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# *Higher Education in the Service of Society*

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**2nd SEA-EU Conference** *Higher Education in the Service of Society*

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# PREFACE

It is with great enthusiasm and pride that I introduce the proceedings of the second SEA-EU Service-Learning Conference, held at the University of Cádiz in April 2024. This volume encapsulates the collective wisdom and advancements presented during this remarkable event, offering valuable insights and inspiration to readers. Building upon the success of the inaugural conference, held in Split (Croatia) in May 2022, this second edition marks a significant milestone, reflecting the growth and increasing importance of service-learning within our expanding alliance.

Service-learning is a transformative educational approach that integrates academic learning with meaningful community service. This innovative pedagogy not only enriches students' academic experiences but also fosters significant personal and professional growth, all while contributing positively to the broader community. It is through this synergy that universities can strengthen their bonds with the communities they serve.

The SEA-EU alliance is deeply committed to advancing service-learning initiatives, particularly through Task 5.3, coordinated by the University of Split. This initiative underscores the crucial role of social engagement across our nine universities, highlighting the collaborative spirit between educational institutions, students, and community stakeholders.

This edition of the conference saw the registration of 84 participants and featured 36 accepted abstracts, including 32 oral presentations. These contributions formed the heart of the discussions, showcasing the vibrant synergy between universities and their communities and providing a solid foundation for future collaborations within the SEA-EU network.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the SEA-EU expert group for Society Hub and the academic committee for their generous support, which was instrumental in the success of this conference. We also express our deep appreciation to the organizing team for their dedication and hard work, in particular Mayka García, Manuel Cotrina and Ana Zarzuela who together with the task leaders Ivana Bilić, Gorana Duplančić Rogošić and Ivana Jadrić have made this event possible.

As you delve into these proceedings, we hope you find inspiration to further the integration of service-learning within SEA-EU university programs. We eagerly anticipate future collaborations and meetings to continue advancing the role of service-learning in higher education within the European University of the Seas (SEA-EU).

We invite you to explore these papers and the valuable insights they offer, paving the way for continued innovation and engagement in service-learning.


Prof. Fidel Echevarría Navas, PhD

General Coordinator of the SEA-EU Alliance

CONTENT

# LEVERAGE POINTS FOR PARTICIPATORY LEARNING IN SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS – PROTOTYPES TO LIVE A UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE

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**ABSTRACT**

Service Learning is an innovative teaching and learning framework at higher education institutions that can enable personal development of all participants, i.e. students, teaching staff, and representatives of Service Learning partners, through social engagement by applying, deepening or extending academic knowledge.

This paper describes and interlinks the teaching experiences and strategic didactical developments within Kiel University (CAU) and Biberach University of Applied Sciences (HBC). The three authors have been collaborating since 2018 in national learning communities for social change education to strengthen changemaker curriculum developments in and across their higher education institutions. Within their peer-to-peer learning processes, they have been constantly challenging and developing their own teaching practices and attitudes and have discovered new learning formats beyond institutional boundaries.

The paper presents two Service Learning teaching formats.

Starting with an example from Kiel: the "Transforming Capitalism Lab". A general elective module at CAU in the winter semester 2018-2019. At CAU, the "Transforming Capitalism Lab" took place as a blended learning format: students in the seminar took part in the online learning sessions of the Presencing Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. The examination format was a learning portfolio with elements of reflecting on one's own values and with empathy exercises. The offline exchange meetings with Kiel students happened during the semester with dialogue methods from participatory and transformative learning.

The second example is a Campus-Community-Partnership two-semester-module in 2023 between HBC and the FUTURIUM museum in Berlin. The Master's students worked on the task of rethinking education and developing a vision and a strategy for a university of the future. Together with FUTURIUM Berlin, students and teaching staff worked on developing a set of future education maps. Therefore, students worked according to a participatory learning approach: modelling and scaffolding by FUTURIUM with future maps, coaching by teaching staff and students. They analysed trends and scenarios for the future of work, conducted interviews in the education sector and with company representatives and worked in teams to develop the scenarios for future academic learning. Students have engaged in a hands-on co-creative process in teams that integrated design thinking to create profound social innovations. Part of the portfolio was the organisation of a workshop with stakeholders from education to test the first prototype of the future map set in the Learning Lab of the FUTURIUM in Berlin.

The paper is an exploration of the didactical set-up through a description and reflection of methods and exercises from the teaching processes. The paper will conclude with personal, institutional, and structural leverage points which support learning processes of students and teaching staff involved in Service Learning in order to lead a new teaching and learning culture.

**Keywords:** Campus-Community-Partnerships, Participatory Learning, Teaching Staff Learning, Transformative Learning, Design Thinking

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As outlined by Osann and Godat (2023) in a German publication on transformation in research and education "Service Learning projects at Biberach University of Applied Sciences (HBC) and Kiel University (CAU) are projects with civil society institutions, educational co-operations and school projects as well as city and community projects. This teaching and learning format focuses on interaction with civil society actors. Projects between academic and non-academic institutions and individuals open up special opportunities for everyone involved: students come into contact with practical applications of the knowledge they have learnt academically. Teachers open up to new fields of practice and also generate new questions for their research. The external partners benefit from the creativity and curiosity of the students. The combination of practical and academic orientation enables an increase in the quality of the project results achieved.

This form of teaching and learning requires new didactic approaches for teachers and students. The innovative didactic approaches used or developed in this context include the Design Thinking method, methods in the context of Theory U, storytelling (to be able to introduce new topics/processes into everyday practice), agile methods of project management, reflection techniques and communication techniques (Osann & Godat, 2023)."

## 2. DIDACTICAL FRAMEWORK KIEL: TRANSFORMING CAPITALISM LAB

This course in English was held for students from different faculties as a pilot seminar in a social entrepreneurship module at the Key Skills Centre in the winter semester 2018-19 at the CAU. Social Entrepreneurship Education was practised between 2012 and 2020 at Kiel University as a teaching and learning format within the Service Learning framework.

The Transforming Capitalism Lab (TCL) was offered as a blended learning format. Students in the seminar took part in the online offerings of the Presencing Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston in a self-organised manner. Open MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) have been taking place at MIT since 2015. The Presencing Institute's online platform provided a virtual learning space that not only promotes experience-based learning for students with the systemic mindfulness approach Theory U. Furthermore, a heterogeneous group of stakeholders (e.g. leaders and managers from companies, consultants, activists, NGO representatives) learned together on the platform and in self-organised so-called offline hubs. The seminar in Kiel was thus a local hub within the university structure.

Students were thus involved in an international learning setting in direct exchange with professional practitioners to shape (social) transformation processes. Learning took place for all stakeholders involved in a setting of a community of practice according to Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner (2015).

Students in this seminar were prepared to orientate themselves in complex social-environmental systems and to recognise design options in the context of sustainable development.

Through the transdisciplinary learning processes in a community of practice, students gained insights into practice and learned from prototypes of transformation processes and projects in the financial system.

In this Service Learning seminar, there was no formal Service Learning partner and thus it was a learning basis for potential social entrepreneurship projects.

The free open access MOOC of the Presencing Institute, in which international representatives of civil society participated, and the accompanying workbook with practices from Theory U were used as a starting point for the content and learning process in the seminar. The Presencing Institute and participants in the MOOC were informal Service Learning partners. The following learning objectives

have been formulated for the seminar from the course material for the MOOC, which started in September 2018 before the start of the semester in mid-October:

- Students develop an understanding of Theory U and how it can help to shape systemic change projects that transform capitalism.

- Students develop leadership skills for systemic change.

Students submitted a learning portfolio to be examined in this seminar. As orientation reflection questions were provided such as:

- Introduce yourself personally by presenting your current understanding of capitalism and relate 3 to 5 of your personal values to capitalism.

- What is your intention for participating in the "Transforming Capitalism Lab" learning journey?

- Start to select articles and books for a personal reading list for this course.

- Describe your current learning engagement on the Transforming Capitalism Lab platform: How do you interact with the international community? Do you work with the workbook? Have you participated in one of the Community Cafés? With whom do you share your insights from this course?

The portfolio was not graded and was linked to a feedback session with the lecturer at the end of the semester.

### 2.1. Impact on students: transformative learning

In theoretical considerations on transformative learning, Singer-Brodowsky concludes that "transformative learning does not focus on an increase in knowledge and competences, but on a change in the basic prerequisites of human thinking, feeling and acting" (Singer-Brodowsky, 2016, p. 133).

Through the reflection impulses in the portfolio and the exchange with dialogue methods with other participants in Community Cafés in zoom, the world-view, values, perspectives, and thinking habits of the learners were questioned in the seminar, made visible in the learning portfolio and were further developed. In addition, learners received new impulses for their own transformation projects on the campus in Kiel through the diversity of projects being discussed and showcased in the international community of practice.

The central element of the MOOC was the systemic framework of Theory U. "Theory U combines the following methods and lines of development with the aim of supporting change makers in their work:

"- Action research and organisational learning in the tradition of Peter Senge, Edgar Schein, Donald Schön, Chris Argyris and Kurt Lewin;

- Design thinking (...) in the tradition of Tim Brown and Dave Kelley;

- Mindfulness, cognitive science and phenomenology in the tradition of Francisco Varela, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Tania Singer, Arthur Zajonc and David Bohm;

- impulses from civil society in the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi" (Scharmer, 2019, pp. 10-11).

The meditation practices of Theory U are interesting for the current development of transformative learning processes at universities.

In education for sustainable development in Germany, concepts of transformative learning are currently being discussed and innovated with in higher education teaching development. As orientation, this article offers two definitions for transformative learning:

1. As summarised by Fleming (2018), the theory by Mezirow is considered as a basis of transformative learning concepts in adult education: "Transformation theory rests on the assumption that we are meaning making beings (Mezirow et al., 1990, p. 1). Learning is a process of utilizing prior interpretations to construe new or revised interpretations of the meanings of one's experiences and using this as a guide to action (Mezirow et al., 1990, p.5). This is done intentionally, accidentally or unconsciously."

2. Discussing transformative learning within education for sustainable development in a report for the German Environment Agency, Blum et al. (2021) conclude that "transformative learning involves a process in which people recognise, question and change their previous perspectives on meaning as such. This is therefore not about learning in the sense of expanding knowledge or skills, but about a fundamental qualitative change in the way people understand themselves and the world. It is about a profound unlearning of previously uncritically learnt patterns of thinking, feeling and acting (Blum et al. 2021, p. 15)."

Elements of transformative learning were integrated in the process design of the Transforming Capitalism Lab and practised in the virtual space in zoom or used by the students in the provided recordings. The practices included, for example, short breathing meditations according to Jon Kabat-Zinn, mindful listening on the four levels of listening (as described in the Theory U toolbox) or in journaling as a writing meditation.

**Image 1.** Generative scribing as a tool for transformative learning in the Transforming Capitalism Lab
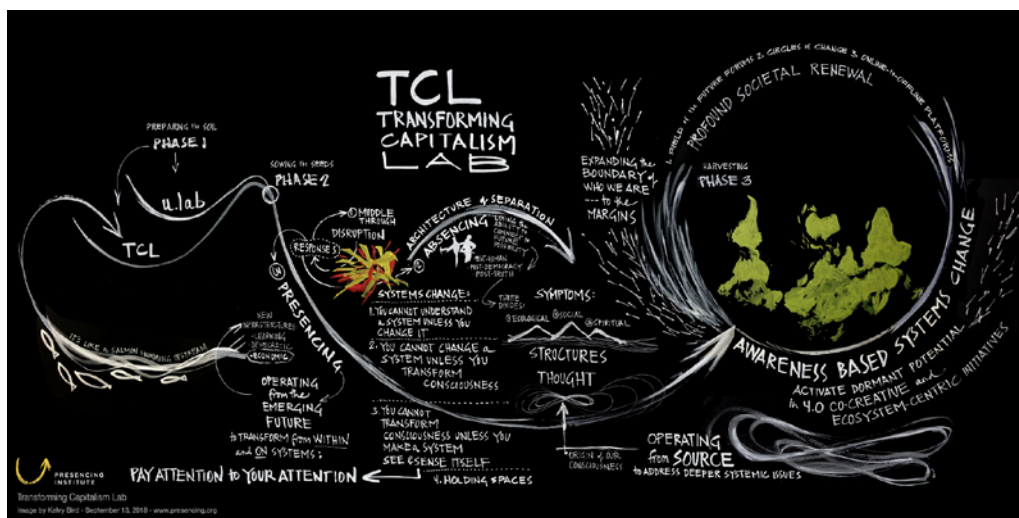


*Source: Kelvy Bird, Presencing Institute, https://kelvybird.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/TCL_Live_20180913.jpg*

In the current discourse of transformative learning within sustainability education at universities, this development raises the question of what effect meditation practices can have on the personal development of teachers, learners, and Service Learning partners in transformative learning settings within Service Learning formats. A research field that is still open to be explored in the future.

### 2.2. Impact on teaching staff: learning and leadership development

According to Balsiger et al. (2017) "there is no transformative learning without transformative teaching".

Thus, what has helped the educator in the TCL seminar to practise transformative teaching? It was a personal teaching toolbox which made need-based application of agile, participatory, and self-regulated learning interventions possible to support students' but also to reflect on the learning processes as a teacher throughout the course. Therefore, a shift from the role as a teacher to learning coach and co-learner was possible.

The learning process of the educator was hosted by the process and practices of Theory U ("a framework for learning, leading, innovating, and profound change", Presencing Institute)  and the Art of Hosting ("an approach to leadership and participatory learning that scales up from the personal to the systemic using personal practice, dialogue, facilitation and the co-creation of innovation to address complex challenges, Art of Hosting).

Another insight from this teaching experience, is the need to support educators as change makers inside the structures of higher education systems. There is the need for knowledge creation and competence development of teaching staff around the question:  How can educators become leaders for curriculum design who can also lead the empowerment of their students to design and co-create a University of the Future? Learning exchanges and networks such as the u.lab Hubs of the Presencing Institute or working groups of the national Service Learning network the University Network for Social Responsibility" have supported the course development described in this article.

Current developments in the field of Social Entrepreneurship Education (e.g. the national community of practice project "Future Social Entrepreneurship Education") look also promising to strengthen and develop educators as change makers and intrapreneurs inside higher education systems through online learning exchanges.

Another thread that has become visible in this example is the high level of uncertainty the educator and students have to face in this emergent learning experience. For example, the educator stepped down from the responsibility to provide the course content. It was provided by the informal Service Learning partner the Presencing Institute and partners in their Transforming Capitalism Lab. The educator acted as a role model for the students by dealing with uncertainty with an attitude of courage and being open to adapt to new course content and emerging learning needs of the students in Kiel (see attitudes described in the Professional UNCertainty Competence Framework, Graph 1, Bollinger & van Rooijen, 2022).

## 3.  DIDACTICAL FRAMEWORK BIBERACH: TRANSFORMING TO A FUTURE UNIVERSITY

Ever since the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on universities, it has been clear that the academic education system needs to be evolved.

The two professors Dr. Isabell Osann and Dr. Henrike Mattheis from Biberach University of Applied Sciences (HBC) have given MBA students the task of rethinking higher education and developing a vision and strategy for the future. In collaboration with FUTURIUM (The House of Futures) Berlin, the HBC students created a box with scenario cards for the "Future of Higher Education" under guidance of the two professors and a professional from FUTURIUM.

The box provides explanations of the terms used and raises questions such as: Where will we learn academic knowledge in the future? Digitally or on site at the university and/or in society? How will teaching and learning take place? In a learning community or independently? Who will deliver higher education? Professors, peer groups such as the students themselves or even impersonal algorithms? How will knowledge and skills be measured? Through examinations as we know them today or solely through practical success? And what role do society, business, politics, and culture play in higher education and transfer? For example, could marginalised groups be increasingly involved as experts, i.e. people who tend to live on the margins of society, such as refugees?

The students tested the newly developed materials of the "Higher Education" future box in a workshop with FUTURIUM and a total of 25 experts from the education sector. The participants reflected the entire

educational life cycle starting from school education to higher education to lifelong learning in professional life.

In short, gaming rounds mixed teams of 5 participants had to decide on how to sort their future cards as a group. The only options were "yes", for using the card, or "no", for this is not an option to be used. The aim was to create a dream scenario for the university of the future and a so-called nightmare scenario. In the end, each group had created their description of the dream and nightmare scenarios. The results of where, how, by whom and for whom learning should be available in the future differed considerably. On this basis, further ideas for university scenarios, learning locations and approaches for future ways of academical teaching and learning were discussed, and creative impulses and visions were developed and documented.

By developing the card set, students combined professional learning with a commitment outside their own educational organisation, namely the Service Learning partner FUTURIUM as a place for dialogue on scientific, technical and social developments, where the focus is on mediation. On the one hand, practical activities (namely the creation of the card set and the realisation of the workshop) were used together as a team to promote the solution of a specific social challenge; on the other hand, these practical activities were scientifically prepared, accompanied and reflected upon by the lecturers and theoretically underpinned. Reflection on the practical experience is a key element of the educational experience. Through social engagement, students can gain an idea of the role their own person can play in the context of society and thus gain confidence in their own social impact. Taking on social responsibility becomes conceivable as a dimension for one's own life.

For the development of the new future box "Higher Education", the students looked at the trends and scenarios for the future of work, conducted interviews with policy makers, teachers, and with company representatives who employ young professionals trained at universities. Simultaneously, in a coaching process with the two lecturers, the students developed a vision and a strategy for a university of the future. The future box for higher education contains various sets of cards with questions and topics that provide impulses for the discussion based on the methodologies of the scenario technique and the STEEP analysis. Possible future trends are discussed and evaluated in small teams.
At FUTURIUM, everything revolves around the question: how do we want to live? The materials created by the students is a box with a card game intending to encourage people to think and discuss possible future scenarios together.
This box, as well as boxes on a wide range of other topics are already available: Labour, health, energy, cities and nutrition, and sets of cards are free to be downloaded from this website: www.futurium.de/zukunftsbox.

**Image 2**. The task in the Service Learning seminar: to develop a similar card deck for "Future of Higher Education"

*Source: HBC*

**Image 3.** Students and partners in a workshop testing a FUTURIUM card deck



S*ource: HBC*

**Image 4.** Multi-stakeholder testing workshop in Berlin moderated by HBC students at FUTURIUM

*Source: HBC/FUTURIUM*

### 3.1. Impact on students: transformative learning

The MBA students had the task of rethinking education and developing a strategy for the university of the future. The students, who worked together in teams of four to five people, were given different sets of tasks to complete. On the one hand, they researched the topic of new educational approaches at universities (future skills, transfer-oriented teaching, new forms of knowledge transfer, etc.). On the other hand, they used common strategic management approaches to develop a vision and strategy for the university of the future around the question: "What kind of university does our society need?". In addition to the classic strategic approaches, new methods were also used to support creativity and transformation. Individual questions were tackled using the Blue Ocean approach and techniques from Design Thinking as well as the Lego Serious Play method. The students gained practical and impact-orientated experience through qualitative interviews. Methods such as storytelling and systems thinking were also incorporated into the seminar in order to integrate many different perspectives and ultimately to communicate new objectives well.

In addition to expertise gained in strategic management, students learned and trained so-called future skills. These include, among other skills:

a) the competent use of (digital) tools, media, information, and data,

b) communication and team skills, taking diversity into account,

c) creative problem-solving skills and

d) independence, self-motivation and flexibility.

The premises of the HBC Innomeile (i.e. innovation mile, an innovative learning space concept)  hosted the master class. In line with the approach "Spatial design as a driver for innovation in teaching and

learning", participants were able to explore experience-based learning methods to train creativity, commitment, innovation and risk-taking and to be able to follow these in complex situations.

**Image 5**. The HBC Innomeile with a Building-Information-Modeling Lab, Design Thinking-Lab and Coworking-Lab for student start-ups



*Source: HBC*

The Master class course participants developed a new attitude. The openness to embrace new things, the willingness to experiment and, above all, the willingness to venture out of the comfort zone are particularly noteworthy. Some of the tasks, some of which had to be solved alone and others in teams, required a willingness to try something completely new. This included tasks the master students had not previously encountered in an academic environment and in which they also had to get involved as individuals. Students were faced with the task of developing a vision, working with scenarios, and developing and implementing strategies. They had to engage in explorative and experimental teamwork in which failure was a possibility and should be used positively (forward failure). In this context, they were nevertheless expected to keep an eye on the big Image and organize their learning and work processes themselves. This transformative and challenging learning experience was closely supported by the lecturers.

### 3.2. Impact on teaching staff: learning and leadership development

By integrating future scenarios for education as an innovative format in teaching, the lecturers' future-orientated teaching becomes more innovative. An important component of transfer competence is the integration of findings from practice into the teaching process (Bormann et al., 2021). This not only contributes to the improvement of knowledge transfer and communication, but also enables a practice-oriented design of teaching (Engel & Voigt, 2023). The process of self-learning was initiated by identifying social needs in open and creative workshop formats (Weber et al., 2014), in this HBC Service Learning project "Which universities will our society need in the future?". Particularly in the workshop with the 25 education experts at FUTURIUM, the lecturers were able to get in touch with society at eye level, to analyse needs and reflect on existing teaching and learning formats. By networking with different types of higher education institutions (FUTURIUM, education experts and the University Network for Social Responsibility) knowledge was exchanged and newly generated for all participants. The different perspectives triggered the reflection on the personal teaching and learning process.

The lecturers also had to develop an attitude of openness, letting go of known patterns, a willingness to experiment and, above all, a willingness to venture out of their comfort zone. They were also involved together with their students in something completely new. This included the willingness to take care of tasks that they had not previously experienced in the academic (and therefore safe for them) environment and in which they also had to get involved as a person. They had to engage in peer-to-peer teaching in which failure was an opportunity and should be used positively (forward failure).

For the teachers, the learning space became a creative space, as they developed the solutions experimentally and co-creatively with the learning community and in doing so, they always needed their own tolerance for ambiguity and the students had to bear the burden of enduring the ambiguity and sometimes even failure.

As learning coaches, the two lecturers accompanied individual forms of engagement with the tasks set and supported the learners in developing their own self-learning strategy and achieving the learning goals. The way we deal with knowledge has changed. Everyone involved in the process, teachers, and students, gathered knowledge from sources, which we collectively assessed and classified for rigour and relevance. For the lecturers, this meant a change from the previous way of designing seminars to more flexibility, just-in-time teaching, empathy, and coaching.

Transformative learning processes thrive - more than other learning processes - on enabling, as they cannot be planned, prepared, and controlled in the same way as other learning processes. The change of role for learning companions and learners necessarily starts with a change in one's own attitude. In order to be able to accompany transformative learning processes, the attitude of the learning companions is important: They create and maintain a safe learning space, pass on practical experiences, organise reflective phases, and promote relationships between the learners and with the Service Learning partners (Osann & Mattheis, 2023). In addition, they support the learners' project management and accompany the entire learning process in the coaching process.

## 4. CONCLUSION: LEVERAGE POINTS TO SUPPORT LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP OF TEACHING STAFF FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

What starts the learning process of teaching staff and then causes the change in teaching practice? For one of us, it was the needs of the Service Learning partners we learned about as citizens and volunteers ourselves. For another one, it is the current transformation processes in society and global challenges that need to be addressed and the strong belief that solutions can be found in societal learning processes where multi-stakeholders are learning together. The reflection and change in our own teaching practice was caused by the involvement of teaching staff in the active learning approach with Service Learning partners.

In our learning processes as teachers, knowledge about didactical concepts is a basis to act. Learning in a community of practice within the university, between different kinds of universities and society is enriching our work and teaching by gaining multi-stakeholder perspectives. However, to have the courage and support to start acting, facing the fear of failure and the unknown, we need our teaching staff peers as partners. In peer reflection and peer feedback, we as teaching staff need competences to reflect, challenge, develop our attitudes as teachers. In balance with didactical knowledge in the described transformative Service Learning seminars, we strengthened and developed an attitude of openness, letting go of known patterns, a willingness to experiment and, above all, a willingness to venture out of our own comfort zone.

Therefore, as institutional and structural support, we need to go beyond teacher trainings and working groups in didactics and create structures within and across institutions of higher education with flexible and self-regulated learning processes that are existent for examples in virtual learning spaces as community of practice such as the u.lab exchange group within the University Network for Social Responsibility or the learning exchange format initiated in 2023 between teaching staff and social entrepreneurs from the field in the Future Social Entrepreneurship Education Network.

As discovered, both with students and teaching staff, there is a huge need to develop as learners and educators a positive attitude to act in environments of uncertainty. As a feed forward insight for designing future reflection processes in Service Learning formats and future research on personal and professional development of students and educators, there is the recommendation to start practising with professional portfolios and strategic conversations around this or similar frameworks.

**Graphic 1.** Professional UNcertainty Competence Framework

1.2 The PUNC menu



| **KNOWLEDGE** | **SKILLS** | **ATTITUDE** |
|---|---|---|
| *Knowing, understanding, being aware of…* | *Being able to…* | *Being willing to…* |

**KNOWLEDGE**

Examples of reducing uncertainty
One's experienced uncertainty in a specific situation, context, or task
One's intuition as a source of information
One's self-efficacy
The benefits of making uncertainty productive
The importance to develop vision
The need for being challenged
The need for dialogue
The need for doing something meaningful
The need for encouragement
The need for experiences of success
The need for positive feedback
The need for room for initiative
The need for scaffolding
The need for self-confidence
The need for support from others
Uncertainty as a phenomenon in learning and working

**SKILLS**

Apply communication skills
Apply conflict solution skills
Apply decision makings skills (based on incomplete info)
Ask feedback
Ask questions
Assess a situation
Connect socially
Deal with incomplete information adequately
Deal with open-ended problems
Deal with problems beyond own expertise
Define the goal / aim
Engage in a supportive network
Find, value, interpret and use or share relevant information and resources
Investigate sources (internal/external) of uncertainty
Make own choices
Operate between an existing and familiar present and an unknown future
Prioritize
Regulate yourself
Solve problems creatively
Take initiative
Take ownership of one's learning process
Think critically
Think divergent / lateral
Think out of the box
Understand causality
Zoom in/out

**ATTITUDE**

Accept failures
Accept not knowing what will happen
Acknowledge vulnerability
Be adaptable and open to change
Be agile
Be courageous
Be courageous to take risk
Be curious
Be enquiring
Be ethical
Be flexible
Be ingenuous
Be mindful
Be receptive
Be self-aware
Discover new strategies for problem solving
Embrace doubts
Empathize with different perspectives
Endure
Experiment
Gain information
Learn
Show feelings
Take initiative
Take leadership
Take ownership
Take responsibility for choices and actions
Take risks
Understand and to make sense of uncertainty
Visualize future alternative scenarios

Reflection

*Source: Bolling & van Rooijen, 2022); N.B.: The PUNC (Professional UNcertainty Competence) project is to fill the competence gap of handling uncertainty productively in a world that is increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA).*

A final look at the design of learning spaces as structural elements at a university of the future: The education of the future needs spaces that enable new perspectives. Virtual and physical spaces that invite discovery and exploration. Spaces in which students can rediscover our world and where teachers can unlearn former educational patterns. (Virtual) learning spaces that inspire them to develop new ideas and take a completely new look at topics such as economy for the common good and climate positivity.

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# SOCIAL INNOVATION IN PRACTICE: THE EXAMPLE OF THE LIBERATO ASSOCIATION

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**ABSTRACT**

Contemporary entrepreneurship develops in dynamic conditions where trends and market needs develop rapidly. Factors such as economic uncertainty, environmental change, social innovation and technological progress shape the contemporary context of entrepreneurship. In this light, social innovation becomes a key factor for facing challenges and achieving social goals.

This research paper explores how support for social innovation can stimulate the development of social entrepreneurship and how social entrepreneurs often serve as drivers of social innovation within their communities. As an example, from the real world, the paper analyzes the Liberato Association, which serves as an inspired example of an organization that promises social innovation and provides key insights into the successful generation, implementation and maintenance of social innovation in the contemporary context.

Through the case study of the Liberato association, it is investigated how the Liberato association, an association founded by students and led by students, contributes to social innovations and how the cooperation of the Liberato association with the University of Split and the local community affects the success of social innovations. Exploring this relationship has major implications for the economy and society at large, implying that promoting social innovation and social entrepreneurship can be an essential strategy for achieving sustainable development and dealing with important societal issues. Through such cooperation between sectors, positive changes are created in society, which is clearly demonstrated by the example of the association Liberato, which currently manages active projects that can be described as true social innovations. The first project is LiberatoMap, an innovative platform that aims to display all accessible locations for people with disabilities in most of the urban areas of Split-Dalmatin County. This innovation not only marked the beginning of the work of the Association, but also created a direction for future active engagement in the creation of social innovations. Another project is DisCloud. Its purpose is to enable people with disabilities to have quick and practical access to information about the accessibility of locations. DisCloud manifests itself as an interactive panel powered by solar energy, which simultaneously supports sustainability and environmental protection. The third project is the Guide for students with disabilities (LiberatoTalk). The guide provides basic information for enrollment and course of study and is designed to directly address high school students with disabilities as active decision-makers. The work also aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of social innovations and their connection with social entrepreneurship. A key connection between social innovation and social entrepreneurship lies in the fact that social entrepreneurs often use innovative approaches and technologies to solve social problems. This interaction between innovation and social entrepreneurship results in the creation of sustainable solutions to complex social problems.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship, social innovation, Liberato association

## 1.  INTRODUCTION

With both for-profit and non-profit companies realizing the potential of social innovation to solve social problems, the convergence of social innovation and non-profit organizations is an evolving theme (Altuna, 2015). Non-profit organizations are considered great social responsibility and the ability to incorporate innovative management techniques (Blanco-Ariza, 2019).

Social innovation is the application of innovative methods and techniques to achieve constructive social changes and build a more inclusive and sustainable community. Social innovation is becoming a key factor for solving complex social problems and achieving sustainable development

This paper focuses on the practical application of social innovation, exploring a concrete example in action, the Liberato association, an association founded by students and led by students, an association that, with its unique vision and action, represents an exceptional example of how social innovation can be realized in the real world.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the approaches used by the Liberato association in the application of social innovations, evaluate their effectiveness and draw key lessons that could be relevant for other organizations and communities.

In the following, the concept of social innovation will first be explored, then the activities of the Liberato association will be analyzed in detail. This work will also show how social entrepreneurs often serve as drivers of social innovation within their communities. The work of organizations like Liberat shows that innovation is not reserved only for large corporations and tech giants, but that everyone can be a driver of positive change in their community.

## 2.  SOCIAL INNOVATION

Social innovations are the subject of various research and topics that have been addressed by many authors. To understand the very concept and context of social innovation, it is necessary to look at innovations through the purpose, environment, and limitations through which they operate. In a narrower sense, social innovations represent new innovative ideas and ways of solving social challenges (Mulgan et al., 2007) while in a broader, practical sense, social innovations can be defined as concrete concepts, actions, models, systems, processes, services, and rules that create fertile ground for the creation of new organizational forms (Murray et al., 2010). According to Tao (2010), social innovation is a creative strategy that is frequently used in tandem with technological innovation to solve societal needs and challenges. Ionescu (2015) highlights the significance of distributed knowledge and self-organization while emphasizing the relevance of social economics in conceptualizing social innovation. Successful social innovations have a lasting effect and call for both opportunity and purposeful action. Lastly, Tracey (2017) offers a framework for more research by classifying social innovation into categories: social entrepreneurship and social intrapreneurship. According to Tracey & Stott (2017) Social innovation is a broad range of organizational and inter-organizational activity that is designed to address the most deep-rooted problems of society.

The role of social innovation in achieving social goals is deeply rooted in the need to address social problems and change existing paradigms. Social innovations appear as a response to the demands of modern society to solve inequality, poverty, environmental problems and other social challenges. The European Union recognizes the triple benefit of the potential of social innovation, which significantly affects the approach and promotion of socially responsible entrepreneurship. Overall, the benefit refers to the overall impact that social innovations have on the following 3 levels: (1) benefit for society; (2) benefit to the government and (3) benefit for industry. (Paska & Pavić Rogošić, 2019).

In addition to the view from the EU perspective, many authors have brought different perspectives on the role of social innovation. For example, Stephen Goldsmith, who stands out as a leader in promoting social innovation in local communities, in his book "The Power of Social Innovation" points out that social innovation serves to use resources more efficiently and find more efficient solutions to complex social challenges (Goldsmith et al., 2010). On the other hand, Gregory Dees, who was known for his research and work in the field of social entrepreneurship and social innovation, points out that the role of social innovation is not only woven in its social impact and bringing new solutions. According to Dees,

social innovations can be an upgrade to already existing solutions, and a big role in their implementation and development is played by the local community and the recognition of different opportunities and combinations on which available resources can be spent (Dees, 2002)

Many studies have explored the role of non-profit associations in driving social innovation. Many associations were able to promote social innovations through ingenuity, inspiration, and leadership support despite financial difficulties and minimal community involvement. In order to promote social innovations, Harrisson (2012) emphasized the significance of intersectoral alliances, such as the partnership between consumer rights organizations and public utility companies. A more comprehensive background was given by Moulaert (2013), who noted the growing impact of social innovation in practice and policy, notably in addressing social problems and encouraging bottom-up engagement. The potential of non-profits to drive social innovation through commercial operations and by upholding a clear and inspiring goal are further explored by Dees (1998) and McDonald (2007), respectively. These studies collectively underscore the significant role of non-profit associations in advancing social innovation.

Research has demonstrated that social innovation fosters long term innovative capacities inside companies. The advantages and chances brought about by social businesses, such as creative methods, enhanced living standards, and easier access to employment, also lend credence to this (Bittencourt, 2017).

### 3.    CASE STUDY: LIBERATO ASSOCIATION

Social innovation is not just a concept, but a catalyst for change that permeates deep into the core of organizations and communities. The Liberato association, dedicated to students and people with disabilities, is an inspiring example of how social innovation can be rooted in everyday action and strategic leadership. Through innovative projects like LiberatoMap, DisCloud and Guide for students with disabilities, the association has strengthened its social impact, changing not only the perception of social problems, but also the way it organizes its resources, communicates with stakeholders, and manages its finances.

The Liberato association was born out of a passion for innovation and a desire to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and students. A key component of its identity is a group of ambitious students at the University Department of Professional Studies in Split who recognized the importance of social innovation and the need to monitor technological progress in Split-Dalmatia County.

It was founded in 2019 and is quickly becoming an incubator of social innovations that have significantly shaped the local and wider community. Currently, there are 5 active projects, 3 of which can be characterized as social innovations, and they are discussed in the continuation of the work. The central innovation that laid the foundations of the association is LiberatoMap, an innovative platform that is aimed at displaying all accessible locations in most of the urban areas of the Split-Dalmatia County. This innovation marked the beginning of the association and created a direction for future active engagement in shaping social realities.

During every step, from the foundation until today, the management and implementation of the projects are based on the leadership of young enthusiasts. In addition, the projects and work of the association received a significant boost from many students, from which the emphasis is placed on students with disabilities who took leading roles in the development of the projects. Their active role as project managers not only helps in expanding the network of knowledge and experience, but also emphasizes that young creators of change are a key factor that leads the Liberato Association to the path towards a leader in the non-profit sector of the Split-Dalmatia County.

**LiberatoMap** represents a key project of the Liberato Association, which profiles itself as an innovative platform and mobile application aimed at showing the accessibility of spaces within the urban environment of the Split-Dalmatia County. By integrating technology and creating a central source of information, LiberatoMap solves relevant problems related to accessibility and integration of people with disabilities (PWD) into society.

**Image 1.** Web interface of the LiberatoMap and the categorization of locations

Source. https://map.udruga-liberato.hr/
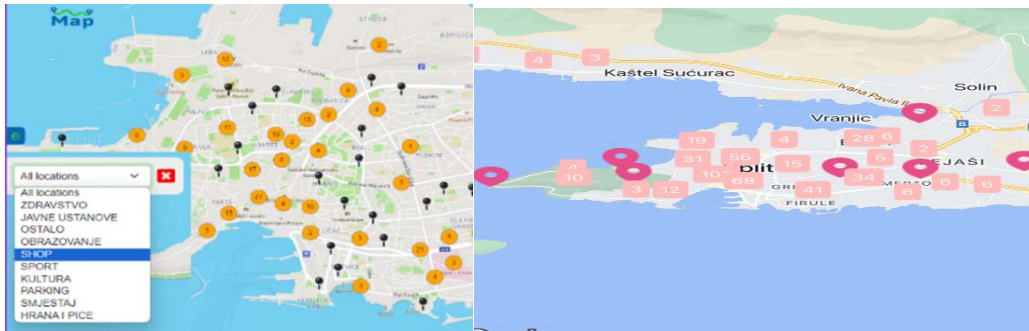
Operationally oriented, LiberatoMap currently covers five cities within two counties - Zadar, Trogir, Split, Makarska and Omiš. More than a thousand accessible locations are registered on the platform, which are categorized according to distinctive characteristics for easier searching. This allows students with disabilities to find out about the accessibility of each place, such as health facilities, educational institutions, restaurants, and cultural attractions. According to the degree of innovation, it can be characterized as a radical social innovation, given that, according to its service, it is a unique platform of this type in the EU.

In March 2023, the LiberatoMap project reached a new level of accessibility and practicality with the launch of a mobile application. This new version of the project provides additional access to users, providing them with a quick and easy way to access information about the accessibility of locations. Combined with DisCloud, an interactive solar panel that displays information from the LiberatoMap platform, the mobile application creates a powerful distribution channel that gets even closer to users. This step demonstrates the continuous effort of the Liberato Association to make accessibility and inclusion ubiquitous through innovation and technology, providing students with disabilities with the necessary tools for easier integration into society.

**DisCloud** is another radical innovation of the association, which on the one hand represents a distribution channel for LiberatoMap, and on the other hand, the potential for use in completely different segments such as commercial ones. Its purpose is to allow people with disabilities quick and practical access to information about accessibility and other functions relevant to their everyday life. This project is a focused and targeted solution that relies on innovation to remove obstacles for the successful social integration of students with disabilities.

DisCloud manifests itself as an interactive panel powered by solar energy, which simultaneously supports sustainability and environmental protection. The idea of DisCloud includes an effort to place panels in key locations in urban environments, especially in city centers and pedestrian areas, to provide users with quick access to accessibility information and other relevant data. The panels are designed and adapted in a way that allows easy access and use for people with disabilities, thus ensuring that the project really fulfills its purpose. The unique design of DisCloud is shown in Image 2.

**Image 2.** DisCloud

*Source. https://udruga-liberato.hr/*

The DisCloud project also has plans for further technical improvement in order to adapt it even better to the needs of users. The plan is to introduce chargers for motorized carts and mobile devices, add voice information and further improve the interface for better accessibility. Considering the variety of needs of students with disabilities, DisCloud will offer functionalities that enable personalized access to information. Its simplicity and practicality make it useful in many aspects of everyday life. No additional construction work is required to install the DisCloud panel. Their power supply is provided by solar energy, while the Wi-Fi network is used for operation. This is not only practical, but also aligned with contemporary Smart City initiatives, where technology plays a key role in creating sustainable and inclusive cities.

The **Guide for Students with Disabilities** is a project deeply rooted in the needs and perspectives of people with disabilities. According to the degree of innovation, it is characterized as incremental innovation.

The guide provides basic information for enrollment and courses of study and is designed to directly address high school students with disabilities as active decision-makers. This approach means that students are recognized as key actors in their academic journey and not just as passive participants.

In the sea of various initiatives like the general pattern, the Guide for Students with Disabilities stands out for its deep cooperation and synergy between the Liberato Association and the Croatian Student Union and various university student organizations at the level of the Republic of Croatia. This cooperation is not only formal but is the result of significant efforts and support of the Split University Choir, which recognized the importance of this project and actively supported and presented it to its membership. Through this collaboration, the project gained a new dimension and became an important tool for empowering PWDs on the academic path.

The emphasis on the social model of disability in the guide reflects this project's deeper purpose. It not only provides practical information but promotes a change in the perception of disability. The social model of disability emphasizes that obstacles and limitations are created by the social environment and not by the disabled themselves. Its content, manner of addressing and design are adapted to teenagers aged 15-18. Image 3 shows which specific segments the guide is based on.

**Image 3.** Guide for Students with Disabilities written in Croatian

*Source. https://udruga-liberato.hr/*

The **LiberatoTech project** aims to expand and enrich knowledge in the field of programming, computer networks and servers (based on Linux). It is aimed at high school students and students studying related fields, with the aim of providing practical experience and volunteering opportunities. The program is led by Stipo Margić, president of the Association and a certified Linux administrator and bachelor's degree in information technology engineering and takes place in the official premises of the Association.

Students participating in this program have a unique opportunity to directly contribute to the development of Liberato innovations. By encouraging technical skills and promoting the importance of new knowledge and activities, the project helps bring together a community of like-minded people. The expertise of the contractor in the field underlines the level of professional experience and commitment that participants can expect from the program.

The development and implementation of social innovations within the Liberato association significantly impacted its financial condition, which can be seen through the analysis of income and expenses during its operation years. Transition from the year 2020, with basic income and expenses, to significant growth in the coming years clearly reflects the association's engagement in the creation and application of social innovations. In 2020, the association's initial financial support enabled a modest but significant start. But with the arrival of 2021 and 2022, with rising incomes, we see a strong boost brought by social innovation. The increase in income from €4,40,091 in 2020 to €23,027.27 in 2021, and an impressive €48,626.98 in 2022, testifies to the success and recognition of the association in society. This jump in income relates to the implementation of innovations that contributed to the expansion and recognition of the association and increased its ability to attract financial resources. On the other hand, the association's expenses also grew, but they are maintained within the framework of sustainable economic practice. With the increase in activity and the growth of projects, the expenses increased from €2,371.23 in 2020 to €11,046.25 in 2021, and further to €33,937.62 in 2022. This growth in expenditure is linked to the need for more resources to realize social innovation and advance projects. Sustainability is a key aspect here, as the association strives to ensure that financial growth meets the real needs of its projects.

**Image 4.** Income and expenses of the association Liberato
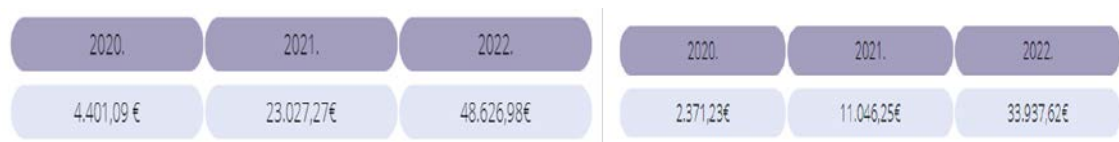


*Source: Financial reports of the Liberato association,*
*https://banovac.mfin.hr/rnoprt/Report?id=56783&year=2023&reportType=BIL_NPF&isOib=false*

Diversification of income is considered a key element of financial sustainability and clearly reflects how social innovations significantly influenced the financial condition and income structure of the association.

A look at the income structure in 2021 and 2022 provides an insight into the changes that have taken place, and at the same time indicates the strategic adjustments of the association in accordance with the development of its innovations.

In 2021, revenues were significantly related to the support of commercial companies and legal entities and local and regional self-governments. The share of income from commercial companies was 66.05%, which suggests dedicated support from the private sector in the initial stages of the development of social innovations such as the LiberatoMap project. On the other hand, the income from local and regional self-governments amounted to 33.76%, indicating the importance of the support of local communities in the goals of the association. These data are graphically presented in Image 5.

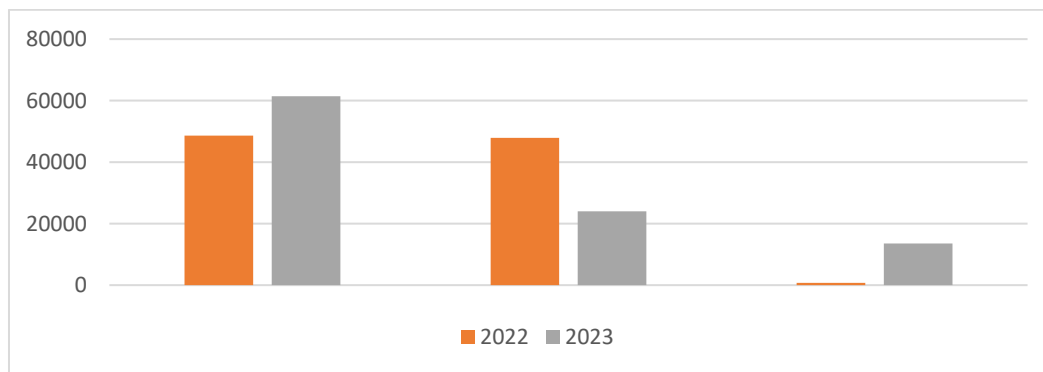**Image 5.** Diversification of income sources in total income for 2021 and 2022



*Source: Financial reports of the Liberato association,*
*https://banovac.mfin.hr/rnoprt/Report?id=56783&year=2023&reportType=BIL_NPF&isOib=false*

However, the year 2022 brings significant changes in the income structure. The share of income from companies and legal entities drops to 3.82%, which may be a consequence of the initial larger investments in innovations and projects of the association and the transition to latest support strategies. The state budget becomes the main source of income with a share of 50.5%, which is related to the financial support of the University of Split's Department of Professional Studies, which recognized the importance of innovation and association projects. In addition, local and regional governments continue to make up a significant share of revenue with 28.65%, emphasizing the continued support and recognition of the importance of the association's work at the local level.

These changes in the income structure clearly reflect the impact of social innovations on the financial condition of the Liberato association. The increase in support from the state budget indicates the recognition of innovation and social impact achieved by the association, encouraging resources for further development and expansion of projects. The decrease in the share of companies and legal entities can be seen as a gradual decrease in dependence on certain sources and emphasizes the need for diversity of income to ensure stability and sustainability.

**Image 6.** Total income; Income from donations; other income

*Source: Financial reports of the Liberato association,*
*https://banovac.mfin.hr/rnoprt/Report?id=56783&year=2023&reportType=BIL_NPF&isOib=false*

Image 6 show that in 2023, the Liberato association achieved a significant increase in total income compared to the previous year. This positive trend testifies to the successful management of resources and continuous growth of the Liberato association. However, to get a complete Image, it is crucial to analyze the income structure. Despite the overall increase in income, the income from donations in 2023 is slightly lower compared to the previous year. Despite the decrease in income from donations, a significant increase in income from other sources can be observed. This change in the income structure reflects a positive shift towards the sustainability of the Association. Dependence on donations can be sensitive, and diversification of funding sources is key to reducing risk. Diversification of funding sources is key to achieving long-term sustainability, and the Liberato association successfully uses these strategies to achieve its goals.

## 4.    LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of this research include the lack of deeper investigative inquiry and the absence of social innovation evaluation, which may affect the overall relevance and applicability of the findings. Therefore, recommendations for future research are as follows:

- **Deeper analysis;** Future studies might look more closely at how social innovation affects the communities that are the focus of the study. In order to comprehend the long-term impacts and possible modifications of initiatives like LiberatoMap, DisCloud, and LiberatoTalk, it is necessary to investigate their long-term repercussions.
- **Social innovation evaluation**; future research could employ relevant evaluation methods and tools to provide a comprehensive assessment of the impact of social innovations.
- **Comparative studies**; further research could offer greater insights into the most efficient methods and tactics for accomplishing social goals by comparing various types of social innovation and social entrepreneurship practices.
- **Qualitative research;** future research could make use of qualitative research techniques like in-depth interviews and case studies in addition to quantitative analysis.

Future research could deepen our understanding of the relationship between social innovation and social entrepreneurship by taking into consideration these limits and suggestions. It could also offer helpful advice for tackling societal concerns and advancing sustainable development.

## 5.    CONCLUSION

In the light of increasingly rapid social, economic, and technological changes, social innovation is becoming a key factor for solving complex social problems and achieving sustainable development. The case study of the Liberato Association provided valuable insight into the process of generating, implementing, and maintaining social innovations.

The Liberato association shows the importance of inclusiveness and cooperation in the process of generating social innovations. Collaboration with local universities, young people and communities is a key component of their success, but they have shown that fundraising from various sources increases financial stability and enables continuous innovation.

Liberato provides opportunities for youth to create, learn and grow, encouraging them to actively participate in creating positive change in their communities. This indicates the need for wider support for young people who want to contribute to society with innovative solutions.

Social innovation plays a key role in creating a better and more sustainable world. Through the experience of the Liberato Association, we understand that inclusivity, cooperation, sustainability, and support for young people are key components of successful social innovations. The work of organizations like Liberato shows that innovation is not only reserved for large corporations and tech giants, but that everyone can be a driver of positive change in their community.

From the above, it can be concluded that support for social innovation and entrepreneurship can be a key strategy for achieving sustainable development and solving key social challenges. Through such cooperation between sectors, positive changes are created in society, which is clearly demonstrated by the example of the association Liberato, which currently manages active projects that can be described as true social innovations.

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# MAPPING AND ASSESSING DIVERSIFIED UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS USING TEFCE TOOLBOX - YUFE CASE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to examine the benefits of TEFCE Toolbox - a novel European framework for community engagement (CE) in higher education - which has been purposefully designed to progress the CE agenda in a European context. The purpose of the TEFCE Toolbox as an institutional self-reflection framework is to serve as a reference tool for universities, communities and policymakers to better understand the dimensions of CE in higher education and as a practical tool for universities to determine how well they perform as well as where they can improve. Centred around seven recognised thematic dimensions of CE in higher education (teaching and learning; research; service and knowledge exchange; students; staff; management policies and management engagement), the TEFCE Toolbox guides users through a process to identify CE practices at their institution and then encourages participative discussions with multiple stakeholders that results in an "institutional community-engagement heatmap" for the university as a whole. This paper follows the process of TEFCE mapping and assessing various forms of partnerships between universities and the non-academic actors through empirical cross-case study analysis of universities in the YUFE alliance. The findings indicate that the TEFCE Toolbox facilitates context-specific applications in different types of universities and socioeconomic environments. Incorporating insights from engagement practitioners, students and community representatives, the TEFCE Toolbox was successfully applied in YUFE universities with diverse profiles and missions. The process facilitated the recognition of CE achievements and the identification of potential areas for improvement for each of the YUFE universities and laid the groundwork for the development of CE strategy for the alliance as a whole.


**Keywords:** University-community engagement, Engagement in higher education, University-community partnerships, TEFCE Toolbox, Case-study

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In recent decades a closer alignment between higher education and society has become quite prominent, with many higher education institutions, as Hazelkorn (2016) argues, embracing their "third mission" of community engagement. Community engagement as such is a compound and multi-layered construct that, in its broadest sense, refers to partnerships between universities and their external communities encompassing public institutions, businesses and civil society to jointly address societal needs (O'Brien et al., 2022).

The broader societal contribution of higher education started re-emerging in the last decade as a European policy priority with the demand for higher education to address societal challenges expressed dominantly in EC Communiques, like the Communication on a Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education from 2017, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025, and the Rome Ministerial Communique from 2020, stating in its Annex II (Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA) that higher education institutions should ensure that community engagement in higher education promotes diversity, equity and inclusion.

Such multiplying focus on the community engagement agenda in higher education has led to a range of initiatives at the international level to assess and support community engagement (Benneworth, 2013). However, with the exception of the Carnegie Foundation Elective Classification for Community Engagement in the USA, most attempts to externally assess community engagement have had limited success and uptake (Farnell and Šcukanec, 2018). Despite a range of international initiatives, there remains an absence of more comprehensive and robust initiatives within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that focus on assessing university community engagement and this is the gap that TEFCE Toolbox filled while becoming more and more recognised, acknowledged and at end, used in wide range of HEIs around Europe and internationally. The TEFCE Toolbox represents an innovative, robust and holistic European framework with the potential to support universities in reflecting upon their pursuit of addressing grand societal challenges, whilst promoting CE among both academic and non-academic actors.

The TEFCE framework was co-created through the EU-funded project towards a European framework for community engagement in higher education (TEFCE). The design process began with a critical synthesis of the current state of the art in community engagement including definitions, classifications and assessments (Benneworth, 2018), following with a critical analysis and review of existing tools to assess community engagement in higher education done by Farnell and Šcukanec (2018). Subsequently, Culum (2018) provided in-depth analysis and classifications of various forms of community engagement activities and a summary of the main broad categories in which such activities take place. Following this critical analysis and classification, the TEFCE Toolbox was designed and co-created by a group of experts and additionally redesigned over an 18-month piloting process with feedback from over 160 users.

Organised around seven recognised thematic dimensions of community engagement in higher education related with key academic pillars and human resources (teaching and learning; research; service and knowledge exchange; students; staff; management policies and management engagement), the TEFCE Toolbox guides users through a process of identifying engaged practices at their institution while encouraging participative discussions with multiple community representatives, that results in an "institutional community-engagement heatmap" for the university as a whole indicating: (I) the level of authenticity of community engagement practices, (II) the range of societal needs is addressed through community engagement, (III) diversity of communities engaged with, (IV) the extent to which community engagement is spread across the university, and (V) the extent to which the engagement practices are sustainable. TEFCE Toolbox incorporates a customised analytical framework "SLIPDOT analysis" (referring to **S**trengths, Areas of **L**ower **I**ntensity, Areas with **P**otential for **D**evelopment, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats). Such a framework grants HEIs with the possibilities of gaining further insight on CE in highly participatory discussions with various academic and non-academic actors

(management representatives, academics, students, community representatives) whilst considering contextual issues.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

Acknowledging TEFCE Toolbox as an almost exclusive European-oriented institutional self-reflection serving as a reference tool for universities, communities and policymakers to better understand the dimensions of CE in higher education and as a practical tool for universities to determine how well they perform as well as where they can improve, this paper sets out to address the research question – what insights, benefits and future application possibilities arise from using the TEFCE Toolbox for community engagement in a context of European university alliance - YUFE? The choice of a case-study research methodology located within a qualitative research paradigm was deemed the most suitable for understanding the process of mapping engaged practices using the TEFCE Toolbox within the YUFE alliance. Case study as a qualitatively oriented research design is well-documented in higher education studies (Harland, 2014). To explore the diverse application settings of the TEFCE Toolbox, the study followed multiple cross-country case-study designs (Yin, 2015). Multiple case design refers to case study research in which several instrumental bounded cases are selected to develop a more in-depth understanding of a phenomenon under study (Mills et al., 2010).

The TEFCE toolbox and its methodology was designed to facilitate gathering rich qualitative data combining specifically designed questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and study visits that facilitate a mapping of community engaged practice at each institution. Within the YUFE, only external study visits were not in place as envisioned by the original methodological framework, but institutional findings have been discussed over joint YUFE meetings where each institution acted a critical friend to those engaged in TEFCE mapping. Combining data collection techniques provided insight on the breadth and depth of community engaged practice, as well as in-depth analysis and reflection on areas for improvement and future development. The collected data were analysed using a cross-case analysis framework (Miles and Huberman, 1994) generally deemed useful for mobilising knowledge across cases and putting that knowledge into service for broader purposes (Khan and VanWynsberghe, 2008). Leaning on a similar analysis done by O'Brien and associates (2022), the analytical activities conducted as part of the cross-case analysis were not conducted in a linear but rather iterative way and took place in different periods pertaining specifically to four within-case analyses and cross-case analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This process allowed us to adequately consider and investigate within-case complexity and case profiles before performing systematic cross-case comparisons (Rihoux and Lobe, 2009).

## 3. FINDINGS - CASE STUDIES ANALYSIS

In this section, the findings of the usage of TEFCE Toolbox in mapping engaged practices at four YUFE universities are presented for each of the participating universities – both in terms of what was discovered about their level of community engagement and the usability and relevance of the TEFCE Toolbox as perceived by involved actors.

### 3.1. Case study 1 - University of Rijeka

*About the University of Rijeka.* The University of Rijeka (UNIRi) was founded in 1973 as a teaching-oriented university and has since undergone a series of transformations by embracing a stronger focus on research excellence and community engagement and thus by acknowledging its role in supporting regional social and economic development. UNIRi is a home for 16 faculties, 3 university departments, 14 R&D centres, 16,600 students, 3100 staff (both academics and non-academics), and 174 accredited study programmes. In addition, the UNIRi has developed a system of accredited lifelong learning programmes so that it can ensure efficient diffusion of ideas and innovations in the community, ensuring the wider social development and raising the overall competitiveness of north-western Croatia. UNIRi is a member of The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance, a major strategic partnership established between ten young research-intensive European universities that aim to bring a radical change to European higher education. The UNIRi has the 2021–2025 strategy, developed in consultation with both internal and external stakeholders. By leaning its future direction to the UN

sustainable development goals (SDGs), the UNIRi aspires to become more socially responsible and embedded more in its community. Extending its collaborative network to various public, private, non-for-profits, as well as citizens, UNIRi strives to create a unique ecosystem linking its academic pillars to diverse communities of needs and interests (Culum Ilic et al., 2020). In YUFE 2030, UNIRi actively participates in the Civic and Community Engagement work group, one of whose objectives was to map and analyse community engagement schemes using the TEFCE Toolbox, which in the case UNIRi represented a follow-up mapping.

*TEFCE piloting.* The UNIRi was the third partnering institution ever to pilot and assess the TEFCE framework within the TEFCE Erasmus+ funded project, for the first time in 2019 and then in 2022 as a follow-up. The first step in applying the Toolbox was the collection of evidence of community engaged activities from across UNIRi. Following the mapping process, a two-day piloting visit took place at the UNIRi involving focus groups and participatory discussions with the UNIRi top management representatives, UNIRi staff, students, local stakeholders (community organisations members as well as local authorities) and (four) visiting international experts.

The overall conclusions regarding community engagement based on the Toolbox application revealed that UNIRi has undeniably a strong and positive impact on the city of Rijeka and in its county in terms of its economic development and the broader social benefits implied. UNIRi's areas of strengths were categorised according to five main points – university leadership, academics, students, engagement culture and university centres. It was observed that the current university leadership values the notion of university-community engagement and the role of universities as responsible institutional "citizens" in their community, which is reflected in UNIRi strategic documents. UNIRi leadership's deliberate choice to focus on promoting and developing community engagement, as well as on creating favourable policies and supportive structures, offers a positive environment for the further development of various aspects of community engagement.

Areas of lower intensity were mostly related to two aspects - research and university impact on the community. As for the research element, despite evidence of good practices, community-based research seems to be neglected as a research design. Following, UNIRi's potential for development is categorised in the following areas: leadership and policy, relationship between university central management and its periphery (constituents' management), university R&D centres, and mainstreaming community engagement. Whilst the current university leadership is recognised for its advocacy of community engagement, their legacy might be threatened and it is, therefore, necessary to secure the long-term sustainability of CE activities, as well as creating a favourable environment at different (institutional) levels.

Threats identified for further community engagement development at UNIRi are mostly related to external elements, for example, in terms of national higher education policies that are in favour of collaboration with business/industry. Numerous opportunities were identified with the membership of UNIRi in the YUFE alliance, highlighted as a platform that opens plethora of opportunities for broadening the ideas and constructive ways of how UNIRi can serve its community and society (Culum Ilic et al., 2020).

Sharing experience of using the TEFCE Framework, Madame Rector of UNIRi observed:
> *"Owing to our participation in the TEFCE project, we have had a highly relevant framework for reflecting on our current and future work on initiating, promoting, and strengthening community engagement. The TEFCE Toolbox – an instrument that helps universities identify how and where to improve their conduct when addressing societal challenges – has provided us with a unique opportunity to evaluate and further develop both institutional and individual capacities in the area of community engagement. Consequently, it has ameliorated our contributions to the broader community."*

### 3.2. Case study 2 - University of Antwerp

*About the University of Antwerp.* University of Antwerp is a young and forward-thinking university, with origins in three separate institutions, formed in 2003. With more than 23 000 students, almost 7 000

members of staff and 154 accredited study programs, it is home for 9 faculties and 17 institutes and R&D centres. Its strong mission and vision around positive change and taking on challenges within society, can be summarised in the slogan 'Let's shape the future!'. The university brings this to life through free and innovative research, student-centred academic teaching and active community engagement. UAntwerp aims to permanently strengthen its commitment to the future development of a sustainable world and a democratic and inclusive society founded on human rights. Engagement is inscribed in the core mission of the university, and has a support structure for embedding and coordinating community engagement activities at university level, and funding instruments that specifically promote community engagement. In YUFE 2030, UAntwerp actively participates in the Civic and Community Engagement work group, one of whose objectives was to map and analyse community engagement schemes using the TEFCE Toolbox.

*Piloting TEFCE.* After following a workshop on TEFCE, and concluding this method as innovative way of looking for an institution's community engagement in a qualitative and participatory way, UAntwerp brought together, quite bottom-up, a very diverse group of 20 colleagues within the university to reflect together where UAntwerp stands and wants to go with its community-engagement. After the collection, mapping and analysis of 134 initiatives, 4 half days of participatory dialogue were organised (reflection and discussion on the preliminary results) with academic staff, students and local stakeholders.

In conclusion, there is great enthusiasm among staff and students to follow community-engagement principles and get engaged themselves, which is reflected in a wide range of initiatives throughout the university. There is also a lot of expertise available, noting that science communication and citizen science is already highly developed at the university. Areas for improvement were captured in a scenario with 20 recommendations, divided into the different themes, to strengthen and structurally reinvigorate community engagement at the university (e.g. in the context of policy, more knowledge sharing can be done in various ways (networking, collaboration), both internally and externally). Specifically towards communication, visibly profiling and framing the university's commitment to and with its partners is central. As for education, new ways of involving the professional field in the learning process can be explored.

Quote from Prof Nathalie Dens, the future Vice-Rector 'Community Engagement' (until now 'Service to Society'), starting September 1st, 2024.

> *"Inspired by a recent internal TEFCE report with 20 concrete recommendations on community engagement at UAntwerpen, we will refine the existing vision around community-engagement and translate it into a number of achievable strategies and measurable objectives. We will develop a framework and communicate it so that it is clear to everyone what community-engagement at the university stands for. Depending on the objective, we will deliberately choose which of the many bottom-up initiatives can be given room for growth and which initiatives we will anchor or not. Besides a dedicated Department of University & Society, it is important that community-engagement is integrated and embedded in all ranks, faculties and departments. In this way, more synergies can also emerge and cooperation and interdisciplinarity can be encouraged. Staff efforts in this area should therefore be explicitly appreciated and supported."*

### 3.3. Case study 3 - Nicolaus Copernicus University

*About Nicolaus Copernicus University.* Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (NCU), established in 1945, is one of the largest universities in Poland, comprising 16 faculties. It provides graduate and postgraduate courses for around 18 000 students, offering education in over 100 fields of study. It employs 4 400 people, and the number of alumni reaches 200 000. NCU has state-of-the-art research infrastructure, modern teaching facilities, excellent social, cultural and sports facilities. It participates in student and staff exchange programs at international and national levels. The university supports local communities with knowledge, stimulates its social and business environment's development, and is a culture-forming institution. It has extensive experience in brokering and organising volunteer opportunities. NCU is a member of the Young Universities for the Future of Europe alliance (YUFE) – one of the first European Universities, aiming to create an inclusive higher education landscape without borders that keeps pace with changes in society and the labour market, giving all citizens access to various opportunities that respond to their development needs. In YUFE 2030, NCU actively participates in the

Civic and Community Engagement work group, one of whose objectives was to map and analyse community engagement schemes using the TEFCE Toolbox.

*TEFCE piloting. T*he TEFCE tool was first used at NCU in 2023 within the YUFE project, a task related to mapping and analysing local cooperation schemes at YUFE universities. The TEFCE tool was recognised as the best one available to assess the extent, form and type of university community engagement, to increase the visibility of good engaged practices at the NCU and to create an institutional framework that would facilitate such activities in the future on three levels - locally, nationally and internationally.

NCU's areas of strength have been detected in 3 main points: (I) involvement of researchers, (II) students' engagement, and (III) implementation of activities that meet social needs. The first one shares a narrative of NCU researchers' participation in public debates and initiatives responding to the vast social needs (political, economic, social, cultural, etc.) of the university's external communities, mainly through public presentations and articles in the media. Such social involvement has been acknowledged and positively evaluated by the external and diverse communities. NCU students' engagement is very high in terms of authenticity. Students carry out their own social activities, mainly through educational and promotional activities. They actively participate in organising and delivering various events organised at the university level. The university cooperates with diverse external stakeholders by implementing short-term projects that meet social needs. The NCU willingly makes its facilities and infrastructure available to external entities.

The areas requiring further investment and support are twofold - the stronger institutional support of the NCU to facilitate current and further engaged practices, and activities for sustainable development, so these two areas constitute university challenges for the close future. The university ensures recognition of the value of social involvement primarily through statements that draw attention to the importance of social involvement for the social needs of the university's external communities.

The NCU has working groups and advisory bodies dealing with university engagement in the broadest sense of the word (third mission, business involvement, civic role, etc.). However, the university lacks a recruitment, tenure and promotion policy that addresses evaluation criteria specifically related to community engagement.

At NCU, it is worth strengthening the institutional sustainability of activities that contribute to the increase in the university's social involvement. Formalising activities and processes responding to the social needs and supporting employees will certainly contribute to strengthening the social role of NCU.

Statement by a research participant: *"The survey based on the TEFCE toolbox makes it possible to analyse activities in terms of many dimensions. The research in which I previously participated was focused on the analysis of only selected areas. TEFCE Toolbox treats activities in a multidimensional manner."*

### 3.4. Case study 4 - Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

*About the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid*. UC3M was established in May 1989. From the outset it was intended to be a relatively small, innovative, public university, providing teaching of the highest quality and focused primarily on research. UC3Ḿs mission is to contribute to the improvement of society through teaching and cutting-edge research. Located in 4 campuses near or in Madrid, with 24 641 students and 3 000 members of staff, UC3M aspires to be a global university, developing its activity on

an international scale and fostering mobility programmes and participation in international initiatives such as YUFE, to which UC3M adhered from its pilot phase in 2019.

Another axis of UC3M's mission is to be more open to society, to the surrounding community and to the world in all its dimensions. This is why already in its 2016-2022 Strategic Plan, UC3M embedded the principles of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and decided to foster research initiatives for development and knowledge transfer aiming (I) to solve global challenges, (II) to promote education programmes for development, and (III) to intensify the connection with civil society and the industry to favour the achievement of the SDGs at local, national and international level. Hence, in 2022 UC3M was the first university in Europe (and the second in the world) to obtain the ACEEU dual accreditation in the "Entrepreneurial University" and "Engaged University" granted by the Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities (ACEEU).

UC3M, as many Spanish Universities, has also a longstanding tradition of deploying cooperation for development programmes. It has funded more than 200 initiatives led by Cooperation Groups since 2004, when a specific office and a vice rectorate were established to foster capacity building or research for development programmes, expanding UC3M's societal commitment to the international arena. UC3M co-lead one of the flagships of the pilot phase of YUFE, called YUFE in the Cities, and developed a series of volunteering projects and HelpDesks. In YUFE 2030, UC3M actively participates in the Civic and Community Engagement work group, one of whose objectives is to map and analyse community engagement schemes using the TEFCE Toolbox.

UC3M launched the TEFCE project in October 2023, organising a 3-hour workshop and setting up a team of university management, staff, students and community representatives who were presented with the initiative and invited to quick-scan the community engagement practices on their existing knowledge using the "Dimensions of engagement Tool", and first 25 practices were successfully identified and mapped more in-depth .

The collection of evidence phase was followed by a letter of the Vicerrector of Sustainable Development, Cooperation and Healthy Campuses, sent in December 2023, inviting all staff members and student associations and delegations to fill in a specifically designed questionnaire "to map the community participation activities carried out by the academic and non-academic staff as well as by UC3M students, with the objective of improving and deepening the commitment of our university in community engagement actions". The model questionnaire provided by the TEFCE Toolbox was adapted to allow for binary or multiple-choice questions and answers to encourage participation. In February, when access to the questionnaire was closed, 54 more practices were collected, upgrading the number to an overall of 79 engaged practices. UC3M is presently analysing the mapped practices, and will continue working on the following phases in the upcoming months. However, the first (preliminary) analysis proved that engaged practices are anchored in all TEFCE dimensions and include a plethora of community partners coming from all sectors (local government, NGOs, public institutions, business representatives). Practices are well aligned with various disciplinary fields and engage community partners in diverse aspects and phases of co-creational and participatory activities.

## 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The usage of TEFCE Toolbox provided useful insight on the feasibility and application of the Toolbox across four different YUFE universities. As distinguished from the case-study findings, insightful information on community engaged practices was captured as well at each institution. Flexible nature of the TEFCE Toolbox and context specific nature of university community engagement in general, but delivered through data collection, mapping analysis and academic and non-academic actors' involvement as well, made the whole experience coherent, successful and meaningful for each institution.

As observed from the case studies, the inclusion of the SLIPDOT analysis provided a wealth of insights into strengths and areas for improvement for each institution. Actors involved welcomed that the Toolbox facilitated a participative approach putting in front both bottom-up and top-down involvement of staff, students, management and community representatives. Engaging with actors both within and outside the institution in the implementation process was deemed essential to obtain relevant insights, acknowledging at the same time that the extent to which the community representatives were involved in the process differed in each context.

This study findings indicate that the TEFCE Toolbox was exploratory and respectful of differences in institutional, socioeconomic and cultural contexts of universities within a same alliance. As observed from the case studies the TEFCE Toolbox was successfully applied at four universities that are diverse in terms of their institutional profiles, priorities, their size and level of integration, their geography in the context of capital cities and small towns, and their socioeconomic and cultural contexts (from countries with relatively high and relatively low levels of gross domestic product per capita). So, the findings indicate that the TEFCE Toolbox facilitates context-specific applications in different types of universities and socioeconomic environments.

Aware of the various situations in which community engagement can occur, this study demonstrates that the TEFCE Toolbox supported a reflective and, dare we say, effective learning experience for each of these YUFE institutions. Additionally, TEFCE mapping exercise established a solid evidence-based foundation for crafting a CE strategy for the YUFE alliance. And last, but certainly not the least, with a plethora of diverse CE activities, YUFE partners contribute to the development of the entire pillar on Societal Impact of YUFE.

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# COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING AS A LIMINAL PHENOMENON OUTSIDE THE TRADITIONAL HE TEACHING FIELD: A MULTI-THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE

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## ABSTRACT

Community-engaged teaching and learning, referring to service-learning as well, has been extensively studied and analysed using many conceptual and theoretical frameworks, some of which as the most dominant paper are highlighted in this paper. However, this paper ambitiously strives to put on the agenda another conceptual and theoretical lens - liminality - and argues for its potential by drawing on Turner's concept of liminality to discuss emerging evidence - coming from various disciplinary fields - indicating the impact of service-learning on students. Turner (1969) defines liminality as a phase characterised by a lack of distinct traits from the previous or subsequent phases, where individuals or groups exhibit ambiguous characteristics. It represents an 'in-between' state, a transitional space where one moves from one experience to another. During this liminal period, individuals temporarily shed their typical identities as they stand on the threshold of personal or social transformation. The attributes of the liminal situation - freedom, egalitarianism, informal unity, and creativity - align closely with the characteristics of a community-engaged learning course. This alignment suggests that such courses can be described using these attributes. This interpretation opens the door for further exploration of community-engaged learning within the framework of liminality as an additional theoretical perspective that can enrich the overall theoretical framework.

**Key words:** community-engaged learning, liminality, liminal phenomenon, community-engaged learning in HE, service-learning

## 1. INTRODUCTION - A MULTI-THEORETICAL LANDSCAPE ON COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING

The community-engaged learning model is based on the intentional integration of the curriculum and (student) commitment in the community with a strong reflective component, while its integration into higher education implies the creation of a stimulating environment for student learning organised in such a way as to encourage meaningful, purposeful and active student participation in activities and tasks of a reflexive nature, carefully designed in cooperation between university teachers and representatives of organisations and institutions in the local community, with the idea of addressing certain needs and/or problems of the (local) community. The model focuses on students' critical thinking, puts curricular concepts in the context of real life situations and community problems, thus empowering students by requiring them to analyse, evaluate and synthesise theoretical concepts in the process of designing solutions to various (social) problems identified in the (local) community.

The philosophical-pedagogical inspiration for the development of community-engaged learning models in the literature is mainly related to John Dewey's progressive educational ideas (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Dewey believed that students should be active participants, distinctly involved in their own learning process. He believed that they should learn through experience and that well-designed (teaching) activities could be an incentive for young people to become involved in the community and have stronger civic commitment (Dewey, 1938, according to Madsen and Turnbull, 2005). With time, the theoretical insights of Kolb and Schon on the role of reflective thinking in experiential education (Cone and Harris, 1996; Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996) and then cognitive

psychologists such as Vygotsky and Bruner, who pointed out that learning is highly individualised and involves the creation of meaning (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989) have greatly contributed to the empowerment and dissemination of this model into higher education institutions throughout the world. community-engaged learning also relies on critical theory and feminist pedagogy (Brown, 2001; Deans, 1999). As noted by Friere (1973) and Shor (1987), critical theory emphasises that education is political and should therefore include a dialectical approach to problem analysis and setting, and a critique of social systems, especially the education system. Feminist pedagogy also accepts the need for critical thinking and dialogue related to the educational aspects of privilege and power (Weiler, 1991). Last but not least, in addition to the above, more recent theoretical frameworks for researching and analysing community-engaged learning models include engagement pedagogy (Lowery et al., 2006), the transformative model (Kiely, 2005), and community-engaged learning, presented as postmodern pedagogy (Butin, 2005). All these theoretical frameworks have signalled the importance of positioning community-engaged learning in the context of social needs, problems, and/or challenges.

The community-engaged learning model is described by many authors as a balanced approach to experiential student education that has the potential to contribute to active citizenship education while ensuring equal focus on community contribution and often the transformative learning that takes place (Furco, 2011). A significant portion of the first wave of community-engaged learning research focused on the positive learning outcomes of students and the impact of this model on their attitudes, values, and beliefs (Astin & Sax, 1998; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). Furthermore, research shows that the community-engaged learning model has a significant positive impact on the students' academic success, and that the best results are achieved through mentoring programmes designed in collaboration with local community organisations/institutions (Conrad and Hedin, 1991; Copaci and Rusu, 2016 ). Astin et al. (2000) emphasise the significant positive effect of the model on critical thinking and the academic and critical writing skill. community-engaged learning also influences students' psychological development because it increases personal and social responsibility (Conrad and Hedin, 1991), develops social attitudes, builds self-esteem, and develops a sense of respect for cultural diversity (Conrad and Hedin, 1991; Simons and Cleary, 2006).

The reflective component of community-engaged learning and its connection to curricular content enables students, as well as university teachers, to explore and understand social perspectives through the process of collecting and studying individual differences in cognitive and emotional patterns that emerge during the educational process (Alexander and Chomsky, 2008). The integration of this model into higher education can have a positive impact on personal development and social responsibility, positive social attitudes, civic action, political awareness, acceptance of different attitudes, level of self-efficacy and a sense that we can integrate desired changes into the local community (Simons and Cleary, 2006; Conrad and Hedin, 1991; Hamilton and Fenzel, 1988).

The community-engaged learning model is recognized in the literature as an approach that helps students develop a sense of community, encourages their activity and civic commitment in the community, influences changes in their attitudes, habits and behaviour, strengthening the students' empathy for community problems (Zlotkowski, 1995). In line with the key and innovative role that the community-engaged learning model plays in the students' personal, social and professional development and in meeting community needs, there is a growing interest in higher education institutions to integrate this model, as well as increased scientific interest in the psychological, social and academic outcomes it has for (all) participants (Eyler, 2002; Furco, 2011). Simons and Cleary (2006) argue that (only) by integrating this model into higher education, does student learning become social, emotional, cognitive, multicultural, and interhuman. Adding to that - transformative as well.

The use of the term "transformative" is deliberate, representing a core principle in service-learning and extensively discussed in adult education literature. Transformation involves a series of stages, a catalyst, and a resolution. Transformative learning signifies a profound shift, a fundamental alteration in how we perceive ourselves and the world around us (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 130). It commences with a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000) where learners confront discrepancies in their prior knowledge, beliefs, biases, or prejudices, leading to a realisation that the world may not align with their previous assumptions. Robertson (1988) characterises this as a "trigger event" prompting individuals to recognize the inadequacy of their former perspectives (p. 88). Social interactions - usually integrated in CETL courses - play a vital role in facilitating these transformative moments.

## 2.    COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING AS A LIMINAL PHENOMENON

In this paper, I employ Turner's notion of liminality (1969) as an analytical framework to explore its capacity to facilitate the interpretation of (some/selected) research studies from various disciplinary backgrounds, and their findings concerning community-engaged learning and/or service-learning.

Turner (1969) defines liminality as a transitional phase devoid of the characteristics of the previous or subsequent phases, characterised by ambiguity in individuals or groups. It represents an 'in-between' state, a transitional space where one transitions from one experience to another. In this liminal phase, individuals exist in a state of flux, shedding their usual identities as they stand on the brink of personal or social transformation. Turner views liminality as a period marked by freedom, equality, informal unity, and creativity. Liminality can manifest in individuals, groups, or entire societies. This paper does not focus on any of the mentioned levels, but rather discusses the concept from a theoretical stand.

Some studies have shown that a course that fully incorporates the community-engaged learning model can be seen as a liminal phase - a transformative and innovative space where students transition from traditional disciplinary teaching methods to experiential learning (Culum Ilic and Milos, 2022). As students engage with community-based learning principles in their higher education journey, they depart from their conventional identities associated with traditional (mono)disciplinary studies. This departure signifies a shift from traditional teaching environments to a more collaborative, experiential, and interdisciplinary educational model. By aligning with Turner's attributes of liminality - freedom, equality, informal unity, and creativity - a course embracing community-engaged learning can be aptly characterised.

## 3.    DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Extensive literature in the service-learning field highlights the numerous benefits of this pedagogy, even though its outcomes may not always be immediately apparent or easily quantifiable. Nevertheless, some studies emphasise the positive influence of service-learning on students' attitudes toward future community involvement and active citizenship, as well as their evolving perceptions of their civic responsibilities in tackling identified challenges (Eyler and Giles, 1999; Eyler et al., 2001; Moely et al., 2002). In this context, a key qualitative outcome of community-engaged learning programs is students' recognition that their actions can create meaningful changes within the local community (Simons and Cleary, 2006; Astin et al., 2000), shaping their belief in their capacity to drive positive social change (Conrad and Hedin, 1991).

Service-learning represents a high-impact experiential teaching and learning approach that not only fosters student engagement and improves retention rates but also nurtures civic responsibility and fosters critical thinking by aligning educational outcomes with community-identified needs (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008; Eyler et al., 2001; Procario-Foley & Van Cleave, 2016; Strait et al., 2015; Culum Ilic et al., 2020). It functions as a pedagogical bridge-building strategy that fosters collaboration, mutual respect, and relationships between academia, students, and local communities (Petracchi et al., 2010). This approach embodies the art of teaching the interconnectedness between universities, communities, and students, leading to various personal and social benefits such as assuming civic responsibilities, fostering social cohesion, fostering trust among stakeholders, promoting community development, and enhancing satisfaction and feeling of happiness throughout the learning and teaching processes (Pereira and Costa, 2019). As a potent pedagogical instrument for personal and social growth, it guides students towards understanding their core values and civic duties, thus making them more engaged, positive, and cooperative members of society (Bringle et al., 2016; Billig, 2000).

Some argue that service-learning serves as an educational pathway that reinforces learning through reflective self-examination (Dunlap, 2006; Petkus, 2000) while empowering students with autonomy and control over their learning process. Additionally, it fosters feelings of competence, self-efficacy, improved social relationships, and meaningful connections (Billig, 2010). This approach also contributes to the creation of social capital (Laura, 2014), combats poverty (Ebrahim, 2012), instils a sense of fairness

among students (Heffernan, 2001), advocates for social justice (Wang and Rodgers, 2006), and cultivates altruistic tendencies in students (Hegarty and Angelidis, 2015).

Implementing service-learning (SL) in educational institutions represents a step towards building a fairer and more sustainable society, as it emphasises teaching-learning processes centred around justice and social commitment. Gaete (2011) argues that SL is a cutting-edge transformative tool with the potential to influence individuals' attitudes, actions, and behaviours, offering a valuable asset for humanity. Integration of SL into course themes further enhances its role in promoting societal sustainability and directing focus towards pertinent societal issues (Cheese and Hills, 2016; Dmochowski et al., 2016).

According to Conway, Amel & Gerwien (2009), regardless of the field or specific course, the outcomes of service-learning (SL) can be categorised into four main areas: academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes. Academic outcomes encompass academic and cognitive developments, the application of knowledge and skills, and the cultivation of individual accountability. Personal outcomes encompass interpersonal skills, values, personal beliefs, as well as positive behaviours and attitudes that enhance individual well-being. Social outcomes centre around interpersonal, group, and societal skills, focusing on interactions with others, respect for community members, empathy, and evolving beliefs about others. Citizenship outcomes highlight democratic participation, awareness of social responsibilities, personal engagement, principles of justice, ethical considerations, and involvement in civic activities. These outcomes are integral components of the service-learning process, shaping students' overall growth and development.

If embracing Britt's (2012) three categories of service-learning, each geared toward distinct learning objectives, and the notion that those three approaches converge on their attention to the development of students' identities, but they diverge on which particular facet of identity is nurtured and called forth - *learner, citizen, or activist* - we can find there additional framework that intertwines with service-learning as a liminal phenomenon.

The learner-oriented approach focuses on honing skills and fostering reflexivity. This strategy draws from Dewey's (1938) experiential education principles and Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning, emphasising "performing work in real-world settings to strengthen learning" (Wong et al., 2012, p. 275). Students are presented with a challenge (a community-identified need), receive instruction on relevant skills (through academic guidance), are tasked with addressing the challenge meaningfully (by applying newly acquired skills), and are then prompted to reflect on this process, refining their skills further.

The citizen-centred approach views community service as a vehicle for nurturing civic values and fostering critical citizenship. This approach aligns with longstanding discussions about the role of higher education, particularly in liberal education contexts. Britt (2012) proposes that this approach encourages learners to contemplate "what it means to exist in relation to others in the community" (p. 83) and prompts the application of critical thinking skills to social justice issues, viewed through the lens of personal values, morality, choices, and societal responsibilities.

The activist-oriented approach frames classrooms as arenas for addressing and challenging social injustices, with students encouraged to view themselves as potential change agents. According to Britt (2012), this approach aims to elevate, explore, and directly confront "social inequities…encouraging students to see themselves as potential change agents" (p. 85). Here, the focus is not solely on developing professional skills through service experiences, but rather on understanding root causes, systemic issues, economic factors, and strategic leverage points related to enduring inequities.

Drawing from Turner's concept of the liminal phase, the studies referenced in this paper (although limited within the extensive literature) and Britt's approaches collectively portray service-learning as a pivotal liminal phase within students' educational journeys. This liminal phase involves a temporary detachment from one's conventional identity, leading to profound personal transformations, as indicated by the research findings highlighting diverse outcomes related to various levels of change.

While existing scientific literature consistently demonstrates the transformative potential of the community-engaged learning model and its role as a foundation for self-reflection and potential habitus changes, especially concerning further civic and political engagement, there is a notable absence of literature examining this model through its liminal characteristics. This paper illuminates that many studies are recognizing the community-engaged learning model as a liminal space within the otherwise traditional landscape of higher education teaching. Therefore, further research focusing on exploring

service-learning within the framework of its liminal aspects seems quite potent and is therefore strongly encouraged.

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# CONNECTING SERVICE-LEARNING TO THE IDENTIFICATION AND REMOVAL OF BARRIERS THAT LIMIT PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

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**ABSTRACT**

This research article presents a didactic-pedagogical proposal for the initial training of future teachers. The proposal focuses on Service-Learning as a means to develop inclusive education through professional practice. It is the result of collaborative reflection by a group of teachers from the University of Cadiz, as part of the I+R+I project titled, 'What are we forgetting in inclusive education: a participatory research project in Western Andalusia' (PID2019-108775RB-C43). The text begins with the assumption that Service-Learning is a means of promoting inclusive education and is itself an inclusive methodology. The proposal connects various core elements of Service-Learning, including the identification of needs and the development of services to reduce or eliminate barriers as a means of transformative action. The links between Service-Learning and the central element of inclusive education make sense. This is embodied in the concept of barriers that limit or prevent the presence, participation and educational progress of all students (Ainscow, 2004). This paper addresses several research questions: How can Service-Learning facilitate inclusive pedagogy in initial teacher education? How can we identify and eliminate barriers to presence, participation, and educational progress for all learners? How does the service contribute to the development of more inclusive school contexts?

This work continues the authors' previous contributions to various areas of Service-Learning development, including its epistemological bases (García & Cotrina, 2012), institutionalisation processes (García & Cotrina, 2015), innovative experiences in subjects related to diversity (García & Cotrina, 2016), and new implementation models such as the cascading service-learning model (Cotrina, 2022). All of the authors are committed to using Service-Learning as a valuable strategy for the initial training of future teachers. This approach enhances their competence development in relation to inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Barriers, Needs Assessment, Teacher Training, Service-Learning.

## 1.  INTRODUCTION

As university teachers who train educators in other educational stages, we have always reflected on and defended the qualitative and quantitative differences in our field of knowledge compared to other disciplines. As trainers of trainers, we must consider the implications of our teaching practice on the type of knowledge and professional rationality we employ, as Schön (1987) points out. Our position requires a reflective practice inherent to the critical current, as noted by Barón (2015). The core of our teaching specialisation and research has been inclusive education, while also exploring other paths. Focusing on inclusive education has enabled us to question and resist pedagogical thinking and ways of constructing schools that are often hegemonic and dominant. Our professional position of challenging the pedagogical status quo, from the perspective of inclusion (Parrilla, 2007), led us to connect with Service-Learning. Over time, we have developed a strong connection from both practical and theoretical perspectives. Service-Learning, a critical strategy according to Deans (2000), is highly valuable for resolving divergent

situations that are typical of the dilemmas of inclusive education. It contributes to a better understanding of the problems we face and puts values into action (Carrington & Saggers, 2008). This is why service-learning, in its practical aspect, has become one of the basic strategies of our teaching at the university level.  Simultaneously, we encourage our students to develop Service-Learning projects as a means of fostering critical pedagogical thinking through transformative practice (Opazo et al., 2018). On the theoretical side, we have researched and examined the epistemological foundations of Service-Learning (García & Cotrina, 2012) and the processes of curricular institutionalisation associated with it (García & Cotrina, 2015). We have described inspiring experiences and practices developed within the framework of subjects linked to attention to diversity. These include the works of García and Cotrina (2016) and Zarzuela and García (2020). Additionally, we have conceptualised a new implementation option, the cascading service-learning model, as proposed by Cotrina (2022).  However, the association of Service-Learning and inclusive education has allowed us to overcome the dichotomy between theory and practice, as highlighted by Mella-Núñez et al. (2021) and Resch & Schrittesser (2023).

## 2. SERVICE LEARNING AS AN INCLUSIVE-BASED PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSAL

Inclusion is one of the great challenges facing our society in the 21st century, as it is becoming increasingly urgent to learn to live together in social contexts of diversity. Exploring ways to move towards more inclusive societies and communities is a global, as well as a European, priority. This concern translates into schools and higher education institutions themselves. In this context, inclusive education is the tool that enables this aspiration for educational and social inclusion. Inclusive education is defined as

> (...) a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach all learners; it can therefore be understood as a key strategy for achieving Education For All. As a general principle, it should guide all educational policies and practices, based on the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society (UNESCO, 2009).

Numerous studies have emphasised service-learning as an inclusive pedagogical approach (Carrington, 2011; Lavery et al., 2017; Valencia et al., 2019). This has led to its increasing adoption by higher education institutions that are dedicated to becoming more inclusive organisations and training professionals who are ethically committed to inclusion. Over 12 years ago, García and Cotrina (2012) introduced us to the value of using this pedagogical strategy in our subject training programmes. As a team of university teachers, we were concerned about improving the initial training of our students, who would ultimately become future teachers.  All of our subjects are related to the attention to diversity. This concern has persisted and strengthened over time, and continues to challenge our pedagogical thinking. We aim to transform these concerns into processes of inquiry about the training curriculum we use in our subjects and teaching practices. Our goal is to transform the school and, ultimately, society towards a model based on equity and social justice.

### 2.1 Service-Learning and Inclusive Pedagogy

It is important to reflect on the pedagogical meaning and formative value of Service-Learning in university teaching. Service-Learning has been identified as a necessity due to its features of inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). Inclusive pedagogy is a pedagogical practice that aims to reduce inequities in the learning process and improve the quality of education. Teachers engage in teaching that enriches learning environments, promoting flexible and varied learning experiences where students can be actively involved and make decisions about their own learning development.

At least three highly valuable aspects of Service-Learning can be distinguished as inclusive pedagogy:

- SL is a didactic approach that offers unique elements not commonly found in other teaching methodologies. It aims to promote critical thinking in the initial training of future teachers. One of its strengths is the ability to raise awareness and sensitivity towards socio-educational needs of the environment. Additionally, it encourages educators to consider the perspective of students who are at greater risk of exclusion and vulnerability.

- SL, universal learning design, cooperative work, and project work are essential components when dealing with inclusive teaching strategies. These factors help future teachers become aware of limitations or conditions that may affect learning for all students.
- Encouraging students to implement Service Learning (SL) projects within the framework of group work can help them take ownership of a valuable teaching strategy. SL projects are a first-order resource for mobilising alliances from the environment to deal with diversity. This can be a useful addition to their didactic-pedagogical resources for future teaching. It is important to note that SL projects should be implemented objectively and without bias.

In previous works, it has been noted that "Service-Learning in teacher education can play an important role in the development of both professional awareness and competence" (García & Cotrina, 2015, p. 16). This is particularly relevant in the field of inclusive education,

- Where it can facilitate research by analysing the community or service target group to understand their contexts, challenges, available resources, and areas of need.
- Dialogue and participation are important channels of communication with community members to hear their perspectives, experiences, and opinions on the most pressing needs and possible solutions.
- Prioritisation involves identifying the most urgent or important needs that can be addressed through a Service-Learning project, considering factors such as feasibility, potential impact, and available resources.
- Collaborative design involves developing the action plan as a collaborative project with community members to ensure that the proposed solutions are culturally, pedagogically appropriate, relevant, and sustainable in the long term.
- By regularly reviewing and evaluating the project's progress, the course of action strategies can be adjusted as necessary to ensure that identified needs are being effectively addressed and desired outcomes are being achieved.

Each of these elements also includes additional valuable aspects, such as reinforcing collaborative work between teachers, establishing a connection between schools and universities, or managing inter-institutional alliances (García, 2021).

## 3. SERVICE-LEARNING, THE DETECTION OF SOCIAL NEEDS AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS

The emergence of the concept of barriers has been central to advancing towards the current conceptualisation of educational and social inclusion. Booth (1998) pointed out that the transition from exclusion to inclusion focused on incorporating the view of the community and valuing participation, assuming the social paradigm of inclusion and interpreting it through the organisational paradigm. Booth and Ainscow (2002) popularised the concept of barriers to learning and participation. They defined these as physical, pedagogical, normative, attitudinal, or other obstacles that make access, participation, and progress difficult or impossible for all students without exception.

> When educational difficulties are attributed to student deficits, barriers to learning and participation that exist at all levels of our education systems are overlooked and innovations in school culture, policies and practices that would minimise difficulties for all students are inhibited (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 20).

This statement clearly connects with the purposes of Service-Learning. Service-Learning is a valuable pedagogical proposal for the development of inclusive education as it focuses on the need for social transformation embedded in the concept of barriers. Although there are different perspectives on Service-Learning, it is necessary to adopt a critical approach (Chupp & Joseph, 2010) to achieve this encounter. This approach aligns with what Chiva and García-Puchades (2018) refer to as a cultural option. When approaching Service-Learning from a critical perspective (Mitchell, 2008), the focus is on its contribution to social change, the redistribution of powers that perpetuate exclusion, and the development of authentic relationships based on values of solidarity necessary for coexistence in diversity.

### 3.1. Detecting social needs and identifying barriers

The identification and understanding of problematic situations are a fundamental process in the Service-Learning methodology. It is crucial to detect needs in order to propose effective solutions. This process gives pedagogical value to 'situating' the teaching-learning processes. Situated learning, as an educational theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), emphasises the importance of learning in contexts that are relevant and meaningful to the individual. This approach posits that knowledge and skills are best acquired through practical application and practice, rather than abstract or decontextualised presentation. Situated learning theory suggests that knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment, and that the context in which teaching and learning occurs significantly influences the acquisition and understanding of knowledge. Therefore, this approach aims to integrate theory and practice, offering students chances to apply what they learn in authentic situations that are relevant to their personal, professional, or social lives.

The identification of real needs of a specific context, community or group is one of the components of Service-Learning that connect with this pedagogical option, where, in addition, there is the aim of designing projects or educational interventions that address these needs with the final purpose of effectively mitigating them. This social need "refers to a problem that is outside us, but which challenges us, concerns us and on which we can act responsibly trying, if not to solve it, at least to improve it" (Batllé, n.d.). Through this definition we can clearly appreciate the difference between educational need (where the subject is the problematised) to introduce us, as the paradigm of inclusion points out, into the field of problematisation of contexts and systems that promote and increase exclusion; and which brings into play a component of solidarity, since it is something that is outside of us. In other words, this concept relates to barriers from the perspective of community and participation. Identifying social needs requires questioning, inquiry, and reflection. Students must ask themselves where, why, and what the causes and consequences are. The purpose of this text is to identify barriers in the field of inclusive education. These barriers are related to the identification of exclusion factors and obstacles that hinder students' access, participation, and progress. Identifying barriers is a powerful strategy in initial teacher education that can challenge the meaning of education and pedagogical practices. As stated in the Spanish version of the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), this process is crucial for promoting inclusive education.

> The use of the concept of 'barriers to learning and participation' can help to resolve the educational difficulties associated with the unfortunately commonplace task of identifying certain students as 'having special educational needs'. The idea that educational difficulties can be resolved by labelling students in this way and then carrying out individual intervention has considerable limitations. (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.27).

Barriers to access, participation, and progress have been classified in various ways (Covarrubias, 2019). In the field of education, it is appropriate to address attitudinal, methodological, organizational, and social barriers, as pointed out by Puigdellívol (2009). These dimensions are the focus of the Service-Learning projects that our students establish in the context of their initial training in school environments. However, when considering social-educational scenarios beyond the school environment, we prefer to base our classification of barriers on the dimensions outlined in the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), which are categorised as cultural, political, and practical. Alternatively, we may refer to the Inclusion Thermometer (Echeita, Fernández-Blázquez & Simón, 2020), which identifies segregation, marginalisation, and failure as dimensions of analysis.

Another important aspect to highlight is that in Service-Learning projects, identifying social needs reveals that barriers intersect, as exclusion is a multifaceted process. Addressing these barriers in the development of Service-Learning projects not only enhances students' understanding of inclusion but also has a direct impact on fundamental aspects of teaching practice. Mendia (2012) identifies three such aspects: Participating in activities aimed at improving the conditions of others or a specific environment can improve self-esteem. This is because individuals not only acquire knowledge and skills that are important for their own lives, but also gain recognition and positive appreciation from those around them. This can empower them as future inclusive teachers. 2) Inclusive values such as humility, empathy, cooperation, bravery, courage, respect, tolerance, social engagement and generosity are developed by individuals (Booth and Ainscow, 2011). They acquire life skills that are consistent with inclusive social coexistence. In other words, they develop psychosocial competence and are capable of positive interaction with themselves, others, and the socio-cultural environment in which they live.

## 4. SERVICES AS PROJECTS TO REDUCE AND/OR ELIMINATE BARRIERS.

In the context of linking Service-Learning and Inclusive Education, services are actions aimed at reducing and/or eliminating barriers. These services become levers for inclusion. The concept of levers is ascribed to the theories of organizational change. Senge (1989) defines them as actions aimed at changing the behavior of an organization and its members. Ainscow (2004) highlights the importance of identifying the actions that provide the greatest impetus for driving change. In the context of Service-Learning, this translates to collaborative decision-making processes where students, with the guidance of teaching staff, select the best service options or coordinate different services to eliminate barriers that perpetuate the social need being addressed.

We can identify different types of service in service-learning, as Lucas (2007) points out: direct, indirect, advocacy and research. Each of these types of service has different implications in terms of inclusive values for the implementation of educational improvement actions. But they all enable future teachers to reflect and act on a key question for the development of inclusive education: How can we remove barriers to learning and participation and mobilise the necessary resources to support learning and participation for all? Some aspects that illustrate the educational potential of each of these in the context of inclusive initial teacher education would be:

- *Direct service*: these involve the direct connection of students with the first-person detection of specific needs at school or classroom level in their immediate environment. This typology favours projects aimed at providing answers to these needs through collaborative work with educational agents. Examples of these are SL projects for the development of teaching materials or the creation of accessibility resources.
- *Indirect service*: these involve reflection by students on macro-level educational structural problems. This modality orients SL projects towards minimising situations of educational exclusion of students in a situation of socio-educational vulnerability. Here we can include SL projects aimed at awareness-raising activities in relation to the recognition and valuing of diversity.
- *Advocacy service* (support): students echo the needs expressed by the educational community, generally in relation to deficits in human resources to address situations that are poorly covered at institutional level. they develop projects linked to the creation and implementation of support actions. In this case, SL projects operate around the design and implementation of support and accompaniment devices for teachers, students, families or associations, such as mentoring projects, peer tutoring, co-teaching, mutual support groups, support for interactive groups, ...).
- *Research service*: connects with the critical perspective of research oriented towards transformation and change. In this modality, students design research and studies to document situations of inequality or educational exclusion in their environment.

Another typology or model that we would like to highlight is often found in initial teacher training. This form of service-learning is linked to social responsibility. Projects in social responsibility combine civic duty and law, which introduces the solidarity component to Learning and Service (Batlle, 2013), calling it *Solidarity Service-Learning*. Solidarity is a value inherent to inclusion, making this modality particularly relevant for inclusive education.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Achieving more inclusive school environments requires identifying and eliminating social and educational barriers that restrict the presence, participation, and learning of all students. This is particularly important for vulnerable students, who may face personal, family, or social challenges that hinder their access to quality education (Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Sapon-Shevin, 2013). Teachers play a crucial role in identifying and removing barriers to inclusive education. However, current curricula have serious limitations in training teachers to be critical, committed, and sensitive towards inclusive educational models (Gónzalez-Gil et al., 2019; Mella-Núñez et al., 2021).

This paper proposes the use of Service-Learning as a valid strategy for identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion in school improvement projects. The proposal connects the detection of needs with the identification of barriers and links service proposals with educational transformation and improvement projects aimed at reducing and, if possible, eliminating these barriers. This paper aims to address a widely

reported shortcoming in the specialised national and international literature regarding the limitations of current curricula for degrees linked to initial teacher training. The paper proposes an orientation in the logic and implementation of Service-Learning projects. Specifically, it aims to address the training of more inclusive teachers and agents promoting educational inclusion (Echeita, 2022; Tjernberg & Mattson, 2014; Torres & Fernández, 2015).

The research results on service-learning and the development of inclusive education, which our group has developed in recent years, encourage reflection on the potentials and limitations of the didactic proposal presented here. On the other hand, our teaching practice is committed to training future teachers who embrace inclusivity. This commitment provides us with the opportunity to experiment and reflect on our training curriculum and classroom strategies. Our hope is that our students will adopt these strategies through the powerful tools of action and reflection.

> Teacher training for educational inclusion favours the systematisation of experiences as a strategy for the production of pedagogical knowledge, as it encourages teachers to reflect on their daily work. Seeking educational inclusion becomes a possibility for the "production of knowledge", as teachers working in vulnerable sectors become "sensitised" to it (Calvo, 2013, pp.15-16).

We are currently systematising the proposal based on the analysis and evaluation of SL experiences and projects developed by our students in recent years within the framework of our subjects. We aim to identify 'Lessons Learned' and involve our students, target groups of the 'services' projects, and collaborating entities (partners) in this process. The value and usefulness of this didactic-pedagogical proposal towards more inclusive socio-educational contexts will be determined by the results of the joint evaluation process.

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# INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH IN SERVICE-LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

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**ABSTRACT**

By allowing students the opportunity to participate in service learning activities that address community needs and reflect on these experiences in class to gain a deeper understanding of the course material and a stronger sense of civic engagement, service-learning stands out as a teaching approach that combines theory and practice. At the University of Split in Croatia, service-learning activities have been actively implemented over the past ten years. Environmental protection has been the main topic of student engagement in service-learning activities at the University of Split. Together with the non-governmental organization (NGO) Sunce and professors from the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology, the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Department of Marine Biology, and the Faculty of Law, students from the aforementioned faculties have been involved in various projects addressing real needs in the local community. Interdisciplinarity is also becoming increasingly important in higher education; science courses rarely include topics unrelated to the faculty's area of research, especially in STEM fields. Service-learning has several advantages that combine theory and practice, engagement, community needs, job-related skills, and learning outside the classroom. Since the students from the University of Split were part of a group of students from different backgrounds working on the same topic related to environmental protection in cooperation with the non-governmental organization Sunce, one of the core values related to these projects was trans/interdisciplinarity. A trans/interdisciplinary approach, allows complex problems to be tackled in a more sophisticated and comprehensive way than traditional single-discipline approaches. Using a trans/interdisciplinary approach to solve community problems through small student projects allowed students from all disciplines to better understand a problem or phenomenon by combining ideas and methods from different disciplines. Trans/interdisciplinary teams may need to adapt to different disciplinary settings, so they need to be flexible in their procedures and approaches. In addition, trans/interdisciplinary teams need to bring together knowledge from different disciplines to create a more comprehensive and integrated understanding. Trans/interdisciplinary teams are formed in response to complex, real-world problems that a single discipline cannot adequately solve. This can lead to new ideas and insights by bringing together concepts and approaches from other disciplines. The soft skills developed by the students concerned improving their communication skills, motivation, open-mindedness, ability to solve complex problems and transdisciplinary competence to seamlessly integrate knowledge. Students were able to show mutual respect when working in a group and demonstrate that they can adapt and use different methods and technologies to work across disciplines. In this way, the service learning projects and activities contributed significantly to the development of students' skills and competencies, improved their professional development opportunities, and prepared them for the job market.

**Keywords:** Service learning, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, environmental protection

## 1.  INTRODUCTION

Service learning (SL) combines social engagement with academic courses and offers students a practical application of theoretical concepts while promoting civic responsibility. The Croatian University of Split (UNIST) has been focusing on service-learning initiatives for a decade, with a particular focus on environmental protection (Carev et al. (2024), Carev (2020)).

Students and academics from various faculties at UNIST, such as the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology (FCT), the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS), the Faculty of Law, and the Department of Marine Studies, collaborated with a non-governmental organization, the NGO Sunce. They worked on trans/interdisciplinary projects dealing with local environmental problems. This approach recognises the importance of interdisciplinary and

transdisciplinary collaboration in solving complex real-world problems, especially in STEM fields (Carev et al. (2020), Carev (2020), Mihanović and Mršić (2020)).

The concept of multi-, trans-, and interdisciplinarity in higher education takes centre stage due to the increasing complexity of research problems in all disciplines. Scientists are encouraged to apply these

approaches in their research as a basis for multiple sources of knowledge to find innovative solutions. However, in many cases, the higher education system and degree programmes still rely on and focus on one discipline, e.g., chemistry, engineering, marketing, law, and other STEM and social science disciplines.

To overcome this problem, the UNIST cohort of the faculty utilised service-learning projects to provide students with a trans- or interdisciplinary approach in their courses of each discipline. This paper presents an example of a successful trans/interdisciplinary approach in the higher education system of the Republic of Croatia, the University of Split, using service learning as a context (Carev et al. (2020), Carev (2020), Mihanović and Mršić (2020), Carev et al. (2020), Carev (2020), Mihanović and Mršić (2020))

In our service-learning projects, students had the opportunity to deal with a complex real-world problem of environmental protection, and offer solutions from the perspective of different disciplines as part of service–learning. Students and academic staff had an opportunity to work together in the small projects which are part of the two large projects "Service-Learning for Nature and Environmental Protection in Croatia" - a German-Croatian cooperation project for students - financed by German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU) (2016-2018) and „PAZI! -Practical-Active-Together-Interdisciplinary! - a program of service-learning for the environment and sustainable development", the project leader is the NGO Sunce, and the partner institutions were the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, all from the University of Split and the ALUMNI FCT Association, 2018-2020, funded by the European Social Fund. As part of these projects, students from different faculties of UNIST had the opportunity to develop small projects to solve some of the real problems in the environment (Carev et al. (2020), Carev (2020), Mihanović and Mršić (2020), Carev et al. (2020), Carev (2020), Mihanović and Mršić (2020)).

### 1.1. The concepts of multi-, trans-, and interdisciplinary in higher education

In order to understand the application of interdisciplinarity in Service Learning (SL), the general meanings of the terms multi - , trans - , and interdisciplinary in higher education are defined (Table 1) (Dragičević (2022), Aguinaldo (2022))

*Multidisciplinarity* is an approach in which multiple disciplines or fields of study are integrated or juxtaposed to address a particular topic or problem. In a multidisciplinary framework, different disciplines bring their unique perspectives, methods and knowledge to comprehensively understand the topic of interest. However, each discipline retains its independence and clearly delineates its focus and expertise. The strength of multidisciplinarity lies in the knowledge and information available, allowing different insights and approaches to be considered when tackling complex challenges (Dragičević (2022)).

**Table 1.** *The difference between the concepts of inter, trans, and multidisciplinarity in higher education.*

| Term | Description | Connection between discipline |
|---|---|---|
| Disciplinary | An approach based on one discipline | - |
| Multidisciplinary | An approach based on multiple disciplines, but which remain within their disciplinary boundaries | Additively |
| Interdisciplinary | The approach is based on the synergy of methods, ideas or theories of several adjacent and related disciplines | Integrative |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Transdisciplinary | A multi-disciplinary approach in which disciplinary boundaries are blurred | Holistic / transcendental |

Source. *Adapted from Dragičević N., Interdisciplinarity in higher education: a critical review and conceptual framework,* [*https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/420180*](https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/420180)[6]

*Interdisciplinarity* is an approach that goes beyond the boundaries of individual disciplines, and integrates knowledge, methods, and perspectives from different fields to solve complex problems or questions. Interdisciplinarity refers to the synergy of disciplines through active linking of topics and integrated curriculum design. In contrast to multidisciplinarity, which juxtaposes independent disciplines, interdisciplinarity is about deeper synthesis and collaboration between disciplines, often leading to new frameworks, theories or methodologies that are not limited by traditional disciplinary boundaries. Interdisciplinary efforts aim to achieve a more holistic understanding of phenomena by combining different knowledge and approaches, to foster innovation and creativity in problem-solving.

The highest degree of integration is usually associated with transdisciplinary approaches in which disciplinary boundaries are blurred. Transdisciplinary practices involve different stakeholders in interdisciplinary teams, e.g. non-governmental organizations, industry, public institutions, citizens, and other actors. They contribute to the integration of their practices in the development and application of knowledge (Dragičević (2022)).

Both transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning offer the opportunity to look at the same topic from different disciplinary perspectives. However, the transdisciplinary approach involves students, scientists and other societal partners in solving a complex problem. For example, through collaboration between students, communities, companies or other social organizations. Transdisciplinarity requires innovation, cooperation, and determination. Below, is an example of a trans- or interdisciplinary approach with a trans- or interdisciplinary team in the context of service-learning (Carev et al. (2024), Carev (2020) Dragičević (2022)).

## 2.    RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By linking different disciplines, the service-learning projects at UNIST provided students with a holistic understanding of environmental issues and fostered the ability to solve problems adaptively. These projects enhance students' academic learning and promote important soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability, that are critical to their professional development (Buljac et al. (2019), Radman et. al (2023), Vukojević Medvidović et. al. (2023)).

To illustrate the trans- or interdisciplinary approach of our service-learning projects, we will present examples of students working and developing projects in inter- and transdisciplinary teams.

The first example is a project developed to raise awareness of the waste problem in Split through practical action - setting up containers for separate waste collection at the faculties with containers for paper, plastic, and mixed waste as well as smaller containers for batteries. The project team consisted of students from the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology (SL office (2023)).

The motto of the project was, "*Don't put everything in the same basket*". The students' first task was to decide on the materials from which the containers should be made, and they opted for plastic and cardboard containers, which were a "greener" choice. Once the contracted company had produced the cardboard containers, the students painted, decorated, and labeled them with names and symbols. At the same time, they stuck transparent stickers with the names and symbols of the different containers on the plastic containers. After completion, they were used at all the faculties mentioned: the Faculty of Law,

the Faculty of Sciences, the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy, the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology, and the College of Algebra Center in Split. Information posters designed by the students themselves were hung above the tank. They then also took battery containers to the same faculties. As a side project, the students also decided to post an announcement on the UNISpoT application about the "*Don't Be an Ostrich*" website as a result of the work of the first group of students in the service-learning program. The publication, "*Don't be an ostrich - learn to separate waste*" is designed to educate Split students about waste issues. The interdisciplinary approach taken by the students was to combine skills and knowledge from the fields of chemistry, environmental science, engineering, materials science, law, communication, and others. The interdisciplinary approach taken by the students involved in the waste management project was clearly evident in the various stages of implementation. In cross-faculty collaboration with the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology, the students designed the project slogan, selected eco-friendly container materials, and designed them creatively. A student from the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology was able to explore the disciplines of design, visual arts, and communication sciences. They integrated their skills and knowledge of design, communication, and environmental science to create informative posters and utilized technology for outreach by posting announcements in the UNISpoT application. This interdisciplinary collaboration ensured that the posters effectively communicated information about waste sorting and environmental awareness to the community, showcasing innovative methods to reach out and educate the community about waste management. This collaborative effort demonstrates the effectiveness of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing complex environmental challenges and promoting sustainable practices within the community.

Another example was a project on sustainable tourism involving students from the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. In Croatia, tourism is an important branch of the economy, which on the one hand, brings considerable financial profits, but on the other hand, also has a negative impact on the environment. For this reason, tourism in Croatia must be made sustainable. The aim of this project was to develop a guide for private accommodation providers on how to become "eco-landlords" and carry out tourism activities in a sustainable way (SL office (2023)). As part of this student project, the students designed a lecture on sustainable tourism with the aim of promoting sustainable tourism among the young and student population. They also conducted an ad hoc cross-section of their colleagues' knowledge of sustainable tourism. The outcome of the project was lectures on sustainable tourism delivered to teachers and 37 students from the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology and 38 students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The results of the cross-section of their peers' existing knowledge of sustainable tourism showed a low familiarity of the student population with the concept of sustainable tourism.

Trans- and interdisciplinary approach in service learning student projects is summarise in Table 2

**Table 2.** *Example of trans- and interdisciplinary approach in service learning student projects*

| Graphical description | Sc ientific field | Theme | An issue / Problem | Goal | Student project slogan |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Faculty of Chemistry and Technology* – STEM field<br><br>*Faculty of Low* – field of Social Science<br><br>NGO *Sunce* | Waste management | Insufficient and inadequate knowledge and application of knowledge about waste management. | Raising awareness of the problem of waste management in Split through practical action - setting up containers for the separate collection of waste at the faculties (containers for paper, plastic and mixed waste as well as smaller containers for batteries) | Don't put everything in the same basket! |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Faculty of Chemistry and Technology* – STEM field<br><br>*Faculty of Humanity and Social science* – field of Humanity<br><br>NGO *Sunce* | Sustainable tourism | Even tourism is an important economic sector that generates considerable financial profits, it also causes environmental pollution. Therefore, tourism must be implemented in a sustainable manner. | The aim of this student project was to provide private accommodation providers with guidelines on how they can become "eco-landlords" and make their tourism activities sustainable. | How to become an "eco-landlords"! |
| *Faculty of Chemistry and Technology* – STEM field<br><br>*Faculty of Humanity and Social science* – field of Humanity<br><br>NGO *Sunce* | Waste management | Lack of a simple and accessible solution for the citizens of Split for the proper disposal of household waste. | Collection of information about the locations of containers for separate waste collection in the city of Split. The aim was to create a mobile application with a uniform map of these locations as a simple and accessible solution for the citizens of Split, but also for numerous tourists during the season. | Don't be like an ostrich! |
| *Faculty of Chemistry and Technology* – STEM field<br><br>*Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism* - field of Social Science<br><br>NGO *Sunce* | Waste management | Students recognized and attempted to raise awareness of insufficient knowledge and application of knowledge about waste management. | To make the citizens of Split, especially the students, aware of the problem of pollution of nature and the environment and to show how everyone can contribute to their preservation. Considering the fact that students make up a significant part of the population, and considering the importance that young people have for the future of Split, the goal was to educate them about the importance of environmentally responsible behavior. | Watch out now - Eco quiz! |

*Source: https://ureddkuoor.wixsite.com/split/dku 11*

The interdisciplinary approach taken by the students involved combining skills and knowledge from different disciplines such as chemistry, economics, philosophy, environmental sciences, tourism management, research methods, statistics and communication sciences. This project on sustainable tourism is an example of interdisciplinary collaboration by bringing together insights and expertise from different disciplines to address environmental and societal challenges related to tourism industry practices. Students had the opportunity to utilize different perspectives and expertise in developing guidelines for eco-friendly tourism practices. Service-learning was found to have increased students' confidence in their professional and social skills. It fostered their creativity and innovation, development of written and oral skills, media and public speaking, campaign planning and public event organization, writing appeals and press releases, and development of time management and problem solving skills. Students became more familiar with the project cycle, from idea to implementation, marketing, communicating with the local community and with students from other faculties. They had to learn how to implement projects with different opinions and ideas, to contribute to the local community. Reflection is a crucial step in the effective implementation of service-learning because it analyzes the impact of the service-learning project on the students and the community.

However, by implementing of service learning into the university curriculum, the following points were emphasized as very important: students acquire new specialized knowledge and skills under the supervision of staff and realize the learning outcomes planned for specific courses while contributing to the realization of the mission and vision of the civic organization, student improvements in learning outcomes vary according to their personal abilities and backgrounds, but these variations are welcome as they provide new ideas for improvement. It must be clear that academic credit for students is awarded for learning, not for service. The relationships between traditional courses and courses that incorporate service-learning can be illustrated as follows: in traditional courses, students must fulfill academic learning objectives. In service-learning courses, on the other hand, students must fulfill both academic and civic learning objectives.

Participation in interdisciplinary service-learning projects enhances students' communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, and prepares them for future professional challenges. Students gained invaluable experience in dealing with interdisciplinary contexts by fostering mutual respect and adaptability within diverse teams.

## 3.    CONCLUSION

Service-learning combines academic learning with community engagement and offers students a unique opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges. The interdisciplinary nature of service-learning projects at the University of Split enriches students' academic experiences. It provides them with important skills for their future professional success and civic engagement.

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# SERVICE LEARNING AS LEARNING FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY – OR HOW RESPONSIBILITY CAN BECOME A KEY ELEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL CULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

In educational discourse, a range of perspectives for the 21st century emerges, focusing on goals such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, multiculturalism, the environment, sustainable development, moral development, etc. All these perspectives share a common emphasis on fostering responsibility. By promoting responsibility as a key educational goal, there is a recognition of the need for education to contribute to addressing contemporary issues. This sense of responsibility towards the communities in which we live is increasingly embedded in current national strategies and is a cornerstone of global initiatives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs serve as development points that expedite actions that ensure inclusivity, leaving no one and no place behind.

In this context, higher education reforms intensely focus on enriching study programs that, in addition to collaborating with potential work environments for students (work-based learning), highlight and implement service-learning, volunteering programs, and other community collaboration initiatives aimed at developing social responsibility and acquiring social capital among students. Many institutions actively endorse service-learning as a widely adopted strategy to facilitate community outreach programs. Particularly, the service-learning program is aptly developed within the framework of education for sustainable development as a "cumulative area," one that supports the discourse of education for responsibility and its full affirmation as a "philosophy of education." This study examines how service-learning is embraced as an educational initiative that promotes students' personal responsibility in society through different initiatives at the University of Split.

The paper first outlines the importance and role of implementing service-learning in education, followed by the presentation of research results conducted in two phases. In the initial phase of the research, data were collected from all faculties within the University of Split through a brief questionnaire sent to the faculties' administrations regarding the extent to which projects, courses, and other activities with a service-learning component are implemented within their faculties (mapping of the previously delivered activities). Subsequently, content analysis was conducted on the faculties' websites, reviewing strategic documents and other available information regarding the topic of service-learning and social responsibility. According to the list of the reported activities there is visible a trend towards orientation of higher education institutions towards social inclusion in society. On the other side, through content analysis of websites, it was noticed that all reported activities are not clearly communicated via the website as a tool that can simultaneously reach relevant internal and external stakeholders and create a certain image in society.

**Keywords**: education, service-learning, social responsibility, new social (educational) paradigm, image.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As stated by the Jickling & Wals (2008), one of the biggest challenges facing society today is achieving a sustainable future while still satisfying present needs, and the solution only can be achieved if we manage to educate students and the future professionals of tomorrow in a different way. According to that, comprehending the current challenges in education is linked to the features of transformative education. Friedman et al. (2020) point out that education is a key dimension of well-being and a crucial indicator of development. Bearing that in mind, educators seek to find a form of education that is not solely focused on society but also endeavors to bring about personal transformation in individuals

undergoing educational processes. The focal point lies in the responsibility to be mindful and responsible within the context of one's societal role and the resulting impact, specifically emphasizing social responsibility. This heightened sense of responsibility towards the communities in which we reside is progressively incorporated into national strategies and serves as the underpinning for global initiatives like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda 2030 was introduced, with 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) included, that outlines a strategy for action to benefit people, the planet, and prosperity. It aims to enhance universal peace within a broader scope of freedom (United Nations, 2024). In this initiative, a central role is assigned to higher education institutions for the development of sustainable practices. Actively engaging in this endeavor, they have initiated programs to promote an innovative approach to education for sustainable development, aiming to positively influence higher education policies and curricula. The focus is on enhancing the perception, teaching, demonstration, and practical implementation of sustainability within these institutions. The quality implementation, a core among the 17 sustainable development goals, is inseparable from the significance of SDGs in education, or vice versa, with SDG serving as a tool for quality education. As highlighted by Aramburuzabala & Cerrillo (2023), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released a 2021 report titled "Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for Education." This report underscores the imperative for an educational transformation to construct peaceful, just, and sustainable futures. It poses three critical questions for education in 2050: What should be continued? What should be stopped? What should be creatively reinvented? The report advocates for a new social contract for education guided by two fundamental principles: ensuring the right to quality education throughout one's life and strengthening education as a public common good. These principles are deemed essential in empowering future generations to envision and shape their futures by 2050. Many institutions actively endorse service-learning as a widely adopted strategy to facilitate community outreach programs (Strand et al., 2003). Engaging in service-learning projects exposes students to diverse individuals and tasks, offering opportunities for both personal and social development (Wade, 1997). Service-learning stands out as a potent experiential educational approach where participants actively address social, environmental, and diverse human needs to advance social justice. This method involves integrating service into curricula, ensuring that students deeply feel civic responsibility and fostering strengthened critical reflection (Aramburuzabala & Cerrillo, 2023).

Service-learning is a reflective, relational, pedagogy that combines community or public service with structured opportunities for learning (Heffernan, 2021).  Its implementation and institutionalization make it possible to respond to the real challenges of society, overcoming the elitism of merely theoretical approaches that lack practical application (Ti, Tang-Wong, Bringle, 2021).

As stated by the Prentice & Garcia (2020), service-learning is portrayed as a rigorous academic augmentation to the repertoire of teaching tools available to faculty members. The delineation emphasizes the flexibility and creativity inherent in such programs, elaborating on their capacity to forge connections across departments and educational levels. Students stand to gain advantages, including exposure to career exploration opportunities, the refinement of interpersonal and human-relations skills, and an enriched academic learning experience. Faculty members benefit from an additional teaching tool to meet the academic objectives of the course, a supplementary avenue for professional development, and an alternative means to address diverse learning styles among students. For community agencies, the advantages encompass the presence of motivated students on-site, providing essential services, and an opportunity to expand the services offered to clients.

## 1.1. The importance of introducing social - responsibility and service-learning education for the development of better people for tomorrow

The aim of the educational systems is to create spaces for the development of socially-oriented members of society, thereby influencing the formation of a new social paradigm—one that builds conscious individuals focused on their own strength in social impact and actively engages with the community's needs. Particularly, the service-learning program is appreciatively developed within the framework of education for sustainable development as a "cumulative area," one that will support the discourse of education for responsibility and its full affirmation as the "philosophy of education." In other words, this approach encompasses both learning and practical living, as well as community engagement, reflecting education as a commitment to living in a better, more just world. There are many different skills that are

fostered by implementing service-learning projects, but according to Astin et al. (2000), writing skills are the skills that bring most benefits associated with course-based service.

Service-learning experiences can provide a variety of benefits to college students that persist even beyond the college years. Eppler (2011) highlighted the significance of understanding oneself as a crucial developmental task for first-year undergraduate students. During a period when community service tends to decline, service-learning emerges as a valuable approach to assisting students in adapting to college life, conforming to social expectations, defining career objectives, and shaping their identity within the broader community context.

Conway, Amel, & Gerwien (2009) assert that these experiences not only contribute to academic learning but also correlate with positive cognitive and social changes. Such changes include advancements in moral reasoning, prosocial reasoning, and decision-making, as documented by Batchelder and Root (1994). Wilson (2011) explored the impact of service-learning experiences on the personal development of college students, specifically focusing on the expression of empathy, where a positive connection was proven. In the realm of developmental transitions, service-learning experiences exert both short- and long-term influences on conceptions of self, self-esteem, and identity formation, as noted by Jones & Abes (2004).

### 1.2. The importance of introducing service-learning education for the image of the university

The fundamental principle of service-learning is that it is implemented in collaboration between teachers (internal partners) and representatives of external associations (external partners). Jadrić, Bilić and Miletić (2021) point out that all activities that take place in interaction with internal and external stakeholders lead to the creation of the image of HEI. In this way, all service-learning activities that are conducted indirectly influence the creation of the image of a specific organization. Duarte, Alves & Raposo (2010) point out that institutional image management has become a critical element to the competitiveness of higher education institutions. How an image represents the overall impression an individual forms about an object (Kotler & Fox, 1995), diverse stakeholders within the higher education institution environment contribute to varying perceptions of the institution's image. As organizations interact with various publics, they don't convey a singular message but rather multiple images (Dowling, 1988). Sometimes, this involves subjective impressions and categories that are challenging to measure; however, there are transparent and verifiable measurement methods that can be used for this purpose. One such method is rankings, where stakeholders in the environment receive information about the position of a higher education institution in comparison to others. Today, an increasing number of ranking entities consider the interactions that a higher education institution has with society as criteria, making it impossible to separate the institution from its societal impact. The importance of interaction with society is beginning to be especially valued with certain rankings, which especially appreciate the implementation of the SDGs into everyday functioning (for example *Times Higher Education* ranking etc.). Examples of such educational initiatives can be found at the University of Split, where service-learning activities served as a criterion for reporting ranking on the World University Rankings for Innovation (The WURI ranking) where the example of service-learning activities was reported and great positioned in the category of Ethical Values. There are many more activities that reshape the image of the university in this manner such as a series of informal educations, volunteering activities, agreement with associations, conference organizations etc.

In this research authors will analyze the data collected to the survey spread among the managements of the faculties gathered under the university. In the continuation, using the web content analyze tool, it will be analyzed if the faculties have communicated messages on the websites their managements pointed out in the surveys. Namely, the role of website features in the branding of higher education institutions is proven through many different previous research (Ghorbanzadeh, 2023; Siripipattanakul et al., 2022).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted in two phases. First, a short questionnaire was created which was sent to the management of the faculties (11 faculties and 1 Art academy) that are under the auspices of the University

of Split. The questionnaire, whose intent was to map undergoing and previously organized activities, was sent in March 2022, and it included several basic questions. Managements of the faculties were asked to map:

- courses
- projects
- education and workshops
- other activities carried out at faculties, which have a service-learning component or other social initiatives.
- persons who lead activities that have a service-learning component and who are willing to cooperate additionally on service-learning or other socially- oriented activities.

In the continuation, a second phase of the research was made. The purpose of the second phase of the research was to evaluate how institutions of higher education (IHEs) at the University of Split communicate service-learning and social responsibility through their websites. This paper describes the results of a content analysis of all faculties gathered under the University of Split. Analysis focused on web-based communication due to its prevalence as a widespread method for engaging a broad target audience, including students, faculty, and staff in Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs). This approach was chosen for its capacity to facilitate a quantitative assessment of a sample, enabling the derivation of generalizable conclusions (Neuendorf, 2002).

The process of content analysis was adopted based on Hasim et al. (2017), who divided research in a couple of phases:

1) The information was read numerous times and relevant data sets were identified. These data sets were copied and pasted to the tables in a document with the specific name for each faculty. A detailed reading was carried out and initial thoughts on service-learning themes were noted in the specific column.

2) The relevant data were read again and the initial notes were transformed into final themes that were significant and relevant to the research aim and objectives. Any unsuitable and unclear initial notes were excluded.

3) The data were read again for refinement of the themes into definite headings based on common practices and articulated within university operations.

**Image 1**. Process of the website content analysis
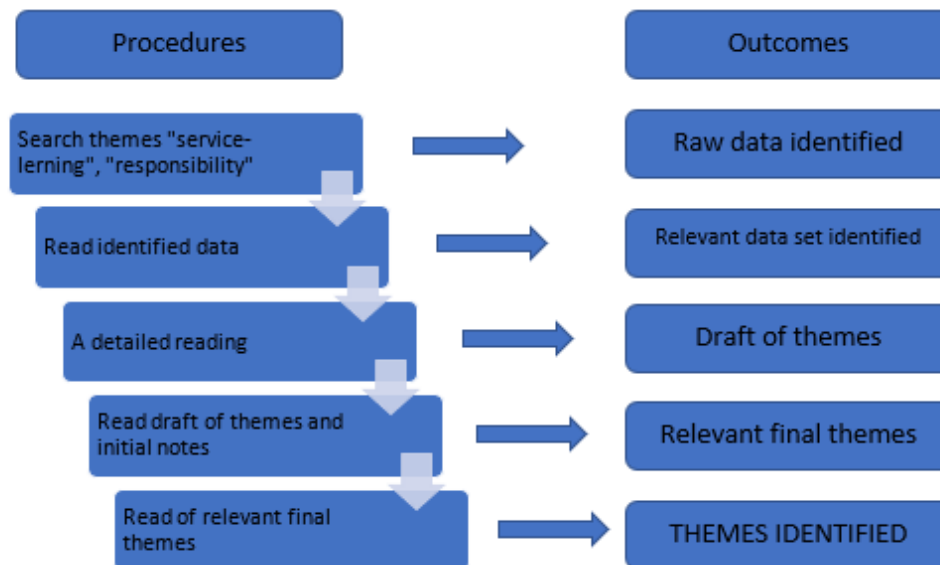
*Source: authors adopted by Hasim et al. (2017)*

The analysis covered the university website down to each individual web page of the faculties operating under the university (11 faculties and 1 Art Academy) in December 2023 and January 2024. The analysis methodology included content analysis, which entails as a widely used research method for objective, systematic and quantitative examination of communication content (Berelson, 1952). As stated by the Kim & Kuljis (2010), it can be useful for discovering and gaining insights into users' preferences and behaviors as well as into complex social and communication trends and patterns generated by users.

Following the methodology applied in the research made by Dade & Hassenzah (2013) in content analysis of higher education institutions' websites in the context of the concept of "sustainability," adopted version that included terms "service-learning" and" social responsibility" was made. The research was focused on:

- the manner in which service-learning and social responsibility are defined was analyzed.
- the extent to which these two concepts are defined as priorities (whether they are integral to goals, mission statements, etc.) was examined.
- the sources of information used for references were investigated.
- it was checked whether a major role in the campus service-learning process and social responsibility is visible according to the website, and whether it is apparent from the information available on the website that service-learning activities and activities promoting responsibility are indeed funded.

## 3. RESULTS

The results collected in the first phase, which was based on the questionnaire sent by the faculty administration of the research were following as a concrete result of the service-learning activities:

• proceedings of the conference on the service-learning thematic was published with 18 papers

• six educations organized that celebrate service-learning as one of the tools of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

• almost 40 teachers reported courses with the service-learning component in the past academic years only at the University of Split (79 in total at the level of six universities)

• over 500 students participated in different service-learning activities during the past years

• 15 student papers written on the topic of service-learning during past academic years

• 33 students actively participating in the workshops and trainings at the University of Split

• 8 teachers finished their education to become mentors at the University of Split and 9 additional in the last academic year from different universities were trained to become "mentors" at the University of Split

• a volunteering portal was established, and the service-learning hackathon events take place every year

• numerous media appearances registered (social media, webpage, radio, television, newspaper)

• 11 courses developed with the service-learning tool included (such as Introduction to Civic Education, Sociology of Education, Civil Society, etc.

All faculties under the University of Split provided answers to the questionnaire for the reporting purpose.

Faculties reported that the University of Split (UNIST) began with a Service-Learning activity started in 2015 with a first Service-Learning project in cooperation with some faculties at UNIST with *Sunce Association* (project titled: Responsible for nature).
In the following 6 years, additional 6 projects on the thematic were implemented and one of them was oriented to the creation of the S-L Centre at the Faculty of Economics, Business, and Tourism.
Regarding the rankings results, in 2020, University of Split was ranked as the 15th university in the world with a service-learning example of Ethical value. In 2021 another WURI ranking was recorded (21st position in the world) and S-L became an integral part of the University strategy. The biggest step forward was recorded when it began to be implemented through the project of the European University of the Seas (SEA-EU) that gathers nine European universities.

In the second phase of the research implementation, website content analysis was conducted, where all the websites of faculties affiliated with the University of Split were analyzed. The keywords searched for were: service-learning (in Croatian and English) and social responsibility (in Croatian and English). Research showed following results, presented in Table 1, based on the methodology presented by Dade & Hassenzah (2013).

**Table 1.** Results of content analysis of the websites of all faculties under the University of Split

| University of Split | www.unist.hr | A dedicated section on the university website focuses on the service-learning concept at the university level. It is integrated into the university's overall strategy. Hardly promoting education opportunities and responsible approach. Development of the service-learning Centre and Society Hub at the level of the SEA-EU Alliance where the university is participating in. Two conferences on the topic of service-learning co-organized by the University and free online education. Many short courses are being promoted. |
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| Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism | https://www.efst.unist.hr/ | Established Center for service-learning, introduced Internship as an opportunity to participate in service-learning projects as an integral part of the curricula, developed portal and hackathons on the service-learning topic, and a variety of other activities. Service-learning is an integral part of strategies, action plans, and reports. The center is funded. Many short educations offered |
| Faculty of Electrical | https://www.fesb.unist.hr/ | The strategy states: One of the fundamental tasks of the faculty is the development of the economy |

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| Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture | | and society as a whole. Additionally, task 4.3. specifies: Encourage collaboration with associations involved in civil society development projects to increase the number of students and staff with acquired practical knowledge and skills for addressing specific social issues and community development. Promote volunteering among students and faculty. |
| Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences | https://www.ffst.unist.hr/ | Established Center for Transdisciplinary Promotion of Sustainable Development. A part of the strategy states the following: improving collaboration with the local and broader societal community and strengthening international cooperation in the European and global context. One of the main strategic objectives outlines the following: organizing and participating in public discussions, forums, and seminars related to environmental development and offering solutions to current social issues (ecological, developmental, demographic, security). As an activity, it also mentions the following: conducting scientific and professional research and participating in the implementation of projects in collaboration with numerous research studies and projects with civil society organizations, conducting scientific and professional research driven by societal challenges. One course development is reported through the curricula (Service Learning in Modern Society) and other courses that have social dimension are identified, such as *Education for Sustainable Development in Primary Education*, *Introduction to Education for Sustainable Development, Civil Society* etc. |
| Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy | http://gradst.unist.hr/ | The strategy states: "...successfully fulfill its societal role in supporting sustainable development of society and the Adriatic region of the Republic of Croatia." The mission is: Faculty is a scientific and educational component of the University of Split that meets the needs of the social community in the field of higher education, scientific, professional, and artistic activities in accordance with the law and its statutes. One of the goals is: To enhance the promotion of professional ethics and the fight against corruption among students within the framework of independence and responsibility. Subgoal 3.5. Respect and promote the principles of social and ethical responsibility in research and critical thinking. Other information on the service-learning activities are not identified. |
| Faculty of Catholic Theology | https://www.kbf.unist.hr/ | Excerpt from the strategy: "The Faculty pays special attention to the local community through socially responsible behavior." Social responsibility is an integral part of the strategy, |

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| | | but nowhere is service-learning specifically emphasized as a tool. |
| Faculty of Chemistry and Technology | https://www.ktf.unist.hr/ | Clearly stated task in the faculty's strategy: LIFELONG LEARNING Task 1.3. Establish lifelong learning and promote service- learning. In addition to this, a service-learning has been determined as a topic of some diploma thesis. |
| Faculty of Kinesiology | http://web.kifst.unist.hr/ | Service-learning is part of the curriculum (course name: Service-learning in Kinesiology), informal education is promoted on the website, and they are involved in service-learning project activities (project: Our Hajduk). A part of the strategy states the following: Modernizing study programs in line with the challenges of the time and environment, and promoting lifelong education and socially beneficial learning, are goals that align with EU standards for education development, and the University strategically plans to achieve this by strengthening the competencies of teachers. |
| School of Medicine | http://mefst.unist.hr/ | Education on the topic of service-learning is promoted on the website. The Student Council is involved in service-learning activities. Social responsibility is an integral part of the School of Medicine's strategy, but nowhere is service-learning specifically emphasized as a tool. |
| Faculty of Maritime Studies | https://www.pfst.unist.hr/hr/ | There are no visible activities in promoting service-learning and responsibility among students. |
| Faculty of Law | https://www.pravst.unist.hr/ | The strategy notes the following: By promoting, especially by setting volunteering conditions for participation in the Legal Clinic, students are encouraged to volunteer, influencing their awareness of the importance and necessity of engaging in socially beneficial work. Other information on the service-learning activities are not identified. |
| Faculty of Science | https://www.pmfst.unist.hr/ | It is closely tied to programming and an association operating within the faculty. There are students' final papers on the topic of service-learning. The strategy emphasizes excellence in the sphere of social responsibility. Other information on the service-learning activities are not identified. |
| Arts Academy in Split | https://www.umas.unist.hr/ | Strategic goal 3 is stated: Involvement of teachers and students in socially beneficial work and directing implementation programs towards socially sensitive groups and other targeted audiences. |

*Source: authors*

The main topics identified in this search process, which are related to service-learning at the university, are: SEA-EU Alliance, service-learning Centre, service-learning Conference, Society Hub, short educations such as AktivniST project, Personal Development through service-learning education etc. The key concepts related to the strategies are the tentatively stated responsibility towards the community,

while only a few faculties specify that this responsibility will be enhanced through service-learning projects. Three faculties have implemented service-learning courses in regular classes.

## 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The educational discourse for the 21st century highlights diverse perspectives, with a common emphasis on fostering responsibility. The study delves into how service-learning is embraced as an educational initiative promoting personal responsibility in society. Service-learning, as a cumulative area within education for sustainable development, aligns with the philosophy of education for responsibility. As Heffernan (2021) pointed out, a service-learning pedagogy challenges faculty to reconceptualize not only their curriculum but also their disciplinary training and their role as educators. It is not just about a pedagogical tool but a concept that truly transforms higher education for the better. The fact is that higher educational institutions are changing their educational course today, with an increasing emphasis on student responsibility. Therefore, the question arises: How prepared is a university (in this case, the University of Split) to respond to the challenges of the future of education? To identify the level of readiness, a two-phase study was conducted: the first phase of the, a questionnaire was made with the administrations of the faculties regarding the implementation of service-learning not only in the teaching process but also in strategies, the extent of their activities, education, projects, etc. The second phase of the research involved content analysis of websites. Namely, according to Hasim et al. (2017), historically, stakeholders were informed through tangible means of the universities through printed annual reports, brochures, and newsletters. However, with technological advancements and widespread recognition of the internet as a communication 'organizational' tool, this paradigm has shifted. Websites can be considered as the main communication tool through which universities communicate with the entire community. According to that, the value of the websites in the development of the university image is irreplaceable. Therefore, it is convenient to analyze them to see how clearly faculties communicate their activities to the public.

By analyzing the data, two important conclusions can be drawn. One is that the faculties' administrations, as reported in the survey, have registered a larger number of activities related to service-learning and the development of students' responsibility towards society than what is visible on their websites. Especially considering that the first service-learning activities started in 2015 and we now witness the implementation of the concept in strategic documents, the creation of a whole series of courses, directing students to work in organizations, and even university rankings on global ranking lists with service-learning as an example of good practice. However, when conducting web content analysis, it is clear that service-learning is one of the strategic concepts in the university's development. Some faculties have indeed implemented service-learning in development strategies, introduced service-learning into curricula, reported individual projects with service-learning, and organized various education initiatives. However, comprehensive progress in this regard has been recorded only at one faculty (with the existence of funded activities, a center, a portal, hackathons, and a strategic point of view), or a couple of faculties with the partial commitment to the service-learning (project, course implemented or education promoted). Therefore, a gap between reported information and what is available on websites has been identified.

It could be concluded, based on the conducted research, it is clear that individual faculties and the university as a whole integrate diverse topics centered around responsibility into the educational framework. In this way, students' awareness is developed that they do not act in isolation but as an integral part of the whole - an integral part of society. Moreover, this approach enables Higher Education Institutions to fulfill their third mission effectively. On the other hand, it is important for individual faculties to understand the importance of websites as a communication tool to clearly communicate the change in the educational paradigm with all stakeholders in society. Another conclusion that can be drawn here is that by analyzing faculties involved in service-learning activities, it can be concluded that those of a social and humanistic nature are more naturally engaged. This particularly relates to these study programs whose processes or modes of critical thinking can be stimulated by service-learning, and relate to ideas that focus on social inequality and concepts of power, privilege and roles in different dimensions such as race, class and gender, which is central to local individual and collective experiences (Howery, 2007), and they share a link with the development of social responsibility. However, it is

important to conduct promotional activities for the concept so that other faculties realize that everyone is invited to change the working paradigm towards service-learning principles because every field and discipline can be applied within the service-learning framework.

At the end it is important to emphasize research limitations. The study relies on a two-phase approach combining a survey and web content analysis. While this provides a comprehensive view, a single-method approach may have limitations in capturing the complexity of the issues addressed. Combining multiple research methods could enhance the robustness of the findings. The study primarily focuses on service-learning activities and their representation on university websites. It may not delve into the broader institutional context or external factors that could influence the implementation and effectiveness of service-learning initiatives. Also, while web content analysis provides valuable insights into the visibility of service-learning activities on the websites, it may not capture the full depth and nuance of the initiatives.

In summary, the study provides valuable insights into the implementation and impact of service-learning in higher education. The positive trends observed underscore the potential of service-learning to contribute not only to individual development but also to the societal and institutional dimensions of education. The findings support the ongoing efforts to integrate service-learning as a transformative tool for building responsible, socially conscious individuals and enhancing the overall image of higher education institutions.

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# PATHWAYS TO EMPATHY: ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN EVENTS TOWARDS COMMUNITY-ENGAGED EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT**

In a time marked by heightened societal awareness, investigating the cultivation of empathy through student participation in volunteer activities stands as a beacon of long-term transformative engagement. This research explores the intricate development of empathy among students, mainly focusing on their involvement in humanitarian events. While volunteering is distinct from Service Learning (SL), this study seeks to bridge the gap by envisioning pathways for integrating such experiences into a framework of community-engaged universities.

The profound impact of volunteer endeavours on students has been well-documented, revealing a complex network of heightened empathy, especially towards marginalised communities and individuals with disabilities. This research delves into the transformative potential of such experiences, emphasising their significance in scholarly discourse and their pivotal role in moulding socially aware individuals. The case study approach reveals the intricate facets of empathy within student volunteers and its essential role in fostering a compassionate society.

The study is rooted in a case study of the "Days of Volunteers" event organised by the nonprofit organisation "Mi." Employing a qualitative approach, this research examines the effects of the event on student volunteers, with a specific focus on their empathy levels towards children with disabilities. While acknowledging the differences between volunteering and SL, the methodology is crafted to pave the way for future development, considering the integration of such experiences into sustained and structured study practices and programmes.

The findings underscore numerous positive aspects of holding events like the "Days of Volunteers" within society, particularly among its most vulnerable groups. Notably, students exhibited heightened empathy towards children with disabilities, showcasing the transformative potential of such initiatives. The study illuminates an immediate impact on empathy levels and a sustained commitment to post-event volunteering, thus laying the groundwork for future Service Learning activities.

Based on these findings, the research envisions a trajectory for future development, proposing ways to integrate volunteer experiences into Service Learning within higher education institutions. Nonprofit organisations can leverage these insights to design initiatives promoting long-term engagement and continuous cooperation with universities. Furthermore, universities are encouraged to consider incorporating community-engaged education into their curricula, fostering empathetic and socially responsible students.

**Keywords**: the nonprofit sector, humanitarian organisations, Service Learning, community-engaged universities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Engaged empathy is a concept that involves actively and profoundly understanding the experiences and emotions of others, particularly those who are marginalised or oppressed (Gruen, 2009). Research has shown that volunteering can significantly increase empathy (Dussán, 2017). This is further supported by the role of empathy in the determination of volunteering, with specific components of empathy being linked to value-motivational tendencies (Koval & Spitsyna, 2021). Empathy's connection with volunteering is additionally shaped by the expected responsiveness of the recipient, where individuals with higher levels of empathy are more inclined to volunteer in scenarios where they can alleviate empathic distress (Barnett, 1983). Furthermore, emotional connectivity, closely intertwined with empathy, emerges as a pivotal factor in retaining volunteers engaged in prosocial initiatives (Farny, 2019). Many researchers (Merlot et al., 2006; Kefis & Aspridis, 2014) emphasise the importance of human resource management in the non-governmental organisations (NGO), volunteer and not-for-profit sectors. The purpose of NGO associations is protection and assistance in achieving the common interests and goals of the association's founders and users. A charity or humanitarian association is an organisation whose primary goals are philanthropy and the welfare of society. These organisations can be educational or religious or engage in other activities that serve the public interest or the common good. Humanitarian associations represent the most numerous groups of associations. The increased number of committed volunteers significantly affects the development of humanitarian associations because volunteers are an essential segment of the NGO (Lorente-Ayala et al., 2020). Regulations, tax treatments and business methods of individual humanitarian organisations differ from country to country. Since humanitarian organisations have been worldwide, numerous contributions have been made by organising humanitarian events. Associations organise events to realise projects for their end users, who most often belong to one of the vulnerable society groups. Whether it is about holding a festival or holding fairs, the goal is always the same; to collect as much money (or some other means) as possible to help the needy or to promote the organisation and its goals. In the Republic of Croatia, numerous humanitarian events, such as events organised by the NGO association „Mi", have a long-standing tradition. The sustainability of humanitarian organisations often depends on donations. Donations are frequently the only form of financing current association projects, so some associations usually cease to exist because they need help finding financial means for their everyday operations. Associations must operate according to the principle of public interest and invest all realised income in the association's work. In many Commonwealth countries, humanitarian organisations must display their financial statements publicly. Marketing of non-profit organisations implies activities that improve some aspects of the non-profit organisation's activities, which in turn realise a particular public interest of the non-profit organisation. Extensive literature attests to the profound influence of student volunteer efforts (Albritton et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2014), uncovering an intricate web of heightened empathy, mainly directed towards marginalised communities and individuals with disabilities. These studies explore the transformative capacity inherent in these experiences, underscoring their importance within academic discussions and their pivotal contribution to shaping socially conscious individuals. Utilising a case study approach, this research unveils the intricate dimensions of empathy within student volunteers, highlighting its indispensable role in nurturing a compassionate society. There is a research gap in the existing literature on students' empathy through volunteering regarding the long-term impact of volunteering experiences on the development and sustainability of empathy. While many studies focus on immediate changes in empathy levels during or shortly after volunteering events, there is a lack of comprehensive research tracking how these changes appear over an extended period. Investigating the persistence and potential attenuation of empathetic gains beyond the volunteering period could provide valuable insights into the lasting effects of such experiences on students. Therefore, this paper aims to describe and analyse the student's engagement in humanitarian events in more detail, using the example of the „Mi" organisation and its impact on their empathy.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress the importance of arranging humanitarian events within the nonprofit sector was the goal of this literature review. Unlike governmental agencies, NGOs are fundamental in solving community dilemmas and implementing economic resolutions (Ciucescu, 2009). This emphasises the role of nonprofit organisations in overseeing social well-being and promoting social welfare systems. Several studies, including those conducted by Yudhaputri and Fatimah (2020), Li et al. (2018) and Gallarza et al. 2013),

have highlighted the importance of volunteers in planning events and activities. Successful humanitarian events for these groups depend on their ability to attract and retain volunteers. The volunteers play a significant role in the daily operations of non-profit organisations, especially charities. However, they need motivation for their activities. To understand the volunteer's motivations of college students, Moore et al. (2014) investigated potential motives that may affect students' willingness to participate in such events. He found the strongest motives for volunteering were values (e.g., altruistic volunteering) followed by understanding (e.g., volunteering for the opportunity for new learning experiences). Numerous volunteering interventions for undergraduate healthcare students were discovered by Barker et al. (2022) across the United States, Singapore, Australia, and Brazil. His thematic analysis revealed that students, engaged in service-learning modalities within community health and palliative healthcare settings, consistently practised and cultivated empathy, leading to professional and personal development. The findings underscore a need for further research in other education areas and on other students to delve into the nuanced aspects of empathy development through volunteer activities, addressing the existing gaps and enhancing our understanding of this crucial facet of university students' inclusion in Service Learning.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper used empirical and research methods to achieve its purpose. In the literature review, the desk method was used to examine and study relevant professional and scientific literature. In the empirical part of the research, the authors used the interview method to gain insight into the organisation of the humanitarian event and insights from students about their volunteering experience. The association "Mi" organises Volunteering Days each year in May. This event is their most recognisable humanitarian event and attracts many volunteers.

### 3.1. General information about NGO "Mi"

NGO "Mi" is a non-profit organisation founded in 1997 in Split, Croatia. The association helps citizens and the local community by encouraging solidarity towards children with special needs, people with life's hardships, and people affected by the Petrinja earthquake, as well as by involving the local population to achieve social cohesion. The association employs between five and fifteen employees, with the occasional need to hire part-time employees. In addition to permanent employees, numerous volunteers are involved in their events. The association's name is unique because it reflects the fundamental goals of the association - the pronoun „mi"in Croatian means "we" and denotes unity. The NGO "Mi" mission is to "*support personal and social growth within the community and promote the values of love and philanthropy through direct services for vulnerable groups, building a society of tolerance and diversity, and support for citizen participation, civic initiatives and volunteerism*."

### 3.2. Humanitarian event – Volunteering Days

This section presents parts of the interview conducted with the " Mi " NGO coordinator. Due to the coordinator's request, her name will not be mentioned. Volunteering Days is an event held in May every year since 1997. The purpose of organising this event is to help vulnerable groups. It is organised every year with a different theme. In 2022, the event's theme was the collection of products and goods for Ukrainian citizens. The name of the project had the unique name "For Ukraine". This event attracted more than 30 different NGOs and ten public institutions. Each association has its stand, offering different products and activities with which it tries to contribute to humanitarian action. These are usually handmade toys, but basic foodstuffs are often collected for the needs of the end-users of associations, such as flour, water, oil, and other food that can last. Đardin, a unique park in Split, was ideal for organising this event because it is in the middle of the fountain, so the stands are arranged in a circle around the fountain, allowing visitors to visit them more easily without creating unnecessary crowds. The Volunteering Days traditionally take place in Strossmayer Park (Đardin) because of easy accessibility as well as its size, which can accommodate many people. Since this was already the 25th year of this manifestation, the location always remains the same because the exact date of the event is known far more in advance. Covered stands are prepared for the event or postponed until the next day in case of bad weather. The event is promoted through Radio Dalmatia and social networks such as Facebook. The event is announced on the NGO's website and the websites of cooperating associations

one to two months before the actual date of the event. The event's main organisers are the "Mi" Association employees, headed by project managers and marketing experts. Like in any other humanitarian event, the organisation would not be possible without volunteers and their dedication. The number of volunteers participating in the event's organisation is unknown because their number changes yearly. This year, according to the event coordinator, the number of volunteers rose to an impressive number of 110 volunteers. The event organisers are pleasantly surprised yearly by the growth in the number of volunteers and visitors willing to invest their effort and work to make the event look as good as possible. The age groups of volunteers range from elementary school children to university students. Persistence, effort and dedicated work are expected from the entire volunteer team. "*If there is a difficulty in which individuals may not know each other or will make a mistake, the rest of the team is ready to help and work together to solve the problem*," emphasises the event coordinator. „*The purpose of organising and holding this event is to help those in need, which is why it is necessary to work as a team, letting others know that they are not alone and that there is someone who wants and can help them.*" The main organiser is in charge of planning and organisation related to the park's arrangement and installation of the security fence. Marketing people are in charge of promotion and advertising through different channels. Interest groups such as the police, emergency services, and local authorities have special requirements for the organisers that could condition the event's feasibility, and these requirements need to be studied in detail. Since Strossmayer Park is in the city centre, the organisers need a public gathering permit from Split city authority. Likewise, the police and emergency services set requirements that organisers must fulfil. "*Given that there is also a stand where visitors can voluntarily donate blood, every year we also include ambulance service employees in the event's organisation.*" The event has grown into a tradition due to its continuous holding for 25 years. The organisers hope that the Volunteer Day organisation will be successfully implemented for many more years so that they can continue to cheer up the people who need their help the most.

## 3. STUDENTS IMPRESSIONS ABOUT VOLUNTEERING

More than 70 students were volunteering at this event. Here are some of their impressions:

„*Participating in this event was an incredibly enriching experience for me! I especially liked the children from the „Srce" association. They just laughed and clapped as they sang. They were so happy. I wonder why we who are healthy cannot celebrate life like they do.*"

„*The atmosphere was charged with a sense of purpose and compassion. I felt helpful like never before in my life.*"

„*That day, the park was a vibrant space for connection and engagement! Being part of a volunteer team allowed me to witness the collective impact of our efforts. This event helped me realise how essential teamwork and mutual support are and how they can foster positive changes.*"

„ *I felt like I was contributing to some more significant cause.*"

„ *Seeing the parents of those needy children, I admired their dedication and persistent efforts. They truly inspire me to be a better person and to serve others*!"

„ *I definitely regret for not being involved in such an events before. I feel not only the need but also the obligation to participate and help in the future as we*ll."

„*Along with the impressive growth in volunteer numbers this year (reaching 110), I like that volunteers range from youngsters to older ones. Age is not essential for volunteering. I am grateful to have been allowed to participate in this event. Generally speaking, I am more grateful for everything in my life after this event.*"

„*As a student, this experience is more than just volunteering for me; it became a tradition of empathy and shared responsibility.*"

From the statement above, it is evident that the event Volunteer Days instilled a sense of pride and hope for the event's success, reinforcing belief in the transformative power of collective action for those in need.

## 4. RESULTS

The testimonies from over 70 student volunteers at the event during Volunteer Days highlight the profound impact of their experience. The positive and inspiring atmosphere filled with purpose and compassion allowed students to connect with the children in need from the different associations, inspiring reflections on their volunteering experience. Engaging in teamwork, mutual support, and witnessing the collective impact of their efforts emphasised the essential role of collaboration in fostering positive changes. The event not only instilled a sense of contribution to a more significant cause but also sparked admiration for the dedication of stakeholders such as parents and their commitment to continuous participation and assistance. The growth in volunteer numbers and the diverse age range demonstrated that volunteering transcends age, fostering gratitude and a tradition of empathy and shared responsibility among students. The students' testimonials underscore empathetic engagement's transformative and enduring impact on community-driven initiatives.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Exploring empathy's evolution through student volunteerism is a beacon of transformative engagement in an era of growing social consciousness. Prior studies have illuminated the profound impact of volunteer initiatives on students, unravelling increased empathy for marginalised communities, particularly among those with disabilities. Understanding the profound implications of this phenomenon not only underscores its significance within academic discourse but highlights its pivotal role in shaping compassionate and socially conscious individuals. As the study unravelled, the empathy woven through the charitable endeavours of student volunteers is critical in fostering a more empathetic society.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore numerous positive aspects of holding events like the Volunteers Days within society, particularly among its most vulnerable groups. Notably, students exhibited heightened empathy towards children with disabilities, showcasing the transformative potential of such initiatives. The immediate impact on empathy levels and sustained commitment to post-event volunteering lay a robust foundation for future Service Learning activities, emphasising the enduring influence of experiential engagement. The implications of these findings ripple beyond the academic realm, urging a collective commitment to fostering empathy through community-centred initiatives, thereby contributing to a more compassionate and inclusive society. NGOs gather people who strongly need societal changes and help vulnerable groups. NGOs help individuals and groups achieve the stated goals in many ways. Their activity is not limited only to the aspect of event organisation, but it is much broader. This paper focuses on more detailed research on volunteering engagement and empathy arising through humanitarian events. New generations increasingly turn to volunteering because they know current issues and needs. Because the younger generations are driving the trend and popularising the very concept of humanitarian aid, many humanitarian associations have no problems financing, donating, or organising events. In this paper, on the example of the organisation of the humanitarian event Days of Volunteering, emphasis is placed on the need to attract volunteers through the event's organisation. The goal was to analyse the volunteer's motivation and feeling after the event in more detail. As such, humanitarian organisations have an exceptional need for deep understanding and engagement, not only of the volunteers but also of each individual involved in organising the event. The events leave an unforgettable mark in the memory of the volunteers and influence their future behaviour and feelings towards the needy.

### 6.1.    Theoretical and practical implications

This study unfolds a compelling narrative on the transformative potential inherent in student participation in humanitarian events, exemplified by the Volunteers Days organised by the NGO "Mi." The implications drawn from our findings carry significant weight, beckoning academia, nonprofit organisations, and educational institutions towards future actions. First, the research strongly advocates for the seamless integration of volunteer experiences, especially those akin to the studied event, into higher education Service Learning programs. This integration is crucial for students' empathetic

development and sustained community engagement, fostering academic growth and nurturing socially conscious individuals ready to tackle real-world challenges. Discerning from our insights, NGOs are urged to craft initiatives that transcend episodic engagement, promoting enduring collaboration with universities. By orchestrating events that resonate with students and directly address societal challenges, organisations can cultivate empathetic mindsets, catalysing prolonged involvement. Additionally, the study illuminates the path towards incorporating community-engaged education within university curricula. Such pedagogical adjustments hold promise in moulding university students who excel academically and emerge as empathetic contributors to societal well-being. These implications underscore the urgent need for collaborative efforts, structured frameworks, and innovative educational approaches, culminating in a more compassionate and socially engaged future.

## 6.2. Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights into the transformative impact of events like the Volunteers Days, it is essential to acknowledge inherent limitations that temper the generalizability and robustness of the study findings. The research's primary constraint lies in its singular focus on a specific event organised by the NGO „Mi", introducing a contextual specificity that may limit broader applicability across diverse settings. Furthermore, relying on a qualitative approach and a small sample size necessitates caution in extrapolating findings to broader populations. The subjectivity inherent in measuring empathy, primarily through self-reported assessments, introduces potential biases and challenges the precision of the observed effects. The temporal scope of our study, focusing on immediate impacts and sustained commitment post-event, precludes a more protracted examination of the durability of empathetic development. These limitations underscore the need for future research to encompass a broader spectrum of events and diverse populations and employ a mixed-methods approach for a more comprehensive understanding of the nuanced dynamics at play.

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# SERVICE LEARNING IN ACADEMIC CURRICULA - PHYSICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS' ATTITUDES

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## ABSTRACT

Service Learning (SL) activities on the academic level are challenge-based and credit-based activities with many confirmed benefits for students, such as improving academic and personal skills, critical thinking, teamwork, and effective communication. For physical activity and sports academic areas, SL implementation in academic curricula can be linked to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) regarding good health and well-being, quality education, and economic growth. Also, the implementation of SL content in Physical Education (PE) academic curricula helps transform a conventional teacher-centered approach in the realm of Physical Activity and Sports education into the contemporary student-centered educational model. By participating in SL activities, the role of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) is changing, and they are becoming competent to serve the community in the 21st Century. On the other hand, students learn in different contexts, from real-life examples, and participate as co-creators in their educational service. The assumption for this research is the possible difference in the perception of the SL benefits among PE students who are previously experience-conditioned. Those differences should be respected in preparing SL projects and creating student-centered curricula to achieve the best possible effect of connecting academia to society. This study aims to explicitly analyze the impact of SL on Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) students' EP using a mixed methods approach. The first step was to analyze the differences in benefits students perceive from participating in SL activities. An additional step was made comparing the benefits with their previous motor experience. The initial long version of the SELEB questionnaire (SErvice LEarning Benefit) developed by Toncar et al., with six categories: civic responsibility, interpersonal skills, leadership ability, ability to apply knowledge, general life skills, and critical thinking, was used for measuring SL benefits for PE students. Research groups are defined based on students' previous motor experience, considering the type of dominant previous motor activity and level of previous dominant motor skill. Data for defining research groups were determined using the semi-structured interview. Two main research groups were conducted on the sample of students of PE aged between 20 and 24 based on previous motor experience: competitive sport previous dominant motor skill (N=35) and recreational previous dominant motor skills (N=23). According to the Analysis of variance, significant differences were found in the critical thinking SELEB sub-scale (F=5.11; p<0.03). For a better insight into the type of previous motor experience, two main research groups were divided into subgroups: competitive sport (team, martial, and individual) and recreational sport (social, self-directed, and artistic). Analysis of variance and Tukey HSD test were used for defining differences between research groups based on dominant motor skills. Significant differences were noted between team and individual competitive sport dominant groups in leadership ability, ability to apply knowledge, and general life skills SELEB subscales. According to the obtained results, previous motor experience should be taken into consideration in developing student-centered curricula and SL content implementation into higher education programs in the field of physical education and sport.

**Keywords:** quality of education, previous motor experience, service-learning

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Service Learning (SL) activities on the academic level are challenge-based and credit-based activities with many confirmed benefits for students as improving academic and personal skills, critical thinking, teamwork, and effective communication. Some authors emphasize the importance of this tool in educational quality improvement and the enhancement of graduate employability (Martínez-Campillo et al., 2019), and other authors especially emphasize the role of this experimental tool in personal development, promoting academic achievement, personnel growth and civic commitment (Sales & Monfort, 2019).

Researchers interests in SL activities and their implementation in higher education institutions programs regarding Sports and Physical education has been on the rise recently (Carson & Raguse, 2014; Chiva-Bartoll, et al. 2019; Pérez-Ordás et al., 2021, Chiva-Bartoll & Fernandez-Rio, 2022). For physical activity and sports academic areas, SL implementation in academic curricula can be linked to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) regarding good health and well-being, quality education, and economic growth.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), commonly referred to as the Global Goals, which were embraced by the United Nations in 2015. They serve as a global initiative urging collective efforts to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee universal peace and prosperity by 2030. (United Nations, 2023). The role of higher education in creating a socially sensitive society is immensely important, hence a strong emphasis is placed on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the educational process. As stated by Geli, Collazo & Mulà in 2019, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is imperative in our unwavering commitment to construct a sustainable future, benefiting both our society and the planet. Also, the implementation of SL content in Physical Education (PE) academic curricula helps transform a conventional teacher-centered approach in the realm of Physical Activity and Sports education into the contemporary student-centered educational model.

Teacher-centered approach refers to the traditional transfer of knowledge and skills in a learning environment, in which the teacher has the dominant role, and student-centredness should encourage student's activity and develop critical thinking skills by using problem-solving methods during PE classes. According recently published research (Rothmund, 2023), obtained on dance PE classes, student-centred approach is focused on holistic development through a discovery process and teacher-centred approach is focused on training of dance artists, emphasizing skill acquisition in dance technique. Author defines middle model for teaching contemporary dance, as combination of skill acquisition and personal growth through problem solving methods. But, to understand better which approach should be preferred and when during PE classes, or is there any differences in effective approaches and teaching styles (Miletić, et al. 2023), more scientific data obtained during educational processes are needed.

By participating in SL activities, the role of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) is changing, and they are becoming competent to serve the community in the 21st Century. On the other hand, students learn in different contexts, from real-life examples, and participate as co-creators in their educational service. The assumption for this research is the possible difference in the perception of the SL benefits among PE students who are previously experience-conditioned.

The main aim of the research was to analyze differences in attitudes related to service learning (civic responsibility, interpersonal skills, leadership ability, ability to apply knowledge, general life skills, and critical thinking) defined by the SELEB scale, between Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) students considering their previuos motor skill dominant experience: competitive sport previous dominant motor skill and recreational previous dominant motor skills. Second aim was to analyze differences between competitive sport previous dominant motor skill subgoups (team sports, martial arts and individual sports) and recreational previous dominant motor skills subgroups ( social recreational activities; self-directed recreational activities and artistic activities).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Fifty-eight students attending a university study programme for a Physical Education teacher, aged between 20 and 24 participated in this study. Two main research groups were defined based on students' previous motor experience (Image 1) considering the type of dominant previous motor activity and level of previous dominant motor skill: competitive sport previous dominant motor skill (N=35) and recreational previous dominant motor skills (N=23). Competitive sport previous dominant motor skill group consisted form three subgroups: (1) team sports, (2) martial arts and (3) individual sports. Recreational previous dominant motor skills group consisted from three subgroups: (1) social recreational activities; (2) self-directed recreational activities and (3) artistic activities. The students from all groups were given basic information and instructions regarding basic information on the study and the study objectives, as well as basic information on the questionnaire being conducted and the way to fill out the questionnaire.

**Image 1.** Research groups defined according dominant previous motor skills

*Source:* authors

The initial long version of the SELEB questionnaire (SErvice LEarning Benefit) developed by Toncar et al., (2006) with six categories: civic responsibility, interpersonal skills, leadership ability, ability to apply knowledge, general life skills, and critical thinking (presented in diagram below), was used for measuring SL benefits for PE students. Students were asked to indicate how important each of the 27 items was to their educational experience, using a seven-point Likert scale anchored by "not at all important" and "very important."

**Image 2.** SELEB categories

| | |
|---|---|
| **CRITICAL THINKING** | Social Responsibility and Citizenship Skills, Community Involvement, Service to People in Need, Ability to Make a Difference in the Community |
| **CIVIL RESPONSIBILITY** | Communication Skills, Understanding Cultural and Racial Differences, Social Self-Confidence, Developing Caring Relationships, Empathy and Sensitivity to the Plight of Others |
| **INTERPERSONAL SKILLS** | Ability to Work Well with Others, Leadership skills, Being Trusted by Others, Backgrounds |
| **LEADERSHIP ABILITY** | Applying Knowledge to the "Real World", Social Action Skills, Connecting Theory and Practice |
| **KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION** | Spiritual Growth, Personal Growth, Professional Relationships with Faculty, Conflict Resolution, Ability to Assume Personal Responsibility, Development of Workplace Skills (punctuality, taking direction), Having a Stronger Voice in the Classroom, Organizational Skills and Bolster Resum |
| **GENERAL LIFE SKILLS** | Problem Analysis and Critical Thinking |

*Source:* authors based on Toncar et al. 2006

The research was conducted in several stages. In the first phase, students were introduced to the SL term and its benefits during regular classes. The second phase of the experiment was to identify research groups based on the student's previous experience according to assumption that different motor skill experience can influence SL attitudes among PE students. To identify students previous experience based on competitive or recreation previous dominant activity, semi-structured interview was used. During the interview, students appointed their lifetime dominant sport or other physical activity and skills. Then, students define the level of motor skills mastery on a scale from 1 to 3. Level 3 denotes a professional level of motor skill mastery as athletes with international competition experience. Level 2 denotes moderate but still significant motor skill mastery. Level 1 denotes motor skill mastery on an amateur or basic level. According to the information obtained, the main research groups were determined as competitive sports previous dominant motor skill and recreational previous dominant motor skills. Competitive sport previous dominant motor skill group consisted from three major sport areas and presupposed long-term participation in: (1) team sports such as football, basketball, volleyball, handball or water polo; (2) martial arts such as judo, taekwondo, fencing, wrestling, etc. and (3) individual sports such as gymnastics, swimming or track and field. Recreational previous dominant motor skill group

consisted from three major recreational area and presuppose long-term participation in (1) social recreational activities denote long term previous experiences in activities aimed at society such as hiking, fishing, gardening etc., (2) self-directed recreational activities denote long term previous experience such as exercise in the gym, exercise on equipment or jogging, and (3) artistic activities that denotes long term previous experience in playing instruments, drawing, social dancing, and other activities with an artistic and aesthetic component.

In the third phase of the research, students participated in the development of the service-learning (SL) projects. The process involved planning the project, which included coming up with a project title, selecting a team leader and team members, choosing an external organization to work with, identifying the organization's needs, outlining the activities students would do to address those needs, deciding when and where the project would take place, predicting the time commitment, planning specific activities, anticipating what students would learn, considering the benefits to society, stating students' expectations, and having a backup plan in case the original plan didn't work out. Students also had to define who would be their mentor in the extrenal organisation who would monitor their project in the implementation. According to Anstee et al. (2008), six-stage SL model, they have achieved Stage 1 (Resource Mapping, Key Stakeholder Identification, Matching Community Needs); Stage 2 (Diversity Awareness and Education, Developing Student Interest) started Stage 3 (Preparation of Research Design).

**2.1. Statistical procedures**

Descriptive statistics was used to summarize and describe the data collected from the SELEB questionnaire (mean value and standard deviation). One-way Analysis of variance was used to analyze the differences between two main research groups: competitive sport's previous dominant motor skills and recreational previous dominant motor skills. Also, Analysis of variance was used to analyse differences between research subgroups, on SL attitudes among students defined by six factors of SELEB scale (civic responsibility, interpersonal skills, leadership ability, critical thinking, ability to apply knowledge, and general life skills). The Post-hoc Tukey HSD test was used to determine significant differences among means. The significant level was set at $p < 0.05$.

**3. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

Firstly, descriptive statistics was calculated to analyze and compare the subscales of SELEB (Table 1). All analized parameters of SELEB subscales and final score were lower in competitive sport previous dominant motor skill group. In both research groups (Table 1), the highest mean was detected at the subscale *Leadership ability* and the lowest at the subscale *Knowledge application*. Basic statistic parameters show satisfactory dispersion of all subscale distributions. According to One-way Analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) significant differences ($F=5.11$; $p<0.03$) between two main research groups is detected only with subscale *Critical thinking* in favour of recreational previous dominant motor skills group.

**Table 1.** Physical Education students' groups based on previous motor experience: descriptive statistics of SELEB items and Analysis of variance results

| | Competitive sport previous dominant motor skills (N=35) Mean ± SD | Recreational previous dominant motor skills (N=23) Mean ± SD |
|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking | **5.46 ± 0.85** | **5.90± 0.50\*** |
| Civil responsibility | 5.53 ± 0.94 | 5.94 ± 0.83 |
| Interpersonal skills | 5.63 ± 0.75 | 5.80 ± 0.85 |
| Leadership ability | 5.96 ± 0.80 | 5.97± 0.77 |
| Knowledge application | 5.39 ± 0.82 | 5.72 ± 0.70 |
| General life skills | 5.54 ± 1.12 | 5.87 ± 1.14 |
| SELEB total | 5.56 ± 0.72 | 5.86 ± 0.63 |

*\*Analysis of variance significant difference between groups (F=5.11; p<0.03)*
*Source: authors*

Descriptive statistics obtained in recreational previous dominant motor skills group were presented in Table 2. The highest overall SELEB score is detected in *Artistic activities* subgroup. The highest mean was detected at the SELEB subscale *General life skill* in *the Artistic activity subgroup, and the lowest at the SELEB subscale Knowledge application in Self –the directed recreational activities* subgroup.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of SELEB items for PE students' groups based on recreational previous dominant motor skill

|  | Social recreational activities Mean ± SD | Self –directed recreational activities Mean ± SD | Artistic activities Mean ± SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking | 5.93 ± 0.54 | 5.71 ± 0.94 | 6.13± 0.38 |
| Civil responsibility | 5.89 ± 0.81 | 5.97 ± 0.75 | 6.10 ± 0.11 |
| Interpersonal skills | 5.86 ± 0.76 | 5.61 ± 0.80 | 6.00 ± 0.55 |
| Leadership ability | 6.21 ± 0.43 | 5.62 ± 0.82 | 6.06± 1.20 |
| Knowledge application | 5.85 ± 0.54 | 5.43 ± 1.12 | 5.97 ± 0.64 |
| General life skills | 5.64 ± 1.21 | 6.00 ± 0.72 | 6.33 ± 1.21 |
| SELEB total | 5.92± 0.48 | 5.67± 0.80 | 6.08 ± 0.72 |

*Source: authors*

To determine differences between three research subgroups groups One-way ANOVA was calculated for each main research group separately. The significant differences between subgroups were detected only in competitive sports previous dominant motor skill group (Table 3).

Descriptive statistics calculated in competitive sport previous dominant motor skill (Table 3) shows the highest overall SELEB score is in *Teams sports* subgroup and the lowest in *Individual sports* subgroup.

The highest mean was detected at the SELEB subscale *Leadership ability in the Martial arts subgroup, and the lowest at the SELEB subscale Knowledge application in the Individual sports* subgroup.

According to the Tukey post-hoc test, significant differences were obtained only in competitive sport previous dominant motor skill group (Table 3) between the *Teams sports* and *Individual sports groups* ($p<05$). The differences were detected in SELEB subgroups *interpersonal skills, leadership ability, knowledge application, and general life skills, all in favor of the Team Spors* subgroup.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of SELEB items; Analysis of variance and Post – hoc Tukey HSD test – differences between three research groups based on competitive sport previous dominant motor skill.

|  | Teams sports Mean ± SD | Martial arts Mean ± SD | Individual sports Mean ± SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Critical thinking | 5.64 ± 0.71 | 5.50 ± 0.79 | 4.84± 1.05 |
| Civil responsibility | 5.71 ± 0.78 | 5.36 ± 0.93 | 5.03 ± 1.21 |
| Interpersonal skills | 5.82 ± 0.69* | 5.55 ± 0.69 | 5.09 ± 0.77* |
| Leadership ability | 6.13 ± 0.72* | 6.27 ± 0.43 | 5.25± 0.87* |
| Knowledge application | 5.62 ± 0.60* | 5.14 ± 0.69 | 4.80 ± 1.08* |
| General life skills | 5.86 ± 0.85* | 5.20 ± 1.30 | 4.77 ± 1.28* |
| SELEB total | 5.78 ± 0.56 | 5.42 ± 0.57 | 94. ± 0.85 |

*Post-hoc Tukey HSD test signifficant differences between Teams sports and Individual sports groups (p<05)*

*Source: authors*

## 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research showed that the differences obtained between the two main research groups, the previous dominant motor skills of competitive sports and the previous dominant motor skills of the recreational type, on the SELEB *critical thinking* subscale, could be connected with PE students' previous knowledge and skills and lifestyles.

In the realm of physical education teacher education (PETE), prior studies have regarded service-learning (SL) as a viable approach for augmenting genuine learning outcomes, fostering critical reflection, and promoting civic engagement among students (Galvan & Parker 2011). In general, there is previous research that emphasized the positive implication of the SL on the skills and attitudes of preservice teachers. For example, Maravé-Vivas at el. (2022) made a research where they concluded that utilizing service-learning proves to be an effective approach in fostering civic attitudes and skills among preservice teachers. The gained knowledge distinctly influences various dimensions crucial for meaningful learning, contributing to the enhancement of skills and attitudes essential for embodying the qualities of an inclusive teacher.

In this research, further analyses by subgroups provided insights that attitudes of PE students in the Aesthetic activities group contribute the most to this difference; students in Artistic activities subgroup indicated that their dominant prior motor skills include activities such as playing instruments, drawing, social dancing, and other activities with an artistic and aesthetic component. It could be assumed that such an orientation towards artistic and social activities contributes to a higher degree of critical thinking in relation to society, such as social responsibility and citizenship skills, community involvement, service to people in need, and the ability to make a difference in the community.

On the other hand, in the competitive sport, the previous dominant motor skill group, low results on the SELEB scale are contributed mainly by students in the Individual Sports group, who have achieved a significant sports career in sports where the focus is usually on one person. In individual sports, the entire sports team, coaches, fitness trainers, physiotherapists, family, and the environment are oriented towards the sports success of one person. It can be concluded that such students are self-oriented and not socially oriented.

According to Miletić et al. (2023), it is possible that the aesthetic and artistic previous experience of PE students can affect a higher level of socialization and, thus, social sensitivity, which we correlate with the motivation to participate in service-learning activities. Meanwhile, long-term practice of individual sports can contribute to a reduced interest in understanding and engaging in service-learning activities. Further research is needed to confirm these assumptions.

Differences obtained between Team sport and Individual sport subgroups in the main research competitive sport previous dominant motor skill group confirm these assumptions.

Significant differences noted in interpersonal skills, leadership ability, ability to apply knowledge, and general life skills SELEB subscales, all in favor of the Team sports subgroup, indicate general students' attitudes about SL components based on the student's previous knowledge and skills, which could be connected to with students lifestyles.

Playing in a sports team implies frequent socializing through training and competitions and a lifestyle in which athletes are oriented towards each other. Their sports success often depends on how cohesive the team is, and thus, ingrained attitudes can reflect on their environment and attitudes about society as a whole.

In conclusion, PE students with different previous motor experiences perceive the benefits of SL differently. According to the obtained results, previous motor experience should be considered in developing PE curricula and SL content implementation into higher education programs in physical education and sport. The findings of this study align with prior research suggesting that to ensure the readiness of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) students to address the diverse needs of their future students, it is crucial to incorporate experiential inclusive education practices into their training. This approach allows PETEs to engage in critical thinking, theoretical exploration, and practical experimentation (Auhl & Daniel; Chiva-Bartoll et al., 2020).

PE students with previous knowledge of artistic and aesthetic content are expected to have a better perception of the benefits that can arise from SL activities, and this should be taken into account when selecting teams for the preparation of student SL projects. In the preparation of SL projects, teams of PE students with different prior knowledge will influence each other to better perceive SL's benefits, thus contributing to the effective implementation of SL content in educational programs.

It can be presumed that students with experience in team sports will be more interested in engaging in service-learning activities. Further investigations of physical education students' involvement in service-learning projects and their reflection on benefits after service-learning activities are needed to confirm the obtained results.

In conclusion, the research reveals that critical thinking skills among PE students vary based on their prior motor skill experiences, with aesthetic activities correlating to higher abilities and individual sports, particularly competitive ones, linked to lower scores. Team sports demonstrate a positive impact on interpersonal skills and life skills, emphasizing the need to integrate diverse motor experiences into PE curricula. Students with aesthetic backgrounds are likely to benefit more from service-learning activities, suggesting the importance of team composition. The study advocates for tailored PE and service-learning content to accommodate students' varied motor experiences, enhancing the overall effectiveness of educational programs.

While the presented study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. For example, the study's sample size may be limited, potentially reducing the generalizability of findings to a broader population. A larger and more diverse sample could enhance the study's external validity. Also, the reliance on self-reported data of students, especially regarding prior motor skill experiences, introduces the possibility of recall bias. Objective measures or alternative methods of data collection could provide more accurate insights. It is crucial to underscore that students did not actively implement the service-learning (SL) project, and their perceptions of the SL benefits may differ when considering the potential impact of actual project implementation.

Reccomendation for future research could be to include several potential avenues for future research in the field of physical education (PE) and critical thinking skills. For example, it would be recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to track the development of critical thinking skills in PE students over an extended period. This could provide insights into the long-term effects of different motor skill experiences on cognitive development. Also, researchers could compare the critical thinking abilities of PE students across various age groups, taking into account their prior motor skill experiences. Investigate how these skills evolve as students progress through different stages of their education. On the other hand, an exploration of the influence of cultural factors on the relationship between motor skill experiences, critical thinking skills, and participation in physical activities could be done. In future research, it would be interesting to extend the research on the positive impact of team sports to examine the specific development of soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution. Assess how these skills acquired through team sports contribute to overall personal and social development.

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# INTRODUCTION OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN ACADEMIC CURRICULA OF THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES – TEACHERS' VIEWPOINT

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**ABSTRACT**

Service-learning as a pedagogical methodology is a well-known concept across the USA and the European Union. Although all concepts are known and many projects have been implemented, the question arises as to the level of awareness of the pedagogical methodology and the degree of its implementation in the Western Balkan countries among teachers at business schools in the region. Most of these Western Balkan countries, with the exception of Croatia, are about to enter the European education system, where community engagement is an integral part of education. With this survey, we have tried to reach out to the wider Balkan community to find out to what extent teachers are familiar with the concept of engaged learning through service-learning and in a second step, we want to find out what they are doing in the classrooms, if they are doing any form of service-learning. The survey was initially sent to all public and private business schools. We received 50 responses, which is a response rate of about 4%.
**Keywords**: teachers, Western Balkan, business schools

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the introduction of service-learning (S-L) in the academic curricula of Western Balkan countries, specifically examining the perspectives of teachers. Service-learning is an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates academic learning with meaningful community service, fostering student engagement and civic responsibility. Researching service-learning from a teacher's point of view is crucial for understanding the practical challenges and facilitators in its implementation. By exploring teachers' experiences and attitudes, policymakers, stakeholders, and educators can develop tailored strategies to support effective implementation and maximize the educational advantages of service-learning for students. Ultimately, prioritizing teachers' voices leads to stronger S-L programs that benefit both students and communities.

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to present the level of higher education teachers' familiarity with service-learning and its relevant aspects in selected countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and to provide an overview of the challenges faced by higher education institutions (HEIs) in the implementation of service-learning programs.

Service-learning is based on the principle of reciprocity, with both students and communities benefiting from the collaboration. In the Western Balkans, however, knowledge and expertise often flow in only one direction, from the universities to the communities, without community members having sufficient opportunity to contribute their own knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in the introduction of service-learning in higher education institutions in the Western Balkans, as universities and organisations have recognised the value of integrating community service with academic learning. This interest can be attributed to several factors, including the need to reform

outdated teaching methods, the desire to improve the relevance and quality of higher education, and the recognition of the importance of social responsibility and community engagement.

As a member of the European Union, Croatia needs to harmonise its higher education qualifications with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), while other Western Balkan countries are only beginning this process. Although several universities in the region have started to integrate service-learning into their academic programs, either as a stand-alone course or as part of (an) existing course(s), service-learning is still considered under-researched in the Western Balkans (e.g., Sotelino-Losada et al., 2021). The University of Split started this process about ten years ago, initially as an individual effort of a few dedicated faculty members, and made it official with a large national call for service-learning projects. As part of this call, the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism established an official course for service-learning internship. As part of this process, many training sessions have been held for students and mentors from the faculties and incoming organizations.

In this paper, we will examine teachers' perspectives on service-learning to gain insights into its recent development in the Western Balkans. By focusing on teachers' viewpoints, we seek to uncover trends, identify areas of growth, and assess the impact of service-learning on educational practices and community engagement in the Western Balkans during the last ten years.

The paper is organized as follows. After the introduction, a brief review of existing literature on service-learning is provided. Then, the findings from a research study exploring teachers' perspectives on the introduction of service-learning in Western Balkan countries will be presented. The paper will conclude by summarizing the key findings, discussing their implications, and offering recommendations for future research and practice.


## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Service-learning as a pedagogical methodology is one of the newest concepts in the European Union. The introduction of a new academic methodology is usually accompanied by logistical and administrative issues (Adler-Kassner et al., 1997). Some other issues can slow down the progress, such as the need for more knowledge about the topic or the teachers' current workload. Although the availability of EU funding is advancing education across Europe, the Western Balkan countries are slower than the rest of the EU in introducing new concepts and methodologies into the education system. The primary goal of the implementation of service-learning is to link theory with practice and classrooms with communities (Butin, 2006) in order to enrich engaged students and others with practical experience and awareness of community problems with the aim of raising responsible citizens. The key benefit of implementing service-learning is personal and professional development for students, but it also provides in-depth peer-to-peer learning through classroom reflection for non-involved students.

Traditionally, service-learning as a pedagogical methodology has found its place in the humanities and in social sciences such as business studies. Salem et al. (2019) found that the use of service-learning is most prevalent in academic disciplines as follows: 30% in health sciences and nursing, 17% in business and economics, 14% in computer and information sciences, while the lowest Image is 2% in mathematics, linguistics and communication sciences, engineering and hospitality and tourism.

Salam et al. (2019) stated that more research is needed on the role of service-learning in higher education. There is also a need to more clearly define what service-learning is and is not, and to combine different approaches to student professional development, such as internships or volunteering. Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that combines meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, instil civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Service-learning in higher education has been recognized as one of the most effective methods for promoting the students' personal, social, and cognitive development (e.g., Choi et al., 2023). It also helps to build social capital for communities and improve the quality of life of citizens.

The results of previous studies have confirmed that service-learning benefits students, community partners, and teachers (Daniels et al., 2015; Rutti et al., 2016). Research shows that students who participate in service-learning often perform better academically, have higher retention rates and are more motivated to learn. By applying theoretical concepts to real-world problems, they gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter and are better prepared for professional life. S-L promotes students' personal growth by boosting their self-confidence and self-esteem and improving their ability to manage emotions (e.g. Balciüniené & Mazeikienè, 2008; Harrington, 2012; Omar et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2019).

Service-learning can also have benefits and positive impacts on a community because S-L projects provide new insights and ideas to solve pressing issues, often lead to long-term relationships between universities and community partners and contribute to ongoing community development efforts and create lasting positive impacts (e.g., Balciūnienė and Mazeikienè, 2008; Eyler et al., 2001; Harrington, 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Yeh, 2010). Teaching staff are encouraged through S-L projects to enhance and enrich their teaching practice by providing opportunities for experiential learning, reflection, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Faculty members develop innovative teaching methods and incorporate real-world examples into their courses. S-L also contributes to the professional development of teaching staff by expanding their knowledge, skills, and networks. They gain insights into community needs and best practices in community engagement, which enriches their teaching and research activities. (Boyer, 1990; Eyler et al., 2001)

These examples illustrate the many benefits of service-learning for students, community partners and teaching staff. Through research, evaluation and ongoing reflection, stakeholders continue to seek ways to optimize service-learning experiences and maximize their positive impact on individuals and communities. Previous research, which has highlighted both personal and professional advantages gained from involvement in a service-learning initiative for teachers, has mostly concentrated on teachers in the United States (e.g., Thierot, 2006; Chen, 2015). This leaves a gap in our understanding of how service-learning might impact teachers in other regions, particularly those in the Western Balkans. Exploring the experiences and outcomes of service-learning initiatives among teachers in the Western Balkans could offer valuable insights into the effectiveness and applicability of such programs in diverse cultural and educational contexts.

To conclude, to the best of our knowledge service-learning is still an underdeveloped a in the Western Balkan countries (WBC) although it can benefit students, teachers and communities alike. This research focuses only on teachers because who should introduce the new teaching method if not the teachers themselves, who are familiar with the subject?
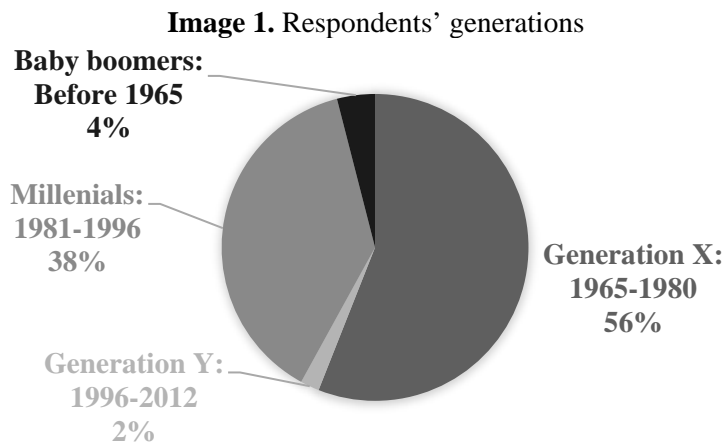
## 3. RESEARCH

The survey was conducted in February 2024. The questionnaire used was developed based on the questions used in previously tested and validated surveys Folgueira et al. (2018). Some general questions about the country, the course and the teaching staff were added to these questions. The questionnaire was sent to approximately 1,600 email addresses. Teacher contact information was taken from the publicly available data on the official websites of the business schools.

In the first round, around 370 emails were returned directly as invalid email addresses. In a second round, around 30 teachers got in touch to ask whether it was appropriate to complete the form as they had no previous experience of service-learning. So as a starting point, excluding the previously mentioned numbers, we can count 1200 valid email addresses, with a response rate of 50, which is about 4.2%, which we consider acceptable for social sciences surveys. The questionnaire was available only in English, without translation into the local language, which probably resulted in a lower response rate.

The results are distributed as follows: universities of applied sciences 9 responses (18%), Universities 37 responses (74%) and Business Schools 6 responses (12%). In addition, 35 respondents came from public schools (70%), while 16 came from private schools (32%), although it should be noted that more than one response was possible and some respondents work at more than one school. The breakdown by country is as follows: Albania 14 (28%); Bosnia and Herzegovina 5 (10%); Croatia 11 (22%); Kosovo 9 (18%); Montenegro 5 (10%); North Macedonia 2 (4%) and Serbia 4 (8%). The respondents were distributed according to their current academic status as follows: 1) Full Professors 10 (20%); Associate Professors 14 (28%); Assistant Professors 10 (20%); Senior Lecturers 9 (18%); Lecturers 5 (10%); Assistants 2 (4%) and Postdocs 0. Most of the respondents taught Management 18 (36%), Economics 14 (28%), Languages and Marketing 7 (14%) each, Accounting and other Social Sciences 4 (8%) and finally Finance and Law 3 (6%) each.

The following Image illustrates the distribution of respondents across the different generations. Most (65%) were born between 1965 and 1980, followed by those born between 1981-1996 (385) and the fewest between 1996 and 2012 (2%) and those born before 1964 (4%).

**Image 1.** Respondents' generations



Source: Authors' research

Some interesting observations can be made with regard to the introduction of service-learning as shown in the following tables (1-7).

Table 1 provides information on the teachers' previous involvement in service-learning projects. According to the findings, only 16% of teachers strongly agree that they participated in an S-L project and 30% agree. More importantly, 50% confirmed this statement with a control question.

**Table 1**. Previous participation in service-learning projects

| Statements / Scale | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I took part in some aspects of the project | 26% | 2% | 24% | 30% | 16% | 98% |
| A new project was created on the basis of my participation | 32% | 10% | 30% | 18% | 10% | 100% |
| My participation was sufficient | 24% | 10% | 28% | 26% | 12% | 100% |
| I have never participated | 34% | 16% | 16% | 6% | 28% | 100% |
| I participated the whole process | 24% | 6% | 32% | 30% | 8% | 100% |
| I participated in the needs analysis | 26% | 6% | 22% | 26% | 20% | 100% |
| I participated in the project assessment | 28% | 6% | 28% | 26% | 12% | 100% |

Legend: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly Agree
*Source: Authors' research*

Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant S-L fields, where 72% of participants agree or strongly agree that educational support is the most appropriate S-L field, citizen participation 62%, solidarity and cooperation 60%, whereas health promotion is the lowest with 42%.

**Table 2.** Description of the service-learning field

| Service-learning field / Scale | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Health promotion | 14% | 2% | 22% | 28% | 14% | 20% | 100% |
| Human rights promotion | 8% | 2% | 26% | 26% | 22% | 16% | 100% |
| Solidarity and cooperation | 6% | 0% | 18% | 32% | 28% | 16% | 100% |
| Cultural heritage | 8% | 0% | 24% | 26% | 26% | 16% | 100% |
| Educational support | 6% | 0% | 10% | 26% | 46% | 12% | 100% |
| Citizen participation | 4% | 0% | 18% | 38% | 24% | 16% | 100% |
| Environment | 4% | 2% | 22% | 24% | 32% | 16% | 100% |
| Generational exchange | 8% | 4% | 18% | 30% | 22% | 18% | 100% |
| Other | 10% | 0% | 28% | 14% | 14% | 34% | 100% |

Legend: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly Agree
*Source: Authors' research*

Table 3 shows the perceived benefits of service-learning projects as reported by the respondents. The majority, 86%, believe that Service-learning fosters a deeper connection with students. In addition, 74% believe that S-L contributes significantly to the improvement of society and that it enables them to understand social needs. Furthermore, 72% of respondents state that S-L enables them to learn values. According to the participants, these elements represent the greatest benefit of S-L.

**Table 3**. Usefulness of service-learning projects

| Statements / Scale | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Understanding social needs | 2% | 0% | 10% | 34% | 40% | 14% | 100% |
| Getting interested in social problems | 2% | 0% | 18% | 22% | 42% | 16% | 100% |
| Contributing to making the society better | 2% | 0% | 10% | 30% | 44% | 14% | 100% |
| Learning values | 2% | 0% | 12% | 36% | 36% | 14% | 100% |
| Being more consistent in my actions | 2% | 2% | 20% | 34% | 28% | 14% | 100% |
| Encouraging me to get involved in my university, area or town | 2% | 2% | 18% | 26% | 36% | 16% | 100% |
| Working in an organization, association, etc. | 2% | 0% | 22% | 32% | 28% | 16% | 100% |
| Getting to know the professional part of my studies | 2% | 4% | 18% | 30% | 30% | 14% | 98% |
| Connecting theory to practice | 2% | 0% | 10% | 26% | 46% | 16% | 100% |
| Reflecting on the course content(s) | 2% | 0% | 16% | 30% | 38% | 14% | 100% |
| Learning course content | 2% | 0% | 20% | 28% | 32% | 18% | 100% |
| Putting professional skills into practice | 2% | 0% | 10% | 30% | 40% | 18% | 100% |
| Being more motivated to study | 2% | 2% | 18% | 28% | 32% | 18% | 100% |

*Source: Authors' research*

The data presented in table 4 shows the benefits that teachers gain from service-learning. The data presented in table 4 shows the benefits that teachers gain from service-learning, with the opportunity for professional development (90%) and the opportunity to connect more deeply with students (88%) being the two most prominent benefits.

**Table 4**. Benefits of service-learning (projects) for teachers

| Statements / Scale | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opportunities for professional development | 0% | 0% | 18% | 44% | 38% | 100% |
| Deeper connection with students | 0% | 0% | 14% | 54% | 32% | 100% |
| Access to community resources | 0% | 0% | 16% | 48% | 36% | 100% |
| Improved Enhanced classroom instruction | 0% | 0% | 20% | 38% | 42% | 100% |

*Source: Authors' research*

**Table 5.** Teacher's motivation for service-learning

| Statements / Scale | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| It is an opportunity for professional development | 0% | 0% | 10% | 44% | 46% | 100% |
| It is an opportunity for a deeper connection with students | 0% | 0% | 12% | 54% | 34% | 100% |
| It ensures access to community resources | 0% | 2% | 14% | 46% | 38% | 100% |
| S-L enhances classroom instruction | 0% | 0% | 18% | 44% | 38% | 100% |

*Source: Authors' research*

The data from Tables 5 and 6 illustrate respectively what teachers see as their motivation for service-learning and what they hope to gain from their participation in S-L.

**Table 6.** What do you hope to gain from your participation in service-learning?

| Statements / Scale | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opportunities for professional development | 0% | 0% | 16% | 46% | 38% | 100% |
| Deeper connection with students | 0% | 0% | 16% | 54% | 30% | 100% |
| Access to community resources | 0% | 0% | 20% | 46% | 34% | 100% |
| Improved classroom instruction | 0% | 0% | 20% | 50% | 30% | 100% |

*Source: Authors' research*

After presenting the responses to the question on the benefits of service-learning for teachers, Table 7 summarizes the potential benefits of service-learning initiatives as perceived by the participants in this study.

**Table 7.** What are the potential benefits of service-learning for students?

| Statements / Scale | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Increased academic performance | 0% | 0% | 14% | 50% | 36% | 100% |
| Improved problem-solving skills | 0% | 0% | 8% | 46% | 46% | 100% |
| Enhanced sense of civic responsibility | 0% | 0% | 6% | 44% | 50% | 100% |
| Better understanding of course content | 0% | 0% | 8% | 54% | 38% | 100% |

*Source: Authors' research*

Perceptions of the impact of the implementation of S-L in higher education in terms of student participation, type of achievements and competences acquired by university students participating in S-L projects. The participants also believe that students can significantly benefit from service-learning as they will enhance their sense of civic responsibility (95%), improve their problem-solving skills (92%), understand the course content better (92%) and perform better academically (86%).

## 4. FINDINGS

In this study, the respondents are distributed across different age groups, which provides a varied perspective on S-L. Generation X makes up the largest share at 56%, followed by Millennials at 38%. Baby boomers make up 4% of respondents, while Generation Z accounts for the smallest share at 2%.

With regard to the respondents' active participation in an S-L project, slightly less than 50% of the respondents have participated in some aspects of it. This can be related to the fact that about 30 participants reached out to inquire about completing the questionnaire, expressing uncertainty due to their lack of prior experience with service-learning. This unintentional selection bias provides valuable insights for future research and emphasizes the need for wider implementation of S-L and teacher training to ensure a more representative sample.

Another notable finding is that 28% of respondents stated that a new project was created as a result of their participation, indicating the impact and relevance of teachers' involvement in S-L.

The perceived benefits of service-learning projects as reported by respondents in the study were remarkably positive. However, it is also worth noting that a significant proportion of respondents (14-16%) did not answer this question (see Table 3), which is likely related to their lack of information and/or experience with service-learning.

Teachers also have a positive attitude towards the benefits they gain from service-learning. They see it as an opportunity for professional development (90%), an opportunity for a deeper connection with students (88%), a means to ensure access to community resources (84%), and to improve instruction (82%). Teachers are also motivated to participate in S-L because it provides them with an opportunity for professional development (82%) and a deeper connection with students (86%), in addition to providing access to community resources (84%) and improving classroom instruction (80%).

Finally, the potential benefits of service-learning for students are overwhelmingly positive, as it improves their academic performance (86%) and problem-solving skills (92%), strengthens their sense of civic responsibility (94%), and allows them to better understand course content (92%).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Overall, service-learning in higher education provides a transformative educational experience that benefits students, communities, and society as a whole. Through the integration of service, learning and reflection, students are prepared to become informed and engaged citizens capable of addressing complex challenges and contributing to positive social change.

Despite positive developments, the implementation of service-learning in the Western Balkans faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the lack of awareness and understanding of the concept of service-learning among students, faculty, and administrators. Many people in the region are not familiar with the idea of combining community service with academic learning, and there is a need for more information and training on how to design and implement effective service-learning programs. Another challenge is the limited availability of resources and infrastructure to support service-learning initiatives. In many cases, universities in the Western Balkans do not have dedicated offices or staff responsible for coordinating service-learning programs. This lack of institutional support makes it difficult to sustain and expand service-learning activities in the long term. There is also a need to build stronger partnerships between higher education institutions and local communities.

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# CHALLENGES OF MOTIVATING STUDENTS TOWARDS HIGHER EDUCATION AND SERVICE LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education has always been associated with a better lifestyle, greater opportunities, better employability, and financial security. Also, there is an assumption, if not a prejudice, that individuals who have acquired a high level of education are more valued in society and have significantly more influence. However, in the last few years, we have witnessed a significant shift in the labour market, where in the Croatian economy there has been a high demand for labour force, especially labour force with only secondary education. The need for low-qualified or nonqualified employees has gotten to the point that the domestic labour force can't meet the demand of Croatian employers, significantly in the tourism/service sector as well as the construction sector. Therefore, there has also been a change in student perception and their choices, whether to proceed with higher education, or to enter the labour market immediately after concluding their secondary education.

Considering the facts mentioned above, we are facing challenges in terms of how to motivate students towards higher education, in order to progress as a society and as an economy. The aim of service learning in higher education is that the teaching courses identify what specific type of service is needed, taking into account the features of the specific environment/society/economic trends, with the final goal of including the students in carrying out the necessary services.

Through this paper, the current state of higher education (schooling) is shown, primarily using the example of the Republic of Croatia. By analysing the collected data, the factual situation is determined regarding the trends of inclusion in higher education. Also, current trends regarding the choice of profession are presented. For research purposes, a survey was conducted among 30 students of the third year of professional undergraduate studies, as well as among 13 students of the second year of specialist graduate studies, in order to examine the level of interest and motivation of the students in service learning. Only students of the University Department of Professional Studies were included in the research, given that they have the course "Professional/Specialist Practice" as part of their university education. There is great potential in enabling students to complete the mentioned course through service learning, which is why it is crucial to examine student interest in such an approach. A comparison of research results between undergraduate and graduate students is also conducted.

In conclusion, after the analysis and presentation of the aforementioned data and trends, the final goal of this paper is to define the concrete challenges we face as a society, which aims to be recognized on a global level as a society of professionals and experts in specific economic sectors. Also, the aim is to provide a clear Image of whether young adults are motivated to conclude their education process by implementing service learning in their study programs, in order to contribute to society.

**Keywords:** higher education, society, labour market, service learning.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is more than one way to define service learning. To be exact, it would be difficult to give one universal definition, considering many authors have defined, or better to say, adjusted the definition of service learning, taking into consideration the context, target groups, and goals of their individual research.

Given that one of the main goals of this paper is to provide a direct link between students of higher education levels and their interest in service learning and the possible implementation of service learning into teaching programs, the definition of Resch and Schrittesser (2019) would be applicable. According to them, service learning stands out as a teaching approach that connects theory and practice by giving students the opportunity both to participate in a service that meets community needs and to reflect on the experience in class in order to gain a deeper understanding of the course content and an enhanced sense of civic engagement. According to Furco and Norvell (2019) service learning is a pedagogical platform that promotes communitarianism by integrating (academic) learning activities and community service through directed, purposeful civic engagement. Flecky and Gitlow (2009) believe service learning is based on the philosophy of learning by doing when students provide service in collaboration with a community partner. According to Annette (2002), service learning is an experience-based learning program in which students work with a local community to provide services. Furco (2019) expounded on this method, which integrates intentional engagement in community-based projects with reflective practices to attain certain learning objectives. Underwood (2000) and Abes (2002) draw attention to the marginalization of service learning programs in higher education, which is caused by a lack of institutional support and faculty involvement. Bradford (2005) and Farazmand (2010) emphasize the value of applying information after it has been learned, while the former suggests that project-based service learning can pique students' interest and inspire them. These results highlight the need for more creative teaching strategies and institutional support in order to effectively inspire students to pursue further education and service learning.

All of those approaches to service learning are correct and applicable in practice. However, it is also needed to mention the impact of COVID-19, which has forced us into a "new normal" in all aspects of life, work, and professional and social growth.

Khiatani, Ching She, Yin Ho, Kei Liu (2023) wrote about the challenges of practicing service learning during the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic. They concluded that service learning, as a multi-party collaborative educational endeavour with roots in community participation that connects and benefits all parties involved, has not been immune to the widespread impacts of COVID-19. The enforced social distancing restrictions and required social modifications had a direct impact on the practice of service learning and follow-through.

We are now living in an era with a focus on sustainability (social, environmental, and economic), and it has become imperative that we find a way to raise awareness of the importance of community service among people of all age groups. A significant contributor to raising social awareness is volunteering. Given that the following research is focused on the education system of Croatia, it is important to showcase the legal definitions of volunteering and associations through Croatian legislation, as volunteering in associations provides the opportunity to directly contribute to the community's needs.

Volunteering is recognized and promoted as an activity of interest to the Republic of Croatia that leads to an improvement in the quality of life, to the active involvement of people in social events, and to the development of a more humane and equal democratic society. The role and significance of volunteering must be conveyed to children and young people through schooling in the educational institutions of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette, 2007. Article 2. Volunteerism Act of the Republic of Croatia). Given the nature of volunteerism, volunteering is mostly linked to associations of nonprofitable character.

An association is any form of free and voluntary merging of several physical or legal persons who, in order to preserve their commitments to the protection of human rights and freedoms, the protection of the environment and nature, and sustainable development, and for humanitarian, social, cultural, educational, scientific, sports, health, technical, informational, professional, or other beliefs and goals that are not in conflict with the Constitution and the law, and without the intention of gaining profit or other economically estimable benefits, are subject to the rules governing the organization and activity of that form of association (Official Gazette, 2023. Article 4, Associations Act).

Since student motivation is identified as the main challenge of this research and is defined as a process wherein learners' attention becomes focused on meeting their scholastic objectives and their energies are directed towards realizing their academic potential (Lepper, Greene, Nisbett, 1973), it should be emphasized that Croatian law has provided one legal framework aimed at giving students an initial boost in motivation for learning and achieving their academic goals. According to Croatian law, a student who is a citizen of the Republic of Croatia or a citizen of another EU member state studying in a regular status at a public higher education institution has the right to subsidize tuition costs in the full amount from the state budget (Official Gazette, 2022. Article 79, Higher Education and Scientific Activity Act).

If we take into account that every student in Croatia has the possibility of free full-time studying, if the criteria of a successful state high school graduation and passing the faculty entrance exam (which is required by certain faculties) are met, there should be an awareness among young adults that it is necessary to give back to the community in any possible form of service activity. The students gain direct practical knowledge, which they are able to connect with the theoretical knowledge provided in the classroom. Implementation of a complete service learning approach leads to personal and professional growth. Increasing awareness of the sustainability of the entire society begins not only with professors and teachers but with every individual adult.

Implementing service learning as mandatory in a specific teaching course, adjusting and combining academic curricula with real-world volunteer projects, is a field where much progress can be made if the motivation of both students and academic staff in total is present.

## 2. STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT DATA ABOUT THE CROATIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Croatia's young population is the one that we need to systematically guide and motivate towards higher education so that they ultimately become individuals with more than just one professional option and contribute to the economy with their knowledge and acquired expertise. Unfortunately, aging and emigration are two factors that will predetermine the demographic Image of Croatia in the future.

Image 1 shows that during the last 10 academic years, we have had a constant decline in total student population, which includes students in elementary and secondary school. The reason for this is the decline in the birth rate, which is a consequence of various economic and social elements, as well as the life decisions of individuals and professional aspirations. To be exact, there has been a change of -11,46% in the total student number since the academic year 2013/2014 until the academic year 2023/2024.

**Image 1.** Total number of students in Croatia (elementary and secondary school) per academic year
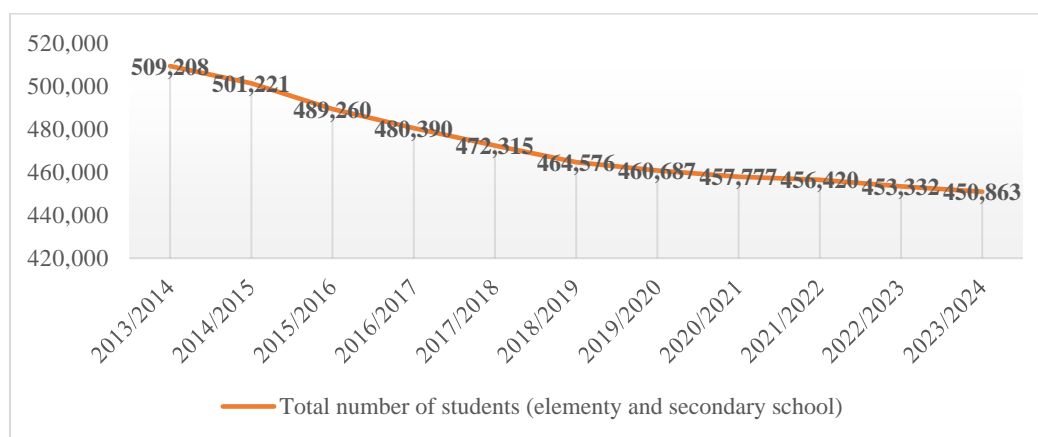


**Source:** *Ministry of Science and Education, ŠeR - Školski e-Rudnik.*
*Available at: https://mzo.gov.hr/ser-skolski-e-rudnik-3419/3419*

However, since the academic year 2018/2019, there has been an approximately equal number of high school graduate students who approached their mandatory state graduation exam. It is an encouraging fact that over the last 5 academic years, out of the total number of graduates, about 70% of them decided to continue their education at a higher education institution (Table 1).

**Table 1.** No. of graduate students (secondary school) and number of students who enrolled in higher education

| Academic year | No. of students at the state graduation exam | No. of students who enrolled in higher education institutions | Ratio (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2018/2019 | 27416 | 18807 | 68,60% |
| 2019/2020 | 26739 | 19501 | 72,93% |
| 2020/2021 | 26253 | 19173 | 73,03% |
| 2021/2022 | 25657 | 19099 | 74,44% |
| 2022/2023 | 26227 | 18699 | 71,30% |

*Source: Ministry of Science and Education, ŠeR - Školski e-Rudnik (Vol. 3).*
*Available at: https://mzo.gov.hr/ser-skolski-e-rudnik-3419/3419*

The state graduation examination requires passing three compulsory subjects: Croatian, mathematics and a foreign language. Students have the right to take so-called optional subjects, which are required for the purpose of enrolling in certain faculties. For example, if a student wants to apply to the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, apart from the three compulsory subjects at a higher level, he will also have to pass chemistry. Therefore, passing chemistry enables admission to this faculty.

Table 2 gives an overview of the 5 optional subjects (courses) that were mostly chosen for the state exam over the last few years, together with percentages of how many students have taken the exam for each course. Given the available data, it can be assumed that students are most interested in social science studies, medical/health, and biochemical studies, as well as natural sciences and engineering.

**Table 2.** Elective courses taken by students-state graduation exam

| Academic year 2018/19 | % | Academic year 2019/20 | % | Academic year 2020/21 | % | Academic year 2021/22 | % | Academic year 2022/23 | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Physics | 38,30% | Physics | 38,10% | Physics | 38,01% | Physics | 40,14% | Physics | 39,82% |
| Biology | 26,18% | Politics and economy | 26,97% | Biology | 26,38% | Biology | 25,33% | Biology | 25,09% |
| Politics and economy | 25,76% | Biology | 24,86% | Politics and economy | 26,03% | Politics and economy | 24,65% | Politics and economy | 24,77% |
| Psychology | 18,55% | Chemistry | 17,09% | Chemistry | 17,76% | Chemistry | 18,80% | Chemistry | 19,00% |
| Chemistry | 16,44% | Psychology | 16,66% | Psychology | 15,80% | Psychology | 15,25% | Informatics | 17,13% |

*Source: Ministry of Science and Education, ŠeR - Školski e-Rudnik (Vol. 3).*
*Available at: https://mzo.gov.hr/ser-skolski-e-rudnik-3419/3419*

Our society is greatly impacted by these specific fields of expertise, so there is a direct correlation between the professional (scientific) progress in these occupations and society in general. The previously mentioned studies have a specific area of interest that they are focused on, whether they are of a social, naturalistic, or other nature.

Considering their character, they represent an ideal platform for students' service learning and implementation of theoretically acquired knowledge in the community, "testing" of knowledge through the community's response, and final analysis of the implemented practice when returning to the classrooms.

### 3. STATISTICAL DATA ON FOREIGN LABOUR FORCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

For the purpose of conducting complete research, it is important to consider the potential of the foreign workforce in relation to the domestic population, specifically to the young workforce of higher education, which is the target group of this research.

According to available data from the Croatian Employment Service, the number of requested work permits in the Republic of Croatia has increased significantly, as shown in Image 2. In 2022, the number of requested work permits doubled compared to 2021, and at the end of 2023, an increase of over 60.000 requests was recorded compared to the previous year.

**Image 2.** Number of applications received for residency and work permits - foreign labour force
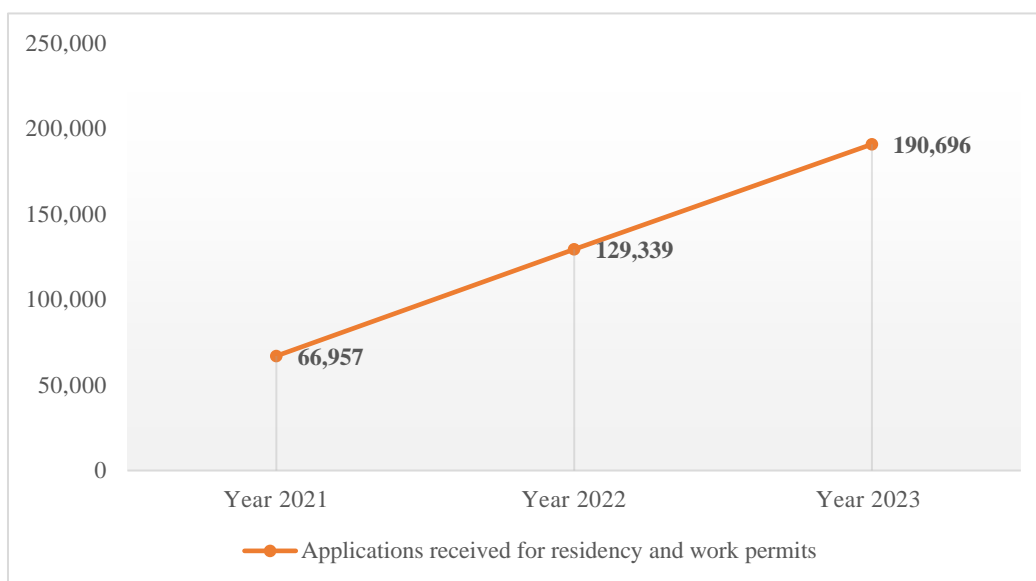


*Source: Croatian Employment Service (CES). Statistics of Labour Market and Work Permit services. Available at: https://www.hzz.hr/statistika/statistika-usluga-test-trzista-rada-i-radne-dozvole/*

Although there is a significant shift in the labour market because of population changes, foreign labour is mainly used in sectors where only secondary schooling is required or no specific qualifications are needed. The labour permits were mainly requested for the construction sector (workers of high construction, workers of low construction, masons, carpenters, fitters of construction elements), the tourism-service sector (waiters, chefs, assistant chefs, chambermaids, cleaning ladies), and transport services.

The average gross salary for foreign workers in those sectors in 2021 was between 630 and 730 euros. Each year followed a slight increase in the average gross salary. In 2022, the average gross salary was between 730 and 830 euros. In the year 2023, the average gross salary reached 900 euros for lower-qualification occupations. According to these data, the inflation impact has been taken into account while adjusting the offered average salaries. However, considering the general cost of life in Croatia and other EU countries, it can be concluded that mainly laborers from third-world countries have submitted their requests for residency and labour permits.

### 4. RESEARCH AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

The primary objective of this study was to assess the level of interest among students in service learning within the University Department of Professional Studies. Data were collected through a comprehensive survey questionnaire, with a targeted sample of 43 students. Descriptive statistical methods were applied for data analysis, and the study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

Visual representation was facilitated through the creation of frequency tables, while SPSS was employed for detailed descriptive statistics to outline the characteristics of the sample.

Within the participant pool of 43, there was a notable gender distribution, with a higher percentage of female participants (81.4%) compared to males (18.6%). The average age of participants was 21 years, ranging from 18 to 25 years. In terms of educational background, 30.2% of participants were enrolled in specialist graduate study programs with an additional 120 ECTS credits, while 69.8% were pursuing professional undergraduate study programs with 180 ECTS. The study unveiled that a significant proportion of respondents (55.8%) exhibited a limited understanding of the concept of service learning.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistic: Gender

| Gender | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Male | 8 | 18,6 | 18,6 | 18,6 |
| | Female | 35 | 81,4 | 81,4 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 43 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

*Source: authors*

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistic: Education

| Education | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Specialist graduate study programs with additional 120 ECTS credits. | 13 | 30,2 | 30,2 | 30,2 |
| | Professional undergraduate study programs with 180 ECTS | 30 | 69,8 | 69,8 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 43 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

*Source: authors*

**Table 5**. Descriptive statistic: Level of concept knowledge

| Familiar with the concept service learning | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | I am not familiar | 10 | 23,3 | 23,3 | 23,3 |
| | Poorly familiar | 24 | 55,8 | 55,8 | 79,1 |
| | Medium familiar | 8 | 18,6 | 18,6 | 97,7 |
| | Very good familiar | 1 | 2,3 | 2,3 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 43 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

*Source: authors*

The analysis of student's familiarity with the concept of service learning in both undergraduate professional study programs (180 ECTS) and specialist graduate study programs (120 ECTS) provides valuable insights into the level of awareness within these academic cohorts.

For students in professional undergraduate study programs, the majority (80.0%) expressed either a lack of familiarity (30.0%) or poor familiarity (50.0%) with the concept of service learning. This suggests a considerable need for educational initiatives and interventions to enhance awareness and understanding of service learning among undergraduate students. Also, among students in specialist graduate study programs, 76.9% reported not being familiar with or poorly familiar with service learning. A notable portion (23.1%) indicated very good and medium familiarity, suggesting a more varied awareness level within this group. However, efforts can still be directed towards increasing awareness among those with limited familiarity.

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of targeted educational programs to improve students' awareness and comprehension of service learning. Tailored interventions can help bridge the knowledge gap and promote a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits and principles associated with service learning across various academic levels.

**Table 6.** Descriptive statistic: Level of familiarity with the concept of service learning among students

| Familiarity with the concept of service learning among students: Professional undergraduate study programs (180 ECTS) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | I am not familiar | 9 | 30,0 | 30,0 | 30,0 |
| | Poorly familiar | 15 | 50,0 | 50,0 | 80,0 |
| | Medium familiar | 6 | 20,0 | 20,0 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 30 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |
| Familiarity with the concept of service learning among students: Specialist graduate study programs (120 ECTS) | | | | | |
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | I am not familiar | 2 | 15,4 | 15,4 | 15,4 |
| | Poorly familiar | 8 | 61,5 | 61,5 | 76,9 |
| | Medium familiar | 2 | 15,4 | 15,4 | 92,3 |
| | Very good familiar | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 13 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

*Source: authors*

Upon examining the collective responses from 43 participants, it became evident that nearly half of the students (48.8%) expressed a neutral stance towards participating in service learning programs. However, a significant 34.9% demonstrated positive interest, with 4.7% expressing a very keen interest and 30.2% indicating a general interest. Conversely, a combined 16.3% conveyed a lack of interest or complete disinterest in such programs.

**Table 7.** Descriptive statistic: Level of interest in participating in a service learning program during studies

| Interest in participating in a service learning program during studies | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Neutral | 21 | 48,8 | 48,8 | 48,8 |
| | Not interested | 4 | 9,3 | 9,3 | 58,1 |
| | Completely uninterested | 3 | 7,0 | 7,0 | 65,1 |
| | Very interested | 2 | 4,7 | 4,7 | 69,8 |
| | Interested | 13 | 30,2 | 30,2 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 43 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

| Interest in participating in a service learning program during studies among students: Professional undergraduate study programs (180 ECTS) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Neutral | 15 | 50,0 | 50,0 | 50,0 |
| | Not interested | 2 | 6,7 | 6,7 | 56,7 |
| | Completely uninterested | 3 | 10,0 | 10,0 | 66,7 |
| | Very interested | 1 | 3,3 | 3,3 | 70,0 |
| | Interested | 9 | 30,0 | 30,0 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 30 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

| Interest in participating in a service learning program during studies among students: Specialist graduate study programs (120 ECTS) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Neutral | 7 | 53,8 | 53,8 | 53,8 |
| | Not interested | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 61,5 |
| | Completely uninterested | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 69,2 |
| | Very interested | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 76,9 |
| | Interested | 3 | 23,1 | 23,1 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 13 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

*Source: authors*

In the subgroup of professional undergraduate study programs, a more balanced distribution was observed. Fifty percent of participants maintained a neutral position, while 30.0% displayed a commendable interest in service learning.

The percentage of those expressing disinterest or complete uninterest was notably lower, at 16.7%. Conversely, in the specialist graduate study programs category, the majority (53.8%) adopted a neutral stance. However, a noteworthy 30.8% demonstrated positive interest, comprising 7.7% who were very interested and 23.1% expressing general interest. The percentage of participants showing disinterest or complete uninterest in this category was 15.4%.

**Table 8**. Descriptive statistic: Aspects of service learning that are most attractive to students

| **Aspects of service learning most attractive to students** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | | 1 | 2,3 | 2,3 | 2,3 |
| | Environmental volunteerism | 3 | 7,0 | 7,0 | 9,3 |
| | None of the above | 7 | 16,3 | 16,3 | 25,6 |
| | Education and mentoring | 6 | 14,0 | 14,0 | 39,5 |
| | Working with children | 9 | 20,9 | 20,9 | 60,5 |
| | Work with people with special needs | 4 | 9,3 | 9,3 | 69,8 |
| | Work in the community | 12 | 27,9 | 27,9 | 97,7 |
| | Health and medical volunteering | 1 | 2,3 | 2,3 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 43 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |
| **Aspects of service learning that are most attractive to students: Professional undergraduate study programs (180 ECTS)** | | | | | |
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | | 1 | 3,3 | 3,3 | 3,3 |
| | Environmental volunteerism | 2 | 6,7 | 6,7 | 10,0 |
| | None of the above | 6 | 20,0 | 20,0 | 30,0 |
| | Education and mentoring | 3 | 10,0 | 10,0 | 40,0 |
| | Working with children | 7 | 23,3 | 23,3 | 63,3 |
| | Work with people with special needs | 3 | 10,0 | 10,0 | 73,3 |
| | Work in the community | 8 | 26,7 | 26,7 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 30 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |
| **Aspects of service learning that are most attractive to students: Specialist graduate study programs (120 ECTS)** | | | | | |

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Environmental volunteerism | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 7,7 |
| | Education and mentoring | 2 | 15,4 | 15,4 | 23,1 |
| | Working with children | 4 | 30,8 | 30,8 | 53,8 |
| | Work with people with special needs | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 61,5 |
| | Work in the community | 4 | 30,8 | 30,8 | 92,3 |
| | Health and medical volunteering | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 13 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

*Source: authors*

The analysis reveals distinct preferences among students regarding aspects of service learning that are most attractive. Working in the community emerges as the most favored aspect among the entire participant pool, as well as within both professional undergraduate study programs and specialist graduate study programs. Since working with children seems to be the second most represented selection of both groups, it can be said that students have the same preferences.

The analysis of student's expectations from the service learning program reveals diverse priorities. Improvement of personal growth and development emerges as a predominant expectation across all categories, emphasizing the personal enrichment aspect of service learning. Also, students in both programs have rated acquisition of specific skills very highly in the expectations list (23.3% of students in professional undergraduate studies, 30.8% of students in specialist graduate studies). These findings underline the importance of tailoring service learning programs to meet the varied expectations of students across different academic levels and disciplines.

**Table 9.** Descriptive statistic: Students expectations from the service learning program

| **Students expectations from the service learning program** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | | 1 | 2,3 | 2,3 | 2,3 |
| | Better preparation for a future career | 7 | 16,3 | 16,3 | 18,6 |
| | Better understanding of social problems | 2 | 4,7 | 4,7 | 23,3 |
| | None of the above | 5 | 11,6 | 11,6 | 34,9 |
| | Strengthening awareness of social responsibility | 3 | 7,0 | 7,0 | 41,9 |
| | Acquisition of specific skills | 10 | 23,3 | 23,3 | 65,1 |
| | Creating a positive impact on the community | 3 | 7,0 | 7,0 | 72,1 |

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Improvement of personal growth and development | 12 | 27,9 | 27,9 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 43 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

**Students expectations from the service learning program: Professional undergraduate study programs (180 ECTS)**

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | | 1 | 3,3 | 3,3 | 3,3 |
| | Better preparation for a future career | 4 | 13,3 | 13,3 | 16,7 |
| | Better understanding of social problems | 2 | 6,7 | 6,7 | 23,3 |
| | None of the above | 4 | 13,3 | 13,3 | 36,7 |
| | Acquisition of specific skills | 7 | 23,3 | 23,3 | 60,0 |
| | Creating a positive impact on the community | 1 | 3,3 | 3,3 | 63,3 |
| | Improvement of personal growth and development | 11 | 36,7 | 36,7 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 30 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

**Students expectations from the service learning program: Specialist graduate study programs (120 ECTS)**

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Better preparation for a future career | 3 | 23,1 | 23,1 | 23,1 |
| | None of the above | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 30,8 |
| | Strengthening awareness of social responsibility | 2 | 15,4 | 15,4 | 46,2 |
| | Acquisition of specific skills | 4 | 30,8 | 30,8 | 76,9 |
| | Creating a positive impact on the community | 1 | 7,7 | 7,7 | 84,6 |
| | Improvement of personal growth and development | 2 | 15,4 | 15,4 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 13 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |

*Source: authors*

## 5. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The main limitations of this paper are:

**Sample size and representation:** the study's sample size, 30 undergraduate and 13 graduate students from a specific university department, may not be sufficiently representative of the broader population of students in Croatia.

**Demographic factors:** diverse demographic characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, geography, and cultural influences, may not have been sufficiently taken into consideration in this study. These factors could have a big impact on students' decisions and motivations for higher education and service learning.

**Self-reporting bias:** survey responses could be skewed by self-reporting bias, in which respondents give socially acceptable answers.

Therefore, recommendations for future research are as follows:

**Longitudinal studies:** to gain a deeper knowledge of the factors impacting students' decisions to pursue higher education and engage in service learning, longitudinal studies should be conducted to monitor the educational and career paths of students over time.

**Broader sample representation:** to ensure more thorough insights into student motivations and interests, increase the study's sample size and diversity to include students from different educational institutions, regions, and demographic backgrounds throughout Croatia.

**Qualitative research methods:** use qualitative research techniques, such as focus groups or interviews, in addition to quantitative surveys to discover more about the underlying causes of students' attitudes about service learning and higher education.

**Comparative Analysis:** to promote the interchange of best practices and cross-cultural insights, compare the attitudes and motives of Croatian students with those of students in other nations that are dealing with comparable issues related to higher education and job market dynamics.

## 6. CONCLUSION

By careful analysis of the collected statistical data that shows demographic trends in Croatia, student preferences regarding professional education, motivation towards higher education, and changes in the domestic labour market, as well as by conducting a survey among students in order to define their interest and motivation towards service learning, clear conclusions can be drawn.

Although the general demographic Image of Croatia shows a downward trajectory, the last 5 years show a stable number of students, about 450.000 students in primary and secondary schools. Given that on average 70% of high school graduates decide to continue their education at a higher education institution, the general conclusion would be that young people in Croatia are highly motivated and still recognize the added value of higher education and the potential opportunities it provides.

At the moment, we are experiencing a labour shortage in the domestic labour market, which is a consequence of the general decline in the birth rate, emigration, and other factors. However, given the increase in work and residence permits issued to foreigners, we are still able to resolve this problem. Croatia lacks the most low-skilled labour force, and it is precisely such foreign labour that targets our market. Considering the above, we need to be careful with our approach to highly educated workers to keep them motivated to stay in the domestic economy, to contribute to society in order for us to stay sustainable, and at the same time, to feel valued and fulfilled on a personal and professional level.

Given the results of the study conducted amongst students of higher education, which included students of two levels of study programs, it is clear that the academic community must strongly strengthen its engagement in approaching the concept of service learning at all levels of study.

Research findings have shown that there is not much difference in opinion between the two examined student sub-groups. Both groups have similar stands in terms of familiarity, interest, and expectations from a service learning approach. Students interest in participating in a service learning program is mainly neutral. However, the percentage of students who are interested in the concept is significantly higher than that of those who are not interested at all. Working in the community and working with children are recognized as the main benefits, which indicates there is a social awareness amongst students as well as

a need to give back to the community. It can be concluded that the examined groups are very career oriented since the main objective of a service learning program would be improvement of personal growth and development. Acquisition of specific skills has also been highly ranked among other offered suggestions.

Although the majority of Croatian youth decide to pursue their higher education degree, given all the descriptive statistics and research findings above, there is a clear need to raise awareness and interest in the service learning concept. In the end, only by carefully and strategically implementing the service learning concept into academic curricula and study programs will we be able to achieve the final goal of a socially sensitive society from which all participants can benefit.

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# EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SERVICE LEARNING ON EMERGING ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSIONALS IN PRACTICE: ENHANCING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGH-RISE HOUSING DESIGNS

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of service learning on emerging architectural professionals' development and their ability to foster social responsibility in high-rise housing designs. Through hands-on projects serving communities, participants not only gain practical architectural skills but also develop sensitivity to social, cultural, and environmental implications. Analyzing service learning's influence on teamwork skills reveals its role in cultivating collaboration, essential in architectural practice. High-rise housing presents challenges to traditional notions of home and urban living, reflecting socio-cultural shifts influenced by various factors. Sustainable design aims to minimize environmental impact and enhance inhabitants' connection to their surroundings. Learning approaches in construction organizations vary, emphasizing networking and experimentation. Design strategies, such as spatial design, can enhance social connectivity in high-rise buildings. Service learning enhances student learning and community relationships in construction programs. The housing sector is crucial for sustainable urban development, emphasizing social and economic sustainability. Community engagement and sensitivity to social, cultural, and environmental implications are essential for built-environment professionals working on high-rise projects. This research focuses on emerging architectural professionals' ability to increase social responsibility in high-rise residential architecture through service learning. The choice of high-rise housing as a case study stems from its negative reputation in some contexts. While initially a post-war solution to housing demands, high-rise buildings lacked community engagement. Service learning is crucial in planning for societal well-being, particularly in housing typologies. The study aims to shift perspectives from critical war to cohesive project building, considering planners' roles and stakeholders' demands for participation. By informing educational institutions, practitioners, and policymakers about the benefits of integrating service learning into architectural professionalism, this research contributes to the field's sustainable growth and development.

**Keywords:** Service Learning, Emerging Architectural Professionals, High-rise Housing Designs, Social Responsibility.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Beyond acknowledging the value of service learning in fostering adaptability and community engagement, this paper overviews the specific aspects of the learning process, shedding light on the varied experiences of emerging architectural professionals in real-world projects. By engaging in hands-on projects that serve communities, they not only acquire practical architectural skills but also develop a heightened sensitivity to the social, cultural, and environmental implications of their work. Collaborative projects often present unique challenges that demand effective communication, coordination, and cooperation. Analyzing the impact of service learning on teamwork skills will provide valuable insights into how this pedagogical approach cultivates a collaborative spirit among emerging professionals, a trait highly valued in the field of architecture. Given the complex nature of real-world architectural projects, emerging architectural professionals involved in service learning initiatives are often required to navigate challenges that extend beyond the theoretical realm. The relationship between service learning, architecture, social responsibility and high-rise housing is complex and multifaceted. High-rise residential buildings, for example, have been found to challenge traditional ideals of home and urban nature, reflecting socio-cultural transformations influenced by managerial decisions and political competition (Amirsardari, 2021). Sustainable architecture and design, on the other hand, aim to minimize negative environmental impacts and establish a harmonious relationship between inhabitants and their surroundings (Keitsch, 2012). Learning approaches in housing, service, and infrastructure project

organizations vary, with a focus on networking in service projects and experimenting in infrastructure projects (Knauseder, 2007). Design strategies such as spatial design can enhance the social connectivity of high-rise buildings (Gang, 2016). Service learning in construction programs can enhance student learning and community relationships (Farrow, 2022). The housing sector plays a vital role in sustainable urban development, with a focus on social and economic sustainability (Kauko, 2012). Moreover, community engagement and sensitivity to the social, cultural, and environmental implications are all aspects that built-environment professionals working on high-rise projects should implement. Thus, the research investigates the capability of emerging architectural professionals with an awareness of service learning to increase social responsibility when designing high-rise residential architecture.

This typology has been chosen as a case study of this research due to its negative reputation in some contexts. As it was a postwar urgent solution, the first models of high-rise housing fulfilled housing demands on a mass scale, within metropolitan areas to meet job opportunities and ease of transport, as well as to clear slums (Ravetz, 2001). While that period was influenced by the functionalist planning approach, designers had the confidence that they could improve the lives of citizens through radical changes (Turkington et al., 2004). However, many key elements were missing, which is community engagement. Thus, service learning is crucial when it comes to planning for the wellbeing of society, especially in the typologies of housing. While high-rise housing is in global demand due to land shortages, the suitability of this typology as a sustainable solution to meet housing demands is examined by shifting the perspective of planners versus end-users from a critical war to a cohesive project building. Planners are much criticized; being easy targets for stakeholders perceiving a negative impact on their property assets through the application of spatial planning policy (Mifsud, 2019). On the other hand, stakeholders are becoming more skilful at themselves demanding legitimate participation, using the means at their disposal to overcome statutory barriers by opening the floodgates of increasingly digital interaction (Mifsud, 2019). Thus, planners are requested to have an increased sensitivity to the workings of participatory structures to correctly gauge both opportunities for participation and potential pitfalls (Mifsud, 2019). The benefit of this exploration lies in its potential to inform educational institutions, practitioners, and policymakers about the multifaceted advantages of integrating service learning into architectural professionalism, ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth and development of the field.

## 2. HIGH-RISE HOUSING: COUNTERING A FAILURE ANECDOTE WITH SUCCESS FACTORS

The capability of emerging architectural professionals with an awareness of service learning eventually increases social responsibility when designing. A case study that has been chosen in this paper to be high-rise residential architecture, for its tendency to be complex and that the relationships between residents reflect this complexity. As a result of global rapid urbanization, reduced quality of life became a consequence (Bardhan et al., 2018). Smith et al. (1998) argue that high-rise housing was designed by authorities, and not by end-users. Helleman and Wassenberg (2004) affirm that past high-rise housings were infamous for being in isolated locations and filled with poor populations, which created remote communities and low safety levels. This resulted in an agglomeration of communities with low income in segregated environments and was not a result of people who chose to live in high-rises, but that social housing was designed as such and people were forcibly relocated there. Nevertheless, once a mass housing solution, high-rise housing became a failure at certain points in history due to many different reasons (Dunleavy, 1981). Prak and Primus (1986) identify three phases of high-rise housing failure as follows: technical decline, social decline, and financial decline. Some sociologists argue that issues with high-rise housing are fundamentally capitalist, which was evident in Swedberg's (2005) research about the economic sociology of capitalism. He states that sociologists viewed capitalism as a root of class struggle and inequality (Ibid). Thus, economists must apprehend social relations, and sociologists must apprehend price formations (Swedberg, 2005).

Kearns et al. (2012) suggest several crucial points that can affect the success of a housing estate. The design must be context specific, should engage with residents, must understand the needs of different people, and must combine a well-connected mix-use typology to encourage walkability (Haigh et al., 2011). Sani et al. (2011) believe that community participation and involvement in the planning, at the design stages, result in a longer life-span of any high-rise housing, as well as avoid having the occupants

feel estranged from their homes. This participation could be made through different methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, to fill in the gap between the designer and the end-user (Ibid). Also, feeling of safety and security play a big role, according to Newman (1972). Ontological security is what makes an occupant feel home, following Dupuis and Thorns (1998) writings on ontological security, that it is experienced in a home when there is consistency in the social and material environment, when people are feeling control of their lives with no surveillance, and when they have a secure base of their identities. Although the overall concept of success might be utopian, and difficult to achieve, minor solutions can sustain successful high-rise housing. There is no formula, however, according to Sitiayu et al. (2016); to reach a sustainable high-rise housing development, the environment must focus on three main principles: the physical, social, and economic aspects.

## 3. THE SOCIAL FACTOR

The empowerment of a specific type of dweller to make decisions regarding their living environment constitutes a substantial impact. There exists a profound influence on social sustainability and the well-being of occupants, through a capacity to exercise choice in residential selection. Thus, to thoroughly understand the occupants' preferences in high-rise living, Furbey and Goodchild (1986) state that there are three approaches to be included when such typology is surveyed: market behaviour, social surveys, and a participatory design procedure by the end-users, which will be applied in the methodology of this research. Housing experts and professionals focus on the dynamics between individuals and their surrounding social, economic, political, and physical contexts, specifically emphasizing their residences and nearby communities (Easthope, 2004). Built environments are reflections of social realms (Al-Jassar, 2009). Living in residential complexes requires social engagement because, without it, communities cannot run effectively in terms of management (Liu et al., 2018). In the field of architecture, studies of the social and mental effects on occupants can be credited to the Chicago school during the mid-1920s, according to McClenahan (1945). Churchman and Ginsberg (1984) believe that within a high-rise residential building, residents may have several acquaintances from the building. Some literature suggests that living closely, despite the differences in cultural backgrounds, could build a sense of home, but also contribute to occasional tensions (Cancellieri, 2017). This is where design contributes to an influential role that affects social interaction.

## 4. SERVICE LEARNING ON EMERGING ARCHITECTURAL PROFESSIONALS IN PRACTICE

Service learning in architectural practice goes beyond theoretical knowledge, providing students with practical experiences that bridge the gap between academia and professional practice. By participating in service-learning projects, architects have the opportunity to apply their skills in real-world contexts, gaining valuable hands-on experience while making meaningful contributions to communities in need (Eyuboglu et al., 2020). These experiences not only enhance technical abilities but also develop their understanding of the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of architectural practice (Bell & Lapp, 2016). This impact on technical skills development represents one of the key benefits of service learning in architectural practice, as well as collaboration and team work. Since service-learning initiatives often involve collaborative projects that require effective communication, coordination, and cooperation among team members, the impact on community engagement and social responsibility.

## 5. SERVICE LEARNING AND SERVING THE COMMUNITY

As service-learning gains prominence as a key element in integrating disciplinary learning with public engagement, it underscores the importance of community involvement and impactful pedagogy across academic institutions (Felten and Clayton, 2011). While service-learning encompasses various pedagogical approaches that connect community service with academic study to mutually reinforce each other (Ehrlich, 1996), its definition has evolved over time to encapsulate several core characteristics. Service-learning experiences are designed to advance both academic and civic learning goals, catering to the specific contexts and objectives of the participants involved (Felten and Clayton, 2011). The spectrum of service-learning experiences may vary in terms of direct or indirect service, as well as the level of responsibility entrusted to participants. Essential to service-learning is the integration of critical reflection, which serves to deepen understanding and facilitate personal and civic growth (Ash and Clayton, 2009). Although service-learning aims to foster civic engagement and critical-thinking skills,

its implementation is often challenged by the complexities inherent in community processes. Research by Eyler (2010) demonstrates that students engaged in service-learning exhibit enhanced contributions to community life compared to their non-participating counterparts. Moreover, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) assert that the evidence strongly supports the positive impact of service-learning on students' personal development and civic engagement. Furthermore, they suggest that service-learning experiences may lead students to recognize the intricacies of social issues, thereby challenging their previous simplistic views on effecting systematic change (Eyler, 2010).

## 6. CHALLENGES, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

### 6.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored the multifaceted relationship between service learning, emerging architectural professionals, and the design of high-rise residential architecture. Through an examination of the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of service learning in architectural practice, it has become evident that service learning offers significant potential to enhance the skills, knowledge, and social responsibility of emerging architectural professionals. By engaging in hands-on projects that serve communities, these professionals not only acquire practical architectural skills but also develop a heightened sensitivity to the social, cultural, and environmental implications of their work. Moreover, service learning fosters collaboration, teamwork, and effective communication among emerging professionals, qualities highly valued in the field of architecture. The paper has also highlighted the complexity of high-rise housing design and its impact on social sustainability and community well-being. Through a critical examination of past failures and success factors, it has become apparent that community participation, contextual understanding, and a focus on social connectivity are essential elements for the successful design of high-rise residential buildings. Service learning emerges as a valuable tool for integrating these elements into architectural practice, as it provides opportunities for students to engage with communities, understand their needs, and develop solutions that address real-world challenges. Furthermore, the paper has underscored the importance of critical reflection in service learning, as it deepens students' understanding of social issues and fosters personal and civic growth. Despite the challenges inherent in implementing service-learning initiatives, research suggests that students engaged in service learning exhibit enhanced contributions to community life and increased civic engagement. Ultimately, this paper advocates for the integration of service learning into architectural education and practice as a means to cultivate socially responsible architects who are capable of addressing the complex challenges of high-rise residential design and promoting sustainable urban development. By doing so, service learning has the potential to contribute to the sustainable growth and development of the architectural profession and the communities it serves.

### 6.2. Challenges, Limitations, and Future Perspectives

Navigating the complexities of high-rise housing design presents architects with a myriad of challenges, from ensuring sustainability to fostering community engagement and social responsibility. While service learning emerges as a promising avenue for addressing these challenges, its implementation is not without limitations. Resource constraints and pedagogical challenges may hinder the scalability and effectiveness of service learning initiatives, while resistance to change within educational institutions and professional practice can impede their adoption. Looking ahead, future perspectives suggest integrating technology, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and expanding global engagement to enhance the impact of service learning in architectural education and practice. Longitudinal studies and policy support are essential for assessing the long-term impact of service learning and promoting its widespread integration within the architectural profession. By embracing innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to social responsibility, architects can harness the transformative potential of service learning to create sustainable, equitable, and resilient built environments for future generations.

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# STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND TRUST IN PEOPLE

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## ABSTRACT

Leadership is a complex and multifaceted endeavour involving several different skills and approaches. Influential leaders should possess strong negotiation and communication skills. Moreover, leaders should have strong interpersonal skills, including communicating effectively with team members, delegating tasks, and making decisions under pressure. They should be able to build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, investors, and regulators. The latter requires communicating effectively, orally and in writing, and building trust and personal authenticity vis-à-vis others. In addition, influential leaders should, among other things, possess strong ethical values. leadership does not only apply to the leader but also includes the followers. The most effective leaders are often those who can understand and respond to the needs and motivations of their followers. This can consist of building trust and credibility, creating a feeling of everyday purposes or providing opportunities for personal and professional development.

Data on respondents' attitudes towards personal and social responsibility, trust in people and personal communication were collected through a questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was distributed online via the Facebook social network and mobile application WhatsApp using the snowball method. After completing the study, the respondents are asked to forward it to respondents they consider relevant to solving it. The survey questionnaire contained four parts, and the questions were asked to examine attitudes about personal responsibility, social responsibility, trust in people, and personal communication. Personal Responsibility Scale (PRS) and Trust in People Scale (abbr. TPS) are psychometric tools used to measure the perceived level of personal individual responsibility 53 students of the Business Management course participated in this survey—department of Professional Studies.

The research results point to different levels of moral responsibility and conscientiousness. Most respondents believe that most people are not honest, good, or kind. Also, most respondents stated that they do not trust other people and that people will not always behave the same way to others as they treat them.

These findings indicate the need to develop the principles of leadership in business management, which would help develop moral responsibility and conscientiousness among employees and construct trust, reliability and reciprocity in interpersonal relationships. Leadership includes making decisions under challenging circumstances, taking responsibility for procedures, and motivating and inspiring others to achieve a common goal. Therefore, applying leadership principles in business management can contribute to developing an ethical and moral business environment and help create a successful and productive organisation. These principles can be used in different fields, such as health, politics and social sciences, to help make informed decisions and develop more effective strategies.

In today's business world, a company's success depends on many factors. However, two of the most critical factors are leadership and management skills. Business leaders should be capable of leading teams, making critical decisions and motivating their employees. The principles of leadership are crucial to achieving the stated goals. This research provides valuable insight into different attitudes and opinions

of respondents about personal responsibility and trust in people and can positively impact understanding of human nature and how people connect and communicate with each other.

**Keywords:** personal responsibility, trust, leadership

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article explores and analyses the factors influencing students' attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in others. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of these attitudes and identify solutions or interventions that could positively impact student behaviour. Many skills and approaches intertwine to shape practical and influential leaders in the dynamic leadership landscape. As many researchers emphasise (Koliopoulos et al., 2021; Giapponi, 2013), adept negotiation and communication skills are central to this domain, pivotal for navigating the complexities of leadership roles. The essence of leadership extends beyond individual prowess to solid interpersonal abilities (Sarbaitinil et al., 2023). such as effective team communication, task delegation, and decision-making amidst pressure. Moreover, fostering relationships with key stakeholders—customers to regulators—demands proficient oral and written communication (Johansson, 2018), trust-building (Soderberg et al., 2022; Turaga, 2013) and personal authenticity (Goffee & Jones, 2005). April et al. (2010) found that ethical values are a cornerstone for influential leaders, underscoring the significance of integrity in their actions. However, leadership transcends the leader's persona to encompass the followers' dynamics. Effective leadership lies in comprehending and responding to followers' needs and motivations. This entails cultivating trust and credibility, fostering a sense of purpose, and providing avenues for personal and professional growth. Establishing a new type of leadership responsive to the growing demands of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices is imperative. The evolving landscape of business and society calls for leaders who prioritize financial performance and demonstrate a commitment to ethical conduct, sustainability, and social impact. The increasing prominence of CSR/ESG initiatives reflects a paradigm shift in business philosophy, wherein organisations are expected to actively contribute to societal well-being and environmental preservation alongside pursuing profitability. This shift is driven by various factors, including heightened awareness of ecological issues, evolving consumer preferences towards socially responsible brands, and regulatory pressures to address social and environmental risks. Moreover, traditional leadership models may fail to effectively address the multifaceted challenges posed by CSR/ESG concerns. Conventional leadership approaches often prioritise short-term financial gains over long-term sustainability, neglecting the broader impact of business activities on stakeholders and the environment. The research on the link between service learning (SL) and the cultivation of new business leaders capable of navigating the complexities of CSR/ESG was conducted by Calvert (2012). The author showed how SL experiences can shape students' leadership skills and values through the case study method. SL offers a unique experiential learning platform that allows students to engage directly with social and environmental issues, develop empathy, and cultivate a sense of responsibility towards their communities and the planet. CSR/ESG and the potential role of service learning in shaping future business leaders were also found in the works of Krsmanovic (2022) and Lester (2015). Despite leadership's pivotal role in organisational success, a notable research gap persists in understanding students' attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in people within the context of leadership development. This study aims to bridge this gap. By exploring students' attitudes towards personal and social responsibility, trust in people and personal communication, this research sheds light on varying levels of responsibility and conscientiousness among students. Therefore, the study's purpose is twofold: first, to elucidate the prevailing attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in people among students pursuing business management education; second, to underscore the implications of these attitudes on leadership principles and organisational dynamics. By unravelling these insights, this research endeavours to pave the way for enhancing moral responsibility, fostering trust, and nurturing ethical leadership practices within business management.

### 1.1. Literature review

Research on students' attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in others reveals a complex interplay of factors. Arlow (1991) researched undergraduate students' attitudes towards corporate social responsibility and found that major, gender, and age influence students'. DeBoer (2020) discovered the role of classroom discipline in promoting student responsibility, with coercive discipline inhibiting its development. In his studies, Borkowski (1992) explored the impact of age, sex, and experience on students' ethical attitudes, finding that these factors can shape their ethical positions. Prior studies like Wood (1988) compared the ethical attitudes of students and business professionals, revealing a willingness among students to engage in questionable behaviour for personal gain. These studies collectively suggest that various individual, social, and educational factors shape students' attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in others. They primarily discuss the social consequences of how students perceive responsibility in their interactions. It sheds light on how attributions of responsibility can affect social relationships among students within educational settings. Wong et al. (2020) examine the interaction between trust in government, risk perceptions and public compliance in Singapore between January and April 2020 (during the COVID pandemic). In this respect, the degree of trust people feel towards each other deeply affects their economic and social life. Societal complaints about business practices quickly demand that universities develop business students aware of personal and corporate responsibility to various stakeholders. Before the pandemic, there was a perceived increase in collective environmental concern and sustainability, but COVID-19 has further accelerated this process and motivated more people to assume this responsibility. This attitude change is related to personal social responsibility (PSR), which relies on the education of a conscious and responsible society and influences individuals' choices. Prior educational research focuses on the quantitative measurement of personal responsibility in studies that include participants from middle childhood to young adulthood (Mergler, 2017). Key topics, including awareness of thoughts and feelings, behavioural choices and control, and consideration of consequences, were found to be essential components of the personal responsibility variable. However, studies from Deveci and Ayish (2018) found that students in the first-level course had slightly higher interpersonal communication. Results indicate that the students' responsibility and interpersonal communication scores were at a moderate level, while the responsibility scores of students in the second-level course were higher. Deveci and Ayish (2018) show that students consider consequences a critical component of personal responsibility. The lack of a sense of responsibility is also reflected by some students' use of means of cheating in exams, recklessness, waste of time, indifference, lack of self-confidence, laziness, mutual reliance, inaction to participate in public service camps, and lack of participation in voluntary activities to serve the school and the surrounding community. Mattar and Mansour (2015) state that the absence of a sense of responsibility is a negative feeling that dramatically affects the community. However, Dyrdal and Karseth (2006) studied students' sense of responsibility. They found it restricted to certain "localism" of their specific occupation. They argue that the students reveal a moral awareness that should be taken seriously by the educational institution to foster critical rationality and professional commitments. Other authors include Mergler and Patton (2007), who emphasises that the role of personal responsibility in the lives of adolescents remains a largely overlooked area in the psychological and educational fields. They found some interesting gender differences, where females and males show different emotions as being within or outside their control. In their studies, only females expressed concern for the feelings of others, and it was a significant factor in their decision-making. The same observation was revealed in Sagindikova's work (2023). She found that gender characteristics in young people contribute not only to their characteristics but also to forming a sense of responsibility, which is necessary for a person's behaviour. The Student Personal Responsibility Scale showed acceptable internal consistency and positive correlations to the Conscientiousness Scale of Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness Personality Inventory-Revised, academic performance, self-esteem, and retention. Developing the Student Personal Responsibility Scale (Singg & Ader, 2001) suggests that interpersonal responsibility may uniquely affect interpersonal trust independent of the impact of the Big Five traits, thus extending the research regarding the relationship between personality and interpersonal trust. The present study explored the longitudinal relationship between interpersonal responsibility (an indigenous Chinese interpersonal trait) and interpersonal trust among 1882 undergraduate students (Zeng & Ling-Xiang, 2019). A range of studies have explored students' attitudes towards trust in people, particularly in the context of e-learning (Dwyer, 2016), social communications (Pishvaei et al., 2014), general human relations (Holmberg et al., 2017) and interethnic relations (Alborova, 2022). They also indicate a high level of trust in family and close friends but a more fragile trust in academic institutions and the community (Ermisch et al., 2010). In interethnic relations,

trust is seen as acceptance of foreign values and confidence in assistance and support (Alborova, 2022). These studies collectively highlight the complexity of trust, with students valuing honesty, openness, and sincerity in building trusting relationships. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of trust and its importance in various aspects of students' lives. The role of personal responsibility and trust in people among students remains a largely overlooked area in the educational field.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey method was used in the research, through which respondents were asked about their attitudes towards personal responsibility, social responsibility, trust in people, and personal communication. 53 students of the Business Management course, Department of Professional Studies, participated in this survey. The survey was conducted in April 2023. The survey consisted of a total of 28 questions. The first part of the survey related general information about the respondents, such as gender, age, employment and marital status. The second part of the survey was related to evaluating the respondents' personal and social responsibility, general trust, active listening skills and oral expression. The authors used the Personal Responsibility Scale (PRS) and Trust in People scale (TPS). Those psychometric tools measure an individual's perceived level of personal responsibility. The development and validation of the Personal Responsibility Scale (PRS) has been explored in several studies. Arslan and Wong (2022) found that the two-factor Responsibility Scale influenced personal and social responsibility measurement. Similarly, Singg (2001) developed the Student Personal Responsibility Scale-10, demonstrating good internal consistency and correlations with other relevant measures. Mergler (2016) further expanded on this work by identifying three factors in adolescents' PRS: personal accountability, behavioural and emotional control, and cognitive control. Martins et al. (2015) tested the validity and reliability of the Personal and Social Responsibility Questionnaire (PSRQ) among athletes, providing further evidence for the effectiveness of these scales in measuring personal responsibility. It consists of items or statements designed to assess an individual's beliefs about his ability to take responsibility for his actions and outcomes in life. The scale includes statements such as "I am responsible for the results of my decisions" or "I take responsibility for my mistakes." Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The Personal Responsibility Scale is often used in research studies to investigate the relationship between personal responsibility and various outcomes, such as academic achievement, health behaviours, and job performance. It is also used in clinical settings to assess an individual's level of personal responsibility as part of a treatment plan. The Trust in People Scale is a psychometric tool used to measure an individual's level of trust in other people. It consists of a series of items or statements designed to assess an individual's beliefs about the trustworthiness of people in general. The scale typically includes statements such as "Most people are trustworthy" or "People can generally be counted on to keep their promises." Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a Likert-type scale, ranging from "do not agree at all" to "completely agree". The Trust in People Scale is often used in research studies to investigate the relationship between trust in others and various outcomes, such as well-being, social support, and interpersonal relationships. The research sample consisted of students from the Department of Professional Studies majoring in Trade and Tourism Management with a course in Business Leadership. In this research, the sample is convenience. The data were collected through a questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire was structured and standardised to ensure the consistency and objectivity of the collected data. Data analysis was performed using statistical tools to obtain information about the sample and its structure. The goal was to determine the characteristics of the sample and the relationship between the variables observed in the research.

## 3. RESULTS

The survey, conducted among 53 students enrolled in the Business Leadership course at the University of Split's Department of Professional Studies, aimed to investigate participants' perceptions regarding personal responsibility and trust in people. The responses provided a glimpse into the diverse attitudes and opinions held by the respondents towards various aspects of their character and behaviour. Participants exhibited varying perspectives on personal attributes, showcasing a spectrum of views on moral responsibility and conscientiousness. The survey results indicated a range of opinions on statements related to time management, resourcefulness in job responsibilities, conscientiousness in tasks, and decision-making in challenging circumstances. Moreover, most respondents expressed scepticism towards trusting others and highlighted doubts regarding consistent behaviour in interpersonal

relationships. This contrasted with their beliefs about individuals' honesty, reasonableness, and kindness, underscoring the complexity of perceptions within social interactions. The research also covered some aspects of interpersonal relationships, such as trust, reliability, and reciprocity. Most respondents stated that most people do not trust others, and the majority expressed that people will not always treat others the same way they treat them. The survey on students' attitudes towards trust, personal responsibility, social responsibility, general trust, active listening skills, and oral expression illuminates significant challenges in their communication and interpersonal domains. Findings indicate a prevalent discomfort among students when engaging in public speaking and a perceived deficiency in communication skills. This apprehension is intricately linked to a lack of trust in others and a fear of assuming responsibility for their actions. The survey sheds light on the interconnected nature of these apprehensions, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach to address these challenges in tandem. The identified discomfort with public speaking and communication skills suggests potential academic and professional barriers to effective interpersonal interactions. The underlying unease also manifests in a pervasive lack of trust, underscoring the importance of fostering trust-building initiatives within educational environments. Additionally, the apprehension towards assuming personal responsibility indicates a broader societal challenge that extends beyond the realm of communication, warranting attention to holistic character development and ethical decision-making. These insights offer a valuable foundation for educational institutions to design targeted interventions that enhance students' communication competencies, cultivate trust, and instil a sense of responsibility, thereby fostering well-rounded and confident individuals ready to navigate the complexities of the academic and professional spheres. These surveys provide insight into the students' attitudes and opinions about different aspects of their lives and skills. Results can contribute to understanding the behaviour, motivation, and psychological processes behind these attitudes and opinions.

## 4. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This study has two significant limitations. First, the student sample in this study was drawn from one higher institution in Croatia, and the findings in the current study may not be generalisable to other areas of Croatia. For subsequent research, conducting more studies in other regions of Croatia is necessary to confirm, validate, and complement the present study's findings. Future research focuses on interventions to improve the physical environment, course topic, course execution, and instructor's personality. Additionally, exploring the impact of student participation on student commitment and appreciation of other students' contributions is recommended. This research should be guided by a theoretical framework that specifies the antecedents and consequences of trust in schools, a methodological framework that specifies the types of data that need to be collected and the types of analyses that need to be conducted to test the theoretical framework, and a practical framework that specifies the implications of the research for educational practice and policy.

## 5. PRACTICAL AND EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS

Studying students' attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in people within the context of leadership development holds significant practical and empirical implications for organisations and academia. Practical applications include tailoring leadership development programs emphasising moral responsibility, conscientiousness, and trust-building skills. Organisations can use these insights to enhance leadership training, improve performance evaluation criteria, and promote team-building activities centred on trust-building exercises. Empirically, the study opens avenues for further research on the relationship between personal responsibility, trust in people, and leadership effectiveness. It highlights the need for reliable psychometric tools like the Personal Responsibility Scale (PRS) and Trust in People Scale (TPS) for accurate measurement. Future research can refine existing scales and explore cross-cultural variations in attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in people. The study's findings offer practical guidance for organisational practices and strategies to foster ethical leadership and interpersonal relationships. They also present opportunities for scholarly inquiry into the intricate dynamics of personal responsibility, trust, and leadership effectiveness, contributing to the advancement of measurement tools and cross-cultural understanding in this domain. In conclusion, this study's practical and empirical implications underscore the significance of understanding students' attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in people in the context of leadership development. By leveraging these insights, organisations can enhance their leadership practices, foster ethical conduct, and drive organisational success. At the same time, academia can further explore the intricacies of these

constructs through rigorous empirical inquiry. Also, this research can help better understand human nature, which can positively impact personal growth and development and how we relate to each other and communicate in society. The survey findings offer valuable insights into the nuanced attitudes and opinions of the respondents, shedding light on their diverse perspectives on personal responsibility and trust.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Service learning, emphasising community engagement and experiential education, offers a unique platform for students to develop and refine their attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust in others. By actively participating in service projects, students are often exposed to diverse social contexts, encounter individuals from various backgrounds, and engage in collaborative efforts to address community needs. These experiences can significantly shape their perceptions of responsibility and trust as they learn to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and understand the importance of reliability and accountability in serving others. Moreover, integrating discussions on the relationship between leadership, service learning, and students' attitudes towards trust and responsibility can provide valuable insights into how these attitudes influence and contribute to broader societal goals. Leaders emerge through their actions and ability to inspire trust and foster a sense of collective responsibility within their communities. By contextualising students' attitudes within the leadership development framework and service-oriented initiatives, the paper offers a more holistic understanding of the factors shaping these crucial aspects of student behaviour. Thus, it effectively bridges the gap between theoretical research on attitudes towards trust and responsibility and practical applications.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study hold implications for understanding human behaviour, motivation, and psychological processes, with potential applications across various fields such as health, business, politics, and social sciences. By contributing to a deeper understanding of individual viewpoints on personal attributes, the survey outcomes pave the way for enhanced insights into personal development and societal interactions. The survey findings among students enrolled in the Business Leadership course at the University Department of Professional Studies, University of Split, provide valuable insights into the diverse attitudes and opinions regarding personal responsibility and trust in people. The varying perspectives exhibited by the respondents highlight a complex interplay of beliefs and perceptions towards moral responsibility, conscientiousness, and interpersonal trust. The survey results underscore the importance of understanding individual attitudes toward personal attributes and their implications for decision-making and social interactions. Scepticism toward trusting others and contrasting beliefs about individuals' inherent qualities reflect the intricacies of human behaviour and the multifaceted nature of interpersonal relationships. These insights have broader health, business, politics, and social sciences implications. By delving into the nuances of personal responsibility and trust, the survey outcomes offer a foundation for informed decision-making, practical strategies, and an enhanced understanding of human behaviour and motivation. These findings can serve as a basis for further research and exploration into the underlying psychological processes shaping attitudes towards personal responsibility and trust. By fostering a more profound comprehension of individual perspectives, this study contributes to personal growth, societal communication, and developing strategies that promote ethical conduct and effective leadership practices.

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# THE-MIND-BEHIND

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## 1. SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

As part of the service-learning project by the University of Kiel and the SEA-EU, students were given the opportunity to independently develop a project contributing to societal development. This freedom enables students to create and discover new possibilities in our world. Simultaneously, the service-learning project serves the personal development of students. We regularly had the time and task to reflect on ourselves, consciously recognizing areas in our own work where further development might be necessary. As students, we are encouraged to identify where we want to go while also being given the time and space to realize what we need to achieve that, understanding that a project in development can also evolve alongside our own personal growth.

At the same time, the project at the University of Kiel was accompanied by our lecturer Frauke Godat. There was always an objective view on the development of our own processes, with hints provided here and there to further the project's development. Thus, the SEA ServiceLearning Project promotes the autonomy and personality of students, demonstrating the value of their thought processes in relation to the environment and personal experiences. Students can reflect here, perhaps for the first time, on what they can or could set in motion.

## 2. MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND REFLECTION

I initially thought about what stood out to me in society and how one might find common ground amid various issues. I really appreciated the freedom this project provided to develop something unique with support, which is quite remarkable for a study program. At the beginning, when we all met for the first time, we were encouraged to find partners who would assist us in the process of developing our ideas. I thought this was excellent because I tend to lean towards abstract thinking and irregular work hours, which can lead to chaos. That's also one of the reasons why this project appealed to me. I have many ideas that I like to implement, but I struggle with structuring them. However, through the project, I was able to acquire and learn some structuring skills, partly because my ultimate learning buddy was the complete opposite. My initial purpose was to create something that would help individuals who are victims of discrimination within the system, while simultaneously avoiding pointing fingers at anyone. The focus was on acknowledging that things are the way they are but not necessarily fair as a result. I wish for people to take their lived realities, far removed from opinions they may not understand due to structural differences, seriously and thereby find the strength within themselves to navigate our world. I believe that a gentle inner journey and the opportunity for

people to truly know themselves can make a significant impact on the world. Those who see themselves also see others, and those who have genuine compassion for themselves can extend it to others as well. I think this was the broad initial idea that drove me and the strong desire to possibly shape these more abstract thoughts into a concrete form that can help others. I was able to use various skills during this project, some of which I became aware of for the first time through this experience. I also had the opportunity to work on weaknesses that I hadn't noticed before. On one hand, I realized that I am someone who can think abstractly, generate many ideas, enjoy communicating, and creating texts. I learned about myself that I can handle flexible work hours better and I like to approach tasks spontaneously as well. I've noticed that I've developed a strong sense of social understanding, for which I am very grateful, and I credit this to my studies. The beauty of it is realizing once again what a gift education can be and how it expands one's own personality. I got to recognize my privilege of studying and having access to knowledge more clearly and I also feel the growing desire within me to make this privilege accessible to

others in an understandable way, which I hope to achieve through this project.

This desire led me to realize that one of my weaknesses is not being specific enough when communicating my thoughts. However, my project partner has been instrumental in helping me clarify these thoughts, and I've learned through various conversations how to express myself concisely and make my points clearer. At the same time, it's fantastic to see how ideas can be realized step by step, and with the right time management, progress can be made faster than one might think. I also find it amazing that this project, particularly the way Ivan and I are shaping it, can make us aware of the many ways of thinking and how crucial that is. Different talents can be brought together, like puzzle pieces, to create a larger Image, and each part is valuable and has its place.

I've also realized that I am someone who can listen, and that's something that continues to educate and shape me. The project allows a lot of room for individuals and aims to find a common ground where people from different perspectives can benefit by addressing core issues. I feel that my own experiences here serve as a skill, which, in turn, helps me derive something positive from personal experiences and recognize how one's own path takes shape.

## 3. START

When I started this project, it was more of a feeling. This feeling developed through my studies, particularly during a seminar in political science titled "The Danger of a Single Story". Here, we were urged to question the eurocentric worldview that has become deeply entrenched in our societal structure over centuries. For the first time, I felt empowered to comprehend a world not

designed for me without resistance or anger but with the simple recognition of its reality. I was particularly inspired by the black philosopher Professor Mills, who introduced a new social contract theory into this world called the "racial contract". Mills emphasizes that traditional social contracts taught in academic institutions, attributed to Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke, though recognizing and reflecting a certain reality, do not include all people, especially not black individuals. These social contracts, explaining our existence in a community, were formulated by white and male individuals during a time when the oppression of black people was justified. Mills also references colonialism, explaining that it was not only brutal and cruel but also devastating for black individuals on a profound level, with lasting effects. The humanity of non-white people was denied, and the societal constructs of white colonizers sought to legitimize that anything different was inherently wrong, even though they themselves became perpetrators of cruelty. Blacks were also associated with savagery, perpetuating dehumanization to rationalize their own cruelty. Consequently, unrealistic images were created, which may capture superficial aspects of a person but distort the true essence, leading others to feel entitled to assume superiority. Even years later, we are still confronted with stereotypes such as the "crying Indian", showcasing how cultural stereotypes continue to hold entertainment value without being critically examined for their truthfulness. [1] Thus, as a black person, one finds themselves trapped in a world where prejudices have been learned from all sides and must simultaneously recognize and believe in oneself amidst depictions and stereotypes meant to represent or deny one's identity. Mills also explains that we live in a world where white people cannot recognize the reality they have created over centuries. By asserting their dominance and considering the oppression of others as natural, they perpetuate subtle or blatant forms of oppression as commonplace. At that moment, I realized what it means to belong to a marginalized group. While I am a black woman, I enjoy far more privileges than other black women or other marginalized groups. Growing up in an academic household of a white family allowed me to understand, through living among white people who perceived me differently because of my skin color while my white family simply saw me as Ann-Marie, where the problem lies. After years of confusion and the subconscious desire to be white, thinking that only then could I safely live my true identity, I was able to recognize my own internalized

racism that turned against myself. I became aware that I confirmed prejudices out of fear of those who unconsciously held them towards me, not because they were true. I recognized how often I silenced my voice, and through the "Mind behind" project, I aim to promote introspection needed to free oneself from internalized oppression. Simultaneously, I hope that by perceiving themselves more accurately, people can resist unconscious prejudices held against them. This is not about one specific group; racism is my experience that led me to the concept I want to develop. It is about many of us having experienced denial

[1] Mills, C. W. (2022). The racial contract (25. Aufl.). Cornell University Press.

of our identity and then believing it. Classism, for example, is a topic that also affects white people. Just like our merit-based society that seeks to evaluate people based on their achievements. We can succumb to this pressure or recognize that our world can evolve in many ways, starting with the compassion we must show ourselves to understand others and recognize where they have been denied in their identity, to be responsible in our actions and language.

The concept of "the mind behind" is in a constant process of development, influenced by new inputs encountered in my everyday life. The idea is for this project to multiply in various forms, with new tool ideas and ways to convey the core idea to others, which I learn at university, work, or even during my training. A part of the project is to constantly stay in contact with diverse perspectives and listen to opinions that differ from my own. Inner and outer conflicts can only be understood and reconciled when understood. Recognizing the existence of another opinion and understanding why it exists. Charles Mills showed this very well in his "Racial Contract", in which he highlighted the historical references responsible for persistent racism today. Another inspiration for my work is radical democracy of agonistic pluralism. According to Mouffe and Laclau, society is a concept that is infinitely possible. [2]

## 4. THE MIND BEHIND THE PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

The Mind Behind is a website designed to operate independently from algorithms, thereby establishing itself as a unique platform. It serves both as a website and an educational tool, aiming to be accessible to as wide an audience as possible, eventually in multiple languages. A website offers ample opportunities for integrating knowledge and accommodating different types of human receptivity. I am in the process of designing a website for diverse learners because our methods of understanding and comprehending vary. Therefore, the website will cater to visual learners through aesthetically pleasing content and meaningful symbolism. Auditory learners will be engaged through video content and podcast-like formats. For

kinesthetic learners – those who learn best through active experience – there will always be appropriate tasks and incentives to write comments, aiding in the absorption and processing of information. Artistic elements like lyrics will be utilized, and theories will be articulated in simple, non-academic language. It is crucial to me that the concept becomes relatable to as many people as possible. Enlightenment and the journey towards a more equitable world can only occur if we communicate in diverse ways and connect with individuals beyond our own circles of privilege.

The objective is to explore political theories, personal experiences, and subjects from psychology, as well as stoicism from philosophy, throughout the development of the website and its associated research. Planning workshops for educational institutions and future employment opportunities is also integral to the project. Consequently, I am applying to speak at the BGW forum, where I will discuss the significance of our language use in combating discrimination and the necessity of understanding the perspectives of those impacted by emerging challenges in educational settings and beyond. This forum is dedicated to the advancement of education. I have already secured permission to present there as a student, which will allow me to further my project in terms of web-based interaction and speaking engagements at various venues, contingent on the requisite support. In this vein, I am also seeking funding for another initiative through the SEA-EU.

## 5. THE IDEA THE MIND BEHIND SHORT ABSTRACT - CONCEPT IDEA

Different perspectives on life from various people give rise to dualities, which in turn influence the roles we take on in this world. However, these roles do not define our essence; they are instead imposed upon us by chance and are subject to change with our environment. Imposed identities can evoke feelings that, in the worst cases, lead to suffering and alienation from our true selves and desires. "THE MIND BEHIND" is created to bring individuals closer to their authentic selves and to reveal the dualities in their lives that restrict their potential. The aim is to assist individuals in breaking free from patterns where they feel oppressed, unheard, or invisible patterns reinforced by externally imposed identities. By making these roles visible, the platform seeks to liberate them from the chains of their anguish and to protect

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[2] Nonhoff, M. (Hrsg.). (2015). Diskurs - Radikale Demokratie - Hegemonie: Zum Politischen Denken Von Ernesto Laclau Und Chantal Mouffe (1. Aufl.). Transcript Verlag.

their mental health. It encourages people to cling to their inner selves despite resistance, to live authentically, and to understand that not everyone will recognize who they truly are. It is about becoming resilient to prejudice, creating space for one's own emotions, and cultivating compassion for oneself and, consequently, for others. To achieve this, we must embrace the genuine self behind the socially constructed facade. Abusive behavior is discredited and refuted when one acknowledges their own stance in life. Navigating life's challenges, especially under difficult social conditions, is made more manageable through this understanding.

**The concept of Duality**

What is the concept of duality? Duality refers to the coexistence of two opposing perspectives or realities that are interdependent, such as light and dark, or love and hate. In mathematics and science, the principle of duality simplifies complex problems. Put simply, if one exists, its opposite must also be present. It is also possible to resolve mutual problems between individuals through the understanding of dualities. Conflicts arise from opposing viewpoints, but when space is created for both perspectives, the potential for negative outcomes is reduced. A prime example is the idea that insecurity cannot exist where security is established. When one embraces this philosophy and utilizes the tools and explanations provided by our website, they can foster a sense of security within themselves. This inner security serves as a shield against the harsh realities of prejudice and discrimination that are deeply rooted in social structures, as seen in instances of ableism, racism, sexism, and classism.

**. THE PROTOTYPE PHOTOS**
**The Introduction, Blog-article-site**

Here, various offerings are intended to take place, including interactive instructions with historical references, aimed at enabling individuals to contextualize themselves within the world they inhabit as humans

**Image 1.** The prototype of my website, which will be complemented with video formats and visually expanded**.**
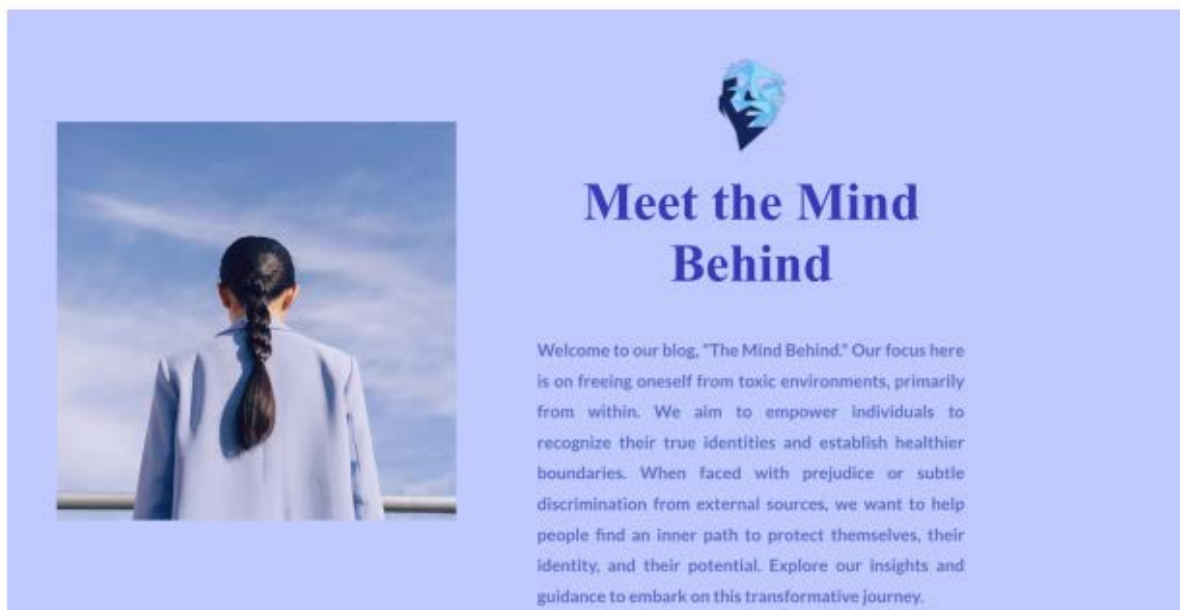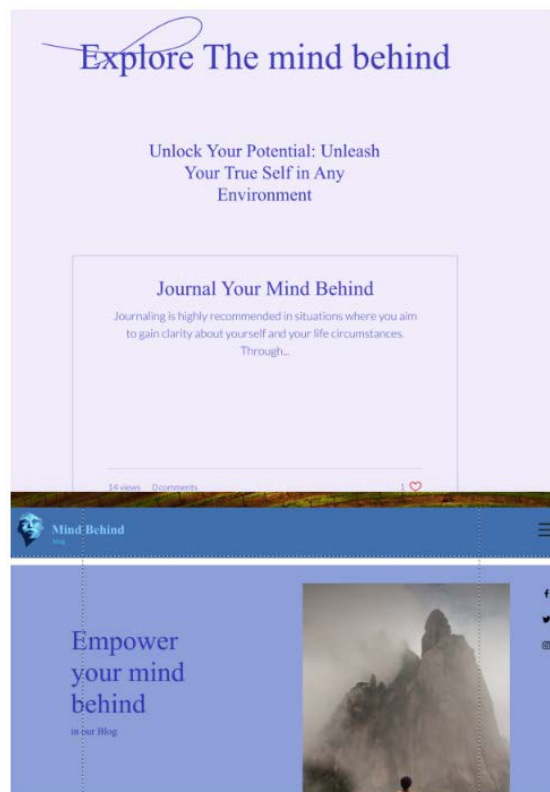


*Source: author*

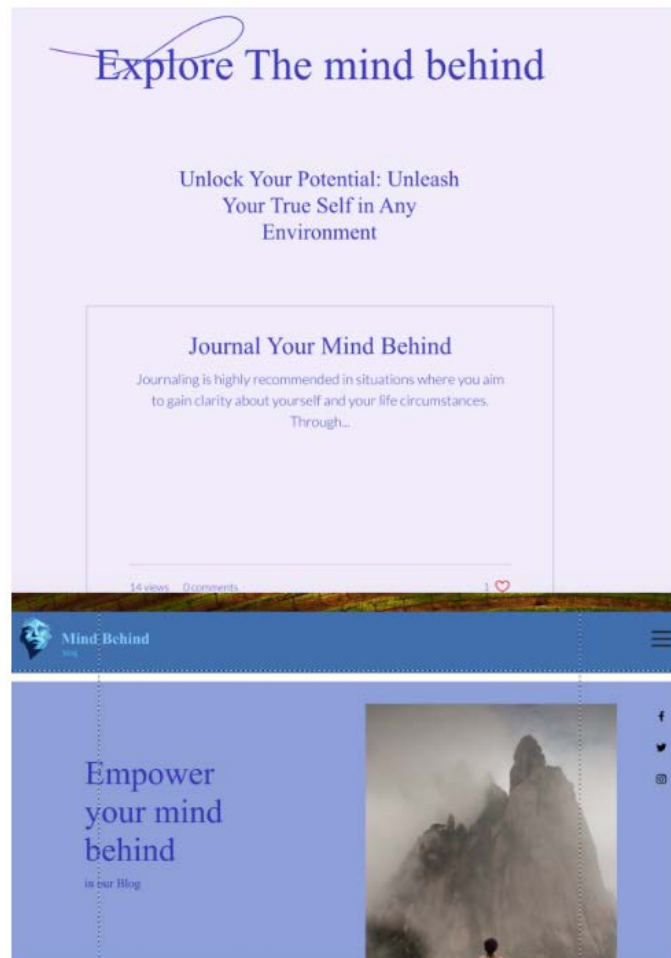**Image 2.** Explore the mind behind
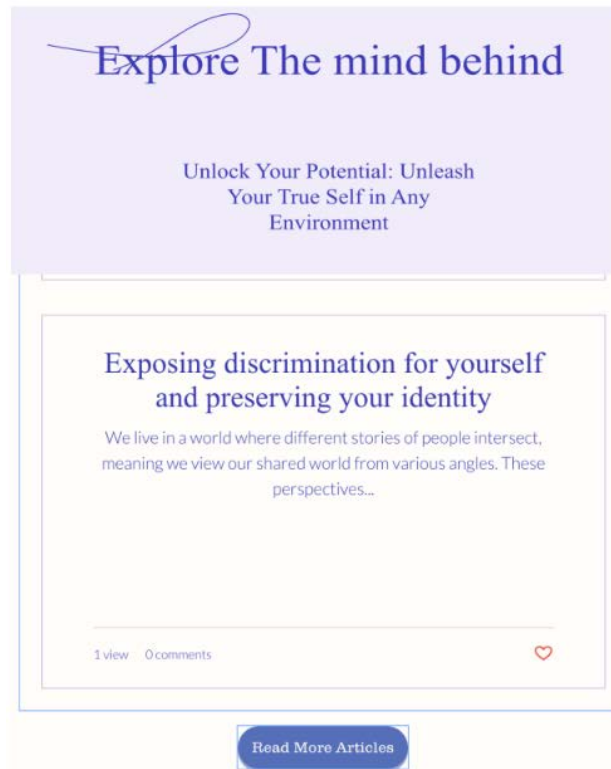


*Source: author*

**Image 3.** Explore the mind behind, additional photos



*Source: author*

**Image 4**. Explore the mind behind, additional photos



*Source: author*

## 6. CURRENT SITUATION

Now, my focus is on expanding and refining my project. Stipo, my partner from Split, is taking care of the website as our programmer. I gratefully got to know them through the SEA EU and service-learning project, and now we can combine what we do in our projects. While he is working on his part as a programmer, I'm deep into researching how we can push the project forward and exploring various locations where it would be beneficial to hold talks or presentations. I set up a detailed schedule to keep us on track, and I also compiled a contact list of key people who will play crucial roles in the project's progression, including potential interviewees.

While the project is still in its early stages, we've already taken the step of incorporating initial blog articles onto our prototype website. It's an exciting start, and we're eager to see how it evolves. Additionally, I'm immersing myself in a range of literature and resources relevant to our project's goals. This reading not only helps me gain deeper insights but also provides valuable knowledge to ensure our implementation is successful.

Overall, our approach is comprehensive, involving careful planning, proactive engagement, and a commitment to continuous learning. By collaborating effectively and remaining dedicated to our shared vision, we're confident that we can navigate the challenges ahead and achieve our objectives.

## 7. CLOSING

"The Mind Behind" aims to be an advanced concept focusing on navigating societal structures of discrimination through various theories in the realms of society, philosophy, psychology, and politics. It delves into self-reflection in an uncontrollable world, emphasizing self acceptance to maintain a connection with oneself. The project aims to provide support for all individuals affected by discrimination, empowering them to live authentically. Additionally, it aims to reflect experiences so that those unaffected by discrimination may recognize their biases from a different perspective and be touched by empathy. "THE MIND BEHIND" underscores our equality while acknowledging the diverse circumstances that can hinder some paths. The project thrives on interactivity and listening to diverse voices, understanding that not everyone can recognize discrimination without firsthand experience. It seeks to create space for marginalized groups by encouraging them to occupy it contrary to prevailing prejudices. Ultimately, it aims to inspire courage and progress in society, recognizing that every silenced voice and unrecognized potential is a loss for all. I aspire for people to liberate themselves from fear and for the platform to offer solace to those who struggle to comprehend why others only see what they choose to see. This project builds upon the insights of previous researchers, tailored to our digital age and accessible to diverse individuals regardless of algorithms, with the goal of fostering a more just world.

SEA-EU gives me the opportunity to shape this project within the framework of my studies and to cooperate with other students who have their own projects that can be connected. Service learning is such an important part of my student career and helps me to understand how I can contribute myself with what I have learned at the university in the context of the world. It's good when studying acquires a deeper meaning than just the academic degree; service learning helps one to develop their personality. I think this is exactly what should happen in the university contex

**Literature**

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