

VERSO

VOLUNTEERS FOR EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT

NEWSLETTER: ISSUE 4, 2014



VERSOs Final Conference, Hungary 23-25 September 2014

Photo: Peter Szabó

VERSO FINAL CONFERENCE

After close to three years of intensive collaboration, conferences and study trips in eight European countries, VERSO has crossed the finishing line. The final VERSO conference was held in Zalaegerszeg, Hungary on 23-25 September 2014. The objective of the final conference was to summarise the lessons learned and finalise the political recommendations for the public authorities. The conference was part of the European Open Days.

At the final conference the good practice catalogue along with the results and the policy recommendations of the project were presented, discussed and approved by the public authorities, the knowledge partners and the members of the project political board.

The eight public authorities discussed the process and methodology that had been used when drafting their implementation plans, and pointed out that the differences between the

participating partners and the regions they represented in terms of social and economic characteristics do not prevent the ideas of the VERSO project from being transferred between various regions of Europe. Every partner agreed that the adjustment of the practice to suit their respective social, economic and legislative environments is self-evident and necessary for the success of this transfer.

WELCOME

Welcome to the fourth and final issue of the VERSO newsletter. VERSO (Volunteers for European Employment) is a Pan-European development and knowledge-sharing project funded by the European Regional Development Fund, INTERREG IVC.

Eight regional authorities and four research institutions in Europe collaborate in the VERSO project. VERSO will map ways to create fruitful interplay of regional political authorities and volunteers of civic society in the fight against unemployment.

Learn more about VERSO at the project website:

www.versonet.eu



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VERSO FINAL CONFERENCE (continued)...



THE ROLE OF THE PROJECT POLITICAL BOARD

One of the novelties of the VERSO project has been the establishment of the project political board, comprising regional politicians and representatives of NGOs from the participating countries of Europe. From the start the members of the project political board have participated in the study trips and conferences of the VERSO project and been responsible for converting the results of VERSO into political recommendations, ensuring that they are also politically embedded in the participating regions and presented to politicians at EU level. At the final meeting the members of the project political board concluded their policy recommendations, agreeing on a common text addressing every government and public authority, and aiming to involve civic society in their effort to combat the problem of unemployment through volunteerism.

By committing to the support and promotion of volunteerism, they benefit from the human capital investment, accomplish social cohesion, and offer a different perspective for the enhancement of employability.

In the framework of the conference, Dr. Christian Kjeldsen from Aarhus University presented the results of the final project evaluation, highlighting the importance of the process and the conclusions drawn from the observations made by the participants. The evaluation confirmed the positive aspects of the project methodology as well as

identifying the weaknesses, contributing to the learning process for the improvement of every project implemented.

On behalf of the hosts, Dr. Katalin Solt, Vice Rector of the Budapest Business School, greeted the audience. She was followed by Mr. Zoltán Balaicz, Vice Mayor of Zalaegerszeg. The Hungarian speakers described the national perspective of the relationship between volunteering and employment. The project political board presented the political recommendations and the implementation of policies.

VERSO GOOD PRACTICE CATALOGUE

Professor Niels Rosendal Jensen from Aarhus University focused on how volunteers across the European regions deliver services to unemployed people by drawing on their knowledge of the dynamics and demands of the job market. Volunteers provide unemployed young people and vulnerable individuals with new opportunities, new social spaces, new networks, improved self-confidence and improved skills, all of which improves their social inclusion and employability.

Professor Jensen presented the final version of the good practice catalogue concluding that the three-year period of systematic exchanges of experiences at the political and social levels, the visiting and discussion of the selected cases in the regions and municipalities, have increased the partner's understanding

of similarities as well as differences of voluntary practices across Europe, taking into consideration historical, cultural and legislative circumstances. Four common parameters were extracted from the cases, providing mutual inspiration for the partners in detecting new solutions in the battle against European unemployment. The VERSO project has successfully contributed to this cause.

STUDY TRIP

During the study trip the participants were informed about the good practices implemented in the area. During the presentation at OTP Bank, the participants learned about the volunteer activities organised with regard to corporate social responsibility. They also met young volunteers in Göcseji Museum, who described their experiences and their excitement about participating in the practice offered by the museum. The VERSO partners also had the opportunity to perform voluntary work guided by volunteers of the Open-Air Museum.

VERSO PRESS CONFERENCE

A press conference took place in Hungarian in order to inform the local media about the project's results. Vice Rector Dr. Katalin Solt represented Budapest Business School. Project political board member Dénes Sándor participated on behalf of the Municipality of Zalaegerszeg. Dr. Dávid Takács, regional project manager of BBS Zalaegerszeg College of Business Administration, and Bert Bouwmeester, Mayor of Coevorden in the Netherlands, also contributed to the press conference.

Dr. Dávid Takács talked about the cost-benefit analysis of the good practices described by the public authority partners. The regional project manager pointed out that the good practices actually enrich not just the volunteers and the direct beneficiaries but indirectly also the local community and society as a whole.

Dr. Katalin Solt shared some more



VERSO FINAL CONFERENCE: AND NOW, WHAT? MARC VIÑAS, GENERALITAT DE CATALUNYA

VERSO is nearly over, but the real work begins now. It's the work of transferring good practices, and the challenge now is to implement them at home, in order to improve the employability of unemployed people.

On 23rd, 24th and 25th September, Zalaegerszeg (Hungary) hosted the final conference of the VERSO project. During these days, we visited volunteering practices; concluded policy recommendations elaborated by the political partners; and considered the implementation plans presented by each partner.

Looking back, during the past three years VERSO has laid the foundations of criteria and indicators to define and determine what a good practice is. The project has also delivered policy recommendations that EU states should apply, and each partner has drawn up implementation plans for the most viable practices to transfer to their own context.

Once all this exhaustive work is done, the question is: what now?

As the Catalan partner in VERSO, we will firstly present the feedback from VERSO to volunteering entities, institutions, business organisations and interested civil society in Catalonia. The aim is to achieve accountability to citizens and to involve them in the Catalan volunteering development. Through the Social Welfare and Family Department of the Government of Catalonia, we have elaborated an implementation document from four good prac-

tices (two from Bulgaria, one from the UK and one from Germany) that should be the starting point of the process: this is an open and flexible document, a working guide that takes into account stakeholders, public administrations, social and business organisations, users and civil society.

The availability or not of the resources needed for the implementation plan will determine the timing; but whatever happens the results probably won't be appreciated immediately, because it is a slow process. But over time, we will identify improvements that have been achieved thanks to the transferability of VERSO good practices.

One of the previous conclusions of the Catalan proposal is that good practices have specific characteristics depending on the context in which they were developed: law, history, economics, and political, social and cultural context. In this sense, we find it quite difficult to transfer all aspects of e.g. one good practice. Instead we consider implementing individual parts /ideas of various good practices, such as role of volunteers, target groups, methodologies, developed activities, fundraising or legislation, geographical area development.

The most important thing is that transferability becomes an opportunity to rethink our reality, our methodology and the way we act.

In this sense, VERSO has become a learning process for all partners because the capacity to show and share our own models, and the chance to appreciate and foster ideas from distant realities. All this makes us more open, flexible and creative with a view to rethinking and improving our reality and our actions.

details of the research with the journalists. Cost-benefit analysis has not yet been used very often to evaluate volunteer work. As a result, the college had to design a pioneer approach since they had to create the framework for and the methods of the analysis.

Mr. Bouwmeester emphasised the importance of volunteerism and civil society. He held these factors to be preconditions for a real democratic society. In other words, politicians are also responsible for promoting volunteerism.

LESSONS LEARNED

The main conclusion of the political briefing session, the lectures and the final conference is that VERSO has proved to be a successful project. The international partners learned a great deal from each other. It turned out that they share similar values, although the demographic, political, economic and cultural circumstances and methods differ from region to region. The VERSO project has shown that volunteering is a real and significant tool in coping with unemployment. The project's political

recommendations will hopefully pave the way for the development of volunteering.

Different regions and countries have different traditions and strengths with regard to volunteering. While volunteerism has just started to blossom in some regions, it has long traditions, mechanisms and techniques in others. This is the reason why it is difficult to compare the volunteer practices of different regions. Nevertheless, this kind of variety serves as a precondition for a competitive Europe and good quality of life for its citizens.

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POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS VERSO – VOLUNTEERS FOR EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT



POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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HOW VOLUNTEERING IMPROVES EMPLOYABILITY



How Volunteering Improves Employability Political recommendations from VERSO

The VERSO project has ultimately resulted in a range of research-based policy recommendations. These recommendations have identified effective forms of volunteerism, indicated how they can be transferred to contexts across Europe, and identified some of the problems which cannot be solved by the family, the market or the state, and which must be addressed by new forms of collaboration involving civic society and volunteerism.

Download the political recommendations at the VERSO website:
www.versonet/publications

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VOLUNTEERS FOR EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT



GOOD
PRACTICE
CATALOGUE



What works? The Good practice catalogue from VERSO

All over Europe, there are valuable good practice experiences in creating fruitful collaboration between regional political authorities and the volunteers of civil society in the fight against unemployment

In the good practice catalogue, VERSO has identified

16 good practices of volunteering which promote the employment and welfare of European citizens. Volunteerism is an arena where marginalised groups, the unemployed workforce and generally vulnerable people can maintain and develop job skills and enhance their network in an informal educational setting. In this sphere it is possible

to acquire, re-acquire or re-orient job skills and develop familiarity with or tolerance of changing job demands.

The purpose of the good practice catalogue has been to collect and disseminate “good examples” of how voluntary work functions in the framework of the VERSO project in order to promote European employment and to contribute to the upgrade of the quality of life of Europeans. The catalogue has been developed in cooperation with the eight public authorities and four knowledge partners of the project, and aims to make visible some of the good practices. In addition, the catalogue will be a means of dissemination, transfer and implementation of the good practices from one region to the next.

Download the The good practice catalogue at the VERSO website: www.versonet/publications

VERSO campaign: Europe face-to-face

The participants in the VERSO project have visited a great number of interesting and inspiring examples of successful volunteering work. Many people are engaged for social, environmental or economic reasons to support for example children, families, elderly people or migrants in their daily lives. Furthermore, volunteer work provides the opportunity to improve the employability of the volunteers.

See the faces of some the volunteers from across Europe on the VERSO website. They are all involved in different initiatives – as volunteers or mentees:

www.versonet/europe-face-to-face/



Name: Péter Kámán

Age: 28

City: Budapest

Country: Hungary

Professional background: Psychologist

Current vocational situation: Employed

Volunteer work:

2012 Turkey (Kazanli), short term EVS - saving endangered turtles

2013 Catalonia (Vic), long term EVS - helping with the occupational therapy of mentally ill people