

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 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 Finland

At the beginning of the project the Second Hand Sector has to be defined clearly because it is close to the concepts of Reuse and Recycling which are more commonly understood and used in Finland. It became obvious already in first interviews that the Second Hand Sector is not only very new concept in Finland but also a fragmented sector with different kind of actors working in different business forms.

The Second Hand Sector can be divided to different dimensions in Finland. There is a difference between North and South as the Second Hand sales is more concentrated to Southern and Western areas of Finland due to population concentration to these areas. Almost half of the Second Hand companies are found in the county of Southern Finland according to Finland Statistics (2005). The second hand sector is also more developed in bigger cities than in the countryside.

The Second Hand business covers many kind of actors. Actors can be divided to private sector, public sector and "the third sector" which is the term used in Finland to cover all the associations, non-profit and charity organisations. In Finland the social enterprises are part of the private sector as they are profit seeking companies (Ltd's). This development is different compared to many other European countries. Public sector is financing many of the associations in the form of employment subsidies in the Second Hand Sector.

There wasn't any comprehensive statistics found covering the whole sector but in 2005, according to Finland Statistics: there was 1258 employed, 753 outlets and the total turn over was 77 417 thousand Euros (outdoor flea markets are not included in these figures). Many professionals reminded that statistics might not cover all the Second Hand sales in Finland. The organisations in the sector have usually several business fields like electronic devices, furniture and clothes. The national and international networks are very important channel for organisations working in the Second Hand Sector in Finland.

In the context of the sector analysis could be identified only a few facts about the topic qualification in the Second Hand sector. Because the Second Hand actors are quite small organisations or sole traders in Finland and the Second Hand sales has been practiced "in a hobby sense" before, the qualification and education strategies are only starting to be developed more profoundly. There are no national standards for qualifications in the Second Hand sector.

From the case studies we found out that the qualification needs are very high for the management of the organisations as the employees are in many cases disabled people or other advantageous groups. So the management needs as well social and pedagogical skills as business thinking and organisational skills.

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