

## Information Sheet

### European Partnership Leonardo da Vinci QualiProSecondHand

The QualiProSecondHand project is a two-year research project supported by the European Commission which aims at developing qualification approaches and possible ways for the professionalisation of the second hand industry. In the framework of this project, the first important results are ready to be presented. They are based on both, a scientific analysis of the sector as well as on several case studies.

At first, the second hand sector in the partner countries of the project such as Germany, Finland, Belgium, Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia and the UK seems to be quite heterogeneous. Nevertheless, numerous similarities were identified in the context of the sector's analysis. Thus, various parallels exist with regard to the employee structure, to the areas of business, to the clientele and to the development of certain trends. In addition to this the companies operating in the sector could be clearly divided into profit and not-for-profit organisations. And also, both the companies' structures within a type of business as well as the tasks and processes within the different areas of business are relatively similar. The second hand industry is an independent, growing sector whose professionalisation and quality can be increased by means of sector-specific qualifications. Therefore, it is amongst other things necessary to improve its comparability with the first hand market and to create more transparency.

The quality of the second hand businesses is an important starting point for comparability. The introduction of quality standards contributes significantly to their professionalisation. The quality is reflected e.g. in the products that are sold, the service, the operating schedule, the way a business is presenting itself and its individual structures and processes. The key to an improved quality and professionalisation is the qualification of the employees. A general sector-specific need for qualifications was identified in the context of its analysis. From this follows the necessity to develop qualifications for the sector on a European level which take into account ongoing developments like the cross-border trade and ensure coherence and comparability in doing so. The project takes the following steps in order to contribute to achieving this goal:

- The creation of a scope for the development of qualification concepts which are based on defined quality standards.
- The creation of a guideline for the development of qualifications. This guideline could serve as and should be a helpful business tool.
- The creation of a network design. This is done against the background of the introduction of sector-specific qualifications especially to be able to involve the small companies. The establishment of networks for the purpose of exchanging experiences strengthens the companies' innovativeness and competitiveness.

A significant contribution to more professionalisation is made by means of the products described. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the development of both, common quality standards as well as quality approaches or concepts, respectively, will have a positive effect on the development of the second hand sector in Eastern Europe which is comparatively underdeveloped. The details of the results of the sector analysis are available at [www.QualiProSH.eu](http://www.QualiProSH.eu) in the form of an overall european report and in the form of individual national reports.

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## The second hand sector in Austria

Already in the beginning of the research it became obvious that a general distinction between companies in the private sector and socio-economic companies has to be made. While private enterprises rather regard the junk goods business as a niche-sector, this sector is used in the social economy because of its low-priced acquisition of goods. The demarcation between antiquities – junk goods – second hand goods is blurred in Austria. This is due to the acquisition of goods, which mainly occurs through clearances of dwellings.

The second hand market is regionally organized. In the private second hand market mainly sole traders, respectively very small enterprises with no or few employees are found. Within the social economy, the number of employees - including key persons - can amount up to 50. Altogether, there are approximately 880 enterprises in the Austrian second hand branch; around 10% of which are organized socio-economically. The denseness of second hand enterprises in Austria amounts to an average of one enterprise/ 9.400 habitants. In Vienna, the denseness is twice as much. The acceptance of second hand goods is higher in conurbations than in rural areas. Furthermore flea-markets are an important segment of the second-hand-market in Austria. Every week there are up to 5000 flea-markets being held in Austria, where professional and private sellers offer their goods.

Changes in the respective business areas resulted, among others, from legal regulations: the WEEE ordinance requires a free take-back duty of old appliances that can be resold. The private junk goods trade is whipsawed by low-budget furniture and –textiles, and thus quests for niches through specializations. The degree of popularity and business success of enterprises are decisively influenced by marketing methods and the shop structure. Good examples were found for shops that were designed in a modern and appealing way and that have abdicated the image of a second hand goods trader. Concerning advertising tactics, various approaches were elicited, whereby good marketing turned out to be absolutely beneficial for the business.

The second part of the study deals with the qualification of the employees. Within the private sector, there are no regulations concerning a special education. In this way, academic persons, engineers, as well as persons without special qualification are found in this branch. The majority of traders enter this branch out of an interest in old items and autonomously pursue further education. The need for qualification was assessed mainly in the field of marketing, yet there is no desire for a specialist education, as the market is changing permanently and everybody is adopting essential knowledge via internet, expert talk and textbooks.

In the social economy, the employment of disadvantaged people like disabled or permanently unemployed people, respectively people with special needs receives priority. This branch deals with low threshold qualification, and its aim is to enable these people to be socially fit throughout the period of their employment, in order to reintegrate them into the first employment market. The employees are trained to be simple aides, technical competence comes second rate.

It is thus paramount to qualify the key persons and to introduce a system for quality management in the companies. Accordingly available reference books can help the frequently changing transitory workers to efficiently be trained in their respective fields of work.

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