



AVE in a professional perspective: Assessing voluntary experiences

**Pilot project: Leonardo da Vinci programme of the European Commission:
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Report 2 for Hungary



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Introduction

The Leonardo project: assessing voluntary experiences (AVE) aims to identify, evaluate and validate skills and qualifications acquired through informal learning within volunteer activities for a professional purpose.

The basic idea of the AVE project is that identifying and evaluating the skills and qualifications acquired through voluntary work should be the way to recognise and validate this informal learning. As voluntary experience is an alternative way to experiment, develop or renew with specific skills and qualifications the recognition and validation of these skills and qualifications should be very useful for people who have no professional experience and for those who have been kept away from the labour market (parents who have raised their children, sick people when they have recovered, prisoners when they are free...).

The AVE-project - in cooperation with partners in 7 European countries (France, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom) - aims to develop a tool and a method for Assessing Voluntary Experiences that can be used by organisations to enable volunteers to make use of competencies and skills gained in volunteering.

The aim of this report – that is the result of the second step of the Leonardo project: assessing voluntary experiences (AVE) - is to summarise and analyse the results of the consultation among associations willing to participate to the project. This consultation made in 2004 means to know the interest of assessing voluntary experiences for associations and to create a network of associations which will experiment the tool and method proposed in 2005.

This second report is meant to present specific information on the consultation such as the period of dispatching, the method used, rate of return. Furthermore it will show the synthesis of data on the management, the training, the valorisation of volunteers and assessment of voluntary experiences within the responding organisations.

Ultimately the report gives a general conclusion on the consultation in the field of voluntary work assessment conducted in Hungary.

I. General information on the consultation

Survey methodology

The questionnaire was designed in Warsaw in April 2004 by the 7 participating countries on the basis of a proposal made by FIVOL (Italy). The final version of the questionnaire translated into Hungarian is 8 pages long and consists of 27 questions. A combination of closed and open-ended questions was used to maximize the quality of the information obtained.

Each questionnaire addressed the following issues:

- Management of volunteers
- Training for volunteers
- Valorisation of volunteering
- Assessment of voluntary experiences
- Description of the association

Method and period of dispatching

It was sent out to all organisations in ÖKA databank by electronic mail in June 2004. This database contains 80% non-profit organisations as well as for profit organisations and public institutions. An electronic reminder was sent twice to all of the organisations in order to maximise the response rate.

The on-line questionnaire was made available on ÖKA Web-site for the period of June to November, 2004.

Wide spread marketing of the questionnaire was carried out via ÖKA monthly newsletter that is reaching around 1400 organisations, institutions and individuals.

The Nonprofit Információs és Oktató Központ (NIOK) placed a direct link on their website to the on-line questionnaire from April 2004 and sent it out in their newsletter.

At the beginning of October 2004, ÖKA called 88 organisations to send back the completed questionnaire.

Rate of return

The response rate for the questionnaire was better than expected. 51 organisation returned the questionnaire completed which counts as a good number amongst Hungarian non-profit organisations dealing with volunteers.

II. Presentation of the associations

In total 51 organisations filled in the questionnaire all over Hungary. The central Hungarian region was the most active in completing the questionnaire. The map below shows that the vast majority of respondents are located in Budapest.



Date of creation

Only 14% of the organisations were created before 1970, however 41% of the respondents were founded between 1991 and 2000. 27% of the organisations participating in the survey were founded after the year 2000.

Geographic level

Concerning the geographic level the organisations they have an equal share – approximately 20 % - among local, departmental, regional, national and international.

Number of paid staff

Most of the responding Hungarian organisations employ either no paid staff at all (35%) or work with a low number of employees from 1 to 9 paid staff members (39%). 17% of them employ workers between 10 and 49 and only one of them provide work for more than 100 employees.

Number of volunteers

The responses from the 51 organisations yield a wide range of data concerning the number of volunteers they work with. 55% of the organisations employ between 10 and 49 volunteers. 25% of them work with 3 to 9 volunteers. 8 associations out of the 51 are in connection with more than 100 volunteers.

Composition of volunteers

Respondents were also asked to describe the proportion of youngsters (< 30 years), of women and of retired people regarding volunteers associated with the organisation.

The proportion of young people in 36 of these organisations is between 30 and 100 %. Consequently the number of retired people volunteering for the responding organisations is rather low.

51% responded that the ratio of women amongst their volunteers is above 60 % and 43% claimed that the ration of female volunteers is between 30 and 60 %.As an initial observation it can be stated that most of the responding organisations' volunteers are women under the age of 30.

III. Management of volunteers in the associations

This part of the report provides a closer examination of the management of volunteers in the 51 responding associations.

Procedures for selecting volunteers

20% of the organisations have no official procedures for selection their volunteers. On the other hand almost 60% of them have some sort of initial interview with the candidate to find out about his/her previous experiences and expectations.

25% of the associations have an application form for the new candidates to be filled in. 20% of the organisations have different procedures for selecting new volunteers. These range from handwritten CV, letters of reference, one-month probation time to obligatory participation on the organisation's training, compulsory presence on clubs.

Prerequisites to volunteer in an organisation

51% of the respondents have no special requirements for those who would like to help their work on voluntary basis. The availability of a minimum weekly commitment of time as for the volunteer position is an entry condition in 23% of the organisations.

23% of the organisations stated that the lowest age of the future volunteers should be limited whilst only 6% controlled the upper age limit in case of new volunteers. It appears from the survey that high education is not considered as a common requirement for volunteering.

None of the responding organisations have set gender or religious issues as entry condition to join the organisation as a volunteer.

Some of the associations have different requisites for different programs, for example domestic programs have no prerequisites but international ones have limited the age of the candidate. There are volunteer organisations that work only with a specific group of people (students, mothers, retired people) they often set these conditions to the volunteers as well or ask for previous experience or knowledge in the relevant field. Amongst others the followings were mentioned as prerequisites to volunteer within the organisation: suitability, active participation in the aims of the organisation, social sensitivity, references, previous drug history, enthusiasm, motivation, to be Hungarian, over 18, to have a clean record and reliability.

Skill evaluation for new candidates

Fluency in Hungarian seems to be an important skill for organisations working with volunteers as 33% of them evaluates it. Specific professional experience is valued at 18% of the organisations completed the questionnaire. More than 80% thinks that collaboration with others, an agreement to the organisation's values as well as coherent style of life are essential skills to be evaluated while availability to relationships (60%) and availability to learn and to test oneself seems less significant (20%). Added skills that the organisations evaluate in the volunteer candidate are: motivation and trustworthiness, empathy, knowing oneself, appropriate helping attitude.

Evaluation process of volunteers

This section tries to investigate whether organisations have any kind of evaluation process for individual volunteers. For this question multiple answers were possible.

Approximately 10 % of all the responding organisations have no evaluation process at all. Half of them evaluate the individuals in an informal way without particular analysis instrument. Less than one third reported that following the progress of each volunteer is the duty either of the project- or area managers.

The indirect way of evaluation of individual volunteers in the organisations' normal reunions is in common use amongst the organisations (45%).

It is especially rare to evaluate individual volunteers through random interviews done with colleagues and the volunteers himself however some of the organisations do evaluate volunteers through interviewing the volunteer manager.

A number of associations mentioned other ways of evaluation like regular supervision for volunteers, twice a year individual appreciating award, annual audit of efficiency, in an indirect way while regular talks, evaluation of the work of members by their leaders.

IV. Training for volunteers

Formal training for volunteers

From this section it is apparent that 80 % of the respondents provided formal training for their volunteers in the last two years within the organisation whereas 30% of the organisations offered training through an external agency. 14% of the associations have not provided formal training for the volunteers.

Content of the trainings

More over half of the responding organisations (65%) provide trainings of solidarity and active citizenship related topics. 40% of the trainings are kept on the mission, new facilities or action objectives of the organisation. Specific knowledge of an organisational – management type are the subject of 30% of the trainings offered to volunteers. Other than that the following contents of trainings were mentioned: PR, HR, problem solving, dealing with conflicts, personal development, network building, media, non-profit training, improving human values, practical training, personal development training, health situation, state of hospitals, how to deal with patients, psychiatric community caretaker course, project writing, drug prevention lectures.

Training needs of volunteers

According to the questionnaire volunteers expressed they training needs with contents inherent in the group dynamics at 75% of the organisations. Other training needs of volunteers pointed out by the organisations are project writing, IT, supervision, communication, student rights, group leading, assertively training, organisational development.

Reasons for providing training for volunteers

The organisations answered the followings for the question why did they provide trainings for volunteers:

Because the volunteers need special skills to deal with the organisation's clients (elderly, drug addicts, mother, etc.).

In order to improve and develop the skills and professional knowledge of volunteers.

To provide knowledge and experiences to volunteers in order to achieve higher success.

To show volunteers alternatives, to make them able to participate in professional work, to be able to give them appropriate tasks within the organisation, to get to know each other, to introduce the organisation, to give specific knowledge on services of the organisation. Plenty of the organisations gave team building and motivation as a reason for training. Others stated trainings being means of keeping the volunteers.

The main aim of the organisation is to widen the knowledge therefore it gives trainings on all kinds of subjects to students.

Only 7% of the trainings provided for volunteers by organisations lead to recognised qualification.

30% of the asked organisations awarded certificates to acknowledge skills of volunteers.

V. Valorisation of volunteering

To investigate the skills mainly achieved by the volunteers during the experience within the organisation the questionnaire aims to detect the main activities performed by them in an organisation.

Main activities fulfilled by volunteers

Most of the volunteers organise events, meetings or festivals, provide information or offer direct services (medical care, therapy, nursing...) to the clients of the organisation. The activities least performed by volunteers in an organisation are providing non direct services, like rescue, protection and advising, counselling or expert's work.

Main skills developed by volunteers

Most significant skill developed by volunteers is the know-how on the field of activity specific to the NGO. Interpersonal skills (communication, negotiation) and management of the NGO's programmes are equally important skills (30%). Fundraising, NGO finances and NGO related legal issues are skills least developed by volunteers. Other skills that volunteers can gain via volunteering: dispatching of questionnaires, club leading, project writing, program coordination, helping and caring for patients.

Main talents, competences and qualifications developed by volunteers

The five most frequently developed competences while volunteering in decreasing order are readiness to help, open-mindedness and readiness for new contacts, being trustworthy and confident, reliability and finally communication skills. The following competences will be improved only on a lower level via volunteering according to the answers: craft skills, leadership competences, public relations and presentation skills.

Experiences appreciated most by volunteers within an association

The most appreciated experiences in an organisation for volunteers are the possibility to generate connections with clients and external referents. Volunteers also value the operative and technical support they receive from specific organisations as well as the variety of duties. 45% of the volunteers consider the possibility of acquiring new and specific competences and the support they receive in psychological and motivational terms equally important. The least significant experience volunteers are interested in is the competence of organisational management and evaluation of activities.

Involvement of volunteers in decisions

25% of volunteers are involved in the decision making process of organisations. Out of this number 90% of volunteers are caught up with projecting specific activities. 80% are participating in verifying and evaluating the outputs of activities. Less volunteers are taking part in programming the annual activities or organising briefings on the functioning of the organisation.

VI. Assessing voluntary experiences

70% of the organisations have information on volunteers who have managed to exploit the non formal competence acquired through volunteering in a working activity. These competences are the followings: community building, organising programmes, craft skills, camping children, lobbying, information transfer, being open, self confidence, knowledge of foreign language, independence, IT, negotiation techniques, self confidence, practice, regularity, belonging in a community, cooperation, empathy, tolerance, problem solving, conflict management, compromising ability, empathy, keeping the competence borders, appropriate help and care,

Communication, project writing and organisational skills were mentioned most frequently.

One quarter of the responding organisations developed procedures to assess the acquired competence of the leaving volunteer. In most cases these procedures are relatively simple meaning that volunteers will be observed while working so called field observation. A small number of organisations conduct a final interview with the leaving volunteer.

More than 40% of the associations provide some kind of document assessing voluntary experiences to their volunteers. The majority of these documents are written references on request including the volunteer activity every so often the length of volunteering as well. Occasionally certificates are given on courses like certificate of 40 hour preparatory course or certificate as volunteer social helper.

Giving awards for significantly good work is a popular way of showing appreciation to volunteers.

83% of these documents are not recognised by other than the providing organisation itself. Very few of the certificates however are accepted by other civil organisations or local governments when applying for grants, scholarships.

VII. Conclusion on the consultation

The main reason for this consultation was to test the reaction of the associations to AVE project. The conclusions of this survey should be a basis for the third step of the project, creating a method and a tool to assess voluntary experiences.

From all over Hungary 51 organisations participated in the consultation, although this might appear as a low number – in consideration of the usual acceptance of questionnaires by the Hungarian non profit sector – it has to be viewed as a satisfactory rate of return.

It is a foreseen outcome of the survey that most of the responding organisations are situated in the capital, Budapest.

It is an interesting finding of the consultation that most of the organisation completed the questionnaire employ 2 to 9 paid staff and work with 10 to 49 volunteers, mostly young people under the age of 30.

As far as the management is concerned organisations have usually initial interviews for selecting volunteers with fairly different prerequisites if at all. Collaboration with others, an agreement to the organisation's values as well as coherent style of life are essential skills to be evaluated at new candidates. The evaluation of individual volunteers is accomplished primarily in an indirect way without particular analysis instrument at general organisations' meetings.

The majority of organisations provided training for their volunteers mainly with active citizenship and solidarity topics.

Training needs of volunteers are predominantly in connection with group dynamics, project writing, IT and supervision.

The chief motive for providing training is to improve and develop the skills and professional knowledge of volunteers in order to achieve higher success.

Most common activities fulfilled by volunteers range from organising events, providing information to offering direct services to clients therefore the most significant skills developed through these activities are the know-how on the field of activity, interpersonal

skills and programme management. The most appreciated experiences in an organisation for volunteers are the possibility to generate connections with clients and external referents. One quarter of volunteers are involved in the decision making process of organisations.

Less than half of the organisations have some kind of assessment for the experiences of volunteers involved with the organisation, such as certificates, written report if asked but none of them have a systematic, structured way of identifying, evaluating and recognising skills and knowledge gained through voluntary work.

However they are aware that such a method of assessing voluntary work experiences would be not only useful but necessary.

Responses from the questionnaires revealed a broad consensus regarding the value of a tool or a method of assessing skills, qualifications gained through volunteering.

99% of the responding organisations would find a method to assess voluntary experiences useful and all of them are interested in implementing and applying such a tool as well as to develop their services offered to volunteers as well as to improve the situation of voluntarism in Hungary.

VIII. Annex : list of the associations

1. Aktív Soproni Ifjak
2. Alapítvány az Egyedül Élő Idős Emerekért
3. Amnesty International Magyarország
4. Aquila Egyesület
5. Béthel Alapítvány
6. BME Management Szakkollégium
7. Csongrád megyei Természetbarát Szövetség
8. Demokratikus Ifjúságért Alapítvány Debreceni csoportja
9. E-misszió Természet és Környezetvédelmi Egyesület
10. eSz Híd Nemzetközi Művészeti, és Kommunikációs Egyesület
11. FAUNA Egyesület
12. Fehér Akác Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megyei Idősek Otthona és Módszertani Intézmény
13. Fővárosi Önkormányzat Idősek Othona
14. Gyermek Intenzív Terápiáért Alapítvány
15. Gyermekeinkért Egyesület
16. Holdvilág Kamaraszínház Kulturális Egyesület
17. Hosszútávú Egészségmegőrző Program Egyesület

18. Ifjúsági Közélet Fejlesztésért Alapítvány
19. „IMPULZUS” Pályakezdők Munkaszocializációjával Foglalkozó Szakemberek Egyesülete
20. Istenkúti Közösségért Egyesület
21. Kalamáris Sz-Sz-B Megyei Ifjúsági Kulturális és Diákújságíró Egyesület
22. Kék Pont Alapítvány
23. Kikötő Ifjúsági Kulturális és Szociális Egyesület
24. Konszenzus Alapítvány Ifjúságsegítő Szervezete - Helyi Ifjúsági Szolgáltató Iroda
25. Kórházi Önkéntes Segítő Szolgálat Alapítvány
26. Községtörténeti Baráti KÖr
27. Kútfő Alapítvány
28. Lelkierő Fiatalon a fiatalokért Egyesület
29. Magyar Gazdák Tejtermelő Szövetsége
30. Magyar Hospice Alapítvány
31. Magyar Konduktorok Egyesülete
32. Magyar Ökumenikus Segélyszervezet
33. Magyar Vöröskereszt
34. Magyar Vöröskereszt Heves Megyei Szervezete
35. Magyar Vöröskereszt Tolna Megyei szervezete

36. Mátészalkai Idősekért Alapítvány
37. Média Az Emberekért Alapítvány
38. Narconon Alapítvány
39. Nonprofit Információs és Oktató Központ (NIOK) Alapítvány
40. Önkontroll Egyesület
41. Osteoporosis Betegek Magyarországi Egyesülete
42. Otthon Segítünk Szolgálat Dunaújváros
43. "Őszikék " Alapítvány
44. RÉS Egyesület a regionális és lokális munkaerőpiac fejlesztéséért
45. „Segítőkéz” Lelkisegély Telefonszolgálat, Debrecen
46. Szivárvány Személyes Gondoskodást Nyújtó Intézmény
47. Szolnok Városi Polgárőr Egyesület
48. Szuhavölgyi Bányászlakta Települések Önkormányzati Szövetsége
Családsegítő és Gyermekjóléti Szolgálat
49. Tatabányai Otthon Segítünk Alapítvány
50. Védegylet Egyesület
51. "Vigyázó kéz" Gyermekvédelmi Egyesület