



Solidarity Service- Learning in Higher Education

Volume 1

María Nieves Tapia (coord.)

Alba González

Andrés Peregalli

Alejandra Batista

Uniservitate Collection

Director: María Nieves Tapia

Coordination of *Uniservitate* Program: María Rosa Tapia

Editorial Coordination: Jorge A. Blanco

Design of the Collection: Adrián Goldfrid

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Coordinator of this volume: María Nieves Tapia

Co-authors: Alba González, Alejandra Batista and Andrés Peregalli.

Translation and editing of texts in English: Alejandra Linares

Design of this volume: Eugenia Rodríguez and María Ana Tapia Sasot

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ABOUT US

Uniservitate

Uniservitate is a global programme for the promotion of service-learning (SL) in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs). It is an initiative of Porticus and is coordinated by the Latin American Center for Service-Learning (CLAYSS).

The programme's objective is to generate a systemic change through the institutionalisation of service-learning as a tool for higher education institutions to fulfil their mission of offering a comprehensive education to new generations and involving them in an active commitment to the problems of our time.

Porticus

Porticus coordinates and develops the philanthropic endeavours of the Brenninkmeijer family, whose social engagement stretching back as far as 1841, when Clemens and August Brenninkmeijer founded the C&A company, starting a tradition of doing good while doing business.

Several businesses, charitable foundations and philanthropic programmes joined Porticus and expanded through numerous family initiatives.

Since its foundation in 1995, Porticus has grown to become one of the most committed institutions working to address the challenges of our time, to improve the lives of those most in need and to create a sustainable future where justice and human dignity flourish.

Porticus has two goals which guide their way it works: to listen and learn from the people they seek to serve, and to act on evidence that demonstrates what Works.

CLAYSS

The Latin American Center for Service-Learning—CLAYSS—is a leading organisation for the promotion of service-learning in Latin America, and a worldwide reference. It promotes the development of service-learning in both formal and non-formal education, and provides advice to policy makers, NGO leaders, communities, educators and students.

***Uniservitate* Collection**

The *Uniservitate* collection is an editorial project of CLAYSS (Latin American Center for Service-Learning) in collaboration with Porticus. It is aimed at Catholic Higher Education professors and authorities, other educational institutions, specialists in Service-Learning, ecclesiastical leaders, as well as the general public interested in education and social change.

With the contribution and collaboration of outstanding international scholars and specialists, the objective is to offer contributions from different regions and to share multicultural perspectives on topics of interest related to spirituality and the pedagogy of Service-learning in the world.

Each digital book is published in English, Spanish and French, and can be downloaded free of charge from the *Uniservitate* website: <https://www.uniservitate.org/publications/>

HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER OF UNISERVITATE?

The **Uniservitate global network** calls on Catholic, or Catholic-inspired, Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs) to become members of its global network and access training resources, global and regional activities, research scholarships, awards and other benefits linked to solidarity service-learning.

An initiative of Porticus, coordinated globally by the Latin American Center for Service-Learning (CLAYSS), *Uniservitate* aims to generate a systemic change in Catholic Higher Education Institutions through the institutionalization of Solidarity Service-Learning (SSL) as a tool to fulfill their mission of a holistic education, to foster agents for social change who critically engage for a better society according to the social teaching of the Church.

We understand networking as a strategy for systemic change. The encounter between educators and students who develop service-learning projects strengthens their practices. The encounter between institutions that promote, implement and systematize it produces stronger institutions. And the exchange between them, at a local and global level, impacts public policy and systems. This critical mass generates and sustains systemic change.

The **Uniservitate global network** is present on all five continents through seven regional hubs that support more than thirty universities that, during the first stage of the programme (2020 to present), were included as supported institutions—a condition that implies technical and academic assistance and financial support.

The new **Memberships** project adds to this structure to expand the scope of the programme. It does not imply any cost for the institutions, lasts one year—at the end of which its renewal can be requested—and includes benefits and services such as the following:

- **Belonging to a global network and learning community of SSL practitioners and researchers**
- **Access to online training resources**
 - » Self-managed courses on SSL: basic concepts and steps to develop SSL projects (5 users for the online training platform).
 - » Digital resources developed by the Uniservitate Community Members in different formats and languages.
 - » Online self-assessment tools to identify the SSL institutionalization level achieved.

- **Participation in the call for *Small Research Grants (2025)*:** Through its regional hubs and the intervention of a scientific committee, *Uniservitate* grants small research 2 funds for projects on specific service-learning topics. Service-learning can make a specific pedagogical contribution to Catholic universities, helping them integrate their social reach and spiritual identity with academic activities, offering innovative ways to achieve an education that unites “hands, head and heart,” as demonstrated by research and experiences developed by Catholic Higher Education Institutions.
- **Participation in the *Uniservitate Award (2026)*.** Global recognition for the best “Solidarity Service-Learning Experiences (SSL) in Catholic Higher Education”. It is awarded by regions to initiatives that demonstrate effective contributions to the solution of socio-environmental problems, identified and addressed with organizations and community members; with active participation of students and a clear connection between service and educational planning.
- **Preferred registration to *Global Uniservitate Symposia*.** (25th November, online): Limited space available for participation in the activities.
- **Exclusive Global and Regional Meetings**
- **Meetings among CHEI Authorities and Community Engagement Leaders.**
- **Twin projects:** bi & multilateral joint SSL initiatives with colleagues from all around the world to share experiences and resources.
- **Bi-monthly newsletter.**
- **Possibility of applying to become an “accompanied institution” by *Uniservitate*.**

How can you be a member of *Uniservitate*?

To apply for the Membership project, the interested institution must complete **a form** ([template here](#)) with basic data and information about its experience or interest in solidarity service-learning and send a **formal letter of commitment signed by the Rector or the designated authority**.

Each application must also have the formal acceptance of the institutions of the corresponding region that, as regional hubs, are already members of *Uniservitate*.

Once accepted as members, institutions will only be asked to:

- Include the “*Uniservitate* Member” logo on the institution’s website, linked to the *Uniservitate* website.

- At the end of the year, fill out a form that outlines the activities you have developed as part of the *Uniservitate* Membership programme and their impact on the institutionalization of service-learning.

Applications for membership open four times a year, in April, June, September and November.

For more information, please contact memberships@uniservitate.org

THIS HANDBOOK

The *Uniservitate* Collection, launched in 2021, has so far had two main editorial lines: *Keys*, which includes four volumes on pedagogy, spirituality, institutionalization and the history of service-learning; and *Proceedings*, which compiles the presentations from the *Uniservitate* Global Symposia held since 2020.

These works include voices and perspectives from different continents, cultural and institutional contexts, presenting a global and “polyhedral” image, a term Pope Francis used when referring to possible models of globalization:

“Here our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness.” (Evangelii Gaudium, 36)

In this volume, we present a new version, a “Handbook” that aims to bring together the global experience of service-learning since the late 19th Century, and especially the experience developed over the last five years by the global and polyhedral community of *Uniservitate*.

Like the entire collection, this work is aimed at professors and authorities in Catholic Higher Education, other educational institutions, specialists in service-learning, leaders of the ecclesial world, alongside the general public interested in education and social change.

However, this Handbook was designed primarily for those who are already implementing solidarity service-learning projects (SSL) and those who are starting or planning to do so. It aims to provide concrete suggestions on how to develop and plan projects, key points to revise experiences already implemented or are currently underway, and numerous concrete examples of best practices worldwide.

This is the first volume of the Handbook, which we hope will soon be followed by a second one dedicated to the spiritual dimension of service-learning initiatives and the processes of SSL institutionalization in Higher Education, which will complete the definitive Handbook.

This first volume is presented, to some extent, as a “beta version” to enable analysis and contributions from those who are currently developing SSL projects and who can enrich the final edition of the Handbook with their reflections, experiences, and bibliographic and

audiovisual resources. We hope those readers who feel called upon to contribute will do so by contacting us at uniservitate@clayss.org.ar with the subject “*Uniservitate Handbook*”.

I would like to specifically thank all the faculty members and students who were protagonists in the experiences presented in this book, which were largely drawn from the “*Uniservitate Award*” and the many regional and global meetings in recent years. In a world where war, polarization, and confrontational trolls seem to have the upper hand, every act of solidarity is a glimmer of hope that not all is lost and that it is always possible to build and rebuild a more sustainable and fraternal world.

1. THE SOCIAL MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: FROM THE “IVORY TOWER” TO THE “THIRD MISSION” AND THE ENGAGED 21ST CENTURY UNIVERSITY¹

“To some universities, academic excellence is their primary goal. We consider community service our purpose in life and academic excellence the best tool to achieve it.”

Faculty members and students from the Medical School of the National University of Tucumán, Argentina (PNES, 2006:11)

1. The Origins of Higher Education and the “Ivory Tower” Model

1.1. The Social Mission of Higher Education in its Origins

From the intercultural and global perspective inherent in *Uniservitate*, it is important to assume that the first medieval universities were heirs of ancient heterogeneous traditions, both in the East and the West, in connection to the different views on the social mission of higher education (Tapia, 2023).

This old identification between higher education and the creation of a class of active leaders is still deeply rooted, in many ways, in the collective vision of contemporary universities. The age-old tension between service for the common good and the pursuit of individual advancement continues to permeate university education and debates about the social mission of higher education.

The aim in all cases was to train both the leaders of their states as well as qualified professionals to serve in the administration of their respective territories. It thus aimed at a very specific social and political mission—the preparation of State leadership and bureaucracy—and was linked to the capacity to manage public affairs. The

idea of the search for the common good was closely connected to the obvious individual interest and the economic and political power of those who managed to gain access to positions which were, by definition, for the elite.

¹ This chapter presents a summary of Chapter 2 of Giorgetti (comp.) (2023). Towards a global history of service learning. Buenos Aires, CLAYSS, Uniservitate Collection, 5. <https://www.uniservitate.org/es/2024/03/12/hacia-una-historia-mundial-del-aprendizaje-servicio/> All links were accessed on 7 October 2025

This old identification between higher education and the creation of a class of active leaders is still deeply rooted, in many ways, in the collective vision of contemporary universities. The age-old tension between service for the common good and the pursuit of individual advancement continues to permeate university education and debates about the social mission of higher education.

In addition, it is interesting to highlight that in ancient times—with the exception of some of the Greek and Hellenistic institutions—higher education was closely linked to a specific religious creed, first at the service of priest-kings and, later on, serving various imperial religions. Religion also took centre stage in the early medieval universities: Christian theology and scholasticism in the first European universities and the study of Islamic law in Muslim institutions. Architectural identity between temples and universities was widespread and is still present today both in Cambridge and Oxford Gothic chapels and in Al-Qarawiyyin and Al-Azhar mosques. Even in contemporary public universities, such as the National University of Malaysia (founded in 1970), the mosque occupies a central place on its campus, as do the chapels on the more modern campuses of many Catholic universities. In line with this, the “ivory tower” image—now associated with a higher education isolated from society and with a poor social mission—echoes the medieval tradition, in which the towers and belfries of ecclesiastical buildings were characteristic of the first European universities.

The metaphor of the “ivory tower” remains a commonplace in contemporary imagination; it is part of the image that modern university developed of itself, and its inertia has largely prevailed to this day.

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has largely prevailed to this day.

The first medieval universities in Europe, which were founded in the monastic tradition, established—for students—very clear boundaries that separated the academic community from the cities or villages where the cloister was located, and remained strictly a minority privilege, almost a rarity, even among the dominant sectors.

By the 15th century in Europe, Renaissance humanism, the Enlightenment, and—later on—encyclopaedism and positivism, confronted medieval universities and the ecclesiastical influence on them. They strengthened the autonomy of sciences and laid the foundations of the modern university between the 18th and 19th centuries, including sectors of the bourgeoisie in the cloisters.

The Napoleonic and Humboldtian University models of the 19th century assigned research and academic production a central role in the identity of the modern university, and generated curricula and teaching and management models that—to a greater or lesser degree—endured throughout the 20th century and even continue to the present day (Casanova Cardiel, 2015; Horn, 2012).

Paradoxically, the belief held by the Enlightenment and by positivism about science as objective, “pure” and “neutral”, largely followed the logic of the “ivory tower”, since it focused on the preservation of academic life from the “contamination” caused by outside interests and needs. In fact, the new university models in the modern age still keep great part of the language and models of the medieval “ivory tower”. Although some of the large urban universities of the late 19th century abandoned the medieval “campus” or “closed cloister” model, dispersing their buildings and schools in various premises or locations, the boundaries between the “inside” and the “outside” of the institution remained clearly defined. Within that framework, if the social mission of the university was proposed, it focused on offering the “permanent advance of knowledge” as a result of research, provided the desired objectivity and neutrality of science was guaranteed.

In the transition from the medieval university to the modern and contemporary university, Catholic educational institutions were often in tension due to the conflicts of the period between hierarchical authorities of the Church and the scientific community. The clash between faith and science occurred at both the personal and institutional levels, generating, on the one hand, valuable reflections and personal and community experiences, and on the other, conflicts and resentments which, in some cases, are still present today.

At the same time, it is only fair to highlight that, from the 15th century onwards, the modern age was rich in great charisms which gave rise to universities and other educational institutions, such as those of Saint Francis, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Dominic, as well as the great charisms centred on education, such as those of Saint Joseph of Calasanz, Saint Angela Merici, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Saint Marcelino Champagnat, Saint Louise de Marillac, Saint John Bosco, Saint Mary Mazzarello and others whose works continue bearing fruit for education, evangelisation and the transformation of the world (Edu-CLAR Commission, 2015).

The independence of the USA and the emancipation movements of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the rest of the American continent took place almost at the same time as the emergence of the Napoleonic and Humboldtian University models in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century.

This “ivory tower” model was also imposed in Asia and Africa during the colonial expansion of the great European empires of the 19th century. Its epistemological paradigm established strict boundaries between academic knowledge—considered exclusive patrimony of “white” people and universities founded by imperial powers—and the native knowledge of the conquered cultures.

The new independent states, both in North America and in Latin America, sought to establish their own higher education systems and, during that process, they integrated—to a greater or lesser extent—the institutions which had already been established during the colonial period with the new public universities. In most

cases, secular state education systems were created, aimed at training the new leading classes for the new states.

In Latin America, revolutionary processes temporarily broke the logic of the “ivory tower”. Many of the colonial universities in Spanish America were active centres for political and social mobilisation, diffusion of the bibliography prohibited by the Crown and promotion of anti-absolutist political thought.

Once independence wars were over, during the establishment of new states in the second half of the 19th century, there was a tendency in almost all Latin American countries to imitate European universities, which were torn between professional or teaching-based and research-based models. The “ivory tower” changed its ideological stance and political allegiances in many cases, but remained the dominant model both in the American continent and in Europe until almost the end of the 19th century.

This “ivory tower” model was also imposed in Asia and Africa during the colonial expansion of the great European empires of the 19th century. Its epistemological paradigm established strict boundaries between academic knowledge—considered exclusive patrimony of “white” people and universities founded by imperial powers—and the native knowledge of the conquered cultures. Even proven, long-standing knowledge such as that acquired from Chinese medicine or from the scientific advances of Muslim universities was either under suspicion or disregarded, and religious beliefs and ancient traditions from both continents were usually dismissed as “superstitions” or “barbarism”. The establishment of colonial universities in Asia and Africa aimed at “civilising” those regions or, in other words, at imposing cultural and institutional models from the mother countries, and—in that sense—their “social mission” was very clear. The missionary spirit of many Christian universities in Africa and Asia usually led them to copy this imperial model.

The inertia of the “ivory tower” model, which arose in the Middle Ages, is usually present in the strongest resistance to the social mission of higher education.

Higher education systems which were established following the European model were part of the system of domination, and because of that, they are

now strongly criticised by knowledge decolonisation movements and higher education stakeholders, especially in Africa (Mbembe, 2016; Bhambra et al., 2018; Nyamnjoh, 2019).

1.2. The “Ivory Tower” and its Inertias

Well into the 20th century, and even today, the inertia of the “ivory tower” model, which arose in the Middle Ages, is usually present in the strongest resistance to the social mission of higher education and to any issues related to the involvement of universities in collaborating with the solution of social problems. This faith in the university as an “intellectual sanctuary” and the Enlightenment-based belief in the uninterrupted progress of science, advancing thanks to its own drive in the search for new knowledge, lie at the root of a model which tends towards hyperspecialisation, field fragmentation and a strict division between the academic world and its social context (Herrero, 2002), and whose inertia was present during great part of the 20th century.

“University knowledge (...) was predominantly disciplinary throughout the 20th century and its autonomy imposed a production process which was relatively decontextualised in connection to the everyday needs of societies. According to this view, it is researchers who decide on the scientific problems to be dealt with and establish relevance, research methodologies and pace.” (De Sousa Santos, 2010:25)

This model tends to introduce a logic in which the primary recipients of scientific production are the members of the academic community itself, and it may not matter whether or not its results are relevant to society as a whole.

Well into the 21st century, the tendency to treat the scientific method as just another individual opinion (as seen in the avalanche of “fake news”) calls for a review of the priority that universities give to dissemination, as well as a strong reconsideration of how dissemination can effectively take place in the world of social networks and instant communication.

The gap between “scientific knowledge” and “common knowledge” has expanded since the beginning of the 20th century, and the increasing difficulty of the scientific community to communicate in terms under-

standable to the majority of the population significantly affected the social impact of higher education. Well into the 21st century, the tendency to treat the scientific method as just another individual opinion (as seen in the avalanche of "fake news") calls for a review of the priority that universities give to dissemination, as well as a strong reconsideration of how dissemination can effectively take place in the world of social networks and instant communication.

Until the second half of the 20th century, educating university students to participate in social and civilian life was not considered to be part of the academic mission.

In the same way as the ivory tower model sought to keep research and scientific knowledge away from "the common people", teaching also tended to be self-referential. The teaching role in

this model entails spreading the knowledge generated by the scientific community; the learning space is the classroom, the laboratory or the library; the "outside" world is—at most—the setting for some practice at the end of the degree course and, even today, many of those experiences take place in areas within the institution: the teaching hospital, the experimental farm, the classroom-workshop. The "know-how" was slowly incorporated with laboratory practices implemented in some subjects or in pre-professional practices before the end of some courses of study. What is known today as "soft skills" and "emotional intelligence" (Goleman, 2000) was definitely not included in the curricula in this model.

As a result, until the second half of the 20th century, educating university students to participate in social and civilian life was not considered to be part of the academic mission and there was a tendency to suppress or barely tolerate students' autonomous mobilisation and organisation. Nevertheless, social activities or campaigns related to the most relevant issues of the time were occasionally organised in many higher education institutions (HEIs). Even the most significant activities were, however, "extra-curricular" activities and they were definitely not considered part of the central mission of higher education.

To sum up, as part of the inertia of medieval and modern models which the "ivory tower" has left in the contemporary life of many HEIs, it is possible to include the following:

- Learning processes planned primarily or exclusively in connection to the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, with discursive methodological approaches centred on the educator, and limited and non-contextualised forms of experimentation.

- Study programmes emphasising the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge over the multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary integration of knowledge.
- Little room for the contextualised development of the competences necessary for professional practice.
- Lack of hierarchical bodies at institutional level specialised in the promotion of the social mission of the university, and no appreciation of the social relevance of teaching and research activities.

Meanwhile, as opposed to positivism, Catholic higher education institutions (CHEIs) emphasised the declared objective of “integral education”, including the dimension of religious education.

The concept of “extension” challenged the “ivory tower” model as it incorporated the attention to specific social demands into the university mission. In addition, the very term “extension” somehow reveals the inertia of the previous model, expressing the symbolic line between the academic community and the world “beyond university walls”, to which the university was required to “project” or “extend itself.”

In parallel, these institutions have been challenged by cultural contexts which, especially in higher education, tend to relegate personal development in general and religious experience in particular to the private sphere, and to understand scientific autonomy as an incompatibility or, at least, an estrangement between faith and science. As part of

these processes of “mimicry” of hegemonic models by CHEIs, especially from the 19th century onwards, many Catholic universities adopted—in effect—models of isolation from their contexts, typical of the “ivory tower”.

Gradually, in many CHEIs, aspects related to students’ personal and faith education, including their dimension of service to brothers and sisters, were increasingly pushed into the background or excluded from the faculty’s main objectives, or restricted to courses on theology, Christian education or Campus Ministry activities, following the mission fragmentation model discussed below. Especially after the Second Vatican Council, the “ivory tower” model turns out to be increasingly inappropriate, not just for having become obsolete, but also for being inadequate for the identity and mission of a Catholic institution in our contemporary world, as Pope Francis has repeatedly warned (Bergoglio, 2013; EG, 20).

2. The Origins of University Extension and the “Three Missions” Model

As mentioned above, by the end of the 19th century the growing gap between the scientific knowledge developed in universities and the general knowledge of “the common people” was already evident. At the same time, this period saw the strengthening of new social and political movements fighting for the rights of workers, women and the marginalised populations, including specifically the right to have access to education. Together with these popular movements, the search for the expansion of higher education by the emerging middle classes made it necessary to revise the elitist models of university and to consider mechanisms for the inclusion of new social groups. In this scenario, there arose what is known as “the extension movement”.

The concept of “extension” challenged the “ivory tower” model as it incorporated the attention to specific social demands into the university mission. In addition, the very term “extension” somehow reveals the inertia of the previous model, expressing the symbolic line between the academic community and the world “beyond university walls”, to which the university was required to “project” or “extend itself”. Even today, the expression “to

The British University of Cambridge is considered to be the first university to have promoted, since 1867, what is known as “extension” activities, i.e., science dissemination activities.

build bridges towards the community”, frequently used by faculty and authorities, expresses the prevalence of the university’s perception of itself as an island isolated from the rest of society.

Extension has acquired various forms in Europe and the Americas. It is part of the origins of many contemporary experiences related to university social engagement and it is present in the current view on the “social mission”. It is also the framework within which some of the first documented experiences of service-learning, in its strict sense, are established.

2.1. The First Extension Models

The European Model

The British University of Cambridge is considered to be the first university to have promoted, since 1867, what is known as “extension” activities, i.e., science dissemination activities, in general through conferences open to non-academic audiences (Labrandero-Santander, 1983), which soon spread to other European countries. The term “extension” encompassed two major issues simultaneously in this period: on the one hand, the responsibility to spread academic knowledge among the social groups who had no access to university; on the other hand, it expressed a social demand for wider access

to higher education. These two important issues dealt with by the first extension movement—science dissemination and social inclusion—are still considered to be a key part of contemporary higher education life and debates.

The American Model

In 1862, during the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln passed the first Morrill Act, which provided that over six million hectares of territories conquered from indigenous populations were to be donated to the states which belonged to the Union at the time, in order for the proceeds of their sale to be spent on the establishment and funding of at least one HEI per state, which—without excluding classical studies—would focus on agriculture and engineering and include the study of military tactics. The institutions founded pursuant to this law and other similar laws are called “land-grant institutions”.

In 1890, the second Morrill Act extended this policy to the states that had been part of the Southern Confederacy and stipulated that the new institutions funded under that law had to admit the African-American population or establish institutions exclusively for them. The system was completed with the enactment of the Hatch Act (1887), which subsidised agricultural experiment stations, and it was further institutionalised as an “extension system” by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which delegated to extension units the education of community members on developments in areas such as agriculture, public policy, economic development and home economics through the creation of university-sponsored local centres (Furco, 2022:346-347).

The term “extension” takes on a different meaning in the American context from that attributed in its British origins. “Extension” or social mission is not born here from the initiatives of faculty or individual institutions, but is instituted by the federal government and constitutes a public policy aimed at promoting agricultural production as well as safety and better living standards for the settlers established on the lands recently conquered from Native Americans.

As a belated concession to the indigenous peoples whose lands had financed the system, in 1994 funds were granted for the promotion of their higher education, thus incorporating these tribal colleges into the system of land-grant institutions (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008; Peters, 2017:71).

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tives of faculty or individual institutions, but is instituted by the federal government and constitutes a public policy aimed at promoting agricultural production as well as safety and better living standards for the settlers established on the lands recently conquered from Native Americans.

As in the European case, the programmes aimed to include new populations in higher education and to disseminate knowledge outside campuses, but in the American model the emphasis is placed on training for rural production: research and experimentation are closely related to production needs of the context rather than to an exclusively disciplinary logic.

In this analysis of the social mission of higher education, we consider the model of land-grant institutions to be highly significant for several reasons.

Firstly, this model—primarily based on addressing the needs of a specific territory and on “know-how”—clearly broke away from the “ivory tower” and the classical Anglo-Saxon liberal education. From that viewpoint, it can be considered one of the first institutional models of “engaged university” and one of the most direct antecedents of American service-learning (Titlebaum, *et al.*, 2004). Secondly, if past debates are left behind, it is hard to ignore today the strength of the engagement tradition that a large number of universities grouped in the land-grant system have sustained with their environment, as well as their significant results (Brunner, 2016; Stephenson, 2011, Jouannet and Arocha, 2022:345-352). Thirdly, in the various ways of implementing this particular kind of extension, we can already see the tension that is still present in many institutions between two forms of linking with the environment: on the one hand, between a unilateral transfer of knowledge from the university to the community, and on the other, the exchange of knowledge with the community of reference and the reciprocity of learning (Peters, 2017:72-73). Fourthly, the “extension system” established from 1914 onwards is an early expression of the institutionalisation of extension as a specific area of university organisation, which together with the Latin American experience, helped to shape a new model of higher education: that of “the three missions” or the “three pillars”, considering the social one as the “third mission” (see 2.2 below). Finally, the aforementioned emphasis on “know-how” that took place in this institutional model is a direct antecedent of the emergence of pedagogies centred on “learning by doing” and “project-based learning”, which will give theoretical and methodological support to the pedagogy of service-learning and to so many other influential innovations in the present.

In the first half of the 20th century, together with land-grant institutions and the initiatives about education based on the experiences of Dewey and his followers (Dewey, 1916; 1938; 1960), other forms of extension were also developed, closer to the European expe-

rience of science dissemination, especially in the oldest universities on the East Coast, alongside other experiences which may be considered direct antecedents of the service-learning pedagogy in the USA, such as the initiatives undertaken by the higher education institutions of the Appalachian region known as “Folk Schools”, which offer rural populations two-year or four-year courses integrating disciplinary learning, work and community service activities.²

The Latin American Model

At the end of the 19th century, the new Latin American public universities either took over the old colonial universities or were created following organisational models and curricula of the European ones. In either case, at the beginning of the following century, there was a clear discordance between the social expectations that universities should contribute to the progress of the new states, and the detachment of the “ivory tower” model from its contexts; additionally, a tension arose between the demand for access to higher education and the persistence of elitist models. This conflict led to the emergence of a regional movement which sought the democratisation of the university system and the “extension of knowledge, actions and services towards popular sectors as one of the fundamental missions” of higher education (Gezmet, 2015:4).

Today, extension can be acknowledged as the hallmark of the Latin American university.

In the early 20th century, three key events took place in the history of the social engagement of Latin American

higher education: the creation of the first formal “extension” body in the organisation of a university in this region³; the beginning of the “University Reform Movement” in March of 1918 (Portantiero, 1978), which spread from Córdoba, Argentina, to the rest of Latin America with the belief that extension and social engagement represented a core mission of the university (Bustelo, 2018; Martínez Larrechea and Chiancone, 2018); and the emergence at the National University of Mexico of the first instances of “Social Service”, which implied a process of institutionalisation of the university’s social mission and a greater professionalisation of extension activities (González, 2023). The mandatory requirement for students to complete service hours not only shaped the social engagement of Mexican higher education, but it also influenced the establishment of similar requirements in many other Latin American countries (Tapia, 2023, p. 28).

² <https://collections.library.appstate.edu/research-aids/appalachian-folk-schools-and-their-scandinavian-precedents>

³ On 19 September, 1905, the Law for the nationalisation of the—until then—Provincial University of La Plata (Argentina) was passed. The structure approved for the new university formally included, for the first time, a department for “extension”, which included among its characteristics the “reciprocal teaching or instruction between professors and students of the university” (González, 1909).

In this scenario, there was a significant increase in student-led projects linked to curricular content and competences specific to the professional profile—i.e. actual service-learning projects—as well as programmes of situated research and participatory research linked to extension projects. Today, extension can be acknowledged as the hallmark of the Latin American university.

2.2. The Institutional Model of the “Three Pillars” or “Third Mission”

As we have seen, the emergence of university extension and its growing dissemination in different parts of the world marks a point of departure from the model of higher education as an “ivory tower” isolated from its environment, which had developed in medieval

Between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, a new institutional paradigm emerged for higher education, which added a “third mission” or “third pillar” to the research and teaching missions: that of extension or social mission.

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This model, more than a century old in the Americas, spread throughout the 20th century; however, it took time to be adopted in some regions, such as those that made up the Soviet bloc, and some countries in Africa and the Middle East. Even in Western Europe, the idea of a “third mission” is sometimes presented as a novelty, or it is associated to the much more recent concept of “University Social Responsibility”.⁴

The metaphor of the “three pillars” is representative of the idea of different missions developing in parallel, generating a fragmented institutional model (see Figure 1).

⁴ <https://www.mappingsansiro.polimi.it/4-ricerca/4-3-terza-missione/>

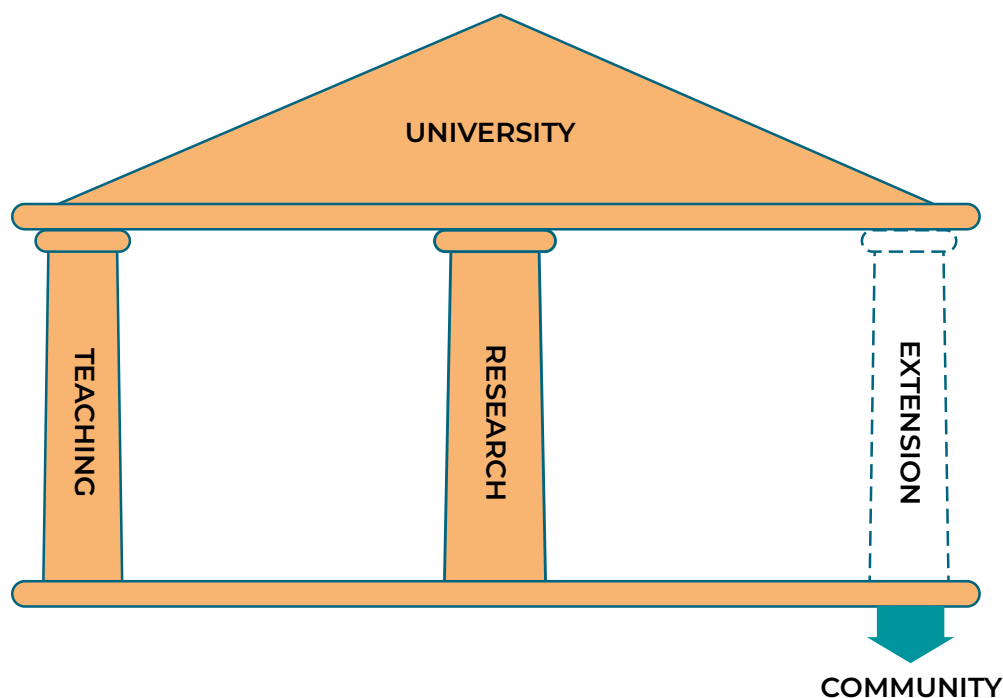


FIGURE 1: The University and the Institutional Model of Social Mission as “Third Pillar”

In this new paradigm of higher education, the extension “pillar” seems to be the only one that clearly breaks with the logic of the “ivory tower” and—intentionally—seeks to be at the service of the outside world.

In this new paradigm of higher education, the extension “pillar” seems to be the only one that clearly breaks with the logic of the “ivory tower” and—intentionally—seeks to be at the service of the outside world. This “bridge-building” of extension towards a community that is generally seen as a recipient or beneficiary rather than a partner or ally was originally developed in parallel to teaching and research. Due to the strong inertia bequeathed by the “ivory tower” model, this fragmentation is still evident in many institutions today: the traditional focus on teaching and research has tended to push the social mission to the margins of the university’s daily life. Even today, faculty evaluation and promotion is still tied, as a rule, almost exclusively to scientific research and publication, while dissemination and social engagement activities—although they may receive some symbolic recognition—are acknowledged in only few institutions as part of the career evaluation process or with economic incentives.

It is important to recognise that the disparagement of the extension movement by many academics was based, in numerous cases, on the fact that a large part of the social activities undertaken by extension involved a high proportion of voluntarism and political orientation, but were not normally accompanied by rigorous research on the issues

The opposition between academic rigour and social engagement has been revealed over the years as one of the many false antinomies that divide university life. Since its inception, the extension movement has offered opportunities for research and teaching with social relevance, and has generated synergies that contribute to both academic excellence and impact on the territory.

addressed or by systematic teaching activities. In general, the initiatives developed outside the university were not formally linked to the curricular contents or the students' specific graduate profiles, even in those cases in which, in fact, they represented valuable practices and potential spaces for learning.

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Among the negative effects inherited by this model—and still very much present in contemporary higher education—we could cite:

- The tendency towards disconnection between the areas of governance devoted to teaching, research and extension.
- The insufficient appraisal, at the institutional level, of extension and volunteering activities in their potential as a space for the application and development of knowledge.
- The low priority given in institutional and career evaluation processes to the relevance or social significance of teaching and research activities.
- The dissociation between student volunteering activities and curricular content or professional training.

The fragmentation of missions and the disconnection between those who lead the different "pillars" can be found also in CHEIs, where the inertia of the "pillar" model can lead not only to the separation of the social mission from teaching and research, but also to the isolation of the evangelising mission as a fourth pillar alongside the other three.

The fragmentation of missions, which in non-confessional universities is manifested in the lack of coordination among faculty, researchers and extension advocates, in CHEIs can be detected in the disconnection between the faculty who teach "religious" or "identity" subjects (Theology, Catechesis, Social Doctrine, Ethics, among others) and the lecturers who teach the

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rest of the subjects; in the lack of coordination between those who are in charge of the spiritual follow-up of the students (chaplains, pastoral animators, etc.) and those who are in charge of their academic education; between those who organise social action projects from their subjects or areas and those who develop them from the areas specifically oriented towards religious education or pastoral animation, among others. This lack of coordination tends to dissipate energy in a multitude of initiatives, which are often not very visible institutionally and depend almost exclusively on the good will of the protagonists for their sustainability.

Papal messages, efforts of the Congregation for Catholic Education—the present Dicastery of Culture and Education—, AVEPRO and so many ecclesiastical organisations and programmes, including *Uniservitate*, aim to overcome institutional fragmentation and incoherence in order to build a Catholic higher education that evangelises both through discourse as well as through the coherent testimony of its institutional life as a whole. In this framework, service-learning projects hold the potential to coordinate in a single project not only social action, learning and research, but also spaces for reflection open to a spiritual dimension (Isola and Gherlone, 2022). Thus, they can contribute to a genuinely integral education and also encourage the dialogue between science and faith, the integration of missions and the coordination of coherent institutional policies.

2.3. Youth Leadership, Pedagogical Innovation, Inertia, and New Challenges for the Social Mission of Higher Education

In the second half of the 20th century, particularly from the 1960s onwards, profound changes of social, political, cultural, and educational nature took place worldwide. These changes had their own peculiar signs and features in every region of the planet, and some

of them had a very direct impact on higher education. One of the most significant social issues of this period is the emergence of youth as a social collective and protagonist in new social and political movements. The importance of youth as a new social actor was acknowledged by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), one of the most characteristic movements of religious renewal of this period, which ended with a "Message to the Youth", valuing young people "with confidence and love" as builders of the present and the future.⁵

Various movements of pedagogical renewal reflect the dynamics of this period and are presented as necessary innovations for higher education. It is no coincidence that, in this context, the term "service-learning" was coined in 1966-1967, precisely at a university in the Southern United States, influenced by the civil rights movements and the quest for the opening of segregated universities (Ramsay, 2017).

New pedagogical and epistemological perspectives aimed at questioning and renewing traditional institutional models of higher education, generating innovative experiences and projects, and developing new and more relevant and pertinent teaching and research strategies for the settings. Against this background, since the late 1960s, the proposal of service-learning began to spread in the United States and worldwide.

Closely linked to the emergence and foundations of this proposal, it is important to mention Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire and the popular education and critical pedagogy movements inspired by him, the diffusion of the "action research" model put forward by Kurt Lewin (1946), which was taken up by Fals Borda in Latin America under the label "participatory action research" (PAR) (Fals Borda, 1973; 1978), the socio-cultural approach of

Vigotsky and his disciples, who promote "situated cognition" and "experiential and situated learning" (Díaz Barriga, 2003).

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Various didactic proposals are also disseminated that question the traditional lecture, and propose replacing or enriching master classes with alternative methodologies such as case studies, problem-based learning,

5 http://www.vatican.va/gmg/documents/gmg-2002_ii-vat-council_message-youth_19651207_sp.html

project-based learning and others. The progressive introduction of these approaches, more focused on the individuals who learned, and more interested in connecting theory with practice, slowly begin to pave the way for new ways of teaching, including service-learning, which could be regarded as a learning format grounded on community-situated projects or on problems diagnosed with the community in order to attempt to solve them together.

The growing development of internship systems opens, in some cases, opportunities for student involvement in community and civil society organisations, which allows students to use their knowledge to solve a wide array of social and environmental issues, and creates new alternatives for pre-professional practices situated in social contexts—service-learning experiences in action.

While these innovations make inroads, in many cases the inertia of the institutional models of the first half of the 19th century keeps determining the continuity of traditional teaching and research models which—even when challenged by new trends—are still dominant in a large number of universities. Although in this period the “three-mission” model of higher education was still new in some regions of the world, in others—like the

University extension expands, becomes more complex, and, in some cases, this term disappears from the university's vocabulary and begins to be expressed through other concepts, like “engagement”, “relationship with the environment”, “university social responsibility” (USR), and others.

Americas—it gradually became established as the hegemonic institutional model, keeping the missions as parallel and fragmented pillars.

The last decades of the 20th century witness other cultural, social and political changes, such as the massive irruption of new information and communication technologies, which have a decisive impact on the field of higher education and become indispensable tools for communication, scientific research and academic exchange. All regions of the world are witnessing increases in enrolment, the growing internationalisation of higher education, and the globalisation of rankings as a key factor in determining institutional prestige; there are also significant changes in the way the social mission of higher education is conceived.

University extension expands, becomes more complex, and, in some cases, this term disappears from the university's vocabulary and begins to be expressed through other concepts, like “engagement”, “relationship with the environment”, “university social

responsibility" (USR), and others. As occurs in other fields, when it comes to the languages of the university social mission, linguistic variations express institutional histories, cultural traditions, and different ideological positions. In the global vocabulary of the social mission throughout the 20th century, older terms were accumulated and juxtaposed with others coined more recently, concepts with very precise meanings with others that allow for various interpretations.

This multiplication evokes the ancient biblical tale of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:6), according to which those who were united by the same language stopped understanding each other. It could be argued that, particularly since the late 20th century, the Babel of languages regarding the social mission of university has given rise to heated debates among specialists who, nonetheless, share the same social fervours and keep encouraging very similar programmes that have an impact on reality (Tapia, 2023:80-88).

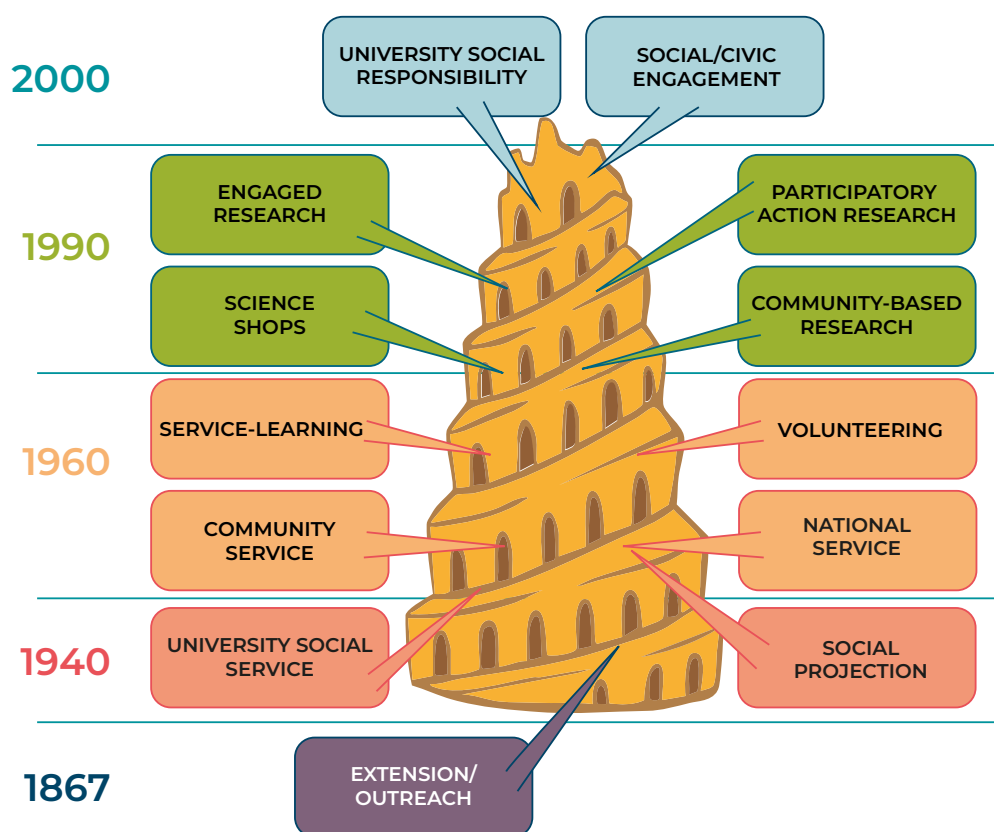


FIGURE 2: The "Babel Tower" of engagement languages (Tapia, 2023:62)

During this period, the proposal of service-learning and other forms of coordination between academic life and the social mission led to a progressive differentiation between the more traditional forms of extension, defined in parallel to teaching and research, and those that intentionally sought to coordinate extension with academic life and which were the forerunners of current trends towards the integration of missions.

3. The Social Mission of Higher Education in the 21st Century

3.1. Coordination of Missions

Since the end of the 20th century and up to the present, several authors and institutions have struggled to “bring order to the Tower of Babel” around the multiple and diverse terminologies regarding the university’s social engagement. At the same time, given the major global challenges that increasingly require interdisciplinary work and networking, new forms of synergy between the “three missions” have been proposed, building better coordinated institutional policies.

Figure 3 shows the reflection that has been taking place in these first two decades of the 21st century on this new model of “engaged university”.

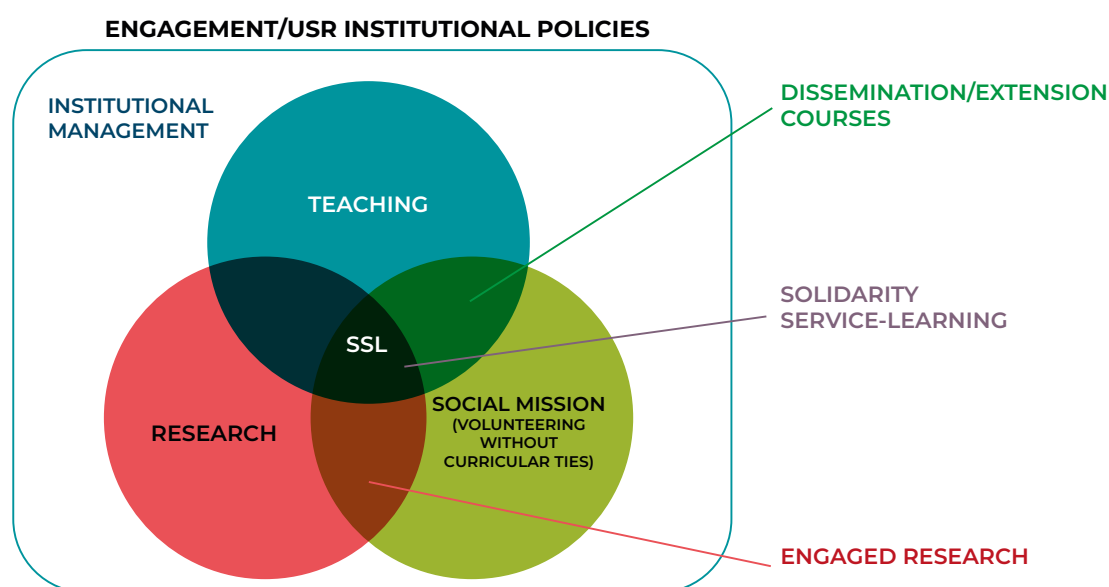


FIGURE 3: Towards an Enhanced Model that Integrates Teaching and Research with Social Engagement.

As can be seen, in addition to the traditional “three pillars”, there is a “fourth pillar” that encompasses the three previous ones, namely that of institutional management, which defines, accompanies and makes viable and sustainable the general policies of engagement or USR of the institution as a whole. Through engaged/responsible management, the social mission is expressed and structured transversally in teaching, research and extension (the latter under various names), both in the different intersections among the missions

“Social engagement is no longer viewed as a ‘third pillar’ but rather as a critical approach to our teaching and research activities.”

(outreach courses, engaged research, service-learning), as well as in the activities of each pillar: volunteering and traditional teaching and research.

The figure above shows that service-learning is precisely at the heart of this new model, in that place where extension, teaching and research meet and interact in institutional dialogue with the community.

In this coordinated model, as British specialist Younger (2009:22) points out: *"Social engagement is no longer viewed as a 'third pillar' but rather as a critical approach to our teaching and research activities."* Utopian as it may still seem in some traditional universities, there are already many examples of such institutional policies around the world (Jouannet and Arocha, 2022).

Based on research into integrated models of a socially engaged or socially responsible university, contemporary authors have proposed various ways of systematising the dimensions to be covered in an organised social mission (Hart, Norhtmore & Gerhardt, 2009:14-15; Campus Engage, 2018:6; Vallaey and Carrizo, 2006:2). Beyond the various nuances of each of these proposals, the common vision presented of an engaged university is a holistic, integral one that encompasses all dimensions of institutional life and can be assessed in a very concrete way.

In this setting, service-learning is not the only indicator of university engagement, but it is indeed a highly significant component. Depending on the perspectives of the various authors, service-learning practices can be framed as "engaged learning" (Campus Engage, Ireland), but also as "experiential learning" or "community-based learning" (NCCPE, UK), or it can be identified among the factors leading to the "educational impacts" of USR (Vallaey and Carrizo, 2006).

Service-learning is not the only indicator of university engagement, but it is indeed a highly significant component..

On the basis of these diverse conceptualisations, it can be asserted today that service-learning is present in all the integral visions of the social mission of higher education.

In fact, in recent years there seems to have been a growing worldwide support for new models of organisation of the social mission of higher education that can overcome the inertia of the ivory tower and the fragmentation of the missions in order to move towards higher education models that are better coordinated in their management of the social mission. In this scenario, the service-learning pedagogy assumes a crucial significance in this coordination and in the generation of innovative projects that go beyond traditional didactics (Martínez, 2008; Osman & Petersen, 2013; Ma Hok-ka et al., 2018).

In CHEIs, the challenge of managing the three missions in a coordinated way is added to that of permeating them with the specific identity and spirituality, intimately linked to the evangelising mission shared with the whole Church.⁶ As Pope Francis pointed out to the university students at WYD in Lisbon:

"Being a Catholic university means, above all, this: that each element is related to the whole and that the whole is found in the parts. In this way, while acquiring scientific competences, we mature as persons, in self-knowledge and in the discernment of our own path." (Pope Francis, 2023)

In this search, a fundamental part of the identity of a CHEI is the construction of a spirituality that is not only personal but institutional (Gargantini, 2022), which—whether or not

Mission management in a CHEI implies that identity, mission and spirituality are not only expressed in the specific "identity" activities, but also cut across teaching, research and social mission. Like all other institutions, CHEIs address the challenge of relevance in the face of today's issues affecting humanity and its common home.

it reflects a particular charism within the Church (Wodka, 2022)—is open to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, as well as to the quest for meaning of those who do not profess any religion (Pushpalatha, 2021; Isola and Gherlone, 2022), a theme that will be further explored in Chapter 5 of this handbook.

Mission management in a CHEI implies that identity, mission and spirituality are not only expressed in the specific "identity" activities, but also cut across teaching, research and social mission. Like all other institutions, CHEIs address the challenge of relevance in the face of today's issues affecting humanity and its common home.

On this path, and as we will now discuss, there is a remarkable coincidence between the call of international organisations and that of the Global Compact on Education to respond to these challenges from an education for cooperation and solidarity, which draws on service-learning to implement these major objectives in didactics and concrete actions (UNESCO, 2021:35; UNESCO, 2022:52; Pope Francis, 2017; Global Compact on Education, 2022:34).

6 Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) Apostolic exhortation of His Holiness Paul VI to the episcopate, the clergy, and the faithful of the entire Church on evangelisation in the contemporary world. Vatican City. pp- 13-20. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/es/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html and *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990) Apostolic constitution of His Holiness John Paul II on Catholic universities. Vatican City, pp.48-49. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html

3.2. Service-Learning as a Pedagogy for the Future of Higher Education

A growing number of institutions are striving to consolidate the social mission as a crucial element for higher education to be able to respond adequately to the challenges of the present and the future. Conferences and publications on the subject have multiplied on all continents, and so have concrete experiences in the development of policies and programmes (Jouannet and Arocha, 2022).

In this context, service-learning is highlighted as one of the pedagogical approaches that can contribute to addressing these challenges. Its dissemination, accelerated globally in recent decades, has generated processes of strong enculturation of this pedagogical proposal in the diversity of regional contexts, pedagogical traditions and local demands, and has fostered the emergence of numerous national, regional and global networks that bring together specialists and practitioners,⁷ as well as international associations that gather researchers in the field, such as IARSLCE⁸ or ACES.⁹

It captures the aspiration to prepare students for “the real world” and to teach them to “really do”, linking higher education to the demands of the communities around it, and ultimately to its relevance as an institution. The new generations and their families expect it to “contribute”, not only to individual professional development, but also to the resolution of the serious and complex problems that afflict humanity today, both locally and globally.

Moreover, in recent years, numerous international documents have underscored the importance of strengthening the social mission of higher education, and—within this framework—service-learning. Among them, we will now focus on the latest UNESCO documents on higher education towards 2050 and the education of the future, published between 2021 and 2022, and on those released by the Vatican on the Global

Compact on Education (2019-2022), which present significant coincidences as regards the importance of service-learning.

The document entitled “Pathways to 2050 and beyond. Findings from a Public Consultation on the Futures of Higher Education” (UNESCO, 2021) presents the results of a broad global consultation. It captures the aspiration to prepare students for “the real world” and to teach them to “really do”, linking higher education to the demands of the communities

⁷ <https://www.clayss.org/en/networks/>

⁸ <https://www.iarslce.org/>

⁹ <https://academyofces.org/>

around it, and ultimately to its relevance as an institution. The new generations and their families expect it to “contribute”, not only to individual professional development, but also to the resolution of the serious and complex problems that afflict humanity today, both locally and globally. Therefore, among the document’s recommendations is to “Strive to make higher education more relevant”, and it stresses the need for knowledge transfer from universities (UNESCO, 2021:57).

The recommendations that emerged from the global consultation should also be read in the context of UNESCO’s latest global document, produced by a vast body of international experts: *“Reimagining Our Futures Together. A New Social Contract for Education”* (2022). The report argues that meeting the twin challenges of ensuring the right to quality education for all and harnessing the transformative power of education for a sustainable collective future requires “a new social contract for education that can redress injustices while transforming the future” (UNESCO, 2022:III).

“Reimagining the future together requires pedagogies that promote cooperation and solidarity. *How we learn must be determined by ‘why’ and ‘what’ we learn.” (...) The pedagogies of cooperation and solidarity must be based on the shared principles of non-discrimination, respect for diversity and restorative justice, and they must encompass an ethic of care and reciprocity. They necessarily require participatory, collaborative, problem-solving, interdisciplinary, intergenerational and intercultural learning.*” (UNESCO, 2022:52, emphasis added)

Faced with these challenging objectives, the document offers some concrete clues for their achievement. On the one hand, it proposes the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as inspiration and curriculum for the renewal of education and the training of students as “global citizens who require knowledge and competences to build sustainable futures” through “interdisciplinary, problem- and project-based learning” that enables them to develop the skills to advance the full range of objectives (UNESCO, 2022:54).



FIGURE 4: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹⁰

Furthermore, the UNESCO document suggests three specific pedagogical proposals to achieve the objectives of the education of the future and overcome the traditional models of the lecture-based class and traditional teaching: problem- and project-based approaches to education, inquiry-based and action research pedagogies, and those engaged in community and service-learning (UNESCO, 2022:103-104).

It is worth noting that this is the first time UNESCO has explicitly mentioned service-learning. Even though in previous documents it had referred to the pedagogical proposal, calling it, for example, “community-based approaches” (UNESCO, 2016:34), the role that this document assigns to service-learning is significant. On the one hand, it underscores the capacity of service-learning to establish links between educational institutions and the community, overcoming—in a way—the “ivory tower” model, and on the other hand, it maintains the importance of solidarity in order to leave aside paternalistic attitudes, and emphasises its inclusive character (UNESCO, 2022:54).

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-goals/>

Pope Francis, for his part, clearly invites us to put academic knowledge at the service of society in a concrete way:

"It is only fair that we question ourselves: How can we help our students not to regard a university degree as synonymous with a higher position, more money or greater social prestige? They are not synonymous. Do we help them to see this training as a sign of greater responsibility in the face of today's problems, in the face of the needs of the poorest, in the face of care for the environment? It is not enough to analyse and describe reality; it is necessary to generate spaces for real research, debates that result in alternatives to today's problems. How important it is to be practical!" (Pope Francis, 2017)

In 2019, shortly before the publication of the UNESCO documents mentioned above, Pope Francis launched the Global Compact on Education (Pope Francis, 2019), directly related to these issues. He called to *"rekindle the commitment for and with the younger generations, renewing our passion for a more open and inclusive education, capable of patient listening, constructive dialogue and mutual understanding."* We must *"unite our efforts in a broad educational alliance to train mature individuals, capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity"* (Pope Francis, 2019).

Based on this call, the Vatican published a *"Vademecum"* (Global Compact on Education, 2022) in which direct reference is made to service-learning:

"The true service of education is education for service. Additionally, educational research also acknowledges ever more clearly the central dimension of service to others and to the community as an instrument and an end of education itself. Let us think, for example, of the great development of service-learning didactics." (...)

"Service can be not only one educational activity among others (...), but, more radically, it can become the fundamental method through which all knowledge and skills can be imparted and acquired. We can point to this process as a development from education for service towards education as service, whereby our neighbour is both the path and the goal of the educational journey." (Global Compact on Education, 2022:34)

In a way, the Global Compact on Education concurs with the diagnosis of the UNESCO specialists who, a few years later, pointed out the need for education for cooperation and solidarity in order to meet present and future challenges. They also agree on the potential of service-learning to renew the educational offer and to train global citizens capable of responding to the great predicaments of our time.

Service can be not only one educational activity among others (...), but, more radically, it can become the fundamental method through which all knowledge and skills can be imparted and acquired..

On the one hand, we understand that this coincidence responds to a common diagnosis of the urgent need to face together the complex matters of our societies and our planet and, consequently, to educate the new genera-

tions to be able to use their knowledge in solidarity for the transformation of reality. On the other hand, we believe that the maturity that the pedagogical proposal of service-learning has reached at a global level, its flexibility to be adopted in very diverse educational systems and cultural contexts, and its capacity to articulate theory and practice and to motivate a generation that wants to "take action", is what makes it particularly convenient.

The timing of the Vatican and UNESCO documents and the attention they are drawing to service-learning proposals open a window of opportunity and responsibility to strengthen this pedagogical field and multiply experiences and quality institutional programmes that can inspire many other educational institutions at all levels, and contribute to educating a generation of global citizens capable of facing the challenges of the present and the future in a spirit of solidarity.

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Resources for further reading:

Volume 5 of the Uniservitate Collection presents progress towards a global history of service-learning, with chapters devoted to the various regions of the world written by local authors. It is available for free download on the Uniservitate website in English, French and Spanish: Giorgetti (comp.) (2023).

In English: *Towards a Global History of Service-Learning*. <https://www.uniservitate.org/2024/03/12/towards-a-global-history-of-service-learning/>

In French: *Vers une histoire mondiale de l'apprentissage-service*. <https://www.uniservitate.org/fr/2024/09/22/vers-une-histoire-mondiale-de-lapprentissage-service/>

In Spanish: *Hacia una historia mundial del aprendizaje-servicio* (Towards a Global History of Service-Learning). Buenos Aires, CLAYSS, Uniservitate Collection, 5. https://uniservitate.org/resources/05_ESP/5-Historia-de-Aprendizaje-servicio-ESP.pdf

2. SOLIDARITY SERVICE-LEARNING (SSL)

1. What do we mean by “Solidarity Service-Learning”?

*Studying and doing research on agricultural techniques applied to vegetable garden cultivation, water quality management and food production is **learning**.*

*Collecting food donations for a vulnerable population is **service**.*

*Using what has been studied to train people in the community to create home gardens is **solidarity service-learning**.*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the recent UNESCO's document on the futures of education states that “*Re-imagining the future together requires pedagogies that foster cooperation and solidarity*” (UNESCO, 2022:52), since the complex challenges facing the planet and humanity today cannot be solved on an individual level; cooperative, interdisciplinary and solidarity-based work is essential.

In this regard, the report identifies service-learning as one of the innovative pedagogical proposals that can contribute to moving beyond traditional teaching formats (UNESCO, 2022:104).

“Service-learning and community engagement soften the walls between classrooms and the outside world, challenge students’ assumptions, and connect them to systems, processes and experiences broader than their own experiences.” (...) Service-learning holds the potential to draw solidarity as a central principle into problem-solving pedagogies rather than favouring solutions which are simply the most convenient.” (UNESCO, 2022:54)

The service-learning approach is, undoubtedly, a pedagogical innovation still unknown to many. At the same time, and as we have seen in the previous chapter, service-learning practices have been developed for more than a century in very diverse cultural contexts. Educators and learners have been creatively “inventing” projects that integrate educational objectives and solidarity activities, and on all continents, there are experiences that represent actual service-learning, even if their protagonists do not call it that, or are not aware of the abundant literature on the subject.

Service-learning, together with the other two innovations recommended by the aforementioned document—project-based and problem-based learning and action research—(UNESCO, 2022:104), are proposals that already have a centuries-old theoretical tradition and practice, but which are particularly relevant to the contemporary context and its challenges, and are only now beginning to be introduced into the “normality” of school and university teaching.

Let us look at some examples of service-learning practices from different educational levels and formats, developed in different parts of the world:

- Gerontology students at the Singapore University of Social Sciences perform their practices serving elderly people living alone, offering recreational walks, physical activity support in face-to-face and virtual formats, and other activities. At the same time, they develop their professional profile and a valuable intergenerational dialogue.¹¹
- Students and faculty from the Departments of Literature and Languages, Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science at Christian Brothers University (USA) are working with the community to enhance the historic Memphis area and promote access to the public library. In particular, they are designing digital tools to provide free access to publications, manuscripts and resources from the city’s cultural heritage. The project is called “Jane Austen and the Civic Heritage”, and is part of a course at the Centre for Community Engagement that draws on the literary work of British writer Jane Austen, who presents a critical view of social conflict and mismanagement of the commons.¹²
- In 1995, in the rural town of Ramona (Santa Fe, Argentina), there was still no running water. In the course of a science fair project, secondary school students analysed the quality of the water from the local wells and discovered that the entire groundwater was contaminated with arsenic, posing a serious health risk to numerous villagers. The students disseminated their research findings, mobilised their neighbours, contacted the authorities, collaborated with the local hospital in preventive actions, and finally succeeded in securing the installation of a water treatment plant which provided access to clean running water. Through this project, the young people developed scientific knowledge along with skills for citizen involvement, and gained numerous recognitions at the National Sciences Fair, and the International Junior Water Prize (Massat, 2022, 4).
- Throughout the world, there are schools that develop service-learning experiences even without giving them that name. The “School adopts a monu-

11 SUSS Office of Service-Learning & Community Engagement Documentary <https://youtu.be/HoGo4NGZkg4?si=-FAjSx4mssDFuc-Fs>

12 https://www.uniservitate.org/es/featured_item/english-355-jane-austen-and-the-civic-commons/

ment” programme,¹³ born in Naples in 1992 and currently implemented in more than 1,600 Italian schools, encourages students to learn about and conduct research on historical heritage and contribute to its preservation and appreciation, generating, in fact, very valuable service-learning projects in educational institutions.

- Service-learning practices can also be developed by youth organisations. For example, the young women of the Association of Catholic Girl Guides in the Ivory Coast were trained to hold meetings and workshops with the women of a rural locality, in which they provided them with information on the problems of AIDS and STDs, and also collaborated in the formation of groups of entrepreneurs for the production of soap, as a contribution to their economic autonomy (Chanes *et al.*, 2006:50).

In these and many other similar experiences, children, adolescents and young people combine learning and solidarity service, and apply their knowledge to serve the needs of their community.¹⁴ At the same time, solidarity action in real contexts allows them to acquire new knowledge that cannot always be found in books, and to develop attitudes for life in general, work, harmonious coexistence and, in addition, to build responsible citizenship.

Today, service-learning projects are developed from kindergarten to postgraduate courses, in formal educational institutions as well as in social organisations on all five continents. It is striking, in fact, to see very similar experiences in totally different environments: children learning to forest with native plants in Argentinian Patagonia¹⁵ and in southern Spain;¹⁶ adolescents and young people training older adults in computer skills in the United States, South Africa and Singapore; students of Economic Sciences advising small traders in marketing and administration in Colombia and Malaysia, and the list of examples could go on.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, many experiences continued to be developed face-to-face or migrated to virtual or hybrid formats (Tapia, M. R., 2021), as can be found in the “Solidarity Service-Learning during Pandemic” map, compiled by CLAYSS.¹⁷ To give just one example, fourth year students of the Kinesiology course at the Catholic University of Chile collaborated with the local council of Puente Alto to offer the elderly continuity in their kinesiological rehabilitation treatments in a virtual format. With faculty supervision,

13 <http://www.lascuolaadottaunmonumento.it/>

14 Acknowledging the variety of approaches and theories that various authors propose in relation to the concepts of territory and community, we have adopted the social science common practice of using the term “territory” referring to local and regional scales, and the term “community” referring not only to a microsocial scale from a territorial approach (neighbourhood and/or area), but also to a sense of “shared identity” regarding a territorial as well as an interest-based community approach (Diéguez, 2000:83), as in the case of “educational community”.

15 <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057487419589>

16 <https://aprendizajeservicio.com/2020-2/premio-aps-en-infantil-y-primaria>

17 <https://www.clayss.org/en/what-is-service-learning>

In recent years, national and regional networks promoting service-learning have multiplied on the five continents, and the active dialogue between these networks is enriching the reflection and practice of a pedagogical movement that, in its fundamental unity, is enhanced by its great diversity.

gists.¹⁸

In recent years, national and regional networks promoting service-learning have multiplied on the five continents,¹⁹ and the active dialogue between these networks is enriching the reflection and practice of a pedagogical movement that, in its fundamental unity, is enhanced by its great diversity.

1.1. Definitions

While numerous experiences linking academic learning with community service have been documented since the late 19th century in various parts of the world (Titlebaum et al., 2004; Giorgetti, 2023), the term “service-learning” was only coined in 1966 by William R. Ramsay, Robert L. Sigmon and Michael Hart in Tennessee, USA (Ramsay, 2017:50).²⁰ In Spanish, it is translated as “aprendizaje-servicio” (with the acronym ApS in Spain or A+S in Chile), or “aprendizaje-servicio solidario” (solidarity service-learning, SSL) (AYSS, in its Spanish acronym) in much of Latin America and some communities in Spain.

The use of the term “solidarity service-learning” underlines the “horizontal” solidarity and reciprocity that must be established between the educational institutions and the communities involved in the projects, and highlights the difference with forms of service that may be paternalistic or “vertical”.

students assisted the elderly remotely, and also developed materials for the council's website, providing guidelines for exercise during the lockdown period. The practice brought into play all the skills inherent to the professional profile of future kinesiologists.

The use of the term “solidarity service-learning” underlines the “horizontal” solidarity and reciprocity that must be established between the educational institutions and the communities involved in the projects (see 3.1 below), and highlights the

¹⁸ <https://youtu.be/PysHEf5VV9k>

¹⁹ <https://www.clayss.org/en/networks/>

²⁰ A detailed version of Ramsay's autobiographical chronicle is digitally available at the “History of Service-Learning” from Stanford University (Ramsay, s/d). <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/servicelearning/catalog/nd509cq9739>

difference with forms of service that may be paternalistic or “vertical” (Tapia, 2003; Tapia et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2022:54).

In various parts of the world, the pedagogical approach of service-learning can also be found under very different names: “civic internships” in the Netherlands, “solidarity learning” in Brazil, “community engagement as scholarship” in South African universities, “community-based learning” in some North American universities, and so many others....

The definitions of service-learning are as varied as the names used to describe it. Let us take a look at just a few, from different continents:

“Service-learning seeks to engage students in activities that combine community service and academic learning” (Furco, 2002:25).

“Academic service-learning is an educational experience based on a collaborative partnership between the university and partner organisations at local, national and international level. Service-learning guides students in applying academic knowledge to respond to community-identified needs and address systemic inequalities. Through structured reflection, students develop critical thinking skills, deepen their academic learning, and gain a greater sense of civic responsibility and social justice.”(Tulane University)²¹

“Community learning activities planned by secondary schools, with participation of the educational community, addressing both community needs and students’ learning objectives. It is an experience that allows students to apply concepts, procedures and skills from the formal learning of the various subjects in their daily environment.” (Ministry of Education of Chile, 2007:15)

“Service-learning is an educational proposal that combines learning and community service processes in a single, well-structured project, where participants learn by working on real needs of the environment in order to improve it.” (Puig and others, 2007:20)

“There is reciprocity in the exchange between students and the community. The service that students undertake is decided on in collaboration with the community. This service is integrated into the students’ academic curriculum and provides structured opportunities for them to think, talk or write about their experiences (in other words: reflect) during the service activity. Service-learning aims at enhancing and extending what is taught so that students develop a sense of caring for others and a more critical citizenship.” (Osman and Petersen, 2013:7)

21 <https://cps.tulane.edu/public-service-requirement>

"The concept of service-learning emphasizes the importance of 'learning by doing'. (...) Contrary to voluntary service in general, service-learning connects academic study and practical experience in the community. Through service-learning students engage in experiential learning, which helps them gain a more comprehensive understanding of academic knowledge and improve their ability to use that knowledge in a flexible and reasonable way. In addition to improving students' academic performance, service-learning also contributes to the betterment of society." (Ma Hok-ka et al., 2018:3)

It is important to emphasize that the terms "service-learning" or "solidarity service-learning" (SSL) can simultaneously describe:

- An educational experience, project, programme or practice in which students learn by developing a concrete activity in the service of the community.
- A teaching and learning methodology that can be considered a form of experience-based or problem-based learning. Like project-based learning or problem-based learning (PBL), SSL is a form of active learning that involves students in the knowledge of reality (see 2.2 below), working around a motivating task or problem, while allowing the development of skills through collaborative work in search of solutions. Unlike other PBL variants that are confined to the educational institution, or are limited to imagining solutions to problems defined in the classroom, SSL projects facilitate links with the territory, interacting with people and organisations in the community, and applying and developing skills and knowledge in the field to contribute to solving specific problems together with others (NYLC, 2006; Tapia, 2020; CLAYSS, 2021).
- A pedagogy, a philosophy of education which is part of the vast movement of pedagogical innovation that, since the 20th century, has postulated the need for an education centred on the subject who learns and not on the educator who teaches; an active education that generates learning that is meaningful for life and relevant to the context in which one lives, a critical pedagogy that educates citizens capable of transforming the local and global reality (Kendall, 1990:23; Puig et al., 2007:18). Service-learning advocates a new model of relationship with the environment, turning the community into a learning space. This helps "soften the walls of the classroom" (UNESCO, 2021:54) and establish new links of genuine collaboration between educational institutions and their territory, or with communities that are physically distant but work together as partners to address social or environmental problems.
- In addition, service-learning is a specific form of seeking to transform reality, which differs from volunteering and other forms of social intervention in its attention to the training component of all its participants, in its emphasis on planning and co-participatory action with the communities that are no lon-

ger “recipients” of help but rather co-protagonists of their own development, and in its focus on considering children, adolescents and young people not just as “hope for the future”, but as active and leading builders of the present.

Beyond the plurality of definitions, there are some common “programmatic” elements that are widely agreed upon by specialists: solidarity service, student leadership and the intentional integration of learning contents with solidarity action. Based on these three major components, we can identify as service-learning those practices that do not bear that name, or that have been developed spontaneously without any knowledge of the pedagogical proposal or the bibliography that underpins it.

In this handbook, we understand **“solidarity service-learning”** as the initiatives, projects, programmes, methodologies or pedagogical proposals that simultaneously present these three programmatic characteristics:

1. Solidarity service actions aimed at meeting real and felt needs in a concrete and effective way, with a community and not only for it;
2. actively led by students from planning to evaluation;
3. intentionally coordinated with the learning contents: curricular contents, reflection, development of competences for citizenship and work, and research (ME, 2001:12; CLAYSS, 2017).

1.2. Solidarity Service-Learning as Integral Education and as an Inclusive, High-Quality “Pedagogy of Common Action”

In the following chapter we will look at these “programmatic characteristics” of service-learning in more detail. Here we would like to point out the close link between these characteristics and learning as proposed by Pestalozzi’s famous formula: *“educate head, heart and hands”* (Pestalozzi, 1805: 141-176), a triad that is now strongly taken up again in the magisterium of Pope Francis:

“There are three languages: the language of the head, the language of the heart, the language of the hands. Education should move along these three paths. Teaching to think, helping to feel well and accompanying in doing, so that the three languages are in harmony; so that children and adolescents think what they feel and do, feel what they think and do, and do what they think and feel.” (Pope Francis. 2015)

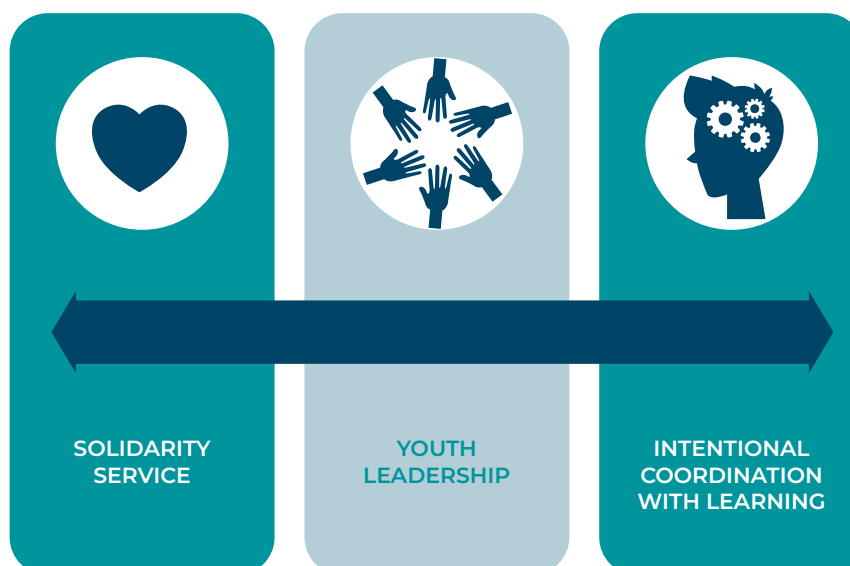


FIGURE 5: Service-Learning, a Pedagogy that Integrates Head, Heart and Hands

We could claim that the service-learning proposal allows for an integral, holistic approach that coordinates:

- socio-emotional education, pro-social attitudes, and facilitates the development of the so-called “soft skills” (“heart”),
- the acquisition of specific competences of the professional profile, favouring the initiative and entrepreneurship of students in action in real contexts (“hands”),
- and the learning of disciplinary content, the application of theoretical knowledge in practice, reflection, and the development of critical thinking about the issues addressed (“head”).

In that sense, this type of project makes it possible to simultaneously develop the “four pillars” or challenges of education in the 21st century, as set out by UNESCO in the renowned Delors Report: “Learning: The Treasure Within” (Delors, 1996).

- *Learning to learn*: The aim is for the solidarity activity to boost motivation and allow the perception of new meanings in learning, the application of theoretical knowledge in real contexts and the generation of new learning.
- *Learning to do*: Field activities should enable participants to develop basic skills for life, work and the exercise of active citizenship, such as working in a team, making decisions in unforeseen or difficult situations, assuming responsibilities and communicating effectively.

- *Learning to be:* The solidarity activity and the systematic reflection on the values and attitudes involved in the activity aim to favour the development of prosocial attitudes and the capacity for resilience; that is, to face difficulties, overcome them and be positively transformed by them.
- *Learning to live together:* It aims to develop, in the field, training for practical and direct citizen and social engagement. Solidarity projects generate opportunities to interact positively both within the school group and in the interrelationship with people, organisations and diverse social realities.

How do we help our students not to look at a university degree as synonymous with greater position, synonymous with more money or greater social prestige? They are not synonymous. Do we help to see this preparation as a sign of greater responsibility for today's problems, for the needs of the poorest, for the care of the environment? It is not enough to analyse and describe reality; it is necessary to generate spaces for real research, debates that lead to alternatives to today's problems. How important it is to be practical!.

The recent UNESCO document on the futures of education mentioned above (2022) seems to take up the last two pillars of the Delors report (1996) by stressing the need for “pedagogies that foster cooperation and solidarity” (UNESCO, 2022:52), which are indispensable for addressing the complex social and environmental issues of our time, explicitly including service-learning, as already noted.

Despite the fact that most public and private universities around the world include in their vision and mission statements the training of good citizens, capable of contributing to the common good, the educational dimensions of cooperation and solidarity are absent in some higher education proposals geared towards training competent individuals only for “individual professional success” who are not always capable of contributing to the resolution of problems that affect the common good. As pointed out in Chapter 1, such individualistic proposals are becoming less and less relevant to public opinion, which expects a greater connection of university education with reality and more tangible contributions of higher education institutions to the problems of the societies that surround and nurture them (UNESCO, 2021:57).

Pope Francis stated in this regard:

“It is right that we question ourselves: How do we help our students not to look at a university degree as synonymous with greater position, synonymous with more money or greater social

prestige? They are not synonymous. Do we help to see this preparation as a sign of greater responsibility for today's problems, for the needs of the poorest, for the care of the environment? It is not enough to analyse and describe reality; it is necessary to generate spaces for real research, debates that lead to alternatives to today's problems. How important it is to be practical!" (Pope Francis, 2017)

SSL strives precisely to “put into practice” the link between scientific training and the training of professionals who can be active and democratic citizens capable of assuming their responsibilities in the face of today's problems.

From this point of view, SSL is also—in the words of J. Puig—a “pedagogy for common action”:

“Common action embodies a set of values that emphasise what brings us together and invites us to cooperate in the face of hardship. A form of action that has driven the evolution of human life and cultural development. This dynamism is so important that it must not fade away under the pressure of individual interest and competition. (...) Common action is a complex social dynamism that transforms a problematic situation into a collective challenge and, in order to face it, activates capacities aimed at gathering, deliberating and cooperating with the purpose of promoting together an intervention project focused on solving the initial problem and executed for the benefit of the community and of each of the participants.” (Puig, 2021:104)

“... common action and service-learning start from a challenge that brings the participants together and prompts them to think and act together to change the situation for the benefit of the community. For this reason, we can say that service-learning is the most mature educational form of common action.” (Puig, 2021:146)

In short, SSL projects simultaneously seek to contribute to the transformation of reality and the resolution of specific problems through solidarity action, while at the same time providing an inclusive educational alternative of excellence.

- *Inclusive*, because the projects can also be carried out by children, adolescents and young people, who are usually considered by the educational system as “beneficiaries” or “recipients” of the help of others. As the above-mentioned UNESCO document points out: “Service-learning should not be a pursuit limited to the most privileged; all learners can contribute to a dialogue to advance well-being within their communities.” (UNESCO, 2022:54)

In fact, in a wide variety of cultural contexts there have been a number of documented SSL projects carried out by students with disabilities of all kinds, in

conditions of extreme poverty, or by minorities who are usually marginalised. Regardless of their circumstances, all students have the possibility—and the right and dignity—to offer something positive to others, provide a service to their community, and learn by doing. For example: blind children who sign-post the streets of the city in Braille, adolescents with Down syndrome who grow community vegetable gardens and take care of their community parks, children and adolescents in extreme poverty who contribute to local development, indigenous adolescents who promote productive projects for local development, and so many others (May and Tapia, 2024).

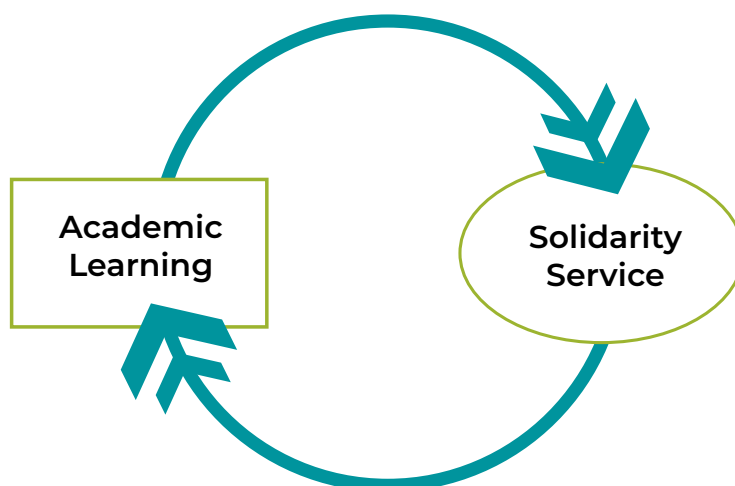
Within the setting of Catholic universities, SSL practices can be “inclusive” not only in the usual sense, but also in terms of including ecumenical, inter-religious and non-religious dialogue. Service-learning activities can offer a training space in the common values of solidarity and fraternity for students of very different convictions, as will be seen in Chapter 5.

- *Quality* in an integral sense, encompassing the dimensions of “head, heart and hands”, as well as those of personal, professional and civic life. SSL projects call for knowing and doing in real settings, which implies a higher level of knowledge and skills than those required by traditional written tests or oral lessons. Transforming reality, even minimally, requires conducting research, learning to dialogue, solving unexpected problems, and—in this sense—international research shows the strong impact of quality SSL practices on academic performance (Eyler, J. & Giles, D., 1999; Furco, A. & Root, S., 2010; Tapia, M. N., 2006; Celio, C. *et al.*, 2011; Warren, Jami L., 2012; Tee, P.L.K., Kalidas, C.S., 2016; Brail, S., 2016.; Blanco-Cano, E. and García-Martín, J., 2021).

In totally different cultural contexts and within contrasting theoretical and normative frameworks, students coincide in valuing experiences that allow them to be protagonists in their communities, to learn in a different way and experience the challenges of their future professional activity in a real context.

Experience allows us to claim that when service-learning projects are carried out, a “virtuous circle” is produced: academic learning improves the quality of the solidarity-based action offered; and for its part, the service stimulates the acquisition or produc-

It enhances the quality of the service offered,



leads to a better integral education,
and stimulates new knowledge production.

tion of new knowledge in order to adequately resolve the identified need, it demands the use of competences inherent to an integral professional training, and it all results in a greater ethical and citizen engagement.

FIGURE 6: The Virtuous Circle of Service-Learning (Cf. Tapia, 2007: 28)

It is vital to bring sound knowledge into play in order to contribute to the generation of sustainable enterprises that allow a community or a group to improve their living conditions. The more learning that occurs in the solidarity-based action, the more relevant the service provided tends to be. At the same time, the more meaningful young people's solidarity activities are for the community, the more motivating they prove to be, the more new questions they generate and the greater curiosity they arouse to continue learning about the topics related to the project.

In the words of Josep Puig Rovira:

"... bringing together learning and service transforms and adds value to both, and even creates new and unexpected positive effects. In service-learning one learns to serve the community, but at the same time, service activities become sources of new competences and values. (...) students participate as citizens in the life of their community and learn as learners, both in school and during service." (Puig Rovira, 2021:143)

1.3. The "Quadrants" of Learning and Service

It can be challenging to differentiate SSL practices, strictly speaking, from other community intervention activities developed in educational settings. To facilitate the identifica-

tion of the proposals that most adequately integrate the solidarity intentionality and the educational intentionality, the literature proposes various tools. Among them, the “quadrants of learning and service”, originally developed by the University of Stanford,²² here in the version adapted by CLAYSS.

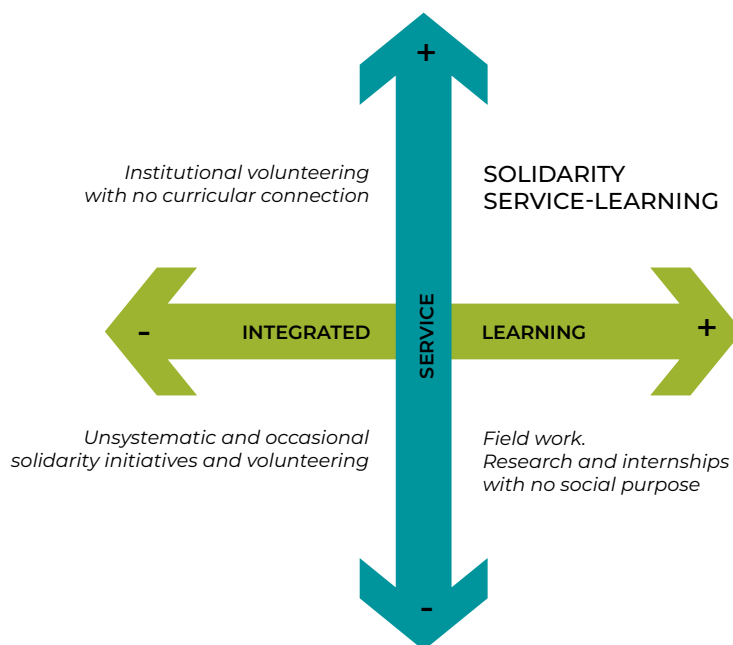


FIGURE 7: The Quadrants of Learning and Service (Tapia, 2006:26)

The vertical axis of the chart refers to the higher or lower quality of the solidarity service offered to the community, and the horizontal axis indicates the lesser or greater integration of curricular learning in the service performed.

Quality in terms of solidarity service is associated with the effective satisfaction of service recipients and community co-protagonists, with measurable impact on the quality of life of the community, and with the possibility of achieving medium- and long-term social change objectives rather than just meeting urgent one-time needs. It is also related to the creation of effective inter-institutional networks with civil society organisations, government agencies, businesses and/or companies to guarantee the sustainability of the proposals.

Quality in terms of learning refers to learning that is intentionally planned, developed and integrated with solidarity activities. It includes both disciplinary and educational curricular content, reflection on practice, and the whole set of knowledge for life which young people can develop through these projects (learning to do, development of communication skills, teamwork, personal initiative, empathy, etc.).

²² The original version of the quadrants was designed by the today dissolved “Service Learning Center 2000” from Stanford University, California, in 1996. They were outlined by Wade Brynolson at the II International Seminar “Education and Community Service”, organised in Buenos Aires in 1998, and first published in Spanish by: Ministry of Education, ME 1999:26.

These axes define the “quadrants”, which make it possible to differentiate four types of experiences that can be carried out within the framework of formal or non-formal education:

- I. *Field work/research and internships with no social purpose*: in this quadrant, we group research and practice activities that involve students with the reality of their community, but considered as an object of study. These allow the application and development of knowledge and skills in real contexts, but do not intend to transform their reality nor establish bonds with it. The recipients of the activity are the students themselves, the emphasis is placed on the acquisition of learning; observation and contact with the community reality is exclusively instrumental.
- II. *Unsystematic and occasional solidarity initiatives*: they are defined by their solidarity and assistance intentionality and by the lack of integration with formal or intentional learning, for example: clothing or food donation campaigns, festivals, “charity” activities, organised on an occasional basis. They are considered “unsystematic” because they emerge from fortuitous situations (a natural catastrophe, a celebration, a specific demand), meet a particular need in a limited period of time and are not institutionally planned. The main target of the project is the target community—even though there may be no direct contact with it. The emphasis is placed on fulfilling a need, not on generating an educational experience. Its impact on the recipients, and on the protagonists, is rarely evaluated. However, it should be noted that unsystematic solidarity initiatives—even the more ephemeral—can prove to be educational for students if they:
 - » stimulate reflection and the shaping of participatory and solidarity attitudes;
 - » help raise awareness of certain social or environmental issues at an early stage;
 - » offer students the opportunity to learn basic management procedures, and
 - » create an institutional atmosphere that is open to social issues.
- III. *Institutional solidarity initiatives*: activities of an institutional and systematic nature, aimed at promoting solidarity actions, social engagement and citizen participation for young people, as an expression of the institutional mission. In this quadrant we would place those activities planned with the purpose of strengthening or promoting participation and engagement in solidarity proposals or traditional extension or institutional volunteering activities without curricular connections. Precisely because they are institutionally

sustained over time, this type of experience can offer the community a sustainable, higher quality service. While such programmes often have a great positive impact on the life and personal development of young people and are an effective strategy for values and citizenship education, they do not include intentionally planned learning content and, therefore, run parallel to curricular learning and academic life at large. Especially in higher education, lack of connection between some extension and volunteering activities and student academic training has been a weakness, and has encouraged views of the “third mission” or social mission of the university as a parallel path to the core missions of teaching and research (Tapia, 2018:9).

- IV. Solidarity service-learning:** in this last quadrant, we place experiences, practices and programmes that not only offer high quality service but also integrate seamlessly with curricular learning. The recipients of the project are considered co-protagonists and the young people who carry it out are, at the same time, providers and beneficiaries of the service, since both benefit from the project. A bond of positive and pro-social reciprocity is established and the community becomes a place of learning and mutual enrichment. The emphasis is placed on both the acquisition of learning and the improvement of the quality of life of a specific community.

Activities corresponding to the four quadrants can be carried out simultaneously in the same university. For example, in the National University of Malaysia, the following were developed in recent years (UKM, 2012 16-17):

- I.** Fieldwork: study visits to the Kilim Geoforest Park, where academics from the University are collaborating with the local government to preserve flora and fauna, develop archaeological sites and promote sustainable tourism.
- II.** Unsystematic Solidarity Initiatives: groups of student volunteers contributed to the clean-up and reconstruction of a tsunami-affected area.
- III.** Institutional Volunteering: the University organised a volunteer body trained to actively intervene in the event of environmental disasters, the Natural Disaster Relief Brigade. Uniforms and equipment are provided by the University, and the activity is awarded two academic credits.
- IV.** Service-Learning medical students support a national eye screening programme for the elderly and children in vulnerable communities. Through an agreement between the university and government agencies, patients treated by the students under faculty supervision receive their glasses free of charge.

In short, service-learning practices are characterised by a double intentionality, solidarity and training at the same time. It is not simply a matter of adding some learning to a solidarity activity; both purposes, as well as the objectives and activities, must be specifically structured and intentionally planned.

2. Transitions towards Solidarity Service-Learning

Some educational institutions initiate projects that bring together learning and solidarity action from the outset; but many others approach service-learning from pre-existing practices, and move forward from experience to achieve more effective actions, more meaningful learning and a more profound impact on the community, the institution and the life of each learner.

These processes constitute gradual transitions, in one direction or another, to arrive at actual SSL experiences and may take place in each institution at very different times and in very different ways. In fact, it is always advisable to start from what is already being done in order to develop service-learning projects that are strongly integrated into the institutional identity. We can use the quadrants mentioned above as a reference point to illustrate how to verify transitions from the most varied experiences to SSL projects.

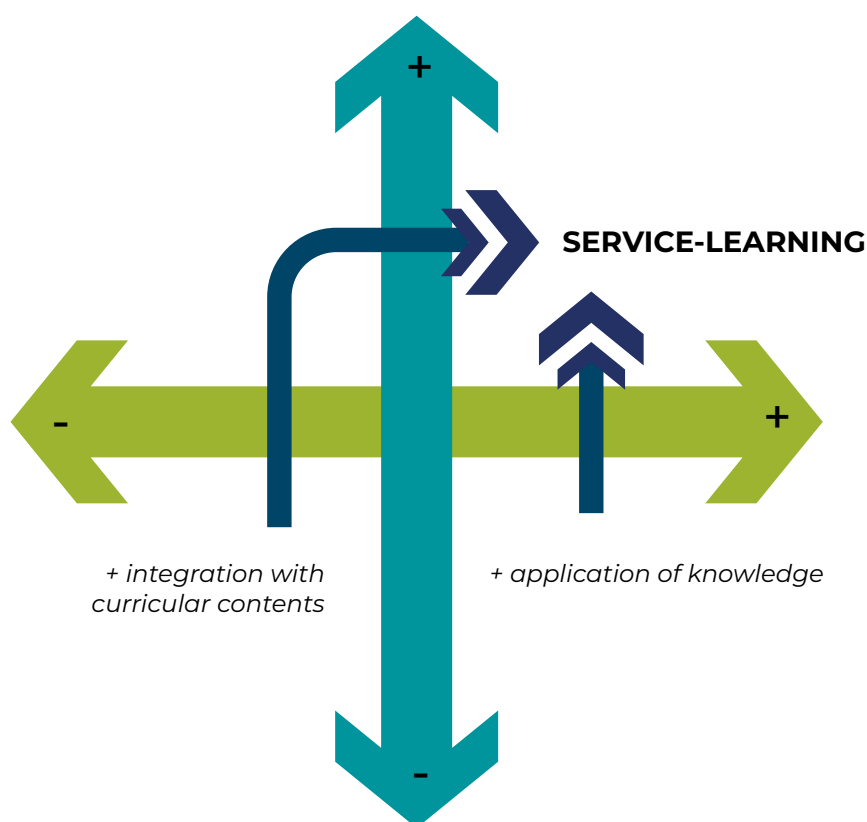


FIGURE 8: Transitions towards Solidarity Service-Learning

2.1. From Learning to Solidarity Service-Learning

The transition from curricular learning to solidarity service-learning occurs when the knowledge developed in the classroom is applied in a real-world setting, engaging with the environment through a solidarity activity that emerges as a response to a social need that is significant for the students and their community. It is a process that requires questioning on the social projection of curricular content and its relevance, in terms of the real needs of the target community, in order to perform an effective solidarity service. In the course of applying the contents and activities of a discipline or area of knowledge, it will be necessary to:

- Organise social activities according to the students' profile, or identify social activities already underway in the institution and link the academic contents with the issues addressed.
- Redirect pre-existing academic activities towards a social purpose.

An example of this transition was developed at the School of Architecture and Design of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). In the courses of Introduction to Design Knowledge I, students used to develop mock-ups and design projects for fictitious clients, but after the serious socio-economic crisis of 2001, the chair decided to put the time, effort and economic resources normally assigned to the final mock-ups of the course at the service of CSOs and small community organisations. The success of the projects, both from the academic point of view and in the recipient organisations, led to the creation of an optional course for advanced students of all the programmes of the School, the “Interdisciplinary Seminar for Social Urgency”,²³ which for over 20 years has been developing its work at the service of community organisations for which it designs, builds and produces, and where one discovers, as a student commented, that “design is not only for the rich” (Frid and Marconi, 2006).

2.2. From Field Trips and Onsite Research to Solidarity Service-Learning

In order to accomplish this transition, direct experiences, field trips and field-based research should be linked to solidarity objectives and specific solidarity activities, so that knowledge can be applied and enriched in the action's real context, at the service of a real and felt social need of the target community.

This transition seeks to link studies on reality with concrete activities aimed at transforming it.

For example, at the Catholic University of Lublin “John Paul II” in Poland,²⁴ Chemistry students learn how to perform bacteriological analyses, systematise the results and draw

23 <https://arquifadu.com/recomendaciones-curso-interdisciplinario-para-la-urgencia-social/>

24 <https://www.uniservitate.org/2024-award/https://www-kul-pl.translate.goog/antybiotykoopornosc-bakte->

conclusions. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the chair proposed that students from the Biotechnology Science Club study antibiotic-resistant bacteria and take the work to the field, in order to provide a service to public health. The students took bacteriological samples from numerous playgrounds in the city and analysed the samples to identify antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The results were used to create a bacteria database, and the information was systematised in a bacteriological map of the city's playgrounds, which was made available to the local council and the general public. Based on the results obtained, measures to increase microbiological safety in playgrounds in urban areas were proposed to the authorities, and awareness-raising materials were produced for the general public.

2.3. From Unsystematic Service or Solidarity Initiatives to Solidarity Service-Learning

When an institution is developing sporadic solidarity activities that are disconnected from academic areas, it will often suffice to ask what knowledge could be applied and developed in the context of the solidarity activity, connect solidarity actions to relevant curricular learning, systematise the educational goals of the project and evaluate achievements, not only in reference to the community but also to the impact of the project on the students' educational path and, in addition, sustain those activities over time.

In the process of linking social activities to academic training and research, the following guidelines should be considered:

- Value young people's initiatives and accompany them through academic content.
- Identify learning opportunities in field activities and exploratory field trips.
- Carry out research that can enrich the social outreach of the project.
- Put into play institutional mechanisms capable of giving continuity and sustainability to initiatives undertaken by individuals or particular groups.
- Coordinate teaching teams around the project, going beyond individual projects—insofar as diagnostic and reflection activities are developed, together with multidisciplinary approaches to the issues addressed.
- Establish institutional partnerships with the community stakeholders involved.

Some universities began with a solidarity activity developed in parallel to academic life, and progressively coordinated with the curricular content. This was, for example, the case of the School of Architecture of the Catholic University of Córdoba, where, based on the voluntary social activities organised by the Campus Ministry in vulnerable neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city, a lecturer who had participated as a student in these activities proposed an optional subject called "Socio-Housing Problems". The subject includes internships for future architects in the community, helping to improve housing, prepare

blueprints and even collaborate in the construction of entire neighbourhoods. Although the six-month course requires Saturday mornings to be spent in peripheral neighbourhoods, when the School undertook a curricular reform, it was the students themselves who requested that it be made compulsory rather than an optional course, as they had seen the importance of this practice for their future performance as professionals and valued its impact on the most vulnerable communities (PNES, 2006, 45-54; Gargantini, 2008).

2.4. From Individual Experiences to the Institutionalisation of Solidarity Service-Learning

When reference is made in the specialised literature to the “institutionalisation” of service-learning, it refers to the effective incorporation of this pedagogical proposal as one of the ways of managing, teaching, learning and linking up with the community that the university as a whole adopts as part of its identity, as will be seen in Chapter 6.

We could define the actual institutionalisation of service-learning as the incorporation of social engagement and solidarity and the SSL pedagogy into the institutional culture. A university that assumes solidarity as part of its identity will show signs of this in its everyday life, in the way it relates to students, faculty and the community, in different aspects of university life, beyond the service-learning projects and who makes up the management and teaching team at any given time.

Very briefly, this transition involves the passage from individual service-learning projects developed in a disconnected way by various chairs or by some schools or departments, to the progressive development of institutional policies that accompany, promote and coordinate existing initiatives and encourage the creation of new institutional programmes. In this process, the university can support faculty training in the SSL pedagogical approach, offer incentives for the development of projects, stimulate the implementation of interdisciplinary programmes between different academic units, establish priority territories or issues for them, promote alliances with community partners, set up institutional evaluation mechanisms, and other provisions to coordinate sustainable institutional programmes.

As we will see in Chapter 6, processes of transition to institutionalisation usually take at least 5-10 years to develop, and can adopt very different management models.

In the next chapter we will see how SSL practices can be identified not only by what differentiates them from the other ‘quadrants’, but also by three ‘programmatic’ features that distinguish them, regardless of what they are called.

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3. PROGRAMMATIC FEATURES OF SOLIDARITY SERVICE-LEARNING

As noted in the previous chapter, service-learning practices precede the definition of this term, and practices that are in fact service-learning are described in various parts of the world under many different names: “civic internships” in Dutch middle schools, “solidarity education practices” at the University of Buenos Aires, “community-based learning” in several American universities, “community engagement as scholarship” in South African universities, and many others.

According to the various historical developments of the last two centuries (see Chapter 1), in some universities service-learning experiences are developed under the umbrella of “Extension”, “Social Service”, “University Social Responsibility” or “Community Engagement”.

The quadrants of service-learning presented in the previous chapter allow us to identify service-learning practices in the strict sense of the term and thus differentiate them from other forms of work outside the classroom. In the following, however, we will look at the “programmatic features” that make it possible to identify a good service-learning practice, regardless of the name given to it or the institutional framework in which it takes place.

1. Solidarity

Since solidarity is at the core of the ethical foundation of the solidarity service-learning proposal, we consider it essential to explicitly state what concept of solidarity is proposed.

When we say “solidarity service-learning”, on the one hand, we are recognising the positive aspects of the term “service”, but also adjectivising it in such a way that it is clear that we are referring to a solidarity service, understanding “solidarity” as:

“... working together for a common cause, helping others in an organised and effective way, resisting as a group or nation to defend one’s rights, facing natural disasters or economic crises, and doing so hand in hand with others.” (Tapia, 2003: 151)

Right from the beginning of the service-learning movement in the United States, the term “service” generated numerous controversies due to its possible paternalistic connotations. Very early on, some authors pointed out the need for “critical service-learning” (Rhoads, 1997; Mitchell, 2008), or “service-learning as justice-oriented education” (Butin, 2007), emphasising the need to overcome naive views of reality and develop critical perspectives geared to an authentic search for social change.

As part of these debates, for decades, many American universities—including Georgetown²⁵ and Notre Dame²⁶—have preferred to use the term “community-based learning” to emphasize the role of the community itself in the processes not only of social activity but also of learning, and to overcome unilateral and welfare-oriented views on the part of educational institutions.

Two South African specialists summarise this substantive debate:

“We must actively choose between service-learning as charity and service-learning as social change. (...) Social change is closely aligned with a social justice agenda whose aim is to work towards a society in which individuals and groups gain access to equal treatment and a fair share of society’s opportunities and benefits.” (Osman y Petersen, 2013:9)

Some researchers have pointed out that the effects on student learning are the same, regardless of whether a welfare or social justice perspective is chosen: student satisfaction and their disciplinary learning do not seem to vary significantly in either case (Moely *et al.*, 2008). Another study would indicate that service-learning, with a social justice perspective, generates more complex reasoning skills than traditional service-learning (Wang and Rodgers, 2006).

In addition to the impact on learning, a number of authors stress that, without adequate planning with a critical perspective, without listening to and partnering with the community to generate a shared leadership—even with the best of intentions—we could be reinforcing paternalistic schemes and situations of injustice, causing more harm than good, and ultimately teaching and learning “the wrong lesson” in relation to social change (Mitchell, 2008).

In the light of this debate, it may be important to promote, as part of the indispensable reflection for a quality SSL project, the differentiation of the implications between a charity-oriented model and a solidarity service-learning model. This reflection is fundamental as part of our students’ training, and also crucial for the educators who accompany them.

In this work, we have chosen the term “solidarity service-learning” (SSL) precisely to capture the complexity of the term solidarity understood as an encounter, as recognition of rights, as an expression of socio-emotional and prosocial skills, and as a “horizontal” link of fraternity and solidarity. We will look at these concepts in more detail below.

25 <https://csj.georgetown.edu/community-based-learning/>

26 <https://socialconcerns.nd.edu/>

1.1. Solidarity as an Encounter

Luis Aranguren explains the meaning of solidarity as an encounter—the approach that we believe is closest to the service-learning philosophy—with these words:

“(...) solidarity as an encounter makes the recipients of the action the authentic protagonists and subjects of their process of struggle for justice, for the resolution of their problems, for the achievement of their personal and collective autonomy.” (Aranguren, 1997:23)

Genuine encounter generates the necessary trust to work together, aims at understanding that a true encounter entails listening to the will and interests of the other, and supports shared work rather than the unilateral “landing” of the university in a territory that it may have studied but does not necessarily know inside out.

This perspective applied to SSL projects involves teaching students to listen to others carefully, without prejudice, and to help them reflect on their role not only as “benefactors” but also and simultaneously as “beneficiaries” of the experience and knowledge of community partners, and for all that they can gain from practice in the field, in contact with reality and with other people.

From this standpoint, SSL experiences contribute to the construction of a “culture of encounter” as presented by Pope Francis, in this case addressing a group of students at Queen's University, Belfast, Ireland, in 2022:

“I encourage you (...) to cultivate the culture of encounter among yourselves and in the University community. The Christian faith is fundamentally about an encounter with Jesus Christ. If we truly believe in Jesus, we must do what Jesus does: encounter others, encounter our neighbours, in order to share with them the saving truth of the Gospel. (...)”

Building a culture of encounter in the service of God's kingdom is personally demanding. It is not simply about seeing, but looking; it is not about hearing, but listening; it is not about just meeting or passing people by, but stopping to engage with them about the things that really matter (cf. Phil 1:10). It is also exhilarating, as we share our journey with others, support one another in our pursuit of truth, and strive to weave a web of relationships which can make our lives together a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage.” (Evangelii gaudium, 87). (Papa Francisco, 2022)

1.2. Development of Empathy and Prosocial Bonds

Thinking of solidarity as an encounter with the other, with the community, involves contributing to the training of our students' capacity for empathy and prosocial attitudes, developing their socio-emotional competencies.

Thus understood, solidarity is neither self-sufficient nor altruistic. It is not centred on the satisfaction of giving, but is based on the practice of "collective and complex prosocial attitudes" (Roche Olivar, 1998). These include understanding, active and deep listening, physical or verbal help, acceptance, engagement, respect and empathy, which generate reciprocity and sociality and are aimed at producing social change with greater equity and justice for all (Del Campo, 2012).

Prosociality places the emphasis on the bond established among the participants, and seeks to objectively evaluate the effective satisfaction of the demand met by the "receiver" and the quality of the link established between them (Roche Olivar, 1998:19).

In terms of SSL projects from the prosocial perspective, we propose, right from the beginning, to have a dialogue with community leaders about their needs and expectations and we evaluate—together with them—whether our students' activities fulfil the agreed expectations and objectives.

The prosocial perspective allows us to understand that the primary goal is not merely to "feel well" or "feel that we are good" as a result of the social activity developed, but to ensure that the people we aimed to serve have been effectively satisfied and that they have at least mitigated their problems or found ways to solve them. The prosocial aspect also challenges educational institutions to step out of their "comfort zone" and question if what they seek to offer to the community is really what the community wants and needs, while it simultaneously encourages them to provide their students with opportunities to reflect on their personal attitudes.

1.3. Solidarity, Rights and Responsibilities

Since the end of the 20th century, education in and about human rights has become stronger. All over the world, numerous educational systems encourage the training of students in the knowledge and defence of their own rights and those of their fellow citizens.

A vision of solidarity from the standpoint of human rights underscores the necessary discernment of the spaces for guaranteeing and protecting rights that are part of the non-delegable function of States, and which cannot—and should not—be assumed by individuals, educational institutions or civil society organisations. Nonetheless, they can

definitely contribute to raising visibility and awareness of their necessary compliance and protection, and, in a subsidiary manner, fill the gaps left by States. This perspective helps overcome paternalistic or naive views that can claim to replace non-delegable roles of States, and it is directly associated with what South African authors Osman and Petersen (2013) call “service-learning with a social justice perspective” (see 3.1 above).

Numerous authors have pointed to service-learning as a powerful tool for training for active and authentically democratic citizenship (Puig Rovira, 2021:141-147), with particular emphasis on the perspective of human rights and social justice (Aramburu Zabala, 2013; Saavedra *et al.*, 2022). This training, historically seen as part of basic education, is increasingly a fundamental component of higher education, a core aspect of the training of future professionals capable of responding to the complex challenges posed by societies and the planet at large.

“The service-learning pedagogy also involves a conception of training for active citizenship that is not limited to the knowledge of rules and values and the diagnosis of political and socio-economic problems, but rather advances in the development of proposals and active participation in initiatives that include not only denouncing and complaining, but also assuming responsibilities and engagement to the construction of better alternatives, and working in coordination with authorities and civil society organisations.” (Tapia y otros, 2015:34)

1.4. A “Horizontal” Solidarity

The conception of solidarity as an encounter with recognition of fundamental rights is defined by some authors as “horizontal solidarity”, and is clearly differentiated from the traditional “vertical” or naive vision of solidarity.

The latter tends to focus on charitable or welfare activities. It stems from a traditional and conservative outlook on “those in need”, whom it seeks to assist with a top-down movement, which can be identified with paternalistic or clientelistic attitudes.

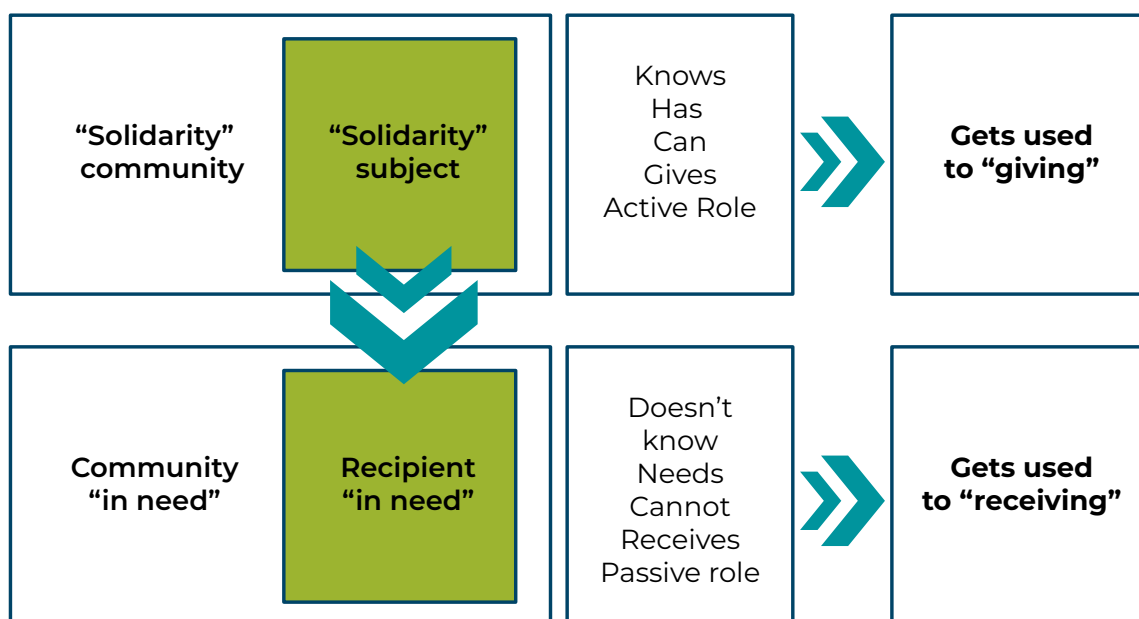


FIGURE 9: "Vertical" Solidarity (Tapia and others, 2015:107)

From this perspective, the individuals or communities comprising the first group take on the role of active subjects, as those who have, can, know, have something to give, and are the ones who assume the active role in solidarity action.

This attitude places the individuals and communities served in the role of passive recipients, portraying them solely as needy, ignorant or disabled, expected only to accept what is given to them and to be grateful. Vertical solidarity immobilises the beneficiaries in the role of passive recipients, thereby generating dependence and—even with the best of intentions—perpetuating the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

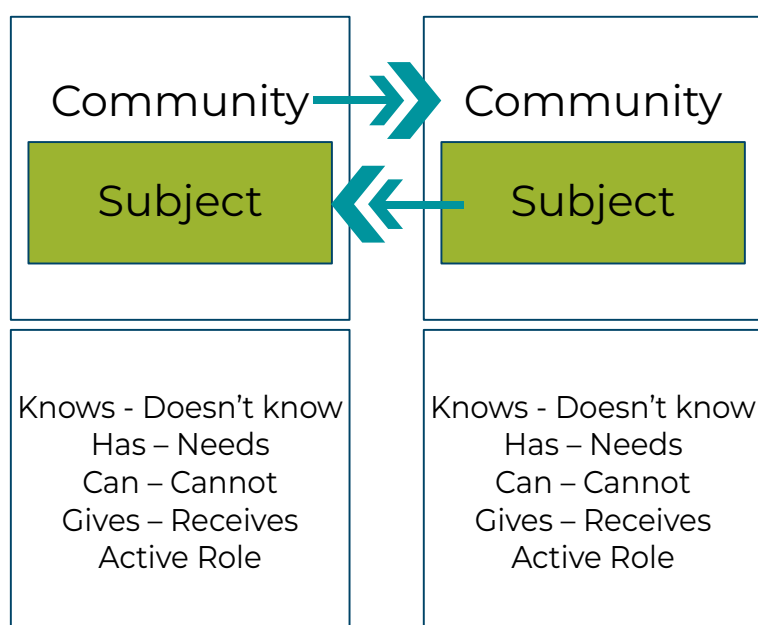


FIGURE 10: "Horizontal" Solidarity" (Tapia and others, 2015:108)

The SSL proposal aims to overcome the vertical model by acknowledging the dignity of individuals and communities and considers them as rights-bearing subjects, generating an encounter and a “horizontal” link.

“Horizontal” solidarity starts not only from the recognition and deepest appreciation of the identity and dignity of the other, but also from the realistic acceptance that, even amid significant differences in economic or cultural resources, we all have something to receive and learn from each other, we are all capable of giving and receiving, and that—even in situations of great disparity of academic knowledge—there is always something we ignore of the reality and culture of the other, something new they can teach us.

CHARITY (“VERTICAL” LINK)	SOLIDARITY (“HORIZONTAL” LINK)
Give - Help	Share - Reciprocity
Do “for”	Do “with”, co-protagonism
Paternalism	Fraternity
Clientelism	Empowerment
“We already know it all	Exchange and joint construction of knowledge
“It makes me feel good”	Empathy, prosocial bonds
Replication of situations of injustice	Recognition of rights, search for equity and justice

FIGURE 11: Differences between Charity and Solidarity

In order to exercise “horizontal” solidarity, it is necessary to develop critical thinking, to learn to deal with multiple and complex causalities and problems, and to consider simultaneously the personal, group, socio-economic, environmental and political dimensions of the activities (see Chapter 4, 4.3.2).

Assuming this model of solidarity has concrete consequences when it comes to organising an SSL project because it implies not giving the community what the educational institution assumes the community needs, or what it is good to give, but rather establishing a collaborative effort together with the individuals and community organisations existing in the territory, and developing and evaluating the projects with them. It implies, as will be

seen later in the “itinerary” for the projects (Chapter 4), taking time for active listening and participatory diagnosis, and for building genuine partnerships with the community.

As already mentioned, solidarity as a “horizontal” encounter also implies that students assume that—in addition to offering a service to the community—they are also “beneficiaries” because of the possibility of learning and researching within it.

In this process of generating “horizontal” links of reciprocal learning, community members can be valuable mentors for students, contributing not only to their human development but also as future professionals. This can also lead to a valuable dialogue between scientific knowledge and popular and ancestral knowledge, which, if conducted in a respectful manner, can be extremely enriching for all those involved.

One experience that illustrates what we have been developing is that of technology transfer to isolated communities carried out by the University of Salta. Students and faculty of the Introduction to Renewable Energies course of the Renewable Energies degree developed participatory diagnostic activities, design and installation of solar energy devices to provide solutions to the needs of different Andean communities. Problems detected together with social organisations and brought up by the inhabitants, such as arsenic contamination of drinking water in the Puna and the cold water used for hygiene and cleaning in the Andean communities, were addressed by the students of the School through workshops to inform and train the beneficiaries on the advantages and uses of solar energy, and the installation, together with the inhabitants, of the appropriate technological elements for each need.

One of the projects originally proposed by the students consisted of installing individual water heaters in homes, among other things, so that women would not have to wash their clothes in a freezing Andean stream. However, through the process of listening to the community, the women expressed their desire to respect their ancestral custom of working together; as a result, the decision was made to build a community laundry, with hot water provided by solar panels (PNES, 2010:22; 2011:71-74).

1.5. Solidarity and Fraternity

CAs we have pointed out, solidarity understood as a horizontal bond of reciprocity and mutual recognition differs from paternalism to seek the construction of fraternal ties. In the context of reflection on solidarity service-learning, we often use solidarity and fraternity as synonyms²⁷. Very briefly, we will reflect specifically on this last expression.

27 In recent decades, the term “sisterhood” is sometimes used alongside “fraternity” to emphasise gender parity. In this handbook, we will use “fraternity” as a synonym for “brotherhood/sisterhood”, including all human creatures without distinction

The term fraternity has deep Christian roots; the Gospel of Jesus claims that we are all children of one Father and each other's brothers and sisters, and that Jesus' "new commandment" is that of mutual love.²⁸ Fraternity also has a long secular tradition, especially visible in the French Revolution (Baggio; 2006, Mardones 2013; Benoit, 2017), and has been historically linked to the struggle for human rights and the search for a society in which freedom is not just for a few, and equality does not become oppressive uniformity.

This double root of the concept of fraternity makes it possible to associate reflection on SSL practices with a perspective that can be profoundly Christian and authentically "secular", open to students of very diverse religious beliefs or none at all. We will explore this theme in more detail in Chapter 5, when we look at the spirituality of solidarity service in Catholic universities.

In this broad sense, Pope Francis refers in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* to the link between fraternity, freedom and equality, and on the ultimate meaning of fraternity he says:

"Fraternity is born not only of a climate of respect for individual liberties, or even of some administered equality. While these are conditions of possibility, they are not sufficient for it to emerge as a necessary outcome. Fraternity has something positive to offer freedom and equality."

What happens if fraternity is not consciously cultivated, if there is no political will for fraternity, translated into education for fraternity, for dialogue, for the discovery of reciprocity and mutual enrichment as values? What happens is that freedom falters, thus becoming more a condition of solitude, of pure autonomy to belong to someone or something, or only to possess and enjoy. This in no way depletes the richness of freedom, which is oriented above all towards love.

Nor is equality achieved by defining in the abstract that "all human beings are equal", but is the result of the conscious and pedagogical cultivation of fraternity. (...)

There is a basic recognition, essential for moving towards social friendship and universal fraternity: to perceive how much a human being is worth, how much a person is worth, always and

28 "“For I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, who causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Do not even tax collectors do the same?” (Mt 5:44-46). “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. As I have loved you, so you also are to love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:34-35). “The whole Law reaches its fullness in one precept: You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Gal 5:14). “Whoever loves his brother abides in the light and does not stumble. But he who hates his brother abides and walks in darkness” (1 Jn 2,10-11). “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love remains in death” (1 Jn 3,14). “Whoever does not love his brother, whom he sees, cannot love God, whom he does not see” (1 Jn 4,20).

in all circumstances. If everyone is worth so much, it must be clearly and firmly stated that “the mere fact of having been born in a place with fewer resources or less development does not justify that some people live with less dignity” (Evangelii gaudium, 190). This is an elementary principle of social life that is often ignored in various ways by those who feel that it does not contribute to their worldview or does not serve their ends.” (Papa Francisco, 2020:103-106)

1.6. Three Dimensions of Intelligent Solidarity

To conclude our reflection on the concept of solidarity, we would like to stress that intelligent solidarity recognises the need for at least three dimensions of solidarity action: direct attention to emergencies, transfer and joint development of knowledge, and contribution to local development.

There is a well-known proverb that states: “If you give someone a fish, he will have food for a day. If you teach him to fish, he will be able to eat all his life.” The phrase contains profound wisdom because it emphasises the protagonism and development of skills of the excluded, rather than the recurrence of situations that may reinforce their dependence. Just as true as the proverb is the comment that a leader of a grassroots organization made about it:

“Sometimes you need to eat first to have the strength to lift the fishing rod, and if you don’t have the sea or at least a small pond at hand, no matter how much you are taught to fish, you are not going to have anywhere to do so....”(In: Tapia and others, 2015: 127)

This insightful observation can help us identify three elements that symbolise the possible dimensions or typologies for the solidarity service offered by service-learning projects.

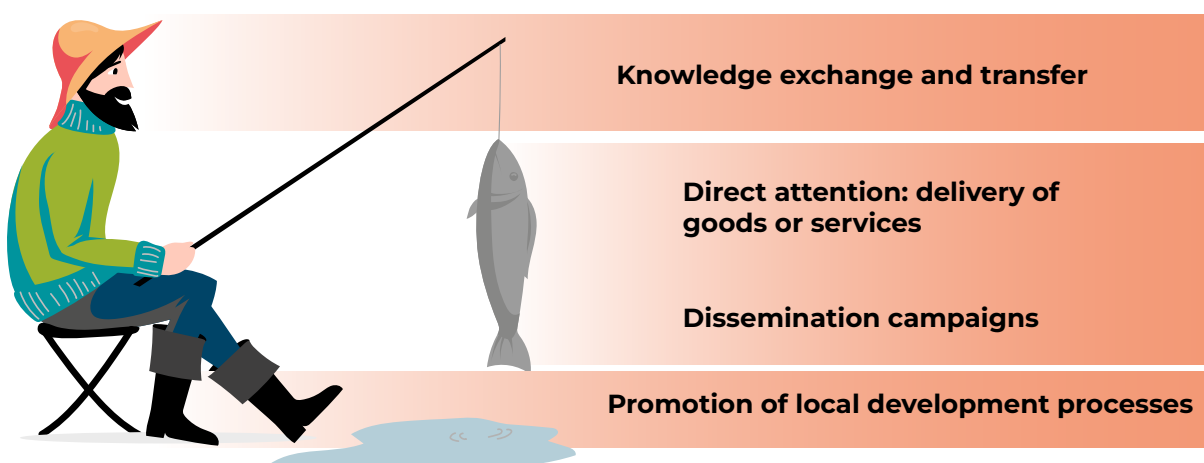


FIGURE 12: The rod, the fish and the pond: three dimensions of intelligent solidarity

In this metaphor, the fish symbolises the goods or services distributed in direct response to emergencies. This is undoubtedly indispensable in times of natural disasters, economic crises and social emergencies. Equally necessary are dissemination campaigns where the good being distributed constitutes relevant information (such as that spread during the COVID pandemic or in other health emergencies).

From the perspective of horizontal solidarity that we have presented, the fishing rod represents not only the transfer of knowledge and skills, but also the exchange and collective construction of knowledge that allows the subjects to take charge of their own problems in an autonomous manner. Training activities, advisory and consultancy services aimed at providing tools for personal and community development are some examples in this dimension.

Finally, the sea or the pond refers to the territories or communities, to the environmental context, and to the need to foster local development processes that contribute to the common good of the entire population. Projects and programmes that address these types of processes usually require multi- or interdisciplinary approaches, as well as the generation of partnerships with governmental and civil society actors, in order to provide community-wide responses.

It is essential to point out that solidarity, properly understood, does not exclude direct attention to emergencies through assistance activities. Certain simplistic views tend to consider any type of direct assistance as “welfare” or “paternalistic”, when in the practical realm of social action, assistance (“providing fish”), the exchange and transfer of knowledge and skills (“teaching how to fish”) and the promotion of empowerment of individuals alongside the pursuit of integral and sustainable development are usually three strategies necessarily complementary and simultaneous in time (Ierullo and Ruffini, 2015).

In some cases, each SSL project is thought of as a contribution to a process of progressive change and improvement: in the first contacts with a community, the starting point is attention to the simplest demands that can be met, and from these first experiences, the following projects move towards social transformations that leave installed capacity, ways of doing things, attitudes and legislation that favour new developments.

In other cases, SSL practices can be found that implement all three strategies in a coordinated way. This is the case of the experience developed by students from the South African universities of Rhodes and Fort Hare from the “*Siyakhula Living Lab*” (Dugmore, 2012). The project was set up to address the digital divide between big cities and the more isolated rural villages, and to contribute to securing the right to communication for rural

dwellers in the East Cape province. Students installed satellite dishes in the villages of rural Dwesa to provide villagers with Internet access, handed out notebooks and set up a computer classroom (delivery of goods and services). The IT classroom was used to educate local trainers in the use of new technologies (knowledge transfer). At the same time, and in dialogue with community leaders, a simple and robust integrated e-commerce platform was installed to facilitate fair trade and enable small local producers to access wider markets (local development). The project included a strong research component to prove the impact of the project and to verify its replicability.

From the SSL perspective, these different types of social activity require progressively more complex knowledge from the students. Collecting and distributing non-perishable food items (direct assistance) calls for less knowledge than designing a dengue prevention campaign (dissemination/awareness-raising campaigns), and much less knowledge than is needed to sustain a school support programme or train community leaders on health issues, or how to take care of a vegetable garden and eat well (knowledge transfer). Actions such as improving water quality or urban recycling mechanisms, promoting productive enterprises or developing strategies to enhance the value of the historical heritage (driving local development) usually involve not only longer time frames, but also more complex knowledge and a greater degree of partnerships with other community stakeholders.

Let us conclude this discussion on solidarity by stressing that one of the main differences between activism and transformative action is that the latter inevitably requires the use of intelligence and the practice of empathy, critical thinking and the knowledge necessary to determine how to respond to the social issues that challenge it. In other words, in addition to putting their hearts and hands to work voluntarily, albeit sometimes naively, students should also be able to involve their heads and all their knowledge in their SSL projects.

2. Student Leadership

Student leadership is one of the key characteristics of a quality SSL project. Most contemporary legislation includes, among the unavoidable missions of the educational system, that of training “participative citizens”, “active protagonists” in their learning and in social and political life, and that most institutional missions assume these objectives as a central part of their mission. Pedagogy emphasises the need for a learner-centred

Student leadership is one of the key characteristics of a quality SSL project.

education, and increasingly proposes active methodologies led by students. However, the very notion of youth leadership is still conflicting or

threatening to those who continue to think of education as a process centred on the educator rather than the learner.

In traditional education, the educator is the main actor in the transmission of knowledge to the students. In this conception, which Freire called “banking” (Freire, 1973), students are passive recipients of the “deposit” of disciplinary knowledge provided by the educator. Despite the efforts that many universities have made in recent decades to update teaching practices and provide pedagogical training for their professors, many university lecturers are still disciplinary specialists who tend to reproduce the way they learnt. As a result, they continue to rely on lectures, “practical” work that in reality consists of simulation exercises or guided reading, and a fundamentally theoretical training that is also evaluated through traditional formats: written and oral exams in which students are assessed on how well they reproduce what is taught in the lectures.

For the generation of digital natives who have been populating university classrooms for some years now, this traditional model is becoming increasingly obsolete. For those who, from an increasingly early age, have had a vast universe of information at their fingertips on their mobile phones and computers, and more recently all the tools of artificial intelligence, it is no longer enough to receive disciplinary information from their educators. Rather, they

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require the necessary tools to be able to navigate with autonomy and critical thinking an ocean of data that includes without distinction the latest scientific discoveries and fake news, pseudo-science and the wildest conspiracy theories.

It is not surprising, then, that UNESCO's latest survey on higher education, “Pathways to 2050 and Beyond” has highlighted the strong social demand for a less theoretical and more real-world higher education, in which students can “really do it” (UNESCO, 2021:35).

Active pedagogies, and in particular that of solidarity service-learning, respond to this demand by promoting the active involvement of students in the design and implementation of SSL projects.

2.1. The Ladder of Participation

Within the SSL perspective, merely involving young people in action is not enough. It is necessary to question whether they are genuinely developing an authentic experience of personal engagement and participation.

When starting a solidarity project, there is a common assumption that the easiest approach is to have faculty, administrators or community leaders organise everything and then present the students with the ready-made project. It may be fast and practical for adults, but it is hardly authentic as solidarity service-learning. No one truly learns to be an active citizen simply by following the instructions of others, participating in someone else's projects.

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the instructions of others, participating in someone else's projects. Experience has shown that if students lack a sense of ownership of the project at an early stage, it will become overly dependent on the educators involved and, as a result, will fail to develop the full educational potential of young people's creativity and initiative.

One of the most valuable and enduring lessons learnt from SSL projects is precisely that students can learn to diagnose the problems to be addressed together with community representatives, that they know how to organise themselves and work with different people, that they can manage resources and time, evaluate and self-evaluate throughout the process, and so many other fundamental skills for their future professional practice and for their personal lives and as citizens—skills that are not always acquired in traditional classrooms.

To explain the concepts of “participation” and “leadership”, Roger Hart's metaphor of the “ladder” of participation comes in useful. He defines participation as *“the ability to express decisions that are recognised by one's social environment and that affect one's own life and/or the life of the community in which one lives”* (Hart, 1993:10-18).

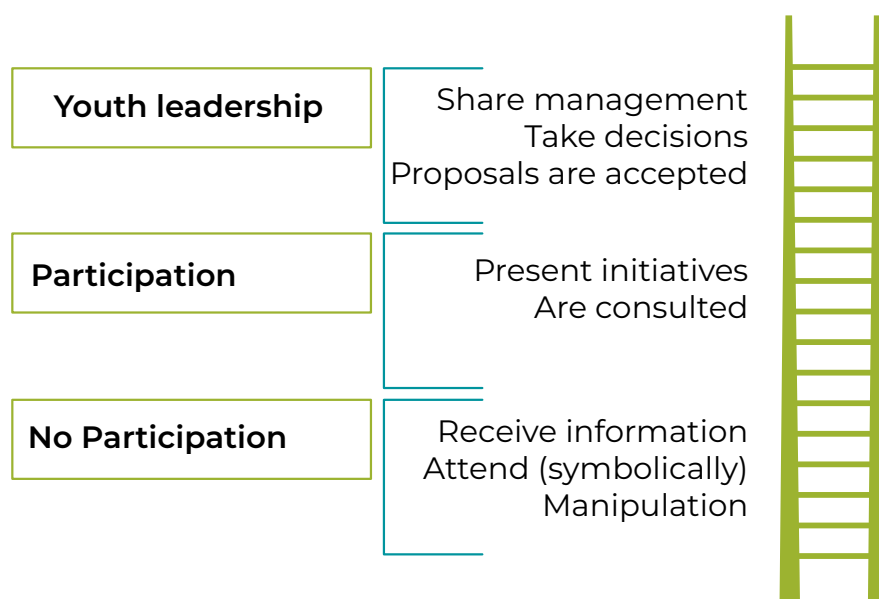


FIGURE 13: Participation and Leadership of Children and Young People (Hart, 1993:10)

The 'ladder of participation' warns against the risks of manipulation, and of using students as 'captive labour' to meet institutional or personal objectives. At the same time, it distinguishes simple participation from genuine leadership, when students not only have the possibility to be consulted and to present initiatives, but can share in the management of projects and have decision-making power.

In short, in a good SSL project, students should not only be informed, consulted and taken into account, but they should also be able to consider the project as their own from the initial planning stages until their final evaluation and closure, and throughout this itinerary to be able to assume responsibilities and make personal or group decisions, always with the educators' support.

There are exceptional cases, such as "CS+Social Good" at Stanford University²⁹ (USA), where the initiative and management of the entire project is carried out exclusively by students. In this case, a group of computer science students set out to show the multiple uses that technologies can have in solving social and environmental problems. They themselves teach a service-learning course, arranged by the university, in which participants develop high-impact real-life projects while learning web development and other tools for using computer science to achieve positive social impacts.

More often, however, educators share decision-making with students. In the best projects, faculty act as mentors and companions to students, and open up spaces for young people's leadership in dialogue with the community.

29 <https://youtu.be/BB3iZB7E9sU?si=DUXdjLRks4CMizIk>

In the accounts of many SSL project coordinators, the fear of 'losing control' is often replaced by the positive experience of being able to delegate or share tasks with students, and not having to carry all aspects of management on their own shoulders.

It is always a delicate balance: on the one hand, the faculty cannot renounce their role as educators, and should accompany and correct field-work as they would do in the classroom, seeking academic rigour and excellence. Espe-

cially in cases where students undertake pre-professional internships in direct contact with people in the community, they should accompany and supervise these internships in a way that simultaneously protects students and community participants. On the other hand, the inertia of the old ways of teaching makes it difficult for many educators to relinquish absolute leadership of projects, and they can end up micro-managing it, depriving students of opportunities for participation and protagonism.

In the accounts of many SSL project coordinators, the fear of 'losing control' is often replaced by the positive experience of being able to delegate or share tasks with students, and not having to carry all aspects of management on their own shoulders. An oft-repeated example is that of acquiring resources for project development: in many SSL initiatives, it is the students themselves who plan activities to raise funds for their projects. Particularly in the South of the globe, it is common to find sales of *empanadas*, cakes, curries or whatever is most appropriate for the region, as well as benefit events, raffles or campaigns to appeal for donations, among others, depending on the needs of the project. In some cases, donations in kind are as or more important than cash donations. For example, in many architecture courses, students develop service-learning projects towards the end of their studies, when they are simultaneously doing internships in professional studios. This connection has allowed many projects to channel leftover materials from construction sites—often an economic and environmental problem for construction companies—as a donation to community organisations or families served by SSL projects.

Especially in universities where student centres have a real impact on institutional policies, student support for the SSL proposal can be decisive. In the case of one university where the newly elected rector was not convinced to continue his predecessor's policies of promoting service-learning, it was the student centre delegates who presented the benefits of service-learning practices to the Council and won approval for its continuation. In several universities, students have initiated or advocated for service-learning electives to be made compulsory.

2.2. Learning Centred on the Learner: Project-Based and Problem-Based Learning, Action Research

As noted above, embracing in practice the concept of student leadership and learner-centrality implies a high degree of innovation with respect to traditional practices. The above mentioned UNESCO document, “Reimagining our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education”, underscores the need to move beyond conventional lecture formats and advocates for three alternative pedagogical approaches: project- and problem-based learning (PBL), participatory action-research (PAR) and service-learning (SL) (UNESCO, 2022:104).

Actually, the latter has points of contact with the other two approaches, as SSL can be seen as a project-based and problem-based approach to learning, and often includes instances of participatory action research.



FIGURE 14: Project- and Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Solidarity Service-Learning (SSL) and Participatory Action Research (PAR)

As illustrated in the graph, service-learning can be viewed as intersecting with the other two alternatives proposed by UNESCO, except that some PBL projects can be carried out only in the classroom, in the interaction between educators and students, and in many PAR projects it is only the researchers/educators who interact with the community. The SSL

Embracing in practice the concept of student leadership and learner-centrality implies a high degree of innovation with respect to traditional practices.

proposal, on the other hand, necessarily requires the protagonism of students, the accompaniment of faculty and the active participation of the members of the community in which the project takes place.

Student leadership is fundamental in the planning and execution of an SSL project. The aspect in which the role of educators is crucial is the pedagogical planning that accompanies and sustains youth initiatives. It is precisely this aspect that distinguishes service-learning from other forms of institutional volunteering and community service.

As Muñoz Muñoz and Díaz Perea point out, the project methodology enables students to be the protagonists of their own learning through their involvement in the acquisition of new knowledge based on what they already have—meaningful learning—in order to use it in

new contexts—functional learning—(Muñoz Muñoz and Díaz Perea, 2009:101-126). Thus, SSL practices can be defined as a form of solidarity project-based learning, i.e., they require not only classroom work, but also field trips and interaction with the community.

SSL projects constitute also a PBL format. Unlike traditional problem-based learning, SSL aims not only to analyse problems and possible solutions in the classroom in a theoretical way, but to engage with the community in making real contributions towards solving them. While in traditional PBL the problem is defined by the educator, generally around a curriculum topic, in SSL the starting point is a participatory diagnosis of real problems in the community, and the activities are not only for learning, but also seek to collaborate with the solution of the problem.

In both SSL and PBL, learning activities should be student-led and student-centred, with the educator primarily acting as a companion, observer or guide to the projects designed and carried out by the young people.

SSL projects provide young people with the opportunity to actively engage with their community, facilitating meaningful and practical learning experiences beyond the classroom setting. Research shows that solidarity motivation strengthens the positive results demonstrated by PBL in terms of interest in incorporating new knowledge and the comprehensive development of knowledge and skills, and that it also adds an important component of training for active citizenship, development of empathy and self-esteem, contributing not only to “learning to learn and to do” but also to “learning to be and to live together” (Blanco-Cano, E. and García-Martín, J., 2021).

Particularly at university level, service-learning projects often involve various forms of community-engaged research, including participatory action research. In this case, the only difference lies in the high level of involvement of students, who are not included

in the action research projects in which university researchers are directly linked to the community without including teaching activities.

3. Coordination between Knowledge and Solidarity Practice

We have seen that student leadership is fundamental in the planning and execution of an SSL project. The aspect in which the role of educators is crucial is the pedagogical planning that accompanies and sustains youth initiatives. It is precisely this aspect that distinguishes service-learning from other forms of institutional volunteering and community service, as we have seen in identifying the ‘quadrants’ of service-learning and solidarity service (see 2.1.2).

While in traditional volunteering the key objectives are those established at the service of the community, in SSL projects we should be able to clearly identify both the service objectives (defined in solidarity with the community) and the learning objectives linked to the curriculum and the development of the professional profile.

As we have pointed out, learning specific to SSL includes learning to learn disciplinary content, the development of “know-how” and also “knowing how to be and live together”, training in values and for active citizen participation. A central aspect of learning in quality SSL projects involves reflection on practice, which takes place through activities that are intentionally planned to develop critical thinking, to go beyond mere activism and to contribute to making the solidarity experience authentically educational.

SSL understands that knowledge is a social good and a contribution to a more democratic, just and supportive world, therefore, it does not conceive learning processes exclusively in terms of individual growth, but also as part of the broader process of building the common good. Thus, it aims to identify the most relevant and pertinent knowledge for the resolution of significant problems in reality, beyond the walls of the classroom.

The experiences documented over the past two decades show that SSL facilitates the application, in real contexts, of conceptual content and competences from all disciplines or areas of knowledge, and also enables the development of interdisciplinary projects that encompass the complexity of real issues.

The close link between theory and practice, together with the frequent need to coordinate multidisciplinary knowledge, drive SSL practices away from traditional encyclopedism and approach

epistemological paradigms more in line with current scientific developments (Herrero, 2002:107).

From this vision of knowledge, it is fundamental to integrate learning with solidarity action. The experiences documented over the past two decades show that SSL facilitates the application, in real contexts, of conceptual content and competences from all disciplines or areas of knowledge (cf. PNES 2013; Tapia, 2018), and also enables the development of interdisciplinary projects that encompass the complexity of real issues. In this regard, and as stated by UNESCO, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be

“a framework around which we can structure interdisciplinary, problem- and project-based learning that helps students develop the skills to progress across the full range of objectives”
(UNESCO, 2022:54)

In fact, in recent years, many SSL projects have been focusing on addressing sustainable development goals from multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives (Gómez Villalba and Martínez Odría, 2022).³⁰

When planning SSL projects, possible links should be found between the academic curricula and the reality of the field, between the demands of the community, the expectations and capacities of the students and the development of learning, reflection and research activities that contribute to students' integral education.

It should be emphasised that, in the life of any university, interdisciplinary interactions usually involve not only theoretical and applied academic practice, but also the establishment of interpersonal links that enable coordinated work between professors, departments or schools. In this regard, interdisciplinary projects tend to promote institutional processes of internal interaction and, in many instances, trigger mechanisms for institutionalising service-learning pedagogy around programmes driven by the institution's global policies (see Chapter 6).

The introduction of solidarity practices into the curriculum can be implemented in various ways in different institutions, from the simplest—an educator who decides to incorporate a service-learning project linked to his or her curricular content—to the most complex, such as multidisciplinary programmes and institutional requirements for service-learning (Tapia, 2018).

30 Cf. the papers presented on the SDGs at the International Seminars on Solidarity Service-Learning, Buenos Aires, 2023 and 2024, <https://www.clayss.org/en/26-th-international-service-learning-conference-materials/> <https://www.clayss.org/en/27-th-materials/>

Here are some concrete examples, grouped by formats that may overlap: a service-learning internship can be developed either at the initiative of a faculty member or as part of an institutional decision. Similarly, service-learning courses may be proposed by faculty (as is common in many American universities) or be mandatory requirements set by the university.

3.1. SSL in a Subject or Course

Often, the first SSL practices in an institution arise from the initiative of a department, which —whether or not it is aware of the pedagogical proposal—links the disciplinary contents of the course to a solidarity activity with the community. This is usually the most immediate modality for implementing SSL projects because it closely connects solidarity actions with specific learning content.

In this modality, SSL practices can be compulsory for the whole class, or be offered as a voluntary alternative: for example, students can choose between presenting a paper on a topic or participating in the project and writing a report linking the contents of the subject with the activity carried out. In the aforementioned case of Chemistry students at the “John Paul II” University in Lublin (Poland), the activity was carried out as part of a Science Club in which students participate on a voluntary basis (see Chapter 2, .2.2).

Overall, the SSL option is often highly attractive to students, as it allows them to learn and apply content in a more realistic way than laboratory practice, mock-ups or simulations, with the added satisfaction of improving the living conditions of real people.

In many cases, the projects arise precisely from the passage from a “practical work” simulation to the implementation of a task with the same requirements, but for real recipients: from the study of fictitious legal cases to the legal clinic; from the essay on teaching resources to the production of real teaching resources for children with specific needs; from the exam on tax issues to tax advice for micro-entrepreneurs; from the design of the model of a building to the design of the blueprints and collaboration in the construction of a community centre, and so many others.

While it is true that from a single course or discipline it is difficult to encompass the complexity of many social and environmental issues, it is no less true that disciplinary projects can often serve as the first step towards the development of more complex initiatives. For example, a Microbiology course had been trying for several semesters to find a source of drinking water for a community whose water sources were contaminated, and they were planning to build a well that could supply the affected population. After numerous unsuccessful attempts, they came to the conclusion that the solution they had thought of was not feasible, and that they needed to obtain drinking water from another location.

Hence, it was necessary to address the problem beyond disciplinary boundaries, incorporating the analysis of the political-administrative issues involved, the need to raise public awareness of the matter, and, therefore, the need to join efforts with other departments, such as Communication and Political Sciences, to tackle the problem more comprehensively.³¹

Here are some examples of SSL projects developed within the scope of a disciplinary subject in various regions of the world:

- *Educational Psychology, University of Deusto (Spain)*: This core subject in the Psychology degree offers all students the option to undertake an internship, working alongside third-sector organizations on social projects with an educational focus, such as: socio-educational support for children in vulnerable situations, literacy classes for migrants, school assistance for children with hearing disabilities, and other related initiatives. Once the experience is over, students must do a reflective assignment in which they apply the contents worked on in the subject throughout the semester and where they reflect on the inclusive and transformative capacity of education at a social level. The learning objectives seek to provide students with hands-on experience in contact with social realities, in situations of vulnerability and/or exclusion, allowing them to apply their knowledge of educational psychology in these settings. In relation to the purpose of the service, the aim is to favour inclusion processes of the people who attend the social entities with which they collaborate. In this case, the initiative arose from the collaboration between the chair and the institutional heads of service-learning at the university.³²
- *Presentation of Final Work. Interior Design, De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, Manila (Philippines)*. *Tanaw*, which means “in sight”, was the name given by third-year students to their project for the INDEXHI, or Interior Design Exhibition, a curricular space that is the culmination of three and a half years of study in Design. The course set out to apply the principles of university social responsibility, which are part of the Lasallian identity, and the concepts of “inclusive design” and “multi-sectorial and experiential design”, to offer the School for the Blind the redesign of its library, in order to better adapt it to the needs of the blind children and young people who attend it. During the COVID pandemic, students engaged in a permanent dialogue with authorities, faculty and library users, and based on what they gathered, they proposed redesigning the space to include innovations such as tactile paths (with tiles in different patterns that inform the user of circulation or chang-

³¹ Experience presented at the 9th Conference on University Social Responsibility. Catholic University of Córdoba, Argentina, October 9, 2013..

³² Experience presented at the Uniservitate Award, 2022.

es in areas of the space, and are detectable with the sole of the shoe or the white cane), a zoning system with contrasting colours, an interactive wall that stimulates sensory learning, and others. Upon reflection, the students agreed that they want to *“remove the preconception that interior design is a status symbol or a purely visual decorative aesthetic. Interior design is for everyone, regardless of social status or disability.”*³³

- *Paving, Civil Engineering, Xavierian University of Cali (Colombia)*: the whole class group was asked to analyse the problem of the frequent need to repave the streets of Cali, with the resulting difficulties for local traffic and the high costs for public funds. As part of their work for the subject, students analysed the chemical formula used by the local council to pave local streets and roads, found shortcomings that made it ineffective for the city's subtropical climate, and made a more efficient and lower-cost alternative proposal to the authorities for the paving work. They also disseminated their findings through the press (García A., 2011).

3.2. SSL in Community Internships and Pre-Professional Practice

Many SSL experiences take place in the context of internships in community organisations, or in a setting of professional or pre-professional practices. Sometimes this happens on the initiative of the faculty members in charge, as we have seen in the previous case. In other cases, it is a matter of institutional decisions in a degree course, school or the university as a whole. In both scenarios, as in the previous case, students can participate in SSL projects on an optional or compulsory basis.

In general, this type of internship is carried out towards the end of the degree course, which means that they make it possible to apply the whole range of knowledge associated with the graduate profile, both the content from various disciplines and competences linked to know-how and the coordination with various community actors. Therefore, they also tend to have a greater impact on solidarity action; yet, they do require great care in clarifying to the community, and for legal reasons, that the students are doing apprenticeships, not substituting the work of professionals.

Unlike traditional internships where students are usually required to perform pre-assigned tasks defined by the host company (and sometimes of little relevance to their training, such as basic administrative tasks, or making coffee), this type of project can offer students the possibility of putting themselves in the shoes of the future professional

33 Experience presented at the Uniservitate Award, 2022. https://youtu.be/PQxalcONwI?si=rUXLDYEQ_t9ziG7c

practice and of designing and managing their own projects to serve the needs identified together with the partner organisations.

Let us look at some examples:

- *Service-learning law clinic. School of Law, Catholic University of Lille (France):* The “Access to Law Bus”³⁴ is a project led by advanced students of the School, who carry out part of their legal internships on a bus equipped as an original set of law clinics. The project is a partnership between the University and the Lille Bar Association. The bus regularly tours the city and other nearby towns to offer legal assistance to people who cannot normally access the legal system. Students work under the supervision of their professors and in collaboration with local lawyers who offer their service pro bono. For example, twice a week, students in the human rights specialisation travel to Calais on board the bus to interact with migrants and offer them legal assistance, in collaboration with lawyers and volunteers from the Cimade Association, specialised in immigration law and procedures. Academic learning has been reinforced by the practical experience of dealing with often legally complex queries in a wide range of branches of law: labour, family, consumer, criminal, commercial, immigration and others.³⁵
- *Physiotherapy of Saint George University (Zaragoza, Spain):* In order to gain access to their professional qualification, students must take the Final Degree Project course (TFG, for its Spanish acronym). In this course, students develop and defend a collaborative academic work with a social purpose, which allows them to integrate the contents, competences and skills acquired during their training as physiotherapists at the service of a specific health group or organisation in the autonomous community of Aragon. For internships with patients, students contact public and/or private non-profit associations linked to patients, relatives and/or researchers of different pathologies requiring physical therapy. As a result of these solidarity internships, professional skills are improved through the application of specific scientific content linked to the pathologies of the people assisted, as well as personal skills through the development of civic and social values. Recipients are able to acquire skills to manage the disease, which promotes their autonomy.³⁶

34 <https://www.busdelaccesaudroit.fr/> <https://youtu.be/9eExjbESii0?si=5uvjBb1cePjzSveH>

35 https://youtu.be/PQuxalcONwI?si=rUXLDYEQ_t9ziG7c

36 https://www.uniservitate.org/featured_item/beyond-physiotherapy-active-teaching-by-developing-service-learning-projects/

3.3. Courses Organised around the Concept and Practice of SSL

In many universities, courses organised not around a specific discipline or area of knowledge, but around the service-learning activity itself, are included in the curriculum as compulsory or optional subjects.

These courses are designed for students to develop an SSL project, and the content is based on knowledge of reality and reflection on practice in the community. They may deal with subjects specifically linked to a course of study or professional profile, or they may offer the possibility of carrying out multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary projects together with students from different programmes. In some cases, the contents include concepts related to service-learning, university social responsibility, links with the environment or other related concepts.

In quite a few cases, these courses constitute pre-professional internships towards the end of the degree, which offer the same opportunities for practice in real contexts as internships in companies, but are carried out in alliance with community organisations or in the service of populations (see previous point, 3.2).

In universities with an open course offer, such as Anglo-Saxon universities, the initiative for these courses may come from the faculty or even from the students, but in general the organisation of this type of course implies a greater degree of institutional decision than in the previous case, as it does not only involve faculty members' personal initiative, but also the approval by the school or university of specific curricular content. In some cases it may even imply curricular reforms that allow for the inclusion of these courses and offer the possibility of having a chair specifically in charge of service-learning in an academic unit.

Such courses can enable a chair to have specific financial and human resources for the development of SSL projects, and often allow for great flexibility in the selection of partner organisations and solidarity actions to be developed. Nonetheless, in some cases there is a risk of emphasising more the benefit to the community and the training of students in values, without linking solidarity action as directly and specifically with disciplinary training as in the previous case. There is thus a risk of isolating service-learning from academic life, bringing it closer to institutional volunteering with spaces for reflection than to an authentic SSL project. On the other hand, when this type of course is planned in close relation to the contents and competences of the professional profile to be trained, it can constitute a valuable format of SSL.

Let us look at some scenarios in which the university has opted for the format of "service-learning courses":

- As noted, this option is very common in universities in the United States, which at the beginning of each semester offer students course listings organised around service-learning or disciplinary courses that have incorporated as part of their requirements the development of a service-learning activity.
 - » This is the case of Georgetown University, which in the student enrolment process identifies those courses that constitute “Social Justice and Community-Based Learning Courses”.³⁷
 - » *Duke University (USA)*³⁸ offers a large number of courses in different schools each semester. For example, in the Spring 2025 semester it offered 48 different courses. Among them, the Film course “Introduction to Global Los Angeles: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry”³⁹ explores the complexities of the city, focusing on issues that have a particular impact on marginalised communities. In the service component, students collaborate for at least 20 hours during the semester with a non-profit organisation committed to the pursuit of social justice. As a final assignment, students produce a documentary film that communicates the goals identified through the collaboration with the community partner.
- *University of Leuven (Belgium)*⁴⁰: Within the framework of “Leuven Engage”, the university offers opportunities for volunteering, sustainability, North-South action and service-learning courses. In this context, students from the School of Pharmacy collaborate in the development of care and recreation activities in a centre for people with disabilities. The learning objectives of the course are aimed at developing the empathy and communication skills of future professionals. Reflection activities allow them to get in touch with their own vulnerabilities and limitations, and to develop their capacity for social engagement.

3.4. SSL in Multi- or Interdisciplinary Institutional Projects and Programmes

As noted above, the service-learning pedagogical proposal facilitates addressing complicated problems through the development of multi- or interdisciplinary projects, which not only promote the approach of realistic solutions for the community, but also offer students richer and more complex experiences and learning. In fact, the possibility of participating in multidisciplinary teams constitutes an increasingly valuable experience for the development of professional life.

³⁷ <https://csj.georgetown.edu/socialjusticecourses/>

³⁸ <https://servicelearning.duke.edu/courses/spring-2025>

³⁹ <https://servicelearning.duke.edu/courses/introduction-global-los-angeles-interdisciplinary-survey-service-learning>

⁴⁰ <https://youtu.be/cdjBHYfnxPQ?si=QYkTXr-vxN3JX4ti>

The processes of multidisciplinary interaction around a service-learning programme may unfold over several years, insofar as the project gradually becomes part of an institutional programme. In many cases, those that begin as disciplinary projects become multidisciplinary due to the very demands of reality.

For example, in the aforementioned experience of the Interdisciplinary Seminar for Social Urgency (SIUS, for its Spanish acronym) of the School of Architecture, Design and Urbanism of the University of Buenos Aires (see 2.2.1), all courses within the School were initially brought together to address the design and construction needs of community organisations. As additional needs of these organisations were identified, chairs from other academic units, such as Education and Psychology, began to be called upon to provide educational support to children attending community canteens. At the same time, other academic units began to request the services of SIUS, and so the School of Veterinary Science requested support for the design of dissemination materials for the prevention of zoonotic diseases in vulnerable neighbourhoods and rural areas and other service-learning projects.

In other cases, projects are designed from the outset in an interdisciplinary way:

- The *Hiri Lagunkoiak denontzat* (Friendly Cities for all People) project of Deusto University (Bilbao, Spain) is a service-learning programme aimed at raising awareness of functional diversity and social inclusion, diagnosing and acting against barriers that limit accessibility for all people. The project involves students from Social Development, Economics and Innovation for People and from the School of Law, and is aimed at Spanish secondary school students who learn about human rights and accessibility deficits in the environment, together with ways to change the situation and generate reports for the responsible actors, becoming a reference for the changes that need to be made. Accompanied by community experts, teenagers and people with reduced mobility, the project invites university and secondary school students to map the environment, share it using free software tools and make proposals for improvement through the accessibility report that is submitted to the corresponding public administration or other interested organisations.
- The “Mediation Centre” was built by the Catholic University of Peru at the request of the diocese and the community of Lurin, one of the municipalities that make up the city of Lima. Lurin had the highest rates of armed violence in the city due to gang confrontation, and to address this problem the University created a mediation centre open to the entire community. Law students specialising in mediation began their compulsory internships in this centre. As the mediation service needed to establish bonds with young people in the neighbourhood and develop violence prevention campaigns, the project design in-

cluded interaction with other courses, as shown in figure 15. For example, Education students helped them organise sporting activities and design flyers and posters for educational and prevention campaigns together with those of the Communication degree programme. Eventually, the programme involved six subjects from four degree programmes, as shown in the following chart:

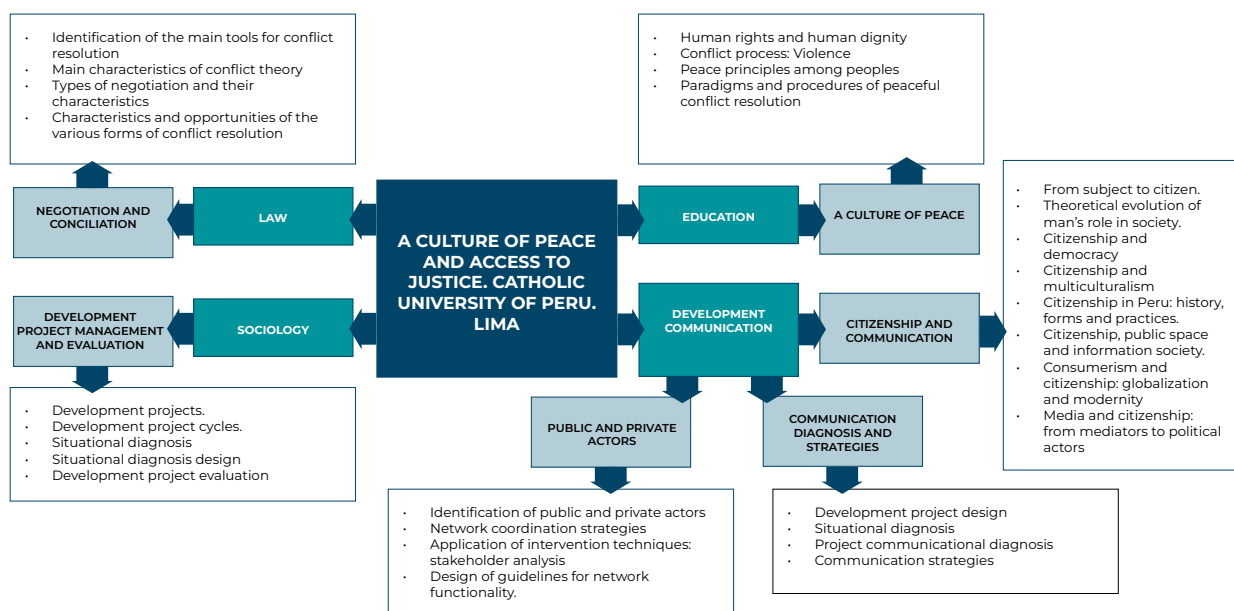


FIGURE 15: Curricular Networks around the Mediation Project to Prevent Violence in the Municipality of Lurín, Lima. Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP, 2006:48)

3.5. Compulsory Social Service and/or Service-Learning Requirements for Graduation

We have referred above to service-learning practices that are compulsory for all students of a subject or course that are part of the required curriculum. Such requirements, as we have seen, can be established by the chair itself (see chapter 3, 3.1.) or by institutional decisions.

A) Compulsory at institutional level:

In cases where participation in a service-learning practice is compulsory as a requirement for graduation at the institutional level—whether in an academic unit or university-wide—there is generally a minimum number of hours to be completed as part of the project, which can range from 30 hours in the case of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire⁴¹, to 360 in the case of Mexican universities. Multiple examples of universities with compulsory service-learning requirements can be found from Singapore to Latin America, although arguably such standards are more commonly found in the Americas and Asia than in other parts of the world.

41 <https://www.uwec.edu/sites/default/files/documents/ServiceLearningGuidebook.pdf>

As for the framework of the SSL practices to be developed, this may vary from one institution to another, but as a rule it can be done through existing training spaces, or by creating new programmes or subjects. Let us look at some cases:

- *One or several already existing curricular spaces or activities are established for the fulfilment of the compulsory requirement.*
 - » In the case of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), since 2010 all students must pass an institutionally accredited 3-credit course to fulfil the service-learning requirement⁴²
 - » In the same year, the University of Buenos Aires established the requirement of 42 hours of service-learning “Solidarity Educational Practices” prior to graduation. These can be completed, according to the decision of each school, within the scope of a curriculum subject; in an extension project approved and financed by the University; in field work or pre-professional internships; or in programmes and activities proposed by academic teams or research institutes of the academic units. (Nosiglia, 2022:333-336).
 - » In the same year, the University of Buenos Aires established the requirement of 42 hours of service-learning “Solidarity Educational Practices” prior to graduation. These can be completed, according to the decision of each school, within the scope of a curriculum subject; in an extension project approved and financed by the University; in field work or pre-professional internships; or in programmes and activities proposed by academic teams or research institutes of the academic units⁴³, including service-learning courses, service-learning internships, faculty-led research projects, theses developed in the service of social organisations, and public service experiences within international exchange programmes.⁴⁴
- *A compulsory course or institutional programme is created for the fulfilment of the requirement:*
 - » The National Institute for Teacher Education in Singapore (*Nanyang Technological University*) established the GESL (Group Endeavours in Service Learning) in 2005. As part of their training, future educators must design group service-learning projects in partnership with local organisations for a duration of 6 to 9 months.⁴⁵
 - » At ITESO, the Jesuit University of Guadalajara, Mexico, the Professional Application Projects (PAP) are subjects incorporated in the curricula within

42 <https://www.polyu.edu.hk/sllo/sl-polyu/sl-requirement/>

43 <https://cps.tulane.edu/public-service-requirement>

44 <https://cps.tulane.edu/academics/petitioning-for-credit>

45 [https://www.ntu.edu.sg/nie/about-us/programme-offices/office-of-teacher-education-and-undergraduate-programmes/group-endeavours-in-service-learning-\(gesl\)-\(te\)](https://www.ntu.edu.sg/nie/about-us/programme-offices/office-of-teacher-education-and-undergraduate-programmes/group-endeavours-in-service-learning-(gesl)-(te))

the area of professional knowledge, with at least 32 credits distributed in one or two of them. They are taken after having passed 70% of the degree programme. PAPs seek to develop alternative solutions to the main needs and problems of the environment, in a process of dialogue and collaboration with various stakeholders in society. The University offers students more than 80 projects in which they can fulfil this requirement, which also meets the Mexican national requirement for Social Service.⁴⁶

B) Compulsory social service and/or service-learning requirements for graduation at national level:

Here we will refer to the legislative regulations that impose at national level the participation of students in service activities as a requirement for graduation in all higher education institutions in that country. While these national requirements rarely call for service-learning projects explicitly—as in the case of Venezuela—they nevertheless tend to encourage de facto service-learning practices in many cases.

Normally, these legislations require the completion of a certain number of service hours, ranging from 360 hours in Mexico to 120 in Venezuela.

The service performed during these hours is not necessarily required to be linked to professional profile training or curricular content. This is the case of the Mexican “Social Service”, established by law in 1945 as a regulation of a constitutional principle, which requires 360 hours of service prior to graduation and leaves the regulation of this service to each higher education institution (De Gortari Pedroza, 2005; Tapia, 2018:60-61). In the case of the “National Service Scheme” in India, founded in 1969 on the occasion of Gandhi’s centennial, it aims to mobilise university students to serve rural populations as a priority. It takes place over two years and includes intensive one-week work camps and 120 hours of service distributed throughout the year in their cities of origin. It is coordinated by a governmental body and implemented by higher education institutions (Tapia, 2023:69-70).

Conversely, in other countries, service hours must be completed in activities linked to professional profiles or in the context of disciplinary or multidisciplinary service-learning projects, as in the case of Costa Rica’s “University Community Work”, established in 1974, or Venezuela’s “Student Community Service”, established in 2005 (Tapia, 2018:62). In Africa, some compulsory social service requirements for university students were introduced during the 1960s in connection with or in replacement of military service, and nowadays locate students to perform tasks in line with their graduate profiles.

46 Winning project of Uniservitate Award, 2024. <https://www.uniservitate.org/2024-award/> https://iteso.mx/en/web/general/detalle?group_id=3088784

To conclude this chapter, we will turn to Álvaro Ugüño Novoa's reflections on the question of why service-learning should be incorporated into higher education:

- *"Because it responds to the institutional mission of serving the regional community.*
- *Because using participatory and service-based methodological strategies generates deep and significant learning in students and motivates them to continue advancing in their professional training, putting young people at the centre of their learning.*
- *Because doing work with the community makes students aware of the value of their disciplinary learning.*
- *Because it generates an exchange of knowledge between students, faculty and neighbours in the community, thus broadening the understanding of the local reality and contributing to the development of the region."* (Ochoa, 2016:36).

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4. HOW TO IMPLEMENT SOLIDARITY SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS

1. Itinerary of a Solidarity Service-Learning Project

The development of an SSL project is like a path to be travelled, an “itinerary” with several moments: a preliminary moment of motivation and conceptualisation, or motivational and rational elaboration of the project; the initial moment of approaching reality when we identify problems, emergencies, challenges, and imagine and work out what we would like to do to solve them; a second moment in which we act; and a third moment of closure, in which we evaluate what we have done, learn from our mistakes, celebrate and plan if we should start over. Along the way, activities and processes that have to do with the specifically educational aspect of an SSL project take place simultaneously: we apply what we have learnt in the activities; raise new questions; learn in the field, with and from the community; reflect on what we have experienced and learnt and share it with others; record the various activities; systematise what seems most important to us and communicate it; and throughout the project, evaluate the process in order to correct what is necessary.

In order to facilitate the understanding of the passage of these different moments, we have divided the itinerary into 5 major stages and 4 cross-cutting processes. The following image allows us to graphically summarise the outline of the proposed itinerary:

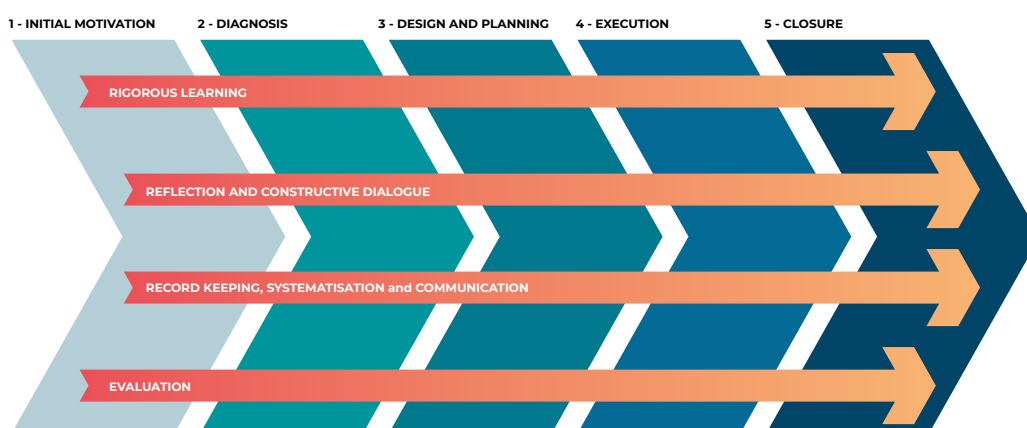


FIGURE 16: Itinerary of a Solidarity Service-Learning Project

Looking at the graph, we can identify:

- *The protagonists:*
 - » Students (or participants in a social organisation or non-formal education settings).

- » Formal or non-formal educators, leaders of youth groups or other organisations.
- » Community members, partners and other project participants.

They are placed at the beginning of the project to underline the importance of involving all of them as early as possible. The risk of projects that are excessively planned and guided by educators is that they limit students' leadership, and therefore also their learning, personal and group reflection, and the exercise of citizenship. On the other hand, if community representatives are not involved from the beginning and do not participate in the initial motivation and diagnosis, there is a risk of developing projects that do not respond effectively to the real needs of the community or to those problems that are a priority for them.

- *The 5 major stages of the project:*
 1. *Motivation:* Personal and institutional motivation to develop the project. Knowledge and understanding of the concept of service-learning. Awareness of the importance of youth leadership.
 2. *Diagnosis:* Identification of the needs/problems/challenges together with the target community. Analysis of the possibility of a response from the educational institution.
 3. *Design and planning:* Definition of solidarity service and learning objectives, project activities and content, and evaluation of project design and internal coherence.
 4. *Execution of the project:* Establishment of institutional partnerships, securing of resources, formalisation of agreements and conventions. Implementation and management of the solidarity project and simultaneous development of the associated learning contents. Recording of performance, reflection and evaluation of the process and intermediate goals. Adjustments, revisions, new implementations and partnerships.
 5. *Celebration and closure:* Final evaluation and systematisation. Celebration and recognition of protagonists. Decision-making on the continuation and multiplication of the same or other SSL projects.

While the stages of an itinerary reflect a sequential and, one could say, progressive logic of the tasks, there are aspects of a project that do not occur in chronological order, but rather run through it on a permanent basis. Therefore, the itinerary includes three simultaneous processes that involve the entire project:

- The development of in-depth learning, including academic content and the development of skills.

- Personal reflection and constructive dialogue with all participants.
- Recording, systematisation and communication of what has been achieved.
- Process evaluation or monitoring.

These processes are transversal to the project and run parallel to each other. In other words, they run through the project throughout its duration, in all its stages. They also respond to a logic of simultaneity and mutual determination.

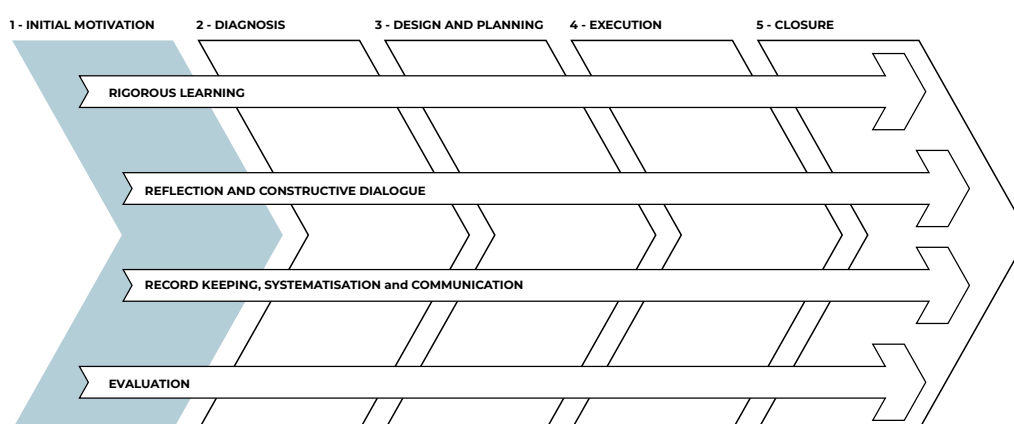
The path of a project may develop in different ways in each institution and involve more or less complex activities depending on the characteristics of each experience. The itinerary we propose aims at suggesting and organising some of the most important tasks for a quality service-learning proposal.

Although each project's road is unique and the steps will adapt to the rhythm of those who "walk through" it according to the singular features of each person, group, institution, need and context involved, we can be certain that the footprints will be indelible in the individual, collective and community development.

In the following section we will analyse each of the parts, starting with the stages and the cross-cutting processes, in order to illustrate a possible itinerary for the development of a high-quality SSL project.

2. Stages of the Itinerary

Stage 1 – MOTIVATION



Motivation is the initial driving force that inspires the beginning of a service-learning project. It is unique to each project because each institution, each educator and each group of students is different and makes each experience special and unrepeatable.

The initial motivation may stem from the educational institution's own interest in improving academic performance, strengthening education in values and/or offering young people the opportunity to be protagonists of solidarity actions through which they actively exercise democratic citizenship and can put their knowledge and skills at the service of the community.

Motivation can often arise from a specific demand that reaches the university from a civil society organisation, from the concerns of the nearest community, or by the initiative of faculty and/or students to respond to problems that challenge them or prompt them to take action.

Initially, motivation is usually shared only by a small number of people, who may become natural leaders or coordinators of the project. For a project to proceed, motivation must be shared by all potential participants and—to the greatest extent possible—embrace the entire educational community and the community at large. The potential of shared motivation can ensure the viability, implementation, continuity and sustainability of the project.

In some cases, the need to organise the project will be obvious to everyone; in others, it will not be so clear and time and effort will have to be invested to sufficiently motivate those who are directly or indirectly involved in the experience.

The motivation stage involves two central aspects:

- a. personal and institutional motivation to develop the project
- b. knowledge and understanding of the concept of service-learning

a. Personal and institutional motivation to develop the project

As noted above, the reasons for initiating a service-learning project can be very varied. Whether the initial motivation has come from the administrators, faculty, students or the community, at this stage it is important to:

- state clearly why the institution has decided to develop this type of project, considering its profile,
- encourage the motivation of management teams and educators,
- promote student motivation,
- consider who will be the promoters and leaders of the project,

- analyse how the link with the community will be established and identify the community representatives who should be informed or committed to the project.

Recommendations are made to recover and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the solidarity experiences previously carried out or in progress in the institution, which can be converted into a quality service-learning project.

It is important to plan informative and motivational activities to encourage the participation of educators, students, the educational community, and—eventually—the community at large. These activities should aim to strengthen the conviction of the educational importance of these new spaces for participation. The clearer the motivation for developing the project is and the more it is shared, the more likely it is that the project will be participatory and sustainable.

b. Knowledge and understanding of the concept of service-learning

A crucial part of the project's initial motivation is ensuring that all participants know and understand the scope of the service-learning proposal, as well as its differences with other types of social activity and with other teaching strategies.

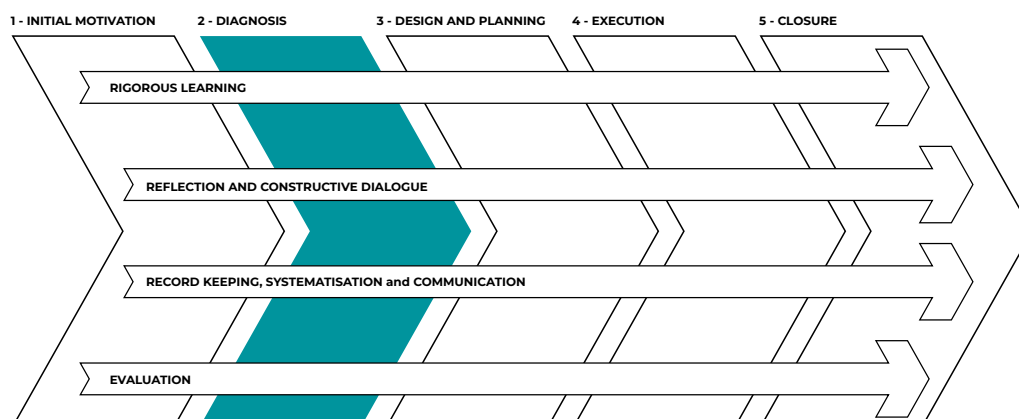
Teacher training is fundamental since it enhances project planning, intentionally coordinating the solidarity activity with the educational project, anticipating and allaying the fears and criticisms that any innovation may cause.

Training the students will encourage them to take ownership of the project and assume a leading role, both in community activities and in the learning processes involved.

If the educational community is fully aware of the type of proposal to be carried out, potential partners, collaborators and stakeholders may emerge and contribute to enriching the experience or—failing that—opposition or fears will be reduced, and the experience can be conducted with minimal setbacks.

Finally, it is vital for community participants to have a clear understanding of the scope and purpose of the activity so as not to generate false expectations, and also to ensure that community participants can assume the role of co-protagonists in the project and the community can effectively become an educational space.

Stage 2 – DIAGNOSIS



The word “diagnosis” refers to an analytical view of a given reality, as used in the execution of social projects. This type of analysis facilitates a clearer perception of what is happening in a social space, detecting problems, identifying relationships, establishing interacting factors and possible courses of action.

In the case of a service-learning project, the diagnosis aims to identify the real and felt needs of the community that can be addressed from the educational institution by the young people, and—simultaneously—to pinpoint, among them, the best opportunities to develop meaningful learning. To this end, students should be involved in the search for information and consult with relevant stakeholders, community leaders, groups and institutions that work in the selected area.

A participatory methodology makes it possible to take advantage of everyone’s knowledge and constitutes a democratic civic exercise, helping to include the opinion of the potential recipients/co-protagonists of the project, especially in cases where they serve a community other than the one they belong to (as in the case of solidarity trips).

Diagnosis can be developed through different strategies of participatory action research or other forms of community research. Regardless of the techniques used, it is crucial to ensure maximum participation, which not only leads to the effectiveness of the diagnosis, but also to the involvement of all stakeholders in the project from the very beginning.

When the SSL project is developed outside of the students’ community, in a distant environment, it is essential that institutional ties and previous contacts aim at guaranteeing a respectful “entry” into the community that is adequate to the time, needs and feelings of the recipients and that also favours the continuity of the actions rather than isolated or occasional interventions.

Characterisation of the Problem

Some project design manuals use techniques and consider prioritisation criteria. For illustrative purposes, here are some of the actions that can help in this task:

- Enumeration of problems affecting a certain group of people.
- Identification of the characteristics of the social situation and the factors that generated them (causes).
- Establishment of the magnitude of the problem, i.e., the number of people affected
- Classification of the problem/need in relation to its seriousness (with an objective and a subjective component) and the urgency of its attention.
- Study of the project's background: if there are similar actions in the area or in a different one, if there were previous attempts to address the issue similar to the one under consideration, etc.
- Consideration of the characteristics of the institution, its strengths and limitations in order to identify action alternatives.
- Analysis of obstacles and difficulties encountered.
- Identification of resources available.
- Identification of potential partners to address the problem.

Analysis of the Possibility of a Response from the Educational Institution

a. Is the response that the school could give related to its identity?

Social problems are multiple and complex, and the university cannot and should not aspire to respond to all of them. When defining the problems to be faced, it is necessary to prioritise those social needs that can be addressed from a clearly pedagogical project, with a high level of participation and learning by students and those that are more within young people's real possibilities. In the case of Catholic universities, the selection of issues may have to do with the priorities set by the diocese or the bishops' conference of the country, or with issues that are significant from the point of view of the Church's social teaching.

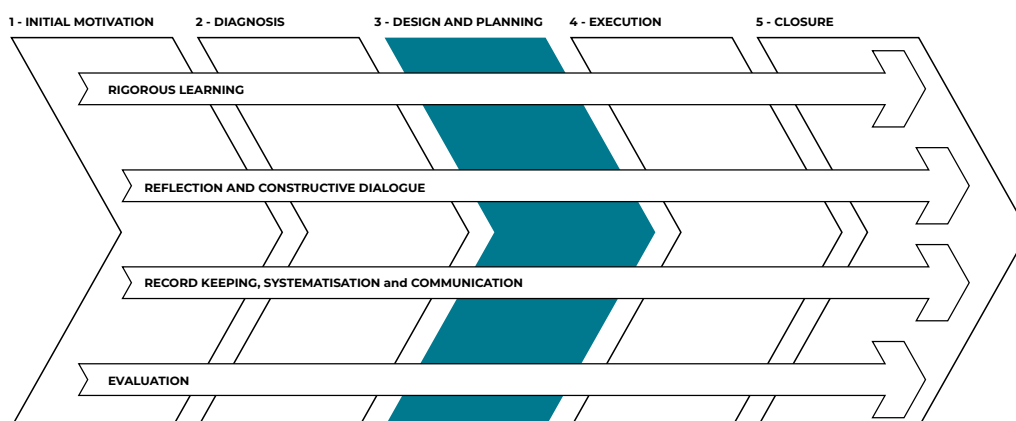
During the development of the project, the university can eventually establish links with other community institutions, government agencies, social organisations and companies that address the problem from different angles, and where the educational institution reserves a place for itself in accordance with its own identity. In this case, the limits of the university itself are clear (academic time, for example) and collaboration agreements can be established to start working together.

b. The possibility of offering solutions according to the resources, priorities and time available

The topic to be addressed will have to match the interests and motivations of the protagonists of the solidarity action, the expectations of the community, the resources and real possibilities of the educational institution to meet those expectations, the relevance of the project from an educational point of view, and the learning opportunities that the proposed solidarity action can provide.

An appropriate balance will need to be struck between the desires of young people and the responsibility of adults to ensure basic safety conditions and effective learning opportunities.

Stage 3 - PROJECT DESIGN AND PLANNING



The design of a service-learning project entails the process of elaborating a work proposal that brings together pedagogical and social intentionality; it incorporates basic pedagogical planning tools and some issues related to the implementation of projects in a context other than the educational one. A good design ensures execution and provides indicators to evaluate the approach to the problem/situation and the curricular learning acquired.

Here are some basic questions to be answered by proper planning:

WHAT do we want to do? Nature of the project.

WHY do we want to do it? Origin and rationale.

WHAT do we want to do it FOR? Objectives, purposes and goals of the project

WHO is going to do it? Project responsible parties.

WHO is it intended for? Target groups or beneficiaries.

HOW is it going to be done? Activities and assignments, methodology, tasks to be carried out by each of the participants, methods to be used and techniques involved.

WHEN is it going to be done? Estimation of approximate times for each activity, providing time for cross-cutting processes. Drawing up a timetable (setting in time)

WITH WHAT is it going to be done? Feasibility, human, material and financial resources. Costing and budgeting.

WITH WHOM is it going to be done? Possible partnerships with other community actors, government agencies, civil society organisations.

WHERE is it going to be done? Physical location. Spatial coverage

FIGURE 17: Ander-Egg y Aguilar Idáñez, 1996; Tapia M. N., 2006:205-213

Design Review and Internal Consistency

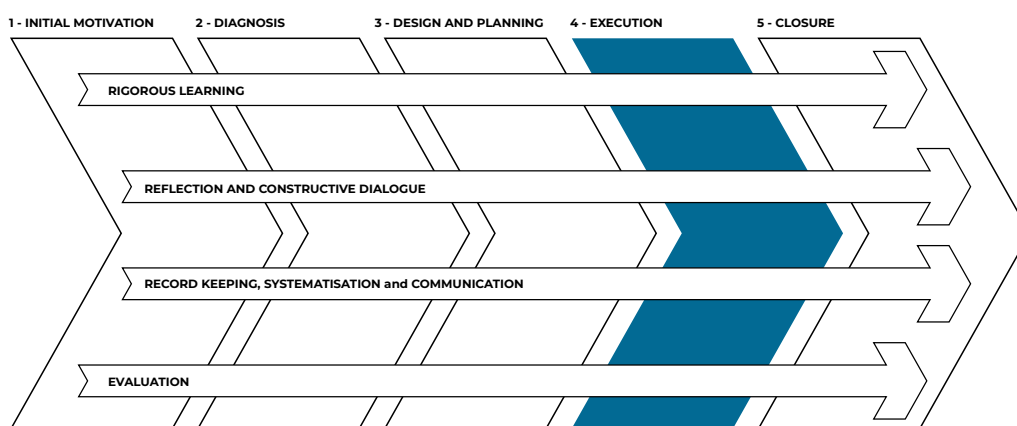
Once planning has been completed, the internal consistency of the project design should be reviewed. This means considering whether there is coherence in concepts and activities, in terms of rationale, objectives, actions, evaluation and results.

The following questions are provided to guide the review of the project design:

- Was the problem clearly identified and defined?
- Is the rationale sufficiently solid?
- Is the definition of the learning objectives accurate?
- Is the definition of the solidarity action objectives clear in relation to the community problem identified?
- Do the planned activities correspond to the stated objectives?
- Are the target recipients identified?
- Are the tasks and responsibilities of each participant well defined?
- Are specific timeframes foreseen for the development of the project?
- Have the spaces, both inside and outside the institution, been considered for the development of the project's activities?

- What material resources are available? Are they enough? What is the origin of the financial resources? Is funding requested from other institutions and agencies?
- Do the planned activities correspond to the foreseen time?
- Are reflection and feedback spaces contemplated?
- Are different evaluation instances and instruments taken into account?
- Is curricular learning explicitly evaluated?
- Is the quality of the service and results evaluated?
- Do students have a leading role in all stages of the project?

Stage 4 – PROJECT EVALUATION



This stage includes the implementation of the project, feedback moments and monitoring mechanisms. Action and reflection, present at each instance, will ensure that it results in effective learning.

Partnerships and Resources

a. Institutional partnerships

We have seen that from the early stages of the service-learning project, contacts should be established with various members of the community, either because they triggered the project with a specific request, or because they were key informants for the diagnosis, or as partners for the planning. When starting the actual execution of the project, it is important to formally establish institutional partnerships with community partners and all the stakeholders who will accompany us, whether as partners, as recipients of the students' activity, as donors or as co-protagonists of the action.

Establishing clear agreements and commitments makes it possible to generate more effective links in the target community, broaden the possibilities of influence in the chosen field and, in many cases, gain access to economic and human resources that would otherwise be unavailable. Close contact with the community organisations served and their representatives is often one of the keys to the success of a service-learning programme.

Depending on the university and the characteristics of the project, the agreements may be more or less formal. In any case, it is important that the partners and organisations targeted by the students' service understand and accept the educational role of SSL projects. The arrival of the university in the field can generate heightened expectations, and it is important to understand that students are not yet professionals, and that as they are in the process of training, they can make mistakes and should be able to learn from their mistakes. Faculty support will attempt to minimise the impact of these mistakes in the community, but it is of great importance that the partner organisations can become learning spaces and co-protagonists of the projects also in their educational aspect. In fact, many community leaders create lasting impacts on the personal and professional careers of young people through their examples of commitment and leadership.

b. Obtaining resources

The possible funding sources for a service-learning project can be very varied and include the institution's own resources, state goods and services, donations from companies, organisations or individuals, and funds obtained through various activities carried out specifically for the project.

For students, the process of recognising that they cannot transform reality without assessing what resources are needed is a valuable learning process in itself. Courses on resource planning, procurement and management can be one of the most useful skills in the experience: learning how to estimate costs, plan the necessary resources and establish strategies to obtain and manage them is extremely useful for all future professionals, and it brings into play crucial competences for their insertion in the world of work and their potential development as entrepreneurs.

Knowing and taking advantage of the existing resources and potential donors interested in the subject of the project, at the national, regional or local level, both from the State and from organisations and companies, constitutes a first stage of research that the young protagonists of the project should be associated with, not just faculty or institutional management areas.

After the necessary funds have been obtained, it is important, both from the point of view of project transparency and student learning, to keep an orderly record of expenditures and income. This may be an activity specifically for students of economics-related subjects, but it can also be a necessary and valuable learning experience for students of other subjects.

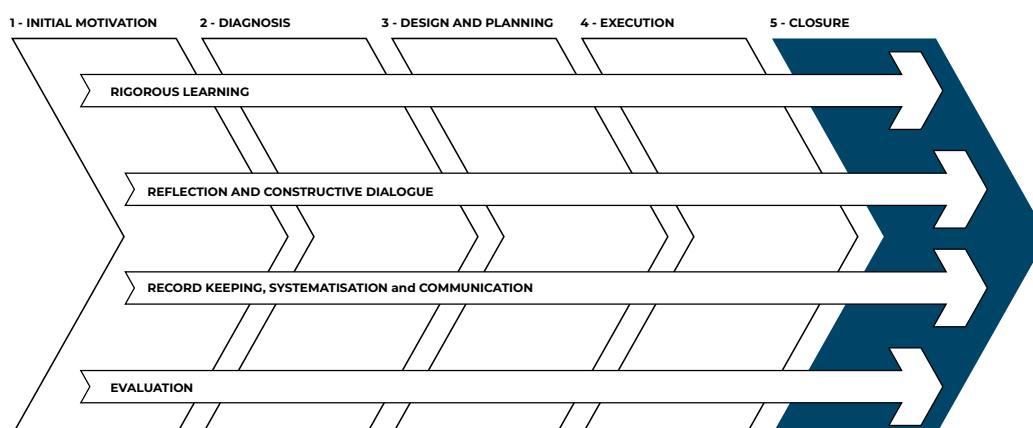
Implementation and Management of the Service-Learning Project

Once the project is underway, all parties involved—from students to the community organisations included in the planning—will form a working network to carry out the planned activities. At this stage of implementation, the different steps of each stage and the cross-cutting processes (reflection, evaluation, recording, communication, systematisation) tend to overlap.

Proper monitoring of both curricular learning and the pedagogical framework set in motion, together with the service provided and the operational issues, will contribute to the harmonious development of everything that has been planned. Drawing up a time schedule and a chart with the expected results of each activity greatly facilitates this control.

Good planning makes it possible to appoint individuals in charge of logistics during the course of the activity and to foresee how to record what is done. There should also be time to reflect on what has been done and time to evaluate what has been done and what has been learnt. In any case, throughout every project, unforeseen setbacks, difficulties and crises inevitably arise, which will test the ability of educators and young people to face them, redirect—if necessary—what was planned and adjust it to reality. This stage also presents an opportunity to discover unforeseen positive results, renew the capacity to be amazed by previously unknown talents and strengthen unplanned links. Reflection activities and frequent dialogue should be the road map that guides the way.

Stage 5 – CLOSURE AND CELEBRATION



While the processes of reflection, record keeping, systematisation, communication and process evaluation accompany the different stages of the project, the aim at this instance is to complete them and draw final evaluative conclusions. This requires reviewing the various systematised materials, analysing the achievements, challenges and eventual impacts, anticipating the final publication or dissemination of the project and its results, and planning its eventual multiplication.

a. Closure evaluation

When a service-learning project concludes, as contemplated in its design, a final evaluation must be carried out, which amounts to much more than the sum of the process evaluation instances.

In accordance with the dual purpose of service-learning and the objectives established at the beginning of the project, the educational results of the experience will be evaluated, on the one hand, in terms of the quality of the learning acquired in a broad sense, and on the other, the quality of the solidarity service and its impact on the target community. The final evaluation also includes analysing the degree of integration between learning and solidarity action during the development of the experience, among other aspects.

Below, we propose a series of basic aspects that should not be absent in an evaluation of SSL projects:

Quality of the service:

- Fulfilment of established objectives
- Effective satisfaction of recipients, partners and the community at large.
- Results or impacts achieved, including possible unintended effects.

Quality of learning:

- Fulfilment of the pedagogical objectives.
- Learning of academic content.
- Development of academic content.
- Academic performance of students involved.
- Evaluation and self-evaluation of the group's awareness of the social problems related to the project.
- Personal impact of the project on each student (self-esteem, security and confidence in their own abilities, recognition of these abilities, etc.).
- Personal and professional impact of the project on the educators involved.

Impact on the institution

- Quality of the links established in the territory and communities where the project was developed.
- New academic content included in the curriculum.
- New research on the issues addressed.
- Community recognition.

The above list is only indicative and does not exclude other dimensions deemed necessary by the project managers and/or stakeholders. At all events, reflection and evaluation of the degree of student protagonism must be present, as well as the perceptions and opinions of the project's target groups and the leaders of the organisations with which partnerships have been established.

Key to the evaluation of the project as a whole is the design of relevant evaluation instruments in relation to each institution and each project, as well as the planning of instances and persons in charge of the process.

A final evaluation that takes into consideration the above aspects can become a very significant learning opportunity for all those involved in the experience.

b. Final systematisation

Everything reflected upon and evaluated throughout the project, along with all that has been recorded, converges at the end in a moment of closure and final systematisation. For this instance, it may be advisable to:

- Sum up the experience, identifying the most critical features and some axes around which to organise the story, without getting lost in what is merely anecdotal.
- Collect not only the most successful activities and positive impact, but also the failed experiences to demonstrate whether mistakes were learnt from or alternative paths were found. Additionally, record any uncertainties that remain from the project.
- Ensure the participation of all relevant actors: educators, students, target community and the organisations involved.

The final product is the ultimate testimony of the project: a report, a folder, a podcast, a short video, a poster, a publication, content on social media, etc.

The closing synthesis is crucial because, regardless of how positive the experience has been for its participants, without a thorough record it will be difficult for it to be valued,

have institutional impact, ensure continuity, or be replicated by others. To gain the support and involvement of new community members, it is necessary to convey precisely why we are working, what we have achieved, and how they could help us.

If links have been established with other institutions—social organisations, companies, private donors or official bodies—it is advisable to send them the evaluation and/or the final systematisation and—if appropriate—a thank you for the support received; if the relationship included the contribution of funds, a detail of the expenses incurred should be provided.

c. Celebration and recognition of protagonists

For the SSL pedagogy, celebration is a time to rekindle experiences and share them, a time of reflection to consolidate an attitude of service in solidarity and it is lived as a commitment. Recognition and celebration bolster personal and group self-esteem and contribute to the appreciation of achievements.

Celebration constitutes an act of fair recognition from the community of the service rendered by young people; it helps break the invisibility of youth engagement and actions, dispelling stereotypes and prejudice by means of positive images.

Celebrations are often open to a vast circle of people and may mark the occasion for awarding certificates, diplomas, medals and any other types of formal recognition of what has been done. An increasing number of universities and companies worldwide consider applicants' previous participation in volunteer programmes for their admission or scholarship processes, which means that the certification of performance in these programmes should not be underestimated.

The celebration can also be an opportunity to present to the local press what has been done, to show videos summarising the experience, publications or research developed in relation to the projects and programmes, and to give visibility to the institutional policies of social engagement and solidarity service-learning.

d. Continuity and multiplication

If the protagonists are satisfied with what they have done and have found considerable impact on the community, they will evaluate the feasibility of continuing with the project or contemplate the possibility of initiating a new service-learning initiative.

There are experiences that, by their very design, have an end date (such as the delivery of a given product to a community organisation), in which case new work objectives should be sought. Other projects are far-reaching (such as working with public health or

monitoring the quality of water in a community); each stage considers the feasibility of the next stage and analyses the adjustments required for a long-term project.

In institutions where SSL is part of the institutional culture, projects tend to multiply within the same institution. The success of a project stimulates other faculty members to generate new experiences from their chairs, sometimes on different subjects.

The multiplication of SSL projects within the university can take place in different ways:

- a.** Branching projects (one topic, several projects): sometimes, the project starts with a narrow theme and, over time, it branches out into related themes.
- b.** Multiple projects (several topics, several projects): some institutions develop various experiences simultaneously, each with a different subject matter

Multiplication is also verified outside the university, either through the creation of networks with other educational institutions to carry out the same project, or through the transfer of knowledge and technical assistance to other study centres so that they, in turn, develop new SSL experiences.

3. Cross-Cutting Processes

3.1. Rigorous Learning

CAs already pointed out, one of the main differences between solidarity service-learning and traditional student volunteering is precisely the coordination between the objectives linked to the transformation of reality and the specific learning objectives for a given group of students.

Every social activity can have an educational value in itself, not only in relation to ethical training, the development of empathy and pro-social attitudes, but also to basic skills for the exercise of active citizenship and for integration into the world of work. In the case of SSL projects, these educational aspects should be complemented by learning planned intentionally around the professional profile to be achieved by the students involved, both from the point of view of the disciplinary content linked to the problems addressed and the specific competences required.

In a volunteering programme for the construction of basic housing such as “Habitat for Humanity” or “A Roof for my Country”, medical or architecture students can partici-

pate in the same way alongside secondary school students, as no specialised knowledge is required. In an SSL project for architecture students aimed at the improvement and construction of low-income housing, on the other hand, students have to apply specific knowledge of particular techniques and materials, develop the necessary skills to serve the “clients”, and present plans in accordance with the required technical and legal specifications, etc.⁴⁷

While field activities should be planned together with students and community partners, the role of faculty members is crucial in the planning and evaluation of the concrete learning to be developed throughout the project. Much of this learning will be the same as that usually included in the classroom programme, but according to the project, some content can be better learnt in the community context. In addition to the intentionally planned learning, in many cases the field activity triggers relevant questions or raises issues that were not originally foreseen, which can be enriching for the learning process.

It is vital to stress that “learning” in service-learning projects should not only be relevant and pertinent to the community context, but also rigorous in relation to academic standards. Neither learning nor solidarity service should be “light”, but rather a rigorous learning opportunity for future professionals. In this regard, and as has already been pointed out, it is essential to associate the planning of the contents and competences to be developed with their evaluation at the end of the project.

3.2. Reflection and Constructive Dialogue

In the literature on service-learning, reflection is the name given to the processes and activities through which the project’s protagonists can critically think about their experiences and gain a sense of ownership of the meaning of the service and the learning developed. It is one of the distinctive and central elements of this pedagogical proposal.

“Systematic reflection is what transforms an interesting and engaged experience into a decisive influence on students’ learning and development” (NHN, 1994:10).

Planning specific times and spaces for reflection makes it possible to connect theory with practice, formal learning contents with experiences in the field; to distance oneself from one’s own practices and rethink them critically; to address questions of relationships or group functioning. These opportunities for reflection can take place in the academic times of the chair leading the project, or in those of a partner chair—for example, in Professional Ethics or Theology. Reflection spaces can also be opened up in non-traditional settings. For example, one chair used the 45-minute journey between the campus and

⁴⁷ See, for example, the course “Social Housing Service” at the School of Architecture of the Catholic University of Córdoba at https://www.uniservitate.org/featured_item/socio-housing-services-shs/

the site of the solidarity action as part of the project: on the way to the location, the tasks to be carried out were distributed and any doubts the students might have about them were dealt with; on the way back, they reflected on what had been done.

Reflection is recommended in all stages and steps of the itinerary of any good SSL project:

- In the preliminary stage: to raise awareness of and review indispensable prior knowledge, and to identify necessary learning activities before implementing the service.
- During the experience execution: to understand and resolve situations, feelings, identify problems, detect errors, consider alternatives, and explore new approaches.
- Linked to recording, systematisation and communication: to organise records and portfolios of the experience, to optimise ways of communicating, to recognise intermediate achievements, processes and acquired knowledge.
- Linked to evaluation: to draw conclusions, find valid variables to measure achievements, satisfaction and impact of the experience.

Reflection on solidarity practice is what allows students to turn their experience into an educational event, and—if well planned—to contribute to developing critical thinking, to acquiring new perspectives on reality and on themselves, and it can have a decisive impact on their life projects (Ierullo *et al.*, 2017:112-118).

Reflection on solidarity practice is what allows students to turn their experience into an educational event, and—if well planned—to contribute to developing critical thinking, to acquiring new perspectives on reality and on themselves, and it can have a decisive impact on their life projects:

- “The socio-economic and political contexts in which the problem to be addressed is situated. (...)”
- The values and human rights involved and which give meaning to the solidarity experience.
- Group dynamics and links with the territory, in order to promote relationships that value diversity and respect and promote the autonomy and initiative of the communities themselves.
- The learning achieved in the course of the solidarity action, and on the practice itself, including, whenever possible, significant activities of personal and group self-evaluation.” (PNES, 2015:38)

Reflection can be developed through multiple activities, through writing or other types of creative expression, through group discussions in class, gatherings, meetings, workshops, conferences or special occasions; and can be recorded in logs, work diaries, reports, research papers, devices, blogs, web pages, etc. The variety of reflection activities is as wide as the creativity of each group.

Reflection has a necessary dimension of personal introspection—an exercise that new generations are not always encouraged to develop. On the other hand, group sharing of one's feelings and opinions can offer an equally rare learning experience in times of trolls and polarisation exasperated by algorithms: that of sharing opinions in a context of respectful and pluralistic listening and expression. At the same time, spaces for reflection can serve to confront opinions with the evidence emerging from reality and to exercise the scientific method in times of “anti-science”. From this standpoint, reflection may be the most crucial educational moment in the whole trajectory of an SSL project.

3.3. Record Keeping, Systematisation and Communication

Recording what was experienced during the project is a fundamental—yet often neglected—aspect of a service-learning experience. Keeping a record of what has been learnt and accomplished throughout the project, rather than only at the end, provides invaluable input for the reflection process. Many instances and activities of reflection are also—simultaneously—occasions for recording what has been done: work diaries, logs, reports, creative expressions, photographs, compilations of anecdotes, recording of testimonies and collections of newspaper clippings, among others.

Keeping a record makes it possible to retrieve the contents and actions that are brought into play during the execution of a project. It must contemplate the motivation and “starting point” of the experience, the design, the circumstances of its execution, the difficulties and achievements, the moments of reflection and evaluation that accompanied it, the end of the project and the “point of arrival” (final achievements, indicators, impact). Hence, the record stands as a key input in the evaluation process and is indispensable for project communication. To this end, there are multiple ways of keeping track of its stages and processes: it can be done in different formats (diary, portfolio, billboard, project folder, blog, web page, etc.), and supports (written, audiovisual, multimedia). These different approaches can stimulate youth leadership and develop excellent and creative learning activities.

We could say that to record is, then, to use all the formats and media considered convenient to turn the key facts or processes of the project into plausible information that can be evaluated and communicated.

Systematisation recovers the richness of the project and contributes to the collective construction of learning. Working with the entire team to organise what is being recorded individually and as a group at each stage of the project is also an important activity for reflection, since it enables us to retrieve what is personal and incorporate it into the collective construction.

By prioritising and systematising the information gathered, the particular features of the project will be disclosed, as well as the strengths and areas that need to be adjusted. In this respect, systematisation also includes an evaluation component.

In addition, the outputs resulting from the systematisation will be the basis for communicating and disseminating the project both within the institution and towards the broader community. For the university, it serves as a “stepping stone” to conceive new projects or to replicate successful ones; for the community, it will be the opportunity to appreciate the scale of the action through verifiable data; for the protagonists, it will measure their task, their commitment and the actions developed.

The support and participation of other community stakeholders will be directly related to the clarity of the information provided and the possibility of evaluating the impact of the project on the basis of real and measurable data.

Systematising is, then, arranging and prioritising the recorded information strategically for the purpose of communicating the project.

Communication is an ongoing process among project participants, within the institution, towards community partners and the community at large. A good SSL project implies generating effective communication channels among project participants, and between them and the community, to circulate information, call for participation, raise awareness of the issues around which the project is developed, disseminate activities and achievements.

Communication promotes additional learning and makes visible the invisible, such as the incorporation of specific learning linked to communication processes, and at the same time it provides visibility of the project and of youth citizen engagement.

The media dissemination of a project plays a significant role in recognising and valuing the contribution of the new generations, reversing deep-rooted prejudice and motivating other young people to participate. In this respect, it is undoubtedly necessary to rely on the institutional communication professionals that almost all universities count on. An even more fundamental part of the experience is to plan for the students' prominent role

in the diffusion of the project on the social networks. Often, young people who may not feel called by the social activity can be expert agents for project dissemination.

3.4. Process Evaluation or Monitoring

Process evaluation or monitoring is a core aspect of SSL projects; it focuses on what has been experienced, analyses successes and shortcomings, considers whether the actions are developing as planned, and whether the objectives are being met. Evaluation is an ongoing process that should be planned from the outset.

In the case of this type of project, its dual intentionality requires evaluation of the results based on the fulfilment of the goals set for community service and the achievement of the pedagogical objectives of the project: the knowledge and skills acquired and applied.

Referring to the evaluation of service-learning projects, Margarita Poggi states that:

“(...) we must aim to evaluate the objectives that were originally envisaged when the project was designed, but also be open enough to be able to meet those that emerge as the project unfolds, often going beyond its design.” (PNES, 2004:90)

In view of the above, we can say that when proposing to evaluate or monitor a service-learning project, the following steps should be taken into account:

- Identify possible evaluation instances.
- Distinguish between learning evaluation and service evaluation.
- Determine methodologies, responsible parties, participants and their roles.
- Design pertinent evaluation tools (registration forms, interviews, self-evaluation questionnaires, etc.).

Additionally, the process or monitoring evaluation should:

- Be participative and democratic.
- Focus on the process and not only on the outcomes, although it should quantify them.
- Promote self-evaluation of achievements and personal changes resulting from practice.
- Start from a positive, prospective point of view. In other words, if an evaluation activity reveals a lack of institutional support, it would be a better option to “propose arranging a meeting with the administrators to discuss specific issues related to the project”, rather than simply concluding that there is a “lack of commitment from the administrators”.

As can be observed, everything related to evaluation requires cognitive operations closely linked to reflection, essential for the process of record keeping, systematisation and communication.

4. The Itinerary in a Real Case of a Solidarity Service-Learning Experience: *Project Banyuhay, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines* (Special Mention Uniservitate 2024 Award, Asia-Oceania Region)⁴⁸

The project aims to preserve the unique cultural identities of diverse native groups by promoting the use of digital technologies and storytelling in the regions of Palawan, Sierra Madre, Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental, and Negros Occidental. It was developed in partnership with two CSOs: Non-Timber Forest Products - Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP Phil) and the UGNAYIN National Indigenous Youth Network. The project's name, "*banyuhay*," or metamorphosis, symbolises its transformative impact, striving to reinvigorate indigenous communities through digital storytelling.

– *Initial motivation for the project:*

Two Development and Social Change courses invited students to develop a service-learning project partnered with two organisations that align with Ateneo de Manila's ethos of "people-for-and-with-others", advocating justice and service, especially for marginalised indigenous populations; they also share the University's commitment to social engagement, cultural enrichment and care for the environment.

– *Diagnosis:*

During the initial dialogue sessions with community partners, it became clear that their primary objectives were to raise awareness of the challenges faced by indigenous peoples, especially youth and women, to promote broader knowledge and awareness of indigenous cultures, and to strengthen the network among Filipino indigenous youth.

Project Banyuhay was developed to provide targeted support through a series of capacity-building workshops in response to these needs. Students and community partners were involved in all stages of the project.

- It began with a comprehensive evaluation, conducted between August and October 2022, in which students gathered information about the lives of indigenous youth. Through area orientations, online interactions and semi-structured online interviews, they developed an empathy map, shaping the challenges and aspirations of the community into a blueprint.

⁴⁸ <https://www.uniservitate.org/2024-award/>

- At the same time, the “Flower Framework Workshop”, conducted by the students during the onsite “National Indigenous Youth Camp”, held on 21 October, 2022, served as a starting point for indigenous youth to conceptualise their development goals. This activity was crucial in steering the subsequent strategy and planning phase of the project.

– *Design and planning:*

- From October to December 2022, the Project Charter and Execution Plan were drafted and validated, providing a strategic framework and action plan for the project trajectory. At this stage, the scope, methodology and objectives of the project were defined, ensuring a coherent trajectory.

– *Project Execution:*

- In February 2023, the students’ commitment to advocacy was embodied in their support for the Dumagat-Remontado community’s protest against the Kaliwa dam, showing solidarity and championing indigenous rights, both on site and online.
- March 2023 was a pivotal month, as students organised hybrid mode workshops on 24 and 25 March, enabling indigenous youth across four regions to converge, narrate, and cultivate their digital storytelling skills. Capacity building workshops focusing on social media literacy and digital citizenship were organised to improve communication skills and imbue participants with the confidence to advocate for their cultures and address community challenges. The participation of ICT experts enriched the experience by providing mentorship and real-world insight.

– *Final Evaluation, Closure and Celebration:*

- The project’s journey came to a close on 10 May, 2023, with students presenting the final evaluation results.
- The closing and handover ceremony marked not only the conclusion of *Project Banyuhay*, but also the dawn of a legacy of digital empowerment for the indigenous youth, now equipped with the knowledge and tools to tell their stories and shape their future.

Cross-Cutting Processes:

- *Reflection:* For students, structured reflection activities, especially those that connect service experiences with Jesuit educational values and spirituality, are fundamental to enhancing students' spiritual growth. These experiences encourage students to contemplate broader ethical and moral issues, nurturing a spiritual responsibility in line with their academic, personal, professional and socio-civic development. The reflection activities required students to:
 - » *Combine academic learning and spiritual growth within a cohesive reflection document:* This synthesis includes the articulation of personal insights and emotional responses to their SSL experiences, relating practical activities to theoretical knowledge from courses such as Community Development, Sustainable Development and Project Management. In addition, these reflections include analyses that link the experiences to personal faith journeys, enhancing academic understanding and spiritual development.
 - » *Boost learning through group experience and community participation:* Faculty lead group discussions, progress reports and debriefing sessions that prompt students to jointly analyse and reflect on their SSL experiences. These interactions encourage students to evaluate the impact of the engagement on themselves and the partner community. Sharing diverse perspectives and viewpoints during these meetings deepens the sense of community and shared learning, which substantially enriches the educational value of the group experience.
 - » *Analyse the social and environmental issues of SSL projects:* The activity engages students with the social or environmental issues addressed by their projects through focused discussions. This method helps students to critically analyse the complexity of these issues and to reflect on the practical consequences of their projects, thus deepening their understanding and bolstering their problem-solving skills.
 - » *Deepen ethical engagement through creative thinking:* Ethical reflections are crucial, especially when addressing dilemmas and decisions during projects. Faculty members organise creative thinking workshops that employ empathy mapping, the impact-effort matrix, six thinking hats, service blueprinting, role-play and simulation, the lotus blossom technique, a 9-dimension team evaluation, conflict confessions, and lessons learnt sessions. These methodologies encourage students to think critically and creatively about ethical challenges within their interactions with partner communities and among team members, fostering a more profound

understanding of the moral implications of their decisions and promoting a comprehensive approach to resolving complex issues

- *Record keeping, systematisation and communication:* This engagement culminated on 1 April, with a day dedicated to exhibiting the youth's digital narratives, evidencing the project's transformative educational impact.
- *Ongoing evaluation* and adaptation led to the creation of Learning Modules, encapsulating the workshop experiences and ensuring the longevity of the project's educational influence within indigenous communities.

– *Final evaluation:*

The project report states that through the experience, students developed solid facilitation and engagement skills, crucial for any community development professional. They learnt to navigate and respect cultural nuances, enhancing their competence in working effectively within diverse communities and fostering a deep understanding of social equity.

The project honed students' abilities to use digital tools for compelling storytelling and advocacy, enhancing their digital literacy and communication skills. They learnt how to integrate traditional knowledge with modern platforms to promote social justice and environmental stewardship, skills increasingly valuable in environmental advocacy, policy making, and sustainable development.

Managing various project phases—from inception to closure—built strong leadership and decision-making skills. Students emerged with enhanced capabilities in managing complex projects, critical thinking, and strategic planning—essential skills for any future project manager or consultant.

The partner community was integral to the *Project Banyuhay*, actively participating from the initial engagement sessions through to the project's design, execution and evaluation. These sessions, led by Team Bukás na Búkas, were crucial for building trust and understanding the unique needs of the NTFP-EP and the UGNAYIN Indigenous Youth Network. The partners' involvement in planning, facilitating workshops, and implementing strategies ensured that the project's activities were well-aligned with their goals, addressing specific concerns effectively. Their commitment and collaboration fostered a sense of ownership and prompted mutual learning, greatly enhancing the project's overall impact.

To align the efforts, the project implemented a variety of diagnostic, planning, evaluation and reflection tools and strategies.

This experience, like so many others, shows the complex journey from the initial concerns to the planning and development of a project and its final evaluation, in a specific context, with certain key stakeholders inside and outside the university.

Like this one, each solidarity service-learning project is simultaneously unique and unrepeatable because of its protagonists, the time and space in which it was developed, and the lessons learned. At the same time, the “process” tool can help identify common features and recurring issues, contributing to weaving of “thematic networks”. These networks include projects that develop literacy or job skills activities, that offer free legal services, provide specific solutions to build sustainable housing in vulnerable contexts, or focus on health issues, among many other significant topics.

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Suggested Resources:

Several tools for the development of the different stages and cross-cutting processes of the proposed itinerary can be found at

- Paso Joven. Participación Solidaria para América Latina. Manual de formación de formadores en aprendizaje-servicio y servicio juvenil (2004). Buenos Aires, BID-SES-CLAYSS-ALIANZA ONG-CEBOFIL https://www.clayss.org.ar/04_publicaciones/2004_PaSo_Joven_English.pdf
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- Some examples of evaluation and monitoring tools and processes can be found in the section: "Monitoreo y evaluación de programas institucionales y prácticas de aprendizaje-servicio" in: M. A. Herrero, M.N. Tapia (comp.) (2015) *Actas de la III Jornada de investigadores sobre aprendizaje-servicio* (comp.). CLAYSS-Red Iberoamericana de aprendizaje-servicio, pp. 193 a 211. <https://www.clayss.org/jias/#vi-jias>

Videos:

- Itinerary of a project: FPB Aeroparque, Canelones, Uruguay - versión sintética. (subtitles in English) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuMTV2pWNOM&t=4s>
- Service-Learning Project Itinerary (English only) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHz-R1M1dz78&list=PLDJgzp92T-kfS8BzCQSDZ_7SKFV3nWHa&index=5
- How do you plan and manage the community engagement process? Christiane Hoth: <https://youtu.be/eMwVrNjOVmk>
- How can you contact a community partner? What is the best way to start working and build trust?/¿Cómo contactar a un aliado comunitario? ¿Cuál es la mejor manera de empezar a trabajar y construir confianza? (In English, subtitles in Spanish). Jimi Caldea: <https://youtu.be/bNxq8WGJxpo>
- Why is it important to enhance the reflection processes, how could this done, and what questions should be asked?/¿Por qué es importante mejorar los procesos de reflexión, cómo hacerlo, qué preguntas se deberían hacer? (In English, subtitles in Spanish)
 - » María Cinque: <https://youtu.be/8Pd5sefbLRo>
 - » Mercy Pushpalatha: <https://youtu.be/LsRY5YwTo8k?si=4602XhK0If5bpxho>
 - » Mercy Kibe: <https://youtu.be/YoPs2We094g?si=RT9MIDTV0U8II-TO>

- How can communities assume responsibility for the service and the experience to sustain the changes and avoid getting back to the previous stage, even if the university stops working there? /¿Cómo pueden asumir las comunidades responsabilidad por el servicio, de manera de sostener los cambios y evitar volver atrás, incluso cuando la Universidad deja de trabajar allí?
 - » Daniela Gargantini (in Spanish) https://youtu.be/I_J2lwV7IYo
 - » Michael Timona (in English): <https://youtu.be/O0PWHJe7R9g>
- How can you evaluate the results of SL in communities?
 - » Andrew Furco (in English): <https://youtu.be/z3-12R9hghI>
 - » Chantal Jouannet (In Spanish): <https://youtu.be/QtgHrrujxeY>

CONCLUSIONS: WHY COMPLICATE SOMETHING SO SIMPLE?

"At the end of our life, we shall all be judged by Love."

Saint John of the Cross, Avisos y sentencias, 59

In closing, and as a preview of the topics to be explored in the next volume of this Handbook, I would like to share some reflections from the volume "Spirituality and Higher Education: Perspectives from Service-Learning" (Isola and Gherlone, 2022) in the Uniservitate Collection. We present this text here with minor adjustments. Today, it also serves as a heartfelt tribute to Pope Francis, who deeply supported Uniservitate from its inception⁴⁹ until just a few months before his passing.⁵⁰

"Why complicate something so simple?" (EG 194) is one of the most challenging questions Pope Francis poses us in his exhortation on "The Joy of the Gospel."

To conclude this book, we would like to echo this question and go over this fragment of *Evangelii Gaudium* in which we are presented with a selection of biblical texts considering the love for our neighbour who suffers, and the urgent call of the Pope that our hermeneutical interpretations and our "conceptual tools" do not end up detracting or minimizing the Word of God:

We incarnate the duty of hearing the cry of the poor when we are deeply moved by the suffering of others. Let us listen to what God's word teaches us about mercy and allow that word to resound in the life of the Church. The Gospel tells us: "Blessed are the merciful, because they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5,7) ... "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy, yet mercy triumphs over judgment" (Jas 2,12-13) ... "Maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4,8). This truth greatly influenced the thinking of the Fathers of the Church and helped create a prophetic, counter-cultural resistance to the self-centred hedonism of paganism. (EG, 193)

This message is so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it. The Church's reflection on these texts ought not to obscure or weaken their force, but urge us to accept their exhortations with courage and zeal. ***Why complicate something so simple?*** Conceptual tools exist to heighten contact with the realities they seek to explain, not to distance us from them (EG, 194).

49 <https://www.uniservitate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/MENSAJE-SS-FRANCISCO-1.pdf>

50 <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/es/news/2024-11/spa-046/aprender-de-los-ninos-para-una-cultura-de-la-curi- osidad.html>

We know that the intellectual work typical of the academic context, necessarily rich in hermeneutics and conceptual devices, can—even with the best intentions—end up “complicating something so simple.”

We have produced thousands of papers, studies and critiques on the identity and mission of the Catholic university. Yet, in the real world of our institutions, we often notice the deep gap between the tenets stated in our missions and our teaching and research practices. We witness the distances between our deep theological reflections and our institutions’ daily practices, which are not always different from those of other non-denominational universities.

From this perspective, we believe that the service-learning proposal can help us “not complicate something so simple” and to strengthen, in our Catholic educational institutions, the Christian Love that should be at the centre of our identity and mission.

In several papers in this volume, there has been an attempt to underline that what is most “the identity” of a Catholic University should be, precisely, the simplest and most central part of our faith: we believe that “God is Love” (1 John 4,8), that “whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4,20), and that the new commandment left to us by the Master is that of mutual love (John 13,34-35).

Paraphrasing St. Paul’s words (1 Cor. 13): if our students can speak in the tongues of Cambridge, Paris and Beijing, but did not learn to love their neighbour, what’s the point of attending a Catholic university? If our Catholic universities dominate all the sciences and are at the top of all the rankings, but do not contribute to building a more fraternal world, we run the risk of being nothing more than a “clanging cymbal.” Even if we make the most generous donations or promote multiple voluntary services and activism, “but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13, 2).

For all those reasons, we understand that developing a spirituality of service, based on authentic Christian Love, should be essential for the CHEIs to avoid “complicating something so simple.”

As this book surveys, service-learning projects help us focus on the essentials because they allow our students to learn to truly love others in deed and truth. They also allow them to use their knowledge and skills serving the needs of others, the communities and the planet, to bring theory and practice together, and join head, heart and hands.

Accompanying these practices with a spiritual reflection allows us to acknowledge the God we cannot see in the brothers we see. This approach to faith has an impact on the lives and projects of our students, much more than so many lessons in morality and theology that can remain at the level of the purely theoretical.

A spirituality based on the practice of fraternal service can help our students discover and cultivate the Love that is patient and merciful and never gets tired of giving (1 Cor., 13), even in cultural contexts that privilege hedonic consumption and ruthless competition. It can allow the new generations to find in the donation of themselves and the construction of a more just and fraternal world, a transcendent meaning of life, even if regarding themselves as agnostics or atheists.

The specific SSL projects allow students who define themselves as Catholic, others who profess different religions and agnostics or atheists to work together in the service of others.

Unlike campus ministry masses, missionary groups and other activities that require the profession of the Catholic faith as a prerequisite, service-learning projects can be an open way of welcoming and proclaiming the Good News to those who a priori are not interested in religion.

Similarly, and especially in contexts where Catholics are a minority compared to those who profess other creeds, service-learning projects can become a fruitful space for dialogue and ecumenical and interreligious spiritual reflection, regarding the “golden rule” common to the great religions (Pushpalatha, 2020; Tapia, 2020).

As noted in this book, the practice of caring for others allows us to work and reflect together in an ecumenical, interreligious dialogue and also with so many who—without professing a religious faith—are committed to justice, solidarity and care for people and the planet.

For this reason, service-learning projects are among the most “Catholic” and identity-based things we can offer, both in the sense of adherence to the most essential aspects of our faith and the teaching of the Catholic Church and at the same time, in the original “universal” sense of the term Catholic.

On the last day, the Master will examine us all, university students or illiterate, professors or laymen, Catholic or not, and will ask us if we have loved him concretely in our suffering brothers and sisters (Mt. 25, 31-46). If we teach our students to use their knowledge and

skills at the service of others through service-learning proposals, if they learn to love others in deeds and in truth, we will have prepared them to pass the most important exam of all.

In addition, evidencing our identity and mission as Catholic institutions will become less complicated.

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Uniservitate is a global network for the promotion of solidarity service-learning (SSL) in Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs). It is an initiative of Porticus and is coordinated by the Latin American Center for Service-Learning (CLAYSS). The program's objective is to generate a systemic change through the institutionalization of service-learning as a tool for higher education institutions to fulfill their mission of offering an integral education to the new generations and involving them in an active commitment to the problems of our time.

Solidarity Service- Learning in Higher Education | Volume 1

In this new volume of the *Uniservitate* Collection we present a Handbook that aims to bring together the global experience of service-learning since the late 19th Century, and especially the experience developed over the last five years by the global and polyhedral community of *Uniservitate*.

Like the entire collection, this work is aimed at professors and authorities in Catholic Higher Education, other educational institutions, specialists in service-learning, leaders of the ecclesial world, alongside the general public interested in education and social change.

However, this Handbook was designed primarily for those who are already implementing solidarity service-learning projects (SSL) and those who are starting or planning to do so. It aims to provide concrete suggestions on how to develop and plan projects, key points to revise experiences already implemented or are currently underway, and numerous concrete examples of best practices worldwide.

This is the first volume of the Handbook, which we hope will soon be followed by a second one dedicated to the spiritual dimension of service-learning initiatives and the processes of SSL institutionalization in Higher Education.

Uniservitate is an initiative led by Porticus, with the general coordination of the Latin American Center for Service-learning (CLAYSS) <https://www.uniservitate.org/>



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