

The project RIVER

The Idea behind the Project



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- Promoting active-aging senior volunteering has an invaluable effect on our societies. Given the demographic trend and the increasing number of elderly people in Europe, it is even more crucial to create opportunities for elderly to stay active. Engaging in mentally stimulating activities is important for the development and preservation of capacities in later life. Involving a larger number of seniors in voluntary work might turn out to be a major tool in active ageing strategies.
- With 2012 being the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between generations, **the EU project RIVER addresses the invaluable effect senior volunteering has on our societies.**

Basic information on RIVER

www.river-project.eu

01.01.2011-
31.12.2013
24 months



GRUNDTVIG
Multilateral Project
Lifelong Learning
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Senior volunteering and why promoting it?

- Volunteering has a positive impact on volunteers' health and well-being, both mental and physical.
- Another important aspect is that volunteering strengthens volunteers' relational network. Through engaging in voluntary activities, seniors can maintain and develop new social networks, actively participate in organisational structures or simply meet new people and make friends.
- Senior volunteering must be seen as a contribution for the promotion of active ageing

Senior volunteering: Motivation and Outcomes

- The strongest reason for volunteering is the wish to transfer experience to others, thus not being a learner, but an instructor in the first place

Expected **results** and **benefits** for (senior) volunteers:

- Increase of personal, linguistic, social and intercultural skills and competences
- Contribution to the development and implementation of non-profit activities; active citizenship
- Acquisition/development/transmission of specific task-related skills

Learning through volunteering

- People usually volunteer for the community or for specific projects they want to support
 - Performing voluntary work requires skills and competences
 - When people act together and engage in new tasks and experiences collectively, they can learn from each other
- > *Volunteering is considered as a means of informal education*

Intergenerational learning in volunteering

“Intergenerational practice aims to bring generations together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between the generations and which help to build more cohesive communities”

(Beth Johnson Foundation 2011)

- The volunteering projects, the RIVER project was focusing on, are mainly projects of intergenerational practice or learning, involving senior volunteers in the work with younger people.
- The main aspect is the exchange of experiences and knowledge between the participants of different generations.

- Senior volunteering plays a key role in our society and demand exposure & recognition
- Yet reliable and convincing methodologies for the assessment and validation of the impact and output of senior volunteering are missing.
- RIVER develops a tailor made competence assessment system which aims at making learning outcomes of senior volunteering visible.

Validation in a setting of informal learning

- In **informal learning**, as major difference to formalised training and education, a standardisation in regard to learning contents (topics), learning objectives and envisaged outcomes (competences) is nearly impossible.
- Moreover “formal education” reaches its limits when it comes to the acquisition of social and personal competences.
- Undoubtedly, the major part of competences developed during learning in volunteering relates exactly to those personal and social competences as described.

Since learning in volunteering takes merely place in informal learning environments the RIVER project chose **LEVEL5** as approach and instrument to assess and evidence learning outcomes or competence developments in senior volunteering.

The LEVEL5 system

RIVER aimed at adapting LEVEL5 (<http://reveal-eu.org/>), a comprehensive methodology for assessing and validating competencies acquired in informal learning settings to the specific requirements of the volunteering sector.

Results of the RIVER project

- RIVER developed a fully fledged validation system for the sake of both the volunteers and the sending and receiving organisations.
- This validation system is integrated in a holistic volunteering learning system that offers new input, ideas, experiences and guidance to stakeholders involved in volunteering activities.

The RIVER team :

- established an open inventory of competences acquired while
- volunteering,
- developed, adapted and contextualise reference systems,
- compiled a set of suitable assessment methods and
- piloted the systems by validating competence developments of senior volunteers in a series of different projects.

Following **products** were developed as result of the RIVER Project:

RIVER Brochure „ Reveal the learning potential of volunteering”:

Gives an overview on the activities of the RIVER project , the piloting results and delivers basic information on the methodology

RIVER Manual

A document for volunteering facilitators or adult educators who want to implement RIVER in their activities with volunteers. Guides step by step through the RIVER methodology – from the project planning to certification.

RIVER Training Concept and Training Material

Training documents which support the training of volunteering facilitators or adult educators on the RIVER Methodology

RIVER software users` guide

A hands on guide that leads through the supporting software step by step to create a RIVER certificate