

KOLPING EUROPE

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Volunteering in the Kolping Society

The European Union has declared 2011 as the "European Year of Volunteering". By declaring this year of voluntary work, it wants to accomplish that more and more European citizens commit themselves in the field of voluntary work, that governmental parameters for voluntary commitment are further improved, that civil society organizations which rely on voluntary work are strengthened, and that volunteering finds greater recognition in society.

The significance of volunteering for the preservation and functioning of liberal societies has been emphasized repeatedly in recent years. In this context it also became clear that the extent of voluntary commitment in the European states clearly differs according to the societal parameters and that a volunteer culture is needed that encourages each single citizen to practice voluntary commitment and to open up the necessary freedom for such a commitment.

However, not only societal parameters are essential for voluntary commitment but also individual attitudes and expectations regarding voluntary commitment. These attitudes have significantly changed in recent years. Whereas in the past voluntary commitment meant for many people the willingness to integrate themselves in hierarchical structures of non-governmental organizations and to assume, for example, leading positions by election for a longer period of time, nowadays many volunteers are often looking for fields of self-actualization and active participation within a fixed-term project-oriented commitment.

The understanding of voluntary commitment and volunteering in the Kolping Society

In the Kolping Society voluntary commitment and/or volunteering has a long tradition. On the occasion of the Year of Volunteers 2001 declared by the United Nations, KOLPING INTERNATIONAL has defined voluntary work as follows: "Voluntary commitment is the unpaid, voluntary service of individuals for a task orientated to the common good that is carried out in leisure time. Voluntary commitment can consist of assuming a certain task that is a sign of neighbourly love and is aimed at helping other people in a concrete emergency situation, but it can also consist of assuming a task for a longer period of time in an organization whose goals are tasks orientated to the common good."

The significance and the priority of voluntary commitment in the Kolping Society

In the Kolping Society voluntary commitment or volunteering as an expression of the freedom and dignity of man and his co-responsibility for solving tasks orientated toward the common good has always had a great significance. In this context the Kolping Society made the experience that assuming responsibility on a voluntary basis for oneself, for people and things, for the community and for society always opens up specific opportunities for education, learning and development that strengthen the personality of the volunteer and give him/her more self-confidence. Apart from these personal perspectives for the volunteer, the Kolping Society considers it a duty in the civil society to commit oneself actively for the benefit of the common good.

Therefore the Kolping Society counts at all levels highly on voluntary commitment not only with regards to filling executive posts but also for the implementation of concrete initiatives and campaigns of the Association. Against this background the Kolping Society – like all civic associations – must be able to find time and again volunteers for a voluntary cooperation. However, this presupposes that the Kolping Society meets the challenge of the new and sometimes changed prerequisites for voluntary commitment.

1. Different lifestyles require different approaches to voluntary work

The lifestyle chosen by each individual and the current phase of life of a person have a decisive impact on the type of voluntary commitment a person finds attractive and what his/her motives and conditions for cooperation look like. If the Kolping Society wants to use the existing potential of voluntary cooperation among its members, it must time and again find new and diverse ways on how to develop this potential. It must offer short-term project-oriented commitments as well as long-term commitments such as executive tasks.

2. Kolping upholds a culture of a variety of charismas

The members in the Kolping Society have different inclinations, talents and abilities that can and must be taken into account when shaping the offer of voluntary commitment. In order to use as much potential of voluntary work as possible or also to offer it to non-members, the Kolping Family keeps a list of tasks that can be fulfilled by voluntary commitment in the sense of the Kolping Society. Each Kolping Family should be something like an "exchange for volunteers". In order to ensure that the members understand their certainly different talents and charismas as opportunities for voluntary commitment, an atmosphere of openness must exist at all levels of the Kolping Society that promotes and utilizes different talents for different tasks.

3. Voluntary commitment requires qualification

Voluntary commitment in the Kolping Society and in society is confronted with ever higher requirements. Therefore the Kolping Society is called upon to qualify its members for voluntary commitment. The qualification offers should be oriented towards strengthening the volunteers in their personal development but also toward imparting knowledge and expertise to assume the respective voluntary commitment. The further development of personal and societal key competences should, if possible, be confirmed by certificates.

4. Kolping strives for a culture of recognition

Voluntary commitment needs recognition and appreciation. Therefore, a culture of recognition must be developed in the Kolping Society which is expressed in appropriate and visible forms. A central form of recognition is the respect for the rendered services and experiences of the volunteer. This is mainly accomplished when the volunteer gets a feedback from the members and executives of other levels on his/her voluntary commitment and when there is a noticeable recognition and appreciation of his/her commitment.

5. Voluntary commitment requires appropriate societal parameters

The Kolping Society sees it as its task to stand up for societal parameters that enable women and men equally to render voluntary work apart from their gainful employment and family work. Governments are required to create the necessary freedom and leeway for voluntary commitment through subsidiarity policies in order to give the civil society the corresponding co-shaping opportunities. These types of policies create a new balance of power between state, economy, and society.

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