

## 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 Germany

Germany's second hand sector is predominantly coined by small and middle-sized types of enterprise. On the one hand, there is the smallest and simplest form of organisation which is the typical retail shop run by the owner himself. It is offering a range of products which is relatively unspecific and is not concentrating on a certain commodity group. On the other hand, however, there are also retail chains which are well-organised and partly bigger. They pursue both, buying as well as sales strategies and rely on quality management, the focusing on certain commodity groups and special concepts which aim at the company's development. Apart from the companies of different size and product range which are operating commercially, there are also numerous non-profit organisations, including charity shops, textile and second hand projects and relief supplies initiatives. These institutions trade under the name of owner-run company, civil law partnership (GbR), limited liability company (GmbH) or association.

There are different associations and networks which define or provide quality standards, and to some extent also qualification standards, for their members or shops. Among these are "Second Hand Vernetzt e.V.", "Ecomöbel-Netzwerk", "Dachverband Fairwertung", "Humana" and e.g. local networks like the ones that exist in Munich. In Germany, almost every product which is sold new is also traded second hand. Especially furniture, textiles and clothes, electric and electronic products including computers and lamps, books and audio media, household effects and living accessories, and also a range of product-related services have to be mentioned in this context.

According to the retail industry's structural data as of 2003, a figure of 283.400 retail shops are registered and operate their businesses commercially. Two percent are established in the second hand industry (antiques included). The annual revenue of these shops was approximately € 824 million in total. About 62% are smaller businesses with one to two employees and a turnover of less than a million Euros per year. Businesses that turn over more than a million are mostly bigger ones that employ up to fifteen people. Their share only accounts for two percent of the second hand businesses registered in total. According to the information released by the "Second Hand Vernetzt e.V." association which operates a national business directory, there are around 10.000 businesses which trade second hand products as in terms of the project. All in all it turned out that the sector had not yet been documented completely with regard to statistics. Experts, however, prognosticate that turnovers will develop positively in the future as well and that the market will grow further due to legal requirements in the field of recycling and a changing consumer behaviour.

Qualification in the private sector primarily takes place on the initiative of the ones who work there or of the owners, respectively. Qualification is achieved mostly by drawing on external qualification experts or training institutions (e.g. academies of business and educational institutions of the chambers) which offer the respective seminars, trainings and workshops. The know-how communicated in the context of such qualifications does not focus especially on the particularities of the second hand industry. The subjects dealt with are rather general (e.g. commercial subjects). The study has made it very clear, however, that the people working in the sector have to meet special requirements. Moreover, a sector-specific need for qualification was clearly identified in the context of the study. Certain steps for qualification were already taken in the past like the concept "shop assistant in the second hand sector" (with curriculum). They hold promising approaches and possibilities for development. The corresponding networks of Germany realised that the second hand sector is offering complex possibilities for qualification in the fields of merchandise management, accounting, marketing, sales strategies, logistics and transportation, stockkeeping, merchandise planning and product treatment.

Partner in Germany: ITB – Universität Bremen BAG Arbeit, BAG Arbeit e.V. and QAD Dresden GmbH