

University and Society – Creating Value Through Engagement

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

University and Society – Creating Value Through Engagement

Book of abstracts

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KEYNOTE LECTURE

From Montessori's Cosmic Task to Arachnean Ethics: Rethinking Engagement as Interdependence

Jarosław Jendza, *University of Gdańsk*

ABSTRACT

This keynote proposes a fundamental rethinking of how we understand the relationship between universities and society by returning to, and extending, the educational philosophy of Maria Montessori. While contemporary discussions of university–society engagement often revolve around notions such as impact, knowledge transfer, and value creation, this talk invites a conceptual shift: from engagement as a strategic activity to education as an ethical and relational practice of peace-building.

Montessori's often-cited assertion—that while politicians are tasked with preventing war, it is education that must build peace—serves as the starting point for this reflection (Montessori, 1949/1992). Developed most explicitly in “Education and Peace”, this idea positions education as the primary force in shaping a peaceful society. However, rather than treating this claim as a moral imperative alone, the keynote explores its deeper pedagogical and ontological implications. What does it mean to understand education, and by extension the university, as a site where peace is not merely discussed, but actively enacted?

Montessori's philosophy situates peace not as the absence of conflict, but as a condition of harmonious coexistence grounded in interdependence (Montessori, 1949/1992). Such coexistence cannot be imposed through policy; it must be cultivated through educational practices that invite individuals into meaningful relationships with others and with the world. Pedagogy, in this sense, becomes the primary space where the conditions for peace are either nurtured or undermined. Teaching is not a neutral act of transmitting or even constructing knowledge, but a formative practice that shapes how individuals come to understand their place within a shared social and ecological reality.

Within this framework, the keynote foregrounds Montessori's concept of the cosmic task as a pivotal, yet underexplored, contribution to contemporary debates on higher education. The notion of the cosmic task refers to the idea that each individual has a role to play within a larger, interconnected whole (Montessori, 1949/1992). Importantly, this role is not predefined or externally assigned; rather, it must be discovered through engagement with a pedagogical environment that is open, dialogical, and responsive. The task of education, therefore, is not to prepare students for predefined economic functions, but to create conditions in which they can begin to sense how they belong to—and contribute to—a broader web of life.

Recent scholarship has reinforced the centrality of peace within Montessori's work. Erica Moretti argues that Montessori's pacifism is not a peripheral aspect of her thought, but its very foundation, reframing her pedagogy as a form of educational activism oriented toward global peace (Moretti, 2021). In this interpretation, education becomes the “best weapon for peace,” not metaphorically, but as a concrete social and ethical practice that begins in early childhood and extends throughout life. Reinterpreted within the context of higher education, the concept of the cosmic task challenges dominant instrumental understandings of the university. If students are seen not as future workers or knowledge consumers, but as participants in an ongoing process of world-making, then the role of the university shifts accordingly. It becomes less a site of production and more a space of relational encounter,

where individuals are invited to explore their responsibilities toward others, both human and more-than-human. However, while this reorientation resonates strongly with contemporary calls for university–society engagement, it also reveals a tension. While engagement is frequently presented as a progressive and socially responsive dimension of higher education, it is increasingly shaped by the same logics that govern other areas of the contemporary university: efficiency, measurability, and productivity. Engagement is often framed through the language of outputs, deliverables, and impact indicators, aligning it with an audit culture that prioritizes visibility over relational depth (Biesta, 2010). In this context, even practices that were originally conceived as transformative—such as service-learning—risk becoming instrumentalized. Rather than fostering mutuality and co-presence, they may be structured as short-term interventions designed to produce demonstrable outcomes for assessment and reporting purposes. Students are positioned as providers of solutions, communities as sites of application, and learning as a by-product of measurable engagement. What is lost in this process is precisely what Montessori understood as central to education for peace: the slow, fragile, and often unpredictable work of building relationships.

Service-learning, in particular, offers a revealing example of this tension. While its rhetoric emphasizes reciprocity, reflection, and civic responsibility, its implementation often remains embedded within institutional expectations of efficiency and performance. Projects are time-bound, outcomes predefined, and success evaluated through metrics that privilege quantifiable change over relational transformation. Such framing risks reproducing asymmetrical relations between universities and communities, where engagement becomes a form of intervention rather than encounter. As such, what we call engagement may, at times, be a refined form of intervention.

To address these limitations, the keynote brings Montessori into dialogue with relational and posthumanist perspectives, particularly the work of Fernand Deligny and Jayne Osgood. Deligny's notion of *lignes d'erre* (lines of wandering) shifts attention from intention and meaning to movement and relation (Deligny, 2015). His practice of mapping traces rather than interpreting them invites a reconsideration of what it means to attend to studying: not as a process of acquiring meaning, but as a way of being in relation.

Building on Deligny, Osgood develops the concept of spidering and the associated arachnean ethics (Osgood & de Rijke, 2025). Spidering can be understood as a pedagogical practice of weaving relations rather than planning outcomes. It involves following lines—of students, materials, and environments—and attending to what emerges in the process. In contrast to linear models of development, spidering foregrounds responsiveness, attentiveness, and openness to the unexpected. Education, in this view, is no longer about designing pathways; it becomes a practice of following lines and weaving relations.

Bringing these perspectives into conversation with Montessori allows for an intriguing conceptual shift. While the idea of the cosmic task emphasizes belonging and contribution, spidering foregrounds the ongoing, emergent, and relational nature of that belonging. Together, they suggest that education is not about discovering a fixed role, but about participating in a dynamic and evolving network of relations.

This reconfiguration has profound implications for how we understand university–society engagement. Dominant models tend to frame engagement in terms of outputs and impact, positioning the university as a provider and society as a recipient. A Montessori-inspired, relational perspective disrupts this binary. Universities do not stand outside society, nor do they act upon it from a distance; they are already entangled within complex networks of social, cultural, and ecological relations.

From this standpoint, the question is no longer how universities can create value for society, but how they can participate in the co-creation of conditions for shared flourishing. Value does not originate within the university and flow outward; it emerges within relations. Not all engagement is relational, and relations cannot be optimized without being diminished.

Importantly, this shift is not merely conceptual, but pedagogical. Teaching becomes a form of spidering: a practice of following, connecting, and weaving rather than directing and controlling. It involves creating spaces where students can encounter difference, engage in dialogue, and participate in shared processes of inquiry. Such pedagogy does not abandon structure but reorients it toward responsiveness rather than prescription.

In conclusion, revisiting Montessori's philosophy offers more than historical insight; it provides a powerful conceptual and ethical framework for reimagining the role of the university in contemporary society. When brought into dialogue with relational and posthumanist perspectives, Montessori's vision of education for peace can be extended in ways that respond to the complexities of our time. University–society engagement, in this light, is not a matter of extending the university's reach, but of deepening its participation in the fragile, ongoing work of living together.

If education is to build peace, then the task of the university is not to produce value, but to cultivate the conditions in which life—human and more-than-human—can flourish in relation.

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SESSION 1: EDUCATION, INCLUSION AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT



Foreign Language Teaching as Social Engagement: Students' Perceptions of Authentic Listening Tasks in German Language Methodology

Mirela Müller, *University of Split*

ABSTRACT

This paper explores foreign language teaching as a form of societal engagement, focusing on the perceptions of students studying German as a foreign language. The aim of the study is to examine how students perceive the use of authentic listening tasks in foreign language methodology courses and to what extent these tasks contribute to the development of their social awareness and professional competences. The research is conducted among university students enrolled in German language study programmes, who are being educated as future teachers and instructors. Within methodology courses, students engage in the analysis and design of teaching activities based on authentic audio materials. These materials reflect everyday social situations, such as communication in public services, interactions within the local community, and culturally relevant contexts. Data are collected through a questionnaire and students' reflective written responses, and analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings indicate that students perceive authentic listening tasks as a valuable tool for connecting language learning with real-life social contexts. Moreover, such tasks are recognised as effective in fostering sensitivity to social and intercultural aspects of language use, as well as in supporting the development of pedagogical competences relevant to future teaching practice. The paper argues that integrating socially relevant content into foreign language methodology courses can strengthen the societal mission of the university by preparing future teachers to design inclusive, context-based learning activities that respond to real social needs. In this way, foreign language education contributes to creating meaningful links between academic learning and societal engagement within the framework of the SEA-EU alliance.

Keywords:

foreign language teaching; students' perceptions; listening comprehension; social engagement; teacher education

The Landscape of Service Learning in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Methodological Trends (2010–2025)

Paulina Białka, Jarosław Jendza, Justyna Siemionow, *University of Gdańsk*

ABSTRACT

Service learning has become an important approach linking higher education with societal engagement, yet the methodological foundations of research in this field remain unevenly explored. This paper maps the landscape of service learning research in higher education through a systematic review of 110 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2025. The dataset was constructed using a structured database search and a transparent screening process based on clearly defined inclusion criteria. Each study was coded using a consistent analytical framework covering research strategy, data collection methods, sampling approaches, and types of conclusions. The analysis is descriptive, focusing on identifying patterns across the field rather than explaining causal relationships. The findings reveal a clear dominance of qualitative approaches, alongside a growing presence of mixed-methods and quantitative studies in recent years. Data collection is primarily based on text/discourse analysis and surveys, with interviews as a secondary method. Sampling practices are strongly dominated by non-probabilistic purposive strategies, showing high stability across time. While nomothetic conclusions prevail, idiographic approaches have become more visible in the most recent period. Overall, the study highlights increasing methodological diversity within a structurally stable research landscape. By mapping these patterns, the paper contributes to a better understanding of how service learning research supports the broader mission of higher education in engaging with society.

Keywords:

service learning, higher education, systematic review, research methodology, university–society engagement

Healthy Lifestyle as Social Value: What Student Profiling Reveals About Psychosocial and Prosocial Functioning,

Jurand Sobiecki, *University of Gdańsk*

ABSTRACT

This presentation examines how promoting healthy lifestyles can be understood not only as a medical or individual issue, but also as a socially relevant university task. Drawing on a student-led profiling study conducted within SciClub, I present evidence that lifestyle-health patterns are meaningfully associated with psychosocial functioning and socially beneficial tendencies. In our work, profiles characterized by healthier routines, more favorable dietary patterns, and better gastrointestinal functioning were linked to more adaptive psychological outcomes and a stronger basis for constructive everyday functioning. These findings suggest that supporting healthy lifestyle patterns among students may have broader consequences than usually assumed, extending beyond physical health into well-being, self-regulation, and social functioning. The presentation argues that universities should treat lifestyle promotion as part of their civic and educational mission, especially in a context where young adults are increasingly exposed to stress, overstimulation, and dysregulated habits. By combining research with a student-led academic platform, this case illustrates how universities can create social value through health-oriented profiling, prevention, and early intervention thinking.

Work-Based Learning as a Pathway to Employability and Professional Competence

Antonela Marić, Mila Bulić, *University of Split*

ABSTRACT

The growing emphasis on work-based learning (WBL) in the design and development of study programs has emerged in response to the persistent misalignment between higher education systems and labour market demands. In addition to compulsory course-related placements, many faculties offer students an elective course entitled Professional Practice in a Teaching Base, enabling them to undertake structured professional placements in organizations beyond the university setting. This paper examines the introduction and implementation of WBL within higher education at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split. A network of 60 teaching bases, both national and international, has been established to support the delivery of additional professional placements for students. In order to evaluate the quality of implementation and the resulting learning outcomes, a questionnaire-based study was conducted among three key stakeholder groups: students, faculty mentors, and mentors from partner institutions. The findings indicate a high level of student satisfaction with the placement experience, alongside a strong recognition of the value of the competences acquired—particularly with regard to the application of theoretical knowledge in authentic professional contexts, the development of transferable professional skills, and enhanced preparedness for labour market entry. Mentors from both the faculty and partner institutions emphasize the importance of sustained collaboration and continuous communication in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the learning experience.

The results of the study clearly demonstrate the feasibility of implementing WBL-oriented educational policies within higher education contexts. The paper highlights WBL as a key mechanism for generating social value through education by enhancing student employability, strengthening professional identity formation, and fostering sustainable partnerships between universities and the broader community.

Keywords:

work-based learning, employability, professional competence, higher education, professional placements, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split

Mental Health Prevention and Protection in Young People: Psychosocial Support Through Community-Based Interventions

Luka Bazina, *Association Phoenix Split*

ABSTRACT

Young people face increasing challenges to their mental health, yet access to culturally appropriate psychosocial support remains limited within community and academic settings. This presentation reports outcomes from "Puna mi je Kapa!" (My hat is full!), a community-based project providing comprehensive mental health prevention and support services to students and young adults aged 16–30 at the University of Split, Croatia. The project implemented 8 integrated activities over 12 months (January 2025–January 2026), including five psychoeducational workshops addressing emotional literacy, self-image, mental hygiene, learning myths, and technology use; ten peer support groups facilitated by trained young volunteers; three creative peer-led workshops emphasizing authentic relationships and emotional wellbeing; individual psychological and peer support counseling; facilitator training for peer support group leaders; a stigma-reduction "Living Library" intervention; public awareness campaigns during World Suicide Prevention Day; and a two-day community mental health festival. The project reached 407 direct participants (302 women, 96 men) and 120 volunteers with an estimated 3,000 indirect beneficiaries through social media and public campaigns. Participants demonstrated increased emotional awareness, improved stress management skills, enhanced social connectedness, and reduced stigma toward mental illness. Twelve young people received individual therapeutic support, while 26 participants engaged in peer support groups. Nine young people were trained as facilitators for future peer support initiatives. Key outcomes include: (1) expanded access to free psychosocial services within the academic community; (2) reduced social isolation and increased help-seeking behaviors among vulnerable youth; (3) peer-driven destigmatization through authentic dialogue; (4) youth empowerment as co-producers and facilitators of mental health support; and (5) demonstrated feasibility of integrating evidence-based peer support practices within university settings.

This project demonstrates the effectiveness of community-based, youth-centered approaches to mental health promotion and illustrates how peer support, combined with professional psychosocial services, creates sustainable pathways for supporting young people's mental wellbeing.

Keywords:

mental health prevention, young people, peer support, psychosocial support, university students, stigma reduction, community intervention, volunteering, inclusive

From Campus Stress to Shared Relief: The Stress Relief Initiative as a Model of Student-Led Social Engagement

Martyna Malcher, Jurand Sobiecki, *University of Gdańsk*

ABSTRACT

This presentation focuses on the Stress Relief Initiative as an example of how student-led academic activity can create direct social value within and beyond the university. Developed within student organization SciClub, the initiative responds to a visible problem in contemporary student life: chronic stress, overstimulation, and limited access to accessible forms of recovery and emotional regulation. Rather than addressing this only at the level of theory, the initiative translates psychological knowledge into practical, low-threshold forms of support, including calming activities, recovery-oriented events, and spaces that encourage pause, reflection, and interpersonal connection. The presentation shows how such initiatives can function as a bridge between academic knowledge and everyday community needs. It also argues that student organizations can serve as important intermediaries in the university's engagement mission by turning evidence-informed ideas into concrete, socially meaningful practices. In this sense, the Stress Relief Initiative is presented not merely as a well-being event, but as a model of socially responsive academic culture: one that recognizes distress, promotes preventive action, and empowers students to co-create healthier environments for themselves and others.



SESSION 2: HIGHER EDUCATION INNOVATION, SERVICE LEARNING AND COMMUNITY IMPACT



The Landscape of Service-Learning in Higher Education: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Trends, Tensions, and Barriers in Research

Justyna Siemionow, Jarosław Jendza, Paulina Białka, *University of Gdańsk*

ABSTRACT

This study examines dominant trends, purposes, and challenges in service-learning (SL) research in higher education through a qualitative thematic analysis conducted as part of a systematic literature review following the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021). The dataset comprised 109 peer-reviewed empirical research articles, which were systematically selected and analysed. Open coding was conducted in line with grounded theory methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), supported by the constant comparative method, and complemented by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021).

The analysis identifies five key trajectories in the field:

(1) a strong emphasis on student outcomes, particularly professional development and employability skills; (2) a focus on civic engagement, social responsibility, and transformative learning; (3) an increasing alignment of SL with sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); (4) growing attention to partnerships and reciprocity, often accompanied by inherent tensions; (5) the institutionalization of SL within higher education as part of universities' societal mission. Service-learning is predominantly positioned as a pedagogical approach that connects theory with practice, fosters civic-minded graduates, addresses complex social challenges, and strengthens university–community relationships. However, the findings reveal persistent tensions and barriers, including the prioritization of student outcomes over community impact, a lack of robust tools for assessing social outcomes, institutional constraints, and difficulties in sustaining equitable partnerships. Overall, service-learning emerges as a widely adopted strategy in higher education; however, its development risks being shaped by the prevailing regime of neoliberal rationality, potentially reinforcing instrumental and outcome-driven logics within higher education (Giroux, 2014; Saltmarsh et al., 2009).

Keywords: service-learning, higher education, qualitative thematic analysis, systematic literature review, civic engagement, sustainability, social impact

From Classroom to Society: A Transformative Peer Teaching Model for Responsible Management Education

Olga Høegh-Guldberg, Kaspar B. Rasmussen, *Nord University*

ABSTRACT

This presentation examines a pedagogical redesign of LED1001, a second-year undergraduate management course at Nord University Business School, developed in response to global sustainability challenges, the rise of artificial intelligence, and declining student engagement. Rooted in the premise that management is fundamentally a societal practice rather than a purely technical one, the course integrates active learning, peer teaching, and the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) to cultivate competencies needed in increasingly complex and ethically charged environments. Grounded in Scandinavian management traditions characterized by low power distance, participatory decision-making, and sustainability orientation, the redesign seeks to create a learning environment that minimizes hierarchy and foregrounds co creation. Students engage in nine student led sessions where they design and deliver 45-minute interactive classes, supported by supervision and structured preparatory activities. Research on peer teaching indicates that students deepen cognitive processing, develop self-efficacy, and assume greater responsibility for their own learning when they take the role of teacher.

The course is structured around three Transformative Learning Objectives—Responsible Agency, Applied Problem Solving, and Reflective & Co Creative Practice—which are integrated throughout the nine thematic sessions, spanning ethics, sustainable management, organizational design, innovation, digitalization, and crisis management. The IDGs further strengthen the developmental dimension by fostering inner capacities such as perspective taking, empathy, complexity awareness, and collaborative skills—competencies essential for managers contributing to societal value creation.

Preliminary findings from the first year indicate increased student engagement, evidence of emerging professional identity, and deeper understanding of management as a relational and societal practice. The presentation discusses the pedagogical model, its alignment with current debates on assessment reform in the age of generative AI, and its potential to serve as a template for responsible, future oriented management education.

Keywords:

transformative learning; peer teaching; Inner Development Goals; management education; university–society engagement

LOESS Project: Demonstrator Soil Garden and Innovative Educational Tools for Enhancing Soil Literacy

Joanna Morawska, Adam Mickiewicz, Karolina Lewińska, *University of Poznań*

ABSTRACT

Soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and declining soil quality are among the most pressing environmental challenges in Europe, requiring increased public awareness and practical education on sustainable soil management. The LOESS project addresses these challenges by developing innovative educational solutions that promote soil literacy among students, educators, and local communities. A key component of the project is the creation of a demonstrator Soil Garden—an interactive outdoor educational space designed to present soil processes, soil biodiversity, and ecosystem services in a tangible and engaging way. The Soil Garden functions as a living laboratory where participants can observe soil layers, water retention, erosion processes, and the role of soil in climate regulation and food production. Complementing this physical infrastructure, the project introduces new educational tools, including short educational videos, microlearning modules, and hands-on teaching materials that support experiential and inquiry-based learning. These tools are designed to be accessible, visually engaging, and adaptable to different age groups and educational settings. By combining outdoor learning environments with modern digital resources, the LOESS project aims to strengthen environmental awareness, foster responsible attitudes toward natural resources, and support the development of competencies related to sustainability and climate resilience. The initiative demonstrates how innovative educational approaches can effectively connect scientific knowledge with everyday environmental practices.

Keywords:

soil education; soil literacy; outdoor learning; environmental education; microlearning

Split as a Student City: University Branding, Visual Identity, and Urban Communication

Željka Sijerak Radas, *University of Split*

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary global higher education environment, universities are increasingly expected to compete not only through academic excellence and internationalization, but also through their ability to construct recognizable and emotionally resonant institutional identities. Within this context, university branding has become closely interconnected with place branding, as higher education institutions increasingly contribute to the image, attractiveness, and competitiveness of cities and regions.

This presentation explores the intersection of university branding, place branding, and visual communication through the ongoing promotional campaign of the University of Split (UNIST) and its collaborative branding initiative with the City of Split, “Split – Student City.” Particular attention is devoted to the visual identity of the University of Split and its integration into broader city branding initiatives. The analysis focuses on logos, typography, color palettes, graphic standards, digital communication, and promotional campaigns as tools for creating a coherent and recognizable institutional image. It further investigates how the alignment of communication strategies between UNIST and the City of Split contributes to positioning Split as a contemporary student city that combines academic quality with cultural heritage, Mediterranean lifestyle, and social vitality. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative case-study approach, including the analysis of visual materials, branding manuals, campaign elements, institutional communication channels, and digital media content associated with the University of Split and the “Split – Student City” initiative. The analysis is complemented by comparative observations of selected European university-city branding partnerships, including the “Limerick Student City” initiative in Ireland, in order to contextualize the Split case within broader contemporary branding practices in higher education and urban communication.

Special consideration is given to the “Science Comes to Town” initiative, a year-round science festival connecting the academic community with citizens through public engagement and science communication activities. Together with the “Split – Student City” campaign, it represents an example of contemporary collaborative branding practice in which higher education institutions and urban environments jointly construct a sustainable, recognizable, and internationally competitive identity. By examining the University of Split as a case study of integrated university-city branding, while comparatively referencing European examples such as Limerick, the presentation contributes to broader discussions on the role of visual communication and co-branding strategies in higher education and urban development, while also offering practical insights for universities and cities seeking to strengthen their positioning within the global educational landscape.

Keywords:

student city, branding, partnership.

Sustainable Project Management in Central and Eastern European Universities: Toward a Comprehensive Implementation Model

Kamil Flig, Marta Ekner, *SGH Warsaw School of Economics*

ABSTRACT

The transformation of higher education institutions in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) over the past three decades has created unique challenges for implementing sustainable project management. Universities in the region face a dual imperative: modernizing management systems while preserving academic traditions, all within constraints of limited resources and rapid societal change. This study addresses the growing intersection of sustainability and projectification in higher education, driven by globalized competition, stakeholder expectations, and European Union funding frameworks that increasingly require sustainable practices.

Contemporary universities operate under conditions of increasing complexity, where project-based approaches enable flexible responses to a dynamically changing environment. In CEE, projectification manifests through growing reliance on EU structural funds and Horizon Europe programs. While initial sustainability efforts focused on the institutional level, the expanding role of project activities has revealed that university-wide sustainability goals cannot be achieved without embedding them in project management practices. This shift demands a departure from traditional hierarchical governance toward inclusive, participatory approaches that engage a complex landscape of internal and external stakeholders.

A significant research gap exists in this domain: while Western European and North American models dominate the discourse on sustainable project management in higher education, the specific challenges, opportunities, and cultural contexts of CEE universities remain underexplored. The main objective of this research is to develop a comprehensive model for implementing sustainable project management practices at CEE universities, grounded in theoretical analysis, empirical research, and best practice evaluation. This presentation contributes to the emerging field of university–society engagement by proposing a contextually appropriate framework that bridges sustainability imperatives with the operational realities of CEE higher education institutions.

Keywords:

sustainable project management, higher education, Central and Eastern Europe, projectification, university governance

Digital Detox in the Age of Cognitive Overload: Mental Training and the Need for Recovery

Julia Kwoczek, Jurand Sobiecki, *University of Gdańsk*

ABSTRACT

This presentation explores digital overstimulation through the lens of evolutionary mismatch and asks what universities can do in response. Contemporary students live in environments shaped by constant notifications, fragmented attention, algorithmic reward loops, and little space for uninterrupted reflection. This condition may not simply reduce comfort; it may also weaken deeper forms of concentration, internal reflection, and mental recovery. Using the concept of the default mode network as a theoretical anchor, we argue that the erosion of quiet, undistracted mental states has consequences for self-regulation, reflective thinking, and cognitive functioning. In this context, digital detox should not be understood as a trendy lifestyle gesture, but as a serious educational and mental-health issue. The presentation discusses how student organization SciClub links this problem to practical responses such as intentional breaks from digital overload, mental training, breathing-based recovery practices, and activities designed to restore attention and psychological balance. The broader argument is that universities should take cognitive overload seriously as a societal and educational challenge. Supporting students today means not only providing information, but also protecting the mental conditions necessary for thought, agency, and sustainable functioning.



SESSION 3: SUSTAINABILITY, GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL IMPACT



Bridging Sustainability and Projectification: A Framework for Higher Education Institutions in Central and Eastern Europe

Kamil Flig, Marta Ekner, *SGH Warsaw School of Economics*

ABSTRACT

The transformation of higher education institutions in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) over the past three decades has created unique challenges for implementing sustainable project management. Universities in the region face a dual imperative: modernizing management systems while preserving academic traditions, all within constraints of limited resources and rapid societal change. This study addresses the growing intersection of sustainability and projectification in higher education, driven by globalized competition, stakeholder expectations, and European Union funding frameworks that increasingly require sustainable practices. Contemporary universities operate under conditions of increasing complexity, where project-based approaches enable flexible responses to a dynamically changing environment. In CEE, projectification manifests through growing reliance on EU structural funds and Horizon Europe programs. While initial sustainability efforts focused on the institutional level, the expanding role of project activities has revealed that university-wide sustainability goals cannot be achieved without embedding them in project management practices. This shift demands a departure from traditional hierarchical governance toward inclusive, participatory approaches that engage a complex landscape of internal and external stakeholders. A significant research gap exists in this domain: while Western European and North American models dominate the discourse on sustainable project management in higher education, the specific challenges, opportunities, and cultural contexts of CEE universities remain underexplored. The main objective of this research is to develop a comprehensive model for implementing sustainable project management practices at CEE universities, grounded in theoretical analysis, empirical research, and best practice evaluation. This presentation contributes to the emerging field of university–society engagement by proposing a contextually appropriate framework that bridges sustainability imperatives with the operational realities of CEE higher education institutions.

Keywords:

sustainable project management, higher education, Central and Eastern Europe, projectification, university governance

Bridging Research, Education, and Practice: A Replicable Lab Model for University Engagement with Society

Pamela Nwakanma, *University of California*

ABSTRACT

Universities are increasingly asked to demonstrate the value they create for society beyond producing credentials and journal articles. This presentation outlines the conceptual framework for the Political Entrepreneurship Research Lab at the University of California, Irvine, an interdisciplinary research environment I am building to integrate research, education, and practice into a single program of work. The Lab studies how individuals and organizations use digital technology to identify institutional gaps and intervene in public discourse, politics, and policy. Through case studies from Nigeria, Colombia, and the United States, including EndSARS, Black Lives Matter, and Colombian Vice President Francia Márquez's grassroots-to-government trajectory, the Lab examines both the democratic potential and the documented dark sides of digital infrastructure, including platform-amplified violence, surveillance, and the oligarchic capture of platforms originally treated as civic infrastructure. The Lab's pedagogical approach, grounded in the work of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, positions students as co-creators of knowledge. This commitment is operationalized through cohort recruitment, multi-tier mentoring, and explicit attention to the conditions that have historically excluded talented students from research participation. Through participation in ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, computational analysis, and a cross-national survey experiment, students develop the methodological skill, intercultural competence, and public-facing communication capacity that civic technology, policy, and community-engaged research require. The paper will present the Lab's conceptual foundations, pedagogical design, and early evidence from a Spring 2026 on-campus proof-of-concept event that documented measurable shifts in how participating students conceptualized political resistance. Designed for scalability and replication, the Lab addresses the question at the heart of this conference: how universities can deepen their contribution to societal development through real-world engagement, knowledge transfer, and shared value creation.

Keywords:

political behavior; entrepreneurship; research-based learning; civic technology; cross-cultural learning

Exploring Inner Development Goals in Higher Education: A Small Step Toward More Meaningful University–Society Engagement

Morena Galešić Divić, Eli Marušić, *University of Split*

ABSTRACT

This short interactive presentation explores the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) as a complementary framework to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on how inner capacities can support more meaningful learning, collaboration and engagement in higher education. Rather than presenting a completed empirical study or a finished institutional model, the contribution shares an emerging practice-based exploration from the University of Split and the SEA-EU IDG Network, where educators are beginning to experiment with IDG-inspired approaches through teaching, mentoring, dialogue and peer learning. The presentation acknowledges that introducing reflective and relational practices into established academic environments may generate resistance, especially in contexts shaped by disciplinary boundaries, time pressure and evaluation demands. In this context, capacities such as self-awareness, systems thinking, listening, empathy, collaboration, courage and responsible action may help educators and institutions respond to complex societal challenges with more humility and care. Participants will be invited to experience a short IDG card-based reflection as a small practical example of how inner development tools can open dialogue in educational and institutional settings. The presentation also opens space for further collaboration through the SEA-EU IDG Network and related communities of practice.

Keywords:

Inner Development Goals; higher education; university–society engagement; transformative learning; SEA-EU IDG Network

Public and Private Funding in European Higher Education: Implications for Social Impact

Maciej Oleś, *SGH Warsaw School of Economics*

ABSTRACT

European universities, regardless of their funding structure, are increasingly expected not only to educate and conduct research, but also to create social value through engagement with society. At the same time, higher education institutions operate within diverse funding structures that combine public and private sources. Each source is associated with different strategic priorities and expectations. Despite extensive debate on higher education finance, which varies across countries, the relationship between funding structures and universities' outputs, their capacity to generate social impact, and their ability to sustain and develop meaningful societal engagement remains insufficiently explored.

The aim of this study is to examine how public and private funding models shape the social role of universities in Europe. The study addresses two main research questions: (1) What are the key characteristics of public and private funding models in European higher education? and (2) How do these funding models shape universities' ability to generate social impact? The study is based on a review of academic literature and policy reports.

A preliminary analysis suggests that public funding may play an important role in supporting inclusiveness, equal access to education, and socially oriented research, thereby reinforcing the role of universities as providers of public value. Private funding, in turn, may enhance financial flexibility and agility, and strengthen collaboration with external stakeholders, particularly industry, but it can also introduce pressures toward market-oriented academic priorities, which may raise questions about the ethical implications of scientific research. The study contributes to the discussion on university–society engagement by examining funding models and selected dimensions of social impact in European higher education.

Keywords:

higher education funding, public vs private funding, social impact, university–society engagement, Europe

Reducing Information Asymmetry through Digital Platforms: A Qualitative Study of Stakeholder Engagement in Coastal Tourism

Daniela Garbin Praničević, Eli Marušić, Katija Kovačić, *University of Split*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of digital platforms in reducing information asymmetry within the blue economy, with a particular focus on coastal tourism. Information asymmetry remains a persistent challenge, often resulting in uncertainty, mistrust, and suboptimal decision-making among consumers. Digital platforms, such as online review systems and booking applications, increasingly serve as mechanisms to enhance transparency and support user engagement.

Within this ecosystem, universities are important stakeholders that contribute to the generation and application of knowledge on digital transformation in tourism. Through research activities, applied projects, and collaboration with industry actors, universities support the development and critical evaluation of digital platforms, helping to improve transparency and reduce information gaps between consumers and service providers. In doing so, they also contribute to broader societal value creation in the blue economy by fostering evidence-based innovation and knowledge transfer.

Using a qualitative research design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with service users and providers in coastal tourism ecosystems. The data are analysed through thematic analysis, focusing on perceived transparency, trust formation, platform engagement, and existing limitations.

Findings indicate that digital platforms significantly reduce perceived information asymmetry by providing access to user-generated content and peer reviews, thereby strengthening trust and decision-making. However, challenges such as fake reviews, information overload, and inconsistent content quality persist. The study contributes to the literature on value co-creation and stakeholder engagement, highlighting both the enabling and limiting roles of digital platforms and the supportive function of universities in this process.

Keywords:

coastal tourism, stakeholder engagement, digital platforms, information asymmetry, qualitative research, university support

Student Decision-Making Capability in the Blue Economy: Sustainability Challenges in Port-City Contexts

Eli Marušić, Daniela Garbin Praničević, Slađana Pavlinović Mršić, Gorana Jelić Mrčelić, Katija Kovačić, Maja Račić, *University of Split*

ABSTRACT

A sustainable, resilient, and innovative blue economy depends on professionals with the knowledge and skills to make informed and responsible decisions in response to growing sustainability challenges. A capable workforce is essential for sustainable solutions in increasingly competitive and digitalized blue sectors. This paper explores students' decision-making capabilities as current and future professionals, many of whom are already working in the blue sectors. Growth in port and maritime activity and coastal tourism, the two largest blue economy sectors, creates new opportunities in port cities, while also bringing significant sustainability challenges to businesses and communities. These include environmental pressures such as resource overuse, pollution, waste, ecosystem degradation, and climate change, as well as socio-economic impacts such as congestion, tourism dependence, seasonality, and pressures on local communities. This study aims to evaluate students' preparedness for real-world situations involving the operation, management, and governance of blue economy businesses, as well as for making individual and team sustainability-related decisions. It analyzes students' perceptions of sustainability challenges in the blue economy, key blue economy sectors, and their preparedness for real-world decision-making. Understanding students' capabilities to address emerging opportunities and sustainability challenges in the blue economy is increasingly important to academia, industry, and the public, underscoring the role of universities in linking academic knowledge with real-world applications. Data were collected using a focus group and an online survey of students at the University of Split, Croatia. A structured questionnaire was used for the survey. Preliminary results show a high level of awareness and understanding of sustainability issues, but more varied levels of preparedness for real-world decision-making. The study contributes to understanding how higher education can support the development of decision-making capabilities and strengthen the connection between academic knowledge and real-world applications in sustainable blue economy sectors.

Keywords:

blue economy, port cities, sustainability challenges, decision-making capability, coastal tourism



PARALLEL WORKSHOPS



ROUND 1

Participatory Budgeting in Higher Education Institutions

António Fragoso, Sandra T. Valadas, Marisol Correia, Eduardo Esteves, *University of Algarve*

ABSTRACT

Participatory budgeting (PB) is generally defined as a practice based on the active participation of citizens in budgetary decisions with the aim of influencing the allocation of resources. Over the last few decades, a wide variety of PB forms, models and practices have emerged, most of which are territorial in nature, covering municipalities, regions or even countries. However, experience within higher education institutions (HEIs) is still in its infancy, despite the available literature clearly indicating a number of advantages. In HEIs, PB has been widely associated with learning about citizenship and democracy. Participatory experiences are considered an effective way of educating better citizens (Nez, 2016). PB involves understanding and claiming our rights as citizens, analysing social reality, recognising the problems around us and working with others to identify the most beneficial contributions to the common good. Thus, PB is associated with many key skills, such as creating new ways of thinking, recognising group participation and developing civic skills. It promotes the transformation of a political culture of passivity and dependency, as well as the learning of medium- and long-term procedures (Fedozzi & Martins, 2015; Lüchmann, 2014). Among its inherent capacities PB potentially fosters the abilities to listen, argue and persuade (Fischer & Moll, 2000). The ability to analyse, evaluate and synthesise information in a rational way can potentially develop critical thinking skills (Pedone, 1986). Thus, PB can promote the development of a variety of skills that are important for collective decision-making processes and for strengthening democracy. In conclusion, there is a number of potential advantages in implementing PB processes in HEI and, from our part, we would like to promote this movement (and maybe we could aim at the creation of an international network on the issue?). In this workshop, we will try to demonstrate in a practical way that the processes of building PB processes are not difficult in organisational terms. We will start to present a challenge for the participants to solve in small working groups. Then we will have a debate on the contributions of the participants. We will finish by briefly presenting the case of the PB process of the University of Algarve.

Rural Service-Learning Lab Workshop

Nives Mikelic Preradovic, *University of Zagreb*

ABSTRACT

The objective of this workshop is to strengthen teachers' and trainers' participation in digital education, equipping them with the skills to design, develop, deliver and assess effective and holistic rural e-service-learning experiences for students and useful community projects. The participants will be able to explore the use of emerging technologies up to their full potential while employing learning experience design strategies.

Target audience: academic teachers and trainers

All workshop participants will gain free access to the self-paced e-course Rural Service Learning Lab that was created by the project consortium as part of the Erasmus+ project CIVENHANCE (E-Service Learning for Boosting Academic Civic Engagement in Rural Areas) <https://civenhance.eu/>.

CIVENHANCE project aims:

- i) To promote social inclusion by designing a framework for university civic engagement in rural and remote areas that combines the strengths of e-service-learning e-SL with rural service-learning (rural SL);
- ii) To discover ways to leverage e-SL to overcome obstacles in rural SL initiatives and unlock SL's potential in geographically disadvantaged communities;
- iii) To educate academic teachers to design, implement and assess rural e-SL projects to foster civic engagement and recognition of community work in students' academic results.

The e-course is divided into 5 standalone modules. After submitting the course feedback, each enrolled participant will receive the Completion certificate.

Expected outcomes

Upon completion of this course the participants will be able to:

- Module 1 - elaborate key areas of opportunity for rural e-service-learning;
- Module 2 - clarify roles and responsibilities of teachers, students & community partners;
- Module 3 - adapt existing courses to introduce rural e-service-learning into academic curriculum;
- Module 4 - to plan, design and implement rural e-service-learning projects;
- Module 5 - evaluate and assess rural e-service-learning.

Towards Inclusive Universities: International Perspectives on Social Innovation

Ana Zarzuela Castro, Rocío Manzano Fernández, *University of Cádiz*

ABSTRACT

This workshop aims to build collaborative narratives through inclusive dialogues, specifically to foster the development of an international perspective on inclusive university practices linked to social innovation activities, creating a space for collaborative and critical dialogue for higher education professionals. Its main objective is to examine how universities address diversity from cultural, policy, and pedagogical perspectives, and to identify strategies that promote more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive academic environments.

The central purpose of the session is to explore the barriers students encounter within university environments and to analyze how institutions can move toward more equitable and inclusive models. Rather than focusing on isolated examples, the workshop seeks to promote a systemic and comparative understanding of inclusion in higher education, drawing on the diversity of national and institutional contexts represented by participants. By bringing together different perspectives, the session will contribute to building shared knowledge and identifying common challenges as well as innovative responses.

The discussion will be structured around three interconnected dimensions: culture, policies, and inclusive practices. Participants will be invited to collectively reflect on how these dimensions shape the student experience and influence the capacity of universities to implement meaningful and sustainable inclusive strategies. The workshop will not address these dimensions in isolation, but rather examine how they interact and reinforce one another within institutional ecosystems. This holistic approach will help participants identify both structural constraints and opportunities for transformation.

The session will be conducted using the World Café methodology, fostering open dialogue, horizontal participation, and collaborative knowledge construction. Participants will work in small groups, engaging in guided reflection and sharing insights from their respective contexts. Key ideas emerging from the discussions will be captured and synthesized in a plenary sharing session, enabling the identification of common challenges, innovative practices, and emerging proposals.

With a duration of 90 minutes, the workshop is designed for 35 people and it intent to be dynamic, participatory, and outcome-oriented. Beyond exchanging experiences, it seeks to generate actionable insights and strengthen international networks committed to inclusive and socially innovative higher education. Ultimately, the session aspires to contribute to the ongoing transformation of universities into institutions that not only acknowledge diversity but actively integrate it as a core value and driver of social change.

Designing Humanitarian Events as Curriculum-Embedded Experiential Learning Projects

Senka Borovac Zekan, *University of Split*

ABSTRACT

This interactive workshop aims to demonstrate how the organization of a humanitarian event can be systematically integrated into an undergraduate Event management course as a high-impact, experiential learning project. The workshop will present a concrete pedagogical model used in a third-year elective course with approximately 20 students at the University of Split. The model links academic learning outcomes with societal engagement by tasking students with the full design and organization of a real humanitarian event.

Methods and Structure (90 minutes):

1. Context and Pedagogical Framework (15 minutes)

Participants will be introduced to the course context (third-year undergraduate elective in Event Management) and the rationale for using humanitarian events as experiential learning tools. Key learning outcomes (project management, stakeholder engagement, ethical considerations, teamwork, and communication) will be briefly outlined.

2. Case-Based Presentation: Humanitarian Event as a Course Task (20 minutes)

The facilitator will present a structured example of how students are assigned to conceptualize, plan, and implement a humanitarian event. This includes task design, assessment criteria, stakeholder mapping, budgeting, promotion, risk management, and evaluation. Emphasis will be placed on alignment between academic objectives and community needs.

3. Interactive Group Work: Designing a Humanitarian Event Assignment (35 minutes)

Participants will work in small interdisciplinary groups to design a draft humanitarian event task suitable for their own institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Each group will define:

- Event purpose and social impact goal
- Target beneficiaries and partners
- Student roles and responsibilities
- Learning outcomes and assessment methods
- Risk and ethical considerations

Groups will use a structured template to ensure transferability to different academic settings.

4. Plenary Discussion and Knowledge Exchange (15 minutes)

Groups will briefly present their concepts. A facilitated discussion will focus on challenges, scalability, institutional constraints, and best practices for embedding community engagement into formal curricula.

5. Reflection and Takeaways (5 minutes)

The session will conclude with a synthesis of key pedagogical insights and practical recommendations.

By the end of the workshop, participants will:

- Understand a replicable model for integrating humanitarian event organization into undergraduate teaching.
- Gain practical tools for designing experiential learning assignments linked to societal engagement.

- Exchange best practices with peers on service learning and community-based education.
- Leave with a draft concept adaptable to their own courses and institutional strategies for university–society collaboration.



ROUND 2

The IDGs and Culture — Why the SDGs Are Stalling and How Art Can Save Them

Vincent Caruana, *CEER - University of Malta*

ABSTRACT

While the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a roadmap for global change, they frequently ignore the "how"—the cultural and inner drivers of human behaviour. This workshop aims to bridge this "cultural blind spot" by utilizing the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) framework. Participants will explore how culture, rather than being a "means to an end," serves as the foundational pillar for structural change. We will specifically examine how artistic media (film, music, and art) acts as a "Trojan Horse" for empathy and courage, moving us from a culture of extraction to one of stewardship.

Methods This 90-minute interactive session employs film-as-pedagogy and collaborative reflection. It utilizes a case study analysis to analyse the IDG skills of Courage and Integrity against rigid systems.

- The "Mirror or Mold" Discussion: A guided debate on whether media simply reflects our current identity or shapes our future selves.
- Art-Catalyst Exercise: A breakout session where participants select a song, film, or artwork and brainstorm how to integrate it into Higher Education (HE).
- Reflective Dialogue: Addressing the "Cultural Diet" and how educators can create "Safe Spaces" for students to practice defending sustainable values.

Expected Outcomes Participants will leave with:

1. A deeper understanding of IDGs as a "de facto" bridge to achieving the SDGs.
2. Practical strategies for using cultural literacy and art as pedagogical tools in Higher Education.
3. The ability to identify and "track" the cultural drivers necessary for systemic transformation.

Target Audience Conference participants. Flexible, and can include Higher Education educators; sustainability practitioners; and researchers interested in the intersection of culture, inner development, and the 2030 Agenda.

Maximum Number of Participants: 30–40 (to ensure quality breakout discussions).

From Idea to Collaboration: Connecting Academia and Civil Society in Environmental Protection

Margita Radman, Jelena Grozdanić, *Association for Nature, Environment and Sustainable Development Sunce*

ABSTRACT

Workshop Description (aims, methods, outcomes, target audience, number of participants)

Aims: This 90-minute workshop is designed as an interactive space for sharing experiences, networking, and developing concrete ideas for collaboration between academia and civil society organizations in the field of environmental protection. The workshop aims to encourage participants to reflect on opportunities for cross-sector collaboration and to empower them to take an active role in driving social change through joint initiatives, projects, and student engagement in community-oriented activities.

Methods:

The workshop begins with a short introduction and participant introductions, followed by a presentation of good practice examples from previous collaborations between academia and civil society. Special emphasis is placed on the co-creation approach, student involvement in projects, and tangible outcomes such as research, community engagement activities, and publications. This segment also provides added value by offering a perspective from outside the academic system.

The central part of the workshop includes a brief individual reflection on participants' own experiences with cross-sector collaboration, followed by group work using the World Café method. Participants will rotate between thematic tables and collaboratively explore: (1) what they can offer as individuals or institutions, (2) their needs and challenges, and (3) ways to establish concrete collaborations in environmental protection and student engagement. This segment fosters active participation, idea exchange, and the development of new partnerships.

In the final part, participants will develop short proposals for potential collaborations or initiatives that can be implemented within their own work (e.g., through courses, projects, or organizational activities). These ideas will be briefly presented to encourage further networking and future collaboration.

Target Audience:

The workshop is open to conference participants, particularly teachers, researchers, students, and representatives of civil society organizations with an interest in environmental protection and social engagement.

Maximum Number of Participants: 25

Expected Outcomes: include increased awareness of collaboration opportunities between academia and civil society, exchange of good practice examples, establishment of new contacts and potential partnerships, and the development of initial ideas for future joint projects.

ROUND 3

From Briefs to Meaningful Learning Projects: Working with Students and Socio-economic Partners

Joséphine Corre, Solenn Hertgen, *Université de Bretagne Occidentale*

ABSTRACT

This workshop aims to develop shared strategies for turning a brief from a socio-economic partner into :

- a genuinely engaging learning project for students;
- and/or a participatory research project for students.

Drawing on their past experiences, the facilitators have designed fictional scenarios on which four sub-groups will work. Each group will receive a profile card for their assigned partner (a company, a local authority, an NGO or an association), an initial brief and a set of constraints to include into the project design. How to reshape an operationally-driven request from an external organisation into a research problem and/or into a meaningful and time-bound project for students ?

Working collaboratively, participants will be invited to build a project syllabus structured around several key sections : identifying shared values and learning outcomes for students; translating the initial brief into a research problem and/or a learning question that preserves room for students to make choices about their approach and deliverables; mapping the data and resources required; selecting facilitation tools that support active student engagement; and clarifying roles and responsibilities. An open space for sharing practices freely will round out the syllabus framework.

The session will run as follows: introduction and framing (10'), collaborative syllabus building in sub-groups (60'), group presentations (15'), closing reflection (5').

How to turn an operational problem into a research problem or a learning experience? How to align learning goals with a partner's expectations? And how to keep students invested in this kind of project? These will be explored in light of each participant's own institutional and cultural backgrounds, making the workshop a space for discussion as much as possible.

Everyone will leave with a working syllabus framework and practical tools ready to use in their own institution. The group's diverse experiences will also make the workshop an opportunity to build a shared bank of good practices in service learning projects.

Ecocultural Identity: Creating Awareness of Who We Are and What We Want to Be in a Future Scenario

Nayr Ibrahim, Marit Solstad, *Nord University*

ABSTRACT

The participants will create an object during the workshop representing their ecocultural identity

This workshop invites participants to explore their own ecocultural identity (ECI) and to reflect on how identities are shaped not only socially and culturally, but also ecologically (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020). Grounded in the theoretical framework of ecocultural identity, the session highlights the complex and multidimensional positionalities and practices that influence how we feel, think, and act in relation to— or in disconnection from—our more-than-human world.

Drawing on the concept of materialities and visual artefactual methodologies (Ibrahim, 2024), participants will create a personal artefact that represents their subjective worldview. These material practices function as agentic tools, enabling individuals to trace and express their ecocultural trajectories while making visible the ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes that shape their sense of responsibility toward the natural world. Through this process, the workshop positions material culture as a valuable methodology in sustainability research, offering a means to explore the situated and interconnected processes of ecocultural identity construction and subject formation. The creation of artefacts supports deeper, more personal engagement with one's ecocultural identity and reinforces awareness of how nature—whether abundant or scarce—forms an integral part of our being alongside culture.

Building Bridges: Addressing the Challenges of First-Generation Students Through Community in Germany and Beyond

Katharina Coordes, Kiel University Advisor to the Executive Board, Gloria Glogau, ArbeiterKind.de regional volunteer manager

ABSTRACT

The German non-profit organization ArbeiterKind.de has been building a nationwide community of first-generation students since 2008. In this workshop, participants will learn about some of the tools and strategies used by ArbeiterKind.de to build and cultivate Germany's largest community for first-generation students. For example:

- a virtual social network in which first-gen students find a safe space to ask questions concerning all aspects of academic life – even the ones they would not dare to ask in real-world academic settings – and where low-threshold mutual support takes place;
 - recruiting volunteers for workshops in schools and universities to engage students and persons who are interested in studying with non-academic background by telling their own story
 - monthly local group meetings in which members reflect on their shared experience of being a first-generation student; nationwide approximate 80 groups
 - regional volunteer manager supporting volunteers and connecting with universities
 - University partnerships that provide mutual support e.g., providing office space for full-time staff, events made together with different experts from each side.
 - recurring virtual exchange formats (“Community Evenings”) to talk about first-gen topics such as: addressing one’s social background, dealing with impostor syndrome, learning to be proud of personal achievements, living between two worlds (academic vs. non-academic), managing estrangement from parents and family, etc.

Participants will also discuss international perspectives on challenges first-generation students have to face in each country. We will reflect if there are already structures to support first-generation students in some countries/universities and will see if some structures could be an option for other countries.

Volunteers from ArbeiterKind.de will contribute the workshop (in person or via video call) by sharing personal experiences and answering participants’ questions.

- ArbeiterKind.de has received numerous awards, including
- German Diversity Award for Social Mobility (2022)
- German Civic Engagement Award (2009)
- International Ashoka Fellowship for Social Entrepreneurs for the founder Katja Urbatsch (2009)

Maximum participants: 25

Keywords: First-generation students; volunteering, peer support; educational justice; university partnerships;

The University Gallery as a Space of Encounter: Experiencing Participatory Engagement in Practice

Helena Trze Jakelić, University of Split, Vladimir Rismondo, *Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek*

ABSTRACT

This 90-minute interactive workshop explores the university gallery as a space of encounter and participatory engagement between academia and society. The session is designed to combine theoretical insights with experiential learning, using the University Gallery of the University of Split as a case study.

The workshop begins with a brief introduction to participatory models in contemporary cultural institutions, focusing on the role of university galleries in fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and audience development. Participants will then be guided through an experiential segment directly connected to an ongoing exhibition, where they will engage in observation, interpretation, and creative response.

The core of the workshop consists of group activities that encourage participants to reflect on how cultural spaces within universities can generate social value. Through guided discussion and collaborative exercises, participants will explore methods of audience engagement, co-creation, and inclusive programming.

The workshop aims to:

- demonstrate how university galleries can function as platforms for dialogue and knowledge exchange
- provide practical tools for designing participatory cultural programs
- encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between academic, artistic, and public stakeholders

Expected outcomes include a deeper understanding of participatory approaches in cultural institutions, as well as concrete ideas that participants can adapt to their own institutional contexts.

Target audience: academics, cultural professionals, students, researchers, and policy-makers interested in university–society engagement

Maximum number of participants: 20–25