

The impact of a European Qualification Framework on the organisation of outdoor activities within the EU *

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Within the context of this EQFOA ¹ meeting it is a great pleasure and honour to have the opportunity to present the **EC-OE**: the **European Confederation of Outdoor Employers**.

Indeed, it is within the context of this EQF / Leonardo Da Vinci project that five employers federations from Belgium, France, Holland, Ireland & Portugal decided to join forces and to create the EC-OE.

Moreover, we expect to welcome within the near future members from Finland, Lithuania, Spain, ...

Some of us already knew each other for some time but to be fair it is through this 'Leonardo Da Vinci' project that we really got into close contact and realised we had a multitude of common interests and most of all: common problems and difficulties. Problems and difficulties to execute our job: the organisation of **outdoor leisure activities**.

It is important to stress this issue: the EC-OE is not involved in organising **SPORT / COMPETITION / RECORDS / RANKINGS / PERFORMANCES**. So the EC-OE (and obviously its members) can't be considered as part of the traditional sports scene.

Outdoor Leisure – through the EC-OE – really claims **its unique identity**; which is an identity of 'Outdoor Employers' **organising** and **selling** 'outdoor leisure activities'.

The latter means we have to cope with issues such as i.e. VAT, social dialogue, unfair competition, etc. ...

It must be stressed that the 'outdoors' really is an important phenomenon in modern western society.

¹ EQFOA: European Qualification Framework Outdoor Animator

From the Vocasport Report – published in 2004 by the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment – it can be deducted that the ‘outdoors’ in the EU engage some ± 250.000 full time employees: with an estimated ± 400.000 near the year 2012.

Sociological keynote issues partly explaining the importance of outdoor activities are: sustainability, aging, health, free time / active leisure time, tourism, etc. ...

In Belgium there are some 65 outdoor companies, in Holland 120, Portugal some 300, in Finland ± 1.000, in France 6.500, the UK, Spain, Italy... some ± 3.000 / country. Trough the EU at least an estimated **40.000** very small enterprises are offering outdoor leisure activities to an increasing number of customers.

The outdoor sector offers a combination of outdoor activities to its clientele such as canoeing, mountain biking, skiing, canyoning, rafting, dog sledging, hot air ballooning, etc....

So Yes, we do relate to ‘sporting activities’ but we implement or translate them if you like, into a leisurely context: no competition, no training etc. ...

So Yes, we are interested in trained employees that are able to ‘animate’ our clientele, and this is exactly what the EQFOA project is about. This is one of the main reasons why the five employers federations participated in this EQFOA project.

So enough incentives to get organised on a European level.

As already mentioned the employer federations have lots of issues to cope with. Take e.g. the cacophony in local, regional, national and EU **environmental** legislation related to the outdoors.

In Belgium i.e. one has to deal with environmental legislation issued by Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and the German community. If you take a look at the UK (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) or Germany (with its 16 Länder), Spain (with Catalonia, Aragon, Bask....17 regions in total) etc., etc., and on top of all some European legislation such as the Habitat directive, Nature 2000, ... it becomes clear that....

Nothing is clear at all !

Apart from the environment, other issues the EC-OE has to deal with are:

- Security (European directive 1994)
- Insurance on liability
- Tourism
- VAT (reduced VAT rates)
- Unfair competition
- Social dialogue
- Etc. etc.

And last but not least: European Qualifications.

The EC-OE is extremely interested in the EQFOA project. If, due to this project, we can obtain a framework of qualifications, this would be of great importance for the ‘outdoor’ sector.

The latter would mean we would at least have a reference for employment. More over, we would have a very useful tool to convince i.e. insurance companies to insure the liability of our ‘qualified’ employees. Insurance companies always want to know whom they are insuring. Without clear indices or qualifications it is nearly impossible to obtain an adequate liability insurance.

Apart from partly solving an insurance problem the EQFOA would also be of great importance to ensure the mobility within the EU of both employers and employees in the ‘outdoors’.

By nature the ‘outdoors’ are very seasonal. One might be a ski instructor in wintertime in France, a canoeing instructor in summertime in Scandinavia but if this canoe instructor travels to France to become a ski instructor during wintertime, in fact he travels back to the **dark ages of Europe**.

The struggle against **protectionism** is really a **major issue** for the ‘outdoors’ in the EU.

Every year – from the introduction of the “*LOI n° 84-610 du 16 juillet 1984 relative à l’organisation et à la promotion des activités physique et sportives*” on - many ‘outdoor animators’ from all over the world are taken into custody by the French Gendarmerie. Their material is confiscated, their customers deprived of their ‘active holidays’, situations that from time to time end-up in liability claims, compensation claims, bankruptcy, ...you name it.

But France is not the only country where protectionism exists. In 1995 an Outdoor Employer spend 4 hours in custody in the **Austrian** prison of Landeck (near Innsbruck) because he was organising a rafting trip. His offence was that he did not posses the apparently necessary Austrian permit to organise '*commercial shipping*'.

And only two months ago we came across the remarkable **Slovenian** Law on Sports (1998). **Article 34** of this law stipulates that “any person can perform tasks in sport as a private worker if (amongst other things)”:

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- This person speaks Slovenian language actively,
- This person has a permanent residence in the Republic of Slovenia.

The EU ambition to promote freedom of travel, free movement of goods and services and so forth, is not always applicable to the 'outdoors'.

From time to time (and particularly in France) organising outdoor activities, engaging outdoor animators, offering people an exiting holiday, ... remains **risky business**.

Though you might start to think you are dealing with some kind of criminal organisation, I can assure you that the EC-OE remains positive to the European project.

To the EC-OE, the EU might prove to be the only clue to finally obtain the freedom to organise our activities within the space of the 27 member states.

The European Qualification Framework for Outdoor Animators might prove to be the crowbar to help brake down the fortresses of **protectionism** that – up till 2008 – unfortunately still exist within the EU.

In conclusion, one might state that the link between the EQFOA project and the EC-OE is a kind of 'marriage de raison'. It is – from the point of view of employers – not very useful to teach and train young people to become an EQF approved 'Outdoor Animator' if, on the other hand the **mobility** of this EQF qualified animator is restricted by protectionism.

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