

6. Volunteering in Slovenia
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6.1. Volunteering in Slovenia

Slovenia is a small country in comparison with other partners in the VoCH project, with only 2 millions inhabitants and 64 officially recognised museums.

Volunteering is not a new phenomenon in Slovenia: in the 19th century there were the beginnings of development of volunteering practice, particularly in the field of culture, education and economy. We can speak about 4 periods in the development of voluntary work in Slovenia:

1. The Austro-Hungarian Empire
2. The so-called “first” Yugoslavia
3. The Socialistic Yugoslavia
4. The Independent Republic of Slovenia

In the first two periods development was similar to other Central European Countries, but the Second World War interrupted this. During the Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (1945 – 1991) it was much more common to volunteer in the social field with humanitarian aims (for example, the fire brigade or the Red Cross) and in local tourist, cultural and sport organisations. After WWII young people joined the big reconstruction works organised by the State. That form of voluntary work was organised and supported centrally up until the 1980s.

6.2. Voluntary Organisations in Independent Slovenia

Shortly after Slovenian independence the Slovene Philanthropy, a non-governmental, non-profit, and non-political organisation was established (1992), with the aim of developing and promoting different forms of humanitarian activities in Slovenia. The objective of the organisation is to encourage and spread volunteering and other charity work in the social field by developing programmes of voluntary work, especially the voluntary work of youth and of the elderly, by promoting volunteering through training and educating volunteers, organisers and mentors of voluntary work, raising the public awareness of the importance of volunteers and developing a network of volunteer organisations throughout Slovenia¹. Cultural heritage and museums have been less common areas for voluntary work, both within Slovene Philanthropy and other umbrella organisations focusing on voluntary work.²

Encouraging and promoting voluntary work is the most important activity of the Slovene Philanthropy, which is carried out through the following activities:

- Developing programmes of voluntary work of youth and the elderly
- Training and educating of volunteers, organisers and mentors of voluntary work
- Developing the network of volunteer organisations
- Issuing publications about voluntary work and charity
- Spreading ideas and values of philanthropy and solidarity through media
- Establishing a data base about volunteer activities and voluntary organisations
- Organising humanitarian events and performances aimed at spreading and developing volunteering
- Co-operation with international voluntary and humanitarian organisations

¹ Jaka Kovač Slovene Philanthropy

² There are several non-governmental, not-for-profit organisations focusing on voluntary work in Slovenia, including the Third Age University, the Anton Trstenjak Institute, and the Social Gerontology Association of Slovenia.

Slovene Philanthropy consists of:

- The General Assembly, which is the highest organ of the Slovene Philanthropy and consists of all the members of Association. It is convened annually to assess the work done in the past year and confirm the basic program orientations of the Slovene Philanthropy for the current year
- The Managing Board, which is the executive organ of the Association and currently has 16 members, among them the President, and two Vice Presidents. One of the members of Managing Board is also Secretary General of Slovene Philanthropy (the only paid Board role).
- The Council, which is an advisory organ, consisting of distinguished and important people from public, cultural, political and economical sector of Slovenia, has 17 members
- The Supervisory Board, consisting of three members, supervises the activities and operations of Association and extra carefully scrutinise and evaluate annual fiscal report of the Managing Board.
- The high quality staff of six full-time engaging experts and one assistant

Around 3000 people attended various events and activities within the framework of the Slovene Philanthropy in the year 2000.

The Slovene Philanthropy is representing Slovenia in the IAVE (International Association for Voluntary Effort) and in the European Volunteer Centre (CEV)

They are cooperating with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations in Slovenia and abroad in a field of civil society and particular humanitarian activities³. They provide training for volunteers and for volunteer coordinators. Their Code of Ethics for Volunteers was confirmed in January 2006.

A big step in promoting voluntary work in Slovenia was establishing the web site www.prostovoljstvo.org, where one can get all information regarding the topic.

6.3. Voluntary Work in Slovene Museums

Although voluntary work is well-organised and quite successful in Slovenia, museums are not well-represented among organisations hosting or attracting volunteers. The Slovene Philanthropy admits that there has not been much interest in voluntary work in museums from both potential volunteers and museums themselves in the past. Their only member since 2007 is the Slovene National Museum, which joined when the project 'Cultural Mediators' started.⁴

Slovenian museum professional are quite aware of the potential of voluntary work in museums in some other European countries, especially the ones with long tradition like The Netherlands, Germany or the United Kingdom, but there were only few attempts to introduce this before 2006. Some of the museums stopped after the first attempt; others were quite successful in the context of international projects. One of these was Maritime Museum 'Sergej Mašera' in Piran which organised an international voluntary work-camp of salt-making in the Sečovelje landscape park.

³ Jaka Kovač Slovene Philanthropy

⁴ Jaka Kovač and Nina Lukashovich, interviewed 8 September 2008

6.4. A success story from 1999: Voluntary Work-camps in Museum of Salt-making

The Salt-making Museum in the Sečovlje saltpans was created as an open-air museum, where visitors can hear the story of traditional salt production. With the aim of transferring this idea into practice, the Maritime Museum 'Sergej Mašera' in Piran which manages the Salt-making Museum, and 'Voluntariat-SCI Slovenia', a Slovene branch of an international NGO, organised the first international voluntary work-camp in 1999.

SCI (Service Civil International) is an organisation with more than 80 years of tradition and has a wide network of national offices in more than 40 countries worldwide. It gathers the volunteers from all over the world. The museum provides the accommodation, infrastructure, work and technical support.

Every July when the salt harvesting season begins, 7 volunteers from different countries come to Sečovlje. They form an international team, which actually revives the open-air museum over 14 days. They stay on the upper floor of an old salt-storage house where there is no electricity. Because they cook by themselves, the experience of international cuisine is always present. They work 5-6 hours per day. Their work consists of helping harvesting the salt, renewing the salt fields and repairing numerous dykes and the area where the evaporation and crystallization pools are. Since this is a period of 'sour cucumbers' in the media, not only physical work is important: as part of an international event, volunteers make a small campaign through the media for the preservation of this manmade, but at the same time small, unique and fragile Mediterranean area, which managed to survive for more than 800 years but is now endangered by the appetites of different parties. The volunteers visit the museum, learn about the surroundings and the country in general, have trips in the vicinity and enjoy leisure activities. Active and in all aspects fulfilling holidays: international team, sea air, no electricity, no TV, no computer, no Internet, no running water, and – no stress.

56 volunteers from 16 countries have participated in the 7 work camps to date. Altogether they have contributed 2357 working hours. They have collected 126 tonnes of salt, transported it to the storage house and repaired countless metres of dykes. Their PR result is 17 radio shows, 16 television shows (among them on CNN International) and 32 articles in various printed media. The PR events have become some of the best marketing tools for the Museum of salt making.

International voluntary work-camps contributed to the Museum of Salt-making receiving the Europa Nostra Medal in the category of Cultural Landscapes in 2003, 'for the Museum of salt making in the Sečovlje landscape park restitution of facilities for traditional salt production technology, architectural restoration, and educational activities, all in close harmony with the natural environment'. This was the first time that any institution from Slovenia received the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards. Their vision for the future is more work camps during all summer season where volunteers will actually maintain the open-air museum⁵.

⁵ Pipan, Primož, International Voluntary Work-camps – an Important Factor of Successful Development of Museum of Salt Making in the Sečovlje Landscape Park, no published yet, e address: primoz.pipan@zrc-sazu.si

6.5. New Milestone: MATRA project

The Slovene Museum Association was from 1996 to 2003 a partner in Matra Project, which aimed to develop Slovene museum management. Part of the training was an excursion to the Netherlands, where 13 Slovene museum professionals and the representatives from the Ministry of Culture had the opportunity to get information and to meet some volunteers. They were especially surprised to find that volunteers can be also the managers of the museums.

Since that time the idea of voluntary work in museums has become more and more alive in the Slovene museum world. Some museums have started to experiment with it, including the City Museum of Ljubljana, whose first 'real' volunteer was recruited on the flight from Amsterdam back to Ljubljana (returning from the Matra excursion). A young man sitting next to one of the participants was so curious that the conversation ended with his sharing his wish to create a museum exhibition. And it happened. Since then the City Museum has carried out some pilot projects with different target groups, mainly within the programs for adults.

At the same time the idea of developing a special Cultural Heritage Protection Act was introduced, which included a special Article on Volunteers; the City Museum of Ljubljana proposed a project *Volunteering in Slovene Museums* to the Slovenian Museum Association, which accepted it as a part of a 3 year plan 2007- 2010; and the Third Age University developed another international volunteer project *Cultural Mediators in Museums*.⁶ The project aimed at students of the Third Age University, and resulted in first well-organised group of volunteers in Slovene National Museum. The project is still alive and more museums have joined in. The Third Age University managed to upgrade the project with Norway and EEA Grants.

6.6. Legislation

The legal base for future voluntary work in Slovene museums is Cultural Heritage Protection Act (CHPA-1) passed by the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia February 1st 2008. In Article 102 (Volunteers) it states:

- Volunteers in public services are individuals with an adequate education or qualification. Upon the termination of volunteering, the administrator issues attestation of acquired working experience or qualifications, unless the law does not determine otherwise.
- Volunteers may perform an apprenticeship as apprentices-volunteers, gain working experience in order to obtain the title from Article 103 of the CHPA, or perform other tasks.
- In public services volunteers-confidants work in the field of protection. Their responsibilities are raising the public's awareness of cultural heritage, informing, and informal supervision of the preservation in the fieldwork.
- The relationship between the volunteer and the public services is regulated by the means of a contract.
- The criteria for the assignment of awards are regulated in accordance with Article 107 of the CHPA.

⁶ as a part of LACE (Lifelong Learning as a Key to Active Citizenship) project

6.7. Results of Questionnaires

We are afraid that no exact data about numbers or profiles of volunteers in Slovene museums are available except that which we have obtained from our questionnaires. At the time we have finished our research (end of May 2008) 17 museums out of 64 told us they have some experiences with volunteers and 8 of them returned the questionnaires. It looks that there were 76 volunteers in 9 Slovene museums at that time; 26 of them in the National museum, 17 in Recent History Museum Celje (regional museum) and up to 12 in Museum of Železniki (special museum), and 1 to 3 in other museums. They are mostly involved in work with public (guides, workshops deliverers, receptionists). It looks that the majority are retired people followed by postgraduate students. Their main motivation is interest/love of the museum and wishing to keep active and engaged. Looking for social opportunities or contacts, seeking work experiences and work as a part of their study are next most important motivation.

The majority of volunteers in Slovene museums are managed by curators or heads of departments. The museums (3) that took part in Cultural mediator project have designed introduction and trainings for volunteers, the rest have mentors who introduce them into museum and work.

Most museums recognise that the volunteers bring additional quality to their services. Most of the museums offer their volunteers free entrance to the museum, events and sometimes to the workshops. The sometimes get free publications and benefits in museum shop and cafeteria. Sometimes museums organise special excursions for their volunteers or they invite them to join the ones for the employees.

The main drawbacks/difficulties of working with volunteers seem to be the effort required to recruit them, the long process of introduction, volunteers' irregular schedules, and the big effort to persuade the curators to accept them.

In the trainings for museums professionals, museums would like to gain some knowledge and skills regarding voluntary work itself and the legislation supporting it, communication skills, how to motivate volunteers and their coordinators, and how to express gratitude to volunteers.

Slovene museums would like to see the following themes within a new European handbook: the meaning and the role of volunteers in museums, managing and solving the conflict, and concrete experience with volunteers.