

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 qualification 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 Belgium

The second hand market in Belgium is a mature and well developed business. Second hand products are widely sold and bought throughout the country and there is a widespread culture of purchasing second hand. For that reason Belgium has always been a fertile ground for the development of pioneer initiatives in this field. These initiatives have in recent years further developed and new concepts and networks have seen the light. This favourable environment made it possible to think more carefully on how to exploit the sector from both an economic and a social perspective. In particular national and local government were particularly interested in exploiting this market to create job opportunities for marginalised groups. The market is dominated by well organised “for profit” and “social economy” players. Beside these main players there is a well established tradition of flea-markets (brocantes) which are organised at any period of the year. It is estimated that no less than 1.200 brocantes are held annually across the country. Many second hand shops are also disseminated principally in the biggest cities. Internet based transactions are increasingly popular and Ebay dominates the scenes with more than 1.000.000 subscribers and 400.000 access a day. No less than 2.000 items are sold on a daily basis.

As said above if we make abstraction from the recent appearance of Ebay, the market is largely dominated by well organised networks. The for profit sector is mainly organised around franchising schemes. We can mention the biggest:

1. Troc International, specialised in bulky items with approximately 27 shops across the country. Shops are generally big and cover large surfaces.
2. Cash Converter with 15 shops specialised in small and medium size electronic appliances, sport equipment, music and instruments. Shops are relatively small but very well and professionally organised.
3. Eco-Shops with 16 shops mainly for bulky items.

Being franchising schemes a capital varying from € 100.000 to € 150.000 is requested to launch the activity. In general this sum is recuperated within the first two max three years, a sign that the market offer good opportunities for success and development.

The social economy sector (or non-profit) is organised around two main networks:

1. KVK with some 33 reuse centres and some 100 shops distributed in the Flemish region which are specialised in selling all sort of items. KVK employs some 2.800 people.
2. RESSOURCES in Wallonia and Brussels regions grouping some 50 organisations whose size varies depending on the nature of their business, their age and the business area. RESSOURCES members employ 1.500 odd workers.

The social economy networks have a very good reputation amongst the population and beside offering job opportunities to people belonging to marginalised groups they have developed very high management standard at all levels. They offer in many cases additional services to the municipalities since they are often responsible for the collection, dismantling and disposal of the material. Some of them have introduced quality and environment management schemes.

There is no officially recognised qualification in Belgium apart from a training on “brocanteur” (operator of flea market business) developed by the region of Brussels. Nevertheless the main players being these from for profit or non profit sector have developed comprehensive and complete and in some case very sophisticated training tools. Some players like KVK and some of Ressources’ members have introduced as well quality management schemes, like Electro-REV, Revisie, EMAS and others. Training is provided both in-house or via the assistance of specialised companies. Worth to mention are the training courses organised by KVK, and Les Petits Riens mainly on electric and electronic appliances repair and refurbishing.

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