

# value

VOLUNTEERING & LIFELONG LEARNING  
IN UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE

Funded by the Grundtvig strand of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, the Value Network (2008-2011) brought together representatives from the university and volunteering sectors to explore the potential for developing new university lifelong learning (ULLL) opportunities tailored and targeted for the volunteering sector.

In addition to working as a whole network, Value partners worked in sub-groups which were devised to allow partners to come together in small groups and to exchange experiences and ideas in a less formal environment than full meetings. The groups were allocated themes of particular interest and relevance to both the volunteering and university sectors and which contribute to debate at European level. Through meetings and individual desk research, individuals investigated and reflected on their theme, both conceptually and in terms of practice in their own countries. The resulting full sub-group reports are available on the sub-group pages of the Value website along with other resources such as discussion documents, web links and bibliographic references. The report summaries are contained in this publication.

[www.valuenetwork.org.uk/html/subgroups.htm](http://www.valuenetwork.org.uk/html/subgroups.htm)

## Partners

- University of Graz, Austria
- EUCEN, Belgium
- European Volunteer Centre (CEV), Belgium
- University of Hamburg, Germany
- Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany
- University of Barcelona, Spain
- Third Sector Observatori, Spain
- Social Guild Foundation, Hungary
- CSVnet, Italy
- INHOLLAND University of Applied Science, Netherlands
- NOC\*NSF, Netherlands
- W. J. Grabski Public Library, Poland
- Pro Vobis National Centre for Volunteering, Romania
- University Babeş-Bolyai, Romania
- University of Primorska, Slovenia
- C.A.R.D.O., Slovakia
- Middle East Technical University, Turkey
- ILKYAR VAKFI, Turkey

### Project Coordination:

- University of Liverpool, UK

### Resources Support and Development:

- Institute for Volunteering Research, UK



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## Exploring Themes

Employability

Older volunteers as learners

Citizenship

Intercultural dialogue

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union

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## Employability

The Employability subgroup discussed the wide range of stakeholders that the 'employability' theme can cover including volunteers, employed managers of volunteers and employers who encourage their own employed staff to engage in volunteering. The group's reflections are as follows:

There is a need to be cautious in assuming that ULLL is universally required by volunteers or managers of volunteers. This educational step is not for everyone. Potential learners do not form a homogeneous group and the motivation, even around the single theme of employability, can vary substantially depending on an individual's background, age group etc.

Volunteering should not just focus on employment outcomes, nor should ULLL. In these times of economic crisis it is understandable that economic benefits of both volunteering and learning are to the forefront of thinking for those in government. Nevertheless both volunteering and ULLL offer much wider societal benefits both to those engaged in it and

to their wider civic community and these should not be undervalued. The rationale for volunteers and those working in the voluntary sector to become engaged in ULLL should not just be an economic argument. The holistic argument, therefore, is much stronger: linking economic as well as social benefits within the local/regional community.

There is, however, a demonstrated demand for tailored ULLL provision for this sector. Even if many volunteers do not want to take the opportunity, there are others who do, although universities and voluntary organisations should not underestimate the investment of time and energy required of an individual engaging in ULLL.

Flexibility of support, content and delivery is the key to successful ULLL and there are examples of good practice e.g. where this is acknowledged and accommodated by several universities in the UK and NL implementing policies of widened access and tailor-made programmes.

 **SUB-GROUP MEMBERSHIP:** University of Liverpool (UK), Institute for Volunteering Research (UK), InHolland University (NL), Babes-Bolyai University (RO)

## Older volunteers as learners

The basic idea behind the sub-group work and report has been that learning based on volunteer work can be a first step on a "learning ladder" for "older volunteers". Most volunteer organisations do not offer formal learning specifically for older volunteers. If they offer courses as obligatory training for volunteer work, it is usually for all volunteers. When providing formal learning, volunteer organisations involve individual researchers/trainers/tutors, sometimes also at university level. However, volunteer organisations are aware that older learners might need different learning settings/learning methods and it is not always "a course" which is needed. In the countries represented in the sub-group, universities offer lifelong learning by providing regular degree programmes, professional development programmes and learning opportunities (non-credit-bearing) for the general public which includes retired seniors. Older learners are not a homogeneous group and older volunteers are in

general not specifically targeted by universities. But some specific case studies could be found which highlight various aspects of the theme.

Based on the group's collaborative work, the vision for the future is that each sector is aware of the other; that they recognise and appreciate each other's work and that institutions of both sectors develop stronger institutional links to institutions in the other sector. This should include the development of joint (credit-bearing) learning opportunities based on the needs of older volunteers in order to open up new learning pathways. It is also necessary that universities have or should have well developed links to those volunteer organisations in the local area that provide opportunities for older students to work as volunteers. This involvement of universities could lead to more involvement of volunteers and – in the long run – to more recognition of the contribution of volunteer work to society.

 **SUB-GROUP MEMBERSHIP:** University of Graz (AT), C.A.R.D.O. (SK), University of Hamburg (DE), Pro Vobis (RO)

## Citizenship

The Citizenship Subgroup work set out to explore and define the relationship(s) that exist between learning, volunteering and citizenship. Discussions centred on volunteering as a way of learning about citizenship. Early work showed there is that little standardized theoretical background available to pin-point how this learning occurs, what competences it builds and whether the understanding of key elements and processes is shared across different cultural backgrounds. However, significant steps forward were made possible by the initiatives, new thinking and policy work in the framework of the 2011 European Year of Volunteering and by inputs to Value from expert contributors.

Throughout the Subgroup work, the grass roots experiences of voluntary organisations and networks in different countries provided the most important stimulus for discussions. Our focus was the wealth, the diversity and the enormous potential for social change that learning to be a competent active citizen

through voluntary action brings to volunteers, their beneficiaries and to community at large. To this end the Subgroup structured a "Learning Citizenship by Volunteering Practice Bank" where a small experiment of qualitative evaluation was attempted, by valuing the following elements: Learning process, Building of social capital, Inclusion and Competences.

Also a repertory of themes and suggestions for reflection was identified, opening new paths for collaborative work among voluntary sector and universities. In the final presentation at the Ankara conference a discussion was launched on how we could imagine a set of learning pathways for Active European citizenship to be developed through a European collaborative effort, based on the following elements: Citizenship and Active Citizenship, Policy Framework, Institutions, Civil Society and Volunteering, Social Capital, Societal Challenges and Emerging Issues, Personal Skills.

 **SUB-GROUP MEMBERSHIP:** CSVnet (IT), Middle East Technical University (TR), University of Barcelona (ES), Observatorio del Tercer Sector (OTS) (ES)

## Intercultural dialogue

The ICD subgroup discussed interculturality not only as a cross-border issue but as one which arises within member states, organisations and across generations. Intercultural issues were discussed under the following subthemes: learning environments and pedagogical theories/practices; inclusive approaches and identities; values, beliefs in pedagogy, communication and language; diffusion and transformation and teachers' education.

The sub-group reviewed definitions of interculturality and divided them into process-oriented and aim-oriented ones. The group also produced a glossary.

A second topic discussed by the subgroup, within the context of intercultural dialogue, was teaching volunteers about professionalism. The group discussed service-learning and its role in taking learners out of the classroom and into a community

setting or workplace that is often unlike anything they have encountered before. – the real intercultural world. Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity changes both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and intercultural knowledge content.

Finally, the subgroup identified and discussed ULLL good practice which both facilitates and promotes intercultural dialogue and the role of volunteers in 'translating' the culture to another culture. The common conclusion was, that it would be useful to have a kind of handbook for volunteers, how to react and behave in the intercultural environment.

 **SUB-GROUP MEMBERSHIP:** W. J. Grabski Public Library (PL), Leuphana University of Lüneburg (DE), ILKYAR VAKFI (TR), Social Guild Foundation (HU), University of Primorska (SI)