



A DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR GOAL-ORIENTED AND COMPETENCE-BASED BUNDLING OF VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRIA

Voluntary commitment of citizens is an indispensable, supporting pillar of critical infrastructures (CRITIS) such as disaster management, rescue, or social services. Sustainability of the voluntary sector, however, is massively endangered by profound changes in *demography, social structure, and volunteer motives* in the sense of *individualization* and *pluralization* of society, leading to a *diversification* and *fragmentation* of the volunteer sector.

These key challenges are addressed by our research project »CiVOLUNTEER« (CRITIS Powered by Volunteers) funded by the Austrian security research program "KIRAS" of the Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF) and FFG. The vision of »CiVOLUNTEER« is to create a *digital platform for goal-oriented and competence-based networking and bundling of volunteer work* across NPOs to strengthen volunteer-dependent CRITIS. Such professionalization of individual volunteering through adequate *digital transformation* should provide the basis for future viability of the voluntary sector and ensure a sustainable and comprehensive strengthening of CRITIS.

Due to the risk potential of CRITIS, we put forward *two complementary research goals*:



Research Goal 1: Digitization of Goals & Competencies

The first goal addresses the challenge of increasing *diversification*, focusing on low-threshold involvement of citizens in strengthening CRITIS by *activating commitment* (»Citizen Empowerment«) and *ensuring long-term commitment* (»Citizen Encouragement«). »Citizen Empowerment« targets

- (i) *low-threshold goal setting/progress mechanisms* ensuring flexibility in terms of timing, scope & form of engagement.
- (ii) *holistic recommender mechanisms* to activate & coordinate volunteer goals/competences with CRITIS' activity needs.

Second, »Citizen Encouragement« targets

- (i) *reflection mechanisms for retrospective analysis* of engagement contribution to CRITIS and personal goals as well as *prospective reflection* on future goals for continuous personal development ("lifelong learning").
- (ii) *transparency mechanisms* for traceability of system support in the sense of an *explanatory component* (e.g., disclosure of recommendation reasons), that builds confidence in the meaningfulness of long-term commitments.

Research Goal 2: Digital Bundling of Volunteering

The second goal tackles the challenge of increasing *fragmentation* and focuses on the digital networking and bundling of volunteering through a central "CompetenceHub" and inter-connected decentralized "CommunityHubs". The central »CompetenceHub« targets

- (i) *networking of NPOs* in order to exploit cross-NPO synergies, i.e., "*competence-based bundling of the best forces*" to strengthen CRITIS.
- (ii) *involvement of sponsors* via *corporate volunteering* initiatives or *incentives* for volunteers, to strengthen CRITIS on a broader social basis.

The decentral »CommunityHubs« target

- (i) *self-organization* of volunteers in a *crowd-driven-manner* by forming needs- and demand-driven *grassroots communities* in any area, which in turn act as local/regional »CommunityHubs« to strengthen CRITIS.
- (ii) *expansion of the mechanisms* for activating and ensuring commitment (cf. research goal 1) so that this networking opportunity can also be used for goal/progress setting, recommendations, and reflection/transparency.

The consortium of »CiVOLUNTEER« includes four scientific partners (Johannes Kepler University Linz (JKU) as consortium leader, FH Upper Austria Campus Hagenberg, Art University Linz, WU Vienna), two business partners (X-Net Services GmbH, doloops accessible web technologies GmbH) & the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care, & Consumer Protection.

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