

History of Be Volunteer

The beginnings of BeVolunteer can only be told alongside a history of Hospitality Club, since this is where all the founders started and learned to love the idea of hospitality exchange.

July 2000

Together with his brother Kjell, Veit Kühne founded the Hospitality Club, inspired by other hospitality exchange networks like SERVAS.

2002 till 2005

The later founders of the future "HCvol"/"BeVolunteer" started volunteering for HC, covering all areas of HC volunteering from programming, spam checking, accepting members, geo adjustment, forum moderation, translation to service for HC members.

2005

Some of the core volunteers from HC - the ones who had been working so closely with Veit for years - started to question Veit about some processes which were obviously missing in HC. These special topics were the following:

- the absence of any legal status for HC
- the absence of any democratic system in the way of taking decisions, at any level
- the absence of any transparency in the management of finances, at any level

Other aspects were pointed out too: feeling of manipulation of volunteers, lack of transparency on HC policies for members...

Those shortcomings became even more problematic to the founders of HCvol since HC could not be considered a baby anymore but a real project that was actually growing very fast. Concerned volunteers felt the responsibility to work on these topics so they could evolve and, with some time and efforts, be implemented in HC.

However, Veit never focused on these problems but tried to make volunteers stick to concrete work instead. He refused to debate and chose neither to involve nor to inform even the most committed volunteers on those issues.

December 2005

After many futile and highly frustrating attempts to push the above mentioned issues further in personal conversations, the time was there for more concerted action. A "manifest" was sent to Veit requesting him to work with the concerned volunteers on the mentioned points, or those volunteers would stop all their work for HC. Regardless of that action, those volunteers were - and still are - totally in love with HC, and never stopped working, but motivation was decreasing.

2006

February 2006

Finally after 2 months of silence, Veit disclosed his position: NO WAY would he accept that manifest. It was clear for him: never would HC offer transparency about money management, never would HC be managed by a democratic structure, and for the legal status he suggested a company status or even worse, something based in the shady tax heaven St Kitts & Nieves.

25th of february 2006

A meeting in Dresden was arranged, to discuss problems and find a new way of structuring HC volunteer teams and rework procedures. Only an inner circle of HC core volunteers was invited. Many attended, some coming from 1000 km of distance, to help solving these ever growing problems in HC and the big lack of motivation after the manifest was turned down. Two later HCVOL founders, Matthias and Marco, took part in the meeting. Two and a half days of heated debate revealed that there was no room for compromise from Veit's side, as he did not give in on any topic. At the end of the meeting, Veit finally accepted to consider an external audit for finances inspection; he set a board of 5 persons chosen by him, and in which he would keep a veto right, to take strategical decisions - but explicitly NOT empowered to discuss finances and the possibilities of creating a legal organization - anything discussed in that board was to keep secret; he considered establishing a legal team to work on defining, what would be the best statutes for HC and he talked about creating a page explaining his point of view on HC policy.

For some of the concerned volunteers this was still not enough, and so unacceptable.

For others it was already a good evolution, even if not enough.

The problem, however, was that **none of the good intentions have ever been implemented**. The board had one or two skype conferences, where nothing was achieved. After six months, the board was officially dissolved. Two later HCVOL founders, Pierre-Charles and Marco, were members of that board.

But there was still the hope that HC could evolve to become the organization that is worth its incredible members!

March-April 2006

A group of highly involved HC volunteers decided to set up HCvol, in order to build a space of communications for volunteers, independent from Veit's control. The underlying main point of criticism of Veit was that he wanted to prevent real communication between volunteers, in order to prevent them from discussing what he decided - be it good or bad. The founders of HCvol considered it unacceptable that Veit had blocked many issues for so long even though whole teams didn't agree with his position.

Is HC Veit's thing?

The underlying idea of HCvol is the question whether HC was 'Veit's thing'. The conclusion that HC was rather the volunteers' thing, if not the members' thing, was quite obvious. Consequently HC

should be owned by a legal non-profit organization composed of the ones who build HC everyday: the volunteers. It is true that Veit invented HC and there is no denying of him having done enormously great things for it. But great inventions transcend their inventor...

The mere thought of all the volunteer work being used in the future for one man's interest was unbearable for the founders of HCvol. Trusting Veit was not enough. Building a future for HC was ensuring that the possibility of HC being sold or used in a commercial way could never come true. This seemed more important than improving HC website or accepting more members.

July 2006

HCvol being set more or less it was introduced to Veit. There were many hopes that Veit would accept that proposal of a new organization, or at least evolve in that direction. Veit's radical answer soon destroyed those new hopes: NEVER.

Never democracy, never transparency.

Some of the HCvol founders, who had given so much of these last years for HC were even threatened to be kicked from HC, and told that their only aim was to gain personal power.

September 2006

Since nothing was moving in HC, it was felt that a real counter-power had to be built. It was evident that having a place for the volunteers to work out of Veit's control can only be a very productive thing. Only by word of mouth many volunteers had found their way to HCvol and started to use the forum extensively for all kinds of discussions.

October 2006

Since October, HCvol is an official organization, and so submitted to democracy and transparency. A group of 9 worked a lot to set an organization as basis of work in HCvol. They (minus one founder) constitute the first "Board of Directors" (which we call the BoD), whose role is to meet weekly in order to take any needed decision, to organize HCvol so volunteers can work well, and to make sure no abuse takes place. As soon as HCvol will contain a bigger group of volunteers, there will be a General Assembly and a BoD will be elected by HCvol members.

In the middle of the month, there was a (last?) big hesitation. Wasn't the whole project a huge waste? Wasn't there any way to work on a really new project with HCvol, but including HC members? So the BoD suggested to Veit that HCvol start developing a project on a new site (new website) but that the HC database be shared. In exchange HCvol members would help maintaining the HC site for a limited period of time. So the HCvol site would have been like a test site, a new site, which HC members could have used if they wanted. It would have been difficult technically, but possible. After lots of hours of discussions one of the HCvol BoD members told Veit about that idea. Well, we understand why he refuses, but for the members, however, we would have liked that compromise.

2007

January 2007

HCvol is renamed BeVolunteer and is totally dedicated to its project, BeWelcome.

The majority of the topics touching the creation of that new platform are being discussed among the volunteers, decisions are taken and all the teams and routines are set.

February 2007

Our first project BeWelcome is launched in a beta phase and the first members start signing up.

May 2007

The first General Assembly is held in Brussels, Belgium. 24 volunteers approved the new statutes

August 2007

Olivier from Marseille, France, joined BeWelcome as our 1,000th member

October 2007

BeWelcome has become the first non-profit travel/hospitality website based entirely on open source software.

An interview with Claudia from the BoD in October 2007

An interview with Frank from the BoD in October 2007

December 2007

A new version of BeWelcome is on-line. the Forum and Search pages show major improvements

2008

January 2008

The 1st BeWelcome Volunteer (un)Conference is held in Antwerp, Belgium.

28 members from 6 countries joined, including members of the Board of Directors of BeVolunteer as well as newer and old-school volunteers alike. Workshops were organized, friendships were made and a splendid time was guaranteed for all 😊 The Volunteer Blog has more info, including a video <http://blogs.bevolunteer.org/>

In the meanwhile, the 2400th members of BeWelcome was accepted ;-)

Autumn 2008

Interview with Felix

2009

February 2009

In France one of the first guidebooks dedicated to Hospitality Exchange is published. It is called "VOYAGER presque GRATUIT" and contains a couple of pages about BeWelcome. One BeVolunteer member, thorgal67, even contributed a funny article about stereotypical Hospex Travelers.

March 2009

BeWelcome is available in 29 languages and 50% of the site is translated in Esperanto.

Volunteer Cafes (virtual chat conferences) become a major tool for BW member empowerment.

July 2009

The 3rd General Assembly is held in Grimbergen (near Brussels), Belgium.

The website gets a new look and member Subaculture introduces Pledgebank to raise money and awareness for BeWelcome.

Groups are introduced on BW which boosts the forum participation.

2010

January 2010

Member tgoorden organises another Unconference in Antwerp, Belgium, and BeWelcome offers its members the possibility to create wiki pages. A BeWelcome Shop is also set up.

February 2010

A collaboration between Servas and BeWelcome is explored. Over the next months several meetings are organized but no formal agreement is reached.

June 2010

The 4th General Assembly is held online in Rennes, France, where BeVolunteer has its official seat.

2011

January 2011

Another meet-up for BW volunteers in Antwerp, Belgium.

November 2011

The 5th General Assembly is held in Grimbergen, Belgium Intense discussions on the first day of BeVolunteer General Assembly 2012 in Halle, Germany

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2012

September to October 2012

The 6th General Assembly is held in two parts: one online part and another real-life meeting in Halle/Saale (Germany).

2013

At present, Bewelcome is very much alive and kicking. With its non-profit, democratic and transparent approach it has been attracting many members from other hospitality networks who may have been disillusioned with the direction their community is taking.

At present (March 2013) there are 50 BV members, consisting of about 50% original members and 50% newcomers. In the past most of them came from Europe, but that is rapidly changing. Pablo for example is from Argentina and works on the BoD and is translation coordinator. Another new member is Jsfan, located in Australia and very active as both a developer and a forum moderator.

March 2013

At the request of BW members the tradition of Unconferences is picked up again. Guaka hosts the first Brussels Unconference and important decisions are taken to improve the forum, groups and decision system.

As of March 2013 BeWelcome is the 3rd largest hospex community with more than 35,000 members and a website that is, with varying degrees of translation, available in over 40 languages.