

Volunteering as a tool for citizenship?

A significant number of newcomers live in the City of Antwerp. Recently Antwerp officially became a 'Majority-Minority City', the majority of the people belong to a minority group. In 2017 approximately 7817 people registered as a newcomer in Antwerp (Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur, 2018). More than half are third-country nationals (TCN). The employment rate of this group is around 50%. The city government wants to increase the participation of the other 50% by activating them through voluntary work.

The city of Antwerp started a project together with social cultural organizations to look for best practices and requirements for success. Within the AP University college we trained and coached the organisations and professionals. We focussed on the do's and don'ts while working with volunteers with a TCN background. The first aim was to help develop a warm voluntary policy that responds to the specific needs and demands of volunteers with a TCN background. Secondly it should lead to a strong policy on working with volunteers in general.

Volunteering has an important place in our society, both from a sociological and an economic point of view. From a sociological point of view, voluntary action contributes to social integration through the creation of networks and cooperation between the members of a society. In other words, voluntary action increases 'social capital'. For the volunteers themselves, their efforts bring numerous advantages in terms of social contacts, professional knowledge and skills, personal well-being and self-confidence. From an economic point of view, volunteering fulfils an economic function and is seen as a productive activity in the full sense of the word. Volunteers provide useful services to the community. Their voluntary and unpaid activities support the functions performed by associations in a wide variety of fields: social services, health care, education, culture, etc. (Koning Boudewijnstichting, 2015).

Why?

Volunteering as an instrument of social activation means 'opportunities to increase social participation, to break social isolation and can be seen as a meaningful activity that can be a stepping stone to paid employment' (Bouverne-de Bie & Verschelden, 2003), thus often 'activating' vulnerable target groups in our society.

Vanthuyne, Verschelde, & Bouverne-De Bie (2006) consider the role and duties of a volunteer as a good opportunity for people of immigrant origin (newcomers) to integrate into our society. Haertjens (2004) also points to the power of volunteering, in addition to the step it offers to find a place on the labour market.

However, Mathijssen (2014) is critical of the above statements. We need to counterbalance an overly one-sided activation policy, which is driven by a European activation discourse and which strongly determines the activation policy in our country:

- from rights to opportunities (and those opportunities must be actively pursued)
- from protection against risks to the ability to adapt...
- from a lack of jobs to a lack of employability.

This author argues that volunteering should be separated from the labour market, despite the opportunities that this can create for a volunteer to work; moving on to work cannot be a goal of volunteering. The right to work cannot be translated into a compulsory job (as is the case with vulnerable support workers who have to do 'compulsory volunteering'). Sustainable activation is achieved by offering quality employment (and training), for which employers and the government are responsible. The focus is now too one-sidedly on individual jobseekers, for whom sanctions have been imposed if they do not show sufficient willingness to work and flexibility.

On the other hand, foreign people look different on volunteering. The concept of 'volunteering' is not or less well known in non-Western cultures. People with a migration background are surprised that in Flanders this is not the case. It is so well organized, with legislation and agreements. They are amazed about the fact that so many people are engaging in volunteering and that way... are working on behalf of third parties. In the home countries it is a matter of helping family, neighbours and acquaintances free of charge, without discussion. They deal with each other differently, many tasks are carried out in non-organized bandages. Each individual has numerous social networks, that guarantee help and support. This can be done in the area of care as financial and material. Volunteering in the sense of helping in an organization is less common.

Language

During the project it became clear that we had to focus on foreign-speaking volunteers. Language is an important part of the problems for organisations. Keeping this in mind, we used the principles of the TOPOI model during the meetings.

The TOPOI-model is developed by Edwin Hoffman (2009) and is based on the work of the Interaction Academy of Antwerpen, which works with the axioms for communication developed by Watzlawick. There are in this model 5 areas to trace misunderstandings in communication.

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|-----------------------------|---|
| - T ongue: | people influence with and without words |
| - O rder: | relativity of truth |
| - P erson: | communication has a relational level |
| - O rganization | |
| - I ntentions and influence | all behavior is communication |

The statements of Watzlawick can be recognized. The O is added because the intercultural communication we discuss takes place in a professional institute, a professional organization. It is important to realize that Tongue, Order, Person, Organization, and

Intentions cannot be separated in practice. They are closely linked together. The areas are only separated for clarity's sake. In real communication you have to deal with all these places at the same time. The TOPOI-model is an instrument to analyse the communication. It also is a model for interventions.

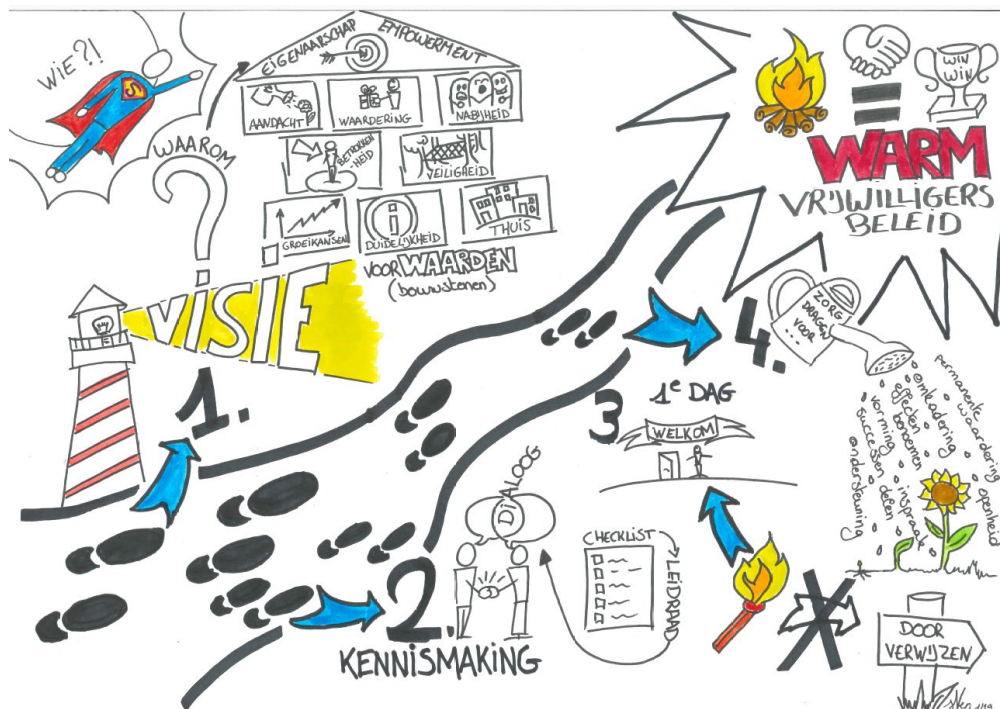
The TOPOI-model is based on some assumptions:

1. communication is universal
2. the focus is on the interaction not the culture
3. communication is a circular process
4. (intercultural) communication asks for an open, reflective attitude
5. be pessimistic about communication, be optimistic about people

The results of the project

We hoped to find answers to the following questions for organisations who wanted to work with foreign-speaking volunteers:

- How do you make sure that a foreign-speaking volunteer feels good in your organization?
- How do you create a welcoming and warm place for a foreign-speaking volunteer who wants to work as a volunteer?
- How can you ensure that a foreign-speaking volunteer is included in the group?
- And is accepted by the public of your organisation?
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What we found out during the meetings, may not be new. But every professional or expert said that following elements are crucial. What lies here is practice based evidence.

1 Volunteer policy

Every organisation has an interest in a solid volunteer policy. A volunteer policy describes the place and role of volunteers in the organisation.

It all starts with asking yourself the next questions:

- Why does your organization work with volunteers?
- What does your organisation expect from volunteers?
- Who can become a volunteer in your organisation?
- What makes your organization attractive for volunteers?
- What does your organisation offer volunteers?
- What motivates your current volunteers?
- What is the practical organisation of volunteering in your organisation?
- How is the current volunteer team composed?
- Is there much or little change in the current volunteer team?

Certain target groups may require some extra attention from your guidance in the organisation during the volunteer work. Extra attention for creating warm contacts and opportunities for growth. Here we talk about a warm volunteer policy. But a warm volunteer policy is a volunteer policy for everyone. This ensures that volunteering becomes a positive experience for every volunteer.

What is important in a warm volunteer policy?

Proximity

It is important that there is support at the beginning and a permanent contact person during the volunteer work. Someone to whom one can turn with all small and large questions and who can really take the time to do so.

Make sure you can be close enough to the volunteer to keep your finger on the pulse. The volunteer coordinator is the most appropriate person. But he can also delegate the task to colleagues, other volunteers, E.g. by working with mentor and godparenthood. However, a fixed point of contact in case of problems should be included by the volunteer coordinator. This person is then a listening ear and can mediate between volunteer and professional or between volunteers themselves.

Appreciation

Just as we like to feel appreciated by our colleagues, friends and family, volunteers want recognition and appreciation for the work they do. Recognizing volunteers for

their contribution increases the chance that they will continue to volunteer in the organization. If volunteers can use their talents, they will be able to do more for the organization.

Clarity

This is interpreted broadly in terms of expectations, tasks, contact person, language (contact language, what do I do if I don't understand it), ... It gives peace of mind as people what is expected of them.

Safe environment

Create a safe environment where there is room for trial and error. Give feedback in a respectful way, and make suggestions for improvement.

Offering growth opportunities

Does a volunteer still feel good about what he's doing? Would he like to grow into another task? You can offer growth opportunities by first having an idea of the motivation. Why does someone volunteer? But also by having an insight into the talents. What is someone good at? By having regular conversations with the volunteer, you gain insight into motivation and talents and you can offer growth opportunities to a volunteer.

2 Extra points of attention if you want to include foreign-speaking volunteers in your organisation

2.1 Promote a diverse volunteering policy

Why does your organization want to work with foreign-speaking volunteers? Is the vision a shared story in your organisations? Make a diversity policy and discuss this choice with your current staff and volunteers. Make sure that there is support within the organisation.

See what support staff or volunteers need for this change and support them in doing so.

2.2 Provide a good framework and guidance

You take care of every volunteer. Guiding foreign-speaking volunteers requires extra care because of:

- of the unfamiliarity with volunteering, written and unwritten rules in an organization
- potential language barriers
- extra worries that may arise (such as housing, Dutch lessons, search for work, etc.)

How can you provide this extra care?

- by doing an introductory interview where you take the time to listen to the interest and motivation of the volunteer.
- Make time to make clear agreements
- investing time in a good induction period so that the volunteer is well informed about his task
- Make time for a follow-up interview in which you hear how someone experiences volunteering with you.

2.3 Lowering the language barriers in your organisation

Think about which tasks you give to the volunteer. Think about how to divide volunteer tasks into limited sub-tasks. Make sure that a task matches personal interests and talents as much as possible. This has a positive influence on the involvement of the volunteer and so there is a maximum development of his abilities. In this way, volunteers can learn new things more quickly.

Think about the language level of the volunteer task

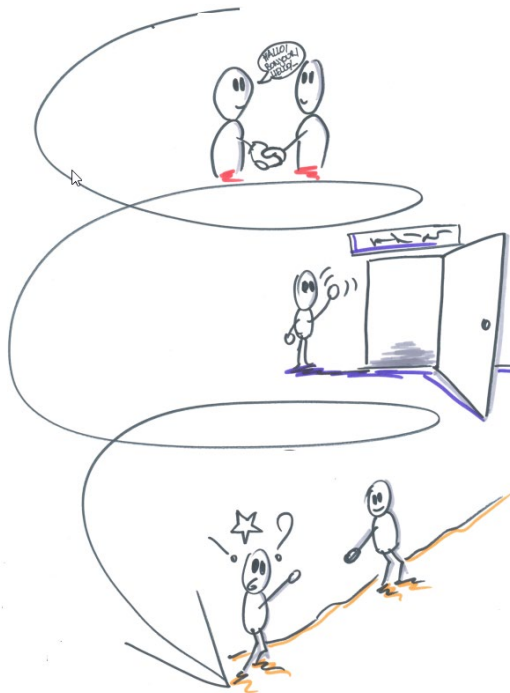
- How much Dutch does the volunteer need to be able to do this?
- What kind of conversations should he have? (always the same sentences or also difficult conversations?)
- Who is the conversation partner (an employee who speaks in simple Dutch or elderly people who speak dialect?)?
- Should the volunteer also make telephone calls? Read information? Write down information for colleagues?

Create documents visually and in simple Dutch. If you provide additional documents (such as a volunteer contract or information brochure), make sure they are in clear language. For people who are illiterate and/or in a foreign language, reading Dutch can be difficult. Some tips:

- Keep the info as short as possible and support your info with realistic pictures of your own organization. (a picture of the front door, a picture of the person in charge).
- It is better not to use pictograms because they are not universal and can be confusing. Take real pictures or search for pictures of objects or situations on the internet.
- Provide a simple and recognizable layout. (no long text, but a list with dots).
- Use a clear and sufficiently large font and avoid decorations that are not functional. Leave out anything that disturbs the concept.

3 The first time...

A good welcome and a good first impression are important. Volunteers who feel welcome remain motivated for longer.



3.1 Provide a warm welcome

- Receive the volunteer at a quiet moment, create a friendly atmosphere and take your time (mobile phone off, do not be disturbed, ...). Thank your volunteer for his commitment, offer something to drink, introduce yourself,....
- Welcome in a place that reflects the atmosphere of the organisation. In this way, a candidate can immediately form an image of your organisation. Make sure that you can go to a quieter place afterwards.
- Start with a number of basic questions. These are intended to put the other at ease, but also provide an estimate of how knowledge is Dutch. Sample questions: . Welcome, I am..., who are you? Are you here for the first time? Are you here by tram or bicycle?

Does the volunteer already speak good Dutch?

- Then speak at a normal pace
- Stay attentive to explain technical jargon and difficult concepts.
- Keep asking control questions (never assume that people will ask if they don't understand anything)

3.2 Spend sufficient time getting to know each other

The important thing is that it remains a pleasant conversation. The introductory meeting is a mutual acquaintance. It is a dialogue where you get to know the volunteer and where you introduce your organisation. In this way both of you can assess what you can do for each other. Do not overload new people with too much information during the first interview.

- Tell briefly about who you are
- Tell what the organisation is doing
- Tell why volunteers are important
- Tell what volunteers can do

You can put this information in an information brochure for volunteers, which you will review together with the candidate during the introductory interview.

Tips:

- Make sure that the information is short and clear. For example, don't start with the history of your organisation. Do not use the organisation chart for a while. Limit yourself to the essence. Also use visual aids.
- For example, show photos of different tasks.
- Show the different departments / parts of the organizations in a guided tour. In this way, the volunteer first gets a picture of the entire organisation and offers him the opportunity to think about what he would like to do. Then he sees the different tasks.

Then you make sure that you can get to know the person sitting in front of you. What questions can you ask?

- Can you tell us something about yourself? Can you introduce yourself?
- Why do you want to volunteer in our organization?
- What do you find fun and interesting? What are your hobbies?
- What would you like to do?
- What can you do well? What are your talents?
- What did you study (in your country)? What study did you do?
- Have you already done voluntary work in the past?
- How many times a week do you want to volunteer? When do you have time to volunteer?
- When do you want to volunteer? Are there any other things we need to take into account? (health, mobility, workplace,...)

3.3 Make clear agreements

If you have found a task that the volunteer would like to do, make clear agreements:

Discuss the tasks and provide clear information:

- The course of the task, step by step.
- The persons with whom the volunteer works.
- The location, hours and dates of the volunteer work.
- Write down appointments for the volunteer.

4 Ensure a good start

4.1 Stand by

Make sure that the first day care is provided for the volunteer who starts. It is best to choose a quiet time to start up so that you have time to explain the tasks and to show the volunteer the way in the organization.

4.2 Also reassure the volunteer

A first day is exciting. Indicate that you can ask the volunteer questions.

Also indicate that it is normal that you do not understand everything. In the school the teacher speaks Dutch clearly and correctly. Here people speak plain language, like on the street. But it is very interesting to practice. Give yourself time. After a few weeks it gets better. And also learn to say if you don't understand something. We don't mind. We think that's normal. (may all seem a bit obvious but in reality is never mentioned and is really reassuring for foreign-speaking volunteers)

4.3 also give practical information

Give a tour and discuss the practical information: where are the toilets, where can you get coffee, there is a locker, where can someone place his personal belongings, where is someone eating, should someone bring sandwiches or not,

4.4 Spend sufficient time explaining a task

There are 3 phases to train someone in a new task.

1. show how it goes
2. doing it together, making adjustments where necessary
3. volunteer does it independently

At the end of the day, make time for a short conversation: what was it like? Was it fun? Do you have any questions?

Make your own checklist for your organisation (just like you might make for new employees). This way, everyone within your organisation is involved in the approach.

5 Take care of your volunteer



5.1 Thank the volunteer

Brainstorming with staff and volunteers about a creative way to thank volunteers! Make sure that the appreciation is tailor-made and in a way that is meaningful.

- Pay attention to figurative language, e.g. in Dutch we say “put someone in the flowers”. A simple 'thank you' is a good start.
- Provide a warm environment (coffee and tea, nice atmosphere, ...)
- People who volunteer to practice Dutch like to chat. Appoint a mentor or godfather who has an eye for the volunteer. E.g. a short conversation to ask how the day was.
- Create room for continuous appreciation. Be sincere in thanking and acknowledging volunteers. Make sure that colleagues always pay attention to permanent appreciation.

Serve as a reference for volunteers applying for work or further learning.

5.2 Stay in conversation

Check with the volunteer regularly. How does he feel, does he learn something new, is he satisfied with the task,....

You can do this informally, in the corridors. But also foresee formal conversations and take half an hour to sit down together. Plan a meeting with the volunteer to hear how things are going.

By contacting the volunteer in his absence, you give a signal that there is proximity and attention for the person.

But being a volunteer should always be a free choice to invest time in activities that are perceived to be meaningful.

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