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## **Becoming validators and facilitators of Easy-to-Read texts: bridging the gap between training and profession**

### **Abstract**

*Though E2R has been gaining the interest of scholars in several fields and, recently, of institutions, we can observe the absence of standardized training programs for validators and facilitators of Easy-to-Read texts at a European level. To this purpose, the EU-funded Erasmus+ project Train2Validate attempts to provide a certified course for both facilitators and validators, by investigating the field and the professional background of the two professional figures. Thanks to surveys, interviews, examination of the literature and previous Intellectual Outputs, the consortium has been able to develop a set of skills for the two roles, creating for the first time structured curricula which hopefully will bring a radical change in the recognition of an already existing profession.*

**Keywords:** *Easy-to-Read language, Easy-to-Read, validators, facilitators, curricula, accessibility.*

### **1. Introduction**

This paper deals with competence-based curricula for validators and facilitators of Easy-to-Read (E2R) texts, in the framework of the EU-funded Erasmus+ project Train2Validate. In order to achieve a certified training for the professional development of the two roles, partners of the project have created two curricula. In short, «a curriculum is a document that outlines the contents to be taught to trainees to help them meet a given training objective and specifies how and when these contents are to be acquired and how their acquisition is to be assessed»<sup>1</sup>.

To fully explain the process and how the partners proceeded to get to the creation of the curricula, Section 2 will give a general overview of the project and of the Intellectual Output dedicated to the design of the curricula. In section 3, there is a brief analysis on the current status of training programs for validators and facilitators across Europe, followed by an overall summary of other significant European projects in the field of E2R. Afterwards, section 4 will present the curriculum design and the rationale of the T2V curricula, explaining how the partners categorized skills to be acquired, and the visual representation of the courses. Section 5 will shortly expose the training materials to be used for both training programs. Lastly, section 6 will introduce the credit system used to achieve a standardized certification.

### **2. The T2V project: Intellectual Output 3**

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-YtX1ULjEY> [last access 28 August 2022]

Before going into detail with the explanation of the curricula, it seems appropriate to give further information on the project and on the path followed by the partners to successfully create the curricula. Train2Validate (T2V), short name for the European project "Professional training for easy-to-read facilitators and validators"<sup>2</sup>, started in 2020 and «promotes the cooperation among organisations and the development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices at organisational, local, regional, national or European levels» (DEJICA – GARCÍA MUÑOZ – ŞIMON – FĂRCAŞIU – KILYENI 2022). In the attempt of bridging the gap of professionalization in the field of Easy-to-Read, the overall aim of T2V is to create new specific professional profiles, called validators and facilitators, with a certified training for the production of E2R materials (GARCÍA MUÑOZ 2022). This was done to face «a lack of specialised literature and a common framework» (GARCÍA MUÑOZ 2022: 16) at a European level, which will be investigated in section 3.

Since the professional profiles envisaged by the T2V project are experienced experts with a certified training for the production of E2R materials, the project called attention to the necessity of defining the skills to be learned and the related methods and materials to teach these skills (DEJICA – GARCÍA MUÑOZ – ŞIMON – FĂRCAŞIU – KILYENI 2022). In particular, we need to bear in mind that validators are people with reading and learning difficulties assessing the readability and legibility of the texts, as well as «immigrants with low skills in the language of the host country, people with dyslexia, elderly, low literacy adults or deaf people» (GARCÍA MUÑOZ 2022: 14). Their work is coordinated by facilitators.

To reach the goal, the work has been equally distributed amongst the seven partners, according to their area of expertise, and divided into specific Intellectual Outputs (IOs). The IO dealing with the creation of vocational and academic curricula for validators and facilitators is IO3<sup>3</sup>, *Curricula for validators and facilitators of Easy-to-Read texts*, coordinated by SSML – Scuola Superiore per Mediatori Linguistici Pisa. The results achieved during this IO have been presented during Train2Validate's Multiplier Event 3, held in Pisa on April 7th, 2022.

In order to develop the curricula, partners took into account previous projects, the data collected during IO1<sup>4</sup> and IO2<sup>5</sup>, the best practices and the limited literature in the field, with the overall aim of producing «educational content and activities that resonate with the targeted students and pick them up in terms of prior knowledge, skills, and competences» (BERNABÉ CARO – CAVALLO 2022: 16).

### 3. Current training programs and other projects

As mentioned, there is a lack of sources in literature concerning validation and facilitation in E2R

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/project/> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/result-3-the-curriculum-that-facilitator-and-validators-should-study/> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>4</sup> The results of IO1, Common methodological framework and best practices in validation across Europe, are available here: <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/result-1-the-current-training-of-facilitators-and-validators/> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>5</sup> The results of IO2, The skills that facilitators and validators need, are available here: <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/result-2-the-skills-that-facilitators-and-validators-need/> [last access 28 August 2022]

(DEJICA – GARCÍA MUÑOZ – ŞIMON – FĂRCAŞIU – KILYENI 2022), confirmed also by the lack of research in other countries, as for instance Italy (BLEVE – EUGENI – SCIUMBATA 2022). Moreover, this lack derives from the scarce presence of training programs for professional validators and facilitators in several European countries, as for instance in Spain (GARCÍA MUÑOZ - BERNABÉ CARO 2022: 56), Italy (BLEVE – EUGENI – SCIUMBATA 2022: 113) and Germany (BERNABÉ CARO – CAVALLO 2022: 101), as well as it has an impact on the lack of E2R materials for public use in countries such as Slovenia (KNAPP 2022: 132). The status of training programs in T2V partners’ countries are widely discussed in a recent publication<sup>6</sup>, where the debate focuses both on current situations in each country and at a European level. As a matter of fact, the results obtained are considered as «representative for the status of training programs for validators and facilitators in Europe» (DEJICA – ŞIMON – FĂRCAŞIU – KILYENI 2022: 149).

The preliminary results and evidence were gathered through IO1 and were essential to develop the curricula. In particular, IO1 consisted in the dissemination of a survey, «to understand more about the status and needs of E2R validators and facilitators across Europe» (DEJICA – ŞIMON – FĂRCAŞIU – KILYENI 2022: 21). The survey consisted of 5 sections (Demographic profile, General education and training, Education and training in E2R, Current activity and Skills). Amongst the data collected, one of the most relevant concerns the level of knowledge and skills related to E2R contents: «65.9% of the 337 people who answered reported having received some training related to E2R» (DEJICA – ŞIMON – FĂRCAŞIU – KILYENI 2022: 141). Even so, data don’t suggest the presence of a standardized training for validators and facilitators across Europe. This statement is supported by the fact that, when asked: “Have you received/used any handbooks for training?”, «the majority of the persons (96 of 176 persons) stated that they had not received or used any handbooks for training» (DEJICA – ŞIMON – FĂRCAŞIU – KILYENI 2022: 142).

Despite this general lack of standardized training and research, several projects prior to T2V served as point of departure. For instance, two leading projects in the E2R field are the European projects Pathways I<sup>7</sup> and II<sup>8</sup>. Pathways I attempted at promoting the professional integration of people with chronic diseases and Pathways II aimed at creating learning programs for people with intellectual disabilities. They underlined the needs of documents written in E2R following guidelines elaborated during these projects, such as “Information for all: European standards for making information easy to read and understand”<sup>9</sup> and “Do not write for us without us”<sup>10</sup>. Another project worth of mention at a European level is the EASIT project<sup>11</sup>, whose main goal was making information easy to understand.

To summarize, the information on the status of validators and facilitators across Europe and earlier projects, as well as the competences identified in skills cards and the Pedagogical and Metho-

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<sup>6</sup> See: [https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/04/CoMe\\_Status-E2R.pdf](https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/04/CoMe_Status-E2R.pdf) [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.pathwaysproject.eu/> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/pathways-2/> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read-standards-guidelines/> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://sid-inico.usal.es/idocs/F8/FDO23139/write\\_for\\_us.pdf](https://sid-inico.usal.es/idocs/F8/FDO23139/write_for_us.pdf) [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://pagines.uab.cat/easit/en> [last access 28 August 2022]

dological Curriculum which will be explained in the next sections, functioned as a starting point for the creation of the curricula.

#### 4. The curriculum design

The T2V curricula for the training of validators and facilitators of E2R texts are based on the Pedagogical and Methodological Curriculum (see section 4.1) proposed by SAFAR (1992) and adapted to audiovisual translation by HAMAOU (2015). It is divided into 3 areas: Aims and Objectives, Tools and Teaching, Assessment. Furthermore, the curricula are designed according to the FAME criteria (see section 4.3). The main feature of these curricula is represented by its structure, which is divided into modules. This modular content structure allows for its use at universities and for inhouse training by procurers and associations. In the next sections, we will analyse its structure as well as the rationale of the T2V curricula.

##### 4.1 The Pedagogical and Methodological Curriculum (PMC)

In addition to adopting resolutions to make higher education systems uniform at a European level, the Bologna process has shaped a different approach to vocational and academic training, focusing on competences to be mastered and acquired by students<sup>12</sup>. Nonetheless, competences and skills per se are insufficient for trainees and students to become professionals. There are other key factors to be considered, that are set into a wider scenario<sup>13</sup>. As a matter of fact, it is important for professionals to better understand their role in relation to the society; also, they should learn to use the acquired skills accordingly, as they have to acknowledge the general context they're working in. On the premise that «there is no unique and right way to translate a standard text into an E2R text» (PEREGO 2020: 235), validating E2R texts implies that simply following the guidelines is not enough, whether they are provided by Inclusion Europe<sup>14</sup> or by single countries. Aspects such as the knowledge of the target audience and its heterogeneity (SCIUMBATA 2021), or the knowledge of text types, influence the work of both validators and facilitators. It is in fact a big challenge to deal with several text types, as stated by BLEVE, EUGENI and SCIUMBATA (2022): «because text types are many, and the number of experts in the field is still limited, a heterogeneous group of validators is needed to be able and validate all types of texts from as many perspectives as possible». Moreover, this is not the only challenge faced by future validators and facilitators. E2R is part of the broader concept of accessibility and contributes to many fields (BLEVE – EUGENI – SCIUMBATA 2022). Notwithstanding, while it is still «not yet established as an access service, or an academic course, its production and training is fractionated, having gained the interests of linguists, socio-linguists,

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<sup>12</sup> Further information can be found at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/bologna-process> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>13</sup> See: [https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/01/IO3\\_Report\\_final-ACC-V3.pdf](https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/01/IO3_Report_final-ACC-V3.pdf) [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>14</sup> Inclusion Europe is the European Association of Societies of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families. Further information can be found at: <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read/> [last access 28 August 2022]

translators, persons with disability, associations, social workers, and even typeface designers» (BERNABÉ CARO – ORERO 2019).

In the attempt to create competence-based curricula for validators and facilitators, SAFAR (1992) and HAMAOUÍ’s proposals (2015) for the training of university students to audiovisual translation laid the groundwork for IO3. Despite the fact that the theoretical framework proposed by SAFAR and HAMAOUÍ applies to audiovisual texts, and that the training (both academic and vocational) for validators and facilitators proposed by T2V applies to any type of texts, the Pedagogical and Methodological Curriculum (PMC) presented by the two has proven to be effective in other projects related to accessibility, as for instance the EU-funded Erasmus+ project Live Text Access (LTA)<sup>15</sup>. They based their work on the proposal made by D’HAINAUT, a Belgian pedagogue, in 1975 and elaborated the PMC to structure a curriculum on 3 levels, further subdivided into 14 subcategories.

## 4.2 Rationale of T2V curricula

The T2V curricula’s structure matches the PMC’s one. Following is a list explaining levels and subcategories, and a short explanation for each subcategory<sup>16</sup>:

### - Aims and objectives

a. *“Defining and analysing educational policy”*. The teaching has to fit in the societal framework, to avoid teaching pathways that are useless or inadequate in the professional world. The European Certification and Qualification Association (ECQA<sup>17</sup>) scheme helped partners creating the design of the trainings for facilitators and validators, aligning them with the vocational and academic training in the EU. Since the learning structure follows standardized procedures, it can be transferred to educational institutions or educational programmes.

b. *“Implementing aims and objectives”*. Trainees need to know in advance what they will learn during the course and what their role in the professional world will be. In order to analyse the bigger picture, the curricula will include specific contents to explain the profiles, the connection between both in the professional development of E2R, and how to acquire entrepreneurial skills.

c. *“Understanding trainees background”*. It is important that trainees do not undergo training that they don’t need and that trainers are aware of the special characteristics of the future validators. As mentioned above, people with reading difficulties that can apply for the role of validators constitute a very heterogenous group. For this reason, their training will include complementary ma-

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<sup>15</sup> <https://ltaproject.eu/> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>16</sup> The full curricula’s structure can be found in the Report of IO3 at: [https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/01/IO3\\_Report\\_final-ACC-V3.pdf](https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/01/IO3_Report_final-ACC-V3.pdf) [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>17</sup> <https://jobcertification.eu/> [last access 28 August 2022]

terials. Trainers will have to adapt methodology and materials for the special needs of the trainees.

d. *"Determining and analysing contents"*. Contents are selected according to a progressive principle, which is determined by the number of Learning Outcomes to be acquired. As stated before, the development of these curricula is based on skills cards, which are useful to learn competences to better adapt in the professional world.

e. *"Processing Learning Outcomes"*. This phase will allow for determining if a goal has been met or not and how much. In short, outcomes will be assessed following a modular competence-based structure and assessing achievement of Learning Outcomes (acquired knowledge, competence and skills) and professionalism.

### **- Teaching methods and tools**

a. *"Determining resources and limits"*. This is a concrete step which will make clear how the course will be held and by whom. The training will include digital resources, so as to support both self-study and face-to-face teaching. Resources will be provided to trainees through the Learning Outcomes, which will determine the duration during the course and the ECTS/ECVET (see section 6) according to the time needed to complete the Learning Outcome itself.

b. *"Tools and methods"*. This part concentrates on which tools trainees should work with in order to meet the goals set, with the resources available and the identified limits. Trainees will be provided with digital resources, specifically videos with an explanation of the main contents, factsheets with a summary of the main contents and task-sheets with exercises. Other resources as extra readings will be included. As accessibility is a key factor in both profiles for the successful end of the training, contents uploaded on an online platform will be made available (subtitles, transcriptions of the videos, accessible PowerPoint presentations, factsheets, and task-sheets in an accessible Word and/or PDF-format).

c. *"Teaching conditions"*. Trainers need to implement the tools available according to students. Advice to adapt the methodology and tools for trainees with special needs will be included in the trainers' guide. In order to do so, trainers will need experience with specific software and accessibility guidelines.

d. *"Learning conditions"*. Trainers need to determine the learning conditions to better target training. While facilitator trainees can be trained on their own through digital devices, the recommendation to better target training for validators is that they attend face-to-face, so that they can be supported by trainers in real time. This recommendation shows the need for trainers to have experience in teaching groups with comprehension difficulties.

e. *"Determining feasibility of tasks"*. Feasibility depends on background, previous Learning Outcomes and resources available. Every Unit will be propaedeutic to the following, so that there is a

connection between all the elements of the training.

f. *"Creation and implementation of missing tools"*. This subcategory explains how to cope with potential lack of resources. The training of validators will be tested with people with reading difficulties in four stages: the platform, the resources, the training methodology and the evaluation.

#### **- Evaluation methods and tools**

a. *"Designing assessment plan"*. An assessment system will be designed making sure that each LO acquired fits the overall structure of the course. The overall assessment plan proposed consists of:

- > Pre-assessment: it consists of an evaluation or self-evaluation of prerequisites necessary to attend the training (soft skills, general knowledge, basic computer skills, the capacity to adapt to changing contexts and text types, and empathy);
- > Peri-assessment: it consists of a standard formative assessment after every Unit with open questions for facilitators, and true or false questions for validators. In order to prepare trainees, it will also involve a simulate post-assessment.
- > Post-assessment: it consists of the standard final assessment with open questions for facilitators, and true or false questions for validators. It must be as similar as possible to the one simulated during the peri-assessment.

b. *"Selection and creation of assessment tools"*. Ideas for objective assessment will be provided in line with the market of job.

c. *"Implementation of assessment methods and tools"*. Tools will be tested on a focus group before starting the course.

#### **4.3 The FAME criteria**

The two T2V curricula for the training of validators and facilitators of E2R texts has been designed according to the FAME criteria (EUGENI – GERBECKS – BERNABÉ 2021), having already proven effective in LTA project. The FAME criteria for an effective 30 ECTS/ECVET curriculum for the training of facilitators and validators of E2R texts are:

- **Feasibility and Flexibility:** a progressive curriculum will encourage trainees to pursue the training, letting them build their skills step by step.
- **Adaptability:** an assessment system including a pre-assessment (prior to training), peri-assessments (after each Unit), and a post-assessment (after all Units) will allow teaching and learning

to adapt.

- **Modularity:** the curriculum structure will be divided into Units and subsequently into Learning Outcomes, containing elements and resources to learn a given skill.
- **Effectiveness:** the T2V curricula will be designed to fit the needs of the job market, thus bridging an existing gap in training. To do so, the ECQA certification will allow both materials and trainees to effectively match the market needs, by explicitly mentioning the skills acquired.

#### 4.4 Visual representation of T2V curricula

T2V curricula will be structured into Units, Elements and Learning Outcomes and they draw on skills cards created in IO2 (GARCÍA MUÑOZ – HORTAL RUBIO – GONZÁLEZ SABÍN 2021)<sup>18</sup>. They are visually represented by Figures 1 and 2, which picture the two courses as trains, using the official colors of each T2V partner. Each coach of the train stands for a Unit, while the locomotive stands for the certification which will be given at the end of the training



Figure 1. Curricula for facilitators

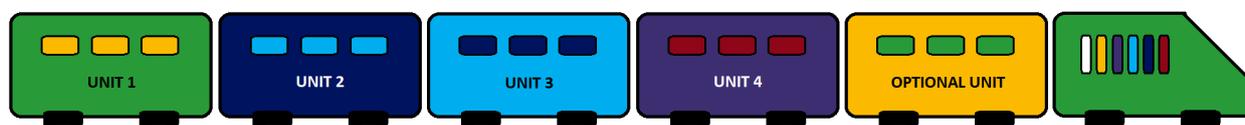


Figure 2. Curricula for validators

There are 4 Units in the curriculum for facilitators and 5 in the one for validators.

The Units for facilitators are explained in the “SKILLS CARD FOR EASY-TO-READ FACILITATORS”<sup>19</sup>. They are: Accessibility and end-users; Easy-to-Read methodology; Easy-to-read facilita-

<sup>18</sup> See: [https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/01/IO2\\_Report\\_final-ACC-final.pdf](https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/01/IO2_Report_final-ACC-final.pdf) [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>19</sup> See: <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/01/Annex-1-Units-Elements-LOs-for-facilitators.pdf> [last access 28 August 2022]

tion; Management skills.

The Units for validators are explained in the "SKILLS CARD FOR EASY-TO-READ VALIDATORS"<sup>20</sup>. These Units are very similar to the facilitator ones, but they are adapted for people with reading and learning difficulties: Accessibility and end-users; Easy-to-Read methodology; Easy-to-Read validation; Management skills; Optional Unit. The Optional Unit, which is only included in the validators' curriculum, will contain extra skills as it deals with secondary non-essential skills, like text analysis, advanced computer skills and entrepreneurial skills.

The certification given by these curricula is promoted not only by the compliance with ECQA standards, but also by the opportunity of undergoing a certification process.

## 5. The training materials

To every Unit, for both validators and facilitators, there is a correspondent Learning Outcome. The language chosen for the training materials will be English for facilitators; instead, E2R English and the languages of the consortium partners will be used to draft the training materials for validators.

The choice of training materials will depend on their role in the different implementation pathways identified:

- *Class-work material*: it will be material used "in class" (face-to-face or for self-study) to acquire competences and skills required for each LO. The course will provide at least: an explanatory introduction outlining the structure of the Unit; a description of Learning Outcomes for each Element; a subtitled video lecture in English for facilitators, a text in E2R English for validators, and a classwork complying with the number of hours needed to achieve it for each LO; a reading list containing references and bibliography of sources used in training materials.
- *Self-study material*: it refers to materials to be used by every trainee outside classes (it may refer to exercises, academic papers, websites, or interviews).
- *Accompanying material*: it comprises every kind of material created during the project (such as subtitles or transcripts of video lectures).
- *Suggested readings*: these are further reading suggested to improve trainees' knowledge of related topics.
- *Tasks*: to substantiate the assessment system (pre-assessment, peri-assessment, and post-assessment), there will be material used for pre-tests, peri-test, and post-tests. Post-tests could be used as models for the certification.

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<sup>20</sup> See: <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/01/Annex-2-Units-Elements-LOs-for-validators.pdf> [last access 28 August 2022]

## 6. Academic and vocational credits

To estimate the number of credits and hours for each Unit, Element and Learning Outcome, the consortium used the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)<sup>21</sup> and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)<sup>22</sup>. According to ECQA, a course should bestow a total of 30 credits, both in the academic field (ECTS) and in the field of vocational education and training (ECVET). These credits coincide with a total amount of 750 training hours, divided into 270 class hours and 480 independent self-study hours.

Every Unit corresponds to a certain number of credits. Given the difference between the various skills to be acquired, the most reasonable solution was analysing skills and Units and attributing them credits according to their complexity, after consulting a group of E2R validators and facilitators and asking them their opinion. This allowed to develop a precise workload of hours.

## 7. Conclusions

Due to different circumstances, such as «the lack of a social and professional recognition of the professions producing E2R texts» (BLEVE – EUGENI – SCIUMBATA 2022: 117) in Italy, or the lack of an official recognition of E2R as a career in Spain (GARCÍA MUÑOZ - BERNABÉ CARO 2022: 78), among others, and despite a general interest in an official training and in E2R, there is no standardized training across Europe to become a certified validator or facilitator. However, gathering information about previous projects and best practices, and examining the existing limited literature in the field, the consortium has been able to outline a set of skills that will enable future trainees to become certified experts. The creation of two distinct competence-based curricula, in line with the ECQA standards, will allow for a professional development thanks to a training course that responds the current market requirements and end-users needs. The idea is to increase validators and facilitators' recognition across countries and institutions once the project is complete (GARCÍA MUÑOZ 2022), by providing an institutionalized course and high-quality training materials. In addition to giving social recognition to the professional roles and, more in general, to the field of E2R, these curricula could also be applied to other educational contexts or further projects, as they are based on the Pedagogical and Methodological Curriculum.

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<sup>21</sup> See: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system> [last access 28 August 2022]

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/european-credit-system-vocational-education-and-training-ecvet> [last access 28 August 2022]

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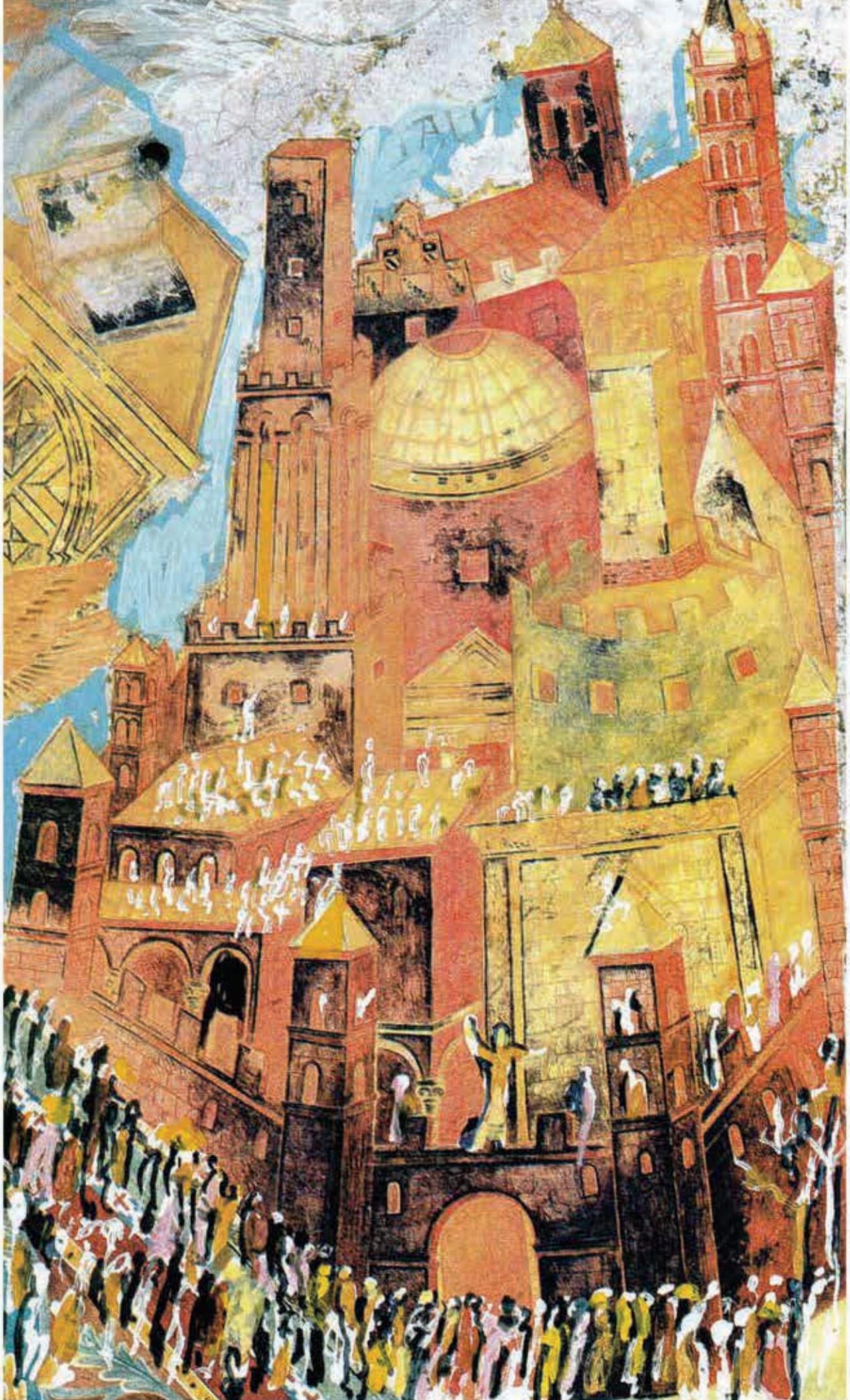
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