

VALUE – National Report: Slovenia

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1. Overview of volunteering – university interaction

1.1 Volunteering in Slovenia

1.1.1. A brief history of volunteering in Slovenia

First signs of organized volunteering in Slovenia can be traced in the 19th century, when first societies were formed, mainly influenced by the Catholic Church. The development continued intensively in the beginning of the 20th century, with different boy-scouting and wood-rangers movements forming in 1922, while the so-called "youth working brigades" were strongly promoted after the 2nd World War by the former Yugoslav regime. All volunteer activities were highly controlled by the government in the first post-war period, which can be observed also in the former Law of religious societies that seriously limited the working of Kartias, a humanitarian and volunteering organization of the church. In 1953, the Association of youth friends Slovenia was formed, a non-governmental volunteering organization still operating today that offered help to governmental systems mainly in the field of education (Jamšek 2009).

During the eighties, there was a burst of newly formed interest clubs and societies based on voluntary work. It was in that period that deinstitutionalization and opening of totalitarian institutions started. Professionals started comprehending and appreciating the importance of voluntary work and started perceiving voluntary work as additional help and also quality in order to deliver a better service to the users (Jamšek 2009).

In the beginning of the nineties, after the attainment of independence, two important organizations were founded: Slovenian philanthropy – Association for the promotion and development of volunteering, and Society for development of preventive and voluntary work. They were the first and only organizations in the country which basic mission is the development and promotion of volunteering on the national level. In 2003, the societies started a mutual programme called "Activities to promote volunteering in Slovenia" that resulted in the first national agency for voluntary work. Another result of this programme is the Slovenian network of volunteering organizations, which included 566 member organizations in 2008 (Jamšek 2009).

1.1.1. Main characteristics of volunteering in Slovenia

There is not a lot of material to be found on any aspect of volunteering in Slovenia, since no-one has been systematically gathering and processing data

on volunteers, voluntary work and organizations and the impact of volunteering in Slovenia (Gril 2004, Jamšek 2009). Gril's research (2004) shows that volunteers work, on average, in the same organisation between 2 and 2,4 years, working approximately 4 hours per week and about 2,5 days per month. They mainly work on different projects as assistants, co-operators and team coordinators and most of them have some influence on decision making regarding the projects they are involved in. Less than a third of organizations accepting volunteers offer them possibility of employment. A research of the Slovenian institute for social security (2006) shows the true span of voluntary work in the country, calculations for 2004 summed up to 1.3 billion hours of voluntary work in non-governmental organizations, which equals to 7125 full-time employments.

The largest cohort of volunteers help in the field of social security (15.6 %), followed by social inclusion and free-time activities (both just below 14 %). To sum up for totally 60 % of all volunteers work in sports and cultural fields. Most organizations that accept volunteer work can be placed in the above stated fields, and a significant cohort (more than 20 %) state they work in fields of personal assistance, human rights and violence prevention (Gril 2004: 18).

According to the statements of volunteers on different web-sites and internet forums, they get involved in volunteering because they want to help other people or organisations. The greatest benefit they report is personal satisfaction and fulfilment, a lot of them also learn new or improve existing skills. However, they usually do not get any formal appreciation or recognition for their voluntary work. They practice volunteering in their free time and occasionally have to take one or more days off work, especially when helping organizing different events.

1.1.3 Lifelong learning in Slovenian universities

Lifelong learning has been present in different forms in Slovenian higher education since the mid eighties and was further developed in the nineties. It comprised mostly of different trainings not focused on learning new skills but refreshing existing knowledge and updating it with new information and discoveries. There was, however, no such thing as prior knowledge recognition until after the adoption of the Bologna reforms in higher education. Since 2004, there were a few project regarding the development and implementation of a knowledge recognition system in Slovenia, resulting in a few seminars and conferences on the subject (Košmrlj et. al. 2006).

In Slovenia, recognition is gaining importance in current higher education policies but due to a rather permissive national legislation, higher education institutions are fully autonomous in implementation of the whole process. This allows them to adapt to their own needs and fields of study but on the other hand they get hardly any guidance, and training for professionals working in this field is scarce. Thus the recognition process is often not only complex, but also lengthy and costly. A national system of recognition of non-formal and informal education in higher education institutions is still being developed and implemented, but procedures in

most higher education institutions base on the following recommendations (Kovač et. al. 2008):

- higher education institutions should define a standardised procedure for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal knowledge obtained before enrolment,
- the procedure shall start with an introductory interview with the candidate who prepares, with support of an expert, an individual portfolio containing all supporting documents attesting to the prior acquired knowledge and skills,
- a commission at the higher education institution evaluates the candidates knowledge according to a set criteria for the recognition of non-formal education and experiential learning and regarding the comparability of the candidate's knowledge to the content and goals of a particular higher education study programme,
- recognition of the prior learning and skills as either a qualification for enrolment into a study programme or as a fulfilled particular study obligation of a study programme obtaining ECTS points,
- candidates need to have a right to oppose to the decision of the recognition commission.

1.2 The political and legislative context in Slovenia

1.2.1 Legal framework for volunteering

There is no legal foundation that could serve as a background to volunteering in Slovenia. Establishment, funding¹ and development of voluntary activities are not systemically organized but left to chance and enthusiasm, knowledge and ingenuity of individuals and organizations that operate in this field (Gril 2004, Jamšek 2009). There is no act that specifically and solely covers volunteering in spite of the many initiatives to prepare and attain one. However, there are some notes on volunteering in the Act on associations (RS Official Gazette, No. 61/2006) and unions and other laws and legal documents:

- Social security act (RS Official Gazette, No. 3/2007, corrections in No. 23/2007 and 41/2007) includes volunteering in social security work and binds the government to assure, stimulate and sustain the development of self-help, volunteering, independent life of disabled people and other forms of voluntary work in the field. It also declares that different services in social security can be performed and delivered through non-professional and voluntary work if supervised by a professional. Besides the law, there is a Code of ethical principles in social security (RS Official Gazette, No. 52/2002) that equals voluntary to paid work, allowing

¹ Some organisations that depend on voluntary work get some public funding which covers some fixed expenses, such as office costs (for example, they are allowed to use a municipal office for a few hours per week or get funds to pay for rent and other expenses). Most volunteering organisations are exempted from tax payment if they do not exceed a certain amount of income.

volunteers to take specific assignments according to their education and experience and obliges organizations to provide training and supervision to volunteers when necessary. Organizations of social security have to be open for voluntary work.

- Act on organizations for disabled people (RS Official Gazette, No. 108/2002) has a very important article on voluntary work, declaring that one of the tasks these organizations have is to train volunteers for work with disabled people. This is a compulsory condition in the founding act of each organization that wants to get a disabled people's organization label.
- Act on humanitarian organizations (RS Official Gazette, No. 98/2003) also defines that humanitarian status can be granted only to organizations which activities are entirely or mainly performed by volunteers who practice their work upon free will and without payment. Volunteers can, however, be refunded for any material expenses caused in order to do the work.
- Health security and insurance act (RS Official Gazette, No. 72/2006) does not include volunteering as a complement to the health security and insurance activities, it does, however, mention obligations to assure health insurance for specific groups of volunteers.

The Association of Slovenian volunteering organizations, which organizes a national volunteering congress every two years, has prepared a proposal for a Volunteering act in 2004. Preparation of such act was included in the Resolution on the national programme of social security 2006-2010. The resolution includes initiatives to regulate voluntary work as an economic category, especially influencing taxation, income reliefs and contributions, but not connecting it to education. The act proposal, however, includes both aspects: on one hand the economic impact in the form of refunding material expenses, rewarding and comparison of volunteers, and on the other hand states among the benefits of voluntary work acquisition of new knowledge and experience and thus provides a measure of the educational impact of volunteering (Slovenian philanthropy 2009). The act proposal does not mention any direct or indirect connection between volunteering and tertiary education or lifelong learning.

In 2008, a special work group was formed to provide a systemic organization of volunteering, focusing mainly on members of the Slovenian philanthropy. Due to development carried on by the group, the Slovenian government decided in the end of 2008 to set the adoption of an act on volunteering as one of the priorities in organizing the non-governmental sector in Slovenia. Even though volunteering experts predicted the act to be adopted by June 2009, due to other current problems (e.g. financial crisis, Slovenia-Croatia border relations) the proposal of the act was not disputed in the parliament, yet (Jamšek 2009).

1.2.2 Legal framework for lifelong learning

A concept of national system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning doesn't exist in the Slovenian higher education system. The national report on

recognition of non-formal and informal learning (Ivančič et. al. 2007) states that legislation regulating various levels of education determines enrolment conditions in formal education in the majority of cases. Apart from the evidence demonstrating the fulfillment of formal enrolment conditions (reports, school-leaving certificates, credits), the recognition of knowledge obtained by non-formal education and informal learning (e.g. Higher education act, RS Official Gazette, No. 119/2006, High schools – Gimnazije act, RS Official Gazette, No. 1/2007) is not very detailed.

Recognition of non-formal education and informal (experiential) learning in higher education is loosely regulated. The foundation for its introduction is laid down in the Higher education act (RS Official Gazette, No. 100/2004 and 119/2006). The Article 33 permits higher education institutions to implement a variety of life long learning courses next to study programs which lead to formal degrees (Kovač et. al. 2008).

On the one hand the Higher education act refers to higher education institutions which are to define in their accredited study programmes the criteria for recognition of knowledge and skills gained before enrolment into the study programme. The accredited study programmes define also the conditions for passing into the next year of study and the transition between study programmes.

On the other hand the Higher education act defines that the Higher Education Council which is the national accreditation body is to specify the criteria for the accreditation of knowledge and skills acquired before the enrolment into a first degree higher education programme. The Higher Education Council adopted the Criteria for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programs (RS Official Gazette, No. 124/2004). According to these criteria higher education institutions are responsible for accreditation of formally, non-formally and experientially acquired knowledge and skills which correspond to specific qualifications of a study programme. For the recognition and validation of knowledge higher education institutions are to consider:

- Formal certificates and documents;
- Documents of non-formal and informal education;
- Concrete work outputs (products) and other documented work experiences.

Recognised knowledge can be used as a fulfilled entry requirement to a study program or as a fulfilled study obligation (i.e. a candidate does not need to pass a certain exam) which is evaluated according to the ECTS (Kovač et. al. 2008).

Though the Slovene higher education legislation offers some basis for the implementation of the recognition of non-formal education and experiential

learning there are still many issues which need to be discussed and clarified (Vrečko 2006):

- The current legislation does not bring much clarity on criteria and standards for valuation and recognition, also not on how to carry out the recognition procedure, which should be in charge and what competencies people should have involved in the recognition procedure.
- Criteria for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes define that higher education institutions are responsible for validation and recognition procedures, but it does not state the level on which recognition should take place (study programme, faculty, and university).
- Recognition and validation procedures require specific skills and therefore appropriate training of people who are involved into these procedures. The current higher education legislation in Slovenia does not give any direction for this type of training and who should be responsible to carry it out.

A step in the direction towards implementing the system of recognition of informal and non-formal education has been made in 2006 when the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology financed a special project for the Implementation of the system of recognition of non-formal and informal education in Slovenian higher education, however a complete system will still need some time and efforts before complete establishment and implementation.

1.3 The volunteering – university interaction in Slovenia

There is no formal volunteering – university interaction in Slovenia. Students in some study programmes in the 1st bologna cycle have to, besides passing courses, do an internship of one to three months in the field of their study in order to test their theoretical knowledge in practice and get working experience. In some cases students get paid but mostly it is unpaid work. This is, however, not a real type of volunteering, since without the internship students can't obtain their graduation diploma.

Students and young graduates are often involved in different clubs or societies that organise sports or cultural activities and events for students either within their own university or within their town / region of origin. This has, however, no relation to lifelong learning and may only benefit the volunteers in terms of experience and widening their social network. Actually, organizing events is the second most frequent task young volunteers have and it occurs in half of all the organizations. The most frequently performed volunteer task is companionship and attendance (Gril 2004: 22-24).

Volunteering of adults, however, is not connected to university activities, at all, even though a significant part (almost 40 %) of organizations accepting volunteer work request volunteers to be "old enough" and have specific knowledge and experience. However, almost 70 % of all organizations accepting volunteer work request prospective volunteers to undergo introductory education or specific

training. According to the motivation for voluntary work and demographic characteristics of volunteers (Gril 2004: 44-47) an assumption can be made regarding reasons for low inclusion of adults in volunteering and for the lack of interest to connect volunteering to university lifelong learning. First of all, most of the adult volunteers already have the education they need or want; secondly they already are employed; and thirdly they have families. Thus they have little free time to dedicate to volunteering on one hand and have a lot of opportunities to fulfil the need to help other people and be useful inside their own family circles.

2. Good practice examples and effectiveness of the interaction

2.1 Successes and challenges

As there is no evidence of any interaction between volunteering and universities, we can't report on successes in the field. Therefore, the main challenge is to start interaction between universities and volunteering organizations.

The Slovenian philanthropy has initiated communication with University of Ljubljana, the oldest and largest of the four Slovenian universities, to establish a department for free-time volunteering activities for students with a possibility of obtaining up to three ECTS points according to the extent of voluntary work. This could be the first step towards establishing recognition of voluntary work for adults, as well.

2.2 Good practice examples and principles

Several examples of good practice of volunteering itself and of lifelong learning – namely prior knowledge recognition can be found in Slovenian university sector, but there is no interaction between the two phenomena, hence there will be no examples presented in this report.

Hopefully, with the help of the few volunteer enthusiasts and the awareness the Value project is expected to build, we will be able to report on good practice in the forthcoming years.

3. Barriers and opportunities for future development

3.1 Barriers

Volunteering as well as lifelong learning in Slovenia is not very well developed or spread, even though a certain continuous development can be observed. The two biggest obstacles for interaction of the two fields are:

- poor and loosely defined legislation;
- low level of awareness among the public.

3.2 Opportunities

In different humanitarian actions Slovenians prove to be a giving nation that puts a lot of importance to people in need, whether be their co-nationals or people of

other countries in the world. A small effort is needed to switch this will to help to the volunteer sector.

A large part of Slovenian higher education institutions are implementing lifelong learning principles and among these prior knowledge recognition. Since volunteering in most cases includes also learning and training for new skills, tertiary education only needs to accept volunteering as a "valid experience" in order for the interaction to start.

First steps for the legislation to be prepared have been made and results of these efforts are expected to be shown, soon. First efforts from the volunteer organizations to universities have also been made and discourse between the two is expected to start in the following months.

With organizing different festivals and fairs, awareness on volunteering is being built in public, as well. Organizers of these events are one or more volunteering organisations. The events are either of promotional type (fairs) where volunteering organisations and other organisations accepting volunteers present themselves to the public, while the other type of events, festivals are more similar to workshops where actual volunteering work (assignment, responsibilities, learning) is presented. Both types of events aim at spreading awareness of volunteering and trying to attract new people to the sector. Organizers should think of inviting higher education institutions' representatives and legislators to participate in order to build and strengthen the connection between the sectors. Since universities are usually rigid and slow changing organisations, relying mostly on science and research (Mintzberg 2001), further research on impacts and benefits of volunteer work for individuals, organizations and society in Slovenia would be needed. Scientific or professional meetings (conference, round table, and seminar) to present and exchange experience and good practice of the interaction of volunteering and university lifelong learning in other countries may prove to be effective.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Initial conclusions and summary

As this report shows, volunteering has been present in Slovenia for about a hundred years and it got more widely spread and internationalized after the attainment of independence. Similarly, lifelong learning started being introduced to universities after the adoption of the Bologna reforms, even though it was present in the educational scheme in different forms beforehand. Despite the previous practice, it is only since a few years ago that prior informally and non-formally acquired knowledge started being recognized in tertiary education, allowing adults to obtain ECTS credit points in order to start or continue their studies. However, only formally organized working experience (i.e. on contract of employment or part time job) is accepted by higher education institutions for prior knowledge recognition. This is another good sign of the importance and urgency for legislation for volunteering in Slovenia. Considering the experience and

practice of other countries, it is believed that this will significantly benefit both the volunteering sector and the university sector, not to speak of the positive impact on society.

4.2 Recommendations

It is clear that a covering act is needed in Slovenia to formally organize volunteering. The act should regulate the status of volunteering organisations and volunteers, funding and taxation of volunteering organisations and organisations accepting voluntary work, establish social and health security for volunteers and on the other hand regulate the responsibilities of both volunteering organisations and volunteers, and regulate penalties in case of violations. We recommend the legislators to include the educational value of volunteer work in the legislation, thus making it even closer to work experience gained during employment. According to that it will be necessary to adapt the regulation on lifelong learning and prior knowledge recognition in order for volunteer work experience to become acceptable for recognition in tertiary education.

Last but not least, more effort is needed in the promotion of both volunteer work and its interaction with university lifelong learning, since there is no awareness of the phenomena in Slovenia. The events already being organized are one good way of promotion, but more efforts should be put into promoting volunteering in mass media, especially television as it is the media with the largest and most diverse public. A new magazine has been published in Slovenia, called Samaritan, which is dealing with philanthropy and it could include more about volunteering, as well. And, as a renowned professor and public figure in Slovenia, also a volunteer, Mrs. Manca Košir said: networking is the future for volunteering, so through the VALUE project we will try to attract as many organisations and higher education institutions to participate in the forming of an interaction between university lifelong learning and volunteering, first through the internet and later on with conferences, round tables and workshops.

5. Further information

5.1 Bibliography and references

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5.2 Further resources

5.2.1 Websites

- Slovenska filantropija (Slovenian filanthropy): <http://www.filantropija.org/>
- Volunteering in Slovenia: <http://www.recikliraj.se/>
- Zveza prijateljev mladine Slovenije (Association of youth firends Slovenia): www.zpms.si
- Red Cross Slovenia: <http://www.rks.si/>
- Search engine for volunteer organizations in Slovenia: http://www.prostovoljstvo.org/main.php?mod_id=13

5.2.2 Glossary

- Voluntary work

Voluntary work is any work, performed by individuals upon free-will decision and with no material benefit for the welfare of other individuals or general public. (Ethical code of organized volunteering in Slovenia)

- Organized voluntary work

Organized voluntary work is all voluntary work, performed as an activity inside a legally registered organization, which programmes are, according to legislation, defined as non-profitable. (Ethical code of organized volunteering in Slovenia)

- Volunteer

Any individual involved in organized or non-organized voluntary work. (Ethical code of organized volunteering in Slovenia)

- Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is undertaken throughout life and improves knowledge, skills and competencies within personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspectives. Thus the whole spectrum of learning, formal, non-formal and informal is included as are active citizenship, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and professional, vocational and employment related aspects. (Kovač et al. 2008)

- Non-formal learning

Non formal learning is achieved when an individual follows an organised programme of instruction in an educational institution, workplace or in the home. This kind of learning is often embedded in planned activities that are often not designated as learning but which contain an important learning element. (OECD)

- Informal learning

Informal learning is achieved outside of organised education or training provision and is not organised or structured. In most cases it is unintentional and it is a result from daily 'experience' which occurs throughout life (work, family or leisure activities). It does not lead to certification. (OECD)

- Recognition of prior knowledge and skills

Recognition refers to learning achievements of individuals which might lead to a qualification. Recognised Individual's knowledge might be used as credit to benefit in the labour market in entry to formal education, financially or in terms of status or self-esteem. (OECD)

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