



Reveal the learning potential of volunteering

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RIVER

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RIVER: Reveal the learning potential of volunteering

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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

This publication provides an exploration of the processes and results of a transnational project that focused on three major themes and the possible links between them: volunteering, intergenerational learning, and recognition and validation of learning. The project's contribution to these themes, and to promoting European Union policies in this regard, is a new methodology for recognising learning and competence development in volunteering activities: the RIVER Methodology. The methodology reveals the development of competences in volunteering settings, and this publication includes an example of specific application to the development of the competence "Intergenerational Cooperation". It presents the context in which the project activities have developed, and examines some samples of practice from the testing of the methodology. It also gives further details on how to make the best of a volunteering activity either as a host or as a volunteer and offers suggestions on how to integrate a learning assessment process into the volunteering activity.

Following the original idea of the project, the RIVER methodology was mainly developed for making learning outcomes of senior volunteering visible

and thus to add to senior volunteers' motivation and sense of achievement. The special focus on seniors engaged in volunteering activities stems from the increasing number of elderly people in Europe and the importance of creating opportunities for them to stay active – volunteering offers this opportunity! Nevertheless, the project activities clearly stated that RIVER is not only for seniors – but a useful method for volunteering in general. So in this brochure, RIVER will be presented as a validation methodology for volunteers of all ages, highlighting the intergenerational aspects of volunteering projects.

Target groups

Apart from the general interest of the content in relation to volunteering, intergenerational learning or recognition and validation of learning, you will find the brochure particularly interesting if:

- You are a volunteering facilitator or mentor in any organisation that receives or sends volunteers.
- You work in an organisation that takes part in the Lifelong Learning Programme, the Youth in Action Programme, or the future EU Programme



for Education, Youth, Culture and Sports (Erasmus Plus!).

- You are a policy maker in charge of learning, volunteering or employment sectors.
- You are an employment officer or career counselor in charge of finding internship opportunities.
- You are a tutor, mentor, coach, or counsellor in any non-governmental organisation or in continuing education and you are looking for innovative ways to validate learning processes in volunteering settings.
- You are a volunteer and you look for ways to have your learning and competence development validated by the organisation(s) you are involved with.

Aims

The purpose of this publication is to introduce the RIVER Methodology with a view to ascertaining its potential contribution to the development, recognition and validation of competences in volunteering settings. Concretely, the publication will give you innovative perspectives on ways:

- to recognise or create informal learning opportunities through volunteering
- to use volunteering to respond to some of the major challenges of today's Europe, such as the ageing population or youth unemployment
- to create opportunities for citizens of all ages to become or to stay active

The brochure ultimately aims to raise interest in the use of the RIVER Methodology and to encourage you, the reader, to try out the tools which have been developed. If you need any support in implementing the RIVER methodology, or you have any other questions, the authors are on hand to answer your queries. You can find more information on the RIVER website, www.river-project.eu.

2. WHAT IS RIVER?

The RIVER Methodology was designed and elaborated to fulfil the three different aims mentioned above, with a special focus on promoting senior volunteering as an important way for older people to actively participate in social and organisational structures. It has three different, but complementary, functions: recognition, development and planning of learning outcomes of volunteering activities. The main focus in the project work was:

2.1 A method for recognising informal learning outcomes of volunteering activities

The methodology is built around a tool and an approach that recognises competence development in volunteering settings. In other words, it is a tool that organisations can use to assess the competence of a volunteer at the beginning and at the end of an activity or of a specific period.


In spite of the “I” in RIVER standing for “intergenerational”, it is worth mentioning at this stage that the final tools developed and presented herein do not apply exclusively to the recognition of intergenerational cooperation competence development, nor do they require that volunteering activities be intergenerational. Although it was tested primar-

ily in such contexts, the methodology applies to all volunteering settings.

A second disclaimer worth stating is that the methodology proposed is not a purely scientific one, as it lacks the rigidity often associated with measurement instruments. The tools we propose focus on soft outcomes and empowerment, taking as a basis for assessment not external benchmarks and indicators, but rather the reality of the volunteer whose competences are being assessed. Volunteers’ motivation is usually “to do something different” and “to be active and useful”, and this tool focuses on competences likely to develop in volunteering settings.

2.2 A method for planning competence development in volunteering activities

Although primarily developed as a recognition tool, the methodology can be used to focus on a specific competence during a volunteering activity. The way the approach is structured, in five stages, allows the organisation and the volunteer to decide together which particular competence should be worked on. Using the reference systems provided within RIVER (see page 29) or independently developed ones, the organisation can support the volunteer by



planning together a learning process focusing on that specific competence. Thus learning becomes an intrinsic part of the volunteering activity, yet the development of the competence will happen informally, without the need for pedagogical or specialist input.

2.3 A method for planning learning processes as volunteering activities

Finally, the RIVER Methodology can also be used to plan a learning process as a volunteering activity. This means that educational and training organisations can use it to plan for their learners a volunteering activity, with clear learning aims, follow-up and assessment. This planning would be done, as a rule, together with volunteering organisations.

As an example, a continuing education organisation that wants to give learners the possibility to learn informally through volunteering, and thus develop a particular competence, will use RIVER to plan and follow the learning path. They contact a volunteering organisation, develop together the work plan for the learner, and assess the learner's competence at start and end points. This assessment process can be run also by the volunteering organisation, thus giving more weight to the informal learning process. These three functions are the basic ones of the RIVER Methodology. This is not to say that organisations cannot find other means of making best

use of the tools provided. Indeed, during the piloting phase some organisations reported that they would be able to use it for quality assurance or as a tool for retaining and assigning volunteers to different tasks. Such applications are welcome, and are at the discretion of organisations and users. They demonstrate the flexibility of the methodology, and the authors would welcome any feedback or information on such further uses.

3. WHO DEVELOPED RIVER?

The history of the methodology is described under 4.1 below. However, for a broad initial image of what RIVER is, a short description of those who contributed to its immediate development is necessary at this stage. RIVER was developed in the identically named EU-Grundtvig project. The consortium was a mixed partnership which combined vast complementary expertise and know-how: on the one hand voluntary organisations, networks and umbrella organisations involved in numerous national and transnational volunteering activities; on the other hand education providers with a long record of planning and implementing training activities to a wide range of target groups.



www.dieberater.com

dieBerater® is a private company founded in 1998 with 480 members of staff who work in more than 70 locations all over Austria. The core fields of business are education and training, coaching, outplacement and consultancy, and EU projects. *dieBerater*® acted as the coordinator of the RIVER project.

BUPNET

www.bupnet.de

BUPNET, Training and Project Network Ltd., founded in 1985 is an adult education provider based in Germany. BUPNET has long-term experience in European project management and has successfully completed several training courses in various sectors (social sector, health care, eCommerce, tourism, environmental economy, journalism, marketing/PR, new media and intercultural issues) both

in the framework of European and national funded projects. Besides this BUPNET developed and conducted the LEVEL5 approach on which the work in this project was based on.



www.csvnet.it

CSVnet, the Italian National Coordinating Body of Volunteer Support Centres (VSCs), was officially opened in 2003 and today it unifies and represents 75 VSCs, with the objective of strengthening the cooperation and the exchange of experiences, competences and services among their members.



www.alliance-network.eu

The Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations is an International Non-Governmental Youth Organisation that represents national organisations which promote intercultural education,

understanding and peace through voluntary service. Since the year 2000 different member organizations started to foster the participation of senior volunteers in their activities autonomously or through European funded pilot projects.



www.frk.or.at

The Research Institute of the Red Cross (FRK) broadly approaches relevant societal problems and works with its partners on developing creative and innovative solutions. The institute is currently participating in national and international research projects and programmes in the spirit of the high principles of the Red Cross, mainly focusing on rescue, emergency care and security, labour market, employment, volunteer services, health promotion and prevention.



www.kansallisetmaahanmuutajat.fi

Kamut, The National Coalition for Immigrants in Finland, was founded in 1985. The main idea of Kamut is to give its members the opportunity to be active in society, to stand up for things that are important to them, to talk about these and to change them for the better. It organises training for its members in societal matters, it develops wide scale information campaigns, it conducts research related to inclusion and participation, and it encourages immigrants to be active citizens.



www.lunaria.org

Lunaria is an association started in 1992 carrying out research, information, training and action on the social economy, immigration, youth programmes and promotion of voluntary service for all. Lunaria has 16 permanent workers and runs several European, national and local projects. They are currently members of the network of the Alliance of the European Voluntary Service Organizations and AVSO Association of Voluntary Service Organisations.



www.bmknet.hu

The Budapest Cultural Centre (BCC) is the professional service institution of the community cultural institutions, civil organizations and communities of the city, yet its services are offered to the widest professional audience as well as to the general public. The centre delivers services in the field of information, education, methodology and art.



4. HOW RIVER CAME TO BE

The original idea of the EU-project RIVER arose from the focus of the European Year of Volunteering 2011 combined with the European Year of Active Ageing 2012. Given the demographic trend and the increasing number of elderly people in Europe, it seems even more crucial to create opportunities for elderly to stay active. Involving a larger number of seniors in voluntary work might turn out to be a major tool in active ageing strategies while on the other hand the increasing involvement of senior people in volunteering is essential for the vitality of the voluntary sector. Following these two principles, the RIVER project initially aimed at promoting senior- and intergenerational volunteering by helping to make senior volunteers' competence development more visible and to give more attention to the engagement of elderly people.

To achieve that aim, a tailor-made planning and validation system for senior volunteering was developed and tested in intergenerational volunteering contexts (see chapter 4.3).

The method may seem simple in itself, but behind it lie years of research, testing, re-drafting and adapting. In this chapter the authors want to explain the theoretical background of the RIVER methodology

and give an overview on the concepts on which it is based on.

4.1 RIVER theoretical background

The RIVER project aimed at adapting LEVEL5, a comprehensive methodology for assessing and validating competences acquired in informal learning settings to the specific requirements of the volunteering sector. The effects (or the impact) of informal learning can be displayed through the development of competence (e.g. empowerment, improvement of “soft” skills, activity level, self esteem, attitudes towards other groups, civic knowledge etc.).

The system LEVEL5 has been developed and piloted in a series of seven LLP-projects between 2005 and 2012 and offers an approach to assess evidence and validate the cognitive, activity related, and affective competence development of learners in informal and non-formal learning contexts. (more information: www.reveal-eu.org) LEVEL5 has been piloted and applied in more than 40 learning projects and scientifically evaluated in the framework of two international PhD theses.

Initially LEVEL5 was specially designed to serve

- target groups that learn outside formal education contexts and
- their learning facilitators, adult learning providers, care organisations, grassroot projects and others.

Individual or group competences are evaluated in a process-oriented way, visualised in a 3-dimensional cube model and fully documented in a specific software system.

The LEVEL5 methodology is based on the fundamental idea that a competence is the ability to apply a synthesis of

- knowledge
- skills
- attitudes

in a particular situation (=context) and in a particular quality (=level).

Consequently the LEVEL5 developers assumed that learning outcomes can be displayed with the help of three components or dimensions:

1. the knowledge component
2. the activity component
3. the affective component

The third dimension in particular is often neglected in the evaluation of learning outcomes, although, in most informal learning projects, this “affective dimension” is of major importance. For the informal learning evaluation process the competence levels of an individual are set at 5 levels for each dimension of learning (knowledge, activity and affective) thus giving rise to the name: LEVEL5.

Hence the kernel of the system is a 3-dimensional visualisation system – the LEVEL5 cube:

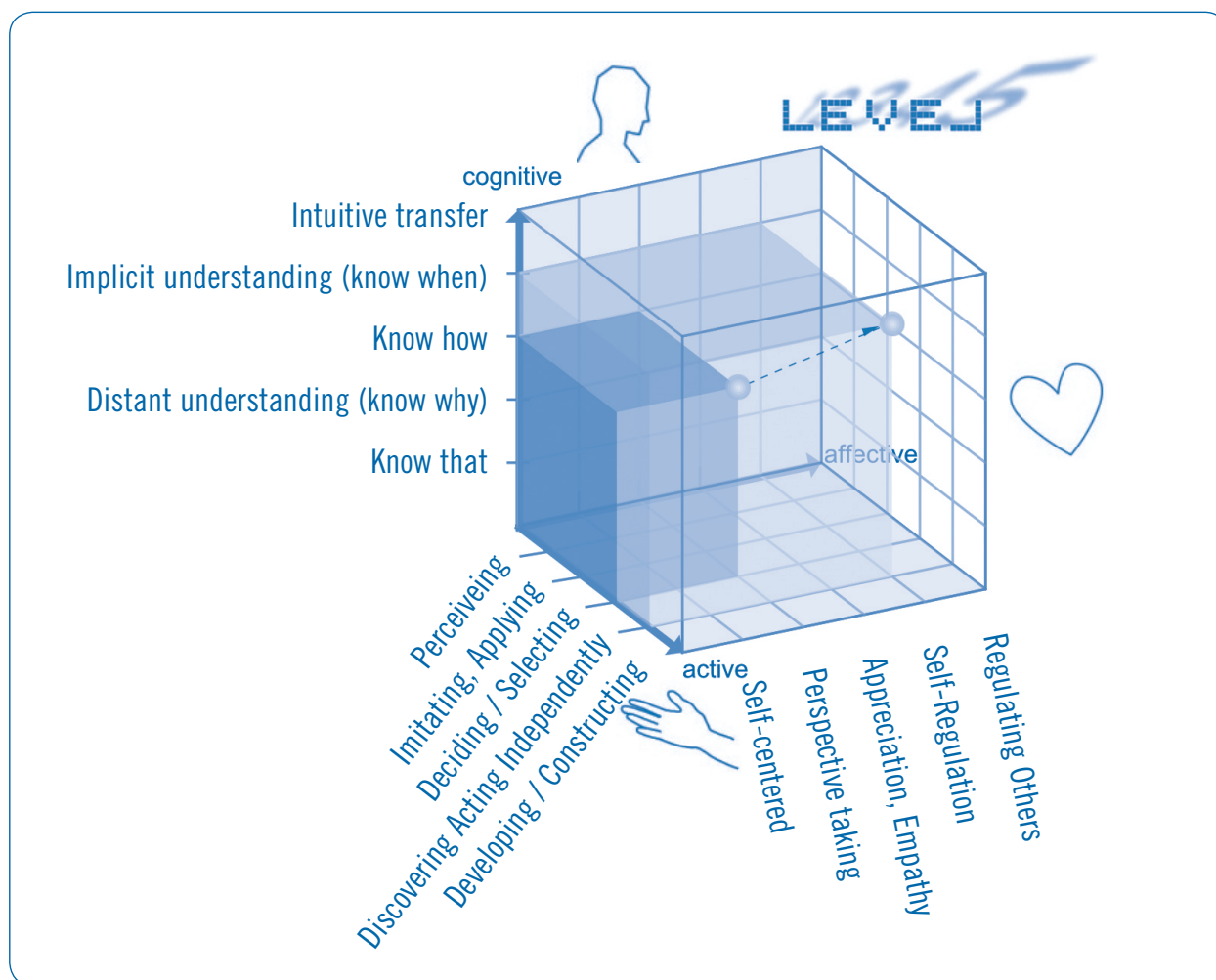


Fig.1: The LEVEL5 cube as model to visualise competence development

RIVER is the adaption of the LEVEL5 system to volunteering settings. As described above the project activities during the development of RIVER focused on seniors who act in the context of intergenerational volunteering projects. The description of piloting activities (chapter 4.3.) shows very clear that RIVER was primarily tested with seniors, who engage in different volunteering activities and projects. Without anticipating all results of the testing, it can be said that one main finding was that RIVER is a methodology, which is not only limited to be used in senior volunteering but for working with volunteers of all ages!

4.2 The concepts behind RIVER

The theory behind RIVER is based on a mixture of five concepts that, at first, might appear to have very little in common. The way they are combined to create an innovative methodology applicable throughout adult learning represents one of the strengths, and an original dimension, of RIVER. These concepts, explained below, are recognition, intergenerational, volunteering, experiences, and results.

Recognition

Recognition and validation of acquired competences has become a major concern in today's society. Mobility and continuous changes in the labour market make it necessary to document all skills and

experiences. Today a certificate is a *sine qua non* for demonstrating one's competences.

The recognition of learning is a priority of European Union actions in education, training and youth. Based on common principles adopted by the Council in 2004, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, Cedefop, published European guidelines on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which provide a tool for the development of certification practices that also take account of the voluntary sector.

Volunteering activities as a form of learning are seen as important opportunities for the acquisition and development of specific competences, including both hard- and soft skills. Senior volunteering in particular creates opportunities for older people to stay active and to share the knowledge and experience acquired over a lifetime. The appropriate recognition and certification of these skills, by validating informal learning in such a variety of settings as the volunteering sector includes, requires an adapted, flexible tool, and a methodology that goes beyond the classical referencing of competences against pre-defined standards. Recognition needs to be based on distance travelled, on evidence that development occurred, no matter what the start and end points are.

Intergenerational

Intergenerational practice refers to activities involving more than one generation. The Beth Johnson Foundation defines intergenerational practice as aiming “to bring generations together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and which help to build more cohesive communities.” The European Network for Intergenerational Learning further clarifies this definition and assigns three criteria for a learning process to be truly intergenerational: at least two generations are involved, the activity is planned rather than accidental, and there are reciprocal learning benefits (the parties learn from each other). Intergenerational practice and intergenerational learning are inclusive approaches, building on the resources that different generations have to offer each other.

But apart from being a context in which activities or learning happen, intergenerational refers also to a competence, defined for the purposes of this partnership as the ability to work with people of different generations, aware of the relationships determined by the cultural context of age, and the ability to understand, accept and adopt behavioural patterns of another generation.

The RIVER Project and the resulting methodology focused on both dimensions, looking at some volunteering activities where different generations came together, and developing a reference system for the

development of intergenerational cooperation competence.

Volunteering

Volunteering is an activity that is present in all societies, and at all times. Whether formally recognised and regulated or happening in a totally unstructured environment, volunteering remains, in fact, the oldest “profession” human society has known: people volunteered long before economic systems introduced the concept of selling one’s time. And it remains today one of the most appreciated and practiced “professions”, one that youth, adults and seniors choose to take part in.

Senior volunteering has been a major aspect of European societies, reflected both in policy priori-



Intergenerational volunteering project, AT

ties and in everyday activities. It plays a key role in our society and demands exposure and recognition. However, unlike youth volunteering, it is often forgotten in the political discourse about the benefits of volunteering. Recent developments have changed that. It is now recognised as a type of activity that brings generations together and creates benefits for both – the volunteers and the organisations involved. Senior volunteering activities provide new learning opportunities and contribute to the ageing population's well-being and life balance. Senior volunteering as a way of informal learning provides organisations with volunteers who have acquired extensive knowledge and experience over a lifetime period.

People often volunteer to be useful to their community or for specific projects they want to support. They may also want to learn a trade, to feel part of the community, or to stay active. Volunteering has also traditionally been the backbone of civic participation. More recently, policy makers have been encouraging volunteering as a tool for the development and preservation of competences and skills, or as a major tool in active ageing strategies.

It is an accepted fact that, when people act together and engage in new tasks and experiences collectively, they invariably learn together and from each other. Hence volunteering is considered a major arena for informal education. And the most valuable contribution of volunteering to learning is based on




Volunteers of different age groups, RIVER-piloting project, IT

experiencing new social engagements, applying a very rich set of soft skills, and confronting personal attributes and values.

Experiences

“Tell me and I’ll forget, show me and I’ll remember, involve me and I will understand.” This well-known Chinese proverb epitomises the universally accepted truth that learning through experience, learning by doing, is the most effective form of developing a competence or acquiring a skill.

Voluntary activities are primarily experiences, situations in which people do things. The strongest single reason or motive for doing voluntary work is not an ostensible desire to learn, yet learning is bound to happen: in helping others, in showing readiness for new experiences, in taking up new challenges, in searching for change, people acquire new experi-



ences, and thus learn something new or develop a competence that they already have. These experiences can be structured either as learning activities, as so-called non-formal learning opportunities in which the volunteer intentionally participates with the aim of learning, or as unintentional and unstructured learning, as so-called informal learning opportunities that are not conceptualised in terms of learning outcomes. It is particularly these latter experiences that were of interest in the development of the RIVER Methodology

In both cases, however, volunteers' learning is not usually certified. Here RIVER fills a major void.

Results

Volunteering activities may have many results, from immediate relief and concrete support to less measurable or visible ones in terms of climate change or cultural benefits. Learning through volunteering has been shown to have positive effects on the health of older people: according to data in the Survey of Health Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), there is a positive relationship between volunteering and subjective well-being as regards health, life satisfaction, and life expectancy. In addition, there is evidence that it prevents the onset of depression at all ages.

Apart from these subjective results, less measurable on short- and medium-term, volunteering activities, whether planned as learning or not, can

have results on a very concrete level. Such results, identified in different studies and more recently anticipated through policy documents, are to do with the increase of personal linguistic, social and intercultural skills and competences, increased active citizenship competences, or intensified European and global outlook in the case of cross-border volunteering.

Such results, although visible, are rarely recognised in a formal manner through certification.

The five concepts above would eventually fuse into the RIVER Methodology, as described in this booklet.

4.3 Piloting experiences

The RIVER Methodology was tested in 5 different countries (Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary and Italy) through 13 piloting projects with the involvement of 27 senior volunteers acting in intergenerational settings.

The projects piloted in the 5 partner countries had different characteristics.

In **Austria** the partner organisation piloted the RIVER methodology in 4 different projects: an after-school centre for children 6 to 15 where senior volunteers work as mentors; a social housing complex in which the residents work with health promotion activities, becoming “health advocates” in their community; an international school project that provides stu-



Piloting project, AT, copyright: Wiener Wohnen

dents (aged 15-19) with educational programs on entrepreneurship with the help of retired professionals acting as volunteer external consultants; a scout group in which senior volunteers support scout leaders on different issues including running local scout activities, managing finances, and organising events.

In **Finland** the partner organisation piloted the RIVER methodology on 2 quite different projects. The first project aimed to create a network for entrepreneurs with migration backgrounds or immigrants wishing to start their own enterprise. Networks were set up by young entrepreneurs, with skills in modern social networking techniques, in collaboration with older entrepreneurs, familiar with the business world. The second project was carried out during a major 2-day cultural festival in Helsinki, where volunteers were involved in the preparation and delivery of activities in collaboration with a local non-profit organisation.

In **Germany** the partner organisation piloted the RIVER methodology in 4 different projects: one sports club in which the 70-year old volunteer president was stepping down, handing his position over to a younger volunteer; a collective house where people of any age can stay to work and live together on a short- or long-term basis; a regional volunteering fire department, totally managed by volunteers of any volunteers or any age; and an elderly home elderly home in Göttingen where, besides the official program provided by the staff, residents are offered a lot of activities supported or directly organised by volunteers.

In **Hungary** the partner organisation piloted the RIVER methodology in a senior volunteering exchange project. Seniors from Hungary and



Senior volunteering exchange project on photography, HU

Germany were part of an exchange during which they took photos and contributed to an exhibition. As part of their voluntary work they also educated local people about the social and popular culture of the sending country at informal events. The intercultural studies and the exhibition were presented by the volunteers in a course of an event.

In **Italy** the partner organisation piloted the RIVER methodology with 2 projects. A training course and internship focused on specific competences for volunteers of any age, aimed to focus on the extent to which a mix of volunteering daily-life and training experiences could improve the senior volunteers ability to contribute to their associations; an international exchange for senior volunteers over 50 years old, who had the opportunity to learn specific soft skills and share their learning experience with young trainers.

4.3.1 Structure of the piloting

Each piloting project had its own peculiarity, but in each country the partner organisation planned the activities following the same settled layout in three parts:

1. **Preparation:** the preparation phase took place between September 2012 and April 2013 with an average of 2-3 months per project. This time was use to **introduce the volunteers and their facilitators to the project and the aims of RIVER, by using coaching guidelines**, which were developed by the project partners. This happened in face to face meetings, each lasting an average of 1.5 hours.
2. **Volunteering activity:** The volunteering activities started between December 2012 and February 2013 (with the Hungarian exception where this phase started early in October 2012) and ended in almost every partner country in May 2013, with an average duration of 5 months. During this time, the assessment was conducted. **Partners chose two dates for the evaluation of the competences, mainly one at the beginning of the reported period, the second date in the end.** Depending on the assessment method partners used, the average duration of time used for this task was 2.5 hours per meeting.
3. **Evaluation:** At the end of the piloting phase all participating persons (volunteers and volunteer-

ing facilitators were involved in a short evaluation to give their feedback on RIVER.

4.3.2 Assessment of volunteers' competences

The projects carried out in the 5 countries involved many senior volunteers. Volunteers included retired men and women aged between 57 and 73. Finland was an exception in that the partner organisation involved younger volunteers - those aged between 20 and 48 – in addition to the main 'senior' target group.

RIVER partners agreed to assess each volunteer in each country on the specific "intergenerational cooperation" competence, according to the reference system developed by the partner organisations consortium during the first year of the project (see page 30, 31). Then, every partner had the opportunity to assess one additional competence on each volunteer, so that they developed reference systems for these competences: intercultural communication, team-working, virtual communication, decision making, problem solving and diversity management.

In all countries the assessment of specific competence improvements of senior volunteers were completed successfully.

All of them developed skills during the projects, and the initial and final assessment indicated, in some cases, visible improvements. In other cases, improvements were less obviously visible.


In more situations, senior volunteers showed a greater capacity to accomplish given goals and a strong ability to work with young people, putting themselves on an equal-level and listening carefully, not with the sole purpose of giving advice, but rather to learn new things.

4.3.3 Methodology in the evaluation process

During the evaluation process, the 5 piloting partners used several assessment tools (between brackets the number of the countries in which every assessment tool had been used): individual interviews (3), self-assessment (3), focus groups (2), observation (2), training courses (1), story-telling (1), questionnaire (1), grids of problem-solving processes (1), external peer-to-peer evaluation (1), role-play (1).

In some projects there were several unplanned situations in which partner organisations had to help volunteers (face-to-face or by phone) in the self-assessment process, clarify special needs or answer questions. These were also opportunities to make a kind of unforeseen assessment.

One peculiar aspect of the Hungarian RIVER experience was the **"3 chairs story telling"** assessment method chosen: the volunteers were asked to talk about some specific events of their past in which they demonstrated to have the assessed skill. Depending on which chair they were sitting in, they could discuss specific aspects of the con-



text (active, emotional and cognitive). The 3 chairs help to focus on the different aspects of the story. The facilitator was a guest and could ask solution-focused questions. The final step of the process was the “cognitive chair” in which volunteers had the opportunity to give an overview of their situation in the context of that specific event. This assessment tool was particularly appreciated by the project consortium because it worked well with the volunteers, in particular to separate the 3 learning dimensions (activity, affective, cognitive), and it was included in the assessment tools catalogue of the RIVER methodology.

In the same way the Finnish experience provided another situation regarding the “**focus group**” assessment tool, which was seen as effective because the comments made by one volunteer often elicited reflection and comments from the other, thus supporting each other in the assessment process.

In all the projects the atmosphere was generally positive and the quality of the interaction was good. There were never issues that led to conflict, none of the volunteers complained about the use of the methodology or questioned its value. Another common aspect of many projects was a very vivid and nice atmosphere during the final meeting.

4.3.4 Achievements of the methodology

Benefits for the volunteers

■ *Learning awareness*

The most immediate achievement of RIVER, for some seniors, was the overall realisation that volunteering generates learning. RIVER gave them the opportunity to see themselves as learners, not only as someone who is volunteering to help others. It opened a place for self-reflection in a context usually oriented towards action more than reflection. In all cases, the focus and main motivation for volunteering remained the volunteering activity itself, not the acquisition and measurement of competences.

As an added value, during the assessment and reflection of the Austrian volunteers, they realised the rich life experience they already possess and the skills acquired during their lifetime, that were now made visible as a result of the RIVER methodology.

■ *Purpose of certification for senior volunteers*

The final part of RIVER methodology, which culminates in issuing the certificate, was not as relevant for seniors as it usually is for other target groups, such as young people. The certificate was considered as something interesting and appealing for the volunteers themselves and their close circle (family and friends), as a way to make the

newly discovered learning visible. For this specific purpose, visualisation of the results appeared to be the most important element and reason for existence of the certificate.

■ *Purpose of certification for young volunteers*

In the pilots with an intergenerational learning component, the young volunteers that got in contact with or used RIVER methodology, expressed a much higher interest in receiving the final certificate. The main difference from the seniors, was that the young people intended to use the certificate for specific and concrete purposes, like applying for a job or a studying opportunity. This may especially apply to young people with no previous working or internship experience that wish to enter the job market.

■ *Motivation and commitment*

The use of RIVER within the volunteering piloting projects contributed towards increasing seniors' motivation to get actively engaged in the activity itself and to become more active in the volunteering organisation. In some cases, they gained a higher awareness of the role they can play as volunteers and their willingness to take more responsibilities within their project or organisation. In other cases, the learning awareness raised through RIVER provides more personal reasons to the motivation of offering help to oth-

ers through volunteering and keep (or start) being active members of society.

Benefits for the voluntary organisations


All the partner organisations agreed on the absolute value of the RIVER methodology in improving the quality of planning, delivery, follow-up and day-by-day monitoring of volunteering activities.

■ *Reflection as an added element of the volunteering activity*

RIVER opened a space for reflection and evaluation within the project, something which is not as frequent in volunteering as it is in formal and non-formal educational settings. Moreover, the structure and specific methodology of RIVER, which address one or few competences, enables the observation and measurement of the impact of the volunteering activity on the volunteer, not from a general point of view but targeting something very specific, the chosen competence/s, which, as a second effect, may also help the facilitator leading the assessment.

■ *Improve project planning*

The results of the assessment process make the volunteer's strengths and weaknesses more visible. This can help to adjust a future volunteering activity to the volunteer's competences and learning interests, and select the right volunteer



for a specific task. As a matter of fact, RIVER opens up the possibility for facilitators and project coordinators to think very carefully about the basic skills required by volunteers to contribute in a certain activity. Also the needs for further training or preparation of volunteers become more visible.

- *Transferability of knowledge to other contexts*

In the case of voluntary organisations that are young or not experienced in project coordination and volunteer' management, RIVER can serve as a guide and source of inspiration in order for the staff and coordinators to better plan and monitor other activities, whether voluntary or not, by focusing on elements such as impact, personal development of the ones involved and assessment (processes that are not very widespread in volunteering field).

- *Recognition of informal learning results of volunteering*

Facilitators in the pilots stated that RIVER, by showing the development of specific and defined competences through clear indicators, contributes to acknowledge and recognise the value of non-formal and informal learning opportunities, specially in national/regional contexts that tend to give priority to formal education. It can become a powerful tool for recognition towards institu-

tions and decision-making bodies, but can also be a useful way to attract more volunteers.

4.3.5 Challenges faced

- *Using the reference system*

Facilitators stated that one of the most challenging aspects of the RIVER methodology is to create or adapt the reference system of a specific competence, according to the target group/individual and the setting. It was especially difficult, particularly for non-experienced evaluators, to clearly separate the three dimensions (cognitive, activity, affective) and choose the right assessment method for the volunteer, according to the setting and the available time and human resources.

- *Motivating volunteers*

Another common challenge was motivating senior volunteers to go through the assessment process, which would have been worthwhile. The benefits were understood by the senior volunteers only on a very general level, more as the results of playing a game or of helping someone else rather than as a real personal opportunity of development. This might also be connected to the usual understanding of volunteering uniquely as “offering help” rather than a learning process.

■ *Time management*

In several projects it took much longer than expected to select the volunteers and it made it a bit tricky to find time slots for all volunteers in the assessment phase, to brief them and guide them (above all in their self-assessment). Also, the Hungarian partner noticed that the time of the volunteering activity (3 weeks) was too short to effectively assess a development in “intergenerational cooperation”.

■ *Shifting focus during the volunteering activity*

Implementing RIVER sometimes took volunteers’ and facilitators’ attention and time away from the actual project. After the initial assessment and due to the newly discovered approach to volunteering as a learning experience, volunteers tended in some cases to focus a lot on the learning process to the detriment of the project’s content. The same tendency was outlined from those facilitators that were not external but were involved in the project planning and coordination.

■ *Self-assessment*

In today’s society, seniors are usually less accustomed to self-assessment than younger generations and less oriented to competence development in non-training or non-working settings. In some cases, it was difficult to apply a self-evaluation method with the seniors without the direct support of the facilitator.

■ *Ongoing volunteering activities*


The German partner noticed a peculiar obstacle, that is worth mentioning: the volunteers they found had already been working for several years before in the same field and it was very difficult to think about a concrete activity to single-out from their volunteering daily routine. Also the Austrian partner faced difficulties in finding suitable participants in the piloting, as most of the volunteers were working in projects that had already started before RIVER piloting phase.

■ *Certification*

Certification is an element that motivates the volunteers to take part in the assessment process. Nevertheless, small organisations do not have the necessary staff and time resources to put into practice a very detailed and complex certification process, which might also diminish the assessors’ motivation.

4.4 Recommendations to work with RIVER

Based on piloting outcomes, RIVER partners adapted and developed the final products so as to meet the specificities of volunteering sector and respond to the challenges faced. The reference systems of some competences most frequently developed in volunteering projects were adapted by partners to the volunteering sector and included in the **RIVER Manual**, which is delivered on a separate CD.



Moreover, accurate **coaching guidelines** to work with the volunteers as well as concrete and effective assessment methods and instructions to write concise evaluation texts, were produced to accompany the RIVER manual for facilitators.

There might be cases of transnational projects where the hosting or sending partner will be also involved in the initial and final assessment phases or in monitoring the learning process during activity. The **RIVER training concept** (included in the CD) gives detailed information and guidelines on how to introduce RIVER to “new comers” or train other people to use the methodology.

Partners outlined that in order to guarantee the sustainability of the full methodology right through to the final step, the certification tool should be easy to handle, accessible, user-friendly, and accompanied by a detailed manual.

Users of RIVER are recommended to take into account the following aspects when implementing the methodology:

- In order to raise the target’s interest and motivation for learning assessment, thus create a productive and focused environment, the **benefits of RIVER should be clearly and explicitly explained** both to organisations (when transferring knowledge about RIVER to others) and volunteers (when using RIVER directly).
- Provided that RIVER requires time and resources that are scarcely available to voluntary organisations, it is advisable to conduct the **evaluations with groups of volunteers**, instead of individuals. Nevertheless and especially in the case of seniors, whenever needed due to personal needs of the volunteer, enough time must be dedicated to the first meeting between volunteers and evaluators. This is when the volunteer might need time to explain his/her story and motivation, might need to feel recognised and valued and to be welcomed in a positive atmosphere that dismisses the idea of “assessment as testing”.
- RIVER might be more effective for volunteering **activities longer than three weeks**, as the development of competences becomes more evident and easier to assess.
- The assessment through RIVER should not become the overarching element of the volunteering activity, or a way to control how the project is run, but should be always kept as **a side aspect of the volunteering activity**, supporting the learning and recognition process. This also implies dedicating the least time possible, still maintaining a good quality, to the assessment, so to maintain the focus on the volunteering action itself. **Reducing the time frame** for the assessment meetings has also proven, in the example of the Finnish piloting, to contribute to

keeping the volunteer's motivation high towards the evaluation process: some volunteers, thanks to this, felt that the return-on-investment was high, and they could see in a more positive light the benefits of RIVER process.

- When volunteers are not used to **self-assessment** or competence assessment in general, **external support and assistance** from the facilitator made it possible for several senior volunteers to gradually enter into a self-assessment process. For example, during the pilots it was helpful when the facilitator, after observing the volunteer "in action", pointed out some improvements, that were then confirmed by the volunteers.
- RIVER can be applied more effectively to activities that have **specific starting and ending points**, which clearly mark the set of time and actions that the volunteer should think about at the final assessment. Such a clear time frame can also help volunteers, especially in the case of seniors, to separate the learning that occurred during the volunteering project from the learning that took place in past life experiences (including other volunteering activities).
- The **facilitators** applying RIVER should preferably have some previous experience in evaluation and facilitation, and should have contact with the volunteering project, so as to be better able to

point out aspects that had changed in the senior volunteer's competences during the project.

- RIVER methodology should be used without regard for the age of the volunteer: it could have strong benefits for **young volunteers**, who could use the certificate in their job-seeking or future training/studying activities.

The following chapter gives an overview on the 5-Step process of RIVER, illustrating the procedure with the help of a case study.

5. RIVER – RECOGNISING LEARNING IN VOLUNTEERING SETTINGS

The LEVEL5 approach is based on a five step procedure, starting with the description of the learning project and ending with the evidencing of learning outcomes and the validation of learners and learning projects.

The procedure is supported by a software which was also adapted in the RIVER project for the needs of the validation process in the setting of voluntary work.

In the RIVER project, the five steps and the templates for the documentation have been **adapted for the volunteering sector**. In this chapter, each step will be described shortly, **a case study shall help to illustrate the practical implementation of the methodology**. **For a detailed description of the RIVER methodology, please read the RIVER manual, which is provided on an additional CD.**

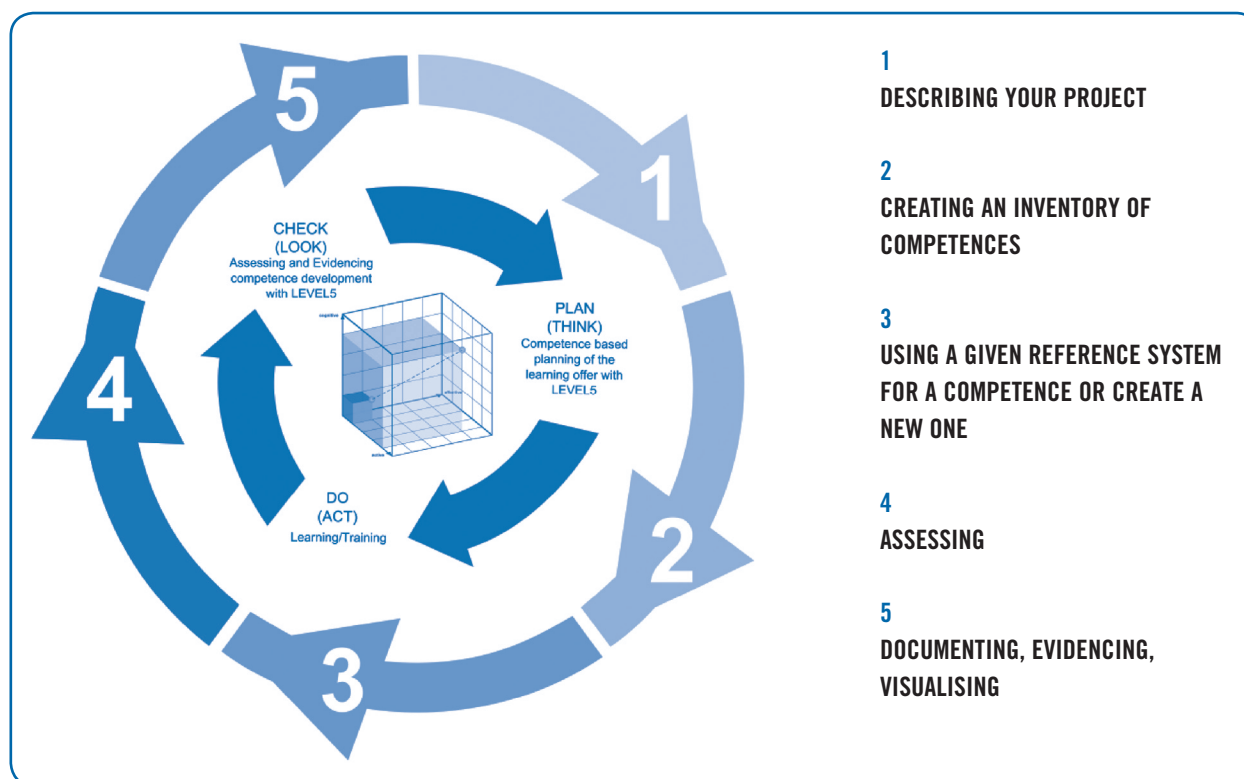
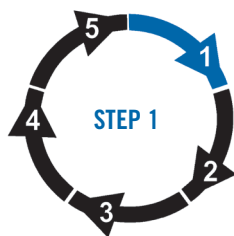


Fig. 2: Visualisation of the 5-step LEVEL5 approach

5.1 Five Steps for using RIVER – a case study

STEP 1: Project Description of the Volunteering project or activity



In the first step the volunteering project or activity is described in a predefined template. In the voluntary sector one can differ between two main types of volunteering activities:

- Specific (senior) volunteering projects which have been created to reach a specific project aim. This type is easier as there are already time frames that can be used for the assessment
- Current volunteering activities, carried out by seniors or volunteers of other ages. For this type of activity it is important to define a specific activity or learning situation to create a time frame for the assessment

The project descriptions include the task of the project, the project aim, the involved volunteers and their characteristics. This first step is crucial for learning about the framework conditions where voluntary work takes place, how it is carried out, who the volunteers are, what their motivation is and

what is the reason is for wanting to validate their competences. In this step it will also be determined whether the competence development will be measured for a whole group or for a single person. When an organisation plans a new volunteering activity or a training for their volunteers, it can be particularly helpful to dedicate more time to the project description template. If the validation process refers to an existing activity or project, it is sufficient to write a short project description and to add the most relevant data.

Case study: Volunteering project “Business Angels”

Business Angels (BA) are senior experts, who volunteer to support young entrepreneurs in their business developments. The project takes place in Hannover, Germany. There is a business club of retired managers and other professionals who applied in cooperation with a project development agency for ESF funds for young entrepreneurs. In contrast to other “mentoring projects” this project has a strong volunteering component.

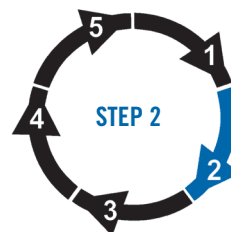
The volunteers' motivation is to support the young entrepreneurs, they want to share their experience and help the youngsters to avoid mistakes in starting their own business. They are also often curious to explore the business life from a different perspective.

The BAs meet regularly (once a month) with the young entrepreneurs for a business talk. Each BA is responsible for 1 entrepreneur. Between the meetings the entrepreneurs report at given times, and the BAs offer their comments.

The aim to validate the competences of a volunteering organisation working with seniors is that they want to give value to the work of the Business Angels by validating their competence development. They also want to achieve a higher participation of senior volunteers in the project. The volunteering facilitator Mrs. Baker carries out the validation process, concentrating on the evaluation of one volunteer, Mr. Adler.

The template “STEP 1: Project description” is included in the RIVER manual.

STEP 2: Selecting topics – The Inventory



By choosing one or more competences an individual **SET OF COMPETENCES** is created. There are three options how to continue the process:

1. Choose one or more of the below listed competences. For these competences preformatted reference systems are available.
2. Choose one or more of the below listed competences and specify it according to the needs of the target group by overwriting it. E.g. **Flexibility** can be turned into **Flexibility concerning time management**.
3. If none of the preselected competences fits to the target group, choose a competence that is not on the list but is suitable for the target group. For this competence a new reference system has to be set up.

In addition to the choice of competence, the competence needs to be described according to the definition in the specific setting. This helps to clarify your definition of Teamwork, Problem solving or Flexibility.¹

¹ With this, you can find out if this is really the competence on which you should be focusing.

Case study:

In the competence validation process, Mrs. Baker wants to focus on the topic: “Intergenerational cooperation”. In the context of the Business Angels project, “Intergenerational cooperation” is understood as the ability to work together with different people of different ages, accepting different working styles, different ways of communicating with each other, etc.

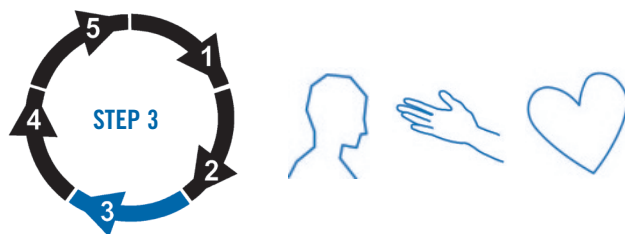
For Mr. Adler, the volunteer, the position of being a mentor is a completely new one, especially in this setting of interacting with younger persons in single and group work. The topic “intergenerational cooperation” shall show how he deals with communication styles but also attitudes and strategies to work, which younger people use, and how he could develop this ability throughout the course of the 1-year project.

The template “STEP 2: Selection of competences” is included in the RIVER manual.

The RIVER consortium developed an inventory of topics which can be useful to focus on in volunteering:

Inventory	<i>Your specified competence</i>	<i>Your description of the competence</i>
Intergenerational cooperation		
Intercultural communication		
Problem solving		
Teamwork		
Virtual communication		
Diversity management		
Flexibility		
Autonomy		
Networking		
Decision Making		

STEP 3: Creating a reference system



A reference system is developed on the basis of the three dimensions – cognitive, activity related and affective – for the five competence levels.

The reference system is a table which offers a description of the characteristics of a competence, referencing the 5 development levels across the three dimensions. As learning always takes place in three dimensions; the cognitive dimension including everything related to knowledge; the active dimension and the affective dimension, relating to emotions and feelings such as motivation. It has to be highlighted, that the reference system is not a static tool but can be adjusted to the target group of volunteers. For the assessor it is possible to change descriptions according to the need of a specific setting or situation.

The RIVER partners adapted and developed several reference systems according to the characteristics of the voluntary settings. To create the validation process as easy as possible, 10 “ready-to-use” reference systems, according to the competence inventories are offered in the RIVER manual.

Case study:

For the validation process of the senior volunteer Mr. Adler in the Business Angels project, Mrs. Baker selects the reference system, according to the chosen topic “intergenerational cooperation” and takes it as the base for the assessment process.

At the beginning she has to take a close look at the reference system and has to think about whether the predefined reference system is suitable for Mr. Adler or if some levels need adapting. It is important to consider the various levels of the reference system, and to ensure that the descriptions of the levels adequately reflect the competence in question.

In a second step, Mrs. Baker thinks about the indicators for the several levels. Some of the indicators were easy to define, in other aspects she is unsure about the right indicators. So she decides to use the first assessment of Mr. Adler to define indicators for the level descriptions.

All 10 RIVER reference systems to be used for STEP 3 are included in the RIVER manual. The following figure shows the reference system for “Intergenerational cooperation”, which was developed in the RIVER project.

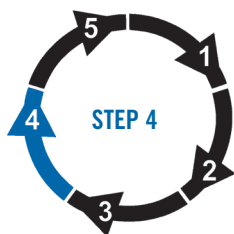
COGNITIVE/KNOWLEDGE				ACTIVITY	
L	Level Titles	Individual description / explanatory statement	Indicators (EXAM-PLES)	Level Titles	Individual description / explanatory statement
5	Know where (Knowledge for transfer)	Knows how to transfer previous knowledge on intergenerational cooperation and turn possible conflicts into beneficial situations. Can identify and use the potential benefits of intergenerational cooperation in different contexts.	Knows how to present to others the benefits of intergenerational cooperation.	Developing Constructing/ Transfer	Ability to develop and elicit ways of intergenerational cooperation. Moves easily in unknown intergenerational cooperation settings and deals without difficulty with age difference.
4	Know when (Implicit understanding)	Knows in practical cases where differences in knowledge, behaviour and attitudes are simply due to generational differences and where they can become challenges. Understands the emotional experience of the other generation in a certain context.	Can use the knowledge to avoid conflicts and to support performance.	Discovering/ acting independently	Ability to test and try out new strategies and actions in order to foster an effective intergenerational cooperation. Tries to propose new ways of intergenerational cooperation.
3	Know how	Knows how different socialisation patterns, as well as cultural, historical and societal realities impact on habits and living styles of individuals thus generating intergenerational tensions.	Can explain the link between certain actions and age.	Deciding/ selecting	Ability to use an already known cooperation strategy for work across generations, in familiar situations.
2	Know why (Distant understanding)	Knows why the different level of experience in life affects the behaviour and thinking of the other generation. Ability to recognise different working and communication styles and reasons.	Can identify the link between certain actions and age.	Using/ Imitating	Ability to react and adapt in certain cases to intergenerational differences in working/acting together. Apply intergenerationally-oriented behaviour when being instructed.
1	Know what	Knows that there is a generation gap and that peers from different generations have different expectations.	Knows how to define the concept of generation.	Perceiving	Perceives different preferences of other generations.

The RIVER reference system for the competence “Intergenerational Cooperation”



		AFFECTIVE		
	Indicators (EXAMPLES)	Level Titles	Individual description/ explanatory statement	Indicators (EXAMPLES)
	Can bring together and mobilise an intergenerational group.	Incorporated	Internalising intergenerational cooperation “living” in the concept of an intergenerational setting. Feeling that one has to foster the intergenerational cooperation. Seeks opportunities for working with other generations.	Inspire peers and junior/senior co-workers to respect the characteristics of the other generation.
	Can lead an already performing intergenerational group efficiently.	Self-regulation	Refrains from own plans and positions for the sake of the quality/effectiveness of the intergenerational cooperation.	Avoids conflict by promoting intergenerational benefits. Accepts different outcomes for different participants.
	Can assess and react in accordance with the intergenerational setting.	Appreciation	Appreciates the value of intergenerational exchange for all parties involved. Has a positive approach/feeling towards generational diversity.	Signs of sympathy and appreciation.
	Exhibits typical behavioural patterns in a training context.	Perspective taking	Is open to and interested in intergenerational cooperation.	Open and curious attitude towards the other generation.
	Ability to identify a generation gap.	Self-oriented	Acknowledges the gap between the generations without relating them to the own situation.	Showing symptoms of diversity.

STEP 4: Assessment



Step 4 is about measuring. Competences are not static, but evolve and develop during learning. Therefore, especially when validating personal and social competences, it is important

to show and evidence their **development**, and with that, the potential of a learner (here: volunteer) regarding the competence. Therefore we try to assess the volunteers' competences at the beginning and at the end of a volunteering activity/project.

There are various methods suitable to assess competences and competence developments.

The Assessment concept and methods should be chosen according to the given context and objectives. From the experiences in the RIVER piloting one can say, that the assessment phase is the most complex step in the procedure since it requires one to choose the appropriate assessment method which fits to the setting and to the person or group who will be evaluated. Limitation of personal or time resources is another aspect which has to be taken into consideration in the assessment step. From the experiences of testing the RIVER methodology in volunteering activities and projects, the

RIVER partners defined 5 methods/tools for assessment which seem to be most suitable for the volunteering sector:

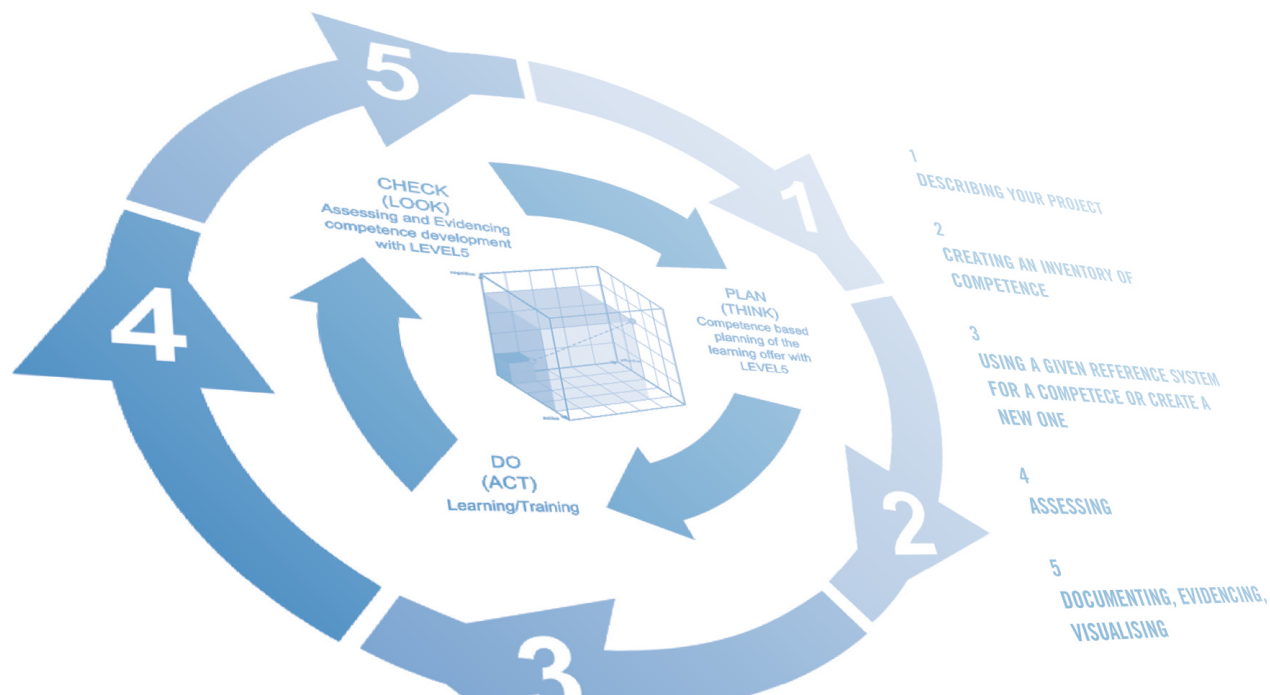
- 1. Self assessment:** with the help of the reference sheet volunteers rate themselves and give a short explanation why they rate themselves on a certain level
- 2. Peer assessment:** follows the process of the self-assessment, but the procedure is done in pairwork together with another volunteer or the volunteering facilitator.
- 3. Focus group:** The volunteers take part in a focus group discussion with the assessors. They analyse their own profile in relation to the specified competences and establish a rating in relation to the descriptions of competences provided.
- 4. Observation:** the volunteers are accompanied while they are working. It is crucial to be a silent partner who watches what he/she is doing and how the volunteer react in different situations. A kind of diary can be used to take notes on the observation.
- 5. Three chairs:** The person who is evaluated is in a room with three chairs. One is marked as the cognitive chair, one is the active and one the affective chair. The person is asked to sit down on one chair after the other and he/her is made aware which one it is. Now the volunteer is asked how he/she sees himself/herself in regard to the dimension he/she is focusing on. The results are recorded.

Case study:

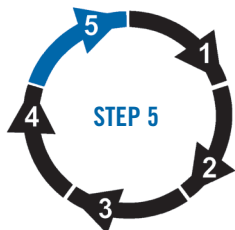
Mrs. Baker decides to schedule two dates for the assessment of Mr. Adler. The first date of the assessment is determined with one month after starting the Business Angels projects – that means right at the beginning of the voluntary activity. The second date of assessment is planned one month before the end of the project. Mrs. Baker decides to use peer assessment, to do the rating procedure in pair work together with Mr. Adler.

Here in a first step self-evaluation is used to enable Mr. Adler to reflect on the reference system and he can rate himself on a certain level. The same time Mrs. Baker rates Mr. Adler's competence levels in using the reference sheet. After having done this, both reflect about their ratings, explaining their reasons to rate Mr. Adler on a certain level and compare and discuss the results.

An assessment grid and a detailed description of the recommended tools are included in the RIVER manual.



STEP 5: Rating



The fifth and final step of the RIVER methodology includes the summary, presentation and visualisation of the results. With the help of the reference system,

the learning outcomes are rated at different times (through the assessment) and the different competence levels are described. The description should also include evidence of the learning outcome. The visualisation of the assessment result is supported by software, which is based mainly on the templates, used in the first four steps of the procedure.

The ratings are justified and documented in the software and, if applicable, in certificates. With the supporting software, certificates for the volunteers can be automatically generated. In case the software is not available, an alternative template for generating RIVER certificates has been developed and is included in the RIVER manual.

Case study:

After each assessment – the self reflection and the peer-assessment Mrs. Baker conducted with Mr. Adler, Mrs. Baker rates Mr. Adler's competence level for "intergenerational cooperation" with the help of the reference system. The first rating happens after the first peer-evaluation, the second rating is done after the second assessment at the end of the Business Angels project.

The template for STEP 5 is included in the RIVER manual. In addition to this, hints for writing evaluation texts as well as the template for a RIVER certificate are offered in the manual.

- 1 DESCRIBING YOUR PROJECT
- 2 CREATING AN INVENTORY OF COMPETENCE

This is the completed rating template
“intergenerational cooperation” for Mr. Adler:

Institution: Business Angels Hannover
Participant: Mr. Adler
Date of birth: 27.10.1942
Country: Germany

RIVER	Rate 1	Start December 2012	Rate 2	May 2013	Resume
cognitive	3 ⁴	Mr. Adler has advanced knowledge of how different social backgrounds influence different working habits.	4	He knows in which way he can benefit from the work with young entrepreneurs (e.g. new media) and what kind of knowledge and experiences he can provide them.	At the beginning of the project, Mr. Adler had knowledge based on experiences of his former working life. During the project he got concrete knowledge on working styles of ‘generation X’ and those even younger, and he knows how to benefit from them and how they can benefit from his knowledge.
active	3	Participates actively in the project, following his experiences as a former manager.	4	Adapt his activities according to the modalities in the project, also using more virtual communication.	Mr. Adler had an active role from the beginning of the project. Over the months he learned new strategies, e.g. to use new media, which he implemented successfully in his consulting activities in the project.
affective	2	The participation and motivation to work as a Business Angel shows his interest in intergenerational cooperation.	4	Recognises the need to accept that framework conditions for entrepreneurial work have changed during the years and require new methods. Mr. Adler feels very positive in his role as a mentor.	From the beginning of the project he had a high motivation to work with younger people and to support them. After half a year in the project, he feels the need, to adapt his own strategy, according to new requirements and strategies young people like to use.

Evaluation statement

At the beginning of the project Mr. Adler had broad experiences and in-depth knowledge in dealing with different generations from his private life and from his former professional life, but working with young entrepreneurs and the focus on entrepreneurial issues was a new situation for him. In the project Mr. Adler learned a lot about the importance of new working strategies (such as virtual and social media) and how to use them and acted in a way that both parties could optimise the benefit in their cooperation.

⁴ The numbers reflect the competence level in the rating!

The following figure shows how the development in the three dimensions of a competence can be visualised with the use of the supporting software:

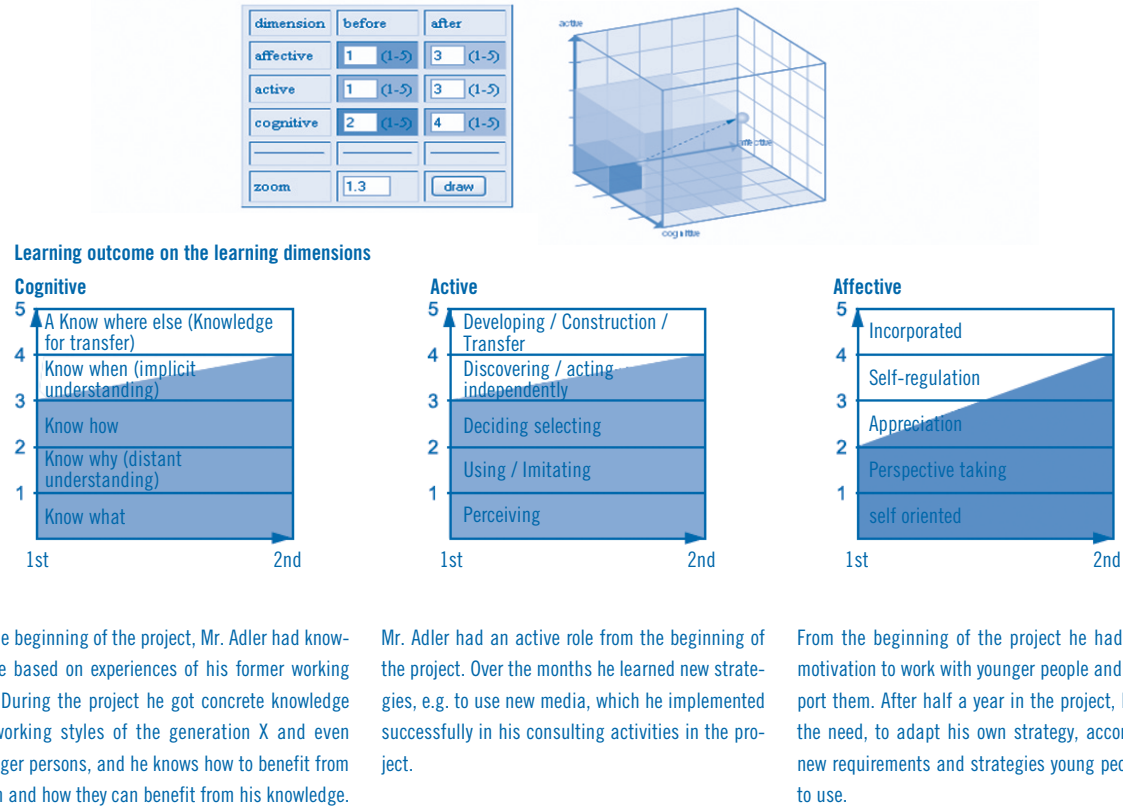


Fig. 3: Visualisation of competence development



5.2 Implementation of the RIVER methodology in the world of volunteering

Working with the RIVER methodology requires preparation – for volunteering facilitators who carry out the validation process as well as for the volunteers themselves – to make them familiar with the aims, the procedure and the benefits of the assessment. RIVER partners designed two materials which support the preparation phase.

The **RIVER training concept** prepares the staff and trainers of voluntary organisations for applying the assessment process.

The **coaching guidelines**, included in the RIVER manual, support the above mentioned professionals to introduce the RIVER methodology to volunteers to be assessed.

5.2.1 The RIVER training concept

As the RIVER methodology is based on the LEVEL5 approach volunteering facilitators should be familiar with this method, so that they understand the five steps of the procedure and can easily apply the RIVER methodology.

In the RIVER project a two day training programme was developed.

The RIVER training concept and training material is included on the CD.

Aims of the training are:

- to learn how to assess the development of competences in volunteering activities
- to know how to include and support a learning process in volunteering activities

The target groups of the training are staff and trainers from organisations

- working with volunteers
- are interested in evaluating, validating and demonstrating the learning outcomes of volunteering activities

By the end of the training participants will be able to

- understand the RIVER methodology
- apply the steps of LEVEL5
- plan the volunteering activity
- validate volunteers' competences and their development within a learning activity
- differentiate competence dimensions
- apply different assessment methods
- summarise the validation and learning outcomes according to a certain quality criteria and to create a certificate
- use the supporting software

Training content

Planning the workshop

This section gives useful information on practical issues to those who would like to run a workshop. The planning part helps trainers to think over the following aspects of the preparation:

- Who is the target group?
- What type of venue do you need?
- Which resources do you need?
- What is the best timeframe for your workshop?

Running the workshop

The training manual contains theoretical inputs on:

- The RIVER project
- The connection between volunteering and learning
- The RIVER process
- Assessment methods
- Reasoning and Rating

In addition to the theoretical backgrounds various training activities support the workshop participants to understand the assessment process and put it into practice.

5.2.2 Coaching Guidelines

Before starting a validation process with individual volunteers or a group of volunteers, it is crucial to deliver information on the RIVER methodology, its aims and its benefit.

RIVER coaching guidelines help the volunteering facilitators to provide the volunteers with necessary information on the assessment by explaining the approach.

The detailed coaching guidelines can be found in the RIVER manual. In general the coaching session with the volunteer should focus on these aspects:

- Volunteering facilitators should deliver some basic information on the validation method. Here it is crucial to provide the right amount of information to avoid confusion.
- It has to be clear for the volunteer, that this is not a process to be tested or to be compared to the performance of other volunteers. The participation in the RIVER validation process is rather to support them in tapping into their full potential and show them how much they can learn during the voluntary activity.
- Privacy has to be ensured as well as the fact that the participation is optional.
- The guidelines contain questions about the senior volunteer's life situation which help to gain a better understanding of the areas where they intend to improve their competences, where they see pos-



sibilities for personal growth and what motivation they have.

- Some questions refer to the volunteering activity, already existing experiences, motivation to volunteer, possible strengths and weaknesses in fulfilling several tasks in the voluntary work etc. These questions help to find out, if the volunteer has a specific interest in the development or the assessment of a certain competence.
- Volunteering facilitators should also clarify whether the volunteer would like to receive a certificate at the end of the validation process.
- Finally it is also important to inform the volunteer about the amount of time that is necessary for the validation process.

After having clarified the interests of the volunteer, one can start planning the role of the volunteer in the project or activity, taking into account also the competence he/she likes to focus on.

Benefits for the (senior) volunteers which should be discussed in the coaching session:

- Raising awareness of the personal and professional growth
- Recognition of learning development in an informal learning setting
- Learning new skills and experiencing new things
- Training and development opportunities
- Receiving a certificate about competence development in informal learning, which can be useful for further volunteering engagement in other organisations as well as for labour market perspectives.

6. MORE PRODUCTS TO SUPPORT THE WORK WITH RIVER

During the project's lifetime the RIVER consortium developed the following products which support the work with RIVER and which are available on **the additional CD**:

- RIVER Manual for volunteering facilitators including a detailed description of RIVER as well as the coaching guidelines, all templates and supporting documents
- RIVER Training Concept and Training Material
- User Guide for the supporting software

