

## Sub-group CITIZENSHIP Background paper – September 2010

### 1. Aim of the group

This group is exploring the current relationships that exist between learning, volunteering and citizenship. It recognises that the volunteering – citizenship relationship may be more explicitly recognised and is therefore investigating how ULLL can contribute to the debate.

The starting point is the largely non recognised wealth of non formal and informal learning that occurs in volunteers involving organisations, important actors and environments of participative democracy. Starting from the basic life skills acquisitions and betterment, the group has set out to initiate discussion around the concept of "competences for active citizenship". It is drawing upon experiences and reference materials at both a European level and from countries represented in the group.

### 2. Benefits from volunteering based on experience

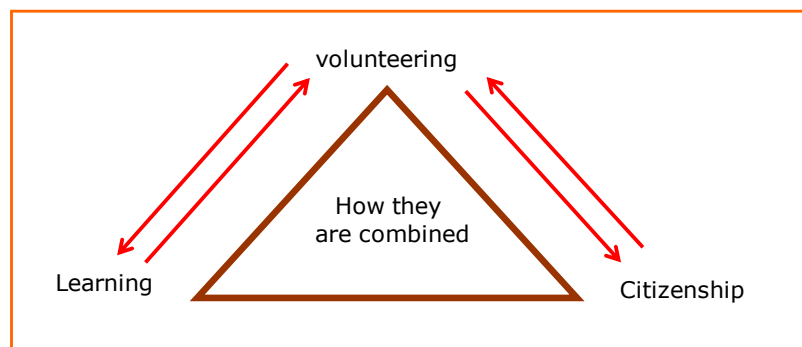
Volunteering give us opportunity to practice in various fields, which may help individuals to improve their self-confidence, group work skills or knowledge about related issues. For example, ILKYAR visits boarding schools and show the students interesting experiments in classes or outside about science, chemistry or physics, and provide different activities concerning literacy, music, environment, origami, astronomy, etc. So, the volunteers who deal with these activities can improve their knowledge about these issues by means of practicing. Also, making these activities in front of the classes improve the self-confidence of the volunteers.

### 3. Basic relationships between volunteering, learning and citizenship

**We advocate that through volunteering people learn and practice, and perfect, their active citizenship.**

A practical guide to define the issue could be to find out the current relationships that exist between learning, volunteering and citizenship and also other possible relationships that could exist.

The main link should be volunteering as is the "nexus". The different kind of relationships to tackle should be: citizenship-volunteering, learning-volunteering and citizenship-volunteering-learning. The following picture can help us in order to think about the different perspectives:



The different issues are all connected to each other. By means of volunteering, individuals can improve their learning and this lead them become active citizenship.

It is important to highlight the importance but also the challenge of building relationships that consider the three elements. It is not always easy. The different kind of nonprofits, the different ways of lifelong learning, the different kinds of volunteering, are some of the aspects to be considered.

On the one hand, sometimes volunteering is understood as a way of being an active citizen but nobody worries about learning (although it exists). Acting with values usually becomes the most important in these cases. The activity and the mission of the nonprofits are a key issue in these relationships. This is the risk if only the concepts citizenship-volunteering are considered.

On the other hand, sometimes volunteering is seen as a way of "technical" learning (for example for university students that volunteer in nonprofits) but citizenship has for them a secondary role. In these cases citizenship is less relevant. These are probably a mistake in terms of the enrichment of the Third Sector.

It could be interesting to think about how to promote relationships that consider the three elements independently of the kind of volunteering, etc.

In order to talk about learning it can help us two aspects:

**-the approach given in the Delors report** (the four pillars of education, values, attitudes, knowledge and skills): each relationship perhaps emphasizes more in some pillars than the other.

**-the different kind of learning that you can acquire in a nonprofit organization:** technical/skills ones (the ones that could be provided by ULL) and life experiences /values ones (the ones you learn in the process of volunteering).

#### 4. Looking at the different relationships

The common structure to look at in each relationship could be based on three main points:

**-Relationship definition.**

**-Experiences from different countries** that reflect and express the relationship.

**-References on the issue** from different countries.

Finally the key issues for a successful relationship based on the three concepts should be considered and pointed out. A decalogue for a successful relationship in which learning-volunteering-citizenship are important could be useful as a tool for nonprofits or for universities which provide lifelong learning.

The country experiences may help us to illustrate each kind of relationship and its main characteristics.

##### a. Citizenship-volunteering:

Volunteering is one of the ways – one of the most demanding ways – to exercise active citizenship. Volunteering is an activity and an engagement given of free will, without pay, for the benefit of others, of the community or for common good. Volunteering activity is most often organised through not for profit organisations

with their own internal democratic life and which interact with public institutions on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity.

Volunteering builds social cohesion, provides answers to emerging needs and initiates change in communities; volunteering builds bonds and relationships: these values and such mission are linked to the core concepts of citizenship based on active participation, solidarity and community spirit.

Examples of citizenship-volunteering could be some local umbrella organizations that work with different kind of nonprofits (educational, disabled people, childhood, illnesses, etc). Also the work of neighbourhood nonprofit organizations is an example on this case. In these cases the learning is related to values and lifelong experiences.

#### **b. Citizenship-learning:**

Learning about citizenship or learning how to be a good – active – citizen? How education institutions collaborate on this particular aspect with public institutions and not for profit sector? What is the attention of the voluntary sector as regards learning about citizenship? What elements of training and what kind of education processes are used? Who are the target groups and what are the objectives?

#### **c. Learning-volunteering:**

This again is a two way interaction. In the first place, it is necessary to learn about volunteering: not only how to perform a task or an activity, but also about the organisation, the rules, the relationships, the social context; about participation, policy, development, people, technical instruments. Only a very small portion of this learning passes through formal training – so this tells us how much learning goes on during volunteering and through taking part in a voluntary organisation. This is learning through volunteering – informal and non formal – through practice, non codified tutoring, role models, debates, confrontation, external occasions. So far, there has been very little attention placed on the value of volunteering as a way of lifelong learning.

#### **d. Citizenship-volunteering-learning:**

In practices analysed the collaboration with ULL is widely missing. Some proposals as to how voluntary organisations and universities could cooperate in order to develop conscious and monitored processes of building citizenship competences through volunteering could be proposed in the final phases of our work.

### **5. Other final ideas**

Some things to show about the different relationships:

#### **a. citizenship-volunteering:**

- The importance of Third Sector as a way of civil society participation.
- Volunteering as an expression of citizens participation in nonprofit organizations.

-The non-formal and informal learning of volunteering: it is a life experience in which people learn values, attitudes and competences.

**b. learning-volunteering:**

-Common learning is needed to volunteer in any kind of organization.  
-Volunteering is one of the ways of learning. There are experiences interesting on this sense (service-learning for example).

**c. citizenship-volunteering-learning:**

-An effort should be done by each social agent (universities and nonprofit organizations) in order to advance.  
-Practical guidelines should be provided so that is easy for both parts which probably do not know each other.