

Seminar in Wien : « Citizenship, social involvement and volunteering »
University of Wien, 16th to 20th of April, 2007

Date	Content		Duration
	Morning : theory	Afternoon : practice & research	
	9h30 – 12h30	14h00-18h00	
Friday 20 th of April 2007	Youth volunteering/ Youth programme (iriv & alii, 2000) Assessing voluntary experience Leonardo project (iriv & alii, 2003)	Research on European projects financing non profit initiatives	7 hours

Selected literature in the field of membership/citizenship by Prof Dr Christoph Reinprecht :

Text to work on : Selle (P) & Stromsnes (K), “Membership and democracy” in Dekker (P) & Uslaner (E), Social capital in Everyday Life, Routledge, London, 2001

Volunteering in a changing society: Specific issues

Volunteering and work

When thinking about volunteering, it is very important to look at the relationship between volunteering and paid work. Following topics are worthwhile to work on in more depth:

- effects of changes in work on volunteering
- differences and similarities between volunteering and paid work
- the relationship between paid work and volunteering on a political level

The profile of conventional work has been subject to many changes. Stable full-time wage employment is decreasing. The trend is towards more fluid forms of work, like self-employment or traditional "atypical" work (short-term jobs, jobs with just a few hours a week etc.). Also working times are decreasing as well as becoming more flexible. On one hand this means that volunteering is becoming relevant as a „building block“ in a flexibel work biography. On the other hand it can mean, that people do not have a stable income and thus are forced to focus on different types of paid work rather than volunteering.

Relationship between paid work and volunteering

Obviously the main relevant factor in differentiating between volunteering and paid work is pay. Apart from that aspects like the level of obligation, regularity, times of day spent for the activity, amount of personal responsibility and participation might differ. (see also 2.1.4). The differences you elicit between paid and voluntary work situations can also help to understand problems that arise between volunteers and paid workers (see xxx).

The relationship between paid work and volunteering on a political level

Negative aspects prescribed to the relationship between volunteering and work are fears that - especially in social services - volunteering acts as a "job killer". Also, blurred boundaries between volunteering and precarious, low paid jobs present a problem. Sometimes low paid jobs are „disguised“ as volunteering. The difficulty of identifying the differences between volunteering and precarious jobs are connected with how much paid volunteering is accepted and usual in the respective countries. Also there is the fear that promoting volunteering might lead to pushing women out of paid work and thus out of the labour market.

Positive facets attributed to volunteering are the possibility to act as a bridge to a paid job for women, people who are unemployed or other disadvantaged groups on the labour market as a field of formal and informal learning.

There is little empirical evidence that can be generalized proving the "job killer" theory or the quantitative impact of being a bridge between non-work and paid work.

Unemployment and Volunteering

Probably the most controversial topic in this context is the relationship between unemployment and volunteering. A great deal of hope is being projected onto volunteering as a way of occupying, but also qualifying unemployed people. There is empirical evidence that unemployed people tend to volunteer less than those employed and that at least currently - in quantitative terms - volunteering contributes little to improving the dilemma of

unemployment. Also, programmes prescribing social or environmental work to the long-term unemployed (e.g. "New Deal" in UK, "Integra" in Austria) are frequently mixed-up with those offering incentives to the unemployed to volunteer. Drawing clear distinctions between these two fields is very important with respect to the centrality of free-choice in the definition of volunteering.

However, from a qualitative, individual perspective being involved as a volunteer can help unemployed people gain competencies, contacts and thus can be a stepping stone towards paid employment. Not only do many European countries lack incentives for unemployed people to volunteer, they also provide barriers for this kind of initiative. These countries either have laws prohibiting people receiving unemployment benefits from volunteering and/or unclear or wrong information is provided by employment offices.

Developing volunteers' qualifications and competencies (The role of learning for volunteering)

The issues of volunteers skills and competencies as well as related learning processes are core concerns in volunteer management. Generally, in connection with societal changes life-long-learning is a key word as well as acquiring more than specialized skills. Key qualifications, personal skills as well as communicative competence etc. are mentioned more and more in all areas. There are many different aspects of skills, competencies and qualifications which affect coordinating volunteers that are mentioned below.

Educational prerequisites for volunteering

Many areas of volunteering require certain skills or competencies. In some cases organisations will look for volunteers with certain skills, in other cases acceptance as a volunteer will depend on participating in a training course and in still other cases skills will be developed during the volunteers' activities. This section deals with the question, which skills volunteers need to have for volunteering and in which cases participation in a training course should be a prerequisite for volunteering.

For which types of volunteering do you need which skills? What do organisations expect of their volunteers?

As there are very big differences in the areas volunteers' work in and their respective tasks, there are also differences in the amount of skills necessary for each type of volunteer activity. Some tasks can be carried out with relatively few skills, others need training beforehand. Areas like fire fighting or rescue services have quite fixed criteria for volunteers, others are only slowly starting to think about this aspect. As a correlate organisations vary in the methods they use for assessing volunteers skills (see also 3.2).

*What are advantages and disadvantages of numerous prerequisites for volunteering?
In which cases should volunteers be expected to attend a training course?*

Having many prerequisites for volunteer work, will make it harder to find volunteers. Also, it will make it harder for people from disadvantaged groups to volunteer (see 3.5.x). It is important to be very specific about which tasks need which skills (see section about job

description). On the other hand, having highly qualified volunteers, will enhance the quality of the work done.

How to enable volunteers to use their skills in their volunteer work

As you have already discussed in the modul on motives, one important motive for volunteering is to make good use of skills a person has (this is especially so for senior citizens). Issues around this are finding out about peoples skills and creating an enabling atmosphere.

Many organisations still do not put enough emphasis on creating a fit between the person and their environment. There are still many organisations that do not enhance volunteers' skills in a positive way.

How can you find out about peoples skills?

Finding out about people skills and enabling them to use them in their volunteer work ist very closely related to the question how to recruit and choose volunteers as well as introducing them to the organisation and ist word. One way of finding about peoples skills is the first interview, which might be a conversation, but also use standardized instruments (see xxx).

How can you enable volunteers to use their skills?

Enabling volunteers to use their skills is linked with many issues of volunteer management. It has to do also with enabling volunteers to acuire skills within their volunteer activities (see next chapter), but generally with creating an anabling and empowering environment for volunteers (see also 3.1 and 3.2). Many of the aspects encountered until now will be relevant for the discussion on this theme. Aspects like regular team meetings, and close guidance can also very relevant for making sure, that volunteers have the opportunity to use their skills in volunteering.

The role of informal qualifications in volunteering

In general, more attention is being given to informal learning processes. This concerns learning in paid work, volunteering but also unpaid work within the family. Awareness is rising that many competencies are won in these processes. In fact, there are research results that state that as much as 80% of peoples skills and competencies are won in informal learning processes.

On one hand the framework of volunteering should allow volunteers to gain competencies and skills in their work (see also above), on the other hand the role of the volunteer manager is also to help volunteers become aware of the skills they gain during their activities.

Skills gained in informal learning processes

A wide variety of skills can be gained in voluntary work. In the framework of a study on relevance of volunteering for job applications in civil service, we found out about following qualifications that can be gained in volunteering:

Speaking in public; make contacts, team work, developing opinions, organisational skills, many methods, responsibility, emotional qualifications, project work, flexibility, communication skills, leadership, assertion. Of course, again it depends very much on which area a volunteer works in and which tasks he or she carries out.

What can a volunteer coordinator do to facilitate volunteers to acquire skills?

Issues here are how to allow participation, self-directed work but also good guidance and reflection (see also 22. and 3.7.2).

How can volunteers become aware of skills gained?

In many cases volunteers are not at all aware of the skills they gain when volunteering. As a result it also happens, that they do not bother to mention their volunteer activities when applying for a job or a promotion in paid work. Awareness for learning situations in volunteering is an important step for individual development but also for being able to profit from volunteering for personnel development in paid work or in other situations.

Certification and relevance of skills acquired during volunteering for paid work

In countries like USA or Great Britain voluntary work plays a big role for job applications in many different areas. In Austria, there has been very little awareness for this issue, it has always depended on the initiative of the volunteer applying for the job and that of the personnel manager whether voluntary work was mentioned in the process of a job application (please add for France and Germany). This is slowly changing and different organisations are thinking about how to certify volunteering and thus helping volunteers for other areas of life.

Advantages and Disadvantages of certification

Among volunteers there are controversies about whether certification is a good thing or not. There are fears that certification will make volunteering more regulated and lead it into the direction of paid work. Also, some people are of the opinion that certifying volunteering can attract people to volunteer, so they can find a job and for no other reason.

Ways of certifying skills gained in volunteering

(Examples of certificates in for working material)

There are many different ways of certifying volunteers activities. Next to standardized reports or checklists, there are examples of assisting volunteers in compiling their own „portfolios“ with activities they carried out, skills they learned etc, that are then certified by the organisations (sample from the Netherlands). In the province of Lower Austria an initiative is planned by the provincial government, the volunteer agency as well as the chamber of commerce to certify volunteers' acquired skills using narrative interviews. In Austria, there is also an initiative of the Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations on certifying competencies gained in unpaid work in the family. This is also based on counselling women, who worked in their home, to recognize their competencies, pass a test and have their competencies certified.

Whereas standardized more formalized procedures are easier to handle, many volunteers and experts in the area are of the opinion that less formalized procedures that raise awareness of volunteers and others involved are more adequate for the area of volunteering and its reasoning.

The question is also in how far any certificate has an official value (see also 3.x.5).

Role of employers

In a study on relevance of volunteering for job applications (Strümpel/Pleschberger 1999) we heard some examples where volunteers did not mention their volunteering because they feared this would have a negative influence. A negative view on volunteering from the employers side can have to do with the fear, that the employee will not have enough time and energy for their job, if they spend too much time volunteering. Another problem in this connection can be that the ideology of the voluntary organisation can clash with the ideology of the company.

Role of networking

Concerning this issue, it is very important that different actors work together. Organisations certifying volunteer activities need to know, what kind of information employers from all sectors need for hiring employees or on issues of career development (see also role of networking (3.8.2)).

The role of formal training courses for volunteering

One way of improving volunteers skills is to offer formal training courses. There is a wide variety of courses organisations have to offer and a wider variety of skills the focus on. Generally, in most European countries voluntary organisations offer their volunteers many opportunities for participating in training courses. Of course, this varies also according to the size of the organisation.

What type of formal training courses are relevant for volunteers?

Courses for volunteers can be categorised into three main areas: specific skills according to the area of volunteering (e.g. first aid course, working with young people, managing a library), skills relevant for volunteering in general (fund-raising, legal framework for volunteering etc.) as well as general skills (communication, project management, presentation skills etc.).

Which type of training will be chosen by the volunteer or offered by the association is very linked to the goals of the association or organisation and the interests of the volunteer.

Sometimes it is essential for a volunteer to receive this kind of specific training. It may also be another form of selection. New volunteers are more conscious of the work they will have to do. During the training in the above example psychologists and doctors, can also see whether the participants are able to bear the burden of dealing with this difficult target group.

For other organisation, training might be more useful after a while when the volunteers have been in contact with the target group and they have already experienced certain situations.

The goal of a training course in connection with this example is to analyse the difficulties volunteers have to face on the streets. Learning by doing would be the key word here as the basis of this training is the experience of the volunteers. Many associations in the social and health field organise workshops where volunteers have the opportunity to express themselves. Specialists but more often other volunteers help them to solve their problems or at least be more aware of them.

Some examples for training courses offered to volunteers are:

- How to organise and lead a meeting,
- How to improve communication inside and outside the association,
- How to energise the human relations in an organisation,
- What are my responsibilities as a volunteer?
- How can I improve my volunteering?

Aspects to consider, when running a training course for volunteers

The framework of courses for volunteers are even more important than for further education in paid work, as volunteers are doing them in their own time.

Most of the time volunteers or paid staff from the association are responsible for the training but people from outside may also be invited to give a course. In some cases, it might be a good idea to find someone from the outside to carry out a training course as he or she will have a more objective point of view.

The choice of an external or internal trainer may also be guided by the kind of training (specific or general). In the beginning volunteers tend to ask for specific training because they need concrete tools or strategies to facilitate their everyday work. Volunteers or paid staff from the association will be the right people to run these types of course. After a while, they might ask for more general training, that is better given by an external trainer.

It is also becoming more and more important to offer certificates for courses and acquired skills. There is an issue on which formal meaning such certificates have. In Austria e.g., in some areas you have courses (usually longer ones) that pertain to certain regulations („staatlich anerkannt“). When offering courses, one needs to carefully consider, which benefits the participants get out of them. The formal benefits should also be considered. (For the separate modules on different types of volunteer management: Which courses would a small organisation need for their volunteers? In large organisations the volunteer managers might work together with an educational department of the org. In small organisations they might want to cooperate with others or just need to find out about information on existing courses).