Workplaces as key transformative learning spaces for facing socioeconomic crisis in post-Soviet contexts: The case of Latvia

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About the study:
This study addresses the new workplace learning strategies used to face socioeconomic crisis in the Latvian post-Soviet context. After decades of strong centralisation - when employers and employees were not expected to take any initiative regarding their professional work, especially in the public sector - in the last 20 years, with the regaining of the independence of their country, they have been forced to do so in order to adapt to the changing and challenging economic situation. In Latvia, workplaces exist not simply in companies and public services, but equally across a wide range of organisational and social contexts, including in the third sector (non-profit-making non-governmental organisations, voluntary work, etc.) and in diverse forms of self-employment, which sometimes is carried out under irregular and precarious conditions. These contexts offer very different kinds of learning opportunities. Therefore, the "learning continuum" between formal, non-formal and informal learning is a key framework for understanding how opportunities for professional and personal development at work are distributed, structured, experienced and used nowadays in Latvia.

Methodology:
In this study an integrated mix-method was used, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The design used in this study was a sequential mix-design: the conclusions of the quantitative study, based on the analysis of the questionnaires with SPSS, were confronted with the answers to the open ended questions, searching for similarities within diversity. AQUAD software was used in the qualitative analysis.

For data collection a standardised questionnaire was used, which was jointly developed by ASEM-LLL Research Network 2 members. The aim of this questionnaire was to get a better idea of people's perceptions of workplace learning and the opportunities and restrictions one might experience when integrating learning in everyday working life. The information contained in the questionnaire referred to the following aspects: employee profile: gender, age, education, background, income; basic information about working situation, including type of workplace, period of employment, number of employees, correspondence between education/qualification and job, and an estimation of current work situation; information about workplace learning, including employee's opinion on workplace learning opportunities to learn new things at work, encouragement for the employee to learn at work; provision and take-up, including opportunities offered by the employer, employee's participation in education and training courses, work-related course required by the employer and chosen by the employee, relevant factors for their decision; and effects on people: own benefits, knowledge and skills, and quality of life.

Two different professions from the public sector were chosen: educators, and employees of information technology services. The first group was selected with consideration to the population of educators in different areas and using the official statistics taken from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia (2008/09). A total of 365 subjects acted as a representative sample of the higher education sector. The second sample was taken from the population related to information technology services using the statistics provided by the Central Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Latvia (2008/09). The number of subjects in this group was 122. The total number of participants in this sample was 487.

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