

Subgroup CITIZENSHIP

Final Report

September 2011

Subgroup Members

Ksenija Fonović for CSVnet – Coordinamento Nazionale dei Centri di Servizio per il Volontariato (Roma, Italy) – Subgroup Leader;
Nuray Yildirim for CEC Middle East Technical University (Ankara, Turkey);
Ana Villa for Observatori del Tercer Sector (Barcelona, Espana);
Laura Castellucci for IL3, Universitat de Barcelona (Barcelona, Espana).

Subgroup web resources on

www.valuenetwork.org.uk/html/citizenship.htm

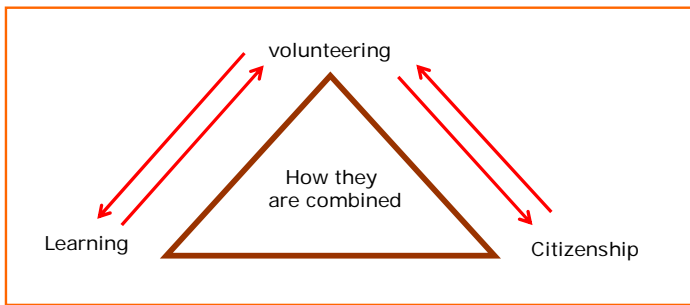
VOLUNTEERING as a way of LEARNING about CITIZENSHIP

Initial objective

The subgroup Citizenship set out to explore and define the relationship/s existing between learning, volunteering and citizenship. It acknowledged the fact that volunteering-citizenship relationship should be more explicitly recognised and therefore investigated how University Lifelong Learning could contribute to the debate. While from experience clearly emerged that volunteers learn about citizenship through their engagement, little standardized theoretical background was 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.

The starting point: Context and key issues

The following “golden triangle” defined as our starting point has remained the terrain for discussions, queries and explorations that the Subgroup pursued.



The starting point was 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 set out to initiate discussion around the concept of "competences for active citizenship", drawing upon experiences and reference materials at both European level and from countries represented in the group.

The discussion also verged on the different definitions of Active citizenship: depending on the authors and the perspectives adopted. One of the main difficulties in defining active citizenship related to the agreement of which the responsibilities of citizens are.

Active citizenship refers to the involvement of individuals in public life and other affairs. Citizens take an active role and exercise their rights and responsibilities in a balanced way.

Active citizenship implies action and empowerment as to making decisions, taking actions individually and collectively, etc. It can take place at local, national and international levels although it is usually used referring to the local level. Nevertheless, examples of active citizenship at the national level can be voting or being involved in campaigning pressure groups. At international level an active citizen may be involved in fair trade, for example. The concept of active citizenship is often associated with a critical attitude towards the societal status quo in a wide array of aspects regarding human rights, equal opportunities, exclusion, environment, common goods. This attitude is corroborated with a surge to take action with the aim to produce positive change in public perception and in public policy and is strongly characterised by collective, rather than single, action. The concept of active citizenship includes a strong educational vocation. Being active citizens does not mean necessarily being good citizens in the sense of following the rules or behaving in a certain way. The key characteristics of active citizenship are: participation in the community, empowerment of people to play a part in the decisions and processes that affect them, knowledge and understanding of the political/social/economic context of their participation and ability to challenge policies or actions and existing structures.

A number of key issues have been identified throughout the discussion in the subgroup, concentrating on the interaction within our "golden triangle" initially defined.

Volunteering – Citizenship

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 initiatives 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.

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?

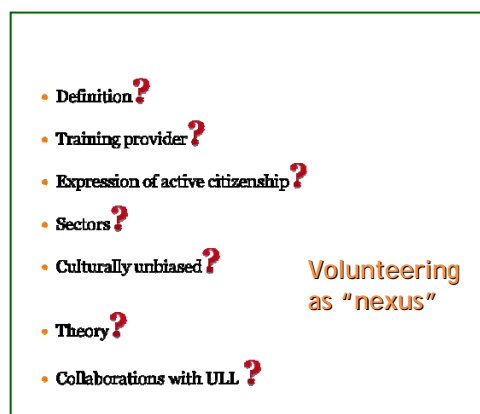
Learning - Volunteering

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 little attention placed on the value of volunteering as a way of life long learning, but in the last few years the recognition of competences acquired through volunteering has gained prominence in EU volunteering policy work.

The starting point: Obstacles and first answers

In 2008 when the Subgroup was planned and started its work, a series of very basic elements as regards the shared understanding of volunteering across Europe had not yet been defined at European level. Subsequently, from 2009 to 2011, in particular thanks to the preparations of the European Year of Voluntary Activities that Promote Active Citizenship – EYV 2011 – significant progress has emerged as regards the definitions, the recognition of values, the institutional documents and trans-cultural sharing of basic concepts underlying the Subgroup Citizenship work.

But the very initial challenge for the discussions was to build common terrain of understanding among participants as regards a series of basic concepts.



Significantly, volunteering was singled out as the “nexus” of discussions, the central concept to which all others related; this also in virtue of its being the terrain of action, and therefore of observation and analysis. But at the starting moment, between partners from different sectors and different countries, we had to start by sharing the definition of volunteering and by discussing rather in detail other types of civic engagement similar but out of scope of the definition of volunteering. Similarly, institutional recognition of volunteering as “expression of active citizenship” was yet to come.

The other terrain that was extensively debated was the training provision and learning environment as regards volunteering.

It was agreed that in the context of the Subgroup Citizenship work voluntary organisations should not be considered as merely providers of training – which they very often do – for their volunteers, both on specific more technical competences and on general themes, such as the mission of the organisation, working in group, legal framework etc. In this aspect, stress was given to the wide array of non formal training provision and education opportunities for beneficiaries of voluntary organisations, such as marginalised groups, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, etc. This was singled out as a set of activities closely linked to learning/teaching citizenship, an outlook at the core of the educational and empowerment mission of voluntary organisations in the field of social fragilities. Similar observations were pin-pointed as regards the advocacy organisations and the promotion of rights and awareness about common goods.

But the Subgroup remained determined not to overlook the less trodden path of thinking about the voluntary organisation as a learning environment for volunteers, besides and regardless

the training provision aspect. It was felt that working with others in an organised structure towards new and shared objectives that often involves a complex set of interactions also with public authorities and emerging societal challenges – represents a powerful learning environment in itself. So far this has represented the aspect less analysed both by practitioners and by academics, but it is at the same time one of the core aspects of “learning citizenship through volunteering”.

Other obstacles initially addressed were:

whether volunteering in any and whatever sector engages equally in processes of learning about citizenship;

whether the outlook on these concepts is the same in all countries or significant cultural differences or societal developments of the third sector can hinder understanding;

what are the theoretical works and acquisitions that can be used as points of reference.

Finally, the Subgroup work aimed to always keep an open eye on what are the existing interactions between the voluntary sector and the University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) and where could the potential lie for further development of collaborations. On our specific theme of “competences for citizenship” only few experiences of collaborative efforts emerged, but the potential for future development was generally felt to be of great value.

Glossary

This initial Subgroup Work produced our “Working definitions for a glossary of terms. What needs to be clear when we discuss about LEARNING. Defining common grounds for discussions on CITIZENSHIP in the voluntary organisations environment” present, as all other materials, on the dedicated web page:

http://www.valuenetwork.org.uk/Documents%20for%20Website/Citizenship/3_WorkingDefinitions.pdf

Proceedings

The Subgroup Citizenship met four times during the course of the project:

- the first meeting was held in Warsaw (Poland), in March 2009 (additional opportunity, linked to Management Group Meeting);
- the second meeting was held in Jonkoping (Sweden), in November 2009 (linked to the general Network Meeting);
- the third meeting was held in Barcelona (Spain), in May 2010 (independent scheduled meeting).

The Subgroup Citizenship work was also shared with other Value partners, some external experts and, at main project conferences, also with other participants.

The subgroup held a meeting at the main VALUE network meeting **in November 2009 in Jonkoping, Sweden**. The discussion explored the following issues:

- The relationships between volunteering, learning and citizenship, acknowledging that the recognition of learning arising from volunteering does take place but is limited and more work is required and the relationships between volunteering, learning citizenship are extremely complex.
- The present knowledge base about this triangular relationship.
- Lessons to be learnt from the practice.
- The common ground voluntary organisations and universities have on this issue.
- Possibilities for future developments.

A network meeting was also held **in November 2010 in Lille, France** where all the work done was shared with all the partners. This wider group produced significant outcomes,

notably more questions and further necessities to analyse in depth and formalise the working definitions of the questions raised.

What is the relationship between volunteering and active citizenship? Is volunteering a particular form of active citizenship? Or does volunteering promote active citizenship? Or is it the other way around?

It has been suggested mostly that volunteering is a particular form of active citizenship and it is possible that the practice and experience of volunteering can help to develop the attributes and dimensions of active citizens.

What kinds of learning processes are involved in becoming an active citizen? How does a person acquire the characteristics of an active citizen? What does a person learn about active citizenship, or about her/himself, or about the world, through voluntary action?

The groups agreed with Dr. Valeria Pavluska of University of Pecs who delivered a highly appreciated introductory lecture, stating that human capital can be developed via formal, informal and nonformal learning. In the course of the meeting Dr. Pavluska provided a very interesting presentation on Learning active citizenship, discussing about how the notion 'citizenship' has changed a lot in the recent 2-3 decades, the concepts of democratic hardware, software and human ware, formal, informal and nonformal learning of Active citizenship.

Dr. Valeria Pavluska "Learning active citizenship" presentation on the website:

<http://www.valuenetwork.org.uk/Documents%20for%20Website/Partner%20Documentation/Meetings/Lille%20Nov%2010/VP%20Citizenship%20present%20FR%2011.2010.pdf>

Key issues

The Subgroup Citizenship has built in the course of its work a repertory of themes and suggestions for reflection, discussed in formal meetings, in informal discussions and during some dissemination events, and that remain on the website as future paths for collaborative work among voluntary sector and universities to pursue. These are some of the themes to explore further, as identified by the Subgroup:

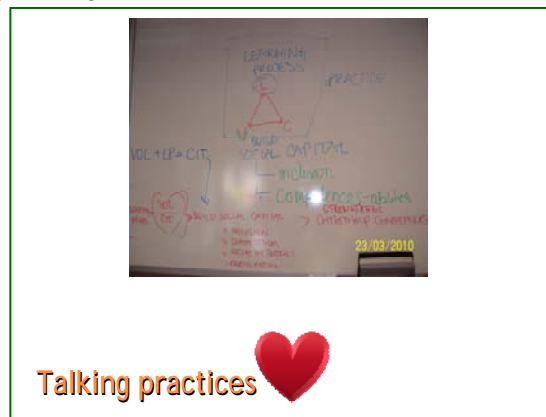
- The extent and importance of the issue in the volunteering and academic world.
- Whether volunteering constitutes a particular form of active citizenship, whether it promotes it or is the other way around.
- Whether every volunteer is an active citizen and what the characteristics of an active citizen are.
- What values, attitudes and competences are shared between volunteering and active citizenship? Are these of a universal nature or culture specific? Does this relate only to local community or also to the global world?
- What kind of learning processes are involved in becoming an active citizen? How does a person acquire the characteristics of an active citizen? What does a person learn about active citizenship, or about her/himself, or about the world, through voluntary action?
- Do all volunteering projects develop citizenship knowledge/skills/competences?
- Does volunteering contribute to citizenship just by actually volunteering? Is it possible to identify citizenship competences? How can these "citizenship competences" be promoted and valued, what kind of learning paths these require?
- What kind of volunteering activities and environments develops citizenship competences? Is there a more explicit link between citizenship and volunteering in some sectors eg. health/education (because of the idea of "public service")? Or are "citizenship competences" embedded in the advocacy functions of volunteering?
- Could a volunteering project be structured in a certain way to help develop (or make visible) competences/ knowledge/ skill more fully – is this where ULLL might come in? Could its contribution be to make more explicit the citizenship element of volunteering, by promoting

reflection and structured learning paths? Do volunteers need this or is this unnecessary or potentially burdensome?

Learning Citizenship by Volunteering Practice Bank

While the definitions and theory continued to pose ever new obstacles, we have realised that real life practical examples and activities of organisations and volunteers in the field provided an extremely rich and stimulating terrain, that contributed to the analysis and to understanding. We have also come to appreciate that what moves our passion to understand, define and promote this particular aspect of the VALUE theme, is exactly 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.

At the Subgroup Meeting in Barcelona in May 2010 we have therefore decided to set up a simple mechanism to try our ideas in practice and set out to understand how learning citizenship through voluntary action works by observing, analysing and experimenting practices in different fields, with different target groups and by different approaches. We have therefore defined a simple framework to collect practices and experiences, projects and initiatives, known in the first place to Subgroup participants, that show in practice how active citizenship is being promoted in and by the volunteering world and what kind of learning experience this represents.



This action / info base we have called “VALUE Learning Citizenship by Volunteering Practice Bank”. The Template and the Guidelines for this Citizenship Practice Bank were posted on the website. The template is simple and rather open, the aim being to explore different sectors and approaches and to remain open to grass roots experiences as well as to structured projects. The main challenge was to single out practical activities and approaches that have never before highlighted this aspect of their action: learning citizenship through volunteering.

There are now 8 examples of very different practices from 4 countries present on the website and can be seen in detail at

http://www.valuenetwork.org.uk/Documents%20for%20Website/Citizenship/Practice_bankFormatte d.pdf

In the practices template an element of qualitative assessment was introduced by demanding from the presenter to evaluate as high/medium/low the presence of aspects that the Subgroup singled out as important for learning about citizenship occurring in voluntary practice. These elements are:

- the intensity of the “Learning process” occurring during the practice, even when not consciously pursued;
- the contribution of the practice in “Building social capital” especially in terms of significant relationships, addressing social challenges or innovative input;
- the development of effective or potential for “Inclusion” both in regard to beneficiaries or to competence building



- for opening paths for empowerment of marginalised groups;
- “Competences” for citizenship acquired through practice, in particular as regards the so called soft skills, capacity for critical thinking and problem solving, dealing with diversities and working in a group.

It does not come as surprise that the majority of practices collected scored high as to all these elements, because the practices were sought after as exemplary and not randomly selected. But it is also indicative that while “Building social capital” and “Inclusion” scored invariably high, testifying the core social mission of the voluntary action, the “Learning process” and “Competences” elements were judged less intensely present. This reflects the experiences of Subgroup members and current thinking on volunteering, where little care is given to the valorisation of volunteering as learning experience and few and incomplete standards are in place for the recognition of competences acquired through non formal learning embedded in voluntary action.

Legacy of EYV 2011 European Year of Volunteering

Europe wide initiatives and policy work that in 2011 with the European Year gained prominence as regards a number of issues connected to volunteering have significantly contributed to removing most of the obstacles as regards common grounds that the Subgroup initially struggled to determine.

The very name of the European Year of “Voluntary activities that promote active citizenship” sanctioned the nature of volunteering as “an expression of active citizenship”. The definition of volunteering including the core values of activity without financial remuneration, performed exclusively of free will of the person, for the benefit of others outside their household or for common good, whether with on organisation or individually, is now universally accepted and recognised. Volunteering as an element of participative democracy, regardless of sectors of activity, and of social cohesion has been debated and as such recognised by the institutions.



Prominence was given in official documents and in networking initiatives to volunteering as an educational agent in lifelong learning perspective. The positive impact of voluntary engagement on volunteers themselves in terms of building their competences and more generally human capital of communities has become a widely acclaimed aspect. Although the focus is ever more shifting towards devising frameworks for the recognition of competences and building skills for employability, solid ground are now in place to further thinking on the more general aspects of education for citizenship that voluntary organisations can contribute to. This represents a new and fertile occasion for collaborative work between the voluntary sector and the ULLL to research and develop concrete learning paths for volunteers and citizens at large.

The most important legacy of EYV2011 as regards the Subgroup theme is given by this shared European outlook on volunteering as connective tissue to a variety of stakeholders and sector policies while the specific VALUE Network contribution lies in connecting for the first time volunteering development practice and policy to the enormous potential for quality learning that university lifelong learning centres can provide and further.

An additional element in this perspective is given by the definition of the elements and functions of the volunteering infrastructure where, besides training itself, volunteer support centres prominently figure. These can represent key actors in developing volunteering as a way of learning about citizenship.

Some problematic aspects

It must needs be kept in mind that concepts of citizenship and social cohesion - although including political activity, civil society and community life, volunteering, helping others and the values of democracy and thus representing opportunities for positive change and guarantee the survival of democracy - may possibly be used to maintain structures of power and inequality. Definitions of citizenship and a cohesive society may be based on models which, explicitly and / or implicitly, through practice or omission of practice, could marginalise certain groups and individuals. Even lifelong learning could be exploited as a way of strengthening norms and encouraging conformity, used for example to reinforce the cultural values of the dominant majority. The question of who controls learning is a central issue. More generally, it is important to recognise that exclusion from full citizenship is the experience of a significant portion of the population who face multiple disadvantage, demonstrated for example in the civic disengagement of the less educated classes and people at the margins of the job market, or in the denial of full political rights to certain categories of migrants, children of migrants or minority cultures. Voluntary engagement, whose core mission is to work for a world of peace and equal opportunities, must be helped to develop its potential for learning to empower and include persons from all walks of life and must never limit the profile of the volunteer to those who are already proficient in citizenship and social skills.

The other potential trap is to burden the voluntary organisations with high expectations on the training and learning environment these should provide for their volunteers. This is an enormous task that claims competence, time, energy, skills, duration, premises, expertise, communication: investment and support should be provided for local voluntary organisations to care for the life long learning of their volunteers but without having to rely on their sole forces.

Volunteers as key target in life long learning strategies

The Subgroup Citizenship have also touched upon the specific position volunteers have in their community, which makes them a specific and important group in lifelong learning. Why? Because volunteers:

- are not just “doers”;
- are not “low cost service providers”;
- through participation they shape society;
- are creative and critical thinkers;
- interact with institutions;
- educate;
- are role models and leaders;
- build inclusion and respect for diversities;
- take care for common good;
- are many, in each and every community.

Such characteristics make volunteers very precious learners, because the impacts of their learning experience produce long waves through their concrete action and multiple social interaction. When volunteers learn, they immediately disseminate.

Final Ankara Conference June 2011 and the way forward

In the final VALUE Network Conference in Ankara in June 2011 the Subgroup Citizenship presented its closing workshop.

It was lead by Prof. John Annette of the University of London Birkbeck College that also delivered a key lecture on “Democracy, Citizenship and Lifelong Learning” which ever so usefully closed our Subgroup work by introducing the concept of “democratic citizenship”.

The workshop also presented the recent work by Pau Vidal of the partner Observatorio del Tercer Sector (OTS) from Barcelona, Spain that represented a complement and a useful innovative example of action-research on themes central to our Subgroup discussions.

Both presentations are available at

http://www.valuenetwork.org.uk/html/conference_programme.htm

In the Subgroup Citizenship presentation an overview of key issues discussed was provided and 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 between voluntary support centres and ULLL centres. This potential contribution to defining a European curriculum on citizenship keeps the initial Subgroup basic orientation to always look to the four pillars of the Delor report: values, attitudes, knowledge, skills. This was the framework proposed as food for thought:

	EU	Nation	Local
Citizenship and active citizenship			
Policy framework			
Institutions			
Civil society and volunteering			
Social capital			
Societal challenges and emerging issues			
Personal skills			

Elements for a curriculum on Active European Citizenship

Some cross-cutting issues were also identified, significantly in line with the other themes of VALUE Subgroups, namely intercultural, intergenerational and employability issues. The need to discuss quality standards, policy framework and financial aspects was also pointed out. The central questions posed, in line with the Subgroup tradition to propose questions for discussion rather than ready-made answers, were:

- Where do we see the European dimension in this?
- What do we need to make it work on local level?

These remain as the final challenges proposed by the Subgroup group, for future work to be taken up, where both volunteering and university sectors have multiple contributions to make and collaborate to jointly develop new thinking, actions and curricula in the field of learning citizenship through volunteering.