VAPE focuses on questions that stimulate, motivate and educate people with acknowledgement and recognition of historical backgrounds. How can we improve skills and knowledge acquired in volunteering activities in our society? What about a better recognition of the non-formal learning aspects? Can we create a better link making use of these skills and knowledge for the overall employability of volunteers? Is our historical background a curse or a blessing? The partners examine the local, regional, national and European context of volunteering work, share best practice and develop educational insights to translate and carry out the learned aspects in the daily work of the staff.

Our idea in "VAPE" is that different concepts of volunteering are demanding different solutions. Because each country has its own historical backgrounds, pedagogical staff act from different backgrounds and using different approaches. The partnership intends to analyse and develop existing educational tools which are aimed at improving social skills of socio-economically disadvantaged learners, with a view to enhancing their participation in society and/or on the labour market. We want to stock of the situation of volunteering in Central, East and West Europe and to examine methods, visions, experiences stimulating participation of young vulnerable adults.

The outcome are lessons on how to use volunteering concepts in our organisations to enhance volunteers' participation in society and how to link this to the labour market.
We met for two days in Groningen, the Netherlands, the home country of our coordinating organisation to discuss about the context of volunteering in our countries and our own experience and approach of volunteering. It was an interesting meeting between the East and the West sharing and learning from each other on topics like MOTIVATION OF VOLUNTEERS (what motivates volunteers in your organisation? Which method do you use to motivate volunteers? How do you find out what their motivation is? Feedback, goal setting and what is done in terms of reinforcement), REPLACING A PAID POSITION WITH VOLUNTEERING POSITIONS (very different perspectives between the East and the West) THE (UN)INVOLVEMENT OF GOVERNMENT IN THE VOLUNTEER FIELD (is there a need for it? is it possible in the present economical context? what is the position of civil society towards this?). We decided to share with you some of our findings, some of our learning outcomes. Thus, in this newsletter you can see an eastern and an western context of volunteering.

OBJECTIVES

• increasing knowledge on the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning acquired through voluntary work as one of the key instruments enabling the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings (labour market, volunteering work and service learning, resume of young adults);

• improving the quality of support systems and the capabilities of staff in the field of non-formal and informal learning in Europe

• reflecting on different concepts of volunteering across Europe and with acknowledgement of historical backgrounds;

• promoting European voluntary work as a concrete tool of non-formal and informal learning and as a tool bridging gaps between formal education, vocational work and work life without being obligatory for young adults with fewer opportunities;

• serving as exchange of best practice/of experiences between Central, East and Western Europe
Volunteering makes a significant contribution to community cohesion. Volunteering is omnipresent in the Austrian social system and seems to work properly. Although volunteering has had a long tradition in Austria (or maybe because of that tradition), there had not been any legal regulation until the European Year of Volunteering 2011 (see below).

Professional organization of volunteers needs specialized organisations offering volunteering opportunities, the necessary legal infrastructure, and of course volunteers. Organisations offering a professional commitment to volunteering include defined volunteering polices, professional coordination of volunteer activities, training, infrastructure and integration of volunteers into the organisation. Public authorities need to define the legal status of volunteers; they need to create a positive picture about volunteering, provide information about volunteer centres and support functions.

As previously mentioned, volunteering has had a long tradition in Austria without very much legislation. In effect, organizations were promoting and offering volunteering without any legal basis.

The first official report on volunteering in Austria came in 2009 (Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection). Volunteering was defined as unpaid productivity by choice external to the volunteers’ private households. According to the responsible Minister approx. 45 % of the Austrians are doing voluntary work which is part of Austrian culture and this promotes social safety and a high quality of life. The report distinguishes formal and informal volunteering, whereby formal volunteering takes place inside clubs, organizations or associations – and informal volunteering takes place outside such structures (e.g. helping a neighbour).

27.9 % of Austrians older than 14 years do formal volunteering for c. 4.2 hours per week and

27.1 % of the population does informal volunteering for c. 3.6 hours per week. Slightly more men do formal volunteer tasks than women.

Within the informal volunteer task field it is the opposite. Personal status or age (up to 69 years) does not seem to have any influence on the likelihood for voluntary tasks. Interesting but understandable is that education has a significant effect on volunteering. The higher the education a person has, the more s/he volunteers. Another interesting fact is that non-Austrians are underrepresented in volunteering: approx. 10 % of the Austrian population does not hold Austrian citizenship but only around 7 % of volunteers are non-Austrians.

Not only organisations benefit from volunteers, volunteers also benefit. Volunteering promotes social skills, provides experiences, increases social networks, keeps people active in old age and finally improves quality of life.

Typical volunteer fields include culture, sports, education, social services, religion, environment and community work or civil protection assistance. The three biggest organizations dealing with volunteers are the Volunteer Fire Brigade, the Austrian Red Cross and Caritas with together approx. 330,000 formal volunteers. This shows that a lot of (social) activities could not be accomplished without volunteers, and so they are highly appreciated. Concurrently there has not been a legal basis or a responsible body for lobbying volunteers work and rights for quite a long time. Since the “International Year of Volunteers” 2001 and especially with the “European Year of Volunteering” 2011 discussions have increasingly taken place concerning these topics. A lobbying body for volunteering and volunteers started to work on a suggestion for a concrete law. 53 Members from the Austrian Federal Ministries, Austrian Federal States, coalition of Austrian municipalities, trade unions, worker representatives and volunteer organizations are part of this body.

Finally the LAW ON VOLUNTEERING came into effect on the 27th of March 2012. So far only a few areas of volunteering are regulated. Although organisations appreciate the situation of a vague and open law which leaves room for interpretation, it seems there needs to be a detailed revision in the future!

The target of this law is to promote volunteering work and to increase social responsibility in society. The law clearly states that volunteering organizations should be promoted, a periodical report of volunteering should be published and that it is planned to develop a “volunteering passport”. Finally a definition of volunteering and a definition of what constitutes a volunteer organization are given.

Volunteering means that a natural/legal person (1) voluntarily performs services to others (2) in an organized setting (3) free of charge (4) with the purpose of promoting the general public or because of predominantly social motives. (5) Additionally voluntary tasks are performed without commercial motivation and are external to employment relationships or a vocational training.

Volunteering organizations (1) are non-profit entities, public or private, whose activities are to a large extent performed through volunteering. Organizations must be registered in the Austrian Federal States, coalition of Austrian municipalities, trade unions, worker representatives and volunteer organizations. (2) must not be political parties. (3) Voluntary organizations can only get donations, when they offer a professional framework for volunteers including provision of abundant information about the organisation, the work, offering concrete contact persons, training, insurance, co-determination, expense allowance and an activity certificate.

Until now many topics are still unclear, for example the above mentioned funding opportunities or which form insurance should take. The rest of the law discusses non classical volunteering like paid “voluntary social year”, paid “voluntary environmental protection year” or “memorial service, peace and social services abroad”.

According to the first official report on volunteering in Austria the social and general conditions are changing. There is a recognizable trend that the quantity of volunteering work is diminishing slightly but quality is increasing. Organizations are specializing more and more in professional volunteering management and the role of volunteers is becoming increasingly essential. In the meantime volunteering is seen as a central plank for social welfare. It seems as though the first important steps are done but there is still a long way to go.
First of all, in Romania there are definition issues regarding the concept of volunteering which are routed in a variety of sources: the vague and incomplete definition in the law of volunteering; the misuse of the term in the public discourse (eg: laws on the “voluntary military service” state that the “volunteer soldiers will receive a monthly payment”, thus contradicting the definition of volunteering); the communist legacy of the former “volunteer patriotic work” which was compulsory for all citizens.

However, there is a consensus regarding the 3 principles that define volunteering: free will; it has as result the benefit of the community; it does not come with financial reward.

In Romania, The Profile of the Volunteer is the one of a young, highly educated person living in an urban area (as this is the social category most common in the volunteer sector). Volunteering among the elderly is however represented in the context of church.

Some Milestones of Volunteering in Romania: 1997 - the first local volunteering centres are created through the PHARE programme. 2001 - the National Network of Volunteering Centres is created; The www.voluntariat.ro website appears (a website that is up to today an informative portal about everything connected to volunteering in Romania); The first Law of Volunteering 2002 - the first edition of the National Volunteering Week (which was celebrated each year ever since) 2010 - the appearance of VOLUM - the Federation of organisations supporting the development of volunteering in Romania, the national umbrella body for volunteer centres and volunteer-involving organisations; the website www.volontareuropean.ro with information about volunteering in general and about the European Voluntary Service (Action 2 of the European Comission’s Youth in Action Programme) 2011 - the first edition of the National Gala Awards for Volunteers - working groups within the European Year of Volunteering that had as result: The Public Agenda on Volunteering in Romania 2012 – 2020; the proposal for the changing of the Law of volunteering; lobby for the inclusion of volunteering and nonformal education as a priority axis within the European Social Fund and the new generation of financing programmes for 2014 – 2020; the publication of the Ethical Code of Conduct for Organisers of Volunteering Activities; a guide for the recognition of the competences developed through volunteering activities (which is being piloted during 2012 and 2013 by organisations working with volunteers); a guide for Employee Supported Volunteering and Corporate Social Responsibility.

An important actor of the volunteering sector in Romania is Pro Vobis, which started as a volunteering centre in 1997 and developed into the National Resource Centre for Volunteering in the last years.

Funding Opportunities: There is no core funding for volunteering activities, as within many stakeholders you can find the perception that if volunteers are involved, money is not needed. Romanian Fiscal Code offers the possibility to tax-paying individuals to redirect 2% of their income tax to a nonprofit organisation. Funding for volunteering in Romania is mainly project based and comes from the international community: Soros Foundation, The Embassy of Netherlands, Switzerland, EU Funding Programmes (eg: within the Youth in Action Programme, volunteering was set each year since 2010 as a priority).

The Law of Volunteering in Romania: law no.195/2011 with several amendments and upgrades. The Law was created as a result of the implementation of the European Commission’s Youth Programme, which led to an increased number of foreign volunteers coming to Romania and the need to contextualise their status. This is why some of the issues are not suited for local Romanian volunteers and efforts are being made in order to change it. Some of the key aspects of the 2001 Law of volunteering are:
- It refers to youth and young volunteers and explicitly to the European Comission’s Youth Programme (today’s Youth in Action) - It provides a definition for volunteering as “the public interest activity carried out of free will by any individual for the benefit of others, without any financial benefit.” - It stipulates principles of volunteering, domains of activity - It mentions the volunteering contract as the document regulating the relationship between an organisation and a volunteer, obligations and rights of the volunteer - It explicitly refers to the recognition of the volunteer’s gained experience by stating the right of an employee to choose in the case of two candidates for a job with equal scores, the one proving that he or she has been a volunteer.

During the European Year of Volunteering 2011 a Proposal for the Change of the Law of Volunteering has been put together, a proposal that has been the subject for consultation with the civil sector and not only during 2012. In January 2013 the proposal includes the following main points in addition to the 2001 law:
- Redefining volunteering - Elimination of all explicit reference to youth volunteering and clear definition of volunteering for all ages as a principle of law - Stating that there is and should be made the distinction between volunteering, internship and professional traineeship - Inclusion of references to ensuring quality of volunteering (the need for a designated volunteers’ coordinator, rights and responsibilities for both the volunteer and the host organisation, volunteering contract, mandatory induction and orientation for the volunteer at the beginning of their activity) - Inclusion of references to ensuring quality of...
volunteering (the need for a designated volunteers’ coordinator, rights and responsibilities for both the volunteer and the host organisation, volunteering contract, mandatory induction and orientation for the volunteer at the beginning of their activity)
- Clarifications of the supportive role of the state in the development of the volunteering sector

RESOURCES:
- Law of Volunteering no.135/2001 with upgrades
- Proposal for the changing of the Law of volunteering published by the National Authority for Sports and Youth – January 2013 version
  - www.voluntariat.ro

IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

- MORE ABOUT THE CONTEXT OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE PARTNER COUNTRIES (EAST MEETS WEST)
- RESULTS OF THE NEXT MEETING TAKING PLACE IN MARCH 2013 IN THE UK: HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE THE NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROCESS THAT OUR VOLUNTEERS GO THROUGH?

DURATION:
August 2012 – September 2014

PARTNERS:
CMO Groningen, The Netherlands - Coordinator
Centrul de Voluntariat Resita, Romania
Internationaler Bund Polska, Poland
Barnardo´s, UK
Musikcafe After Eight, Finland
Pitea Municipality - Labor Market and adult education, Sweden
Internationaler Bund Franken, Germany
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Caritas der Diozese Graz-Seckau, Austria
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