

VALUE: National Report for Slovakia
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1. Overview of volunteering – university interaction

1.1 Volunteering in Slovakia

Volunteering in Slovakia has a long tradition which has its roots especially in the Middle Ages. In the era of communism in the 20-th century, almost all volunteer organizations and associations were shut down. After 1989, in CEE, the renewal of non-profit sector started. Currently, there are not enough data and researches done in the area of volunteering in Slovakia. Volunteering is not so popular here as in Western European countries.

According to the opinion poll “Eurobarometer“ from the end of 2006, 79% of Slovak citizens stated that help to others or volunteer work are important for them. This percentage is similar to an average percentage of 25 countries of European Union. Approximately 34% of European are involved into work of various organizations or into volunteer activities, in the case of Slovakia the reached percentage was one percent lower (33% Slovak citizens).¹

In Slovakia, volunteers can implement volunteer activities in a non-profit or a third sector, in a public sector and in a private sector. Every organization volunteers are active in is considered to be a volunteer organization. According the survey done by the Institute for Public Affairs from 2003, volunteers were mostly active in following areas: religion and church activities (13%), community development (12%), sport and recreation (9%), schools, education, science (9%), culture and art (7%), social services (7%), environmental issues (7%), health care (7%). (Brozmanová Gregorová a kol., 2009)

1.2 University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) in Slovakia

Under the lifelong learning we – in Slovakia - understand an education during the whole life - in a childhood as well as during adulthood.

At universities, the lifelong learning is understood as a provision of educational and counselling services, but also as innovating of portfolio of language, expert and interest programs which takes into consideration the most modern development trends and needs of a praxis, and which is stimulating people towards further education. Lifelong learning is basically implemented in three different ways:

¹ *European Social Reality*. Report. Special Eurobarometer 273 / Wave 66.3: February 2007. Online: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_273_en.pdf [10.2.2009]

1. Through further professional and carrier education: this includes accredited courses focused on professional education, additional courses supporting carrier development, for example IT courses, business courses, human resources management courses etc.
2. Language courses – individual language courses and courses for companies, as well as courses of Slovak language for foreigners which do not need to be finished by an exam and a certificate.
3. Universities of the Third Age – education of seniors. This kind of education is currently provided by 13 universities of the third age in 11 towns in Slovakia. Anybody who is over 50 and has graduated from a secondary level education (comparable with „A“ level in the UK) can become a student of such a university. There are no entrance exams and students are accepted in the order in which they enrolled to that particular university. Students can study at various departments. After finishing a three-year study they get so called „certificate of a special interest study at University of the Third Age“. Students of this type of university gain personal experience and opportunity how to stay active also in senior age; however, they have no opportunity to verify their knowledge in a practice.

1.3 The political and legislative context in Slovakia

1.3.1 Volunteering policy

Currently, the volunteering as such is not sufficiently supported by the state – neither economically nor legislatively – which causes a situation in which volunteering is not recognised in society. Current Slovak legislation is not regulating volunteering in a complex way, it is only regulating two its forms – volunteer service implemented by unemployed people as a form of activating activities and youth volunteering.

In the first case it is related to gaining practical experience for the needs of the labour market. Person who is seeking an employment is implementing publicly beneficial activities for 20 hours a week for maximum of six months. For this kind of „volunteer“ this activity means also a right to be financially awarded by the amount of minimum wage and also by refund of part of the expenses related to the volunteer service. Many experts active in the area of volunteering do not consider this form of „volunteering“ to be a real volunteering as it is paid for.

The area of youth volunteering is regulated by the Law on the Support of Work with Youth, which was accepted in 2008. This law is not regulating volunteering as such, it determines only youth volunteering. It states that only a person who is over 15 but under 30 and works with youth in an organization the mission of which includes work with youth can be so-called „youth volunteer“. This law makes it obligatory to refund travel expenses and other costs related to volunteering, however, it does not say what the sanctions are if this is not abided.

Team of lawyers and experts from NGO sector were working on a separate legal framework for volunteering in 2002. There was no consensus reached among volunteer organisations, and there was not a satisfactory level of communication between lawyers and volunteer organisations. . This topic was raised again in 2007 and discussions about accepting a complex law still last. Outcomes of current discussions state that there are potential benefits of the law on volunteering:

- Would help to promote volunteering – it would increase prestige and public appreciation of volunteering in Slovakia;
- Would provide a definition of volunteer, respectively of volunteer service;
- Would define rights and responsibilities of a volunteer, organization, or the third party for which a volunteer is working, respectively, it would prepare conditions for contracting relationships existing within volunteering;
- Would take into consideration the economic aspects of work with volunteers – refunding of costs related to volunteering (insurance, subsistence, travel costs);
- Would – in an ideal case – provide possible support from the state, for example through counting the time spent during volunteering into time usage for the purpose of pension or donations for volunteer organizations.

1.3.2 Lifelong learning policy

Lifelong learning is legally determined by the Law on Further Education which passed in 1997. So-called further education which enables anyone to complete, broaden or perfect already gained knowledge, to re-qualify or to fulfil interests, or through which anybody can be prepared for gaining certain degree in a schooling system. This law regulates various kinds of education and defines who can provide it and how it can be funded.

Further education can be funded by:

- Payments of participants of the further education,
- Resources of employers,
- Purposefully bound subsidy from the state budget,
- Labour Office budget – if it is related to requalification of unemployed people who are registered at the Labour Office and employees,
- Municipal resources,
- Resources of foundations and other legal and private entities.

Currently – in a case of Professional/carrier education and language education, participants pay this kind of education from their own resources. Educational institution can ask for a subsidy from the state budget or a municipal budget, however, it can be generally stated that if participants do not belong to risk or

marginalized groups (such as unemployed, people marginalized on the labour market, etc.) costs of this kind are paid by participants.

In a case of the Third Age Universities, participants pay only partial costs. These universities can be partially supported by subsidy from the state and municipalities, however, they often fight with financial problems. Their work is secured especially thanks to the EU projects – through support of European Union.

Lifelong learning and its opportunities are discussed only weakly in Slovakia. There are no complex data about how many students at universities are involved into further education. In Slovakia, there exists so-called Association of Third Age Universities, which unites universities of the third age. This association serves for mutual sharing of information about funding and methodical and pedagogical preparation of programmes for students.

1.4 The volunteering – university interaction in Slovakia

There are no studies and surveys focusing on cooperation between volunteer organizations and universities available in Slovakia. We do not have even complex surveys and data related to the lifelong learning as such. As we know interactions between voluntary organizations and university sector exist only at four universities in Slovakia: Pedagogical faculty of Matej Bel University (Banská Bystrica), Pedagogical faculty of Comenius University (Bratislava), Faculty of Social Work and Health Care at the Trnava University (Trnava) and Faculty of Art of Prešov University (Prešov). However, these are not examples of lifelong learning, but examples of education of university students of the second grade, respectively of students who attend daily or distance classes of humanities, especially of social work who graduate with the title Bc. and/or Mgr. Up to now, we are not aware of centres of further education and third age universities which would offer in their curriculums lectures focused on volunteering or non-profit sector.

2. Good practice examples and effectiveness of the interaction

2.1 Successes and challenges

Basic factors of cooperation are relationships between a specific volunteer organization and university. These relationships were developed only by specific lecturers working at universities. If an enthusiastic „pro-volunteering personality“ can persuade management of a faculty and university for cooperation, she/he forms an ideal environment for development of interaction among these two sectors. Currently, there still does not exist „pro-volunteering“ atmosphere at Slovak universities (above mentioned faculties are exceptions, while „pro-volunteering“ lecturers are active in areas which are related to volunteering), and that is why it is often difficult for university teachers to enforce ideas and subjects focused on volunteering. Almost all below mentioned lecturers are also active in volunteer organizations, or they established a volunteer organization by themselves.

Even though there appear first thesis and study works focused on volunteering, volunteering is not considered to be an important subject for research in general. In Slovakia, surveys of this kind are supported especially by experts active at above mentioned universities.

The four mentioned universities in Slovakia have several common characteristics: students can learn about volunteering principles and management of volunteers within some subjects there. Some of these universities offer an opportunity to get credits for volunteer activity as it is considered to be a form of practice.

Some other universities in Slovakia cooperate on the level of informing students about „actions“ organized by volunteer organizations. Our experience suggests that this situation is again very individual – if we ask for promotion of a volunteer action at universities, it depends on specific people active at faculties, whether they allow us or not to inform their students about it.

In Slovakia, there is no formally organized or strategic cooperation either between voluntary and university sectors or between individual faculties; the limited amount of cooperation that is present is informal and unsystematic. This creates the challenge for public and for universities (and also for the area of lifelong learning) – especially talking about humanities - to create a system of cooperation between non-profit sector and universities, to establish subjects focused on volunteering (especially on management of volunteers) and to enable students to gain volunteer experience they can get credits for.

2.2 Good practice examples and principles

2.2.1 Examples of good practice

A. Social Work Department, Faculty of Arts at the Prešov University and the Prešov Volunteer Centre

Cooperation and development of volunteering at this department was initiated by Doc. Matulayová, who is currently leading this department and who came to Prešov University from Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica in 2004. She found out that many lecturers and students are active volunteers, however, they often lack a strategy – system of cooperation with a non-profit sector as a place of practice for students.

That is why the Andragogy Department in the cooperation with the volunteer centre started to organize so-called *Fair of Voluntary Opportunities* – a one day campaign focused on promotion of volunteer organizations and recruitment of volunteers among university students. On the web site of the university, she also established a section called „Windows to Volunteering“ which provides basic information about volunteering. Since 2006, in the premises of Andragogy Department, there is located an information panel which offers volunteer opportunities in social services.

Nowadays, volunteering is perceived as a part of the study at this department and also as a strategy for cooperation with practice. At the Faculty of Arts, there exists an obligatory course *Volunteering in Social Services* and for students of andragogy there is an obligatory course *Volunteering and its Andragogy Dimension*. Principal of the Prešov University accepts – during last three years – suggestions of the Social Work Department for awarding a special scholarship to students actively involved in volunteering. Students can - once during their study - gain credits for a long-term volunteer activity which is considered to be a form of practice.

B. Pedagogical faculty of Matej Bel University and Volunteer Centre in Banská Bystrica

Since 1998, T. Matulayová together with her students organized so-called volunteering campaigns – two-week events focused on increase involvement of students into volunteering and on improving status of volunteering in the society. Her two students - A. Brozmanová Gregorová and L. Vavrinčíková established in 2000 an organization called *Volunteer centre* which closely cooperates with the department on volunteer projects. They both became lecturers at the Social Work Department and also today they inter-connect activities of this department with volunteer projects of *Volunteer Centre* including volunteer campaigns.

The Volunteer Centre established at the Pedagogical Faculty gradually broaden its activities to the whole university in a sense that it offers an opportunity to get involved into volunteer projects and organizations to all students interested.

At the Social Work Department, subject called *The Third Sector and Non-Governmental Organizations* is lectured. During attending this subject, students do volunteer work and inter-connect it with theoretical knowledge. This subject is obligatory for students of social work and optional for students of other programmes. Students of social work can also choose and optional subject *Non-Governmental Organizations II*. Students can get credits which are equal with credits for practice for a long-term volunteer work.

This department also organizes special seminars and workshops focused on volunteer management (not accredited) especially for students. It also organized two exhibitions of photographs of volunteers and two award ceremonies for volunteers held on the occasion of the International Day of Volunteers – these events were organized in the cooperation with the Centre of Volunteering.

C. Pedagogical Faculty of the Comenius University and the Association of Supervisors and Social Counsellors, Bratislava

E. Mydlíková - the President of a non-profit organization *the Association of Supervisors and Social Counsellors (ASSP)* started to lecture at the Social Work Department in 1995. As basics of the social work were established in the USA as

a result of volunteer activity of middle-aged women, she established a subject called *Volunteering in Social Work* at this faculty. This department started to initiate non-governmental organizations towards accepting students for practice through the form of volunteering. Currently, the department has signed agreement on providing practice to students with many NGOs. Students can get credits for such a form of practice.

The Association of Supervisors and Social Counsellors in the cooperation with several Slovak universities – departments of social-scientific disciplines implemented a two-year project in which students of helping professions were trained and worked in 21 NGOs. Universities functioned as informers – facilitators of further education and students gained training and were involved into further volunteer activities in NGOs through the project.

D. The Faculty of Health Care and Social Work, Trnava University, Trnava
The students of the Faculty of Health Care and Social Work have a chance to get involved into volunteer activities abroad – especially in African countries. These opportunities were developed especially by prof. Krčméry, who established the Department of Volunteering and Missionary Work at this faculty. This department is currently cancelled; however, students can still travel abroad.

There is an obligatory subject The Third Sector and NGOs lectured at the Social Work Department. It is partially focused also on volunteering.

Whether or not students get credits for their volunteer activity implemented in Slovakia as a practice is individual and it depends on a particular lecturer.

2.2.2 Principles of good practice

Talking about the above mentioned examples of cooperation, it can be stated that universities or specific faculties / departments basically already have established contacts with specific volunteer organizations and cooperate on volunteer projects, respectively they provide students with the opportunity to prove their knowledge in a practice. Cooperation between university and volunteer sectors was established thanks to the personal efforts and motivation of teachers in volunteering. These experts, through their reputation and prestige within their faculties have influenced the faculty departments and successfully established cooperation between sectors. All these experts are working within the social work field. As volunteering had many things in common with principles of social work they succeeded with linking theory and practice (volunteering) in front of their superiors. They also started to promote volunteering among students and teachers and thus extended the idea of cooperation between universities and volunteer organisations.

3. Barriers and opportunities for future development

3.1 Barriers

In Slovakia, there are just few examples of informal cooperation between the voluntary sector and institutions of lifelong learning. We suppose that until now no such formal cooperation between these two sectors was considered. Both sectors are currently young, they start to be active and define their programmes and projects. Basic barriers lies in the lack of awareness of both sectors which could cooperate and enrich each other. Therefore there is no cooperation starting to be considered now from the lifelong learning institutions side. C.A.R.D.O. as a national volunteer centre is researching this topic within VALUE project and another project supported from EU (Validation of non formal learning in voluntary work, under the GRUNDTVIG learning partnerships) which will try to create a strategy how to link both sectors.

At universities – within education - there exists only cooperation based on individual interest and motivation of specific lecturers. We in Slovakia lack valid strategy for cooperation between university and voluntary sector which would have an impact also on institution of lifelong learning.

Regarding this, we also have to mention the low prestige of volunteering and the lack of appreciation for volunteering as a form of informal learning and of professional and personal development. Low prestige of volunteering was mainly caused by 40 years of communism where people were either pushed to volunteer by common activities proposed by the regime (e.g. so-called 'brigades' on Saturdays when everyone had to participate in some kind of community work). On the other hand the state was the one who secured everything – no one has to do something for the good of others unless the state has not ordered it. And last but not least the most of volunteer organisations were shut down since there was not freedom of word, religion or gathering. After 1989 we had to start from the bottom – to start to develop a civil society. The nongovernmental sector had to be again very spontaneous and react flexibly on the needs of society or community. Volunteering is in that way something what is normal and does not need any special attention. We – NGOs – do not stress the importance of volunteers enough and that is why state or municipalities as well as media (and public) do not appreciate the work of volunteers. The situation has been slightly changing in the past years when C.A.R.D.O. started to lead new campaigns and volunteer awards. There is also lack of finances for developing volunteer infrastructure and volunteer organisations and no financial support from the government. Weak awareness and low status of volunteering reflect the lack of interest of universities and institutions in volunteering. Similarly as we lack data and surveys in the area of volunteering, we also lack experts at many universities who would focus on volunteering. On the other hand, neither voluntary sector probably can imagine what it can gain from the cooperation with universities.

In addition to personal barrier and barrier of awareness, another gap is created by financial capacities. Both sectors have to look for possible fundraising strategies in this area.

Last, but not least barrier related also to other countries is related to acceptance of volunteering as a result of informal education, which is often not respected by universities.

Opportunities

As the development of cooperation between voluntary and university sectors in Slovakia is only at its beginnings, the most real opportunity remains strengthening the tradition which was started by above mentioned four universities in Slovakia and transfer of this tradition to other universities, centres of further education and universities of the third age. We have to – in the cooperation of foreign European institution – raise awareness on importance of connecting theoretical knowledge with practice and on volunteering as the form of informal education.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Initial conclusions and summary

Currently, the cooperation of four universities with the volunteer sector is functioning in Slovakia. However, this cooperation is not systematic; respectively it is based on individual effort of some experts and their followers who were able to enforce it during their active involvement of particular faculty. The goal of volunteer organizations – especially of volunteer centres and experts in the area of volunteering at universities should be focused on creation of pressure on universities and preparation of concept for cooperation of both sectors.

4.2 Recommendations

1. To increase awareness within the university sector on volunteering and volunteer management through special seminars and conferences.
2. Volunteer centres in Slovakia should create a strategy for cooperation between voluntary sector and universities. Those faculties which interconnect volunteering and university sector should spread these interactions to other faculties and universities.

Questions which should be answered:

How can these sectors help each other?

What should the voluntary sector do to enforce volunteering and issues related to it into curriculum of lifelong learning?

What subjects could be offered by centres of further education and the universities of the third age in order to reach higher involvement of people into volunteering, higher quality of volunteer management and to improve prestige of volunteering?

3. University and voluntary sector should find a way how to develop research in the area of volunteering in Slovakia, they also should look for personal and financial capacity to do so.

4. C.A.R.D.O. is currently thinking about a potential project into which it would involve the universities of the third age in Bratislava. During last two years we started to cooperate more with senior volunteers, some of which studied at these universities. These students gain theoretical knowledge they have no chance to use in practice. At the same time, we are not aware of any subject that would be lectured at this type of university and would be focused on NGO sector and volunteering. Our idea is to inter-connect new education subject focused on the non-profit sector and volunteering with other subjects and to involve students over 50 into practice in volunteer organizations.

5. Further information

5.1 Bibliography and references

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5.2 Further resources

5.2.1 Websites

<http://www.cdvuk.sk/> - Center of Further Education, Comenius University

<http://www.ucv.utc.sk/ucv/> - Lifelong learning Institute in Zilina

<http://www.tuzvo.sk/cdv/> - Center of Further Education, Technical University in Zvolen

<http://cms.uniag.sk/Groups/vzdelavanie/podujatia/celozivotne-vzdelavanie> - Lifelong learning in Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra

http://www.stuba.sk/new/generate_page.php?page_id=672 - Institute of Lifelong Learning in Slovak Technical University in Bratislava

<http://www.uniba.sk/asociaciautv/> - Association of Third Age Universities

5.2.2 Glossary

Volunteering – *an activity done claimless of any reward, in a free time and for the benefit of others*

Volunteer organization – *an organization which use volunteers in order to reach its goals or to implement its activities*

Voluntary Sector – *term representing all volunteer organizations*

Non-profit sector or the Third Sector – *includes all forms of organizations which are not established with the goal of profit-making: civic associations, non-profit organizations, foundations, funds, allowance organizations.*

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