

## Seniors, Personal Memories and Intergenerational Learning



**Project name:** HiStory - Seniors tell about History

**Project number:** 134563-LLP-1-DE-GRUNDTVIG\_GMP

**Coordinating organisation:** ILI - Institute for Innovation in Learning (FIM Neues-Lernen), University Erlangen-Nuremberg

**Countries involved:** Germany, Belgium, France, Spain, Slovenia, Italy and Greece

**Types of organisations involved:** Research and training centres, universities, ICT organisations

**Implementation level:** HiStory was implemented at European level.

**Website:** <http://www.history-project.eu>

### 1. Project Relevance

The History project tackled important issues for seniors such as e-inclusion, social cohesion, lifelong learning; its main output, the HiStory blog, was very successful, as a large number of seniors were willing to use it in order to tell their stories. The idea of intergenerational exchange and learning processes between young people and seniors was very positively received by participants. Both ideas of building learning and exchanging tandems (one student and one senior per tandem) and of starting contests to motivate people to participate and interact in this field of intergenerational exchange were appreciated as experiences.

Seniors are the actors/creators of the content; at the same time, they learn how to use Web 2.0 and ICT. In the intergenerational exchange and learning process, youngsters helped seniors to deal with technical issues, and there was also a transfer of experiences of seniors to younger generation.

Inviting seniors to tell their own life stories enhances their empowerment and participation, the same effect is obtained by means of transmitting past knowledge and facts, and linking these activities with youngsters and/or with people younger than themselves. Also, it is necessary to mention the multilingualism and use of a digital environment are split between the two main groups as potential source of difficulties that should be taken into account in the design of a similar learning process.

### 2. Background and Aims

Psychological findings show that learning in older ages is possible and desirable, when some particularities of the target group are taken into account. The project HiStory – Seniors tell about History regarded these particularities by choosing a subject, the personally experienced history, which is highly relevant and motivating to the target group of elderly, and integrating the subject into an easy-to-handle weblog learning environment with the potential of integrating audio and video files.

The History project has been implemented by organizations from Germany, Belgium, France, Spain, Slovenia, Italy and Greece. The project partnership was based on the successful consortium of the previous Socrates project TALE -“Telling about Learning Experiences” (2004-2006): ILI (FIMNeuesLernen), SCIENTER España, Amitié, Lambrakis and IPAK. The former TALE consortium was enriched by organisations connected to the target group of seniors (e.g. CCN50+), transgenerational learning issues (Entr’ages, ADN64) and to historical subjects (Foro per la Memoria).

HiStory wanted to address the social inclusion (and e-Inclusion) of seniors and to advance active citizenship in terms of awareness of historical contexts and, as a consequence, responsible political and cultural acting in the present and future. The learning process in HiStory was not “just a collection of data”, but advanced meaningful, emotionally and socially relevant knowledge. Besides the content, which is of high relevance for the target group, the pedagogical approach carefully respected the needs and constraints of the senior target group, based on the current trend of learning psychology.

The learning process and the learning environment was adapted to the needs of seniors, advanced communication and intergenerational exchange and thereby contributed to a socially integrated and more content-wise ageing. Additionally, the project wanted to integrate the aspect of trans-generational learning by including, during the second half of the project lifetime, European schools that carried out pilot projects about experienced history. Students learned from seniors’ tales and started a communication process for trans-generational exchange, communication and learning purposes.

### **3. Description of Target Groups**

The target group of HiStory was mainly formed of senior citizens from the above-mentioned seven European countries, as it can be seen from the more than three hundred stories published on the blog. Most of the seniors using the HiStory service were recruited by organisations from the project consortium. In Germany, France, Belgium and Spain, project partners were directly involved into work with seniors (CNN50+) or into intergenerational working processes including older and younger generations (ADN64, Entr’ages, I2cat).

The second target group was formed of young people, attracted and involved during the second project year in the communication of seniors’ experiences to the younger generation; for the latter, the intention was to learn to connect their personal history to historical periods and events in general.

Project partners introduced the project on several occasions to the target group, e.g. at meetings of seniors’ organisations, adult learning events, school events, etc. Many of the seniors were addressed by means of flyers, posters or other PR materials disseminated in senior organisations. The previous knowledge of the target group towards the subject and the web 2.0 learning environment was quite heterogeneous.

### **4. Outputs and Multiplying Outcomes**

The History blog is online and contains the following features:

- A story collection of tales about histories experienced by seniors from seven European countries (BE, DE, IT, FR, EL, ES, SI). Stories are available in the original languages: DE, ES, EL, FR, IT, SI and part of them are also available in the translated version and in EN. For some stories, multimedia documentation such as videos, photos and audio files are available.
- A comment function, where users can respond to others’ stories; Tags sections assigned to stories, which help users find thematically connected stories.
- A user guide, explaining in detail the use and features of the weblog environment, in seven languages; a collection of links related to the subject of history, biographical research and storytelling, from the seven partner countries.

The Story Categorisation & Analysis Report was also elaborated during the project development.

The main project phases were the following:

- Technical development devoted to the technical development of the weblog.
- Methodology development: to define specific content-related requirements to be fulfilled by the planned learning programme; users’ needs were analysed and defined and a detailed methodological framework for the creation of the learning environment (including the structure of the weblog area) was developed.

- Identifying participants & establishing contacts with piloting institutions: identification of a group of pilot participants and realization of a pilot phase to test, evaluate and adapt the weblog-service developed according to users' recommendations.
- Running service to collect as many as possible historical stories of seniors from different European countries.
- Trans-generational transfer of seniors' experiences to the younger generation.

## 5. Impact and Sustainability

Altogether 318 stories were posted on the weblog: 211 in the original language, and 107 as translations from other languages. Some of the stories comprise multimedia elements such as audio or video files, pictures, etc.

31 authors of the stories are indicated in the weblog; however, a note should be made that the "author" is not in all cases the storyteller himself. Many seniors told their stories either orally or by writing them by hand or in word processing programmes; then, they asked one of the project partners to post the story on the weblog. Thus, the "author" indicated here is just the person who posted the story. The storytellers' names, if they did not want to post anonymously, were indicated on top of the respective story.

Countries where the History blog had a major impact were Germany and France. This was because in both countries project partners were directly involved with seniors.

The French partner organised a contest inviting seniors and elderly people to write a story on the History blog, individually or with the help of a youngster ("in tandem" modality): the best stories won high quality portable multimedia devices. More than 100 people participated in the contest, by posting a story, including an individual participation and also "in tandem" participations.

Italy cooperated with the Municipality of Casalecchio di Reno (Bologna), by cooperating in the organization of an exhibition on School Memories. Within this cooperation, they interviewed and filmed many senior citizens telling their school memories and uploaded their stories on the History weblog. The project was presented during the Casalecchio event on School Memories to citizens, schools, and to the public in general.

To reach seniors interested in ICT, many training centres for seniors were contacted, as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> age universities, libraries, etc. asking them to cooperate, e.g. proposing to hold free lessons on blogs and storytelling in the frame of existing training courses on ICT for seniors. Within the framework of a training course on ICT for adults & seniors, a workshop was held on the History blog – that was also an occasion to test the blog with real users. Unfortunately, users were not interested in continuing the work on the blog.

An agreement was made and used for internal purposes between the story teller and the HiStory partners. Under this Agreement, the story teller accepted, on a voluntary and non-profit basis, that his/her story should be a part of the project collection of stories, an original collective work edited and promoted by the partnership which is holding the respective copyrights.

## 6. Educational Process

In order to enable a meaningful, holistic and sustainable learning success, three main theoretical approaches (Oral History, Biographical Research and Storytelling) constitute the pedagogical background of the project. The three approaches had already been applied in the project TALE (Telling About Learning Experiences) in connection with a weblog environment; such approaches seemed to be suitable to support and enhance the learning processes of older people.

HiStory is explicitly addressing older people, trying to create an alternative opportunity –in connection with the subject and with the learning environment– for them to gain understanding, knowledge and an exchange of views on European history. The informal and individual learning approach met the demands of older people who are not (any more) used or able to integrate themselves into formalised educational systems and situations, but want to learn in spite of this.

Findings of the psychological ageing research (e.g. Lehr, 2006) show that the meaningfulness of the content and motivational aspects play central roles in the learning processes of older people. From the experiences in the project TALE, it could be derived that the storytelling approach is qualified to promote meaningful, holistic and highly motivated learning. This approach and the storytelling practice was applied in HiStory and transferred to the target group of seniors.

The phases included in the educational process:

- Desk research on seniors' learning processes and suitable methodology approaches.
- An analysis of users' needs designed to customize the technical and didactical approach to the target group.
- The technical development of the HiStory website and weblog, gradually adapted to the users' needs.
- A piloting phase with a first set of users, finalised by the analysis of the users' feedback.
- A phase of running service with a collection of stories in seven languages and a translation service.
- A content analysis of the stories on the weblog.