

Standard Policy Brief Template

Under the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022)
[Section for Higher Education](#) | Division for Education 2030

Type: One organisation | Alliance

A European Framework for the Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education

March 14th, 2022

Abstract

Our planet and humanity are under threat. The pandemic and other global crises (climate change, intergroup violence, social injustice) have demonstrated that solidarity is essential and that higher education institutions can and should exert a key role in building a natural and social sustainable environment, and a critical, committed and democratic citizenship. For that, it is necessary to integrate methodologies in higher education that are consistent with the sustainability and social justice principles into the educational model.

This policy briefs by the European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education in collaboration with Global University Network for innovation and Talloires Network proposes Service-Learning as a powerful methodology for enriching learning in higher education, fostering civic responsibility and strengthening communities.

This policy brief sets the concept of institutionalization of Service-Learning in European higher education and presents policy recommendations for the European Commission, European States, international stakeholders, and higher education institutions.



European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE)



Talloires Network of Engaged Universities (TN)



Global University Network for innovation (GUNI)

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Acronyms

ECTS European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

GUNi Global University Network for innovation

HEIs Higher education institutions

SL Service-Learning

TN Talloires Network

Introduction

Although it is commonly accepted since the creation of the first universities that their mission revolves around four axes -(1) development of people, (2) creation and (3) transfer of knowledge and (4) service to society, research and teaching have been the focus main activity of the university. However, at the end of the last century, the relationship and commitment with society began to gain relevance in the debate about new university models for the 21st century (Millican et al., 2019).

This new perspective became a reality in the last three decades thanks to the impetus of international and national organizations, which focused on the need to connect the university with society in order to contribute to community development and the improvement of academic training. Examples can be found in the UNESCO World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century, from 1998, the Conference on Higher Education organized by UNESCO in 2009, the Declaration in Support of Action “A Crucible Moment. College Learning & Democracy’s Future,” published in 2011 by the National Committee for Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement with support from the US Department of Education or the 2021 UNESCO Report “Reimagining our futures together. A new social contract for education”. These and many other meetings and documents contributed to define and strengthen the role of the university in social, economic, scientific and cultural progress.

This framework supported the development of multiple initiatives in all regions of the world, such as the following:

 Campus Compact	 CampusEngage	 CLAYSS	 Asia Engage	 The Ma'an Arab University Alliance for Civic Engagement	 IARSLCE
Campus Compact	Campus Engage	Latin American Center for Learning and Solidarity Service	Asia Engage	The Ma'an Arab University Alliance for Civic Engagement	International Association for Research on Service-Learning & Community Engagement
 engagement australia	 EURASIA FOUNDATION	 SAHECEF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FORUM	 The Talloires Network Pakistan Chapter	 VIETNAM CAMPUS ENGAGE BROADER CAMPUS COMMUNITY	
Engagement Australia	Russian Community Universities Network	South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum	Pakistan Chapter of the Talloires Network	Vietnam Campus Engage	

While this was happening in other regions of the world, in Europe a trend in favor of higher education as a motor of change and social development was taking shape more slowly. The reason for this delay is not easy to explain, but it could be related to the state of well-being and peace that a good part of the continent enjoyed and that contributed to the focus of the universities moving away from social issues; the growing commercialization and privatization of universities, less concerned with issues such as social justice or sustainable development; and the distancing between the university and political life. Starting in the second half of the 20th century, the purpose of universities seemed to have been oriented more toward an economic engagement approach than a civic one, focusing on issues such as the global marketplace, the knowledge economy, research, and performance measurement (González-Pérez et al., 2007).

In spite of this, and given that every day more people in Europe are suffering the consequences of the crises in the economic systems, which have been aggravated by the

COVID-19 pandemic, initiatives were emerging in Europe in favor of a socially responsible University committed to social justice, supported by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Parliament (European Union, 2012), and the strategy of "Modernization of European Higher Education" and the Bologna Declaration of 1999, which establishes that

“A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the situation in South East Europe”.

Along the same lines, in 2002 the Council of Europe carried out research on the role of universities in the development of civic competences and the mechanisms to achieve this objective (Plantan, 2002), reaching the conclusion that universities have an important role in promoting participation in the political life of the community through the action and decision-making of the students themselves in collaboration with other actors.

Some of the initiatives that emerged under this new university model are the Going Global Conference, organized by the British Council in 2013, which defends the role of higher education in achieving lasting peace in societies that have experienced serious conflicts; the Declaration for Civic and Community Engagement signed in 2014 by the chancellors of Irish universities; the Technical Document approved in 2015 by the Executive Committee and the Plenary of the Sustainability Commission (CADEP Group) on the Institutionalization of Service-Learning as a teaching strategy within the framework of University Social Responsibility for the promotion of Sustainability at the University. More recently, in 2017, the European Union published the Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education, in which it calls on universities to counteract the growing polarization of society and mistrust of democratic institutions by engaging more actively with the communities that surround them and promoting social inclusion. This document challenges higher education institutions to “not be ivory towers, but civically conscious learning communities connected to their communities” in which students develop skills through activities based on real problems, and in the work volunteer and community.

In Europe, much has been done in relation to the development of civic engagement in higher education, but much remains to be done. Educational practices, such as Service-Learning, that integrate community service into the curriculum, are necessary to improve learning, develop civic skills and transform the community. For that, higher education institutions should develop programs that promote such practices.

This policy brief sets the concept of institutionalization of Service-Learning in European higher education and presents policy recommendations for the European Commission, European States, international stakeholders, and higher education institutions. This work has been done by the European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education in collaboration with Global University Network for innovation (GUNI) and Talloires Network (TN), using their global expertise.

Practices of civic engagement in European higher education

If, as mentioned above, in Europe more and more communities need actively committed and democratic citizens who advocate for social justice and use their energy and talent in promoting initiatives for the construction of a society with possibilities for a better future, the University must not remain oblivious to these objectives. The challenge for European higher education is to reconsider its mission: to educate students for a life as responsible citizens, instead of training students solely for a career. Its function must be to educate competent professionals connected to the needs of the community. It is necessary to combine academic rigor for the development of professional skills with social commitment. In this way, the new university will connect theory with practice to face social problems.

For this, the most appropriate pedagogical model is experiential learning, which allows students to connect practical experience with the training that is given in the classroom, in an area that is outside their comfort zone.

But, how to implement these experiences? Bringing the university student closer to social reality can be done through various techniques. In order to respond to these needs, in the last decades of the 20th century, European universities launched volunteering and international cooperation activities in a fairly general way. Since then and up to the present, these solidary practices not linked to the curriculum have received institutional support in numerous European universities, where there are units dedicated to these practices, funds are assigned to them and the activities usually have credit recognition (Hoyt, 2014).

Another proposal, which emerged in some European universities at the beginning of the 21st century with a social justice approach, is Service-Learning, a methodology that goes beyond the walls of the university connecting with the community and its needs, and contributing to improving society and, specifically, the lives of the most vulnerable people, but also connecting theory with practice to improve learning.

Service-Learning in European higher education

The history of Service-Learning in European higher education

When Service-Learning arrives in Europe, it is already consolidated in higher education in other regions of the world, where not only projects are developed, but there are structures inside and outside the university that support and promote these actions (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019)

The first decade of the 21st century was characterized by the silent work of individual teachers using Service-Learning in some universities, mainly in Ireland, Germany and Spain.

In the second decade they began to create networks in order to share experiences and research. Then national networks such as Campus Engage (in Ireland), the Network for Social Responsibility in Higher Education (in Germany), and the University Service-Learning Network (in Spain), arose.

The European Association for Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE) was created in 2019. The Association houses the European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EOSLHE), that has gathered 138 Service-Learning experiences in 20 European

countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Ukraine.

In addition, 10 national networks in European countries have been founded since 2009: in Austria, Finland, Flanders, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

The situation is very diverse, although the use and research of Service-Learning is growing in all the countries mentioned. While some countries are at the critical mass construction phase, and others have already passed it and are making progress in the institutionalization process, in some States there is no evidence that this methodology is being used (Cayuela, Aramburuzabala & Ballesteros, 2020).

EASLHE's statement on Service-Learning in European higher education as an ideal teaching methodology for the development of civic engagement

The European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE) considers that higher education is a key tool to promote sustainable human development. In accordance with its commitment to sustainability in the search for environmental quality, social justice and a viable and equitable economy, EASLHE academic members believe that the generation of a culture that contributes to a comprehensive and environmentally sustainable development is an ethical imperative. For this, it is necessary to establish channels that facilitate the involvement of the entire academic community in the construction of a model of HE institutions that promote sustainability, democracy and social responsibility.

The inclusion of civic engagement in the teaching-learning processes must be done through methodologies that are consistent with the ethical, holistic, complex, global, transversal, and socially responsible principles.

From this perspective, Service-Learning is a valuable strategy for the inclusion of civic engagement in the curricula. Likewise, it responds to current HE regulations, which demand that HE favours practices of social and civic responsibility that combine academic learning in the different degrees with the provision of services to the community that are aimed at improving the quality of life and social inclusion.

Service-Learning is a powerful pedagogical methodology that contributes to putting this mission into practice by improving learning, developing social responsibility, and strengthening the communities.

EASLHE definition of Service-Learning

Service-learning in higher education is an experiential educational method in which students engage in community service, reflect critically on this experience, and learn from it personally, socially and academically. The activities address human, social and environmental needs from the perspective of social justice and sustainable development, and aim at enriching learning in higher education, fostering civic responsibility and strengthening communities. Service-Learning is always recognized with European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

Service-Learning can be used in all Undergraduate and Postgraduate degrees. Its integration in the curriculum can take different formats: integrated in the teaching syllabus, external internships, and final bachelor and master thesis. All teachers previously trained in this methodology can supervise a Service-Learning project, which must be linked to the content of the subjects they teach and to social organizations (associations, NGOs, foundations, public institutions, etc.).

Institutionalizing Service-Learning

Institutionalization of Service-Learning in the world

Service-Learning was first coined in 1969 and it is said to be connected to both the founding of Campus Compact in 1985 and the creation of the national program Learn and Service America in 1990, that facilitated the creation of central units devoted to Service-Learning in most higher education institutions (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Since then, Service-Learning is consolidated in higher education in other regions of the world, where not only projects are developed, but there are structures within and outside the institutions that support and promote these actions.

However, there is a lack of systematized data regarding the main steps and strategic milestones that have characterized the evolution of the institutionalization of Service-Learning in the regions of the world where it's already consolidated.

Global hubs such as Global University Network for innovation and Talloires Network promote and connect universities and higher education institutions committed to the concept of the civic university and service-Learning as a practice.

International, national and local networks that focus on Service-Learning and civic engagement in higher education have also contributed to the institutionalisation of Service-Learning.

The support of national and local governments has also been a facilitator of the development of Service-Learning in higher education around the world by adopting it as a strategy to strengthen student learning and linkage with communities, and creating policy. As an example, national service schemes in India, Indonesia, Mexico, and the United States exerted a strong impetus for Service-Learning (Berry & Chisholm, 1999).

For Service-Learning to be integrated in the work and culture of the academy, the support of the academic authorities is essential. Numerous institutions around the globe have institutionalised Service-Learning. Examples in different parts of the world go from the University of Minnesota in the United States to Stellenbosch University in South Africa, from Veracruzana University in Mexico to Lingnan University in China, and from COMSATS University Islamabad in Pakistan to University of Western Sidney in Australia.

Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Europe

Knowledge about the state of Service-Learning in the European higher education context is limited. As the use of this methodology spreads, evidence of its practice and processes for its institutionalization are available (Aramburuzabala et al., 2021; Cayuela, Alonso, Ballesteros & Aramburuzabala, 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2021a). Thus, there is data on higher education

institutions in countries such as Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and United Kingdom, in which structures are being created and support given for integrating Service-Learning into the curriculum.

Although the situation is very diverse, it can be said that European higher education institutions are currently on the first step of transformational change for embedding Service-Learning into the existing structures (Ribeiro et al., 2021b).

The institutionalization of Service-Learning in European higher education requires support from global, international and national organizations and bodies, as well as customized Institutional Declarations, approved by the Governing Councils, or by Boards of University Networks, to support the implementation of Service-Learning projects.

EASLHE, with the support and building on the worldwide expertise of GUNi and TN, proposes the institutionalization of Service-Learning in European higher education to promote civic engagement, contribute to the development of a fairer society and improve academic and social learning that favours the development of the students' competences.

EASLHE definition of Service-Learning Institutionalisation

Institutionalization of Service-Learning is a multifaceted process that integrates civic engagement values into higher education curriculum of an institution so that SL becomes part of the culture of the institution. It implies the inclusion of SL in the strategic plans of the institution, to provide resources needed to support the use of this methodology, including a SL office, staff, funding and space, training, faculty rewards, credit recognition for student participation, and a program evaluation.

What institutionalizing Service-Learning implies

- a) Recognition of the teachers who promote, tutor, coordinate and evaluate the Service-Learning projects carried out by their students in the context of their subjects or in specific Service-Learning courses.
- b) Commitment to the development of teaching training programs focussed on the Service-Learning methodology.
- c) Visibility of the Service-Learning projects carried out and positively evaluated through institutional websites.
- d) Support to carry out Service-Learning projects within the framework of teaching innovation.
- e) The necessary health and legal coverage of civil liability that may be specified in the description of the Service-Learning projects, that are carried out in the community, outside the university campus, which guarantees at all times the rights to health and safety of all the relevant people involved.
- f) Creation of stable governance structures that support the planning, execution, and monitoring of Service-Learning projects.

Institutionalizing Service-Learning challenges

Service-Learning in Europe faces challenges related to socio-political approaches to the mission of HE institutions, institutional models to support Service-Learning practice and research, the creation and maintenance of national and international networks, and the linguistic and cultural translation of the term “Service-Learning”. The following challenges have been identified (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019).

1. Accommodating the model of Service-Learning with the various European socio-political models. The practice of Service-Learning, which originally comes from the United States must be adjusted to the diverse cultural contexts in which it occurs.
2. Translation of the “Service-Learning” term, and cultural adaptation of the methodology.
3. Infrastructures for project coordination at the level of each higher education institution.
4. Financing that facilitates the use and impact of this methodology.
5. Internal and external recognition, both for teachers through promotion mechanisms and accreditation systems, and for students, who must obtain recognition of their participation in these experiences in terms of ECTS credits.
6. Curricular time for teachers, since designing, implementing, and evaluating Service-Learning projects requires extra effort and time.
7. Knowledge of the methodology, for which courses, seminars and other training actions are valuable.
8. Research that allows obtaining evidence of the impact of Service-Learning on students, teachers, the university, the community, and participating social entities.
9. Tools for evaluating Service-Learning experiences that include indicators and allow assessing their effects on the environment and on the various actors.
10. Sustainability of the Service-Learning projects, but also of the institutional programs that support this methodology.
11. Quality standards that improve the use and research of Service-Learning.
12. Involvement of students, academic staff, and community partners. For this purpose, issues such as motivation to participate, reciprocity and collaboration are of great importance.
13. Analysis of the benefits or possible disadvantages of making Service-Learning a mandatory or voluntary course for students.

Policy recommendations

Policy recommendations for the European Commission

1. Pursue an agenda to make Service-Learning a reality in higher education institutions (HEIs) in all Member States.
2. Promote Service-Learning as an integral part of the Erasmus+ Programme, especially within the mobility and training programs.
3. Fund teacher training, professional development, technical assistance, research and mobility programs on Service-Learning.

4. Promote and offer educational digital and curriculum resources for Service-Learning in higher education.
5. Support the development of national centres for Service-Learning for promoting the development, implementation, and sustainability of Service-Learning within all HEIs.
6. Work with the Departments of Higher Education of Member States on Service-Learning matters for developing common quality standards, scholarships, mobility programmes, etc.
7. Work with the Quality Accreditation Agencies of the Members States on recognition of Service-Learning.
8. Promote the development of HEIs rankings that integrate civic engagement.
9. Create a common database of Service-Learning stakeholders in the Member States.

Policy recommendations for European States

1. Advocate Service-Learning at the national level to build private-public partnerships in support of Service-Learning as a tool for building common bonds.
2. Call on relevant professional organizations, private foundations, community organizations, educational centres to include Service-Learning in their agenda.
3. Advocate Service-Learning as an integrative strategy for grounding civic education, civic engagement, and a sense of social connection with others.
4. Undertake a national Service-Learning strategy to promote and distribute the most up-to-date guidelines and best practices about Service-Learning to every HEI.
5. Improve the existing infrastructure for providing technical assistance and professional development of teachers, staff, and administrators.
6. Appoint a specialist in Service-Learning and pursue Service-Learning initiatives.
7. Appoint a national Service-Learning Committee in order to formulate, review, and recommend general HE curriculum and operational guidelines as they relate to internships, scholarships, mobility, and Service-Learning experiences.
8. Integrate Service-Learning and civic engagement in the accreditation processes of academic staff and HEIs.

Policy recommendations for International Organisations

1. Advocate Service-Learning as a tool for integrating civic engagement in the higher education curricula.
2. Facilitate international Service-Learning projects.
3. Work in collaboration with HEIs to assess community and environmental needs.
4. Disseminate Service-Learning.
5. United Nations declares an international Service-Learning Day.
6. Identify the Service-Learning Research Agenda taking into account the European cultural context.

Policy recommendations for the Higher Education Institutions

1. Include Service-Learning the HEI strategy plan.
2. Create a Service-Learning program and structure to coordinate all activities, ensuring the necessary human and material resources.

3. Incorporate Service-Learning into existing academic programmes and promote it in collaboration with students, teachers and staff, assessing the needs of the local community and its existing capacities.
4. Provide high quality Service-Learning training to teachers.
5. Allocate time in the teachers' schedules to prepare, plan, guide and evaluate Service-Learning.
6. Internal and external recognition and rewards, both for teachers through promotion mechanisms and accreditation systems, and for students, who must obtain recognition of their participation in Service-Learning experiences in terms of ECTS.
7. Guarantee sustainability of the Service-Learning projects.
8. Promote both basic and applied research needed to examine how Service-Learning influences civic education and academic learning, and to provide evidence of the impact of Service-Learning on students, community, teachers, and participating entities.
9. Appoint a national Service-Learning Committee to formulate, review, and recommend general HEI curriculum, operational guidelines, policies, and tools and criteria for the evaluation of SL experiences that include indicators for assessing effects on the environment and on the various actors.

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Annexes

Annex 1 - Participating organizations

European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education, EASLHE



Mission and Vision

EASLHE promotes the development and dissemination of practice, research, institutionalization and policymaking on service-learning in European higher education.

A relevant European service-learning network of members who value social justice, civic responsibility and engagement, intercultural knowledge, ethical reasoning, lifelong learning, cultural awareness, tolerance, and diversity renowned for its capacity to support the institutionalization of service-learning in European Higher Education institutions and contribute to the development of a fairer society.

Values

- Social Justice
- Civic engagement
- Diversity awareness
- Equity
- Critical thinking
- Democracy
- Responsible leadership
- Sustainable development

Objectives

- to disseminate and exchange information, good practices and knowledge about service-learning
- to foster and develop training activities and resources
- to establish links between local, transnational and global networks
- to organize meetings, exchanges, seminars, conferences, congresses and other events, alone and/or with groupings pursuing the same objective
- to advocate service-learning development in higher-education institutions in Europe
- to contribute to the development of policy recommendations and initiatives
- to support individuals and institutions in developing service-learning projects
- to conduct and encourage research and scientific publications on service-learning
- to raise funds, receive legacies and donations to achieve the goals of the association

Global University Network for innovation, GUNi



Mission and Vision

GUNi's mission is to foster the role of higher education in society by supporting the renewal of its visions and policies around the world in terms of public service, relevance, social responsibility and innovation.

GUNi promotes the exchange of resources, innovative ideas and experiences. GUNi allows for collective reflection and co-production of knowledge on higher education emerging issues.

Our Values

- Defence and promotion of education, culture and science as decisive tools for human and social progress
- Sustainable development
- International cooperation, multilateralism and democratization of education and science
- University autonomy and academic freedom
- Responsibility and social commitment of higher education institutions
- Promotion of the diversity of higher education institutions
- Equity, equal opportunities and the defines of human rights
- Multidisciplinarity

Objectives

- Generate and share knowledge on higher education policy and management around the world
- Promote the knowledge society by strengthening higher education systems and institutions for the sake of progress, culture and well-being
- Support institutions and governments around the world for the advancement of higher education, scientific research and innovation
- Promote the development of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable
- Development Goals within higher education systems and institutions around the world
- Encourage academic and scientific diplomacy to promote multilateralism and international cooperation

Talloires Network of Engage Universities, TN



Mission and Vision

The Talloires Network of Engaged Universities is a growing global coalition of 421 university presidents, vice-chancellors and rectors in 83 countries who have publicly committed to strengthening the civic roles and social responsibilities of their institutions. It is the largest international network focused particularly on university civic engagement.

We work together to implement the principles of the [Talloires Declaration](#), collaborating with communities and partners to confront societal challenges such as disease, famine, structural racism, gender oppression, economic inequality, and climate change.

We envision universities around the world as dynamic forces in their communities, incorporating civic engagement into their research and pedagogies — and building relationships through a productive exchange of knowledge, ideas, and practices.

We recognize and celebrate the diversity of ethical approaches to university civic engagement. We support engagement in all its forms including community-based research, applied research, service-learning, experiential learning, extension, volunteerism, public service, policymaking, political activism, and social entrepreneurship.

We strive to expand definitions of success in order to foster more inclusive and impactful university civic engagement. We advocate the most promising practices from our members, particularly those in the Global South.

We strategically partner with [national and regional networks](#) for university civic engagement. In solidarity, we are building a global movement of civically engaged universities.

Our Values

- **Collaboration:** We believe in the power of working together toward a common vision.
- **Inclusion:** We seek to promote human rights and further the free exchange of knowledge, ideas, and practices by organizing convenings, conversations, and collaborative activities.
- **Equity:** We aspire to build a diverse coalition of universities, university leaders, faculty, staff, students, and community partners in which all are able to learn, thrive, and contribute to shaping societies and the future of higher education.

- **Leadership:** We believe that universities have a responsibility to develop the next generation of active citizens with the capacity to address the complex challenges around the world. We seek to inspire and empower university students to take action by providing resources to support community collaborations.
- **Innovation:** We aim to advance the application of high standards and the evolution of ethical ideas and strategies in the field of university civic engagement.
- **Hope:** We believe people are central to engagement and we seek to invest in their aspirations.

Objectives

- Champion ethical and diverse approaches to university civic engagement
- Financially support innovative approaches to university civic engagement
- Identify and publicly recognize engaged universities
- Reinforce institutional commitments to civic engagement practices, structures and policies
- Build an international community of practice and facilitate rigorous and critical reflection on those practices
- Elevate innovative civic engagement research and teaching by disseminating the approaches throughout the Network as examples of promising practice
- Raise awareness about the public role of universities and strengthen public support for the global civic engagement movement in higher education
- Engage with new members and network partners, expanding the reach and impact of the university civic engagement movement