



AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences

Report 1 for Austria



Authors: Charlotte Strümpel, Margit Grilz-Wolf, Wolfgang Kellner

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I Introduction

The « AVE in a professional perspective » project is meant to identify, evaluate and validate skills and qualifications acquired through informal learning within volunteer activities for a professional purpose. Volunteers share their time, professional expertise and contacts. Non profit organisations generally have a better chance of attracting volunteers if they make volunteers aware of the a variety of social and professional experiences that volunteers can gather in their organisations in return for their support.

Identifying and evaluating the skills and qualifications acquired through volunteering in associations can be a viable way to recognise and validate this informal learning. This is especially relevant for young people who have had no professional experience and who volunteer as one of their first experiences in an organised (quasi) work setting outside of school as well as for those who have been away from the labour market and would like to take up paid work (parents who have raised their children, long-term unemployed people). Voluntary experience is an alternative way to experiment, develop or renew specific skills and qualifications in a specific context, with both professional and non-professional staff, with the goal to include and serve the general interest.

These thoughts constitute the background of the AVE-project, which in cooperation with partners in several European countries and under the co-ordination of IRIV, France aims to examine which projects and good practice on recognising and certifying voluntary experience exists in each countries and develop a tool that can be used by organisations in different European countries to enable volunteers to make use of competencies and skills gained in volunteering.

A first step of the project consists in giving an overview of voluntary work in each of the countries and looking at how this issue is dealt with in each country. This first report is meant to present basic information relevant to the themes in the respective countries.

The project partners in Austria are the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research and the Verband Österreichischer Volksbildungswerke. These are both organisations that have been working on the theme of recognising and assessing competencies and skills gained in volunteering for several years and among the first in Austria to deal with

the subject. They both bring in expertise from several years of work and projects in this field and several years of successful cooperation with each other.

The following report will give an overview on the issue of terms and definitions of volunteering in Austria and some of the main cornerstones of the few surveys there have been on this theme in Austria. Also, it will highlight the structure of associations, the meaning of volunteering in Austrian (especially rural) life as well as the specific political dimension of non-profit organisations and volunteering in Austria. Finally, this report will show which projects have been carried out concerning the assessment of informal qualifications in volunteering and other areas of life (other than paid work) as well as giving some examples of non profit organisations that have voiced their interest in the project.

II. Survey results, national structure and legal framework

II.1. Definition and Terms

In the International Year of Volunteers (2001) the Austrian government established different working groups to promote the discussion on the situation of volunteer work in Austria. The working group “Basic questions of volunteer work and quality” defined volunteer work as follows (www.freiwilligenweb.at/pages/umsetz/arbeitskreise/ak1_uak1.html):

- being voluntary
- involving no remuneration
- having a certain duration and/or regularity
- not being for one’s own good or for that of one’s own family
- taking place in the context of an organisation

This definition is based on aspects considered in Austrian as well as international studies on volunteering, whereas the last point "taking place in the context of an organisation" is handled very differently in different studies.

For example the most important study on “The Volume of Volunteer Work in Austria” (Badelt/Hollerweger, 2001: 2) – that is described in more detail below – uses the aspects of voluntarily participating in the activity, not being for one's own good or for that of one's own family, but includes all forms of informal voluntary engagement in the community. In its results, the study distinguishes between the two types of volunteering: volunteering within an organisation (formal volunteering) and supporting and helping neighbours and people in the community (informal work).

A specific Austrian dilemma is the term used most commonly for volunteering until now. This is "Ehrenamt", which means "honorary function (office)". While honorary functions such as participating in managing committees in associations are traditionally one of the important pillars of volunteering in Austria, there are more and more activities that do not fit into this perception. In the past few years there has been a discussion and a search for other terms that reflect the English term volunteering better, such as “voluntary engagement” (freiwilliges

Engagement), “volunteer work” (Freiwilligenarbeit), “voluntary social commitment” (freiwilliges soziales Engagement). They are all used synonymously with the Term “honorary function (office)” (Ehrenamt), which is still commonly used in the field. Terms reflecting more the civil society aspect and that of social and community influence such as “Bürgerschaftliches Engagement” (“civil engagement”) that has become popular in Germany have not been firmly established in Austria.

II.2. Results of surveys

Austria is a small country with a population of app. 8 million inhabitants. It is divided into nine federal states that have quite different regional and geographic characteristics as well as distinctive federal policies concerning most policy areas.

What types of surveys are there? Research on volunteering has been and is being carried out at the University of Economics (Prof. Badelt), the University of Linz (Prof. Zapotocky), the University of Graz (Dr. Heimgartner) and at the European Centre. There is also a small independent institute that does research on donations and fundraising (“Spendeninstitute”). Apart from that there is a working group on “civil society” that carries out seminars and lectures regularly in this area.

Although the topic volunteering has been coming more important in public debate in the past few years in Austria, there have been very few surveys dealing with the issue. The most comprehensive work has been done by Christoph Badelt from the University of Business and Economics in Vienna, who carried out a study on Austrian’s volunteer activities (in organisations as well as informal activities) in 1982 (Badelt, 1985 and a study in 2000 (Badelt/Hollerweger, 2001), which also compares trends in voluntary activities in those years. Apart from that an Austrian market research institute (FESSEL-GfK, 1998) carried out a survey on volunteering and civil society in 1998 for the Christian Democratic party. This focused mainly on volunteer as well as general activities within organisations and partly used questions from the “EURO-VOL”-study (Gaskin/Smith, 1995). Otherwise there have been studies carried out in single Provinces (Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg and Vorarlberg) that were usually connected with “years” (campaigns) to promote volunteering in these provinces (Badelt, Hollerweger, Bachstein, 1999; Strümpel/Pleschberger/Riedel, 1999; Zapotocky/Pirklbauer, 1997; Zapotocky/Kranewitter/Wagneder). Finally, there have been studies carried out on certain themes, such as volunteering of older people in a certain region

of Vienna (Reinprecht, 1999b), female volunteers in religious organisations (Bauer, Gubitzer, Winkler, 2001), how volunteers contacting a local volunteer centre make their decisions to volunteer with an organisation (Brückner-Diesner/Kolland/Oberbauer, 2003) as well as specific studies on volunteering in certain organisations (e.g. Strümpel/Pleschberger, 1999a).

How many people volunteer? The most pertinent result of the newest comprehensive survey (Badelt/Hollerweger, 2001) is that 51,1% of the Austrian population over 15 years of age volunteer in some way. This large percentage comes about because it includes not only volunteering within organisations, but also all types of informal volunteering. However, the percentage of volunteers has decreased over time: in 1982 (Badelt, 1985) 58,9% percent of the population volunteered.

How long? On average volunteers are active for 5,07 hours a week (Range 0 to 88). In social services the weekly average of volunteer activities is 4,49 hours a week, in sports 2,88 hours a week and in the area of education it is 2,07 hours a week.

How much is this in all? Badelt and Hollerweger (2001) calculate a total volume of 16,7 million hours of volunteering a week in Austria. If this voluntary activity would be paid with 7,20 Euro an hour, this would make up a sum of 6.3 Billion Euros a year.

Who volunteers? The difference between *women's and men's* volunteering has decreased over the years: in 2001 55% of all volunteers were men and 47,2% were women, while 64,8% of all volunteers were men in 1982. While there seems to be the trend that women and men both volunteer, there are large differences in the areas that they are engaged in. In the social services, there are more female (61,5%) than male (38,5%) volunteers as well as in church related activities (72% women, 28% men). In areas like nature conservation and environmental activities twice as many men volunteer (64,7% men, 42,2% women), as well as in sports (73,1% men, 26,9% women) and volunteer ambulance and fire fighting services (81,7% men, 26,9% women). In the areas of education, culture and informal help in the community, both women and men are roughly active to an equal measure (Badelt/Hollerweger, 2001).

Concerning *age*, the highest percentage of volunteers is found in the group of 20 to 24 year olds. After that there is also a high percentage of volunteers between the ages of 30-49. While the percentage of volunteers in each age group ranges between 53,5 and 61,6%, the age group of those of 60 years old presents an exception: Here only 36,5% percent of those interviewed

in this age group volunteer. There has been a substantial decrease of volunteers in this age group compared to the year 1982 (50% of those interviewed in this age group volunteered at the time).

Table 1: Percentage of volunteers according to age (2000)

Age group	Interviewed persons					
	Volunteers		Non-volunteers		Sum	
	absolute	in %	abs.	in %	abs.	in %
▪ under 19 Years	87	54,0%	74	46,0%	161	100%
▪ 20-24 Years	101	61,6%	63	38,4%	164	100%
▪ 25-29 Years	104	53,1%	92	46,9%	196	100%
▪ 30-39 Years	191	57,5%	141	42,5%	332	100%
▪ 40-49 Years	164	56,7%	125	43,3%	289	100%
▪ 50-59 Years	139	53,5%	121	46,5%	260	100%
▪ ab 60 Years	176	36,5%	306	63,5%	482	100%
Total	962	51,1%	922	48,9%	1884	100%

From : Badelt/Hollerweger, 2001, Annexe: Table A13: 31

A new focus on groups of volunteers in Austria is looking at *migrants' volunteering* (Grilz-Wolf, 2003). However, not much is known about this issue, at this stage. There are a variety of associations by and for migrants in Austria. Reliable information exists on migrants' associations in Vienna. Here there are 500 migrants' associations, in particular those of migrants from Turkey and Ex-Yugoslavia (Sohler/Waldrauch, 2003). One third of these organizations aims to integrate migrants in to the community that they live in (Sohler/Waldrauch, 2003). On the average eight persons work in these associations as volunteers, 44% are women. The rate of youth and older volunteers is only 12%.

Table 2: Integration and educational work in migrants' associations in Vienna

Integration in general	21%
Promoting contacts to the native population	9%
Gaining knowledge on Austrian culture	4%
Gaining other knowledge about Austria	9%
German language courses for adults	9%
German language courses for children and youth	4%
Other education activities for adults (Computer course, job orientation courses, ...)	12%
Other educational activities for children and youth (Learning aid, ...)	5%

From: Sohler/Waldrauch, 2003: 168

While contacting organizations that potentially work with and for migrants, it became clear that the perspective of migrants' themselves volunteering is quite unknown and new for many of our contact persons. These first contacts already made clear that volunteer work of migrants is a new way at looking at things in Austria.

A few good practice examples of associations that involve migrants' volunteering were found that focus on general education; culture, leisure activities and socializing; social care and political participation.

The organizations of migrants are usually located in Austria's bigger cities and paid employees' work together with volunteers in different projects. The general target is to integrate migrants in the social system of Austria. They are very often financed by special projects that have no basic financing (Grilz-Wolf, 2003).

In which areas are volunteers active? According this study, the area with the most volunteers is informal help in the community/neighbourhood (23,5%). The next most frequented areas of volunteering in Austria are social services as well as culture and entertainment. After that church related activities, sports as well as educational activities are the most popular. The amount of informal volunteering in the community has decreased since 1982 (from 38,5% in 1982 to 23,5% in 2000), whereas the rate of volunteering within the social services has increased (from 16,8% in 1982 to 25,3% in 2000). 60% of all volunteers volunteer in the framework of at least one organisation. Most of this formal volunteering occurs in one of the

100.000 associations that exist in Austria. There are associations in the area of sports (21.662), culture (13.023) and a wide variety of other areas (Kellner, 2001).

Table 3: Percentage of volunteers according to areas (2000)

Areas of volunteering	Number of Interviews (n=1884*)			
	Volunteers		Do not volunteer in this area	
	absolute	in %	absolute	in %
▪ Social Services	317	16,8%	1567	83,2%
▪ Education	127	6,7%	1757	93,3%
▪ Culture	282	15,0%	1602	85,0%
▪ Environmental, nature conservation activities	94	5,0%	1790	95,0%
▪ Sports	156	8,3%	1728	91,7%
▪ Voluntary ambulance and fire fighting services	81	4,3%	1803	95,7%
▪ Church-related activities	181	9,6%	1703	90,4%
▪ Politics and interest representation	109	5,7%	1775	94,2%
▪ Informal support in the community (neighbourhood)	443	23,5%	1441	76,5%

From : Badelt/Hollerweger, 2001, Annexe: Table A7: 28

Why do Austrians volunteer? (Motivation) The above mentioned study of the market research institute Fessel-GfK (1998) asked volunteers for their motives for volunteering. 39% of the volunteers mentioned, that they wanted to contribute to their community, while 35% aimed to have contact with others and meet people. 23% of the volunteers interviewed, engage in their activities, because they would like to help people and 19% do this due to their religious beliefs, while 18% would like to contribute to political and social change (Fessel-GfK, 1998).

When asked which benefits are gained from volunteering 46% refer to the personal joy they get out of their activities, while 32% report they help people and win friends. 26% say that they gain experience and 23% mention seeing concrete results of their work. For older people finding contacts and working towards their personal beliefs is more important, while young people are more interested in learning new things, gaining experience as well as seeing

concrete results of their activities (Fessel-GfK, 1998). The Study by Badelt/Hollerweger (2001) identifies several related clusters of motives: volunteering as a personal gain, volunteering as a contribution for other people and the community, volunteering as a political instrument and volunteering to support and promote a person's professional career. In a study on older volunteers in a region of Vienna, the motive to have contact with others is quite strong (55%) as well as to help disadvantaged people (42%) (Reinprecht, 1999b).

Which potential for volunteering is there? In the Fessel-study, when asked why they were not active, 20% of those who were non-active mentioned that they were never asked. 29% said that they were non-active for no special reason and 19% said it was due to the fact that they were not a social person. 24% are in principle willing to volunteer (Fessel-GfK, 1998).

In the Viennese study on older volunteers, 22% of those who are not active would be willing to become active, 30% state that they might volunteer at a later stage and 31% state that they will volunteer under no circumstances (Reinprecht, 1999b).

II.3. Political dimension: The role of associations, non-profit-organisations and businesses for volunteering in Austria

Until now, volunteering has been an issue that was dealt with in the framework of the organisations or umbrella organisations within which volunteers work. Until recently there were *no volunteer centres on national, provincial or local levels*. Volunteer bureaux on a local level are starting to be developed (e.g. Freiwilligenzentrale der Volkshilfe Steiermark, Freiwilligenzentrum Innsbruck). They are usually connected to one of the larger social service organizations.

However, there is a long tradition of voluntary activities in many different areas in Austria. There is a substantial amount of activity in organisations as well as informally. As mentioned above, 51% of all Austrians are engaged in some type of volunteering (formal and informal). 75% of all Austrians are members of associations and organizations.

Especially in rural areas the activities of associations („*Vereine*“) are very important for life in the community. There are many different types of associations in all areas (culture, sports, social services etc.). For example in the province of Lower Austria (Population 1.5 million) there are 17.325 „*Vereine*“ (that is about one for 100 inhabitants). Many of them are run only

by volunteers (in Lower Austria 85% of smaller associations). In all of Austria (population 8 mill.) there are app. 100.000 associations (Strümpel/Pleschberger/ Riedel, 1998).

The local level is very important for volunteering in Austria. Here networking and promoting volunteering mostly happens at an informal level. Associations play an important role in the life of the communities. Very often the mayor of a town or village has functions in several organisations. Sometimes associations can use rooms and infrastructure of the community council or of the local school. Sometimes communities also provide funding for associations.

Approximately 200.000 people are employed by non-profit organisations in Austria. 52% of these are in the social sector, 20% in the area of education and research and 10% in the area of health. Funding varies depending on size and area of activity. Income sources are membership dues, donations and sponsorship, public subsidies and income from own activities and services. Also, depending on size and activity, the quantitative relationship between volunteers and paid staff varies greatly. In some cases, associations are only run by volunteers, in other cases paid staff work for a committee, which is made up of volunteers (Bachstein, 1997).

Most large NPOs are organized federally. There is usually a national umbrella organisation and nine provincial organisations, whereby the actual decision-making usually takes place on provincial level. Most of these organisations in addition are also organized on regional and local level. Some of these regional and local organisations are registered as associations in their own right.

An Austrian specificity is that many associations and non-profit organisations are closely linked to the two large political parties (Christian Democratic Party and Social Democratic Party). The historical reason for this is that after the Second World War the democratic system in Austria made a systematic effort to build up an equal number and quality of organisations for all political parties. This applied to providers of social services, senior and youth organisations as well as sports organisations. This "political split" in all walks of life still exists, but has weakened over the years. Also, more organisations have developed that have links to the Freedom Party as well the Green Party. Apart from that a large amount of volunteering takes place in organisations affiliated to the (mostly catholic) church. Also, there are many volunteers in political parties and trade unions themselves.

Despite the large extent of volunteering, a public debate on the changed conditions of volunteering and on developing a public policy on volunteering have just begun in the last few years. Recently the ÖVP (Christian democratic party) has started a debate on civil society that entails a growing interest in volunteering. The Social Democrats in Austria have until now, had a negative view on volunteering and mainly stress that it poses a threat to paid jobs. This is quite in contrast to the fact that a great deal of Social Democratic organizations, such as political parties, trade unions, but also seniors', youth and social organizations involve volunteers. Lately – due to this fact and the growing importance of the issue in European policy – there has been a slow process of reflection on this theme going on within the Social Democratic Party.

Until now in Austria businesses and companies have played almost no role in promoting volunteering, at least not at an official level. However, there has been an emerging culture of social sponsoring on one hand. On the other hand companies have traditionally been very involved in associative life at the local level. Many local businesses fund the associations' festivities and there are many business people involved in different functions in associations. However, this involvement is usually seen as a private issue. There is hardly any awareness for questions of corporate social responsibility or for the possibility of systematically promoting volunteering. Recently – also in connection with the growing governmental initiatives on volunteering - there have been several efforts to promote corporate social responsibility. A network on employer community involvement was founded (LINK-Austria) and non profit organisations are actively seeking more opportunities for cooperation with companies.

II.4. Legal framework

There is no law on volunteering as such in Austria. Volunteers do not have a legal status. However, there are several laws that touch on volunteering in different contexts.

In connection with volunteering in the framework of fire fighting and rescue services there are specific laws on national and (in some provinces) on provincial level (e.g. „Niederösterreichisches Landesfeuerwehrgesetz“, „Sanitätargesetz“).

The most important law in connection with volunteering and associations is the Associations Act („Vereinsgesetz“), which regulates the operation of associations with respect to their structure, tasks, taxability etc. The Department for Internal Affairs (Innenministerium) is

responsible for all issues concerning associations. The administrative body concerned with associations is also called “Vereinspolizei” ("associations' police").

The Associations Act (“Vereinsgesetz”) was revised after a long public debate, also involving associations, volunteers and governmental bodies in 2001, the International Year of Volunteers. For a long time there was the general feeling, that this Act was not based on current developments, but that many of its elements were still based on the first such act, that was passed in 1867. The revised Act aimed at simplifying things for the voluntary functionaries, by reducing bureaucratic procedures, reducing costs and by enabling a modern management of the associations. The law regulates e.g. how to found an association, which bodies an association has to have and how the funding and financial management should be processed. One important aspect is that of the functionaries' liability for the associations' funds: until now the problem was, that a voluntary functionary was personally liable for the associations' funds. This has been changed to reduce personal risks for the voluntary functionaries. Also, the law includes a passage on offering less bureaucracy and more service and consultancy by the public bodies responsible for associations (“associations police”).

National funding for associations and non-profit organizations is provided by the departments pertaining to the area of work (e.g. culture, environment, social affairs etc.). There are no funding programmes specifically geared towards volunteering, except for specific commissions by the Ministry for Social Security and Generations.

According to the national law regulating employment (§1152 „Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch“ and § 6, Abs. 1 „Angestelltengesetz“) it is not whether somebody earns money or not which distinguishes an employee („Arbeitnehmer“) from a non-employee, but whether the person is „personally dependent“ on the organization. Criteria for „personal dependency“ are the mandatory character of the work, the type of control over the employee etc.

Prerequisite for somebody being an employee is a contract, which can be written or oral (Runggaldier/Drs, 1999).

Also, in the work laws no difference is made between payment in money or in kind (food, apartment, use of vehicles). That means, those persons who do not earn money but only receive payments in kind are to be treated the same as those who earn money. In this context volunteers are those who receive neither monetary nor other payments. Since the majority of volunteers in Austria does not have a contract and is not „personally dependent“ on the

organization, the work laws do not apply to them. However, some laws like those regulating employment of foreigners („Ausländerbeschäftigungsgesetz“) are also relevant for people who are „quasi-employees“ („arbeitnehmerähnliche Personen“). It is not quite clear under which circumstances volunteers belong to this group (Runggaldier/Drs, 1999).

Volunteers are not subject to mandatory social insurance according to the Social Insurance Laws („Allgemeines Sozialversicherungsgesetz“). Thus, in their role as volunteers, they do not receive health or pension insurance. However, if they receive some sort of regular remuneration, they might be subject to social insurance (Runggaldier/Drs, 1999).

II.5. Recent governmental initiatives in volunteering

The active support and promotion of volunteering has slowly developed in Austria in the past few years and has culminated in the activities connected to the UN-Year of Volunteers in 2001 and its follow-up which is still being pursued actively. In the International Year of Volunteers 2001 the Austrian Federal Government aimed to raise awareness for the importance of the volunteer work for the social system in Austria. It involved public agencies (federal and provincial) and many non-profit organisations and associations to think about and implement improved conditions for volunteering.

The organisations (non-profit organisations as well as governmental representatives on different levels), represented in the “Austrian National Committee” for the International Year of Volunteers 2001, produced together a “Volunteers Manifesto”. They have identified common concerns for the promotion of volunteer commitment in Austria on the basis of the results of eight task forces (working groups) set up by the “Austrian National Committee”, that met several times in 2001 (Bundesministerium für soziale Sicherheit und Generationen, 2002a; Bundesministerium für soziale Sicherheit und Generationen, 2002b):

- Volunteering requires recognition: e.g. a constitutional recognition of volunteerism
- Volunteering requires training
- Volunteering requires a legal basis: e.g. an assignment of competency for general issues of volunteer commitment in the Federal Ministries Act and a federal law for the support of volunteerism

- Volunteering requires cooperation: e.g. an inclusion of experts from volunteer organisations in the further development of the laws' governing associations
- Volunteering requires platforms
- Volunteering requires support: e.g. a general accident and liability insurance for volunteers
- Volunteering requires publicity

To implement these demands, the Ministry of Social Security and Generations installed the “Austrian Counsel of Volunteer Work” in 2003 to represent the interest of volunteers and volunteer organizations and to advise the Austrian government on these issues. The “Austrian Counsel of Volunteer Work” has 46 members representing different institutions (members of federal states and provinces, NGOs, ...) and have already commenced their group. There are also several working groups that have the aim to develop and implement specific measures (also as the "volunteer pass" described below) (see: www.freiwilligenweb.at/ministerratsbeschluss.html, 16.07.2003).

Also, in the last few years the Ministry of Security and Generations has built up organisations to support volunteering in eight of nine provinces, called “Citizens Bureaux for Younger and Older People” (“Bürgerbüros für Jung und Alt”). The aims of these offices are to support the organizations' volunteer work and to promote the importance of volunteer work in Austria. They are platforms for older and younger people to become involved in a wide range of volunteer activities and are loosely based on the concept of the German "Seniorenbüros".

III. Examples of assessing voluntary experience

Formal learning and training programmes for volunteers has been very popular in a variety of non-profit organisations and associations in Austria in the past years. Most (large) organisations make an effort and are quite proud to offer their volunteers opportunities for training courses and to present them with a formal certificate stating which skills they have acquired (see also below).

However, there is no national training institution focusing on volunteering and no research organisation dedicated only to volunteering research as yet in Austria. Training in the area of volunteering is mainly offered by non-profit organisations or umbrella organisations themselves. Some training is offered by adult education organisations (e.g. Volkshochschule, Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung) or by academies linked to provincial governments (e.g. Niederösterreichische Landesakademie). The “Vereinsakademie” (academy for associations), that is affiliated to the ÖVP (Christian Democratic Party) was founded in 1996 and offers seminars, training courses and information for people working with and in associations. The “Volkshochschule” has been offering a course in the management of associations since 2000. The NPO-Institute, which is affiliated to the University of Economics in Vienna offers seminars and lectures for representatives of NPOs on a variety of subjects.

Parallel to the enhancement of formal training opportunities in this field here have been several efforts and projects dealing with assessing and raising awareness for skills and qualifications gained in informal learning processes in the past few years. While only a few are geared at volunteering specifically (the first 5 examples described in the following), there are also projects that have a more general focus on informally gained competencies, the include volunteering as one area of many in which skills and qualifications are won (last four examples). The following section will give a short description of these examples according to their background, aims, methods used and results achieved (if applicable).

III.1. Projects on certifying voluntary experience and other forms of informal learning

Project: Volunteering as criteria in job applications in public service

Background: One of the first studies dealing with recognition and certification of volunteering and its relevance for job applications and development was commissioned by the Austrian Social Ministry and carried out by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in 1998. The idea was to have an explorative study looking at whether volunteering is recognized as a criteria for job applications in civil service and whether those responsible for personnel policies in this area would find it useful to consider looking at competencies gained in volunteering when recruiting employees in the future (Strümpel/Pleschberger, 1999b; Strümpel/Pleschberger, 2000).

Aims: The aims of the study were to elicit common practice in job applications in the civil service and to examine the relevance of volunteering in these processes. Also, the study aimed to collect the views of those responsible for personnel decisions in civil service. Apart from that the goal was to look at common practice in non-profit-organisations on certifying their volunteers' activities. The study was to give a first overview on these issues and pave the way for further developments in this area in Austria.

Methods: 23 expert interviews with those responsible for personnel policies in different Austrian ministries were carried out as well as 12 interviews with experts in non-profit-organisations who were responsible for volunteers on a policy level. Finally, a feedback seminar with some of the interviewed experts was done to present project results and develop joint recommendations.

Results: One of the main results of the study were that voluntary activities have not been considered on a systematic level in job application in civil service until now, but that depending on the individuals' responsible for the respective application process, some have considered volunteers' activities on an informal level. Suggestions for recognizing volunteering as a criteria in future procedures pertained to mentioning volunteer experience in job advertisements, encouraging volunteers to state these in their application papers and CV's, or to considering them systematically in job interviews. None of the non-profit organizations interviewed at the time had a systematic policy of giving volunteers certificates for their activities. However, a number of organizations mentioned that they gave volunteers written reports if they asked for them and many organizations already offered certificates for formal

training courses their volunteers took part in. The interviews showed that there was a starting awareness for these issues in non-profit- organizations that have developed further until now.

Volunteer pass (Freiwilligenpass) and certificate of competencies (Kompetenznachweis)

Background: In the framework of the above mentioned working groups in the International Year of Volunteering, in 2001, one working group dealt specifically with the recognition of voluntary activities. One of the concrete recommendations of this working group was to implement a “certificate of competencies” which documents the volunteers’ competencies earned during his/her activities and has a larger format (A4, several pages) as well as a “volunteer pass” which documents the volunteers’ activities in a small booklet (A5). These will be made available to all organisations involving volunteers. A study was commissioned to find out which preferences organisations and volunteers have towards such a method of certification (www.freiwilligenweb.at).

Aims: The aims of implementing such a certificate of volunteers’ activities is to offer an instrument to assist volunteers in their professional activities, to offer official recognition of volunteer work and to increase people’s motivation to volunteer.

Methods: A qualitative study was carried out to prepare the development of such a certificate. A certificate, that has been developed using examples from Switzerland, will be available shortly and will be tested in several Non Profit Organisations. After that the certificate will be adapted before being made available to all Austrian organisations that involve volunteers.

Outcomes: The certificate is not available yet, so no tangible results can be reported. Results of the study are to include six types of information in the certificate: basic data, description of tasks, description of the volunteers’ working style, soft skills/social competencies, technical and organisational competencies as well as official certificates from formal training and further education. The certificate will be filled out by the organisations and include an official stamp or logo of the Austrian government.

Projects: Verband Österreichischer Volksbildungswerke (VÖVBW)

Background: The Austrian Volksbildungswerke is a national umbrella organization for voluntary work in the field of adult education (founded in 1954). Volksbildungswerke's volunteers manage about 1000 local educational organizations (especially in rural areas) and more than 2000 local cultural associations. In eight of the nine federal states of Austria there is a centre of the Volksbildungswerke with full time employees for supporting and counselling the volunteers. In sum the Volksbildungswerke work with about 6000 volunteers and with about 60 full-time employees.

Themes of the Volksbildungswerke educational and cultural work are among others: communal and regional development, active citizenship and political education, health education and wellness, promoting creativity, European Union (globalisation, cross-border contacts), family/partnership/education/personality, vocational training and key skills, information and communication technology.

Methods used in the educational and cultural work of the Volksbildungswerke are: lectures, educational days/educational weeks (especially in villages), courses, workshops, practical training, excursions, guided tours, village crossing (a project group for communal development walks through the village assessing e.g. the cultural and environmental conditions), exhibitions, concerts, readings, theatre performances, theatre festivals, consulting and planning for educational and cultural activities.

The Volksbildungswerke has been one of the first voluntary organizations to deal with the question of informal learning in volunteering, the assessment of these experiences and possible consequences of paid work in a systematic way. They have been working with tools and methods to assess voluntary experience for over seven years. The following projects have been carried out: (1) EU-Socrates Project "Identifying and Evaluating Informal Learning" (1997 -2000) ,(2) Pilot Project "Competence Portfolio for Volunteers in Lower Austria " (since 2001), (3) European Socialfonds-Project "Competence Development in Voluntary Work" (since 2003).

VÖVBW-Project 1: Socrates Project "Identifying and Evaluating Informal Learning"

(1997 -2000)

Background: The idea of the Socrates-Project "Voluntary Commitment and Adult Learning: Identifying and Evaluating Informal Learning" (official title: "Active Citizenship and Community Adult Education: Interfaces of Informal and Formal Learning Processes") which was carried out from September 1997 – September 2000, was the development of methods to identify and to evaluate processes of informal learning in the field of voluntary work by reflecting the contradictions between competence development and active citizenship. The target groups were umbrella organizations in the field of volunteering and institutions for adult education, especially the volunteers themselves (Brandstetter/Kellner, 2000; Brandstetter/Keller, 2001).

Partners: (1) Coordination, Austria: Verband Österr. Volksbildungswerke, Wien; (2) Germany: Zentrum für Arbeit- und Organisationsforschung, Beratung und Bildung, Leipzig (ZAROF), Centre for research into work and organizations consultancy and education, (3) Italy: Agape Centro Ecumenico, Turin, An ecumenical conference and education centre belonging to the Protestant Waldensian Church; (4) Great Britain: Selfhelp Nottingham, Self Help Groups Nottingham: umbrella organization for about 260 self-help groups Information, Support, Development; (5) Netherlands: ODYSSEE – Maatschappelijke: Among other aspects continuing education and research in the voluntary sector; (6) Hungary: Magyar Művelődési Intézet (Hungarian Cultural Institute), Budapest, umbrella organisation for about 2600 local cultural centres.

Aims: The two phases of the project had following aims: (1) The main focus of the project's first phase was an investigation into informal learning processes within the voluntary sector. (2) The project's second phase was concentrated on forms of recognition and evaluation that pertain to informal learning and informally acquired competences. The main focus of this phase was the development of guidelines and a brief outline of a practical competence evaluation model.

Methods: The primary methodological question was: "How does one go about recognising and describing informal learning processes?" One might simply pose the direct question "What have you learned from performing volunteer work?" - or even ask individuals to fill out a standardised questionnaire. However, here the Socrates-project found that what is

required is a process of self-reflection, of remembering, expounding, providing examples etc. for which qualitative methods of social science prove to be particularly well suited. Their application led us to the following procedure: (1) Performing narrative, biographic interviews and moderated group discussions; (2) Evaluating interviews in multiple steps; (3) Discussing the project results with interviewees, within their own organizational environment and in the course of workshops and conferences.

Outcomes: Project outcomes of phase I were: insights into the voluntary sectors in six countries (the diversity of learning processes, diversity of working styles, changing motives), a scheme of types of learning (esp. informal learning) in the field of volunteering, a method to identify processes of informal learning, a report under the title "Voluntary Commitment, Learning and Democracy" and a project-website.

Project outcomes of phase 2 were guidelines and a brief outline for a practical competence evaluation model (competence portfolio for volunteers) and a report under the title: "Voluntary Commitment and Adult Learning: Identifying and Evaluating Informal Learning."

It was also found that the investigation and identification of informal learning processes using narrative, biographical interviews is in itself an important learning process, and that the volunteers interviewed (as well as those conducting the interviews) experienced the process as a very productive and enjoyable one.

Building on the mutual findings (the diversity of learning processes, diversity of working styles, changing motives) and experience gained with respect to methodology (the utility and positive acceptance of biographical interviews), the Socrates project set out to establish guidelines for evaluating competence acquirement within the volunteer sector. Ultimately, the goal was to outline a practical evaluation model based on these guidelines. A particular challenge in this regard was the task of defining the appropriate terminology with respect to competencies. In addition, a significant methodological challenge presented itself with respect to translating learning experience in to acquired competencies. On an "ideological" level, the challenge that presented itself was the intrusion of categories otherwise associated with professional education and personal development into the volunteer sector: So the guidelines express the much discussed ambivalence encountered during the course of the project toward volunteer evaluation schemes or, alternatively, the opportunities and risks of market and professionally oriented intervention within the volunteer sector.

Within the process there was a big change from the intended main emphases "active citizenship" to the non-intended main emphasis "employability".

The following four conclusions from the first phase of the Socrates-Project are deemed to be of central importance for establishing the outline the evaluation model: (1) The field of voluntary work contains a multitude of diverse and intensive learning processes; (2) For the most part, volunteers (and their umbrella organisation) are not consciously aware of the diversity and comprehensive nature of these learning processes; (3) Facilitating the recognition of these learning processes through qualitative interviews (narratives, in-depth biographical interviews) represents a separate learning process; (4) Most of the volunteers found the interviews to be surprisingly enlightening, very exciting and also very entertaining (and that goes for the interviewers as well).

VÖVBW-Project 2: "Competence Portfolio for Volunteers in Lower Austria " **(since 2001)**

Background: After having finished the Socrates-Project, ÖVBW was looking for an Austrian partner to develop and to test the competence portfolio for volunteers - according to the results of the Socrates-Project. ÖVBW found a partner in the Austrian Federal State Lower Austria: "Service Freiwillige", an official service organization for all volunteers in Lower Austria. In Lower Austria the best developed official service system for volunteers in Austria is established (by the Organization for Communal and Urban Development in Lower Austria).

Target groups in the pilot project were volunteers from the whole voluntary sector in Lower Austria (not only volunteers from Volksbildungswerke like in the Socrates-project) (Kellner, 2001; Kellner 2002; Kellner, 2004).

Partners: (1) The main partner was "Service Freiwillige", the official service organisation for volunteers in Lower Austria, (2) The Chamber of Commerce of Lower Austria, (3) umbrella organizations of the voluntary sector in Lower Austria (in the field of social work, sports, culture, health etc.)

Aims: (1) Developing a setting for a competence-portfolio process for volunteers - according to the results of the Socrates-Project (especially: portfolio-process as an accompanied self-assessment); (2) Developing the structure and the design of the portfolio; (3) Testing the instrument in a pilot phase in Lower Austria; (4) Preparing a public relations campaign for the

implementation of the portfolio (events, folders etc.); (5) Developing and testing a course for portfolio-facilitators in order to have a certain amount of people who are certified portfolio-facilitator and who can implement this procedure in organizations.

Methods: Workshops with social partners and representatives of voluntary organisations in Lower Austria were carried out. The workshops encompassed: a comparison between different forms of competence assessment (pure self assessment, pure other party assessment, accompanied self-assessment, combination self and other-party assessment) and discussions about the needs of volunteers, voluntary organisations and enterprises. Apart from that the instrument "portfolio" was developed and tested. The course "portfolio facilitating" has just started.

Outcomes: Outcomes of the process so far are: A setting for the portfolio-process, which is comprised of an interview on personal competences, an accompanied self-assessment of the results of the interview and the filling out the portfolio by the volunteer alone. On the basis of the portfolio, ÖVBW provides - optionally - a competence description for applications (referring to the needs of the expected jobs) - also as an accompanied process. The project also developed questionnaires and an interview-aid guideline for the portfolio-interviewer and made first steps to compile a system of competence categories for the field of voluntary work.

The design and structure of the portfolio were developed. The current structure of the portfolio, which contains on four or five pages: (1) The personal data: name, date of birth, occupation, field of voluntary work, function in the voluntary organization, extent and frequency of voluntary work; (2) A biographical overview as a table: education, trainings, waged work, voluntary work, hobbies etc.; (3) A short portrait of the volunteer's work (motives, key-events, expectations, problems, plans etc. - at most one page), (4) a personal competence-profile and (5) an action plan (for voluntary work and employment) with strategies and time-plan.

The portfolio process consists of the biographical/narrative competence-interview (about 2 hours) and an accompanied self-assessment afterwards. Some days after the interview the portfolio-facilitator makes a pre-evaluation of the interview and sends it to the portfolio applicant per e-mail (or post). With this material and with his own pre-evaluation (using checklists and questionnaires) the applicant makes his portfolio, discussing the process with the facilitator by mail and telephone. Sometimes there is a second meeting with the facilitator

to finish the portfolio. Optionally, they make a competence description for applications on the labour market. This is an evaluation of the finished portfolio referring to the needs of the expected job.

Most of the volunteers found the portfolio-process surprisingly enlightening and exciting.

Some unexpected results: More volunteers used the portfolio for orientation in voluntary work than for labour market purposes. The number of volunteers that wanted to participate in the portfolio process was less than expected. Reasons might be that the theme is very new and unknown, that there are prejudices against linking the voluntary sector with the labour market or that our advertising was not adequate for the target groups.

VÖVBW-Project 3: The European Socialfonds (ESF)-Project - "Competence Development In Voluntary Work" (October 2003 - September 2005)

Background: The ESF-Project is a great step in the process of developing and implementing methodologies and systems for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in the voluntary sector. For this project it was also necessary, that the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture decided that assessing of voluntary experience is an important field for the future.

Partners: Partners are umbrella organizations for voluntary work in the following seven federal states: Vienna, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Tyrol, Styria und Burgenland. They all are working in the fields of adult education and cultural work, but they will provide competence-portfolios and competence workshops for the whole voluntary sector in their area.

Aims: Developing and establishing "Centres for Competence Development in Voluntary Work" in six umbrella organizations for voluntary work in seven federal states of Austria. The centres should offer: (1) providing competence portfolios for volunteers in all fields of volunteering in seven Austrian federal states, (2) providing competence workshops for volunteers (for orientation for further voluntary work, for making competence-portfolios in group processes), (3) organising events for information and publicity for competence development in voluntary work, (4) offering recruiting and training for portfolio facilitators

Methods: Until now a project group with representatives of all partners has been constituted. Workshops for compiling competence portfolios also in groups will be developed and tested.

Finally a public relations campaign for the competence portfolio for volunteers will be prepared.

Outcomes (as of March 2004): There has been a successful start of the training for portfolio-facilitators with a course consisting of 4 modules. To get a certification for portfolio-facilitating every applicant must also make an own competence-portfolio and compile at least five test portfolios as a portfolio facilitator. At the beginning of April the first competence workshops will start in Vienna, Salzburg and Styria.

Kompetenzbilanz Tirol (Balance of competencies)

Background: The “balance of competencies” developed by the Zukunftszentrum Tirol (Centre for the future, Tyrol), is based on the knowledge of the rapidly changing situation in international business and in the world of employment. The idea is to give individuals a tool to facilitate the more frequently occurring changes and developments in their life cycles. The tool should help people use the knowledge and competencies that they have acquired in an optimal fashion. The project is seen as a reaction to international developments which give growing importance to flexibility and recognizing competencies gained in all walks of life and not only those in formal education (www.zukunftszentrum.at).

Aims: Aims of the “balance of competencies” are to support life long learning and allow participants to develop trust in their own competence, to look at the interdependence of work and education as well as of business development and personal initiative as well as offering educational opportunities to become aware of one’s own skills and knowledge and to implement the consequences of this in practice. It should also allow businesses to improve their assessment of the potentials and possibilities of their job applicants and employees. Finally, it is seen as an instrument to help with placing job seekers in the right job and to give systematic advice on further education.

Methods: The “balance of competencies” consists of several steps that take approximately three weeks in all. In the first step there is an introductory meeting about the contents, aims and benefits of the “balance of competencies” as well as a first reflection of participants’ biographies. In a second step participants are asked to compile a profile of their life including their family background, school and vocational education as well as work and leisure. In the third step – a first consultation with a personal coach – an awareness for individual learning experiences is gained with respect to different situations’ in one’s life cycle. In a fourth step

participants write a Curriculum Vitae, in which they present themselves with formal reports, certificates and with the results of their informally gained competencies. In the fifth step – a second interview with a personal coach – participants answer questions on their own self-perception, on others' perception of themselves and about their future perspectives and aspirations. The last step consists in the third interview with the personal coach on the next steps and aims for the future. The result of the process is a written balance of competencies from the “Centre for the Future, Tyrol”.

Outcomes: The project has been taken up very well. More than 1000 participants have voiced their interest in the project and 500 „balance of competencies“ have been compiled since the beginning of 2003, when the project started. Participants report that they have become aware of their knowledge, skills, competencies and potentials, that they have found out how much they have learned through non-professional activities such as work within the family or volunteering or that they have discovered they had knowledge and skills, that they did not even know about. Some participants report that the process of the “balance of competences” has helped them find new professional perspectives and has given them the courage to embark on career leaps.

Making competencies visible (Kompetenz! Sichtbar machen)

Background: The Volkshochschule Linz (Training Centre for Adult Education in Linz) has developed a methodology to assess and certify social and communicative competencies, which have been acquired informally (www.linz.at/vhs). This methodology was developed in the framework of a Socrates-project with partners from Germany, Finland, Hungary, UK, Switzerland and Italy.

This project, like many that are being carried out in German-speaking areas is based on the “Swiss Qualification Book” which seems to have a model character in this area. Switzerland seems to have a leading role concerning certifying informal competencies for German speaking countries. Within Switzerland, these impulses have come from the French-speaking part of the country, that have taken up recent developments in France. This is relevant information for our project, as it will be interesting to see how projects in France relate to the examples mentioned here.

Aims: The project aims to help people in all phases of vocational orientation to assess and certify their competencies that they have acquired informally. This pertains to competencies

acquired e.g. through volunteering, work within the family or in other contexts. Target groups are people seeking a new job, women returning to the labour market, older workers or unemployed people. Participants have the chance to assess their potentials and further education needs, to document their informally acquired knowledge and to assess their competencies in a holistic way.

Methods: The assessment of competencies has three steps:

The first step consists of a so-called “Portfolio-analysis”. Here participants work on a self-assessment procedure in four workshops, with a duration of three hours each. In between the workshops, participants are asked to engage in individual research work and biography analysis. The second step consists of the participation in a one-day assessment centre, within a certain standardized setting and the evaluation through external experts. Finally, participants receive a certificate, which contains the assessed competencies as well as detailed results of the portfolio-analysis and the assessment centre.

Outcomes: Through this process, participants are expected to strengthen their self-confidence, to have contributed to their personal development and to profit from experiences within the group they have been working with. It is expected that using the certificate in job applications etc. will enhance the participants' chances on the labour market. Since this offer is relatively new, concrete outcomes on the labour market are not known yet. However, there has been a large amount of positive feedback by the participants.

Qualibox

Background: The QUALI-Box is an instrument for self-assessment, which consists of six modules. It was developed by the Institute BIFO (Vocational and educational information centre, Vorarlberg) in the Austrian province of Vorarlberg within the project “Developing a book for documenting qualifications with an implementation programme”. This project was financed by the European Social Fund and by the Austrian Social Ministry. It was meant to contribute to the idea that “life-long learning” can be implemented in a practical way for each individual. The QUALI-box is also based on the above mentioned “Swiss Qualification book” (CH-Q) and was developed together with the Swiss project team that developed this book. The individual modules of the working book QUALI-box were developed by working groups consisting of different experts. The modules were then tested and developed further (www.bifo.at).

Aims: The QUALI-Box offers those using it an awareness of knowledge and competencies they have already acquired, to find out what their individual strengths are and to take a step back from their every day life and reflect about their (vocational) past and future. The QUALI-box can help planning one's further professional career, planning further educational activities or to prepare for job applications. It can also be used as supporting material for career counselling and for career planning within organisations.

Methods: The QUALI-box consists of four modules, which are meant to be filled out by the participants in a self-organised fashion and at their own pace. Each module takes about two hours to fill out. Module 1 deals with the individuals' personal development until the present. Module 2 examines the individual's personal learning experiences, while Module 3 looks at experiences in formal education such as school and further education programmes. In Module 4 the participant has the opportunity to reflect on knowledge and competencies gained in paid work and Module 5 puts its focus on competencies gained in the family, leisure time and volunteer work. It gives participants the opportunity to list all the types of activities in these areas that they engage in, to reflect on which kind of qualifications they have gained in these activities and to think about how they can use these qualifications in a vocational context. The sixth Module allows participants to summarize the results from the first five modules and to reflect the consequences of these results with respect to their future life course and career development. Finally, to help participants reflect their qualifications, there is a detailed list of qualifications, that can be gained through different vocational and non-vocational activities

Outcomes: Outcomes of using these tools are detailed self-reflection, a clear view of personal competencies and concrete help for planning one's future professional life-course. The BIFO (Vocational and educational information centre Vorarlberg) also offers advice and counselling for people who would like to use the QUALI-box or have already filled out the QUALI-box and need external support to implement the results.

Project „Women, Associations, Responsibility, Engagement (FARE_Femmes, Associations, Responsabilités, Engagement)

Background: The project FARE is being carried out by partners in France (French Information and Documentation Centre for Women and Family (CNIDFF), National Conservatory of Arts and Trades (CNAM), Spain, the Czech Republic and Austria (Network of Austrian Counselling Services for Girls and Women). The partners are all networks that

coordinate associations in which mostly women have the key functions in the managing committees. The idea is to support women that are in the managing committees of associations and to recognize the competencies that these women acquire within these functions. The project is being carried out from October 2003 until October 2005 in the framework of the European Commission's GRUNDTVIG-programme.

Aims: The project aims to find out what motivates women to take over managing functions in the committees of associations, to sensitise women to be able to take up responsible positions in society, to establish a handbook for women in managing committees of associations and to sensitise women engaging in volunteering how to assess and value the competencies they acquire through volunteering. In this project the focus is not only on the professional utility of voluntary work, but also on the utility for women's participation in politics. This means the project is looking at the usefulness of volunteering for gaining competencies in professional as well as political settings.

Methods: Within the project, a qualitative study will be carried out using individual and group interviews with women in managing positions in associations' committee. Questions will concern, motives, acquired competencies and their recognition, barriers for women to take up responsible positions in society and suggestions for solutions to overcome these barriers. Developing a handbook for women in associations' managing committees will also be a task of this project. Finally, there will be a comparative study of official recognition of competencies that are acquired through the work as voluntary members' of associations' managing committees.

Outcomes: There are no tangible outcomes as yet, as the project was only started a few months ago.

III.2. Organisations interested in the project¹

As mentioned above, organisations involving volunteers have become more aware of the necessity to recognize, assess and certify the competencies and knowledge their volunteers gain in the course of their voluntary work. Many organisations have some sort of assessment of their volunteers' competencies or offer written reports if asked. What is more common is giving volunteers certificates for formal training they have engaged in. However, few organisations in Austria have dealt with these issues in such a comprehensive and systematic way, as this has been the case for the Verband Österreichischer Bildungswerke. Our first contacts to organisations have shown that they are very interested in this issue and also interested in the AVE-project.

Catholic Women's Movement

The Catholic Women's Movement, an organisation that offers many possibilities for women to volunteer within the catholic church, has been dealing with the issue of volunteering for many years. It launched a discussion in the framework of a conference in 1995 (Artner, Klein, Riedel, Strümpel, 1997) on changing traditions in volunteering and what this meant for their volunteers. One of the results of this conference was that the Catholic Women's Movement decided to print calendars, in which their volunteers could document the number of hours they have worked in order to raise awareness among themselves and among the public for the amount and type of work done. This was done from 1999 to 2002. However, due to budgetary constraints, a low rate of use of the calendars and controversial discussions ("Why should I write my activities down, I like doing them..."), this provision has ceased to exist. However, the chair person of the Catholic Women's Movement is very interested in pursuing the issue of recognition and assessment of volunteering more intensively in the future and mentioned a vivid interest in the AVE-project.

¹ The information in this section is based on phone calls in the first two weeks of March, 2004 with the following persons: Maria Beate Eder, Chairperson of the Austrian Catholic Women's Movement; Erika Delarich, Volunteer Coordinator of the Caritas Vienna; Nikolaus Kubiczek, Chairperson of the Austrian Scouts; Christian Halbwachs, Assistant of the Office of the Austrian Sports Umbrella Association and Erika Hintermayr, responsible for personnell matters in the Austrian Red Cross.

Caritas Austria

The Caritas Austria is one of the largest providers of social services in Austria with a wide variety of offers and is linked to the Catholic Church. It has a long tradition of working with volunteers and has been seeking to improve the volunteers' situation within their organisation for many years. For instance, there is a volunteer coordinator in the Caritas Vienna that deals with the improvement of a framework for volunteers. Within the Caritas there is a formalized certificate that volunteers received including personal information, the description of the voluntary activity, the duration of the volunteers' activity and the amount of time invested. The Viennese volunteer coordinator also voiced her interest in the AVE-project.

Austrian Scouts (Pfadfinder)

The Austrian Scouts offer a variety of activities for children and youths after school. They have a large amount of youth volunteers that plan and lead different activities and groups of children. They also offer a course for all young volunteers that have a managing function in their organisation. Those completing the course receive a certificate including the topics taught in the seminar and the competencies acquired. Informal learning through the volunteers' activities is not certified in a systematic fashion, but written reports are given on demand. The Austrian Scouts are also interested in developing this issue, as the vocational and professional dimension is especially relevant for young volunteers.

Austrian Sports Association

The Austrian Sports Association is the umbrella organisation of all sports organisations in Austria. It represents a large number of associations that rely mainly on volunteers. The organisation has been very active in the working group on recognition in the framework of the International Year of Volunteers, 2001. An assistant of the office of this organisation is also participating in a current working group, initiated by the social ministry on recognition and certification. The different member organisations of the umbrella organisations have very different practices concerning the assessment and certification of their volunteers' activities. However, the umbrella organisation is interested in developing a systematic procedure and in the further proceedings in the framework of the AVE-project.

Austrian Red Cross

The Austrian Red Cross, which offers a wide variety of social services as well as voluntary ambulance services, has a long tradition of working with volunteers. Many training courses are offered within the Red Cross and participants always receive official certificates after completing these. Many regional offices offer their volunteers written reports, which they are careful to formulate in a language that human resources managers in companies will understand. Apart from that the Austrian Red Cross has undertaken the effort to sensitise representatives of businesses to the value of voluntary activities for gaining competencies relevant to paid work. For example it has already had meetings with the president of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce on this subject. While this issue of certification and valuing voluntary activity is at the core of the Red Cross' volunteer policy, there are as yet no systematic activities or written materials on this issue within the organisation. The organisation is interested in developing these issues and also interested in a possible cooperation with the AVE-project.

IV. Conclusions

Volunteering plays an important role in Austria. There is a long tradition of voluntary activities in many different areas in Austria and a substantial amount of activity in organisations as well as informally. 51% of all Austrians are engaged in some type of volunteering (formal and informal). The most popular area of volunteering is the social sphere, and then culture. An Austrian specificity is the reliance on volunteers in fire fighting and in rescue services. As in other countries, those involved in volunteering and participating actively in the associations are those who are socially integrated: Those in employment, with a higher education and a higher income are more likely to be active than others. 75% of all Austrians are members of associations and organizations.

However public debates and concerted efforts to improve the framework conditions of volunteers and their situation have just been going on for a few years. As mentioned above, many organisations have been developing training courses for volunteers and improving volunteer management in general. Some organisations also employ people who are responsible for coordinating volunteers. However, in many cases volunteering still takes place in a very informal frame.

Especially, the International Year of Volunteering has given the issue a boost and has encouraged governmental initiative, which has several concrete results, such as offering joint training programmes for volunteers outside of organisations, governmental and public recognition for volunteers' work as well as an effort to offer volunteers in all organisations a "volunteer pass" including the skills and competencies they have acquired in volunteering.

While formal training opportunities and their certification have been pursued quite intensively within and between non profit organisations in the past few years, assessing and valuing skills and qualifications gained informally in the process of volunteering (and in other non-work related areas) is just beginning to be recognized as important in Austria. There are a variety of relevant and interesting projects dealing with these issues (partly involving international collaboration) and organisations that are already actively developing this aspect of their work and starting to incorporate businesses in their efforts.

The experience with existing instruments of assessing voluntary experience shows, that they all offer volunteers a valuable opportunity for reflecting and recognising their own skills, that

they have not necessarily been aware of before as well and that it is very valuable for individuals, non profit organisations and businesses to place more focus on these issues. However, it has also become clear that it is also important to find clear and transparent methods, that are easy to use and to balance the reached outputs with the financial and time resources invested. Also, cooperation with employers is a very important aspect to keep in mind as the usefulness of these assessments is closely connected to whether they are accepted by employers or not.

The organisations contacted in this preliminary phase are very interested in the issues raised in the project and further contact has been agreed with all of them. The research and contacts made in this first phase are a good basis for further research in the AVE-project in Austria and the contacts to organisations will be intensified in next phase.

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