

value

VOLUNTEERING & LIFELONG LEARNING
IN UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE

National Reports on University Lifelong Learning - Volunteering Interaction

Consolidated Summary

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union

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Funded by the Grundtvig strand of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, the Value Network (2008-2011) brought together representatives from the university and volunteering sectors to explore the potential for developing new university lifelong learning (ULLL) opportunities tailored and targeted for the volunteering sector.

Part of this work was to investigate and report upon existing lifelong learning links between universities and volunteering organisations in countries represented in the Network. As well as providing background information on volunteering and ULLL in the country described, the reports also record examples of good practice of volunteering-ULLL interaction, explore opportunities for future development and identify barriers and challenges. There are country reports for the UK, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Hungary, Romania, Turkey and Italy. In the main, the reports were researched and produced by the partner representative(s) of each of the countries. They can be found on the Value website www.valuenetwork.org.uk and are available in English and the language of the country described. Some are also available in a third language.

The following is a consolidated summary of the reports.

University Lifelong Learning and volunteering across Europe: Reflections from the National Reports

1 Introduction: the National Reports

One of the core outputs of the VALUE project was the production of a series of National Reports. Each partner country¹ produced a report describing the nature and extent of collaboration between University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) and organisations that involve and support volunteers, including examples of good practice and challenges involved.

This summary is based on National Reports from twelve European countries written between the end of 2009 and the summer of 2011². It follows an interim summary report that was published halfway through

the project, in April 2010. The findings in this report are not exhaustive and are intended only to give a flavour of the emergent themes; for more information, the full national reports can be read at www.valuenetwork.org.uk

It should also be noted that the evidence in this summary report is based wholly on that included within the individual national reports, which have been researched and written by the individual partners; full references are available in the individual National Reports.

2 The picture across Europe

In order to describe the diversity of interactions between ULLL and volunteering throughout Europe, three working models have been developed for the purposes of this report. These models present a spectrum of interaction, from a great deal to very little. The models do not suggest that one situation is better than another, but demonstrate that practice is different in each case. Each of the models presents a group of

countries which best fit within that model. Some countries, however, may be placed within one working model, but nonetheless have something in common with another, and the boundaries between the models may often be blurred. Each of the models will be discussed in turn, describing their key characteristics. There is also a reasonable degree of diversity within each of the models.

¹ This excludes Belgium (CEV and EUCEN, which were involved as dissemination partners and therefore not committed to producing a report). All National Reports are available to download, in multiple languages, from the website at www.valuenetwork.org.uk

² Austria (2009), Germany (2010), Italy (2009), the Netherlands (2010), Hungary (2011), Poland (2009), Romania (2011), Slovakia (2009), Slovenia (2009), Spain (2010), Turkey (2010) and the UK (2009).

3 Model one: a lot of interaction

3.1 Description

This model includes the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain where multiple and embedded examples of interaction were observed. These include universities offering accreditation for employees of voluntary organisations and their volunteers. In the UK, for example, a survey by the University of Liverpool found that 23 of the country's 128 universities offered some form of targeted accreditation for the staff or volunteers of voluntary sector organisations.

Interaction can also develop on a more individual basis. In the UK, universities have a large degree of autonomy to develop their own approach. This has, in one instance, resulted in the University of Liverpool and the National Trust developing an innovative partnership. University staff, for example, run lectures and short courses on the history and architecture of Speke Hall, a local National Trust property, for the public and volunteers. The volunteers subsequently directly apply such learning to their volunteer roles, such as room stewards. The University also offers an accreditation process for volunteers through their Personal and Professional Development Award.

Spain also focuses on training volunteers, with some university courses, such as those focusing on partnership working for volunteer development, specifically developed for volunteers. Such an approach is also highly developed in Germany, where 50 institutions across the country offer some form of adult education. The University of Duisberg-Essen's UNIAKTIV project has, for example, developed over 300 opportunities for students in local nonprofit organisations (including developing marketing strategies or undertaking business administration).

3.2 Characteristics

Volunteering is a popular activity within Germany, Spain and the UK. In England, for example, surveys show that approximately 40% of people volunteer at

least once a year through a group, club or organisation, while 34% of people in Germany undertook voluntary activities in 2008. This can be associated with a long history of volunteering, and trends such as the professionalisation of the voluntary sector, most commonly observed through the rapid increase in the number of paid staff working in the sector. Volunteering within these countries also tends to be well recognised and is often highly valued by their governments. In the Netherlands, for example, the government sponsors the 'National Compliment', an annual prize for the best volunteering project. Governments can also focus their interests on the link between volunteering and employability, something that has become increasingly relevant after the development of the global recession, its subsequent recovery and the resultant public spending cuts. In Spain, indeed long before the recession, there has been a focus on providing vocational training for unemployed people, while in the Netherlands, the government has worked with the voluntary sector to strengthen Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL) since the start of the economic crisis in 2008³. While this can often be highly beneficial to those involved, there is some concern that emphasis on the vocational element of lifelong learning may be prioritised at the expense of 'leisure learning'.

While ULLL and volunteering may be well connected, funding and structural issues can remain major challenges. This is particularly pertinent within the UK, where recent policy changes have dramatically increased the cost for an individual to undertake an academic award / accredited module at the same level, directly threatening the existence of lifelong learning provision within some universities. Germany is also experiencing considerable challenges. The practices of service learning and continuing education tend to be developed within often rigid frameworks which can limit their ability to adapt to the needs and characteristics of non-profit organisations or to include topics which would be of relevance.

³ The recession refers to the economic slow-down of 2008. The national reports were written before the 'Eurozone crisis' of the summer of 2011, therefore do not take this recent economic development into account.

4 Model two: some interaction

4.1 Description

This model includes Austria, Italy and Slovakia. In each case, some level of interaction between universities and volunteering is present, although the majority tends to focus on student volunteering, such as students completing placements within voluntary organisations. There are, however, some other interesting examples which extend beyond the model of student volunteering. In Italy, for example, volunteers and staff from voluntary organisations are invited into universities to tell students about their work. There have also been examples of joint research projects being undertaken between universities and voluntary organisations. Austria demonstrates a further form of interaction, that of the provision of training by universities to volunteer managers.

4.2 Characteristics

Volunteering within these countries can be a highly popular activity, as in Austria (44%) and Slovakia (33%). In Italy, where it currently demonstrates lower levels of participation, it is nonetheless increasing rapidly: the number of voluntary organisations – although not necessarily equated with the number of volunteers – increased by 152% between 1995 – 2003. This is often taking place in the context of

government support for volunteering and legislation to support its development. In Slovakia, such support tends to focus on youth volunteering and volunteering by unemployed people, while Italy's Framework Law on Volunteering has provided a definition and principles for the sector to adhere to.

ULLL is often present and sometimes even well established within these countries. It can often, however, be limited to certain sectors, such as education and counselling in Slovakia, and uptake can remain limited, such as in Italy where only six per cent of the population undertook some form of lifelong learning in 2005. Governments within these countries can nonetheless support the development of ULLL. This is perhaps most evident within Austria, where a national strategy on lifelong learning and an Austrian Working Group on Learning in Later Life has been formed. Despite its low uptake, Italy also has a working group of lifelong learning to strengthen the coordination and development of a national and regional system for ULLL.

Mutual awareness of the other sector, however, tends to remain limited. Similarly, there is limited awareness of the learning benefits of volunteering. While there is some good practice evident, these countries often demonstrate considerable variation between their different regions.

5 Model three: more limited interaction

5.1 Description

This model describes Poland, Slovenia, Romania, Hungary and Turkey. There tends to be limited or no interaction between universities and organisations that involve volunteers. What little interaction there is largely confined to student volunteering, such as internships or placements. These can often be mandatory elements of courses, such as one course in Community Service in Turkey in which students are expected to volunteer 28 hours within a non governmental organisation within one semester. Similarly, some courses in Slovenian universities require students to undertake internships of between one and three months in their field of study in order to graduate⁴. In other cases, there are examples of non compulsory student volunteering such as students from Károly Róbert College promoting and organising blood donations on behalf of the Hungarian Red

Cross; or the 'Add tovább' ('Pass On') initiative which places students from ELTE University in Budapest into organisations working with and supporting young people.

There are, however, some examples of interactions which extend beyond student volunteering, although these remain less widespread and often isolated. Courses about the voluntary sector are, for example, evident in Turkey, such as the 'Non Governmental Organisations' course at Sakarya University. Poland also demonstrates an interesting example of interaction through its 16 partnerships between its universities and the Universities of the Third Age. This can, for example, include the accreditation of volunteering. Staff from Warsaw University give their time voluntarily to this process, giving lectures and running courses in the process that is coordinated by the city's Volunteer Centres Association.

⁴ This form of activity may not necessarily meet the definition of volunteering as an activity undertaken of someone's freewill – if the volunteering is a required component of a degree course, it effectively becomes a coerced activity.

These countries have been placed in this model as the result of limited understanding of the link between ULLL and volunteering by various stakeholders; what evidence we have suggests, as discussed above, that the interaction is limited, but in some cases a lack of knowledge about what activities are being undertaken may simply point to the absence of evidence rather than the absence of activity.

5.2 Characteristics

These countries tend to demonstrate lower levels of volunteering (for example, 10% in Poland, 11% in Hungary and 14% in Romania) and a relatively recent history of volunteering as an activity (for example, volunteering in its modern form emerged only after 1989 in these countries). This can mean that volunteering as an activity is less embedded in society and the wider benefits to the individual are perhaps not widely understood or appreciated. Volunteering also appears to exist in a policy environment which does not consistently offer a great deal of support. There is, however, a sense that this could be changing in some instances. In Turkey, for example, the younger

population have been described as increasingly appreciating the personal benefits of volunteering and as demonstrating a greater interest in getting involved. Similarly, the recent Polish Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism (2003) may indicate the development of a new policy environment. Finally in Romania, the volunteering infrastructure has developed rapidly in recent years from the first independent volunteer centre being launched in 2001 to the present national network of 15 centres.

While the education sector does offer a wide variety of opportunities for adult education and vocational training, it does not always appear to have been appreciated within the context of lifelong learning. It is, however, possible that this situation is changing, with a greater number of systems to recognise prior learning being developed in recent years. In Slovenia, the Bologna process was described as acting as a catalyst for such development in 2004. However, participation in adult education generally can remain low, with less than two per cent of adults aged 25 – 64 participating in lifelong learning.

6 Factors affecting the level of interaction

Analysis of the National Reports has highlighted a number of factors that appear to affect the level of interaction between ULLL and volunteering. These factors, although not exhaustive, include:

- The popularity of volunteering. This includes the level of public participation in volunteering⁵ and the extent of government support. Those countries where both was higher tended to demonstrate higher levels of interaction. Historical and cultural factors are also important in this context. The post Communist countries of Eastern Europe often have a strong legacy of 'compulsory volunteering' in which people were required to spend one day a week volunteering for the good of the state. In many instances this has contributed to a degree of suspicion and distrust surrounding volunteering. Furthermore, it frequently means that volunteering does not have such a long history as other countries and often lacks a comprehensive or established infrastructure to support it.
- The extent to which the link between volunteering and learning is appreciated and understood, by governments, organisations and individuals. Where this link is made, perhaps through the link between volunteering and employability, higher levels of interaction were frequently observed.
- The enthusiasm, interest and commitment of individuals within universities. To some extent within any of the countries which demonstrated interaction, success could be attributed to the actions of an individual staff member who drove the work with the voluntary sector organisation due to their personal interests and beliefs.
- The extent of mutual awareness between universities and volunteering organisations. In cases where one sector was unaware of the activities of the other, or how to access them, interaction tended to remain somewhat limited.
- The level of funding. This remains a pervasive issue within all countries, something that has been exacerbated by the recession, its prolonged recovery and public spending cuts. This affects even those countries where levels of interaction are highest. Certain countries have also been affected to greater degrees by the recession and its aftermath.

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⁵ Rates of volunteering cannot be compared directly between countries due to differences in methodology and how the question about volunteering was asked; they can, however, give an indication of broad differences.

Partners

- University of Graz, Austria
 - EUCEN, Belgium
 - European Volunteer Centre (CEV), Belgium
 - University of Hamburg, Germany
 - Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany
 - University of Barcelona, Spain
 - Third Sector Observatori, Spain
 - Social Guild Foundation, Hungary
 - CSVnet, Italy
 - INHOLLAND University of Applied Science, Netherlands
 - NOC*NSF, Netherlands
 - W. J. Grabski Public Library, Poland
 - Pro Vobis National Centre for Volunteering, Romania
 - University Babeş-Bolyai, Romania
 - University of Primorska, Slovenia
 - C.A.R.D.O., Slovakia
 - Middle East Technical University, Turkey
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