



THE LIFT

EVALUATION REPORT

sharing experiences of a youth exchange network project

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The Evaluation report represents Benson Consulting's views on the project *The Lift*.

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Cover Photograph: The cover photo shows EVS-volunteer Rigel Svensson who was sent by Mejeriet (Lund, Sweden) and hosted by Pekarna magdalenske mreze (Maribor; Slovenia) within the project *The Lift*. The photo was taken by fellow EVS-volunteers during a trip to Croatia.

Download the illustrated handbook of the project on www.teh.net.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE EVALUATION OF THE LIFT	4
SETTING THE SCENE	5
<i>Youth politics in the EU</i>	5
About the action programme(s)	6
2000-2006 (The YOUTH Programme)	6
2007-2013 (The Youth in Action Programme)	7
European Voluntary Service (EVS)	8
EVS within the cultural sector	10
Trans Europe Halles and EVS	11
Why EVS?	11
THE LIFT – BACKGROUND: HOW IT CAME TO BE	14
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT?	17
<i>Voices from the sending and hosting organisations</i>	17
<i>Conclusions from the sending and hosting organisations</i>	18
<i>Voices from the volunteers</i>	20
<i>Voice from the Project Manager</i>	21
CONCLUSIONS	23
<i>Objectives</i>	23
<i>Structure</i>	24
<i>Results</i>	25
APPENDIX: REFLECTIONS FROM THE PROJECT MANAGER	26

THE EVALUATION OF THE LIFT

This evaluation report is the result of the evaluation work that has been carried out during the last project year of The Lift – 2008. During this time Mathias Blob from Benson Consulting has been following the project by frequent meetings with the Project Manager, follow-up discussions with sending and hosting organisations, interviews with stakeholders other than the sending and hosting organisations, interviews with volunteers, etc.

The main objective of the evaluation has been to sum up and analyse the outcomes, with particular focus on future possibilities. The evaluation was designed as a process evaluation, e.g. with a focus on the path to the goal rather than the goal in itself. Hence, the evaluation will mainly answer questions of a structural and aggregated character rather than questions of a more individual character. The evaluation will also answer some questions about how things came to be as they did and what can be done to strengthen good experiences and eliminate bad ones in future initiatives.

In practice I (Researcher Mathias Blob) have worked with the Project Manager since the beginning of 2008 until the beginning of 2009. Approximately 50 hours in total has been allocated to the evaluation. Besides the mentioned interviews and discussions Benson Consulting has used documentations from the Project Manager and other public and research reports on the subject of youth exchange and EVS.

In this evaluation report you will find both some statistical material and more qualitative reports of how the partners in the project have perceived it. The report is divided into three main parts:

The first part – Setting the Scene – describes the foundations of the European Youth programmes and how these are related to the volunteer exchange programmes. This chapter serves the purpose of contextualizing and making the evaluation's suggestions relevant and in line with policy development.

The second part – The Lift – is the descriptive part of the project evaluation. Here the reader will get to know the project, how it was organised, funded, executed, etc. This part also includes a more analytical section where the practitioners of the project, project leader, volunteers and representatives from the cultural centres come alive and speak of their experiences.

The third and last part – Conclusion – is the main analytical and evaluating chapter. Here we will look back on the time spent as well as towards the future and how to manage a good exchange.

SETTING THE SCENE

Youth politics in the EU

Different words can be and are used in different times to try to grasp and describe the importance, view and/or position of young people (under the age of 30) in society. In modern times the young population of society have been made the drivers of their own development to a much larger extent than before. Looking back through the history of modern time, particularly the development in the industrialised world, the position and the voices of young people have become a much more present force in everyday politics. In building the social peace and prosperity of society and securing the welfare system, the policies for youth involvement have become an integral part of the day to day politics. Young people are seen as the future of society and thereby the main target group for strategies and politics concerned with establishing the values of tomorrow. To secure unity and sustainable development young people are today, more than ever, invited in to the decision making process.

From the perspective of the EU the message that has been strong in the political life of Europe is that the EU must take shape with the people of Europe. The future of Europe is resting in some sense on the young people of the EU, therefore the path forward and how EU will develop and through its form of governance should include the people to whom tomorrow's Europe belongs. The European project is itself young, still forming and still being debated. If it is to make progress, it needs ambition and enthusiasm, and commitment on the part of young people to the values on which it is based.

This perspective is clearly stressed in the white paper "A new impetus for European youth" (2001). The white paper is an important milestone in the development of an EU youth policy, a policy that has a great impact on national policies and legislation. The paper states the following in the introduction:

If young people have one clear message, it is that they want their voice to be heard and want to be regarded as fully-fledged participants in the process; they want to play their part in building Europe; they want to influence the debate in the way it develops. It is time now to regard youth as a positive force in the construction of Europe rather than as a problem. In other words, we have to give young people the wherewithal to express their ideas, and to test them against similar ideas from other players in civil society.

The white paper quoted can be said to be the starting point for the development of *young people's engagement in becoming active citizens*. Of course there have been developments and activities prior to the white paper mentioned, that have been aiming at the same direction. Already in 1988 the *Youth For Europe* programme was launched, promoting specific activities of youth exchanges.

In the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993 youth issues were raised and the treaty extended the scope of EU policies to include the youth 'field', thanks to Article 149 § 2. This states that the EU should "...encourage the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors..." Four priority areas for action were identified: *participation, information, voluntary activities and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth.*

With the white paper from 2001 young people of the EU became an integral part of decision making and the framework for future youth programmes was set by the Council of the European Union in 2002. The framework was later updated in 2005 to take into account the European Youth Act with focus on social and occupational integration.

Furthermore the paper states: *"Getting young people more involved in the life of the local, national and European communities, and fostering active citizenship thus represent one of the major challenges, not only for the present but also for the future of our societies"*

These brief quotes and remarks mentioned above represent the foundation of today's youth policies within the EU and are the core values that shape the subsequent action programmes that are of main concern here; **YOUTH Programme (2000-2006)** and **Youth in Action programme (2007-2013)**.

About the action programme(s)

2000-2006 (THE YOUTH PROGRAMME)

The YOUTH programme was the EU's mobility and non-formal education programme targeting young people aged between 15 and 25 years during 2000-2006.

The Programme was open to youth in 31 European countries. The programme offered possibilities to young people in the form of both group exchanges and individual voluntary work, as well as support activities. It started in the spring of 2000 but incorporates, and was based on, the experiences faced by the former Youth for Europe and EVS programmes. There were National Agencies for the YOUTH programme established in all 31 Programme Countries. The Agencies assisted with the promotion and implementation of the Programme at national level.

The programme primarily addressed young people aged between 15 and 25 who were legally resident in one of the Member States of the European Union or other Programme countries. The following groups could participate in the Programme:

- groups of young people who want to organise a youth exchange or launch an initiative in their local community
- young people who would like to get involved in European Voluntary Service
- ex-volunteers who are looking to build upon their experience
- youth organisations
- youth leaders
- youth workers
- project managers or organisers in the field of youth and non-formal education
- other non-profit organisations, associations or structures.

The Programme strived to achieve and maintain a balance between personal development and collective activity across all sectors of society while pursuing the following objectives:

- Facilitating the integration of young people into society at large and encouraging their spirit of helping young people acquire knowledge, skills and competencies, and recognising the value of such experience
- Allowing young people to give free expression to their sense of solidarity in Europe and the wider world, as well as supporting the fight against racism and xenophobia
- Promoting a better understanding of the diversity of our common European culture and

- shared heritage as well as of our common basic values
- Helping to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promoting equality at all levels of society
- Introducing a European element into projects which will have a positive impact on youth work at local level

The programme had different priorities every year and the priorities of the last programme years were:

Priorities 2004:

- Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities
- Promoting diversity and in particular reducing all forms of racism and xenophobia
- Sport
- Enlargement
- Follow-up of the new framework of cooperation in the youth field

Priorities 2005:

- Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities
- Promoting diversity and in particular reducing all forms of racism and xenophobia
- Follow-up of the European political cooperation in the youth field

2007-2013 (THE YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME)

Youth in Action is the successor of the YOUTH Programme (see above), and the new programme is the result of consultations with stakeholders at all levels. By implementing the new programme the EU wants to respond to the evaluations and needs of young people.

Youth in Action is the EU Programme for young people aged 15-28 (in some cases 13-30). It aims to inspire a sense of *active citizenship*, *solidarity* and *tolerance* among young Europeans and to *involve* them in shaping the Union's future.

The programme's main activities promote mobility within and beyond the EU borders, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encourage the inclusion of all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background. With a total budget of 885 million euros for seven years (2007-2013), the Programme supports a large variety of activities for young people and youth workers through **five Actions**. The Programme aims to achieve the following general objectives:

- promote young people's active citizenship in general and their European citizenship in particular
- develop solidarity and promote tolerance among young people, in particular in order to foster social cohesion in the European Union
- foster mutual understanding between young people in different countries;
- contribute to developing the quality of support systems for youth activities and the capabilities of civil society organisations in the youth field
- promote European cooperation in the youth field

Action 1 – Youth for Europe

Encourages young people's active citizenship, participation and creativity through youth exchanges, youth initiatives and youth democracy projects.

Action 2 – EVS

Helps young people to develop their sense of solidarity by participating, either individually or in group, in non-profit, unpaid voluntary activities abroad.

Action 3 – Youth in the World

Promotes partnerships and exchanges among young people and youth organisations across the world.

Action 4 – Youth Support Systems

Includes various measures to support youth workers and youth organisations and improve the quality of their activities.

Action 5 – Support for European Co-operation in the Youth field

Supports youth policy co-operation at a European level, in particular by facilitating dialogue between young people and policy makers.

As did the former programme, the Youth in Action programme has priorities. Some of them are permanent and others change from year to year. The permanent are as follows:

- **European Citizenship:** A key goal of the programme is to raise awareness in young people that they are citizens of Europe, as well as citizens of their own countries. The aim is to get youth actively involved in shaping the future of the European Union. Projects will have to show a strong European dimension if they are to receive programme backing.
- **Participation of young people:** Youth in Action promotes and supports young people's involvement in democratic life, spurring them on to be active citizens who care about their communities and understand the value of representative democracy.
- **Cultural diversity:** Respect for people's cultural origins is at the heart of the Youth in Action programme, as is the desire to fight against racism and xenophobia – forces that undermine European values and people's solidarity.
- **Inclusion:** The focus is on ensuring that young people with fewer opportunities have access to the Youth in Action programme, as well as on encouraging projects with a thematic focus on inclusion.

In addition to these permanent priorities, each year the focus is also placed on specific annual priorities.

- **Opportunities for All:** In 2007, the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, priority was given to projects reflecting issues related to fighting against discrimination. Priority was also given to projects aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles through physical activities, including sport.
- **Together in Diversity:** In 2008, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, priority was given to projects with a specific focus on this theme.

The other annual priorities for this year (2008) were:

- combating violence against women
- sport as a tool to promote active citizenship and social inclusion of young people
- promoting healthy lifestyles through physical activities including sport
- preparation of the 2009 European Year of Innovation and Creativity and European Parliament elections

European Voluntary Service (EVS)

Some experimental voluntary activities of young people were introduced on a modest scale in 1995 in the Youth for Europe Programme. Based on a working document "Towards a EVS for Young People" of January 1996, the Commission then introduced EVS as a pilot action in 1996-1997. It was aimed at young people aged between 18 and 25 and allowed young people to spend a period of voluntary service in another Member State, Norway or Iceland or, on an experimental basis, also in a third country. The first EVS volunteers started their

projects in November 1996.

Since the first project EVS has become a part of the youth programmes. As we can see in the description of the different youth programmes the EVS scheme has become one of the main actions for achieving the objectives of the youth programmes.

EVS provides young Europeans with the unique chance to express their personal commitment through unpaid and full-time voluntary activities in a foreign country within or outside the EU. In this way, it seeks to develop solidarity, mutual understanding and tolerance among young people, thus contributing to reinforcing social cohesion in the European Union and to promoting young people's active citizenship.

EVS enables young people to carry out voluntary service for up to 12 months in a country other than their country of residence. An EVS project has three phases:

- planning and preparation
- implementation of the Activity
- evaluation (including reflection on a possible follow-up).

EVS is open to all young people aged 18 to 30. Participation is free for the volunteers who also get board and lodging, insurance coverage and an allowance for the duration of the project. Special conditions apply to encourage the participation of young people with fewer opportunities.

A successful EVS project requires co-operation among at least three key players: **a sending organisation, a host organisation and the volunteer**. One of the organisations involved in this partnership also plays the role of coordinating organisation and applies for an EU grant on behalf of the partnership. Organisations perform a number of roles: they identify volunteering opportunities and develop projects that benefit the local community. They also recruit and prepare the volunteers, host them, and ensure follow-up. EVS activities can be carried out both individually or in a group.

EVS spans a wide range of areas, such as culture, youth, sports, social care, cultural heritage, the arts, civil protection, the environment, development co-operation, etc. High-risk interventions in immediate post-crisis situations (e.g. humanitarian aid, immediate disaster relief, etc.) are excluded. One thing all the activities have in common is a clear European and intercultural learning dimension.

EVS has certain core values and quality standards which are laid down in the EVS Charter. In order to protect and uphold these, organisations interested in sending or hosting EVS volunteers or coordinating an EVS project need first to be accredited.

To receive accreditation, organisations submit an 'expression of interest' and, once their application is approved, they sign up to the EVS Charter. Accreditation lasts for three years, but can be withdrawn immediately in cases of non-compliance with the Charter.

Implementation of the Youth in Action Programme and the EVS action is mainly decentralised, the aim being to work as closely as possible with the beneficiaries and to adapt to the diversity of national systems and situations in the youth field. Each Programme Country has appointed a National Agency. These National Agencies promote and implement the Programme at national level and act as the link between the European Commission, promoters at national, regional and local levels, and the young people themselves. It is their task to:

- collect and provide appropriate information
- administer a selection process for project applications to be funded at a decentralised level
- provide administrative processes
- seek cooperation with external bodies
- evaluate and monitor the implementation
- provide support to project applicants and promoters throughout the project life cycle
- form a network with all National Agencies and the Commission
- improve the visibility of the Programme
- promote the dissemination and exploit the results of the Programme at a national level.

EVS within the cultural sector

The EVS exchange can take place within several sectors and in the case of The Lift the one in focus is the cultural. The EU has always been active within the cultural sector, as it is one of the core arenas of the European “project”. In 1993, the enactment of the Treaty of Maastricht gave rise to a new article in which cultural co-operation became a recognised aim of EU action, with an accompanying legal basis. As a result, an initial range of pilot programmes and subsequent sectoral programmes were launched.

With this experience to build on, preparatory actions were undertaken in 1999 to bring Culture 2000 into play. This was an EU programme established for seven years (2000-2006). It differed from earlier financial instruments in that it provided grants to cultural co-operation projects in all artistic and cultural fields.

The objective of Culture 2000 was to promote cultural diversity and a shared cultural heritage. The programme had three actions to support artistic and cultural projects with a European dimension. Activities supported included festivals, master classes, exhibitions, new productions, tours, translations and conferences.

With the next step the EU’s Culture programme (2007-2013) has a budget of €400 million for projects and initiatives to celebrate Europe’s cultural diversity and enhance our shared cultural heritage through the development of cross-border co-operation between cultural operators and institutions. The Culture programme aims to achieve three main objectives:

- to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector;
- to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output;
- to foster intercultural dialogue

These are the main objectives of the Cultural Programme and the Programme is the main action for the EU on the cultural arena. Besides this specific action, other programmes, aiming at other groups and fields, often have an impact on the cultural field.

One of the objectives of the previous Youth Programme was to foster a better understanding of the cultural diversity of Europe. The new Youth in Action Programme also seeks to promote linguistic and cultural diversity.

From the perspective of EVS we can look back in the mirror and find quite a few projects that have been taking place within the cultural sector. The cultural sector is in itself a sector with a tradition of volunteer work. This “bias” in relation to knowledge and readiness to work with volunteers makes the EVS suitable for the cultural sector.

EXAMPLES OF EVS PROJECTS IN THE CULTURAL SECTOR

Pépinières européennes pour jeunes artistes

For more than 15 years, the NGO *Pépinières européennes pour jeunes artistes* (Paris, France) has been an active promoter of the exchange of artists within the cultural sector. Over the years 450 artists have been promoted to the international scene by *Pépinières*, and *Pépinières* has also contributed to creating professional and social links between more than 3000 people on the international cultural scene. To support and promote a younger generation of artists who are inventing new forms of expression by redrawing the place of the artist in his/her relation to the other, *Pépinières* set up the *Artists in Context Project*. For more than 6 years, this mobility programme (realized with the help of EVS) has enabled some 60 creative artists to develop their projects.

► www.art4eu.net

European Voluntary Service - A capital idea

When Luxembourg became the European Capital of Culture for the second time in 2007, the City wanted to involve young people from across Europe in its celebrations - not just for pleasure, but also as valued contributors. Through EVS, young people from Lithuania in the north to Portugal in the south came together in the City to work on a range of cultural management tasks. The volunteers had their own website, which still serves as a record of their work and a place to exchange ideas, ► www.volontaires.lu

Volunteering together: The “Roma-Gadje Dialogue through Service” initiative

Roma communities are often isolated, with little communication or understanding between them and society at large. The *Roma-Gadje* project brings Roma and non-Roma youth together in voluntary service activities, within the EU as well as non-EU countries in Central and Eastern Europe, with the aim of increasing mutual understanding. The current project, running from 2007 to 2009, is the successor to a previous 18-month project. Youngsters from different backgrounds work together on long- and short-term projects in 11 countries. The project aims to involve 75 youngsters in total, half from Roma communities. The previous initiative is already reported to have had a strong impact on both communities and participants. The project brings together voluntary service organisations, youth organisations and Roma cultural and social centres from all countries involved.

► www.rgdts.net/welcome.html

Blogs

Several interesting and inspiring exchanges are made public through the stories told by the volunteers themselves. On the blog Myevs you can find several examples of successful exchanges within the cultural field and learn more about how these exchanges have contributed to the development of both the volunteers and the hosting organisations.

► www.myevs.net

Trans Europe Halles and EVS

Trans Europe Halles (TEH, www.teh.net) is a European Network of Independent Cultural Centres. Founded in 1983, the network currently has 49 members in 25 countries. The mission of TEH is to offer a dynamic forum for ideas, collaborations and mutual support in the pursuit of intercultural exchange, understanding and artistic freedom. Members of TEH all have their own distinguishing features; however they share the same spirit of support for new talent, innovation, young artists and cultural exchange. Many of the members have been pioneers in providing opportunities for young people to utilise and develop their artistic skills and challenging the common cultural policy. Prior to the project *The Lift*, TEH also realized another EVS-project called YEP (1997-1998).

The following text from the webpage of the network clearly captures the network’s perspective on the EVS-scheme:

As a young person, going abroad and working in another TEH centre is often an overwhelming experience. Thanks to the network’s dedicated sending and hosting organisations, young persons aged 18-30 are given the opportunity to work at another TEH centre for 2-12 months through EVS. EVS covers all costs of the young person’s stay abroad. At the end of the day, it’s all about reciprocity and showing appreciation to the young, dedicated people who are connected to TEH centres all around Europe. It’s about offering a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for young people to get work experience at a TEH centre abroad, as well as opening up and welcoming young people from other European countries to our own TEH centre in return

One of the members in the network is the Swedish cultural centre *Mejeriet* (www.kulturmejeriet.se) in the city of Lund. Mejeriet is a multi-disciplinary cultural centre based in an old dairy in Lund, Sweden. Mejeriet’s programme has a strong focus on music and the centre is well known for its excellent concert stage. The house also hosts a theatre, a cinema, a café, etc. Mejeriet has been a member of TEH for many years and since 2005 Mejeriet also hosts the Coordination Office of the network.

Why EVS?

Early on in the history of the EU we can find traces of the youth polices of today. In some sense the EVS scheme has been and still is the main vehicle of youth action programmes. The EVS-scheme makes it possible

for young people to meet other young people, to travel to different parts of Europe, to get to know new customs and beliefs that are to be found within the EU member states and above all for young people to become active citizens of the EU.

If we look upon the EVS action from the perspective of the EU, the action is an important step toward a united and socially inclusive union. By promoting and supporting the exchange of young people, the EU is not only taking part in the education and development of young people but is taking part first and foremost in the shaping of the future.

When looking back on the past year's activities within EVS, we can find some interesting figures. In the table below we can see that the numbers of volunteers have been quite large. During 2005 over 7000 volunteers travelled and visited other people abroad.

FLOWS OF VOLUNTEERS 2005

Programme Countries (Europe)	Sent	Hosted	Total
Austria	149	113	262
Belgium	164	141	305
Bulgaria	23	17	40
Cyprus	0	0	0
Czech Republic	80	55	135
Denmark	46	98	144
Estonia	77	49	126
Finland	68	88	156
France	507	294	801
Germany	759	366	1125
Greece	74	169	243
Hungary	176	43	219
Ireland	14	103	117
Italy	300	302	602
Latvia	64	64	128
Lithuania	66	78	144
Luxembourg	4	27	31
Malta	2	9	11
Netherlands	103	84	187
Poland	350	233	583
Portugal	92	142	234
Romania	60	40	100
Slovak Republic	64	82	146
Slovenia	20	34	54
Spain	336	427	763
Sweden	100	89	189
United Kingdom	159	459	618
Iceland	10	28	38
Liechtenstein	1	3	4
Norway	48	59	107
Turkey	86	30	116
Total	4002	3726	7728

From the perspective of the national agency the EVS is often seen as the vehicle of participatory youth policy. By encouraging and promoting the scheme the national agencies are fulfilling their part as a member of the EU as well as their national policies of youth involvement.

EVS has always been a very popular scheme among participants (promoters and volunteers). Reading through older evaluations and reports from volunteers it is obvious that EVS holds a unique quality in the way the action scheme makes young people meet other young people and professionals from new cultural settings.

From the perspective of the sending organisation it is obvious that they gain a new unique opportunity to strengthen their ties with hosting organisations abroad. They also tend to express an educational perspective, where the sending organisation gives some of their young volunteers the opportunity to travel abroad and learn from new encounters and be able to bring this new knowledge and experience home.

From the information in reports and evaluations we can state that the sending organisation and the hosting organisation have some experiences and reasons in common for engaging in EVS. Both stress the educational aspect, both for the volunteer and the staff in the respective organisation. They also make it an important point to put emphasis on creating a better world and contributing to a better understanding between people.

The hosting organisation also talks about the positive effect of EVS in terms of new perspectives on their activities, establishment of new contacts (locally as well as internationally), extra workforce, making things happen, etc.

When we turn our eyes and ears to the reasons being put forward by the volunteers themselves, we can find a range of reasons. Some volunteers talk about the opportunity to travel abroad and learn more about other cultures. Others put more emphasis on the vocational training and others on the personal gains in relation to building up a network. The reasons for engaging in EVS vary extensively depending on the volunteer's socio-economic background, place of origin, interests, educational level, etc. Nevertheless, young people coming back from some time spent abroad as a volunteer all talk about new perspectives, new knowledge and above all new friends.

THE LIFT – BACKGROUND

How it came to be

Before setting up the project and applying for funds, the decision to focus on youth exchanges through EVS within the network was discussed at several TEH Meetings in 2004/2005. In this phase, all members of TEH were interviewed and informed about EVS and how it works. They were also asked to fill in questionnaires to explain their capacity in sending and/or hosting young people in their centre. The objectives of *The Lift* were all agreed to by TEH and its members before the start of the project.

While the application to realize *The Lift* was processed by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, a seminar about EVS was organised in connection with the TEH Meeting hosted by ACC Metelkova mesto in Ljubljana, Slovenia (May 2006). The seminar was organised with funds from the Youth in Action Programme.

One of the purposes of the seminar was to ensure that all members of TEH had the same level of knowledge about the EVS-scheme. The aim of the seminar was also to allow for TEH members to get to know each other better and that way facilitate the matchmaking and quality of future EVS exchanges. During the seminar an EVS Core Group was formed with members from different TEH centres. The purpose of the EVS Core Group was to form a group that would help to further develop the project and discuss issues such as quality/evaluation, communication tools and project activities together with the Project Manager.

Soon after the seminar, *The Lift* was awarded a grant by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs and the Project Manager started working on the project the 1st of August 2006. TEH members that joined the project were all asked to sign a Platform Agreement that outlined the responsibilities of the project partners. At a later stage, a checklist for EVS exchanges in TEH was produced that further clarified the responsibilities of the sending and hosting organisations and volunteers in the network.

The project has been evaluated continuously. Interviews have been conducted with all sending and hosting organisations and with all volunteers. In 2008, a Researcher evaluated the project. In addition, an Evaluation Meeting for all sending and hosting organisations was organised with funds from the EU Youth in Action Programme. The Evaluation Meeting was hosted by Mejeriet in Lund, Sweden. Funds were also applied for to organise an Evaluation Meeting for all volunteers in connection with TEH Meeting 66 at Tou Scene (Stavanger, Norway, 18th-21st of September 2008), but this second Evaluation Meeting was not granted.

WHAT WERE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LIFT?

- To give young people who are connected to the different cultural centres of the network the chance to go abroad and do voluntary service in another centre of the network. The EVS exchanges realized within the project should be of high quality and well prepared and should contribute to the volunteers' professional development as well as strengthen their European awareness.
- To strengthen the relations between the members of TEH.
- To increase the number of youth exchanges within the network.
- To facilitate for the volunteers to get to know each other and encourage them to realize projects together.
- To inspire organisations in the region of Scania to engage in international youth work through EVS.

HOW WAS THE PROJECT ORGANIZED?

The Lift has been run by a Project Manager working full-time in the TEH Coordination Office. The tasks of the Project Manager included:

- Supporting TEH members in the process of becoming accredited to work with the EVS-scheme as well as giving advice about how to fill in the EVS application form. Other tasks include marketing, communication and matchmaking between sending and hosting organisations and potential volunteers.
- Evaluating the exchanges together with the sending and hosting organisations in TEH as well as the volunteers.
- Facilitating communication between the volunteers and informing them about the funding opportunities in the Youth in Action Programme.
- Informing about EVS on a regional level.

WHO WERE THE PARTNERS?

The project was managed by TEH in collaboration with Mejeriet. When the project started, Mejeriet's regional youth project Storasöder was a partner too. Storasöder was supposed to become a permanent project, but was not granted by the region of Scania to continue in 2008. The youth exchanges in the project were realized between TEH Members and Friend Organisations. Since the project was supported by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, the Project Manager also worked with establishing contacts with local and regional partners through the project, as well as informing young people and youth NGO's on local/regional/national levels about EVS.

FUNDING

The annual grant from the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs* has covered the salary and travels of the Project Manager, the costs for evaluating the project (Researcher), plus marketing, communication and administration. Besides the grant from the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, Mejeriet has made a significant investment towards the costs of the project in terms of offering free office space and equipment plus contributing to the salary of the accountant and general support and management/monitoring of the project. The members in TEH that have been partners in the project have also made substantial investments in the project in terms of time. They have also paid all costs related to attending TEH Meetings (where the project has been developed and evaluated) themselves. The EVS exchanges are realized with separate budgets that come from additional funding that the sending/hosting Organisations apply for from the Youth in Action Programme.

* August 2006 - March 2007: 190 000 SEK (approx. 18 820€), March 2007 - December 2007: 300 000 SEK (approx. 29 720€), January 2008 - December 2008: 490 000 SEK (approx. 48 540€).

A BRIEF TIMELINE

November 2004

Discussions about the interest of the project-idea at TEH Meeting 58 hosted by ufa-fabrik in Berlin, Germany.

Spring 2005

Interviews with the centres that had shown interest in the project idea. Further discussions at TEH Meeting 59 hosted by Buenaventura in Castelfranco Veneto, Italy.

Autumn 2005

Research on potential funders for the project. Discussions started with the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

January 2006

Application sent to the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

May 2006

Seminar about EVS in connection to TEH Meeting 60 hosted by ACC Metelkova mesto in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in order to ensure that all potential project partners had the same level of knowledge about the EVS-scheme. Late May: positive answer from the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs.

August 2006

The Lift started and Emma Ernsth was employed as Project Manager based in the TEH Coordination Office.

2007

The project is up and running, more centres continuously join the project.

2008

Additional funds are applied for from the Youth in Action Programme to organize an evaluation meeting of the project. The application is granted and the evaluation meeting is hosted by Mejeriet in Lund, Sweden, June 8th-10th. A Researcher is hired to do an unbiased evaluation of the project. A guidebook is produced late 2008 and disseminated early 2009.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT?

Voices from the sending and hosting organisations

PLANNING

Many of the sending and hosting organisations have been pointing at the importance of early and good planning. In discussions with representatives it is clear that this has not always been the case. In many cases the time and resources have not been enough to plan well in advance. One representative of a hosting organisation puts it like this:

To be able to meet the prospective volunteers before the exchange would strongly affect the actual exchange in a positive way, for example; we could more easily find a specific assignment direct, and have the right amount of expectations on the volunteer.

This comment is supported by several others and we can conclude that to gain the most from an exchange, be it from the perspective of the volunteer or from the perspective of the organisation, planning is essential. There is a need for competencies to be communicated, preparation to be made, matching between organisation and volunteers, etc.

In the specific project we can see how the preparation has been easier and thereby granting a better exchange:

With the project [The Lift] I think we increased the possibility to get more out of the exchange. As both a hosting and a sending organisation, we want to plan as much as possible before the actual exchange. With trust comes better planning, and we have good trust within the network. To have the project in the network led to better planning and better exchanges.

Others talk about the possibilities the infrastructure of the network give the work with exchange programme, how it makes it easier to share knowledge and experiences to be used in future exchanges:

The project made it easier to get in contact with others involved in exchanges, to share ideas and knowledge and to learn about how to go about engaging in an exchange.

DURING

Even though preparation is important and must have its time and resources; the main activity is the actual exchange. This is when the youth meet the hosting organisation; this is when the volunteer encounters the new culture, the new environment. Even if we have done the utmost to create a good period for the volunteer, the

practice might come to change that.

Sometimes it is very hard to know how much one could expect from a volunteer; it differs from one volunteer to another; and it is very important that the staff in the cultural centre be informed and have the time to be a mentor and guide the newly arrived.

Or with other words:

It takes time to work with volunteers; one has to consider this before engaging. If one has the time it is a very rewarding experience and it will lead to many new ideas.

At this moment of the exchange there are several voices pointing to the great advantage The Lift gives involved partners:

Thanks to the project we could really begin working with EVS, with the help from the Project Manager we got information and contacts so that we today can host several volunteers and give them a meaningful experience as well as give our centre some new perspectives.

When we talk about the positive effect the project has had upon the involved organisations' ability to engage in an EVS they also mention the positive effect the project has had upon the network:

Through the project the TEH became alive, the project manifests the network, and this is a perfect example of how we can gain from the network in everyday life at our centres.

And others:

I think we are very different as organisations within the network, and through this project I think we have learned much about each other; how we structure our work, how we look upon volunteers, etc. It has been a very good experience.

AFTER

It is easy to forget what one could do after the exchange is over. By facilitating the work after the exchange in a structured way, (exhibitions, workshops etc) the ties between the centres in the network could be strengthened even more.

The quotation above relates to the importance of the often neglected "after" the exchange period. If used in the right way, this period can lead to many new projects, exchanges, knowledge transfers, etc. But we often tend to overlook the importance of this period. In the case of *The Lift*, this is also true, but *The Lift* has also contributed to point the importance out:

In the project the experiences that have been had have been collected by the Project Manager. To have a Project Manager that actively gathers the experiences from the partners has been very useful.

One of the main effects of the project, when we talk to the centres that have been involved, is the coordinating task that led to an accumulated knowledge that was sorted and transferred to the centres in need of that knowledge.

Conclusions from the sending and hosting organisations

The list below was put together by the sending and hosting organisations in TEH when meeting at the Evaluation Meeting at Mejeriet, Lund, Sweden, the 8th-10th of June 2008.

BEFORE ENGAGING IN THE ACTUAL EXCHANGE (THE PLANNING STAGE)

1. Analyse finances / good economy of the EVS

To be able to get the most out of an exchange it is essential that the financial conditions are well thought through from both the sending and hosting organisation – to make a well-supported budget. It could also be

a good idea to seek additional funding as a way to increase the possibilities of the exchange. For some hosting organisations a good economy could be achieved by hosting two or more volunteers at the same time or arrange for different volunteers overlapping in time (a concept that is usually supported by the volunteers themselves). In relation to economy, some of the funding should be used to arrange pre-departure language courses, hereby making the actual stay and the time at the hosting organisation more useful for all.

2. Strengthen the dialogue between sending and hosting organisation

Several representatives from the hosting and sending organisations have come back to the importance of a good dialogue between the two organisations before the actual exchange. This dialogue should aim at establishing a common ground on expectations – i.e. what can be expected in terms of the outcome, the workload, the volunteer and the follow-up activities. If the exchange is realized within a network it might be a good idea to let the network delegate in the respective organisations **be the node of connection**.

3. Learn as much as you can about the volunteer(s)

Try to learn as much as possible about who the potential volunteer is (competencies, experiences, needs, wishes, etc.) beforehand. The most effective way would of course be to meet the volunteer before the exchange. Due to the costs involved this might not always be possible. Instead the information can be acquired by compiling a simple questionnaire for the volunteer to fill in or by asking the volunteer to write a short motivation etc.

4. Plan activities and organisations' readiness in advance

Prepare the team in your organisation for the arrival of the volunteer. To make the exchange as good as possible it is important to not only prepare the staff that is going to work directly with the volunteer. Take some time to inform the whole staff about the exchange, the expectations and the volunteer. It is also a good idea to make a "default list" of tasks that the volunteer can work with. This way your team will feel that they have tasks to give from day one and the volunteer also feels he/she can contribute with something right from the start. As time goes by the task list should of course become more challenging based on the interests of the volunteer.

DURING THE ACTUAL EXCHANGE (THE ACTION STAGE)

5. Separate mentor (outside) from coordinator (inside the hosting organisation)

Make sure the volunteer has both a coordinator to turn to from within your organisation and a mentor to turn to from outside your organisation. The role of the coordinator is more of a work leader while the mentor functions as a buddy that the volunteer can turn to concerning various issues related to everyday life abroad (where to buy food, what cafés/clubs to go to etc.)

6. Encourage socializing outside the workplace

Encourage the volunteer to learn more about his/her new city/village, country, culture etc. and to socialize with people outside the hosting organisation.

7. Encourage the volunteer to bond with other team members

Creating a good relationship between the staff and the volunteer increases the chances for a successful exchange. This can be achieved with simple means, for instance by organising a weekly 10-minute language training with different members of your staff and the volunteer.

8. Involve the volunteer in activities to promote EVS

If the volunteer feels up to it, it is usually a good idea to involve the volunteer in promoting EVS on a local level, as a kind of informal "EVS-ambassador". This gives the volunteer the chance to share his/her experiences and to get to know other young people and organisations in his/her new country. It also helps to spread information about EVS to potential future volunteers.

AFTER THE ACTUAL EXCHANGE (THE FOLLOW-UP STAGE)

9. Bring the volunteer's experience back to the sending organisation

Facilitating the realization of different activities where the volunteer gets the chance to share his/her experiences might lead to unexpected outcomes of the exchange. For example, the sending and hosting organisation could get better connected and want to realize additional projects/exchanges together, the volunteer could inspire more young people to go abroad through EVS, the skills acquired during the exchange could become more visible, the staff in the sending organisation could get more “hands on” information about the EVS, etc.

10. Work on the EVS continuity and development

EVS should not be used as a funding possibility. One should be aware of the work needed to engage in an exchange and not simply look at it as a means to get funding. Once engaged in the scheme, it is important to work with a perspective that stretches beyond the actual exchange to be able to realise the full potential of the EVS exchange. Organisations involved in an EVS-exchange should follow-up, disseminate experiences and try to involve themselves in the development of the EVS exchange.

Voices from the volunteers

To give some more life to the report we have also asked some of the volunteers to talk about their experiences and what they have gained from taking part in the exchange.

Overall there is a wide range of issues that are presented when asked about the experiences. The volunteers talk about all things ranging from new friends being made to a new professional carrier started. For some it has been the start of involvement in the TEH network, where the time spent as a volunteer has meant some work with issues related to the centre's work with the network.

In only just one month I already got the chance to participate in my first EVS meeting and the week after to attend my first TEH meeting. It's a good thing to get the opportunity to meet some of the other volunteers at the very beginning and to share a bit of their experience.

For others it has not been so much of an international networking experience as an encounter with a new culture and new people:

It was fascinating to sit around a table for dinner and talk to people from Slovakia, Italy and Latvia and compare our views on things. Working at Stanica gave me the opportunity to try things I had never tried before, like performing and meeting with dancers and artists from France and Poland.

And:

To meet with others and learn how they perceive the world is the most rewarding experience.

No matter what the more specific experience, most of the volunteers come back home with some very useful knowledge and experience that can be facilitated and used in many different areas:

When I came in contact with my sending organisation Mejeriet for the first time, I did not imagine that I would later go abroad through EVS and after that work with culture. The EVS period really gave me tools and experiences that I use in my life today. I am really happy to have been given this opportunity to learn.

And others:

I gained very much from going abroad through EVS. Before I did I had many contacts within the sector and I also met many people locally and internationally, but after my time as a volunteer I got a much broader network. Today I use this in my travels and work.

If we talk a bit about the things the volunteers would like to change or make even better concerning the EVS exchanges in TEH, some point to the issue of preparation.

I think it would be much better if one could meet the centre before going away for such a long time, one could come on a network meeting before and then meet different centres in the network and decide together with them what to do and when.

Others talk about the time-consuming, mandatory activities that are connected to the EVS-scheme and that these activities do not fill a justified purpose for the volunteer, as the time could be better spent in the centre. On the other hand there are stories from volunteers pointing to the opposite direction where these events are very useful, especially when you are alone and isolated at the centre.

This might also be the core point in arranging EVS, to satisfy all is hard and maybe impossible, but as the centres themselves are pointing out there is a need for solid preparation and an understanding of the time it will consume to be a mentor for a volunteer depending on the age and experience of the volunteer.

It is also obvious that through the establishment of *The Lift* the EVS exchanges in TEH have had a better chance of success, due to the incorporation in the network. It has meant that experiences have been shared between centres and volunteers and that the connection between sending and hosting organisation has been somewhat stronger on the forehand. This is evident from the voices of the volunteers themselves.

Voice from the Project Manager

The Project Manager has without a doubt the most extensive knowledge about the project, and if anyone should be asked about what could have been done differently or how one should construct a similar project in the future, this is the person to ask.

In this report we have put a section called “reflections by the Project Manager” in the appendix. This section is written by the Project Manager and is therefore representing the views of the Project Manager, nevertheless it is important to take them into consideration and the top 5 –list below is based on these reflections also written by the Project Manager.

1. Write a SMART project description

When writing the project description, always double-check if your objectives are SMART (S for specific, M for measurable, A for achievable or agreed to, R for realistic or rewarding, T for time-based. The SMART checklist is a tool often listed in literature on Project Management). Specify numbers and time frames as often as possible so that it is easy to continuously evaluate and adjust the objectives as time goes by.

2. Realistic forecasts of the number of volunteers

If you do not design the project so that you identify the volunteers before the project starts, make a qualified guess of how many volunteers you think you will exchange and divide it by two. Recruiting and matchmaking of volunteers usually takes a lot more time than you imagine it to.

3. Work with volunteers as ambassadors

Allocate sufficient resources for an information campaign and marketing material for young people when the project starts. Once the volunteers come back home again, they are usually the best EVS Marketing & Communication Managers you will ever be able to get. If they are willing to act as informal EVS ambassadors, take the opportunity to involve them. Nothing beats a story told face-to-face by someone who has experienced EVS him/herself.

4. Limit your target groups

Depending on your resources, carefully consider how many different target groups the project should aim at reaching and/or involving. Clearly specify what the different target groups can expect from the project.

5. Clearly define functions etc. in the project

Aim at reimbursing/financially supporting all project partners in some way (and the volunteers if you want to involve them in the project activities). Write a simple agreement that gives you an overview of each partner's rights and responsibilities.

It is clear from the Project Manager's point of view that most of the development areas are to be found in the structure of the project. The purpose in itself fills a need and there seems to be a great need for similar projects to stipulate functions, target groups and intermediate objectives.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, the evaluation has come to the same conclusion as the Project Manager, *The Lift* has been a successful project in terms of deliverance. This being said, it is important to look upon what “we” have learned and what could be shared with others that want to realize a similar project. In the following, five areas of development will be presented.

Objectives

Let us begin with the five main objectives as they are stipulated in the project description:

1. To give young people who are connected to the different cultural centres of the network **the chance to go abroad** and do voluntary service in another centre of the network. The EVS exchanges realized within the project should be of **high quality and well prepared** and should **contribute to the volunteers’ professional development** as well as **strengthen their European awareness**.
2. To strengthen the **relations between the members of TEH**.
3. To **increase the number of youth exchanges within the network**.
4. To facilitate for the volunteers to **get to know each other** and encourage them to **realize projects together**.
5. To **inspire organisations in the region of Scania** to engage in international youth work through EVS.

I have highlighted some of the words in the five objectives. This is done to show that there are many sub-objectives within the five main objectives. If we should start counting the objectives they would amount to at least 10. Taking into account that each of these objectives is targeting different levels and groups it makes it a very hard task for the Project Manager to be able to fulfil them unless they are divided into more measurable and operational values.

Some of the objectives are already easy to measure: *to increase the number of youth exchanges within the network*. Here we can check the number of volunteers each year at the beginning of the project and compare that to the number of volunteers at the end of the project. In this case we can clearly see that the goal has been met (even if less volunteers were exchanged compared to the original application sent to the Swedish National Board

for Youth Affairs). Not only has the amount of volunteers increased, the number of centres engaged has also increased.

The other objectives are not that easily measured, and this is not a specific problem with this project, rather this is a problem with most projects that has an aim of making people engage, strengthen ties, work for the harmonisation etc. It is hard to measure the effect. Nonetheless we can listen to the people that have been involved and learn from them, and hopefully do better projects and keep pushing the development forward.

This being said, the objectives do not have an inherent counter productiveness, but it is hard for a project to serve several “masters” at the same time and leave the room with everyone happy. There could for example be conflicts between the interest of the hosting organisation and the volunteer, so who is the project to support, both?

It is also hard to have the objective to serve the network exclusively with some tasks and not exclusively with others. It would have been easier to define this as an exclusive project for the network, not to involve other stakeholders (but this was built into the financial construction). In conclusion, the objectives are constructed from both a funding perspective and a “desired” result perspective. This is quite common, but one should be aware of the position this puts the project in. Objectives could be divided into a priority list, as a means to overcome the hardship of satisfying different agendas.

Structure

As mentioned above, the financial structure made the project reliant upon working within as well as outside of the network. In the internal work, there was a clear and formal order of things (well-structured work with the platform agreement etc). But outside of the network the project lacked a mandate and specific agenda.

To achieve the goals of promoting exchange within the network, the structure was right, but to work more outside of the network was wrong. This led to a resource allocation problem, where much energy was put into an area where the return of the time invested depended more on other things beyond the control of the project.

I would also like to point out that even though the structure of the project was more adapted to work within the network, in the future even more could be done to increase the effect of invested time and energy. For example, the project could have been a “European Project” in the full sense, where the scope is European and the mandate is European. To become this, the project must be supported by a European body not a Swedish one, with restraints on where to invest and act. By this, *The Lift* could be responsible for supporting a certain amount of exchanges within the network as a financial as well as administrative coordinator, and not only be the supportive coordinator.

By facilitating a structure for youth exchanges within the TEH network, I believe that much of the aims and objectives that we find in the political documents and guidelines (essentially the framework for the youth programme) could be met and fully achieved. The TEH network is a very strong inter-cultural body, with great potential for fostering and creating a cultural arena for youth with roots all over the world. The non-governmental structure combined with a youthful atmosphere (ever-changing) gives the network the opportunity to be co-partners in the creation of the active citizens of Europe. But projects like *The Lift* need to have the space and manoeuvrability to act as an intercultural, inter-European project that has the mandate and financial capabilities to reach objectives of the youth policies. My main point is not to say that this is not possible, my main point is to say that this is very likely to happen if the project is a network project with a full European scope.

As mentioned before, different stakeholders have been involved in the project and many of them have had different reasons for engaging in the project. These reasons are seldom expressed; instead they tend to be a hidden agenda. When talking to the hosting and sending organisations it is obvious that different agendas lead to different views of the project. For some the most important reason to engage in an exchange is to gain some new perspectives on their own cultural centre, while others stress the need for their young members to travel abroad, and others point out the need of human resources in the hosting organisation, and so on.

In the future it is vital for similar projects to work with stakeholders in the formative period and gain a common purpose; above all it is important to limit the scope of the project.

Results

As mentioned in the beginning, the results of the project are, in general, very good. The project has delivered in almost every sense what it set out to do. However, the more qualitative aspects of the objectives (strengthen relations, youth networks, strengthen European awareness, etc) could have been achieved to a larger extent with development and alignment of the objectives and structure (organisation). e.g. if the project had been funded by an EU body and only directed to the network organisations.

Nevertheless, much has been achieved and both youth and cultural centres have learned very much from each other. Above all, several meetings between cultures have been realized due to the exchanges supported and coordinated by the project. In the voices from the project we can find several comments that signify an increased interest in the exchange programme, a positive perspective in the exchanges within the network, and reports of new contacts being established across borders.

There are several voices from the involved cultural centres saying that the project has, in a very profound way, shown how the network can work. *The Lift* is a good example of how the TEH can organise its members and how it can be used to take advantage of its many members in different countries.

Even though it is very hard to measure, as mentioned before, *European Awareness* has increased among the volunteers: a result that we can find manifested in the comments of what they have experienced during their stay at different centres. If we look at some of the exhibitions or blogs that have been created by the volunteers, or some of the books that some of the volunteers have published, we find many good examples of increased awareness of the European reality.

One could only stress the need for similar events for all volunteers concerning the activities that they undertake once the EVS is over or close to its end. It is important for those of us who are not directly involved to understand the impact, but it is also important for the next generation, and the intercultural dialogue. This is why the work being carried out in the end or after is so important.

The Lift has been a vital part in promoting active citizens of the EU. In this sense, and maybe the most important sense, *The Lift* has been a very successful project. By promoting EVS both locally and internationally within the network the project has given youth from different corners of Europe an opportunity to encounter new cultures, people and working environments. Even though this can be achieved outside of the project, both the voices and the material from the project point to the importance of a coordinating body to make the cultural centres and the youths visiting them gain more from the exchange. By building a framework for the exchanges within the network, youth and staff have been given the opportunity to learn, interact and exchange ideas of how to become active citizens in the Europe of tomorrow, a Europe where culture and diversity are closely linked, produced locally, and presented globally in an intercultural dialogue.

APPENDIX

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PROJECT MANAGER

Text by Emma Ernsth, Project Manager of *The Lift*

In general, *The Lift* has been a successful project. It has been delivered as promised, completed on time and adhered to the budget. The project has achieved most of its purposes and met most of its stakeholders' expectations. At the Evaluation Meeting in June 2008, the TEH centres took a joint decision to continue to work with EVS after the project which means that the project has facilitated that the EVS exchanges become a permanent activity of the network. Looking back, there are however, a few things that are worth reflecting upon. The challenges that we have encountered can be summarised in the following areas:

- The number of volunteers
- The involvement of the project partners
- The involvement of the volunteers
- The different target groups

THE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

Fewer volunteers were sent and hosted within the project than we expected and there are many different reasons for this. Even if the mobility scheme has its problems, EVS is still a great opportunity for young people who want to work abroad. Recruiting the volunteers has however taken a lot longer and been a bigger challenge than we expected it to be. The recruiting of volunteers would most likely have been helped by an initial, bigger investment in direct marketing material for young people in the different TEH centres. Even with this though, exchanging the number of volunteers that we estimated would still have been technically impossible. This is mainly due to three reasons. First of all, *The Lift* started right in the shift between two youth programmes. In August 2006, the old EU Youth Programme was still running, but in January 2007 the new EU Youth in Action Programme 2007-2013 was introduced. This meant that the Project Manager had to spend a lot of time learning about the new Programme in order to be able to support the TEH centres in the right way. Even if there weren't a lot of big changes concerning EVS in the new Programme, many TEH centres found the new application forms exhausting since you have to use the same application and answer the same amount of questions regardless if you want to exchange one volunteer or one hundred volunteers. Even though the Project Manager produced templates for how to fill in the application forms, the shift of youth programmes affected the number of volunteers exchanged since it was time-consuming both for the Project Manager and the project partners. Secondly, the time that it took for the TEH centres to become accredited by their respective National Agencies varied a lot. Some National Agencies were so inundated with work that it took them up to a year

to get back on accreditation applications. Apart from affecting the number of potential exchanges within the project, this also meant that some centres gave up and lost their motivation to become accredited. Thirdly, some exchanges were never realized because potential volunteers changed their mind about going or because the period that they wanted to go did not fit any of the hosting TEH centres. Some applications were also not granted which obviously lowered the amount of exchanges too. It is worth noting that several TEH centres had low confidence in their National Agencies because of not giving enough nor the appropriate help and support, because of different National Agencies interpreting the same rules differently and because of National Agencies rejecting applications without disclosing what motivated their decision that is clear enough to help you write a 'better' application the next time.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE PROJECT PARTNERS

The project partners in *The Lift* were not formal project partners. Apart from expressing interest in sending and/or hosting EVS volunteers and signing the Platform Agreement, none of them signed any legally binding contract concerning rights and responsibilities. The whole project was based on the TEH centres' passion for the network, engagement in the project and their staffs' voluntary work to make it happen. As much as this is a beautiful thing, it also makes projects very fragile. With just one Project Manager being paid to work on the project, it is hard to demand time and energy from the project partners. Just applying for and realizing an EVS exchange in itself requires a lot of voluntary engagement from the TEH centres. Asking the TEH centres to perform additional tasks related to *The Lift* sometimes proved to be tricky. Creating a functioning EVS Core Group (a group with representatives from different TEH centres supporting the Project Manager with the development of the project) was also challenging. It is not easy to maintain continuity when people so often change positions and work places. Consulting TEH centres about the project in connection with TEH Meetings worked very well, but managing to get an EVS Core Group to work on the project in between the biannual TEH Meetings proved to be very difficult. It would of course never have been possible to realize *The Lift* without the hard work of the dedicated project partners, but it is still a fact that it is good to think twice and match ambitions with resources. Especially if you are not able to reimburse the project partners financially from the project budget and write binding agreements concerning what is expected from them.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE VOLUNTEERS

The budget of *The Lift* contained no travel support or project money for volunteers to meet and realize projects together. All volunteers were put in contact with each other and a blog was established where the volunteers could write about their experiences abroad. With the financial help of their sending and hosting centres plus personal investments, some volunteers also met at the biannual TEH Meetings. In addition, the Project Manager continuously informed the volunteers about different funding opportunities in the EU Youth in Action Programme. The volunteers felt differently about getting to know each other and working together. Some often wrote on the blog and to the Project Manager, travelled to meet other volunteers from the project and came to the TEH Meetings, while others hardly responded to emails. Going abroad to work in a new environment is a big thing in itself. When you become an EVS volunteer you are also automatically invited to preparatory and mid-term meetings with other volunteers. These meetings are financed by the EVS scheme. For most volunteers in *The Lift* it was difficult to separate the EVS scheme, the TEH network and the project *The Lift* from each other. They already got to know a lot of new people at preparatory meetings and in their hosting centres and mostly did not feel any special motivation to collaborate with the other volunteers from *The Lift*. In order for this to have happened, the project would have needed additional funding for the volunteers to meet and exchange ideas in a structured way. Funds were applied for to organise an Evaluation Meeting for all volunteers in connection with TEH Meeting 66 at Tou Scene (Stavanger, Norway, 18th-21st of September 2008), but unfortunately it was not granted.

THE DIFFERENT TARGET GROUPS

The objectives of *The Lift* aim at reaching and involving several different target groups: TEH centres and potential volunteers in the centres, the volunteers that are sent and hosted within the project and organisations in the region of Scania. Of course, regardless of whether you have the financial means to realize a project on your

own budget or not, very often you still have to take the wishes of many different stakeholders into account. If you are a network or a member organisation, your members will most likely have opinions. If you are applying for funding you have to take the funding body's wishes and criteria into account and so on. Still, *The Lift* would most likely still have benefitted from having fewer target groups. Working with fewer target groups would have made it possible to work in a more focused way and would allow for spending more time on supporting the target groups involved. One way of solving this could have been to focus the support from the Project Manager to organisations and the organisational level only. This has, in fact, been the area where the Project Manager has been most needed and invested most of the work-hours, and, as mentioned above, the project would have needed extra funding to have been able to implement a more structured collaboration between the volunteers anyway. When talking about target groups it is also important to clearly define what kind of support you can and cannot offer to the different target groups. This has been challenging concerning the organisations in the region of Scania. The idea was to use *The Lift* as a best practice example and, in that way, inspire more organisations to engage in international youth work. However, when they later understood that they could not join *The Lift* (since they did not fulfil the criteria to join TEH), some of them felt disappointed. Specifying the type and amount of support that regional organisations could expect from the Project Manager would have helped as a guideline.

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