

**Volunteering in EU Policies and its Interrelation with the Policy of Member States –
a Comparison of Approaches in the UK and Germany**

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by Annett Wiedermann

AnnettWiedermann@web.de

University of Applied Science Fulda

First supervisor: Prof. Dr. Hans-Wolfgang Platzer

Second supervisor: Prof. Dr. Gudrun Hentges

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Introduction

Volunteering is not a new phenomenon. As an expression of communal engagement and charitable commitment it has existed through different times. Charitable organisations, especially organised around the monasteries, can be traced back to medieval times and beyond. Also self-help begins with the fraternities, confraternities and religious guilds of medieval Europe.

However, the past decade has witnessed a considerable surge of public interest throughout European countries and the world in issues relating volunteering. To bring volunteering onto national agendas, the United Nations 'International Year of Volunteers' 2001 served as a major driving force in many countries. Throughout the year, committees formed at local, state and national levels have motivated government representatives, civil society as well as the private sector to actively support volunteering. At the same time most European countries face limits on public expenditures and a strong pressure on the welfare system as such. The public sphere is also characterized by a significant decline in voting in the national and European elections as well as an increasing disillusionment of citizens with politicians and a shift towards more individualistic modes of (political) engagement.

These facts and its social relevance perform one relevant reason for studying what actually happened at EU level and the level of the Member States to bring the quasi interest into real policy. There are two other aspects underlining the choice for a thesis on this particular topic. The first is a personal interest in and experiences with voluntary work and the second and most driving force was a four months internship at the European Volunteer Centre, a European lobby-organisation, representing thousands of volunteer organisations, associations and other voluntary and community groups at local, regional and national level as well.

The overall aim of the thesis is to take a closer look at and exploration of policy documents, programmes and measures, which have been issued within the context of volunteering. Therefore formal governmental sources such as strategic papers and departmental reports, research studies and electronic publication of performance related to volunteering and active citizenship and also legislative sources are used. Additionally, secondary literature which concentrates on volunteering was also studied.

The thesis focuses on two major questions that served as guiding principles:

- Who are the partners and key actors in the policy process?
- What are the characteristics of volunteering policy?

The thesis examines formal documents political processes at EU level and their relevance for the Member States. The thesis also takes a look at processes influencing the level of volunteering of two Member States, Germany and the United Kingdom. These countries were selected because

they show similarities regarding geographical size and number of citizens and both are Member States of the EU for a long time. That was assumed as good foundation for the comparative approach of the thesis.

Hence, the thesis is structured in the following way: The first chapter explores the concepts and fields of volunteering and its incorporation within the category welfare system. The social origins theory of Salamon / Anheier is referred to here, which explain patterns of volunteering and welfare systems in a cross-national study.

In the second chapter a review of what has developed to date in the field of volunteering within European policy is presented. The chapter introduces and analyzes EU documents, which show some significance to volunteering. Finally, on the basis of these documents the main characteristics about volunteering in the European context are summarized.

Chapter three consists of the actual comparison of political developments to volunteering in Germany and the UK. An overview is given of the historical, political and social framework of volunteering. Moreover, this chapter looks at present key influences and recent developments. At last, in accordance with these facts, volunteering policy of both countries is compared.

Subsequently, on the basis of the findings in chapter two, the relationship between policy development in the EU and the two countries, Germany and the UK is examined.