

**VOLUNTEERING, Education for life!
Recognition and validation of learning outcomes
in grassroots sport-volunteer education**

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Why to educate volunteers?

As voluntary work is considered to be the most important resource of the grassroots sports sector, sport organisations need to take care to get enough and qualified volunteers, either for leadership and management functions or as instructors, trainers and for supporting tasks. This is a big challenge facing the fact, that

- the willingness to become engaged as a volunteer is decreasing;
- the demands on voluntary work have expanded and increased and are constantly changing.

On account of these more difficult requirements sport organisations are challenged to put higher attention on the education of volunteers and to start more well-aimed educational measures.

The education of volunteers has to fulfil two main functions:

- To qualify for a particular volunteer task; e.g. to become active as an instructor in practical courses or as a team-coach; or to gain knowledge and experience for a special task in the board of a club.
- To recruit, retain and to appreciate volunteers. To gain competences and skills through volunteering is an important motivation to become and to stay engaged for volunteering (Hansen, 2011, S. 123/124)

Volunteering in sport offers a wide range of learning outcomes in all modes of education, in formal, non-formal and informal education. The following definitions are used on European level (EC-DG ET: Lifelong learning policy/doc 52)

- *Formal learning is typically provided by education or training institutions, with structured learning objectives, learning time and learning support. It is intentional on the part of the learner and leads to certification.*
- *Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. However, it is intentional on the part of the learner and has structured objectives, times and support.*
- *Informal learning results from daily activities related to work, family life or leisure. It is not structured and usually does not lead to certification. In most cases, it is unintentional on the part of the learner.*

Semi-formal education systems in organised sport

Many sport organisations in Europe have established their own education system for volunteers. Those systems can be assessed as "semi-formal". They are based on well structured curricula and lead often to certification. For example the education system of the German Gymnastic Federation offers 46 different training profiles, 74.000 licences on different levels are valid, and every year app. 5000 new licenses are issued. But the education systems in organised sport are mostly not accredited by governmental authorities and not affiliated to the public educational systems like schools, universities or vocational education and training institutions.

But it's obvious that the education policy in Europe has started to change since several years and becomes more and more open to recognise education programmes from outside the formal learning institutions and taking into account a holistic view of education and lifelong learning, including knowledge, competences and skills acquired also outside the state accredited formal education process. In the meantime many important political documents from EC-ET had been published on this topic (<http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc36>).

But to become respected within this change of education paradigm it's necessary to develop convincing, quality conscious educational programs for organised sport and to take actively part in the national and European Lifelong Learning (LLL) discussions as well as to adapt the own educational programs to the National and European Qualification Standards (NQF/EQF).

Learning outcomes in non-formal and informal education

Sport organisations offer as well many non-formal education measures for the qualification of volunteers, like seminars, congresses, conventions, practical courses. More than 4000 volunteers participated last year in such educational offers of the German Gymnastic Federation.

Last but not least "learning by doing" as informal learning happens, while volunteers are engaged in their work as leaders, managers or on executive level as instructors, coaches, in supporting tasks. While learning experiences in formal education are normally clear defined through pertinent and valuable objectives, competences and skills, learning outcomes in non-formal and informal education had rather been taken into consideration until now. But this comes more and more into focus.

"Countries around Europe are increasingly emphasising the need to take account of the full range of an individual's knowledge, skills and competences – not only those acquired at schools, universities or other formal education and training institutions. Recognising all forms of learning is therefore a priority of EU action in education and training.

Learning that takes place in formal education and training systems is traditionally the most visible and recognised in the labour market and by society in general. In recent years, however, there has been a growing appreciation of the importance of learning in non-formal and informal settings. New approaches are needed to identify and validate these 'invisible' learning experiences."
(<http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc52>)

This statement is as well applicable to learning processes in sport and more over to education of volunteers in sport. Logically the "EU-Communication on Sport" (2011) recommended:

"Commission and Member States: support the inclusion of sport-related qualifications when implementing the European Qualifications Framework. In this context, promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning gained through activities such as voluntary activity in sport."

But what kind of "invisible learning experiences" can be gained through voluntary activity in sport? Some new studies treat this topic and give detailed information, what learning outcomes could be expected. (Hansen 2009; Braun/Hansen 2011; Neuber 2006). The studies point out key competences on 3 different levels:

- Individual, personal competences: independence; load-bearing capacity; flexibility; self-confidence;
- Social competences: sense of responsibility; communication ability; ability to settle conflicts;
- Subject relevant competences: organisational skills; methodical skills; enhancement of knowledge and practical, sport-technical skills.

Volunteering makes competent for life

Even if there is still a deficit in studies evaluating the evidence of transferability of competences gained through volunteering in sport into other sectors of life like school-education, professional training or private life, there are sufficient results, which are able to verify the thesis of transferability. Hansen refers in one of his empirical studies on the conviction of volunteers in sport, to be able to transfer most competences gained in sport voluntary work into other sections of life (Hansen, 2009).

Sport organisations should recognise that this conviction is also an important reason to become a volunteer and might be a conclusive effect to volunteering. This argument should be used much more in strategies to recruit and to retain volunteers and as a tool in a "culture of recognition".

Summery and perspectives

Human resources development is a key for a prospective development of a sport organisation and volunteers are the most valuable resource. The education of volunteers is one of the main challenges for the development.

- Education of volunteers needs a strategic, systematic approach. A clear documented and politically approved concept is strongly recommended.
- ISCA is developing its own education-program
- A semi-formal education-system should be strived for.
- Cooperation with national Lifelong Learning networks and organisations is recommended. ISCA is already partner in the European Lifelong Learning Network (EUCIS LLL).
- It's recommended to make learning outcomes of non-formal and informal education of volunteers in grassroots sports more popular on one hand in inside the national organisation and on the other hand in the topical political discussion on education.

- Take into account the ISCA-Europe position paper "Sport for All –increasing European Human Capital" on promotion and validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Make learning outcomes of volunteer education to a central argument for the recruitment and retaining of volunteers for your organisation.

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