roth & Thum, 2010), this statement is embedded in the overall European strategy for economic growth and social cohesion. It considers the development and exploitation of human capital across the lifespan a lever for promoting employment, social inclusion and protection for every citizen – especially the most vulnerable (Lodigiani, 2010)– together with the collective wellbeing and the economic competitiveness.

Against this context, our study has focused on migrants as specific beneficiaries of recognition systems, and devoted particular attention to SKC linked to their migratory background –such as linguistic or intercultural skills– or developed thanks precisely to their migratory experience –such as resilience and risk management–, being aware of the potentiality and the criticalities that it can have on the process of learning and identity formation (Morrice, 2014).

During the last two decades, with specific reference to migrants, a mounting debate about the waste of their potential on one hand, and skills shortage and demographic change in hosting societies on the other, has been developed, preparing the terrain for the launch of initiatives and projects addressing this specific target (IOM, 2013). Particularly the recognition of formal qualification has reached a certain level of consideration. It has been acknowledged as a relevant issue for breaching in the phenomenon of underutilization of migrants' human capital, and especially for accessing to regulated professions, for which official recognition is generally mandatory.

As milestones of the awareness raising process on this issue we can mention: the Lisbon recognition Convention (1997), the Bologna process (started in 1999), the Copenhagen process (launched in 2002), EU Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, up to the Recommendations of the European Parliament and Council of the European Union on the “European Qualifications Framework for

⁶ In the same document, we find the basic definition of LLL promoted by the European Commission and the Member States. Within the European Employment Strategy, LLL should be intended as “all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence”. LLL is not just one aspect of education and training, but “the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. All those living in Europe, without exception, should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change and to participate actively in the shaping of Europe’s future”.

Lifelong Learning” (formally adopted in 2008) and the institution (in 2009) of the “European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training” as a common framework for the accumulation and transfer of units of learning outcomes in vocational education and training in Europe.

Despite these references are generally shared, the cross-country analysis carried out within the project⁷ has highlighted substantial differences among the European countries involved, alongside the six analytical dimensions chosen for the comparison: (1) systems seniority and maturity, (2) systems universalism vs. selective approach, (3) systems occupational vs. learning goals, (4) procedures formalization/bureaucratization vs. flexibility, (5) systems and procedures levels of friendliness in relation to migrants, (6) stakeholders’ participation and cost sharing.

The data collected show that, although increasingly structured and formalized, recognition systems of formal qualification present many differences. Several “cultures of recognition” emerge, and tools and procedures reveal different degrees of accessibility and usability by migrants. In this way, we have identified some more consolidated and advanced systems, that is, well structured and with a good balance between centralization and territorial diffusion as, for example, the Dutch, German and Swedish systems. They provide users with some pivotal reference points on the national level, but offer also local and widespread services of information, orientation and assistance which favour the accessibility across the territory. Other systems appear to be likewise consolidated but less challenged, as they are well designed and organised, but the relatively low share of residing TCNs does not put them to the test, as, for example, in the Finnish case. Some others systems can be defined formally developed, but fragmented: they result to be enough developed in legal terms, but also very fragmented, complex, and sometimes poorly organised, hence lacking in efficiency and user friendliness, as the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese systems, mainly, seem to be. In some cases, systems appear still incomplete and under construction: they have

⁷ The collection of data was carried out on the basis of a shared research protocol, including desk analysis and field work, with semi-structured interviews to relevant stakeholders and key informants (exponents of: social partners, national/regional and local institutions, migrants’ associations, consulates/embassies, civil societies, companies, educational institutions, employment services; leading experts in assessment of training programs and systems). The project included the pilot construction and validation of a multi-stakeholder (participated and transferable) audit scheme for TCNs SKC assessment.

undertaken the rout of innovations and adjustment both on legal and operational level⁸, as the Hungarian and Polish cases demonstrate.

Going a step further, as the European approach to LLL teaches and requires (Commission of the European Communities, 2000), the countries where this issue of migrants' competences recognition is more developed confirm that the real breakthrough for the valorisation of migrants' human capital is the validation of SKC wherever and however acquired, thus considering non-formal/informal learning (CEDEFOP, 2009). In fact, it should be considered as an integral part of the national qualification system and a fundamental pillar of a complete recognition system, provided that a clear definition of (and a good balance among) the concepts of skill, knowledge and competence is reached (Méhaut & Winch, 2012).

Considering non-formal/informal learning does not, in itself, create human capital, but makes the stock of human capital more visible and more valuable to individuals and society at large, hence finally promoting the increase of human capital (Werquin, 2010a). This is particularly important for migrants, who –as we have already noticed [section 2]– are too often subjected to the deskilling or decredentialising of their prior learning and work experience, independently from their educational credentials (Andersson & Guo, 2009; Andersson, Fejes, & Sandberg, 2013). Moreover, recognising SKC wherever and however acquired may represent an extraordinary opportunity for gaining credits for re-entering the education system and, as such, a motivational lever to keep on studying (Werquin, 2010a). Hence, the recognition outcome could be used as a step for achieving formal education certifications, by offering a “second chance education” and counteracting the harmful effects of “early leavers”, promoting the democratization of educational opportunities and assuring equal access to them across the lifespan, as stressed by the European Commission (e.g., 2011).

According to our findings, comparing to the recognition of formal qualifications, the attention for non-formal/informal learning is more recent and less developed although incessantly expanding. Apart from a few cases, the national systems analysed appear to be very fragmented and lacking in terms of norms, structures, procedures and tools, especially if we consider the capacity to face migrants' specific needs. In this

⁸ Even independently from the main features of the respective national system, in order to improve their effectiveness and accessibility, some interesting experiences have been carried out at the regional or local level. Promoted by different kinds of bodies and institutions, these experiences are involved, for example, in providing information, counselling/orientation and technical assistance; promoting professionalizing internships; supporting the re-entrance in the education system; realizing research aimed at identifying recognition trends.

respect, in order to examine the data collected in the country involved in the project, the six analytical dimensions chosen for the comparative analysis (above reported) were merged to the evaluation of both the system as a whole and its capacity to be migrant friendly. From this perspective, the degree of “maturity” appears to be proportional to the development of the related national LLL system, the length of the country’s migration history, the volume of migration flows, and the policy approach to migration, while innovative experiences emerged at the local level in all countries. In this light, we have outlined three types of systems: “mature” (such as the Dutch and the Swedish), “consistently evolving” (for example Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain), and “starting” (Estonia, Hungary and Poland).

Developing connections between LLL and different levels of education is a basic objective of the validation system. It aims at appreciating competences which otherwise would risk being wasted, and at supporting the re-entering in the education system, also thanks to courses and compensation measures that allow to fill gaps which hinder the achievement of a formal qualification. Thus, the integration between the two typologies of recognition –of formal and non formal/informal learning– can be realized (Sumption, 2013). Among the countries investigated, this integration is stronger where the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad opens to a wider recognition of migrants’ knowledge and experiences instead of simply looking at formal educational attainment. As in Sweden, this appears to be a very promising path for improving the existing procedures, especially from a methodological point of view, since the tools and procedures developed in this field can be useful to overcome some of the major limits of the formal qualification recognition system (Dingu-Kyrklund, 2013). However, the LLL purpose is not the only one, but goes together with the aim of promoting a better inclusion in the labour market. A meaningful example is the Dutch case, where recognition and accreditation of prior learning have been well developed since the beginning of the 2000s (Pijpers, Beckers, Grootjans, van Naerssen, Paardekooper, & Smith, 2015).

In those countries where the system has received a recent impulse, recognition and accreditation of prior learning are the main focus but the connection with the labour market is still weak, as in Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. On the other hand, these are also cases characterised by regional sub-systems differently developed and structured, featuring the involvement of many stakeholders within a complex set of different institutional competences. While this featuring can generate conflicts and

heterogeneity in rules and mechanisms, it also opens rooms for bottom up innovations. A case in point is Italy where, according to the 2001 reform, the State should have defined a general framework containing a set of guidelines for regional implementation, but until 2012 this task was not accomplished. During this long period, some regions remained in a situation of stasis, but others started acting on an autonomous basis, developing very different legislative frameworks and methodological tools directed at valorising SKC on a professional basis (Zanfrini, Monaci, Mungiardì, & Sarli, 2015).

Conversely, in those countries where the system is at a very early stage, the aim to develop connections between LLL and different levels of study represents the main objective of the validation system, but much could still be done to foster the integration of different forms of recognition (Estonia, Hungary, Poland).

Despite the heterogeneity of the described scenario, rapidly evolving, from every country experience univocally emerge that migrants scarcely take up those opportunities; at least they are comparably less than all other citizens which, in any case, do not profit as much of the recognition opportunities. Even fewer migrants successfully complete the process of recognition once undertaken.

5. The many facets of inclusiveness and friendliness of SKC recognition systems

Several factors hinder migrants to fully benefit from the recognition opportunities. Among the meaningful: the mechanisms established for the involvement of beneficiaries; the professional sectors concerned, usually the most qualified; the costs implied, often high and borne by the candidate; the length, complexity and opaqueness of the procedures; broadly the difficulty to grasp recognition's economic and social return; last but not least, the presence of linguistic disadvantages. Good linguistic competences are very important for the success of the process, particularly for the identification of non-standard skills, which are essential in this field and which depend on TCNs' ability to describe them. Moreover, also cultural understanding of the receiving society's norms, LLL opportunities, labour market functioning, and employers' expectations are required: all factors that, when lacking, unfairly undermining migrants' chances (Guo, 2010⁹).

⁹ In this respect, it is particularly interesting Guo's research (2015) upon the Canadian experience in managing the integration of economic immigrants and refugees in the labour market. The author research reveals the existence of "racialised skills regime". Thus the "social construction of skill" is not only gendered and classed, but also racialised.

Besides these factors, our research has highlighted that recognition systems are not always as much universalistic as they in principle should be, so migrants often suffer from “selective eligibility”. A case in point is the distinction between EU and non-EU migrants connected with the access to regulated professions for which a formal recognition of previous qualification is mandatory. In accordance with the Directive 2005/36/EC, a person having acquired his/her license in a Member State has the right to have it recognized in any other EU-State and pursuing his/her profession with the same rights as nationals. Conversely, for non-EU citizens the outcome of the recognition process is uncertain, depending on more or less well-defined procedures of evaluation of the previous training and professional experience, and/or on tests assessing migrants’ competence, or on the presence of agreements between receiving and sending countries. This Directive aims to facilitate labour mobility across EU countries, but indirectly establishes a legal discrimination between EU and non-EU migrants, conditioning their opportunities of incorporation in the labour market. Also, the bilateral agreements between Third and EU countries define a framework in which the recognition process may take place. These agreements are extremely important to avoid that the lacking information on the educational systems of many Third Countries can end up in paradoxical discriminatory effects among migrants of different origins. In this regard, Germany represents a case in point (Bosswick, 2013). Similar effects, too, come to light in those systems which privilege the recognition of qualification in specific professional sectors (e.g., health) or of certain (generally high) education/training levels (while completely ignoring the qualification achieved in the vocational system), thus endorsing migrants with particular qualification and educational credentials.

We could make other examples but the question is raised: how the formal qualification recognition system accessibility and usability for all migrants, independently from their nationality or level/type of qualification possessed, can be reinforced? Although the differences underlined are mostly due to the normative framework regulating non-EU migrants’ treatment and are positively aimed at favouring the integration of certain groups of migrants, they need to be identified as a possible source of discrimination, preventing this effect without nullifying the steps made forward.

Partially different is the case of recognition systems of non-formal/informal learning. These are deeply grounded on universalistic basis to offer concrete equal opportunities to every individual. Hence, in principle, migrants residing legally in the

receiving country can enjoy, practically everywhere, the same services as native people and can as well benefit from technical assistance, in particular with regard to information and career guidance, access to training and LLL, employment and unemployment benefits etc. The universalistic perspective depends not only on the shared principle of non-discrimination, but also on the fact that this issue has been developed under the European pressure, fostering the development of a LLL system capable of including and enhancing any learning context and its outcomes (CEDEFOP, 2009). While this idea is clearly expressed in each country, there are differences in the ways it is implemented. Somewhere the (at first sight) lacking of a specific attention for TCNs depends on a solid cultural frame of equality. Here, the procedures of validation meant for all citizens are proven to be potentially well suited and friendly to migrants. The most meaningful example is the Dutch one as the literature confirms (Van der Welle, 2013), but good practices can be found in many regions investigated by the research, e.g., in Arnhem-Nijmegen (NL), Västerbotten (SE), Baden-Württemberg (DE). In other countries, where the universalistic approach is only formally instituted but not substantially pursued, it unpredictably produces some discrimination effects. For example, in Spain there are no *ad hoc* procedures for TCNs, who have to follow the same route as EU citizens: this means that the “merits” that are valued –especially professional experience– must have been obtained in Spain. The lack of specific attention to TCNs can depend also either on the weakness and the early stage of the recognition system in itself (as in Estonia) or on the small size of non-EU migrant flows; in the latter case, the recognition system can even be well structured but remains “less challenged” by migrants’ needs (as in Finland).

In some countries, an attempt to promote the access of migrants to the validation system is carried out mainly through ongoing pilot projects and local experimentations. Sometimes, this attention is part of a wider sensitivity to special categories –including, for example, less educated or disabled people– and has produced some interesting and innovative methodologies which help in documenting competences and in overcoming eventual linguistic deficit. They use various kinds of attestation methods, including photos, audio files or letters, and tools for self-assessment. In Hungary, for example, the Artemisszió Foundation, in cooperation with Menedék Association, has deployed a tool to recognize TCNs’ skills, qualifications and competences. The integration program is customized for each participant, based on his/her different needs and whole life cycle. It aims at rising individual’s awareness about his/her own competences. This kind of focus

on TCNs shows the will to make equality of opportunities concrete and substantive improving the migrant-friendliness of the recognition systems.

Paradoxically, the focus on TCNs can even become itself a factor of differentiation producing other forms of inequalities. The “advanced” Swedish case provides some reflections on these unforeseen consequences. Sweden has been testing methods of assessing, recognising and validating competences and abilities acquired through non/informal learning since 1997, and with a more explicit focus on migrants since about 2008 (Thomson, 2010). Despite this, some studies have identified some weaknesses and failings in the system. First, the so-called “individual establishment plan” for newly arrived migrants is accessible only to TCNs under international protection and their relatives, while no direct access to the system exists for other migrants (Länsstyrelsen Västra Götalands Län, 2012). Second, while SKC validation has been conceptualized with the aim of furthering social justice in relation to individual opportunities, and increasing individual self-confidence, this may produce opposite effects for TCNs, weakening their placement in the labour market, unintentionally enabling discrimination processes to persist. Some criticalities were “simply” related to the level of training and interest of the assessors and their own motivation and understanding of labour market dynamics (Diedrich & Styhre, 2013). Others criticalities were connected to the intrinsic rationale behind the system of recognition: its effectiveness substantially depends on its capacity to lead to a certification, that is, bringing competences to some professional or learning standards. Therefore, it can be useful in selecting the migrants considered in line with certain standards, whilst excluding others (Andersson & Osman, 2008).

It is difficult to reach an unambiguous conclusion. The comparison between the universalistic approach and an approach opened to solutions targeted at migrants shows some paradoxes and contradictions. There are universalistic approaches that are such from a substantive point of view, resulting implicitly migrant-friendly, and others that are only formally universalistic, hence unable to take into account migrants’ specific needs and consequently penalizing their access to the recognition procedures. Conversely, there are countries in which the attention to migrants translates into positive actions, and yet sometimes these measures –in a counterintuitive manner– produce discriminatory effects.

6. Migrants' and stakeholders' engagement in the recognition systems

Procedures and tools for recognizing SKC wherever and however acquired are highly diversified across the countries, but within the same country too, depending on the regions, employment sectors, features of the LLL systems. Everywhere, the promotion of more standardized procedures has proved to be a key issue to ensure the transparency, cost-effectiveness and efficacy of validation systems. Tackling this issue appears to be particularly urgent especially where procedures largely depend on the different bodies and authorities in charge, and each education institution, labour market actor, company, NGO etc. tends to produce its own validation mechanism. However, to a certain extent, standardization is not even a desirable goal if it shifts in bureaucratization. The diversity of tools and procedures can actually be an asset that encourages their use by individuals with diverse characteristics, including TCNs. And an excess of bureaucratization can make the system incapable to grasp the heterogeneity and complexity of the skills to be brought to light, assessed and certified, and of the different routes leading to their acquisition. It risks decreasing the level of awareness of the actors involved as regards the meaning and objectives of the process. As demonstrated by the Dutch case, standardized procedures may promote a kind of “procedural thinking” that hinders the beneficiary’s empowerment and active involvement, and overshadows the importance of tailor-made solutions capable to meet individual needs and specificities (Pijpers *et al.*, 2015). Conversely, the Hungarian case shows that the lack of official procedures devoted to TCNs may avoid the risk of bureaucratic redundancy whilst enlarging the range of recognizable competences, even migratory experiences and intercultural competences.

The presence of a case manager/personal counsellor helps to mediate between standardization and flexibility of procedures. When accessing and during the validation process, the active involvement of beneficiaries is extremely important. The presence of such an expert and the development of specific instruments for guidance and “skills balance” are crucial for enabling procedures to meet differentiated individual capacity, needs and objectives, and to put in place personalised solutions. In Sweden, for example, it is through case managers at the employment office that a person can access different measures for validation aimed at completing documentation and certification of SKC. Moreover, the relational approach of counsellor (and tools) makes the difference. As the literature on social work has been suggesting since long time, this kind of practices really promote the empowerment of subjects and their motivation and

activation, particularly when they are “strength-based” and “capability-building” oriented (Folgheraiter, 2007)¹⁰.

The recognition process tends to put a lot of pressure on the individual, who is required to be responsible, motivated to continue LLL, to be actively engaged in the validation process, and who is often an adult migrant needing to combine training, work and family life. When the process of recognition is long lasting, and especially if it is connected to some adjunctive training initiative, the problem is to find flexible solutions able to suit individual needs and to enable the person to better balance this experience with other engagements. The pressure is also economic. As the empirical evidence points out, insufficient economic support can be a severe hindrance to accomplish the recognition process, especially when it is long and entails the participation in a training course (MacKay, Lindström, & Stjernström, 2016). These reflections are particularly relevant for TCNs, who are mostly employed in low-income jobs, and considering that in many countries it is not clear whether, and to which extent, candidates should bear the costs.

Admittedly, the centrality given to individuals, especially in lightly-structured systems, can lead to contrasting effects. On the one side, it can have positive consequences for migrants’ empowerment, motivation and subsequently for their employability and active engagement in society. Using a metaphor, this centrality seems to “unchain” them –as a sort of Prometheus– for achieving new opportunities, helping to break up the invisible constraints of the above discussed European approach. On the other hand, it risks penalizing the weakest among them, the ones with lower abilities to move independently and with less power to enforce their rights and take advantage of the opportunities offered. Remaining in the metaphor, it rather tends to “bond” migrants to a Procrustean bed, which instead of finding flexible solutions for anyone, forces the individual to fit the unique solution available, as the logic of competences tends to do compelling to match some predefined standards (Lodigiani, 2011). This paradox is more likely to become real especially when the notion of competence (pl. “competences”) is not intended in a holistic fashion –as in the EU language and approach– and it is considered –in line with the behavioral perspective– as an individual characteristic,

¹⁰ It is useful here to recall that empowerment means “enhancing an individual’s or group’s capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”; and empowerment “is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make purposive choice) and opportunity structure (the institutional context in which choice is made) (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005).

independent from the working and social context¹¹.

To face these negative effects, it is crucial to sustain migrants' access to the recognition systems by giving them adequate supports for affording it and acknowledging it as a real chance. Moreover, it is important to empower their capability to elaborate and clearly express their own life/work experiences. In this regard, it is fundamental to consider the power of the different actors involved in recognition processes and more specifically the *voice* of the candidates.

In fact, in order to exist as such, a competence must be socially recognized. More precisely, the definition of a competence is based on three elements: the subject's self-perception, the interaction with objective indicators (standards, referential), and social recognition (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). It is this third element what gives meaning to the first two. To avoid that competences become a lever to perpetuate power and privileges of dominant groups (Guo, 2015; Shan & Fejes, 2015), candidates should participate in processes of social construction of recognition mechanisms and tools, including competence repertoires and inventories. In particular, with specific reference to migrants, the possibility of having a voice and being involved, through their representative organisations, in the designing of recognition systems is essential, especially in order to valorise from a social standpoint a series of competences which otherwise would tend to remain hidden. We are dealing, in particular, with the competences acquired informally through the migratory experience. These competences can fruitfully undergo a process of registration, through the use of portfolios or other *ad hoc* tools, as we have seen above. However, in order for them to be formally recognized and translated into certifications appreciated by the labour market, their social acknowledgment is crucial. Migrants and their associations, if given the opportunity to express their claims, could have a strategic role in this direction, by practising their "capability for voice". Referring to the Senians' approach, this capability concerns the ability to express one's opinions and thoughts and to make them count in the course of public discussion (Bonvin & Farvaque, 2005). In our case, it implies the possibility to valorise migratory background and individual life-course together with the possibility of participating in the discussion concerning the definition of standards and referentials.

¹¹ According to the behavioral approach, it would be better to speak about "competency" (pl. "competencies"). We do not have the space here to deepen these differences and the related debate, that still remains wide open; in this regard see CEDEFOP (2006).

However, we need to take another step forward in our analysis. While there are reasons for promoting individuals' responsibility, migrants are not the only actual beneficiaries of the competences recognition. The involvement of different stakeholders (e.g. social partners, companies, employment services, institutions, training centres, vocational systems, besides migrants and their associations) is crucial for promoting the "culture of recognition" and the idea that recognising SKC wherever and however acquired is an advantage not only for migrant workers or job seekers, but also for the employers and the society as a whole, as the international recommendations on this issue underline (IOM, 2013; Werquin, 2010b). But, far from being limited to a formal, merely institutional dimension, the participation of all the stakeholders should imply the presence of an actual space of action and the possibility of an active contribution. The stakeholders' engagement can also have important consequences in terms of cost sharing. As the literature confirms, the expenses related to validation procedures represent the main factor discouraging authorities, companies, and public or private services from promoting them, so that the successful establishment of procedures represents only one side of the coin, the other is the capability to secure the sustainability of national validation systems (CEDEFOP, 2009). Being involved in the construction of the recognition systems, co-responsible of their functioning, aware of their importance for the whole society is the first step to understand that together with the benefits that they produce, their funding can be considered a form of investment. Unfortunately, beyond rhetoric, this awareness is far from being reached.

However, the empirical investigation has revealed some positive trends. In fact, where SKC validation systems are more advanced, also stakeholder's participation is better developed. The Dutch experience, for example, shows how the participation of social partners could be decisive. They play a key role by including the right to recognition of prior learning in many collective agreements, promoting employers' responsibility as regards the costs of recognition procedures, and requesting financial benefits both for employers and employees (Duvekot, 2010).

Moreover, where the attention to the positive occupational and economic effects of competences recognition is high, the engagement of companies particularly stands out as it is essential for employers to know and trust this system as an asset for their businesses: a lever for better meeting their own skill needs and allocating their own human resources. In more advanced cases, companies' involvement does not take place only through their participation in the validation process of the competence of a single

worker, but also through the active contribution of their representative organizations in the definition of recognition procedures and tools. When this happens, companies become “institutional actors” of the recognition process too, together with the other actors responsible for the development and implementation of the recognition system. Such experiences are still sporadic, but they mark the direction to follow.

All these issues considered, DIVERSE project’s attempt to build a multi-stakeholder (participated and transferable) audit scheme for assessing TCNs’ SKC (see footnote n. 8) appears particularly relevant. The great part of its “added value” is linked to the raising awareness it can promote among the different actors involved in the recognition system.

7. Conclusion: the paradigmatic value of migrants’ experience

According to DIVERSE’s premises and ambitions, the study realized within the project amply confirms that SKC recognition represents a significant lever to approach immigration in a smart and inclusive way [section 3], as it may produce many positive impacts, from both a concrete and a symbolic point of view, at individual, organizational and societal level. Evidences collected in the various countries involved in the study prove how this step gives migrants the opportunity to test and adjust their skills against labour market standards, to abandon marginal activities, to reduce the time needed to become established in the labour market, to speed up the path to qualified and socially-recognized employment; but also to protect workers during the periods of economic recession, and to help obtaining social coverage, especially for those workers employed in “invisible” sectors, such as domestic service. As far as the organizational performance is concerned, this lever improves the process of recruitment, permitting the employer to appreciate applicants’ qualities and to go beyond stereotypes and prejudices. Finally, at a societal level, it can reduce the degree of ethnicization of the labour market, and the related risks of social dumping; it contrasts the phenomenon of over-qualification; it improves the process of human capital development, by making it possible to access different types of learning opportunities; it enhances migrants’ contribution to the financial sustainability of the social security system; finally, it supports the process of internationalisation of European economy. Most broadly, this lever turns down the assumption that migrants, particularly if coming from non-EU countries, “must” work only in low-skill jobs, thus showing how they can offer a net gain to the European economy. Moreover, people who have succeeded in the process

improve their self-image and self-esteem with, presumably, positive consequences as regards their general attitude towards the hosting society. And this circumstance can envisage an emulative effect, that stimulates other migrants to accede the procedure. Actually, reflecting the processes of social construction of the migrant's role by both the receiving and the sending countries, migrants are often subjugated by aims of immediate gains and savings, and succumb to questionable migratory cultures whereby they are expected to "sacrifice" themselves for the well-being of the families left behind. And this inhibits the access to the procedure, beyond the "real" obstacles which they often have to face.

Mirroring the structural framework described above [section 2], our field research [sections 4-6] have confirmed, first of all, the persistence of *various form of discriminations "embedded" in the law*. The line distinguishing EU and non-EU citizens, together with a range of other lines exiting from the national laws, constitutes, as we have described, a major factor of discrimination and, at the same time, of under-evaluation of migrants' human capital. Nationality is another cause of discrimination: beyond the distinction between EU and non-EU nationals, the multiplication of bilateral agreements, while favouring migrants coming from the signatory countries, reinforces the disadvantage suffered by other migrants. Moreover, different systems of civic stratification decide about the opportunities open to various "types" of migrants, thus enlightening the feeble edge which separates inclusion and exclusion, that is the tension between the incorporation in the community of "equals", and the need to reaffirm the existence of "borders" in the access to rights and opportunities. Secondly, as it reflects *the (un)voluntary discriminatory functioning of the recognition systems*, the chance to accede and complete the procedure is influenced by other variables such as migratory seniority –the longer the permanence in a given country, the easier to dispose of the information, contacts and money needed to face the procedure– and the social status, which obviously affects the capacity to afford the costs of the procedure, considering that commonly there is no financial support from enterprises and institutions. At the same time, linguistic barriers have emerged as one of the main obstacles, together with other forms of *cultural discrimination*, less easy to identify, but which have a negative impact on the level of migrant-friendliness.

However, once again, the limited access to the procedure, together with the current situation of TCNs widespread deskilling, might also be considered an unintended and dysfunctional consequence of the way migration has been

predominantly approached. Not incidentally, despite the existence of some interesting innovative practices, often promoted by civil society's actors –which actually represent one of the most encouraging aspect emerged from the study–, in general terms, according to our theoretical premises, this issue continues to be marginal from the public agenda (with very few exceptions), and this goes hand in hand with the lack of awareness of the potential advantages of competences linked to a migratory background. And, just to cite another example about the negative impact of social expectations, our study denounces how the origin country strongly shapes employers' perception about the quality of educational credentials, considered that many TCNs come from those which are perceived as “low ranked countries”.

Two other crucial issues have emerged from the study.

Starting from the first one, the study has clearly demonstrated that, despite their ambitions of inclusiveness, the recognition process may produce a *filtering effect* between those who are able to get through the process and those who cannot. Paradoxically, it can turn itself into a “divisionary tool” and weaken the position in the labour market, whenever the individual profile does not match certain standards, defined from the top (MacKay *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, by focusing mainly on tools and methods –according to the contemporary technocratic ideology–, socio-cultural barriers tend to be neglected, resulting in a low level of “friendless” against those who are perceived as “diverse”. Therefore, this kind of system can even serve –according to the more sceptical views– wider power dynamics and special interests, excluding some groups of people. Actually, all along the tormented relationship between immigration and European society, migrants' condition has been disclosing ambivalences and *aporias* of the declared “universalism” on which our democracies purport to be based. And, as it emerges from an analysis of the relationship among immigration, work, welfare and citizenship (Zanfrini, 2010), in the present scenario migrants offer an emblematic example of the paradoxes generated by the application of the conditionality principle to the access to rights and opportunities, maybe anticipating a future in which citizens' prerogatives will be more and more strictly linked to an active role within the national economy. In this light, SKC recognition emerges as a critical mechanism in deciding who is “productive” and who is not.

The second crucial issue concerns the *level of qualification*: this is a central argument in the current debate about the “selective” (pay attention to the word) migration policies. Indeed, the level of education/qualification not only constitutes a key

variable determining the possibility of (legally) migrating –in Europe as in the “global North”–, but it also influences the chance of improving one’s position within the labour market through some kind of institutional support. The focus on the dequalification, or *brain waste*, issue paradoxically can contribute to obscuring the condition of less educated TCNs, often segregated in ethnicized niches of the labour market, with almost no chance of professional mobility, and sometimes openly discriminated by the legislation. Moreover, poorly educated migrants often suffer from a lack of awareness of their abilities and aptitudes, particularly those acquired in non-formal/informal contexts (and even more so those acquired thanks to their migratory experience): as they do not know their “talents”, they are not able to engage themselves in the process of recognition, if not specifically supported.

Evidently, these considerations do not concern migrants only; rather, TCNs represent a paradigmatic example betraying the inadequacies and shortfalls of the systems of recognition. Our initial assumption was that of considering the TCN as a sort of archetype of the citizen of the contemporary Europe, confronted with the challenge of gaining from the different kinds of SKC accumulated in both formal, informal and non-formal environments, but also challenging institutionalized systems of assessment designed in the past and increasingly distant from the new reality of global mobility. Focusing on the concept of “diversity”, as it is particularly embedded in TCNs’ life histories, our project solicits a rethinking of the process of assessment and recognition. Not only because citizens and workers are more and more “diverse”, and cannot be easily channelled towards the standardized procedures defined in accordance with the “presumed” mainstream society; but, also, because their singular –if not unique– SKC could reveal themselves an extraordinary and unexpected resource for the contemporary heterogeneous, global and changing economy. At last, the bet at stake is not how to “adjust” migrants’ profile to the professional needs defined according to standardised descriptions, thus rebirth the guest worker model’s ambitions, but how to allow the emergence of competences and abilities not already inventoried.

Finally, developing the systems of recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning, giving specific attention to migrants’ needs, can not only concur to recast the European approach to migration –asking migrants’ not merely “to adapt” themselves, but to provide their singular contribution to the common growth–, but also strongly improve our systems of recognition, with profitable outcomes on inclusiveness and economic competitiveness.

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