

REPORT

VAPE Transnational Seminar, 05-06.03.2013 in Liverpool

Third meeting of VAPE project took place in Liverpool from 5th to 6th March 2013. Over 20 participants from 10 countries gathered together in order to exchange the information about volunteering practices in their countries and to discuss some relevant issues.

The seminar started with the presentation made by hosts, Justine Williams and Diane Pryde (Barnardo's, UK). This was an informative introduction about the functioning of Barnardo's organization and their contribution to the non-formal learning. Some interesting statistics about number of volunteers, gender correlation (80% women and 20% men) and other facts were presented. Barnardo's representatives also explained the procedure of recruitment and further supervision of volunteers. Barnardo's is teaching their volunteers the history of organization,



Barnardo's vision and values as well as important health, safety, equality and diversity issues. The volunteers of Barnardo's are very diverse: aged from 10 to 85 years, of any nationality, with different educational attainment. However, this diversity contributes to a good functioning of the organization, which shows a really good performance.

Second part of the seminar was focused on volunteers' recognition. Seminar participants shared recognition practices from their countries. Thus, UK mentioned special internal awards, thematic "Make a difference day", special issues of volunteers' journals, supporting groups, certificates and gifts. Other countries mentioned Christmas celebrations and balls, informal meetings and other types of informal recognition. In Czech Republic and Romania best volunteers are mentioned in local newspapers or television, which does not always cause the volunteers to feel pride: because of social prejudices still existing in those countries. No formal recognition is known to be in Scandinavian countries: probably the long tradition of volunteering tends people to take it for granted. Participants agreed on two issues, first, that more formal recognition is needed, and secondly, that the image of volunteering should be changed to a more positive one, especially in Eastern European countries.

Third part of the seminar included discussions about the role of governments and other authorities in the volunteering. As one would expect, important differences between countries in the matter of

legislation and regulation had occurred during discussion. Eastern European countries seem to be more flexible in terms of legislation and regulation than the Western European countries. Thus, in countries like Romania, Poland and Czech Republic volunteers are not insured and there is no compulsory police check (even for the foreigners). At the same time, projects are mainly financed by European Union, which means that governmental and municipal support in those countries is rather limited. On the contrary, in UK the regulation went to its extremes. Barnardo's professionals mentioned excessive bureaucracy, expensive police checks and risk assessment procedures.



Other countries, like Germany, Austria, Netherlands and Scandinavian countries get rather strong governmental support. Their volunteers are insured (or, in case of Scandinavian countries, no insurance is needed due to a free healthcare) and procedures like police check take less time and cost less than in UK.

All participants agreed that governmental support is very important, but the balance is needed between rules and regulations from the one hand, and support from the other hand.

The seminar closed with the discussion on the future of volunteering. Because of recent labor market policy developments such as activation measures for unemployed people claiming unemployment allowance, volunteering and civic community services become more and more compulsory. This might have undesirable effects on volunteering image in general. Budget cuts might also endanger the future of volunteering projects. Finally, deeply rooted social prejudices represent an important obstacle for young volunteers in many countries.

Further international collaboration is strongly needed in order to manage the above-mentioned difficulties. Next transnational seminar is taking place in Poland, in September 2013.