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Learning opportunities for senior volunteers – Managing trans-national exchanges

Handbook for
senior volunteers,
sending and host organisations,
coordinators,
local authorities and
educational institutions



Funded in the framework of the SOCRATES programme as well as by governments, NGOs and institutions for education and research in Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom

Contents

Introduction	2
Senior volunteers as providers and recipients of knowledge and experience <i>Karin Stiehr</i>	4
Selection and preparation of volunteers and host organisations <i>Davide Di Pietro</i>	12
Foreign language skills: learning opportunities and obstacles <i>Rory Daly</i>	21
Placement of senior volunteers: work contents and conditions <i>Charlotte Strümpel</i>	28
Other framework conditions: accommodation, meals and leisure time <i>Aleksandr Kurushev</i>	39
Factors for a sustainable exchange of senior volunteers <i>Karin Stiehr</i>	47
10 Golden Rules for senior volunteers by senior volunteers <i>Dietmar Eisenhammer</i>	55
10 Golden Rules for host organisations by host organisations <i>Paolo Maddonni</i>	58

Appendices:

- A. Example of an information sheet for volunteers
- B. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
- C. Further information
- D. Conference participants

Introduction

This handbook combines the results of four European pilot projects involving the exchange of senior volunteers that have been undertaken since 2000:

- ***European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers***
Funded by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
140 volunteers, aged 48 – 86 years¹, from eight European countries were exchanged in 2001. The project objective was to promote the cross-national transfer of knowledge in voluntary work.
- ***Mobility 55***
Funded by DG Education and Culture
40 seniors, aged 52 – 70 years, from five countries volunteered abroad in 2003. The objective of this project was to offer opportunities for intercultural learning and active citizenship.
- ***Still Active***
Funded by DG Education and Culture
30 seniors, aged 50 – 69 years, from seven countries performed voluntary work in another country in 2004. Based on the experiences of *Mobility 55*, the project aimed at developing and testing training measures for the preparation of seniors prior to their volunteering abroad.
- ***Teaming Up!***
Funded by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
118 seniors from six countries, aged 49 – 78 years, most of them volunteers, were exchanged in 2005. The project focused on self-organised teams of senior volunteers and aimed at promoting bilateral relations between towns and counties by seniors, acting as "ambassadors", for and within existing partnerships.

The basis for this handbook was a conference in Tallinn, Estonia, in December 2006 (a SOCRATES Accompanying Measure), where participants in the four projects mentioned above discussed their experiences. A broad spectrum of representatives of civic society organisations attended this conference, including institutions for adult education with trans-national work approaches, local and regional governments, local initiatives, NGOs, international voluntary service associations and individual senior volunteers.

Under the general principle that senior volunteers are not only recipients but also providers of knowledge and experience, particular consideration was given in four workshops to the following issues which are fundamental for a successful trans-national exchange:

¹ The definition of an "older volunteer" was left to the interested participants themselves.

- Selection and preparation of volunteers and host organisations,
- Foreign language skills: learning opportunities and obstacles,
- Placement of senior volunteers: work contents and conditions,
- Other framework conditions: accommodation, meals and leisure time.

Additionally, two specific working groups were set up to develop:

- Guidelines for senior volunteers by senior volunteers and
- Guidelines for host organisations by host organisations.

This handbook documents the experiences of all actors involved in previous exchange programmes including the benefits and the difficulties of international exchanges. It does not provide all the answers but will help potential participants in future projects ask the relevant questions before embarking in their projects.

By analysing and recording existing knowledge and examples of good and bad practice in this handbook, we hope to provide future participants in trans-national exchange projects with a valuable resource. The EU programmes for education and training, youth, culture and citizenship in 2007-2013, especially the "Lifelong Learning" and "Europe for Citizens" programmes, provide an excellent basis for activities alike.

The editors thank all conference participants for sharing their expertise and enthusiasm for the benefit of future projects.

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Senior volunteers as providers and recipients of knowledge and experience

Karin Stiehr

1. Introduction

Volunteering abroad is a full non-formal learning experience. Its main dimension is intercultural learning in the broader sense of this term. Within the range of social and cultural variation, the volunteer will find his work and leisure time similar to that he will be familiar with in his home country in many ways, but he will also discover the differences. The topics that will allow for comparisons, assessments and potential reviews of previous opinions are manifold. They range from basic issues, like food, over standards and procedures, like in a specific field of voluntary work, to even more complex dimensions, such as the social or political system of the other country.

Personal development is highly probable when taking part in a senior volunteers' exchange project. It includes discoveries of previously unknown areas, insights at political level and the revision of preconceived opinions. Not being a tourist in a foreign country but participating in "real life" is crucial for personal gain. Intergenerational learning and acquiring foreign language skills are further aspects which can be enhanced by a trans-national exchange project.

One essential characteristic of seniors is that many of them are not only open to new ideas and opportunities for personal further development – which some of them simply did not have when they were young – but they also have the best prerequisites to act as multipliers in passing on knowledge and experiences. So learning takes place in (at least) three directions:

- Seniors learn by volunteering abroad,
- Seniors pass on knowledge to their host nation abroad,
- Seniors transfer the newly gained knowledge to their home countries upon return.

The hosts also learn from the volunteers' different points of view and different ways of performing activities. Giving information on best practice in a specific field of volunteering in a foreign country, and thus giving the host organisation the opportunity to implement new methods and procedures, is only one issue. Seniors also dispose of great knowledge from their former professional areas and of life experience in general.

In order to identify a framework in which the learning opportunities for all parties involved can unfold in the best possible way, factors for a successful exchange of senior volunteers must be

differentiated according to the role and function of the different stakeholders. This especially applies to the

- Personal qualities which a senior volunteer should bring along,
- Activities which should or should not be offered to senior volunteers,
- Length of the placement abroad,
- Benefits which arise under good circumstances for all parties involved, and
- Difficulties which may have to be overcome.

2. Results

2.1 Personal qualities of a successful senior volunteer

The most important requirements of a senior volunteer applying for a placement abroad are social skills and personal capabilities:

- Being open-minded and flexible in general,
- Being intellectually curious in terms of getting to know other people, discovering and experiencing different cultures, habits and behaviours,
- Being socially competent, especially in communicating with others, coping with conflicts and misunderstandings and expressing one's own wants and needs,
- Knowing one's limits – nothing will be gained by physical or mental overstress.

It is important for senior volunteers to prepare in advance for the exchange and to ask for detailed and relevant information on the placement. Of course, the voluntary work description must match one's own capabilities but the offered voluntary work must also be acceptable from a personal point of view, such as expected working hours per day, professional guidance, and the provision of board and lodging.

"Advice to senior volunteers: consider reasonably where you are going, inform yourself about the place, be open-minded and have a personal disposition to discover new things if necessary. Discover, unveil and communicate your capacities and skills."

Educational institution from Germany

2.2 Activities offered by the host organisation

In designing the contents of an exchange project, it should be appreciated that *the* ideal project for a senior volunteer simply does not exist – it is for the individual volunteer to decide what is appropriate or what is not. Nevertheless, facing the broad spectrum of competencies seniors could offer, senior volunteers should benefit from performing useful work. Some functional restrictions

can arise in old age and, of course, must be considered as potential factors but these should not lead to the exclusion of persons concerned. Volunteering activities that present a negative image of old age and assign seniors to tasks that imply a restricted level of capability should not be offered.

"What differs young volunteers from seniors is that the latter have professional skills and experiences. They are to be considered a source, a treasure that should be taken into account."

Host from Estonia

A clear and comprehensive description of the voluntary work placement is the best way of helping to ensure that the right volunteer for the placement abroad is found.

In many respects, working in a team can solve problems, including those which result from missing language skills. One person, for example, who is more fluent in the foreign language can take over the role of a translator for others. Working in a group also prevents the risk of social isolation which may occur if no joint language is spoken.

"Advice to host organisations: Be patient and tolerant, prepared for anything, and if problems occur, don't panic."

Coordinator from Estonia

2.3 Length of the stay abroad

In considering the minimum and maximum length of the placement abroad, senior volunteers and host organisations may have very different perspectives. Seniors often have obligations at home, such as voluntary work or family responsibilities. For the older age groups among seniors it may also be that they are not used to travelling long distances. There may be different fears connected with travelling, ranging from problems such as missing a connecting train, or sharing a room with another person or having to adjust to unfamiliar food. As a general rule, the volunteers in our pilot projects tended to restrict their stay abroad to two weeks (though afterwards quite many felt that this was too short).

Senior volunteers exchange in 2001	
Length of placement	Number of volunteers
2 weeks	108
2,5 weeks	5
3 weeks	8
4 weeks	3
5 weekends	2
In total	126
Basis: Volunteers who participated in the evaluation	

Conversely, host organisations would often prefer voluntary work exchanges lasting longer than two weeks, and under good conditions there is no need to define a maximum exchange length. Two weeks are usually necessary for the placement orientation, meaning that the volunteer often has to leave just when he or she is beginning to perform useful work. In addition, intercultural learning is unlikely to be that effective after such a short period of time.

Taking these arguments into account, the decision on the duration of placement must be considered as being part of a process for an individual volunteer. Two weeks abroad are the equivalent of a comprehensive study visit. However, this length of placement can encourage a further, longer stay, an observation that was made by many of the volunteers in the pilot projects. Based on the positive first impressions, a second placement of three to six weeks should therefore enhance in-depth intercultural learning.

2.4 Potential benefits

The learning benefits of senior volunteer exchange projects at European level are manifold. Volunteers primarily stress personal gains, be that

- Mastery of a challenge,
- Enhancing their voluntary work skills,
- Increased self-confidence,
- Better ability to compromise,
- New cultural impressions,
- Discovery of new ways of life or
- New friendships.

In many cases both volunteers and host organisations have expressed a wish to place the contacts between the persons and the organisations on a permanent footing.

"My personal gains included getting to know the special institution 'Les Petits Frères des Pauvres', testing my flexibility in coming to terms with, and adapting to difficult situations, a considerable improvement in my knowledge of French, as I spoke French almost exclusively, getting to know so many friendly people, the possibility of developing one's own ideas and implementing them successfully. It was very nice being in France for a longer period of time, and not as a tourist."

Volunteer from Germany

Many volunteers highly rate the European dimension of an exchange, namely

- Establishing trans-national contacts,
- Learning to avoid overhasty comparisons with similar situations in their own country,
- Improving language skills,

- Removing personal prejudices, or
- Developing new perspectives on their own country by becoming acquainted with the situation in their host country.

"I discovered a new interest in fields that were unknown to me, and a greater understanding of the difficulties involved in bringing about a socially-oriented Europe."

Volunteer from Belgium

The benefits from the perspective of host organisations do not only refer to their learning opportunities – they also appreciate it if some of their work burdens are taken over by a volunteer. Nevertheless, some positive operational aspects were that hosts

- Gained good ideas for new projects,
- Obtained practical support in introducing improved working processes,
- Received concrete improvements and expansions of the organisation's working arrangements and
- Had the opportunity to make trans-national contacts.

"Older people have a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience to pass on to other organisations, both in England and in Europe. The volunteers visiting us were able to share their experience, not just in volunteering but from their previous employment, with both staff and volunteers."

Host from the UK

A senior volunteer can inspire the host organisation to review their aims and work and thus make changes, if necessary.

"You have an important guest and you re-think what your organisation is doing, how the organisation should present itself and define its aims. From the external perspective, volunteers can see blind spots which are not yet visible from the internal perspective. This can create interesting dialectic shocks. It is a very strong learning effect especially for organisations that do not have experiences or routines in handling volunteers from abroad or volunteers in general."

Host from Italy

The benefits of local, regional and even national governments, which are actively involved in senior volunteers' exchanges at European level, are diverse and include learning opportunities as well. For the government officials who are involved in senior volunteers exchanges, there are good opportunities to broaden their European networks and deepen existing relations, e.g. in form of town twinning relations or partnerships between regions.

"Senior volunteers' exchanges give us the opportunity to promote active and competent ageing in a wider political sense and way. It also prompted the re-shaping and re-organisation of our relationships to local NGOs who acted as hosts."

Local government official from Germany

"When talking about the European exchange of senior volunteers, the most interesting part for me is its connection with the programme of lifelong learning in a non formal learning context for older people and its impact on active citizenship."

National government official from Austria

2.5 Potential difficulties

There are various factors that can hinder the realisation of the above-mentioned benefits. Regarding the volunteers, this can include

- insufficient personal preparation, including basic language skills,
- not getting in touch with the host organisation in order to clarify questions on the placement,
- lack of willingness to understand the different structures and cultures in other countries.

Regarding host organisations, obstacles in achieving the benefits can be caused by

- insufficient preparation for the placement, including neglecting the volunteers' specific requirements,
- not getting in touch with the volunteers in advance of the visit to avoid them getting the wrong impression,
- not insisting on a certain level of language skills if this is required for specific work.

From the coordinators point of view, it is important to have the highest possible level of co-operation with and knowledge of both sides, volunteers as well as host organisations. The framework and conditions of the projects as well as the volunteers' personal prerequisites must be clear if they are to be matched effectively.

"The coordinators role is organising the activities for the volunteer. Projects involve working with individuals, not with the organisations. Have the link with the person that will do the work with the volunteer on the day-to-day basis."

Coordinator from the UK

3. *Conclusions*

For the senior volunteers themselves, but also for host organisations and governments, the European exchange of senior volunteers offers a broad spectrum of learning opportunities which can be realised within an appropriate framework. The learning effect is complex. One of the main advantages of such exchanges is the unique experience of meeting people from other countries and having access to and knowledge of their normal working, cultural and social environments, thus affording the volunteers the chance to learn about the professional standards and skills of their hosts and their organisations. The opposite applies here too, of course.

The question if and to which extent seniors require special "treatment" is a controversial subject for discussion and is one that has not yet been answered conclusively. Certainly, age and life experiences are but two factors amongst others that contribute to an individual's personality, and there is no doubt about the tremendous amount of capacities and skills seniors have to dispose of. However, if functional restrictions (which can begin at the age of 60) are not recognised and taken into consideration European exchanges will only be suitable for younger and fitter volunteers. These considerations should not only relate to a comfortable bed and barrier-free access but also to specific preferences, safe environment and the ability to enjoy some privacy.

If organisations which exchange young volunteers and which have useful relevant experience of these routines were to share their experiences with local voluntary work initiatives involving seniors, this could reduce and/or solve many problems. And this also applies to cooperation with local, regional and national governments.

In our pilot projects, both senior volunteers and host organisations have displayed a high degree of open-mindedness and flexibility and this is essential for a successful trans-national exchange. Our experience is that most problems can be avoided by good preparation prior to the exchange and the readiness of both sides to contact each other when questions arise. Even with easy access to the internet and email, a telephone call to a foreign country should no longer be a barrier to effective communication.

Each senior volunteer and each host organisation has an individual profile. These must match as closely as possible if the right person is to be sent to the right place. The next four chapters will discuss how to successfully facilitate the exchange.

"Recommendation to all parties involved: Keep a sense of humour and try to stay relaxed when problems arise."

Host from Austria

* * *

This chapter is a joint result of all conference participants. Theme-related inputs were prepared and given by Inge Bierbrauer, Gaby Born-Zimmermann, Ave Bremse, Horacio Czertok, Rory Daly, Gertraud Dayé, Davide Di Pietro, Dietmar Eisenhammer, Franz Errath, Gabriella Fabbri, Lesley Gair, Elisabeth Hechl, Sheila Hyson, Hannelore Jani, Waltraut Kovacic, Aleksandr Kurushev, Lia Loode, Martin Oberbauer, Augusta Rabuiti, Dorothea Ruegsegger, Pascal Sarlette, Ulrich Schiepe, Carmen Stadelhofer, Charlotte Strümpel, Angelika Trilling and Uwe Wolk. Examples and quotations in this chapter are partly taken from materials of previous projects.



Selection and preparation of volunteers and host organisations

Davide Di Pietro

1. Introduction

If we agree that the experience of senior volunteering abroad is a process that includes the preparation, the actual exchange and the follow up, in this chapter we will explore the different aspects of the start up phase of this process. We believe that if the selection and preparation of volunteers and host organisations are undertaken properly, the other two phases will likely follow quite smoothly.

Before starting, it is important to clarify how the experimental/theoretical structure works, as it is explained below.

The structure

A volunteer is basically recruited, prepared and sent by a sending organisation and is received, accommodated, fed and looked after by a host organisation. We have seen this in the main international voluntary service programmes such as the European Voluntary Service for young people launched by the European Commission, or the Medium and Long Term Volunteering programme held by the main International Voluntary Service Organisations. As it can be easily imagined, for the benefit of a volunteer and the whole project, a high degree of co-ordination and cooperation between these two bodies is needed. In fact, there is quite a lot of work to do before the volunteers arrive on a project, by both organisations as we will see below. Regular and effective communication flow between hosting and sending organisations is most important. In the projects that have been running so far, an unofficial central European co-ordination was established to collect all the host projects and circulate them to the sending organisations. This facilitates the whole process but of course introduces a new actor: the co-ordinating organisation. In theory it is not necessary but of course, in practice, it helps a lot. One way to avoid this new actor could be the draft of bilateral (or tri- or multilateral) agreements among organisations in different countries that share the same goal of realising senior exchanges.

2. Actors

A senior volunteer program as conceived so far usually comprehends three main actors, and a project is actually the result of their partnership and cooperation.

These actors are

- 1) Sending organisations dedicated mainly at international relations,
- 2) Host organisations mainly working at local level,
- 3) Senior volunteers.

It is important to make each role clear and to allocate them properly. The roles range from program planning to financial resources. Local Governments can substitute or work alongside host and/or sending organisations.

2.1 Sending organisation

A "sending organisation" works as placement agency for senior volunteers and should have possess a range of all the possible projects than can be offered to senior volunteers by host organisations in different countries. In theory volunteers could go and find the projects by themselves without any intermediary, but our experience shows us that a sending organisation is a guarantee for both the volunteers and the host organisation in another country. This will obviously result in the next paragraph when we will list all the tasks that a sending organisation should perform. A sending organisation is then responsible for preparation, support during the service and evaluation re/entry.

What is expected from a sending organisation:

- Recruit and train the volunteers,
- Research information to pass to volunteers,
- Select the volunteers and place the volunteers according to their skills and interests in the most suitable project,
- Team building between volunteers in the same phase of volunteering, if necessary,
- Persuade past volunteers to help new volunteers with same,
- Introduce past volunteers to new volunteers,
- Evaluate the project,
- Take care of and having responsibility for the volunteer during and after the project, ensuring contacts with the host organisation while a volunteer is in the project,
- Visa support (if needed),
- Provide information about arrival date and time,
- Provide emergency contact persons for family of volunteers.

2.2 *Host organisations*

By the term "host organisation" we refer to any organisation or institution that run social activities on a permanent or at least on a long term project basis. Several institutions and organisations of the civil society have already been involved in including senior volunteers in their daily activities: these range from care centres for people with disabilities to associations for the protection of the environment, from orphanages to cultural centres, from associations that give assistance to older people in need, to hospitals and many other different institutions working with persons of all ages.

What it is expected from a host organisation:

- Confirmation of the acceptance of the placement to the sending organisation and volunteer,
- Sending sufficient information to sending organisation and volunteer,
- Arranging the programme including technicalities such as meals and accommodation,
- Arranging transportation from the meeting point to the project side (desirable),
- Welcoming and first orientation for volunteers: introducing the volunteer to the project and to all the members, volunteers and staff of the host organisation,
- Introducing the local culture, custom, law, tradition, belief and norms to the volunteer,
- Providing a tutor or a contact person for the volunteer,
- Coordinating daily work for the volunteer,
- Providing transportation during the project,
- Writing an evaluation report together with the volunteer and the sending organisation,
- Organising extra curricular activities (optional) or giving information about options in the local area,
- Ensuring and facilitating the communication flow between the foreign senior volunteers and the local volunteers,
- Providing health care for volunteers,
- Giving advice to volunteers concerning local health structures.

2.3 *International senior volunteers*

In this context we identify a senior volunteer as being at least 50 years old and interested to work for a period abroad on a social project. You can volunteer to host or send senior volunteers on an individual or a group basis. Apparently a group can be more tiring, but experience has shown that seniors abroad in a group tend to support each other very carefully and to find common solutions to problems. As far as language skills are concerned it can be an advantage being part of a group, because it is more likely to find someone speaking the host nation's language. Whereas a lone volunteer in a project without the necessary language skills is may be at risk of becoming isolated and their need to share their experience might be unsatisfied.



It must be stressed that if you need or are looking for permanent staff in your organisation, you should understand that senior volunteers are not substitutes. They stay for short periods and they require a lot of your attention, to say nothing on the fact that volunteers are not to be used as a form of cheap labour. But they represent an important resource in terms of intercultural learning and human support that your organisation may need. We do not want to underestimate the practical work that they can perform to help you which is great, we just underline that they can't and won't substitute any paid staff.

What is expected from senior volunteers:

- Keep motivated during the programme,
- Adhere to all agreements,
- Respect the local culture,
- Be responsible to their own belongings and themselves,
- Keep and respect the different roles,
- Be involved in the local community,
- Write the final reports,
- Help new volunteers in returning to home country,
- Evaluate placement with local member,
- Contribute to the host organisation's learning process and to an intercultural and intergeneration dialogue,
- Self manage free time (Rather: the senior volunteer is asked to self organise his leisure time),
- Have a flexible attitude towards both working and framework conditions.

2.4 *Local Governments*

The results of the projects carried out so far (as mentioned in the Introduction) were of great interest to local and regional governments, as they are the bodies primarily concerned about the ageing of their populations. They begin to see older people as a resource, not simply as a burden, a group of the population only needing care. We believe it could be wise to involve local and regional governments in different countries willing to implement the senior volunteers' exchange programme and to help in setting up a permanent programme at European level. We already started with the idea of fostering bilateral partnerships among local and regional governments; the senior volunteers themselves can be supportive for governments who are interested in setting up such bilateral relations.

Because local governments often operate in networks with many organisations that act at grassroots level in the social field, they can act/function/work as host or sending organisation or even cover both tasks.

On the sending side, volunteers and/or local organisations may refer to a sending organisation. On the hosting side, volunteers and/or local organisations refer to a host organisation. A sending or a host organisation respectively may refer to a co-ordinating body which links sending and hosting bodies.

3. *Selection and preparation*

3.1 *Why should an organisation host a senior volunteer from abroad?*

To realise a programme we must have organisations willing to offer places to senior volunteers from abroad. We can have hundreds of volunteers willing to help everywhere in the world but if there are no organisations willing to host and take care of them, all the good will of volunteers will turn out to be useless. We considered it to be a good idea to ask organisations and local governments why they hosted senior volunteers and what would be the advantages for other organisations to host them. These were the answers

- Practice integration of different lifestyles (get to know your European neighbours),
- Exchange of good practices in common areas,
- Create a steady network that can manage old and start new actions,
- Skills of the volunteers can support the work of the organisations (exchange of skills),
- Get a new point of view for the work of your organisation (a different perspective),
- Seniors have more competences and life experience,
- Implementation of the exchange: incoming volunteer as a model,
- Express and feel concrete solidarity and reinforce sense of community,

- If we want a more social oriented Europe we should also work on the senior and not only on the young generation.

These are not only good reasons to host and exchange senior volunteers, but they also represent the motivations that lead an organisation to exchange senior volunteers from abroad. Should an organisation disagree with any of these points, maybe they are not really interested in hosting senior volunteers.

3.2 Recruitment and selection

The recruitment of volunteers in our scheme is the task of the sending organisation as defined above. In many cases the volunteers themselves look for an organisation in their own countries that can help them to find a suitable project abroad. Should you be an organisation with well-established and effective contacts in other countries, you may think to propose yourself as sending organisation, draft agreements and gather information on projects abroad to propose to your volunteers. Of course, if you are an organisation working with volunteers, it may be interesting for you to send them to volunteer in another country in order to widen their horizons and give them the chance to learn and do something new, stimulating and rewarding.

In our understanding and the setting up of the whole programme, one of the main features of these projects was that every volunteer should have been able to perform any project in order to give the chance to all to access this intercultural experience abroad. Many volunteers came to us with the idea of "helping" in co-operative projects like those carried out in the southern part of the world. These projects require qualified volunteers with specific skills: of course they are fundamental and deserve all of our respect and admiration but it is not what we want to propose.

The focus of our proposal is an educational one. It is based on the exchange and on the mutual intercultural learning among people coming from different backgrounds, either national, cultural or social. Under this perspective, everyone is suitable of performing a period of voluntary service abroad, regardless their skills, because every person will surely have something to learn and to teach at the same time. We do not state that skills and previous experience are unimportant. We want to state that each skill will turn out to be useful, not only those related to the former professional work.

Where do we "fish" for volunteers?

First we need to clarify whom we want to involve. In fact, our procedure changes if we want to involve either anybody or a precise target group, like those who already work as volunteers for an organisation or people belonging to a social centre and so on.

In the first case, the working group has discussed these possible recruitment forms:

- Advertise or report experiences of volunteers in the newspaper,
- Spread information via the internet,
- Organise public meetings open to all,
- Broadcast radio or TV spots,
- Distribute leaflets and brochures in places such as info-points and travel agencies.

If we want to involve a specific group we would rather concentrate on contacting the following:

- Volunteer agencies,
- Church and religious institutions,
- Local senior organisations and social centres gathering seniors,
- Universities of the Third Age,
- Institutions delivering language courses,
- Seniors' newspapers.

3.3 Self-selection as a result of the preparation

Selection or Self-selection?

Given the fact that ideally we want to leave this experience open to everyone, it is difficult to establish criteria of selection in order to decide who should access this experience and who should not. Organisations expect that some work should be performed in the best possible way. How do we match these two very different needs? And to make it even more difficult: what do we do if we have 10 places for 100 volunteers willing to fill these places?



Part of the solution, we believe, can be accomplished by the preparation of the volunteers and the host organisations. Through our training we should be able to facilitate the volunteers' self-assessment, so that they can evaluate whether this is what they are looking for and if they can manage to perform the whole experience as requested.

When someone learns about the possibility of volunteering in a social project abroad, many fantasies come up to his/her mind. Our mind tends to focus immediately on those who suffer, especially in the poorest parts of the worlds. Those who are deprived and need our help. But we also start to fancy about travelling abroad, getting to know other people and why not challenging our lives with new experiences. These are some of the main expectations that volunteers may have when approaching this experience.

One of the main goals of the "trainer" is to channel these expectations into a realistic perspective, making clear what volunteers should expect of this experience and what they could not gain from it. Being very clear in this expectation-building exercise can be of a real benefit for the volunteer and the project and avoid a series of problems linked to misunderstandings and too high expectations. For example, if I am motivated in saving the life of the starving children in the world, I should know that with this experience I simply will not achieve this aim. When we realise that volunteers are motivated and oriented towards something different from what we can offer, it is important that we do not discourage these volunteers to take part in a project anyway, but we should direct them towards organisations that can cater their motivations and consequent expectations.

3.4 Contents of a volunteer training course

The training course that was experimented between 2003 and 2005 included the following topics:

- Motivation and Expectations,
- An introduction to the European dimension of the programme,
- Intercultural learning,
- How to managing prejudices and stereotypes,
- Conflict management and problem solving,
- Technical and practical information on the programme.

Something astonishing that happens is that, at first, volunteers are mainly interested in the practical work they are going to do, so when you organise a meeting it is difficult for them to understand why they should also discuss all the further questions. In spite of this, the participants of the seminar felt that the topics above were needed but not exhaustive for a thorough preparation so they also included the following additional topics:

- Language and behaviour,
- Information exchange sessions for specific countries,

- Intergeneration learning,
- Self-assessment and self-selection.

For the practical content of the training please see the "Still Active" training course.

3.5 Contents of a host organisation's training course

A training process is also intended for host organisations, not so much because they need to learn how to work, but because they need to be given information on an experience that may be very new to them and as such full of unexpected features that should be analysed beforehand.

In addition to the topics that were outlined for the volunteers (most of these sessions can also be proposed to organisations), the seminar pointed out that the following topics should be tackled and discussed by the host organisations.

- Motivations and expectations,
- Definition of skills and profile of the volunteer,
- Definition of a schedule for tasks,
- Tutoring (a mentor support person),
- Co-ordination, monitoring, evaluation and problem solving,
- Logistics,
- Intercultural dimension,
- Conflict management.

It is very important that an organisation has clear ideas about all the above before actually hosting a volunteer. An important exercise is the compilation of an information sheet that collects all the information to be given to the volunteers. An example is give in Appendix A.

* * *

This chapter is the result of Workshop 1: "Selection and preparation of volunteers and host organisations". Contributions were made by Ingeborg Bierbrauer, Aigi Bremse, Gabriella Fabbri, Elisabeth Hechl, Maret Kokla, Paolo Maddonni, Christine Meyer, Christa Perabo, Augusta Rabuiti and Carmen Stadelhofer.

Foreign language skills²: learning opportunities and obstacles

Rory Daly

1. *Introduction*

Our group's interest in languages was not that of language teachers – although there were some in the group - our interest was in older people and volunteering exchanges. As a group, we recognised the importance of language skills but the role of our group was not to compile a language-training course, but rather to assess whether language skills are a necessity for a successful volunteering exchange and to see where such a training course might fit into the structure of a volunteering exchange.

The group felt that being able to communicate properly is one of the keys to a successful volunteering project. When problems arise or when details need to be finalised it is important that all the participants understand each other. Furthermore, if we are to fulfil the desire to assist in European integration through senior volunteering then these volunteers, sending and host organisations, need to be able to communicate.



² In this chapter, when we refer to language skills we are referring to skills in a language other than one's native tongue

An individual volunteer may be able carry out basic volunteering work without being able to communicate with their host organisation or other volunteers and we should not exclude anyone solely on the grounds of language capabilities - but being able to communicate will certainly enhance the volunteering experience.

The participants disagreed as to the necessity of speaking the host language but despite this, or perhaps because of it, the discussions were very informative and we were able to reach some agreed conclusions on the relevance of language skills to successful volunteering exchanges and some suggestions regarding language training.

2. *Discussion results*

2.1 *Why is language skill important?*

When we travel to another country (or indeed to another part of our own country) to volunteer, being willing and able to use the language of those around you shows a degree of respect for, and interest in, your host organisation and their culture. Like anywhere else in the world, languages in Europe carry a great weight of social, political, and cultural significance. The attitude of many Estonians to the use of Russian language and the importance of the use of language and its connection with identity amongst the German speaking population of Belgium indicate that it is not merely a question of communication. It is important that we remember this when we travel.

Being able to understand instructions and suggestions easily is necessary for a successful project. Without an ability to speak the language, volunteers are limited in the type of projects they can be involved with. It will be difficult to work with the very young or the very old or the very ill if one cannot communicate with them properly.

"Certainly having knowledge of the host country's language is helpful, but I think the communication has to exist at every level, especially the personal level. The mutual understanding among different people with different cultures, ages and ways of life, may come from this non-verbal communication."

ranca, an Italian, volunteered in Austria, 2004

The group was concerned that we did not forget the role the volunteer's language skills played in ensuring the volunteer enjoyed their whole experience – not just the volunteering. Being able to speak the native language means the volunteer is likely to be more adventurous in travelling around the country during their free time and they are more likely to make friends if they are able to speak the native language, and they are more likely to understand the hosting country and its population.

2.2 *Should it be compulsory for a volunteer to be able speak the language of the host country?*

While we agreed that it is important to be able to communicate, the group did not feel that we should exclude a volunteer because of their language capabilities (if we did it is likely that we would, almost by definition, be excluding certain socio-economic groups). If people could join exchanges with limited or no language skills, the group recognised that adopting this policy would require some different ways of looking at the question of languages during an exchange. However, in the case of long-term projects we felt that the volunteer should have some basic knowledge of the language of the host country before leaving.

"In regards to my limited knowledge of the Italian language, I had read on the application form: 'It is sufficient to show a good interest and the readiness to learn.' This may be sufficient for the daily work and for the interaction within the group itself; however it is not good enough to understand the connections between various things."

Franz, an Austrian, volunteered in Italy, 2004

2.3 *Removing or lessening the language barrier*

In an ideal situation, we believed that every volunteer should be able to speak the language of the host country but to avoid this being a method of exclusion we suggest:

- Every exchange should have a number of projects that were not dependent on language capabilities – environmental projects were thought to be one area where this might be possible.
- Exchanges should consider the triangular model of languages. In the modern Europe many languages are shared across borders – English, French, German, and Russian are some obvious examples. It may be possible for a volunteer from Italy to travel to Austria and for all communication to be in English or for a volunteer from Scotland to travel to Belgium and all communication to be in German. This requires the host organisation to be flexible in its language requirements and, perhaps, to select volunteers based on the language capabilities of their own staff or volunteers.
- Only send volunteers with a previous interest in the country. They may have travelled to the host country on holiday but might not have developed their language skills. By travelling to the country they have already expressed an affinity with it, so will probably be willing to make the effort to communicate with their host organisations.
- Exchanges of migrants between their current 'home' country and their original 'home' country would have fewer language problems.
- Exchanges could be organised between countries that share a common language – Germany and Austria, France and Belgium, Scotland and Ireland.

During the Still Active project when an Austrian organisation was getting ready to host a volunteer from the United Kingdom, all the workers spoke in English for the three weeks before the volunteer arrived, so that they would be able to give the volunteer a friendly welcome and to work effectively with the volunteer.

3. *The Training*

3.1 *Where will it be held?*

The group felt that before discussing the content of the training sessions it is necessary to establish whether it is the host country or the sending country that will deliver the training. If it were the sending country, we would be organising language training to be held perhaps one day a week for two months. However if it is the host country, holding the language sessions as part of the induction process, we would be organising sessions to be held over perhaps two days at most. Most of what follows assumes the language training will take place before the volunteer goes to the host country.

3.2 *What factors will shape the language sessions?*

- The type of work the volunteers will do: as mentioned above, some types of activity do not require great language skills and some do.
- The duration of the project: If a volunteer is going abroad for a week, can we really expect them to spend a long time learning the language?
- Preparation time: After recruiting volunteers is there enough time to teaching them some basic knowledge of the host country's language?
- It is important that the language skills of the staff of the volunteering project are taken into account and not just that of the host organisation – they will often not be the same organisation.
- It is also important to remember that language is intimately connected with the cultural, social, and political side of a country and that when we learn a language we should learn about the country that uses it.
- It is also important to look at whether it is possible to deliver tailor-made sessions that relate directly to a particular type of volunteering or whether it should be a generic basic languages course similar to what one might learn if one was planning on going on holidays to another country.

"We are used to speaking with someone else and being listened to and understood at once. This does not necessarily happen when you have to speak or listen in a language that is not yours. This may seem obvious but it is sometimes under-recognised. More so, it is important to assess if the linguistic misunderstandings are on the level of the wording (I do not understand what you are saying) or at the level of the meaning - I understand what you say, but not what you mean."

Still Active Training Materials

3.3 Who will deliver the course?

The majority of people organising volunteering exchanges will not be professional language teachers so the organisers of the exchange will need to establish who will deliver the sessions. Some possible options mentioned were

- To employ a language tutor from the project funds to teach the basic language skills. However this becomes too expensive if the volunteers are leaving for a number of countries;
- To provide online/CD Rom based language tutoring;
- To offer the volunteers vouchers to use at their local school or college to take language classes;
- To provide language training as part of the exchange; a volunteer from one country could volunteer in another country to teach the potential volunteers in that country a little of their native language.

3.4 How do we measure the language level?

When we talk about volunteers being able to speak another language or teaching them that language, it is important that we have some kind of common standards. If a host organisation declares it needs its volunteers to be quite fluent in their language, how does the sending organisation know if their potential volunteers are fluent or not? How will their teacher know if their language skills are sufficient? During the conference, groups produced their initial findings to another group. In one of these sessions, it was suggested that volunteer exchange projects should use the standard of the Council of Europe self-assessment grid as a tool to measure language skills. This would allow everybody to have some common reference points. For instance, someone who is going to work on an environmental project planting trees would only need A1 level language skills while somebody going to volunteers with older patients in a hospital would need to have C2 level language skills (see Appendix B).

3.5 What about the course content?

As was noted above the group were not teaching professionals, but we did have ideas of some of the necessary content of such a language course. Issues such as travel, accommodation, and food would obviously have to be covered but some topics could cross many volunteering projects. For instance, many exchanges involve working with children or on environmental projects, or in health related areas.



It may be possible to put together an international 'volunteers' vocabulary' which we could encourage the volunteers to learn. Other than these points, such lessons would be like any usual language lessons. However, it may be worthwhile to check with the teacher that the content of the course is suitable for the volunteers. The volunteers are older people and it would be important for the teacher, who may be used to teaching children, to be aware of the profile of the volunteers and their reason for learning the language before they put together the content of the course.

As mentioned above, when we learn a new language, we learn a little about the people that use it so it is important that the language training also includes something about the history, culture and social habits of the country the volunteer is about to visit.

The group felt, that on any language course for a volunteer, there should be a reminder that we also communicate in non-verbal ways. Body language is very important as it is knowledge of how people engage with others. In some cultures, it is usual to shake hands on every meeting - in others it is not. A hand gesture can mean one thing in one country and the opposite in another. It may be possible to include work on this topic, with local drama groups who would have experience of this type of training, as part of the volunteer training.

4. *Conclusion*

Language skills are very important for a successful volunteering project. Although the ability to speak the host's language may not be central to the volunteers' work, it makes the project more enjoyable for the volunteer and easier to organise for the host organisation. Developing language skills should be seen as an enhancement of the exchanges and language skills not be used to prevent people from participating.

* * *

This chapter is the result of Workshop 2: "Foreign language skills: opportunity or barrier?". Contributions were made by Gaby Born-Zimmermann, Fillipo Cavalieri, Horacio Czertok, Gertraud Daye, Lesley Gair, Hannelore Jani, Lia Loode, Anna Mansolilli, Dorothea Ruegsegger, Irene Stamogiorgou and Angelika Trilling.

Placement of senior volunteers: work contents and conditions

Charlotte Strümpel

1. Background

When looking at a permanent and sustainable exchange programme for senior volunteers, two of the central points are (a) which activities volunteers will be engaging in and (b) under what conditions these activities will take place. The focus of our workshop was to elicit the characteristics a senior volunteer's work should have and the necessary conditions to ensure a successful and worthwhile volunteering experience for the older person as well as the host organisation. It became clear that it does not make sense to define certain fields of activities or even specific conditions. All through the workshop participants stressed how important individual needs and prerequisites are, as well as the specific context under which the respective exchange takes place. However, several points were raised and discussed at a general level that were seen to be important for a successful foreign volunteer experience.

2. Characteristics and aims of an overall exchange programme

A common understanding of the issue at hand was considered important to create the basis for successful group work. To create this common understanding, participants discussed the aims an overall future exchange programme should have.

A basic assumption is that the desired goal is a sustainable and permanent exchange programme for senior volunteers that also includes follow-up activities. Follow-up activities can entail further contacts between volunteers and organisations, and volunteers who have already participated in an exchange programme can guide "new" volunteers or evaluate workshops involving volunteers and/or organisations.

Since many endeavours concerning the exchange of senior volunteers have been and will be run in the context of lifelong learning programmes, this aspect was stressed during our discussions. A main point is that an exchange programme for senior volunteers needs to be set up in such a way as to enable different aspects of lifelong learning. Participants viewed opportunities for intercultural as well as intergenerational learning to be important. An exchange programme can and should also be an educational tool for "doing good". As such, it should contribute to enhancing the social awareness of the individual and of participating organisations and should thus contribute to solidarity and social cohesion on a societal level.

The idea of contributing to social inclusion through an exchange programme for senior volunteers was considered to be quite controversial: In order to participate in a programme for senior volunteers, there are quite many prerequisites for participants in terms of personal qualifications, flexibility, mobility etc. Making provisions for people from disadvantaged groups leads to higher costs for a programme and possibly more efforts from the side of organisations. It was agreed that social inclusion should not be the main aim of an exchange programme for senior volunteers. However, it was regarded as important that senior volunteer exchange programmes should not lead to further exclusion and that there should be provisions to enable people with e.g. little income or a disability to take part.

An exchange programme for senior volunteers should help to achieve awareness and broaden both the individuals' and the participating organisations' horizons. It should actively enable exchanging know-how, skills and knowledge on methods of actual volunteer activities. Participating in the exchange programme should be useful for the organisations as well as contributing to improving voluntary work and the conditions under which it is carried out within the participating countries.



Participants stressed that an exchange programme should have a European added value dimension. This means that it should be designed in such a way as to allow for benefits for volunteers as well as organisations that go beyond the benefits generated when volunteering within a national context, offering implications for inter-cultural learning.

3. *Desired characteristics and conditions of voluntary work*³

3.1 *Characteristics of work*

As mentioned earlier it was not deemed possible or even necessary to define specific types of work or even concrete characteristics of voluntary work for older people. People can volunteer in a wide variety of different areas and an older person can volunteer in any of these as long as it suits their individual needs and qualifications. However, several general characteristics were elicited which were in line with the aims of an exchange programme for senior volunteers defined earlier.

All participants agreed that the voluntary work someone engages in should offer opportunities for learning. This work should be useful, real work, allowing the senior volunteer to carry out meaningful tasks that are also feasible and achievable for the senior volunteer.

On the one hand, it might be helpful for an organisation and also for a volunteer to work in an area he or she has previous experience in. On the other hand, a senior volunteer should also get the opportunity for to work in completely new areas, to be able to use further skills or acquire new ones. The ideal type of work might differ for the volunteer and for the organisation. The organisation might prefer a volunteer to work in an area where she or she has already worked before or where he has the necessary qualifications. Conversely a volunteer might be interested in working in a completely new area. It is important that the placement of volunteers happens in a way which assures added value for both parties.

Whatever the qualifications of the senior volunteer or the characteristics of the work and the organisation are, it is important that these two sides match. This is a crucial aspect which has to be in place to ensure a successful exchange programme. Several different ways to ensure this were discussed in some detail. Firstly, the volunteer and the organisation need be honest. Most importantly the volunteer should not overestimate his or her abilities and experience. Both need to define their offers and their limitations precisely and honestly. The type and the area of work and the actual tasks need to be set by the host organisation and the volunteers must choose what suit their needs and interests.

There are several ways in which such a matching process can be solved. Agencies, coordinators or other actors, for example, can function as brokers, bringing organisations and volunteers together. In addition, or instead, volunteers can access a website (like is the case with European Voluntary Service) or a catalogue. For host organisations without large international networks, but with difficulties in finding volunteers, a website might be especially important. It is crucial to provide clear information on what the organisation needs, what is expected and what can be offered to the volunteer.

³ The following sections are based on written and oral contributions by the participants. This explains some of the redundancies as well as the vocabulary used.

Even if a placement is very well prepared, circumstances can be such that the match between the volunteer, the voluntary work and/or organisation he is engaged in is not adequate. In these cases all those involved have to be flexible. If problems arise it is important to be prepared to change the task, the work, the working conditions or the organisation. The latter should always provide a Plan B as a fallback option.

"In Offenbach we had Austrian volunteers that did not like their placement. They looked for a new placement on their own and found an organisation that suited their needs. That worked out very well and they were very happy with that."

Hans, coordinator from Germany

While all participants were of the opinion that it could be helpful to change the placement when problems arise, there were different opinions concerning changing placements as a matter of course. In general, it depends on the type of work, the host organisation and the volunteer whether this is reasonable. Some participants felt that some areas of voluntary work – such as working within the social sector – called for longer placements, while others felt that if those involved were willing, it would be possible to change placements in any area of work. If possible, an exchange programme should be designed in such a way as to allow for a certain amount of choice. In this case it would mean allowing for continuing placements as well as for changing placements.

An example was mentioned from Italy where volunteers changed their placements every four days. Four people were sent to Rome and during their period of stay, had 3-4 different jobs there, as park guards, visiting older people and driving them to different activities, school crossing guard or museum guards. A local volunteer and a foreign volunteer were always together for each activity. This worked very well and was very rewarding for the volunteers and the organisations.

Two key issues with respect to working conditions are the overall length of the voluntary work placement and the expected number of working hours per day and/or per week.

With respect to the number of working hours, work and free time should be well balanced. The right balance also depends on the needs of the organisation and the stamina and capabilities of the volunteers. It is hard to identify a minimum and a maximum working time. While the overall financing structure of an exchange programme will need to define a minimum working time (probably about 20 hours a week), no maximum working time should be defined *per se*. However, it is very important to agree on and fix the amount and type of time allocation for each individual placement. So while it is hard to give abstract time recommendations, on the level of the individual placement, fixed agreements with preceding negotiations – that take into account both party's needs - are necessary.

Concerning the length of placement for senior volunteers, it was also very difficult to define an ideal or preferred duration. In principle participants agreed that the average senior person will not be prepared to spend as much time abroad as a younger person might be willing (or able) to spend. Anything between two and four weeks was seen as feasible but a longer stay should also be possible. Some participants felt that two weeks might be too short, especially from the point of view of how useful the volunteer's placement is for the organisation. Different models of placements, e.g. a short-term placement (about 2-4 weeks) and a long-term placement (up to a half a year) would be ideal. An interesting possibility, which should be explored is to allow for "periodic" volunteering opportunities. This means, for example, that a volunteer would be placed in a certain organisation for two weeks in first instance and after returning home for a month or so could then rejoin the placement for a further two or more weeks.



It was furthermore discussed whether the working conditions - e.g. working time – needed to be in line with other (younger) volunteers within the organisation.

"I had a contract for 25 hours of work and the young volunteers I worked with had a 40 hour contract. It did not feel right, that I worked less then they did, so I worked more than I was supposed to."

Dietmar, senior volunteer from Germany

Foreign volunteers should be treated similarly to local volunteers to minimise the likelihood of an accusation that local volunteers consider them as competition. In some cases it was felt to be useful to define a certain project (with a beginning and an end) for the senior volunteer to carry out. Thus, the guest volunteer would know clearly what his or her actual tasks are and the local volunteers would be prevented from feeling that someone is interfering in their regular tasks.

3.2 Contact person and team work

One of the main principles of a successful volunteer work placement is that the volunteer is not left alone. Good communications and caring for the needs of the foreign volunteer are seen by all participants as being absolutely fundamental for a good placement.

At least one responsible contact person is crucial! There are several possibilities and examples of how this is solved. In many cases the responsible contact person is a paid staff member, who is responsible for coordinating volunteers within the organisation. Also, it can be helpful to have a local volunteer as a "local friend" or mentor. Participants agree that this can be organised in different ways, but it is important for the volunteer to have a person to turn to if he/she needs help. Also a "hotline" or phone number in case of emergency or dire need should be in place.

"We work with local friends. A local friend is somebody who is there for the foreign volunteer if they need something. The local friend also shows the volunteer around. Our foreign volunteers have said that it is very nice to have a local friend."

Ave, host from Estonia

"We always gave our volunteers the phone number of our coordinator. This worked very well. Not many problems arose, but if one did come up we could react quickly."

Waltraut, host from Austria

In general, opportunities for regular communication and reflection of the voluntary work arrangement should be provided. Such regular meetings should enable working conditions to be adapted if necessary.

For most senior volunteers it is very rewarding and important to feel that they are part of a team. The organisation should support this, if possible. Of course, there always will be occasions where the volunteer would prefer to work alone or it is necessary for him/her to do so. This needs to be clarified at the beginning of a work placement.

Don'ts with respect to communication (Repetitions were left to show how important this issue is)

- Leave volunteers alone
- No social contact
- Isolation of volunteers
- Non-responsible
- Volunteers' loneliness
- To leave volunteers alone
- Lack of communication
- Isolate volunteers
- Volunteers must not be left alone
- That the volunteer is left alone (e.g. for lunch)
- Closed shops
- Not to involve volunteers
- No teamwork

Of course, personal contacts should not be forced or preordained in a systematic way, but the organisation should create opportunities that support volunteers in establishing personal contacts. Contacts with other international volunteers as well as with local volunteers are seen as being very rewarding.

4. How to ensure a rewarding placement beforehand

While the subject of our working group was the actual work placement, it became clear that a successful placement depends very much on prerequisites concerning the volunteers, the organisation as well as the preparation before and at the beginning of a work placement. Quite a lot of discussion went on about these topics during the workshop.

4.1 Prerequisite for volunteers

Members of the working group felt that the most important prerequisite a volunteer should have in order to participate in an exchange programme is the motivation to volunteer and be willing to do this in another country. Apart from that openness and curiosity concerning new experiences as well as the flexibility to adapt to new situations were considered as being extremely important. Additionally, a volunteer participating in an exchange programme must know his or her limits and should be able to articulate these. In the best case a volunteer can assess beforehand whether certain conditions, situations or tasks are suitable, bearable and manageable for him or her – or is at least capable of noticing or communicating a perceived problem if this is not the case. Also, it needs to be clear to the senior volunteer that voluntary service is not a holiday, meaning that those with the expectation of merely having good time without investing work and expertise are not suitable for participating in an exchange programme. Participants felt that experience in volunteering was not necessarily essential but could be helpful to enhance the benefits of an exchange programme for the participant as well as for the organisation. Finally, volunteers should have some knowledge of the field and the regional characteristics and circumstances they will be working in. They should know or at least be willing to find out something about the country, the region and the organisation.

4.2 Prerequisite for organisations

As an analogy to the prerequisite for the volunteers, an organisation should very clearly have the motivation to host senior volunteers and be flexible enough to deal with new people, who will bring their own view of things, who might criticise and attempt to initiate change within the organisation. Apart from these very basic issues, the organisation should have defined places and tasks for the senior volunteer from another country, including an "identity" for the volunteer. This means that volunteers should be offered a defined status, defined activities as well as some

visibility. It is also important that the volunteer is informed about the philosophy behind the project. In this connection it is seen as being very helpful for an organisation to have experience in dealing with volunteers. The organisation is expected to outline explicitly which skills and experience they need in a foreign volunteer. Finally, organisations must inform paid staff as well as local volunteers about visiting foreign volunteers beforehand. Information should be given about the tasks the foreign volunteers will undertake, how to liaise with them as well as any planned joint activities. This is crucial in order to make sure that the contact between the organisations' paid staff, permanent volunteers on the one hand and the foreign volunteers on the other hand is optimised and that negative competition between these groups does not occur. Organisations should also be willing to evaluate their experiences with an exchange programme in order to inform future programmes.

4.3 Preparation

The preparation on the part of volunteers and organisations was seen by participants of the workshop as the most important way to ensure a placement benefits the volunteer as well as the organisation. Therefore, this issue was addressed in the working group even though it was not officially one of our specific objectives.

Several aspects need to be defined clearly by the organisation beforehand, such as who is in charge of and responsible for the senior volunteer, which work area he or she will be placed in and which tasks he/she needs to complete. Also, the volunteer should have ready access to information about the host organisation. As mentioned above, a website can be a good place to access such information. Also, European and/or country coordinators of an exchange programme can assist with providing the relevant information and the matching process.

Also, it was seen as being important to hold a preparation meeting, where potential volunteers can meet with each other, prepare for and receive relevant information about their placement. In general, apart from the preparation meeting, none or just simple training should be necessary for participating in an exchange programme for senior volunteers. Last but not least, the organisation needs to ensure that the volunteer has his or her own workplace, including the required equipment, if necessary.

4.4 Information - Orientation

During the working session we distinguished between "preparation", which takes place before the placement and "information/orientation" which takes place at the beginning of the placement. When volunteers start their placement in the host country they should be provided with detailed information about their placement. Some participants opted for written information. It should include a description of the volunteers' role and tasks, a description of the organisational structure

as well as a defined work plan and a detailed time schedule. The placement should start with a meeting between the contact person in the organisation and the volunteer to agree upon these points. The result should be an agreement on these issues or, if necessary, terms of reference. Some participants felt this agreement should be in writing, while some felt that that was not necessary.

This initial meeting is important in order to check whether the expectations of the volunteer and the organisation match. The sooner any differences in expectations are exposed by either side, the easier it will be to react. Furthermore, volunteers should receive general information about the *region* they are placed in as well as specific information on *volunteering* in the region. Last, but certainly not least, guest volunteers must be introduced to the colleagues whom they will be working with. This includes the paid staff, the local volunteers as well as other foreign volunteers.

5. *Conclusions and discussion points*

One of the main conclusions of this working group is that an exchange programme for senior volunteers must combine good information and realistic sound agreements with a large amount of flexibility on different levels. There is common agreement that *the* ideal senior volunteer and *the* ideal host organisation simply do not exist, so that the structure of an exchange programme needs to take different needs and expectations into account.

The main pillars for a successful volunteer placement are providing meaningful work that allows for learning experience, a good match between the volunteer and the organisation and opportunities for communication and exchange. This can be ensured through good and clear information, an adequate matching process, good preparation and orientation as well as providing opportunities for team work and a contact person who can help volunteers in case of problems. Opportunities to review the placement and, if necessary, to change parts of the arrangements or conditions are considered very important.

Several controversial issues that prompted discussion were raised: One point that was discussed was how far a European exchange programme could contribute towards Europe-wide social inclusion. It became clear that while it was already difficult to provide framework conditions to suit average senior volunteers, it could be very costly to provide more financial and other support for disadvantaged senior volunteers (e.g. disabled, low educational status, bad financial situation). Also, the question was asked whether certain people, like those with severe psychological problems, should be excluded from an exchange programme for senior volunteers.

It was very difficult to determine the minimum or maximum of working time for volunteers as well as on an ideal duration of a placement. However, it was understood that a framework for an exchange programme would have to agree on a certain time frame concerning working time and duration of placement. An appropriate working time was considered to lie between 20 and 40

hours per week, while participants felt there should be no fixed maximum working time. Concerning the duration, two to four weeks were considered adequate for senior volunteers. However, some participants thought that a two weeks period was too short and hence, neither organisations nor volunteers would gain adequate benefit from the placement. Participants also aimed at seeing an opportunity for long-term (up to a half a year) or repeated placements (e.g. two weeks and come back a month later for another two weeks) built into an exchange programme.

Another topic of discussion was how often volunteers should change their placements within one stay. Generally, this should depend on the organisation and the volunteer. Some positive experiences were reported with placements that planned different periodical "stops" – i.e. changing placements every few days. However, some participants felt that when working with other people in a social context (youth work, old age and care homes etc.) a certain degree of continuity amongst volunteers was important.

Whether the organisation's contact person needed to be a professional, or a volunteer, or whether several contact people with different tasks would be more helpful was considered very important by all participants. The answer depends on the type of organisation, its resources and the needs of the guest volunteer.

Finally, while all participants agreed that certain agreements must be reached between the volunteers and the organisations, some regarded a written agreement as unnecessary, while others were of the opinion that this was crucial.

Last but not least, people discussed whether working conditions needed to be in line with those of other (younger) volunteers in the organisation. One senior volunteer felt that this was an important point. An organisation's representative also mentioned the importance of not treating guest volunteers differently to those who work in the organisation regularly. Others felt that it was important to offer conditions that cater to individual needs, even if these could then differ from other volunteers' working conditions.

In summary, it is important to view the placement of the senior volunteer in the framework of an overall exchange programme. An overall exchange programme needs to have its financing in place, combine flexibility with affordability and needs to define clear responsibilities. Integral parts

Don'ts:

- Don't leave volunteers alone !!!
- Don't overprotect volunteers
- Don't be unprepared
- Don't be inflexible
- Don't use volunteers as cheap workers
- Don't make demands on volunteers without involving them
- Don't have a volunteer placement without tasks
- Don't use volunteers as cheap workers
- Don't treat voluntary service as a holiday
- Don't stick inflexibly to schedule
- Don't offer a placement that does not include a specific identity for volunteers
- Don't allow for big surprises
- Don't restrict a volunteer placement only to work experience

of an exchange programme should be cooperation and evaluation as well as coordinators with defined responsibilities.

* * *

This chapter is the result of Workshop 3: "Placement of senior volunteers: work contents and conditions". Contributions were made by Ave Bremse, Laura Casorio, Dietmar Eisenhammer, Waltraut Kovacic, Hans Lucas, Francesca Marchetti, Martin Oberbauer, Pascal Sarlette, Nicholas Tobin, Éva Turós and Tanja Villinger.



Other framework conditions: accommodation, meals and leisure time

Aleksandr Kurushev

1. Background

As a matter of fact, there is no strong theory about other framework conditions for senior volunteer exchange programme such as accommodation, meals and leisure time. There are merely a number of questions challenging host organisations each time they plan to host senior volunteers on their projects:

- Which forms of provided accommodation and meals are inexpensive and meet both personal desires and the needs of senior volunteers?
- Which forms of provided accommodation and meal provision are absolutely unacceptable?
- Which conditions allow senior volunteers to organise their own leisure time without or with just a little support by the host organisation?

There are examples of good (and sometimes not very good) practice collected by host organisations throughout several years of exchanges of senior volunteers as well as diverse experiences of senior participants themselves on various host projects around Europe.

The aim of this chapter is to give simple answers, hopefully helpful to future hosts planning to receive senior volunteers. It is based entirely on previous experiences, developed and recognised good practices and the advice of senior volunteers – real participants of real projects in the past.

2. Accommodation

It is the host organisation's task to arrange suitable conditions for the reception of volunteers. There can be different arrangements and solutions to host senior volunteers. It would certainly be preferable to provide them with a single room and a private bathroom. However, this is not always possible. A double room could also do, providing that it is occupied by e.g. two friends. But any arrangement involving use of a dormitory accommodation or room shared by others should be discouraged.

2.1 *Types of accommodation*

The following accommodation facilities have been practiced so far.

- *Home stay:* This represents an ideal opportunity for volunteers to experience local life, culture and customs as well as for the host family to absorb a little of the volunteers' own culture etc. It is also beneficial because volunteers do not need to worry about their meals everyday and can focus on other aspects of the programme instead. Of course, the relationship between the host family and the volunteer is very important and should be monitored by representatives of the host organisations.
- *A room with facilities:* A room with facilities at the volunteers' workplace (like school dormitory, a room in an orphanage, etc) is a recognised solution. This can be helpful for good communication with the host organisation, because senior volunteers can communicate more with their hosts. The latter does not have to worry about everyday transportation of the volunteer to the project. Living "on-site", however, has its disadvantages because the volunteers might want to "escape" from the project from time-to-time and have the opportunity to refresh and relax outside the workplace. Obviously, such opportunity has to be provided by hosts.
- *A vacant house or apartment:* Living alone and independently can also be a good option. On the one hand volunteers can enjoy their privacy after the working day ends but on the other with this option volunteers are at risk from being isolated from the local community.
- *Hostel, Bed & Breakfast:* If the host organisation can afford it, this would be a solution most volunteers would be delighted of. However, it may create the feeling that they are on holiday. Of course, there is nothing wrong in going on vacation, but there is a risk that the local community regards the volunteers as tourists and the volunteers may feel the same way towards the hosting environment. Still, if the project promotes good integration between the volunteers and the local community, it might not represent a problem at all. Once again it is a matter of monitoring how this relationship develops.

2.2 *Volunteers' point of view*

Since senior volunteers are the main recipients of the programme, the starting point of the discussion about practical arrangements was – not surprisingly - to check own expectations towards the accommodation mode, resulting in the following inputs.

- Single room accommodation is generally preferred.
- In principle, group accommodation can be considered if volunteers are coming as a group or if a group stay provides additional learning benefit. Naturally, volunteers must be informed about that well in advance in order to avoid unpleasant surprises.

- When arranging the volunteer's stay, the host organisation should carefully consider the distance between the workplace and the accommodation as well as transport possibilities in case the accommodation is located remotely from the project.
- Regarding the age and the physical abilities of the volunteers, an appropriate level of comfort should be provided (good bed, level of warmth, general facilities like bathroom, etc.).
- Hosts should even take into consideration the senior volunteers' ability to climb stairs.
- A noisy surrounding/environment is not acceptable which could be the case if the accommodation was arranged in a youth hostel.



As a general rule, participants agreed that as people senior volunteers are different, their requirements are different, therefore they may be prepared to accept very different types of accommodation. Thus, host organisations should not restrict themselves to only a few approved types of accommodation – different solutions might work, too. It is important to provide the potential volunteer with adequate information on the practical arrangements for available board and accommodation. This information and arrangement can become crucial when choosing a project.

2.3 Host organisations' point of view

The discussion amongst representatives of host organisations had a slightly different outcome as other practical aspects were considered or received higher priority.

- The distance between the workplace and the accommodation is an important factor. Host organisations would certainly look for a more practical solution in having the accommodation as close as possible to the project.
- Obviously, host organisations seek low costs solutions which can be achieved by different means, e.g. a long-term rental agreement or off-season accommodation in a hostel or a guest house.
- If the available financial resources are not sufficient to satisfy the minimum requirements of volunteers additional contribution from volunteers may be sought.
- Students' residences might be a good solution but only in the summer, when students are away from university and do not use their rooms. However, living in the same building with students may provide good intergenerational contact, which can be of interest for some senior participants and therefore it should not be totally ignored.
- A family stay is an excellent way to provide valuable learning opportunities. However, the host organisation has to be ready to work on the recruitment and the preparation of potential host families in order to be confident about accommodation offered to the volunteer.

Just like the senior volunteers the host organisations agreed that an adequate description of the project is very importance. This description should include the most detailed information about practical arrangements as possible. An example of such an information sheet by one host organisation in Estonia is given in the Appendix A.

3. *Food*

Like everyone else, senior volunteers need to eat three times per day. The host organisation has to provide these meals. The solutions can be different, which mainly depends on the accommodation situation.

- In case of a home stay the host family takes care of the guest meals.
- Meals can be provided on the project, which is easily achieved if it is a residential project, e.g. an orphanage.
- Volunteers may arrange meals themselves, in which case a certain amount of money should be available.
- In certain cases, volunteers may even have to contribute to the costs of the meals but have to be aware of it before joining the placement.

If a volunteer has to follow a special diet, the host organisation must be informed so that his/her dietary requirements can be met. If it turns out to be impossible, the volunteer is advised to search for another project.

Simple recommendations worked out by a group of former senior volunteers and host organisations concerning food arrangements on host projects prove the points above.

- Adequate food arrangements must be considered and agreed in advance between the volunteers and host organisation.
- The volunteers should not be asked to pay unacceptably high costs for food.
- The host should not forget their role of being hosts – show your hospitality!
- Dietary needs should be clearly mentioned in the volunteer's application form.

Most of the senior volunteers have their own eating habits, which in reality cannot always be met. Therefore it is important that the sending organisation advises the volunteers to be flexible about food. After all it is an important part of the intercultural learning process of the whole experience.

4. *What is not acceptable*

Finalizing the previous chapters which considered practical arrangements suitable for a senior voluntary project such as accommodation and meals, a group of former senior volunteers and representatives of host organisations concluded: "Anything preventing a person from undertaking voluntary service abroad is unacceptable".

Such a - at first sight - vague conclusion is actually quite meaningful. It leaves a lot of freedom and flexibility to the host organisation which receives a senior volunteer. Different arrangements are possible, indeed, and can easily be accepted by the volunteer. The most important rule is to inform the volunteer well in advance about the conditions and that he or she agrees to these.

5. *Insurance*

Another important practical arrangement required to protect both the volunteer and the host project is insurance. If something serious happens to a volunteer, for example permanent disability, it helps a lot if the volunteer is properly insured. The host organisations or the volunteers themselves could encounter extreme financial problems if volunteers are not covered by insurance.

The sending organisation should make sure that the volunteers have adequate insurance cover. Several commercial companies cover travellers against anything happening during their trips - excluding any accident that is related to a work situation. This could be a solution, but this option should be used with great caution because volunteers' claims may well be deemed invalid. The problem resides in the fact that volunteers do not have a recognised status, they are somewhere in between a tourist and a worker without properly belonging to any of the two categories.

A good solution could be to apply to the insurance scheme run by some international voluntary service organisations, for example Service Civil International (SCI). They exchange more than 10,000 volunteers each year from one country to another and they have a collective contract with

a major insurance company that covers all their volunteers and to which other organisations can apply upon request. It is possible either to apply to SCI or to enquire of other international voluntary service organisations about similar arrangements.



Another possibility is to check at local level whether insurance companies are willing to ensure senior volunteers abroad and under which conditions. And it is important to remember that in all EU countries, citizens have the rights to access health assistance as in their own country. So before volunteers leave, they must obtain a European Health Insurance Card (formerly known as E-111) that certifies that you have this right in your country.

Should the permanent programme for senior volunteers be launched at European level in future the European Commission would have to propose a comprehensive umbrella insurance scheme covering volunteers' and host organisations' needs. European Voluntary Service programme (EVS) for young volunteers have a special insurance scheme with a large insurance company. This arrangement could serve as a good model.

6. Leisure time

Leisure time is a very important element of the voluntary service abroad. It is the time when a great deal of intercultural learning takes place. Previous experiences show that some host organisations underestimate or disregard the importance of leisure time as a learning possibility. But also the volunteers may not be conscious of it. Could learning opportunities be enhanced by

host organisations through leisure time arrangements? Or is leisure time simply the volunteers' *free time* of and as such, should be left to their disposal and left untouched by the host projects?

Before answering these questions let us first have a look at various possibilities for leisure time activities. Depending on the location and the nature of the host project these could be:

- Local sightseeing,
- Cultural visits,
- Family visits,
- Visits to other host projects in the area,
- Meetings with other volunteers and local people,
- Recreation, and finally
- Free time – as volunteers certainly sometimes need to be on their own.

It is important to understand that all the above is optional – it could or should be offered to the volunteer, but one cannot insist on a volunteer's participation. Often volunteers like to organise their leisure time themselves. However, such self organisation may require certain language skills, the lack of which may easily become an obstacle. This should be taken into account by host organisations. Moreover, hosts taking good care of volunteers should provide detailed information about leisure time possibilities in the area and help them access it.

7. *Conclusions*

So which conditions outside the voluntary work deployment are likely to enhance the learning opportunities for senior volunteers? This is an important question to answer if we want to improve the overall learning experiences and opportunities for senior volunteers.

The volunteers themselves stress the impact of the exchange on their personal lives, caused by this new experience. What they mentioned first and foremost is that they developed continuing friendships with other volunteers, NGO representatives or other acquaintances that they made in the foreign country. As for intergenerational projects, this can also include younger people, and if placed in teams, deep personal relations with colleagues from one's own town or country can also be built up. As a matter of fact, the best experiences have been seen when senior and young volunteers worked together and shared their daily life from the work to the meals and sometimes even to the same accommodation. It is actually impossible to state who is learning from whom but it is clear that the process of mutual enrichment is there and works well destroying all possible prejudices and stereotypes people have towards those of a different generation.

Former senior volunteers pointed out that for them the main learning opportunities were ensured by deep intercultural experiences obtained through meeting local people and integrating

themselves into the local community. Therefore, the following leisure time possibilities were emphasised by the volunteers as enhancing the learning opportunities:

- meeting local people,
- visiting families,
- visiting other project,
- becoming acquainted with local heritage.

Host organisations are advised to facilitate the above mentioned for the senior volunteers they host, keeping in mind that they benefit from the following conditions:

- Volunteers are given the opportunity to explore the wider community.
- Host organisations give some freedom to their volunteers so that they can take over some responsibility for themselves (e.g. single travelling, cooking a meal for themselves – perhaps the first time, coping with foreign languages, dealing with unusual circumstances, etc.).
- Host organisations allow volunteers the opportunity to discover and experience unfamiliar situations or habits (e.g. staying with people of other cultures and backgrounds, coping with foreign languages, discovering different ways/rules/traditions, etc.).
- Volunteers are given the opportunity to compare work similar with that they normally do in their own country.
- Volunteers are introduced to fresh approaches, thoughts, new ideas.
- Opportunities for networking are given.

Volunteering abroad starts a learning process not only for the seniors who go abroad and learn from the new environment. It is also a learning process for their hosts who have to deal with experienced people from different countries and backgrounds bringing in new and different ways of working and more generally conceive life. This mutual exchange fosters the dialogue between people from different generations and different countries, becoming a step towards a greater understanding in the entire European Community.

* * *

This chapter is the result of Workshop 4: "Other framework conditions: accomodation, meals and leisure time". Contributions were made by Franz Errath, Raffaele Fabrizio, Manuela Hinterberger, Sheila Hyson, Ulrich Schiepe, Uwe Wolk and Jelena Zhurajeva.

Factors for a sustainable exchange of senior volunteers

Karin Stiehr

1. Introduction

The sustainability of the European exchange of senior volunteers is an important aspect which should have already been considered in the planning phase.

A significant difference between youth and seniors who work as volunteers abroad is that seniors prefer a much shorter stay which, however, does not mean less valuable outcomes in terms of sustainability. On the contrary, sustainability can be considered an integral part of a European exchange of senior volunteers.

In addition to that, sustainability can be enhanced by an adequate project design. The framework of the exchange conditions will markedly contribute to deeper effects of the learning experience of having volunteered abroad.

And last, but not least, the conceptualisation of a sustainable exchange project must not disregard the financial aspects. Sending and hosting senior volunteers abroad is in itself no cheap venture, especially when one takes into account the comparatively short duration of their stay and some age-specific requirements which should be considered when accommodating senior volunteers. This general approach will only be sustainable if the benefits for all parties involved match their investments in the placements.

Examples of sustainable effects and recommendations for designing quality framework conditions, enhancing the long-term impacts and being cost-efficient at the same time, will be given in the following paragraphs.

2. Results

2.1 Examples of sustainable effects in previous exchange projects

The European exchange of senior volunteers has affected a broad spectrum of learning impacts at individual level, at NGO levels and even at governmental level.

The volunteers stress the impact of the exchange on their personal lives caused by these new experiences. To start with, continuing friendships were developed, be it with volunteers, NGO

representatives or other acquaintances that were made in the foreign country. In intergenerational projects, this can also include younger people, and if placed in teams, deep personal relations can be also built up with colleagues from one's own town or country. The four pilot projects contain many examples showing that that the official end of the placements did not in any way discourage the participants from continuing their private and (in part also) professional relations in self-management at their own expense.

"The site of my volunteering was the Kinder- und Jugendfarm [children's and teenager's farm] in Offenbach. It was a good experience. I discovered aspects of myself I didn't know I had. I found out to be a more communicative person than I thought to be through the ease in making friends with my fellow-volunteers whom I had not known before, with the host association, our contact person and all other people I met and above all with the girls and boys of the Kinder- und Jugendfarm. For these, particularly, I thought to have lost the habit to deal with a generation so different from my own. The novelty and diversity of this experience from the previous ones have also been an input to know more of what is around me, of the EU, its institutions and the turmoil of initiatives in it. My frame of mind has changed, and I consider the opportunity to go to Offenbach as a gift. Now I know that there are many opportunities that can be rewarding and interesting for me as a person being an active citizen."

Volunteer from Italy

If the exchanged senior is already an experienced volunteer in his or her home country, the stay abroad can have sustainable influences on future work. This can mean that they can enrich their previous activities by new features, but can also start a completely new project. In both cases, a trans-national transfer of ideas and knowledge is provided.

The range of these experiences is as manifold as the personal backgrounds of senior volunteers. They range from a newly detected personal interest in voluntary work at local level via practical improvements of work contents and procedures in already established projects to goals such as contributing to the infrastructure for the European exchange of senior volunteers.

"I am glad to have made this experience which I want to make use of for future projects. I want to implement an agency for the exchange of senior volunteers in order to contribute to a better linking of the Franco-German border region PAMINA consisting of the southern part of Rhineland-Palatinate (PA, Germany), the Middle Upper-Rhine region of Baden-Württemberg (MI, Germany) and the northern part of Alsace (NA, France)."

Volunteer from Germany

From the perspective of host organisations, this basically strong commitment of senior volunteers can have a decisive impact on NGOs which are open and willing to further development in terms of new ideas concerning work contents and procedures. Examples of good practice can be transferred by experienced volunteers in a much more sustainable way than by written documents,

because by personal contact their experiences can be considered in-depth and thus adapted to the existing framework conditions.

The placement of senior volunteers offers special learning opportunities with sustainable impacts to voluntary service organisations which are dealing with younger volunteers but want to involve new target groups in future. As seniors are usually looking for a framework which meets some of their specific interests (such as making use of their personal and professional experiences) and requirements (such as some privacy where they are being accommodated), voluntary service organisations for youth are advised to make certain adaptations to attract a larger number of seniors. Senior volunteers themselves play an important part in that.

"I have hosted four senior volunteers. The volunteers taught us how to manage and how to host them. A female teacher for primary school was working in a kindergarten in a city that was a former military base. The accommodation was very simple. When asked about her feelings she said, 'I survived, and others will also survive.' Volunteering in this regard means also teaching the organisation."

Host from Estonia

Sustainable impacts of a European exchange of senior volunteers are not just restricted to seniors and host organisations, but also apply to governments at all levels. The desire of seniors to make use of their know-how and maintain established relations in the long run is of great importance for the tasks and missions of government officials. Know-how transfer by seniors can thus also consist of advising governments on how to implement successful models of voluntary work from other European regions.

"In Marburg I am volunteering as an 'Engagement-Lotse', a guide for citizens, NGOs and local authorities in questions of voluntary work. During my exchange to the German-speaking Community in Belgium, I introduced this concept to the ministry, and they have set up such a project in Belgium, too."

Volunteer from Germany

The overall positive experiences in two seniors exchange pilot projects lead to an official agreement between the Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium with their partner region Rhineland-Palatinate on a long-term establishment of an exchange of senior volunteers.

"A contract was signed by the Prime Ministers of Rhineland-Palatinate and the German-speaking Community of Belgium, in St. Vith, a city destroyed in World War II. It refers to the cooperation in activities for people with dementia and befriending services for older people at home. The project will run from 2006-2009. During 2006-2007, Rhineland-Palatinate chairs the working group, afterwards Belgium will take over this part. The contract is a direct consequence of the pilot project Teaming Up."

Government official from Belgium

From the perspective of governments, town twinnings and regional partnerships are an excellent field for the exchange of senior volunteers with sustainable effects for the relations between volunteers, host organisations and local and regional authorities. In this context, senior volunteers take over the functions as ambassadors in building up or strengthening existing partnerships. The results of the pilot project Teaming Up! which focussed on this aspects encourage this approach.

Teaming Up! project in 2005			
How effective is the idea of an exchange of older volunteers to promote the trans-national relations between towns, districts or NGOs?			
	Senior volunteers	Host organisations	Authorities
I still regard it as a very good idea	109	28	11
I am less convinced about the idea than I was before	1	2	1
I am not keen on the idea any more	1	0	0
Valid responses in total	111	30	12

2.2 How to promote sustainability in designing an exchange project

A European exchange project for senior volunteers should be conceptualised as a process of three consecutive phases: the preparation phase, the placement phase, and the evaluation phase. For each phase it is important to ensure high standards of quality if sustainability is desired.

The preparation phase is important so that both seniors and host organisations can clarify that 1) they still want to participate and 2) the two parties, the host organisation and the senior volunteer, are the right match for each other. Sustainability can only be achieved if co-operation continues satisfactorily on a day-to-day basis works out and personal empathy with the project helps to overcome initial problems. A preparation seminar can help seniors and host organisations clarify their suitability for an exchange. The question of the right matching, however, can only be solved by personal contacts of both parties prior to the exchange by email, mail or telephone.

Due to the existence of trans-national language areas, seniors without foreign language skills will have in most cases the chance to volunteer abroad by being able to communicate in their own language. But the exchange offers excellent opportunities to all seniors who want to brush up existing language skills or start to learn a completely new language. In some projects, arrangements are made to support those seniors whose language skills are poor, e.g. by providing a voluntary interpreter for the local language or by offering an alternative commonly used language, such as English. However, the learning advantages such as gaining a more meaningful understanding of the culture of the host country will be enhanced if the senior volunteer has the opportunity to communicate fluently in the host language.



Work contents and conditions must meet the expectations of the volunteer and the work results the expectations of the host organisation. The better the preparation and communication prior to the exchange, the more satisfactory the co-operation, and the more reason for both sides to continue the relationship on a formal or informal basis. Exchange projects for senior volunteers must find a balance between contradictory aspects:

- On one side, senior volunteers are people who, in principle, can do everything, and on the other, there may be specific needs and requirements for individual seniors.
- On one side, each host organisation has their own rules and regulations, and on the other side, senior volunteers' exchange projects require a high degree of flexibility and the ability to adapt.

- On one side, tailor-made projects are ideal especially in European exchanges, on the other side financial restrictions will often set clear limits to creativity.

As regards the other framework conditions of living abroad as a volunteer, they can be as decisive for the learning impacts of the exchange as the work contents and conditions. Accommodation should provide a certain degree of privacy but also should facilitate the opportunity to get together with other volunteers and the local population. Sharing a kitchen and bathroom with others means contact and joint leisure time options. Bed-and-breakfast arrangements will offer insights into local family lives. Some support in organising leisure time, e.g. by local volunteers, will help the foreigners to easier and quicker access to the locations of interest.

Local and regional authorities can be of tremendous support in designing a sustainable exchange of senior volunteers. They possess networks, public relation channels and, in especially lucky cases, guest houses which could be used to accommodate the volunteers. With regard to town twinning, the responsible departments may even have funds available to support the exchange financially. But as in all other cases, it is true that there must be a win-win situation to convince the authorities of the benefits of the exchange.

"Personal development opportunities are only one aspect; there must be also an output for the community. If the volunteer is part of an association, when regressing he or she can provide some kind of development to the organisation. Also the community should get some benefit. Follow-up activities are very important, for example an exchange between organisations in similar fields of work to ensure further communication and relations."

Local government official from Italy

Follow-up activities should not only include the government officials and host organisations involved in the project placements, but the coordinating agencies should also offer evaluation seminars for senior volunteers. In these seminars an in-depth analysis must be made of the benefits and problems for which solutions must be found in future exchanges. An important additional topic of such evaluation seminars would be a discussion of options for continuous activities at local level resulting from volunteering abroad, thus encouraging the participants to make best (and sustainable) use of their experiences.

2.3 Financial considerations

With Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006, an action programme in the field of lifelong learning was established for the period of 2007 – 2013 that gives the European exchange of senior volunteers a financial basis. Another opportunity for fundraising – with a focus on town twinning and the meeting of citizens – is offered by the "Europe for Citizens" Programme 2007 – 2013. In each case, however, national co-funding and a sensible application of the available money will be necessary.

Time and effort spent on the preparation of seniors for their placement abroad in general and their potential language training in particular must relate to the duration of their voluntary work in another country. A long-term stay of several months will certainly need another type of preparation and justify higher expenditures than an exchange of 2 – 3 weeks. For a short-term stay of only a few weeks a one day preparation seminar, if possible organized at regional level to avoid hotel accommodation and high travel expenditures, will a reasonable solution.

If language training is needed, vouchers for a self-organised language course is highly recommended. In university towns, language students can perhaps be asked to provide inexpensive language training.

The costs of host organisations will mainly consist in paid staff who will have to prepare and monitor the placement of foreign volunteers. For smaller organisations it has turned out to be a good idea to share some of these obligations – with good results for the volunteers, too, who get to know a broader spectrum of activities and thus increase their learning opportunities. Many of the tasks, combined with the placement of volunteers from abroad, can well be taken over by local volunteers. If appropriately organised, this eases the burdens that might otherwise be placed on an organisation's paid staff without losses in quality. On the contrary, the preparation and monitoring of a placement by volunteers for volunteers can include a high amount of "extras" which professionals might not notice.

Accommodating senior volunteers from abroad can easily result in high costs, but the above-mentioned ideal conditions with view to learning opportunities (including shared facilities by a group of volunteers or private accommodation) are at the same time the most cost-effective options. However, a certain standard must be given but not only to attract the fittest and most adventurous seniors to volunteering abroad.

"Think of details to make the stay comfortable. And ask yourself: 'Would you host your own mother in that place?'"

Coordinator from Estonia

The general rule for a cost-effective European exchange of senior volunteers is to use existing resources and to establish a solid network of co-operation, especially with local or regional authorities. Besides a potential direct resource of financial support, local authorities dispose of a variety of helpful resources, be it their public relation channels (the local press is always interested in reporting about senior volunteers from abroad) or leisure time offers which could be provided for free or at reduced conditions.

Last, but not least, a contribution by the volunteers themselves can and should be considered. The stay abroad will not only consist of full-time work. To avoid accusations that public money is being used to finance another kind of holiday, it appears to be justified that a small fee (e.g. 50 € per week) is charged as a personal contribution, especially if meals are provided. After all, volunteers

would also have to feed themselves if they were at home. However, no regulations should be applied which exclude seniors at low income. For them, exemptions from fees should be foreseen.

3. *Conclusions*

In designing a European exchange project for senior volunteers, special emphasis should be laid on ensuring the highest possible degree of sustainability. In order to obtain long-term impacts for seniors, host organisations and government officials and to create an adequate framework at cost-effective conditions for the placement abroad, teamwork is highly recommended. Coordinators should confine their roles to one of facilitators, leaving decisions on contents and methods of the exchange to those whom they concern.

Senior volunteers are ready and able to take over a high degree of responsibility and should therefore also be included in the preparation and evaluation processes. The same is true for the other actors involved: host organisations and government officials have specific interests and needs and should not be restricted to their immediate roles and functions, such as offering a work place or contributing financially.

It will be the conceptual contributions of seniors, NGO representatives and government officials which will make the exchange a sustainable effort.

* * *

This chapter summarizes the discussion results of the final plenary session including sustainable effects that were pointed out in the first plenary session and in the workshops.



10 Golden Rules for senior volunteers by senior volunteers

Dietmar Eisenhammer

From the point of view of experienced senior volunteers, people interested in such an exchange should take into account the following rules during the preparation, the placement and the evaluation phases:

Preparation phase

1. Thoroughly research the placement conditions prior to the exchange. The more comprehensive the information, the better you can get prepared and the higher the benefits will be.
2. Identify the technical demand profile and inform yourself about
 - the host organisation,
 - the contents of work,
 - the language requirements,
 - the working time (per day/per week),
 - the duration of the placement,
 - the seasonal conditions for your placement,
 - the type of work: individual or teamwork,
 - the lodging conditions,
 - the meal arrangements, and
 - the financial conditions (travelling/transport, accommodation, meals, insurance, pocket money).
3. Based on the written demands of the placement, check that you are suitable for the project
4. Examine your capabilities and capacity critically and honestly. You should be
 - fit for the job
 - open-minded
 - flexible
 - a team-player
 - respectful of others and
 - willing to cope and to adapt to different placement conditions abroad.

5. Attend a preparation seminar, if offered, to make sure that the demand and your personal fitting profile match.

Placement phase

6. Be aware that problems can occur during the placement abroad despite the best preparation. They can consist of
 - too much or too little work,
 - being often or never alone,
 - not finding enough contact,
 - language problems,
 - wrong expectations.
7. Write a diary; this will be particularly useful when an evaluation is made of your stay. You can note
 - the kind and duration of work which you have performed,
 - special occurrences at work,
 - proposals for improvements.

Evaluation phase

8. On your return, participate in an evaluation seminar, if offered, and fill in an evaluation sheet. Here you can mention and explain difficulties and proposals for improvements for the organisations involved. A written report may also be required by the financing institution.
9. Pass on your experiences of your placement to others. Consider writing an article for the local press, give a paper or organise a seminar for other interested persons.
10. Cooperate closely with the responsible organisations in order to shape and formulate future conceptions of the placement programme.

* * *

This chapter summarizes the results of a working group consisting of senior volunteers experienced in trans-national exchanges, including contributions by Gaby Born-Zimmermann, Filippo Cavalieri, Franz Errath, Gabriella Fabbri, Sheila Hyson, Anna Mansolilli and Ulrich Schiepe.



10 Golden Rules for host organisations by host organisations

Paolo Maddonni

Promoting voluntary service and experience abroad as non-formal educational projects for senior people begs a certain number of questions for the organisations involved. Even the best-oriented and most open-minded institutions need references and key points as guidelines for their projects. The aim of this particular Conference workshop was to draw up possible guidelines from the point of view of the organisations. The following "Decalogue" evolved from the workshop and cannot reproduce in summary the rich exchange of ideas and opinions of our wide-ranging discussions. Nevertheless, even though some of the guidelines might seem rudimentary, all suggestions are meant to clarify doubts and to reinforce the positive aspect of hosting senior volunteers.

Decalogue of the organisations:

1. Hosting senior volunteers demands (and the host project has to be ready to provide fully):
 - human resources and energy,
 - money (for logistics e.g. transport, telephone),
 - time,
 - fantasy,
 - patience,
 - flexibility,
 - motivation,
 - pleasure.
2. A senior volunteer must always be welcome in a local community. He or she will be useful but might not be necessary for the project to survive. Senior volunteers can represent and add value to an existing project which will continue after they have gone.
3. The senior volunteer must have the curiosity and endeavour to learn some (at least a basic knowledge) of the host country's language. No language is impossible to learn. Language is a key to understanding local culture; volunteers must try and use it and the host organisation must encourage and facilitate its use.
4. Volunteering is a learning opportunity for both the participant and the host community. (Roles to play during the exchange every day: teacher and student, expert and beginner, equal and different).

5. Sending Organisation should support the possible participants and volunteers by giving:
 - information,
 - orientation,
 - preparation and
 - evaluation.

The link between sending and hosting organisations must not be severed once the volunteer is abroad.

6. Monitoring the project: flexibility to adapt the work expected of the volunteer to the limits of his/her abilities and/or to maximise his/her capacities. Every project is a permanent work-in-progress.
7. Hosting a senior volunteer means immersing him/her in a local community. This includes a two-way cultural exchange and reciprocal discovery and acceptance. The volunteer must not lose his or her cultural identity during the project.
8. The host organisation has the right to say to the senior volunteer: "Unfortunately, you are the wrong volunteer placed in the wrong project" or vice versa. Despite the best preparation and volunteer matching processes, neither side should feel guilty the placement doesn't work out. Both parties must have the right to discuss solutions or to terminate the placement.
9. Hosting a group of senior volunteers does not mean that the individualities of the participants should be neglected. A variation of tasks and free time options should be considered.
10. Don't look at the age, look at the individual! Don't treat seniors like disadvantaged people, but as individuals with resources and needs. Age is not a stage of mind.

* * *

This chapter summarizes the results of the working group "Charter for the exchange of senior volunteers" consisting of members of host organisations experienced in trans-national exchanges, including contributions by Ingeborg Bierbrauer, Ave Bremse, Laura Casorio, Horacio Czertok, Gertraud Dayé, Manuela Hinterberger, Waltraut Kovacic, Lia Loode, Christine Meyer and Martin Oberbauer.



Appendix

A. Example of an Information Sheet for volunteers

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the significance of adequate information about the host project provided to the volunteer in advance cannot be overestimated. The volunteer's initial decision to join the project rests upon this information. It is furthermore the material for preparing his voluntary adventure and thus helps to form right expectations. Even in the age of computers and electronic devices of all sorts, nothing is more appealing than some information on paper that you can keep in your hands and read over and over again. Below, we enclose a sample of an information sheet which was handed out to volunteers (see Appendix). For the volunteers, it acts as a reference point which probably guides them through the project; and for the organisation, compiling the information sheet may represent sort of a final check-list.

By the way, if you are not able to compile such an information sheet, you probably need to work a little more on your project regarding the senior volunteer exchange.

Imastu Koolkodu (Imastu Residential School), Estonia

2 places

Date of exchange: 1st -21st August

1. Communication data

Organisation:	Imastu Residential School		
Address:	Imastu küla,	45105 Tapa sjk	
Telephone:	+372	Fax:	+
E-Mail:	imastu@.....ee	Website:	
Contact person :	K. O.		
Position :	Director's substitute		
Telephone:	+372.....	E-Mail:	imastu@ee
Foreign language knowledge of the contact person:	English		

2. Profile and context of the work

Imastu Residential School, established in 1948, caters for around 110 children, who are mentally and physically handicapped or suffer from genetic deceases. Youngsters of Imastu are aged 5 - 18 and there are also young adults aged 18 – 32. Most of them are orphans.

Imastu uses a model of family style living, where children of different age and with different disabilities live together in family groups, about 20 children in each, under supervision and with assistance of experienced

staff. Three groups consist of mainly children, while two other groups have mainly young adults. Local personnel monitors their health and development, provides medical, psychological and psychiatric care, teaches them basic skills, runs leisure time activities such as games, handicrafts, sport, excursions, etc. depending on age and disabilities of children. There are about 60 people working directly with children. The total number of staff is 77.

Being a municipal institution Imastu relies on financial support of the municipality and the state as well as help of individuals and organisations and enthusiasm of the staff and volunteers. The host project has already welcomed a number of volunteers from abroad.

3. Placement area for the senior volunteer

Designation of the area of placement:

The tiny village Imastu located in Lääne-Virumaa County. The nearest town and railway station is Tapa (3 km). Tapa lies in northern Estonia, about 90 km southeast of Tallinn, at the junction of roads and railways. Due to this favourable location Tapa has started to develop into a centre of transit and trade of considerable national and international importance. The proximity of small forests, Lahemaa National Park and the Baltic Sea offer good opportunities for vacations for those who work and live here. The area of Tapa is about 16 km² and it has about 7,200 residents. The majority of workers are employed by the railroad. An industrial park on a former Soviet military base offers additional jobs to Tapa residents.

There are 3 churches in Tapa: Russian Orthodox (since 1904), Methodist (1924), and Lutheran www.eelk.ee/tapa (1932). There are 4 schools: Tapa Secondary School (founded 1919), Russian Secondary School (1945), Children's Music School (1957), and a reform school for Russian-speaking boys (1965).

The Tapa Town Library was reopened in 2001 in a newly renovated building with public Internet access. A new culture house and a retirement centre were opened in 1993. The Development Centre was established in 1994 as a municipal enterprise offering training and continuing education. In 1994 a museum opened its doors with a permanent exhibition on the history and contemporary life of Tapa. The largest performing groups in Tapa are the children's school choirs, a chamber choir, the mixed choir "Leetar," and a brass band. More information on www.tapa.ee, www.visitestonia.com.

Activities of the exchanged senior volunteer:

Although there are about 60 people working directly with children in the shifts it is not enough to provide good attention and support for each child. The staff, being overloaded with the routine tasks supporting the basic needs of children, often do not have enough time simply to play with kids, organise extra activities for them, develop new type of activities or maintain individual contact. Volunteers can easily fill this gap assisting the staff by giving their time and care to the young people of Imastu. Volunteers will be supporting the project personnel in looking after the children and running daily tasks such as:

- looking after the children and helping project staff in teaching them basic skills

- playing with children
- arranging children's outings, e.g. culture visits, excursions, hikes, picnics, etc.
- offering activities for kids outside regular curricula (arts, handicraft, drawing, etc.)
- helping to feed children
- assisting personnel with any other required activities

An extra task of the volunteers could be to establish contacts with similar institutions for mentally handicapped children in his/her home country in order to have mutually beneficial co-operation/exchange between institutions in future.

4. Conditions of placement

Framework conditions:

- Team work
- Exchange of experiences with other volunteers
- Full board and lodging in the Institution
- Linguistic materials

Accommodation:

Volunteers will have own furnished separate rooms in Imastu Residential School. WC and washing facilities are in the common corridor and shared with the staff.

Volunteers will eat in the family group during working days. During days off the volunteers can eat in the canteen for the staff. If food in Imastu Residential School is found to be not sufficient then volunteers can buy extra food by themselves. The closest shops are in the town of Tapa, 3 km from Imastu. The possibility to make own food is provided - there is a little kitchen corner with fridge and microwave oven arranged for volunteers.

Dates and time schedules:

Number of weeks:	3
Minimum working hours per week:	25
Maximum working hours per week:	35
Preferred working days:	Five working days
Preferred working times:	negotiable

B. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; Source: European Council

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	Listening	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
S P E A K I N G	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure, which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
W R I T I N G	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles, which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

C. Further Information

"One million volunteers: the story of volunteer youth service"

by Arthur Gillette, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968.

"The beneficial effects of volunteering for older volunteers and people they serve: a meta analysis"

by J. A. Weeler, K. M. Gorey and B. Greenblatt, International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 1998; 47(1): 69-79, Baywood Publishing Company.

"Older Volunteers: A guide to research and practice"

by Lucy Rose Fischer and Kay Bannister Schaffer, London, Sage Publications Inc., 1993.

"Time to Volunteer! International voluntary service proposals for senior citizens"

by Davide Di Pietro and Erika Lombardi, Rome, 2002.

Published by Lunaria with the contribution of the Socrates Programme of the European Commission. (Available in English, French, German, Spanish and Italian)

"Active ageing in active communities: Volunteering and the transition to retirement"

by Justin Davis Smith, Pat Gay, Bristol, Policy Press, 2005.

Download: www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1861347626.pdf.

"Older People and Volunteering"

by Zoë Gill, University of Adelaide, 2005.

Download: www.ofv.sa.gov.au/pdfs/research_older_peopleandvolunteering06.pdf.

"Still Active!"

- Training Course for Senior Volunteer
- Handbook for Volunteers
- A guidebook for the Organisations of the Civil Society Interested in Hosting Senior Volunteers

Davide Di Pietro, Rome, 2005.

Produced by Lunaria with the contribution of the Socrates Programme of the European Commission. (Available in English, French, German and Italian)

"Volunteering, self help and citizenship in later life"

Research project by Age Concern Newcastle and the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2006.

Download: www.ncl.ac.uk/geps/research/soc/transformations/vshacill.pdf

(The researchers conducted focus groups and a questionnaire survey of current and former volunteers. In-depth interviews with 76 people aged 55 and above involved at Age Concern Newcastle formed the main part of the research.)

"Teaming Up! A Guidebook for Local Governments interested in international exchange programmes for senior volunteers"

Davide Di Pietro, Rome, 2006.

Produced by Lunaria with the contribution of the European Commission D.G. Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (available in English, German and Italian).

"Europäisches Volontariat älterer Menschen. Austauschprojekt älterer Freiwilliger in 8 Ländern"

Karin Stiehr and Susanne Huth, Marburg, Peter Wiehl Verlag, 2002.

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