Handbook 0

Service-Learning at the University

Service-Learning Network
of Catalan Universities

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Presentation

There is a growing number of initiatives, projects, and dynamics that open the doors of classrooms to society in order to address the social realities of the surrounding community. In this sense, service-learning enables the acquisition of key knowledge and competencies through direct engagement with these realities, facilitating a genuine experience of social participation.

The Service-Learning Network of Catalan Universities (Xarxa ApS(U)CAT) aims to foster experiences and build new knowledge regarding the promotion, implementation, assessment, and institutionalisation of service-learning in Catalan universities. The Xarxa ApS(U)CAT is made up of teaching and technical staff from all Catalan universities and aims to be a meeting place open to the entities with which service-learning projects are developed, as well as to interested students. Currently, these universities are incorporating or institutionalising service-learning as a line of work that crosscuts the different missions of higher education (research, teaching, and knowledge transfer).

In 2018, a collaboration framework was established with the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), through which the visibility and consolidation of the Network is supported. The ACUP concludes that service-learning is a strategic line towards which higher education must advance and to which it wants to actively contribute.

From this point of view, the initiatives of the Xarxa ApS(U)CAT represent an important and unprecedented impulse of the Catalan university system for the recognition of service-learning experiences developed from different disciplinary areas, the link between the university and the surrounding region through proposals for social transformation, the consolidation of processes of institutionalisation of service-learning in each of the universities, as well as a shared framework with the perspective of university social responsibility as a transversal axis of quality teaching, research, and transfer.

This document is part of a collection of handbooks that delve into service-learning in different university fields and contexts. The purpose of the handbooks is to build and disseminate knowledge about this method in the university.

1. Social responsibility and the university

The concept of social responsibility refers to the idea of commitment – individual or collective – to society. This concept has gained importance in the university world and emphasises the university's debt to society, which it repays through public service. This repayment takes shape through the three fundamental functions of the university mission: teaching, research, and knowledge transfer.

But what do we mean by the concept of social responsibility?

Social responsibility implies that the university should contribute to improving equity and inclusion in its areas of influence. This is achieved through different actions, including the programming of university extension courses and non-formal training programmes and the incorporation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (for example, through scholarship programmes).

Social responsibility, however, must also be associated with increased social and civic involvement among universities. To achieve this, universities must not only train students in academic disciplines, but must also promote ethical learning, both in the professional and individual spheres (Martínez, 2008). In this sense, numerous universities have foundations dedicated to solidary actions and volunteer services. In these, advocating for the importance of social responsibility implies that the university's third mission shifts from being viewed solely through an economic lens – which entails understanding knowledge transfer as a driver of entrepreneurial activity – to being considered from its ethical and civic dimensions.

The construction and extension of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has made it possible to propose the implementation of other social responsibility practices that have been progressively extended. These practices include service-learning activities, which combine community service with student learning. The EHEA has framed, at a continental scale, a paradigm shift in knowledge, transitioning from a focus on academic disciplines to emphasising the development of real-world professional competencies relevant to the everyday environment, where students will grow both professionally and as citizens.

In our immediate context, service-learning has appeared in universities in the last two decades, influenced by studies and contributions from other countries. University service-learning has been gradually introduced across various domains and at different times through specific experiences aimed at reinforcing practical learning, fostering interaction with the community, and cultivating a sense of commitment to community engagement.

Officially, service-learning has been included in the University Student Statute since 2010, as follows: "The universities [...] shall promote practices of social and civic responsibility that combine academic learning in the various degree programmes with community service aimed at improving quality of life and social inclu-

sion". (Royal Decree 1791/2010 of December 30). Subsequently, in 2015, the Sustainability Commission of the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE) approved the document titled "Institutionalisation of Service-Learning as a Teaching Strategy within the Framework of University Social Responsibility for the Promotion of Sustainability in the University".

In the same vein, rooted in territorial proximity and collaborative workspaces, the Network of Service-Learning at Catalan Universities (ApS(U)CAT) was born. The network was created from the interest of faculty members from various Catalan universities to implement this educational proposal in their classes and promote joint research in this field. The need to share teaching experiences, outcomes, and challenges meant that, little by little, meetings and exchanges were formalised. In 2015, an annual working and training was established.

The initial debates and shared experiences within the network served to define the construct, identify its components (needs, learning, service, reflection, recognition, partnership), position it within the university, and begin to build a map of the implementation of service-learning locally or globally (instructors, courses, degrees, faculties, credit recognition...) and emerging knowledge areas (health sciences, sciences, social and legal sciences, arts and humanities, engineering and architecture), as well as establish key steps for its deployment (design, development, assessment), gather the voices of faculty, students, and involved services, analyse motivation and impact, list needs (institutionalisation, support services, infrastructure...), consolidate some practices, and address new challenges.

The ApS(U)CAT Network also aims to extend its shared experiences to other universities through participation, either jointly or individually, in service-learning conferences and initiatives, in the organisation of specific training sessions and events, in the publication of informative and scientific writings, etc. Additionally, it aims to introduce this educational proposal to the different management teams, deans, and programme coordinators of universities in Catalonia so that they may consider the possibility of including it in proposed teaching innovation plans and projects for community outreach and transfer, as has already begun in some institutions.

> Service-learning reinforces practical learning, contact with the community, and a sense of commitment to society.

2. Service-learning at the university

In order to properly define what we mean by "service-learning", as well as to ensure the quality of the projects recognised under this name, we must ask some questions:

What is service-learning at the university?

What activities are related to it? How are they similar and different?

What key elements should any project that aims to work from this perspective include?

What questions need to be answered to design a service-learning project?

" Service-learning is a teaching and research proposal that integrates community service and academic learning in a single project that allows students to learn based on the real needs of the community with the aim of addressing them.

In this way, service-learning is not fieldwork, although it usually includes fieldwork tasks. Service-learning is based on the detection and analysis of needs but, in addition, requires direct action to address them, with the aim of improving the surroundings and the community. Service-learning should not be confused with volunteering, since in service-learning social contribution and student learning have equal weight. Service-learning experiences integrate learning processes in a practical and meaningful manner with community service, fostering collaboration among various stakeholders within a well-structured project.

With all this, service-learning can be considered to be simultaneously a method, a programme, a philosophy, and a form of political participation (Puig, et. al. 2006). It is a teaching and learning method that establishes the steps and key elements for training competent, committed professionals. It is simultaneously a programme since it defines the organisational forms necessary to favour and strengthen the link between the university and the community. It can be considered a philosophy, since it responds to a way of understanding what the university institution should be and what it should serve in terms of responsibility and social transformation. Finally, service-learning is also a form of political participation because service-learning is, ultimately, a real-life opportunity for the democratic participation of responsible citizens.

The core elements of a service-learning project are highlighted below. For each one, a brief overview is provided, along with suggested questions to consider when designing a project (Martín and Puig, 2017).

Social needs

Service-learning is based on difficulties or challenges presented by the community and on which social entities work. It is important for the needs to be real and to be addressable within the students' competencies, and therefore, they must be directly related to the curriculum and year of study. Therefore, real-life conditions must be researched, analysed, and critiqued to determine what interventions students can undertake to address the identified deficiencies. As far as possible, students should participate in the process of diagnosing these needs.

Some questions to ask in relation to the definition of social needs:

What need do you want the project to address?

What social entities already work there?

What spaces can be provided to publicise the needs of social entities?

How can students contribute?

How can they get involved in the diagnosis of needs?

Partnership

If service-learning is based on social needs, the proposal requires an intense, respectful, reciprocal and mutually beneficial collaboration between social entities and the university. Therefore, it is important that time, effort, and resources be allocated to establishing and maintaining these relationships, with the understanding that this is key to improving teaching and research. This joint task is precisely what should allow us to face the needs of the community, define socially useful service spaces, and engage in activities that benefit both the community and the university. That is why it is essential to adapt the work to the task and mission of the partner entities.

Some questions to ask in relation to the establishment of partnership:

With which entities can the project be carried out?

How to establish first contact?

What should be the principles of this collaboration?

How to determine a joint monitoring process throughout the project?

Learning

Another central element of service-learning, as its name suggests, is learning. This proposal aims to promote the acquisition of content (knowledge, skills and procedures, attitudes, and values) and competencies (transversal and specific) linked to the studies undertaken by the student. From this perspective, service-learning

advocates for practical, research-based, mobilising, and meaningful learning, while also being well-grounded theoretically and academically rigorous. Therefore, learning becomes a key axis throughout the entire process, both before (to be able to carry out high-quality service), during (raising new questions), and after the service activity (generating new learning).

Some questions to ask in planning the learning outcomes:

How is the project linked to the subject, the course, the degree (subject, final research project, internships...)?

What lessons should students learn throughout the project?

What transversal competencies can be developed?

What specific competencies?

Service

Service-learning requires direct action with respect to these social needs with the aim of addressing them. It is not enough to analyse real-life conditions and reflect on them; it is also necessary to participate. The student, individually or in groups, carries out an unpaid activity, related to their future profession, which they offer for the benefit of the community in exchange for the opportunity to learn in a real-world setting. Service-learning students cannot be used to cover empty professional positions. Following these guidelines allows us to design rich experiences that are appropriate for the students and lend themselves to reciprocity.

Some questions to ask in relation to service planning:

What service tasks can students perform?

Is it a service that is carried out individually or in groups?

How long does the service last and when does it take place?

Who is the entity's reference person for the performance and monitoring of the service?

Reflection

In service-learning projects, reflection is the component that allows learning to be generated from one's own experience in a systematic and conscious way. Reflection is based on lived experience, favours understanding, and allows us to analyse our own actions. Moreover, reflection allows for an analysis and construction of the social significance of this action, the emotional and personal impact it can provoke, and its connection with the theoretical and practical learning objectives of the area of study. Additionally, it enables students to consider their professional identity and the political dimension of the tasks they undertake. Because of all this, reflection must be planned from the beginning and for each of the phases of service-learning projects.

Some questions to ask in relation to reflection planning:

What moments and spaces for reflection does the project envisage?

What strategies are intended to be used to favour and systematise the reflective process?

What should be considered to monitor this reflective process?

What materials and resources are available?

Recognition

The development of service-learning projects makes sense when these types of proposals have the same treatment in the teaching and institutional sphere as other training activities. Therefore, service-learning activities must be assessed and should entail appropriate recognition for the student, whether in the form of marks or credits, depending on the context of the project. This assessment, which must include all the elements described so far, should point towards co-assessment approaches that consider the different stakeholders participating in the project.

Some questions to ask in relation to planning, recognition and assessment:

How can project participants be recognised?

What is the value attributed to participation in these projects in terms of credits?

What criteria and instruments are planned to be used to assess students?

What documentation is necessary to carry out this recognition?

3. Spaces for incorporating service-learning into the university

Service-learning as a method that integrates learning and community service requires curricular and extra-curricular spaces as a formative pathway in and outside the classroom (Santos, Sotelino, & Lorenzo, 2015).

Some questions under the premise that innovative learning spaces should give maximum weight to learning and involvement with a social perspective (OECD, 2017):

What are the appropriate spaces to incorporate service-learning into higher education?

Why and how to choose the most suitable for each situation?

Service-learning can be incorporated into any area of the university curriculum. Since it involves academic learning, service-learning necessarily implies a link to the teaching plan of the subject, with all that this implies for the purposes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning. Moreover, as can be seen below, there are various options for the location and curricular integration of these types of projects.

Subjects

According to the method and the function one wishes to attribute to service-learning, each professor can design the educational process with a different degree of intensity. This could depend on whether participation in service-learning projects is mandatory or optional, whether activities are individual or collective, and whether it involves the development of reflective activities or direct impact.

If participation in service-learning projects is mandatory, the whole class must carry out the project presented by the professor. It is mandatory and is done by everyone, in groups or individually. On the other hand, if participation is optional, the activity is proposed to be carried out in different environments.

If participation is collective, a group decides to opt for the service-learning proposal made by the professor, whereas if it is individual, each student can undertake the activity independently.

Finally, with regard to the focus of the learning activities, depending on the duration and degree of involvement and interaction with the entity, learning situations can be considered within the framework of the subject. These can be reflective-consultative when they are carried out in the exclusive framework of the classroom or participatory-transformative when they propose direct interaction with and impacts for the entities and users that have expressed a need.

Curricular internships

The aim of introducing service-learning into curricular internships is for students to be able to carry out an intervention that entails a verifiable improvement in their internship centre and, at the same time, develops the competencies and learning outcomes of the subject (Edo & Blanch, 2016). In this way, students will be able to progress in the acquisition of professional resources that will allow them to demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and procedures necessary to develop their professional competence.

Internship centres should provide the necessary information and allow for observation and participation in the centre's dynamics, so that students can identify any needs and areas for improvement within the centre. It is also possible for the internship centres to present an intervention proposal resulting from a need they have already identified. In both cases, the student will develop a proposed course of action, discuss it with their supervisors, design it, and formulate an action plan. Finally, the student will define the project in detail, determine its implementation phases, and commit to carrying it out.

Bachelor's Final Project (TFG) and Master's Final Project (TFM)

A Bachelor's or Master's final project linked to service-learning is an action-based project where the emphasis lies in addressing the needs of the community through learning. Thus, the effort is placed on practical intervention, and the competencies being developed are identified: conducting research, designing materials, or creating proposals of interest for social entities (UdL, 2017). The TFG and TFM allow for the inclusion of a research and production modality agreed upon with the stakeholders and aimed at addressing social problems, which contributes to generating basic theoretical knowledge. The project carried out may be the result of a need detected by the centre or a need identified by the student.

Transversal projects

Universities promote educational innovation with a perspective of social commitment from the design, development, and pedagogical assessment of initiatives aimed at integrating social responsibility into teaching and curricula from an extracurricular approach with credit recognition. These initiatives promote transversal competency learning, are developed through volunteering, have curricular recognition, and are guided and evaluated as a learning process. This allows students to have the opportunity to apply knowledge and learn in authentic and meaningful participatory contexts, often transversal, and with interdisciplinary teams.

This transversal and interdisciplinary approach facilitates the involvement of students in different tasks of service to the community throughout their training, beyond university classrooms and regulated practices.

After having specified the service to be provided with the receiving entity, time is allocated in which the student, accompanied by the supervisor and together with the whole group, shares the lived experience, reflects on it, and prepares the activities to be carried out. The receiving centres are responsible for training students and offering them support and resources throughout the project.

Interdisciplinary projects

Interdisciplinary projects are an opportunity to build innovative learning environments through connections to situations that favour the integration of elements, in order to build knowledge and transfer it (OECD, 2017).

The design of an interdisciplinary service-learning environment allows for addressing the complexity of reality by leveraging the complementary perspectives of different disciplines to provide responses. The integrated curricular experience across various degrees, subjects, and educational levels, driven by a common social commitment, responds to real and complex needs, posing a significant impact on entities and their users.

Transversal and interdisciplinary social innovation implies a different approach to teaching and learning based on a real need (Hernández & Figueras, 2016) and allows us to address a situation or problem from different perspectives, with a complex, global view of the situation. In this way, it facilitates the hybridisation of the methodological approach for each situation, combining approaches from direct and in-person fieldwork to address needs as part of the solution. It involves the participation of students from various specialisations, which generates added value as it necessitates considering issues from broader perspectives beyond the specific scope of a specialisation or subject.

The assessment of interdisciplinary cross-cutting projects requires a dual model: on one hand, specific to the subject and related to specific knowledge, and on the other hand, as a global impact analysis model to obtain indicators of learning and overall service.

> " A pedagogical model aimed at addressing the needs of the community through service-learning involves designing cross-cutting, interdisciplinary, or specific experiences within both curricular and extracurricular realms. These experiences are focused on making a real impact on the needs and goals of the community, requiring the involvement of teaching and institutional teams. This means creating authentic spaces and contexts to develop general, specific, personal, and professional skills.

4. Service-learning experiences according to knowledge areas at the university

From which community needs and in collaboration with what type of entities can service-learning projects be launched according to knowledge areas?

What social, cultural, and environmental objectives drive service-learning projects according to knowledge areas?

What types of service-learning services can students develop according to their knowledge areas?

What are the training objectives of service-learning projects by knowledge areas?

Health sciences

The set of disciplines integrated within the health sciences provide a wide range of service-learning projects that build very diverse experiences that respond to real health needs of the community and favour student learning from experience and reflection in a framework of reciprocity. The services are carried out with institutions, entities, and NGOs of very diverse types and that belong mainly to the social, educational, and health fields.

Most of the projects are structured within the field of health promotion, health education, and disease prevention. They cover a wide range of social groups and include services designed through knowledge and innovation (Morín Fraile, Sancho, Galimany, Guix, Estrada, Vázquez, Rubio, & Escofet, 2017). Some of the projects being carried out involve training students to educate individuals in handling life-threatening situations and being advocates for health promotion among youth, aimed at preventing drug use, and promoting safe sexual behaviour, as well as physical activity among women after childbirth, and promoting healthy eating and other healthy habits among various groups.

Projects aimed at people suffering from diseases are also designed. In this case, the services offer useful strategies and tools to empower them to make decisions and manage their illness autonomously. The students put their knowledge and skills into practice, providing care to children with diabetes in a recreational context, training them in self-care techniques, and improving the management of disorders and illnesses. Improving the use of inhalers, providing appropriate care for Alzheimer's patients and loneliness in the elderly are other examples.

With the aim of familiarising students with the care of more vulnerable groups at risk or in situations of social exclusion, various projects have been carried out with institutions and NGOs that provide direct assistance to homeless individuals who typically do not use public health system resources. It is crucial that students can grasp and understand the health situation of those experiencing social exclusion, as they suffer from higher

morbidity, have less capacity for self-care, and have fewer opportunities to overcome illness processes. Some examples of projects in this context include designing and implementing health workshops for women at risk of social exclusion, providing support for emotional management with youth at risk of exclusion, and creating health education workshops for homeless individuals recovering from acute illness.

Sciences

The service-learning projects included in the sciences have a strong commitment to the sustainable development of our environment. Projects are launched that promote the improvement of social and environmental sustainability and work together with local entities and other institutions.

The participation of students in collaborative work and training actions on chemical contamination through the analysis of contaminating elements, the creation of a workshop to improve communication among secondary school students by analysing environmental problems and their consequences, as well as the organisation of workshops on topics such as nutrition, air, and water within events dedicated to science outreach among schoolchildren, are examples of service-learning projects aimed at raising awareness among citizens, especially adolescents and children, to take measures and advocate for initiatives against actions that destroy our natural and cultural heritage.

Social and legal sciences

There are many service-learning projects that are designed and organised in different formats and in collaboration with a wide variety of institutions from the different fields of the social and legal sciences. Collaboration has been established with a solidary foundation so that students can assist socially vulnerable and at-risk entrepreneurs who wish to start a project through microcredits. This is an example of a service-learning project that promotes social integration and cohesion through advising and supporting entrepreneurs.

The promotion of TFGs through service-learning offers a wide variety of innovative solidary services. These are social projects aimed at improving the management model, changing the organisation of social entities, and enhancing the social and economic profitability of social action. They also provide useful tools, such as market research, plans for welcoming collaborators, social communication designs, and the analysis of the internal and external communication of social entities.

Thus, a project has been carried out to help create a new community identity for a neighbourhood by launching initiatives that allow for deconstructing the stereotypes surrounding it. A project has also been developed that has allowed for the creation of an audio-visual piece adapted to the needs and characteristics of the different entities. This initiative has enabled students to apply their knowledge and skills in a solidary action aimed at entities that, without this assistance, would find it very difficult to access this type of service. In addition, it has made it possible to collaborate with third sector entities.

Facilitating individuals in situations of social vulnerability to share their experiences in order to reconstruct their life story, designing a community diagnosis that includes values and concepts inherent to social commitment, conducting applied research so that students can thoroughly understand the phenomenon of unaccompanied migrant minors and make proposals for social intervention for this group; these are some of the service-learning projects that exemplify the possibilities of this learning strategy within the social sciences.

In the field of law, it is worth highlighting the proliferation of legal clinics that launch service-learning projects that propose a large number of initiatives based on a commitment to solidarity with the most vulnerable populations and in close collaboration with social intervention entities and associations.

Arts and humanities

With the aim of valuing popular knowledge and promoting intergenerational exchange, collaborations have been established with associations of older people and city councils in order to carry out projects on oral cultural heritage in municipalities and neighbourhoods. In this way, we have collaborated in the recovery of historical memory, as well as in the dissemination of the knowledge and materials derived from it, through public exhibitions.

In response to the need in schools to address potential situations of linguistic stigma and prestige associated with speech, projects have been developed on the use of Catalan and Spanish in schools, through sociolinguistic analyses using methods from the sociology of language and linguistic ethnography. In collaboration with NGOs and entities that provide direct services to newcomers, we also teach the pronunciation of Catalan, as well as translation services in English.

In collaboration with penitentiary institutions in Catalonia, the need to adjust some teaching materials to the reality of the classrooms of the prison population was detected. With this social objective, a didactic unit of the teaching of Spanish in this specific context has been developed, which is available to the professors in charge of teaching these classes classrooms.

Cultural dissemination as a citizen right is also part of projects in which students transfer content relevant to their academic curriculum to higher education centres and which have, at the same time, a component of social and cultural value.

Engineering and architecture

In the field of computer and telecommunications engineering, many services have been developed to facilitate the organisation and improvement of digital environments for entities with specific needs: designing computer applications, enhancing websites for task dissemination and exportability, or creating telematic tools for optimising public resources, among others.

The work with environmental entities and public bodies has responded to problems related to access to water and its potability, the design of irrigation systems for community initiatives, studies on the environmental implications of specific infrastructures, and the preparation of proposals to improve the territorial and landscape planning of municipalities.

From collaborations with NGOs, international organisations, as well as units and structures of the university that work in international social action, synergies are found for the achievement of service-learning projects that work on the ethical, social, and environmental implications of engineering in contexts of development cooperation. The services derived from this training in urban planning and architecture have been channelled through proposals by students for urban planning and improvement, and for the design and construction of public facilities (schools, libraries, universities) in impoverished countries, with the aim of collaborating in sustainable architecture.

In collaboration with groups with functional diversity, citizen platforms or public bodies, proposals for social inclusion in local contexts based on accessibility as a universal right have been developed. In this context, games, teaching materials, and accessible computer applications have been researched and designed, according to the needs of specific groups. In the context of architecture, studies and analyses of public spaces, facilities, and businesses in towns or villages have been developed, along with proposals for how to adapt them to the needs of the community. Engineering has also been applied in situations of energy poverty, with experiences of energy audits in public facilities, such as schools.

Through analyses and specific intervention proposals in collaboration with entities and town councils, work has been carried out with the aim of assessing and emphasising the most relevant characteristics of cultural heritage (material, natural, movable and immovable), facilitating its appropriation as a community asset, as well as establishing knowledge that can be used for educational purposes or social awareness.

Interdisciplinary projects

The achievement of interdisciplinary and transversal projects is one of the great challenges of the university, since the needs detected in the community are often susceptible to receiving answers from different academic disciplines that work for a common interest.

Thus, the fact that most of the activities carried out in schools are designed for neurotypical children led to a TFG from the fields of health, social sciences, and engineering. The common objective was to provide methodological adaptation strategies that use new technologies and improve the learning of young people with autism spectrum disorder.

The lack of healthy eating habits by people with intellectual disabilities is widespread and often leads to other health problems. In collaboration with a guardianship organisation, health sciences students work, from nur-

sing and nutrition, in the creation of a practical and understandable guide, aimed at people with intellectual disabilities who are under public guardianship and have some autonomy.

The transversality of service-learning projects is also reflected in the scientific dissemination conducted by students through lectures given in high schools on topics of general interest and from different knowledge areas. The objective of these talks is to share knowledge and engage in discussions on a topic that the university is working on and that is relevant for high school students' education.

In the process of needs detection in collaboration with entities, proposals that are susceptible to being transformed into interdisciplinary projects of various kinds have been identified. These include studies on housing in energy poverty, the design of technological innovation applications for literacy for people with intellectual disabilities, proposals for improvement and utilisation of community natural spaces, analysis of accessible heritage monuments, work on chemical contamination, and population studies on disability and sports, among others.

5. Steps to carry out a service-learning project at the university

Preparing, designing, and carrying out a service-learning project requires a long and continuous process that includes different stages of preparation, execution, and assessment. Generally, service-learning projects arise from an initial idea, a preliminary creative moment, a germinal spark that needs attention and shaping step by step to turn it into a high-quality socio-educational proposal.

What are the steps we can follow to carry out a service-learning project at the university?

Service-learning projects follow a systematic methodological process consisting of a sequence of stages, shared with that of any project-based work, which includes planning, executing, and evaluating three core processes, each consisting of different phases (Fuertes, 2014b). While there is general agreement on the different stages, we may find various proposals regarding the number of phases that will make up the three mentioned core stages, without this implying a substantial change in the project.

Thus, according to Bosch & Batlle (2006), in the implementation process, we can distinguish five phases in the three basic stages of planning, execution, and assessment:

Table 1. **Service-learning project implementation process.**
Adapted from Bosch & Batlle (2006)

Core stages	Phases of each of the stages
Planning	Preparation Planning
Execution	Execution
Assessment	Assessment with the group Educator assessment

However, Puig, Martín & Batlle (2008) define the three key moments as preparation, implementation, and assessment, specifying them in seven stages shown in the following table:

Table 2. **Stages of a service-learning experience** (Puig, Martín & Batlle, 2008)

Moments	Sub-stages of a service-learning experience
Preparation	1. Prepare the draft 2. Establish relationships with entities 3. Plan
Implementation	4. Prepare 5. Execute 6. Close
Assess	7. Assess in a multifocal way

The sub-stages of the preparation stage are fundamental for the subsequent development of the project. In drawing up the draft or "outline of the idea" (Batlle, 2008), the need that could be addressed, the service that could be carried out, and the related learning objectives would be defined. In sub-stage 2, centres with which collaboration could be established should be identified, demands should be presented, and agreements should be established. In the plan-

ning sub-stage, pedagogical aspects, the specific service to be carried out, and the organisation of the project should be defined.

The sub-stages corresponding to planning of execution include the preparation of the project with the specific group of students in terms of motivation, identification of the social need, and definition of the service, and reflection on the relationship with the acquired learning. Sub-stage 5 corresponds to the execution of the project and, consequently, to its realisation by establishing collaboration with individuals in the community and reflecting on the learning that occurred. The phase corresponding to the closure of the project includes reflection at the end of the process, which would lead to subsequent assessment.

Regarding the multifocal assessment of the final stage, we believe it is essential to approach it from different perspectives, including those of the participants, the entity, the learning outcomes, and also self-assessment. The number of sub-stages, as well as the specific order and weight of each one, may vary depending on the nature of the project, the characteristics of the group, and the previous experience of the participants.

Another classification is offered by Tedesco, Hernaiz, Tapia & Rial (2006), who tell us about an itinerary to refer to the steps or stages that a service-learning project should follow, which transversally would be formed by processes of reflection, systematisation, and assessment, as shown in the table below:

Table 3. Stages of a service-learning project.
Adapted from Tedesco, Hernaiz, Tapia and Rial (2008)

Stages	Steps	Transversal processes		
Diagnosis and planning	1. Motivation and conceptualisation 2. Participatory diagnosis 3. Project design	REFLECTION	COMMUNICATION	ASSESSMENT
Execution	4. Institutional alliances and obtaining resources 5. Project implementation and management			
Assessment and final systematisation	6. Assessment, continuity, and multiplication 7. Celebration and recognition			

According to the authors, each of the stages would be subdivided into different phases or steps. Reflection takes place before, during, and after the project, involving individual work on self-awareness, the development of metacognitive processes, and the exercise of autonomy, as well as collective work in relation to others. The monitoring of these stages contributes to the assessment process and makes it possible to design, organise, and analyse the information obtained according to the plans that were established. The assessment of a programme or project, understood as a system for verifying the objectives we had set ourselves, should allow us to correct errors and make decisions for future actions.

In short, as stated above, service-learning projects can be very broad, as is the knowledge that can be applied in an activity or in a service-learning project. Depending on the revision carried out, we could say that the basic shared stages of the different classifications are the following:

1. Detection of needs and diagnosis of reality

In service-learning projects, one of the first particularities that must be addressed is, without a doubt, the need to respond to specific demands, felt by the community, that arise from reading and analysing the situation. From this perspective, the inclusion of socio-pedagogical strategies becomes indispensable to help participants identify and define possible issues or unsatisfactory situations in the socio-cultural environment that are susceptible to intervention and improvement. This entails shaping socio-educational proposals based on the construction of processes of collectivisation and social formulas towards the common good (Miró & Molina, 2017). The detection of needs becomes, therefore, the starting point from which to identify and carry out a preliminary study to understand the scope of the problem and the possibilities of intervention to improve the situation (Miró, Carrera, & Molina, 2016).

According to Puig, Gijón, Martín & Rubio (2011) in service-learning projects, the starting point is a diagnosis of reality and its protagonists, so as to favour the detection of aspects susceptible to improvement. The diagnosis of needs involves defining the problem and implies choosing, making decisions, focusing on the issue, and centring on a specific objective that will serve to focus the work with the necessary flexibility to adapt to the context (Fuertes, 2014a).

A service-learning project must respond to identified needs of the community in which the student puts into play specific skills to plan actions, monitor them, and assess their outcomes. Any analysis of reality and identification of problems would lose its educational potential, social sensitivity, and civic education if students did not plan and develop some type of action in response to the analysed need (Luna, 2010).

Thus, diagnosis allows us to identify the real needs of the community, the human and material resources that will make it possible to implement the project, and the opportunities to carry out meaningful learning. Let's not forget that in a service-learning project, the social objectives and learning objectives we intend to achieve must be present and clear.

There are often many needs that will need to be prioritised. Therefore, in this first phase, an initial evaluation of the demands is carried out to see which can be met by the educational institution. The most important thing, in any case, is that students participate in the diagnosis, planning and design, execution and assessment of the project, even if it is simple, short, or limited (Fuertes, 2014a).

2. Project design

The design of the project helps us to detail the plan that allows us to carry it out. To do this, it is necessary to consider the learning and service objectives, justify the advantages that the project implementation can bring, have a clear understanding of who it is addressed to - that is, who the recipients will be - determine activities and assign responsibilities, specify the time frame, and analyse the project's viability and the obstacles we may encounter.

It is very important that students participate in the design process, as involvement contributes to improving their motivation. Feeling part of the project makes them acquire a commitment that will inevitably improve their learning, as they participate in the planning of the actions that will be carried out.

3. Project execution

The execution of the project is the implementation of the different planned actions. Student reflection during the project is required so that they can act and adapt or change, depending on the project's development and the possible problematic situations that may arise.

Reflection on action must accompany the entire process and allows for connecting curricular objectives with the service experience. It must make it possible for experience to become a real learning opportunity.

4. Assessment

In service-learning projects, the intention is to assess both the merit and the value of the work carried out.

Final reflection and assessment allow us to draw conclusions, evaluate the experience, and make decisions to improve the efficiency, efficacy, effectiveness, and value of the programme. It includes, as we have already said, three levels: assessment of the impact on students' personal and social development, assessment of the learning acquired, and assessment of the service provided. Although we place it at the end of the process, we cannot forget that it is carried out as an initial assessment when diagnosing needs and as formative assessment during the execution of the project, a moment in which participants reflect and collect data.

Thus, we must ensure the dual perspective of assessment: on one hand, the quality of the service, both from the students and from the centres and practice institutions, and on the other hand, the quality of the learning acquired in terms of disciplinary content, skills, and attitudes demonstrated during the project's development. The success of a service-learning project, in part, can be measured according to the possibilities that have

been opened up to repeat and improve it. The final step of a project should be the assessment of its implementation and outcome, which is recommended to be done in a simple and brief manner, involving those who participated.

The impact of the implementation of a project produces effects not only on the actors involved, but also on the institutions that collaborate. On the one hand, the educational institution opens up to the outside world and is linked and inserted into its environment, acquires greater credibility by responding cooperatively to real needs, and is recognised throughout the associative and civic fabric. On the other hand, the entities linked to the project make their work known beyond their circle of action and voluntarily become involved in the initiative from within a horizontal relationship (Bosch & Batlle, 2006).

The process followed is summarised in an intervention sequence adapted from Fernández-García & Ponce de León (2006):

Figure 1. Sequence of a service-learning project (Fuertes, 2014a)
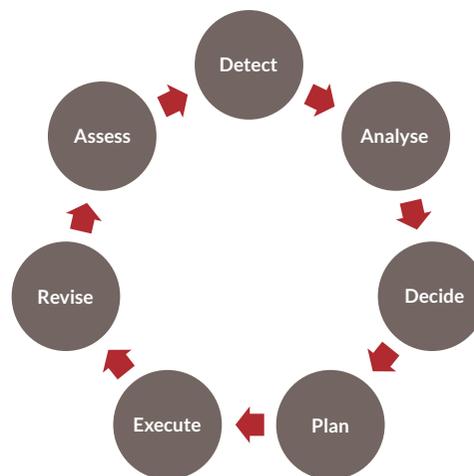
The outline of the project will help us detail the action plan. In order to specify both the diagnosis and the design of the project and focus on the topic, it is advisable to follow in each of the projects the scheme that we collect in the following table:

Table 4. **General scheme of service-learning projects** (Fuertes, 2014a). Adapted from Ander Egg & Idánez (2005)

Diagnosis of community needs	
Planning	
What?	Nature and description of the project
Why?	Origin, foundation, or justification
For what?	Objectives and purposes
Where?	Physical location
How?	Activities, tasks, and methods
When?	Timeline
For whom?	Recipients/beneficiaries
Who?	Human resources
Resources?	Material resources

Once the above variables have been defined, the actions or activities to be carried out in accordance with what is defined in the previous table are planned and executed in the real-life situation. Thus, to carry out the project, we consider the following three moments:

Table 5. Summary of the different moments of a service-learning project (Fuertes, 2014a)

BEFORE	Detection of needs. Select those that can be covered by students according to the studies they are undertaking (initial assessment). Connect the action to be carried out with the curricular contents (relate theory to practice). Plan collaborative action. When planning the action and the tasks, we must have prepared a space for improvisation in view of situations that we had not foreseen to occur and that can make us rethink objectives, contents, and methods.
DURING	Reflect on the action or actions that are being carried out (formative assessment).
AFTER	Reflect on the process. Multifocal summative assessment at three levels: – The impact on personal and affective development and values of students – of the learning acquired – of the service provided

6. Testimonials: the voices of the participants

Considering the voices of the participants in service-learning projects means listening, understanding, and learning, in a shared way, everything that the experience offers us. Professors often assume a prominent role in learning processes, which is not easy to relinquish in order to give voice to other participants. Faced with this challenge, there is an interest in learning about the perspective of students, entities, and professors who participate in service-learning projects and who, in a collaborative way, are the protagonists.

How can we deepen our understanding of the participatory elements that bring meaning and value to service-learning projects, based on the voice of their protagonists?

Are testimonials a key aspect of project development and assessment?

This section delves into the points of view of the participants (students, entities, and professors) from different experiences in service-learning projects and reproduces their voices.

The students' interest in participating in service-learning projects is linked to the motivation to contextualise their learning in the real world and add social value to their training. Among the most specific aspects that serve as motivators for participation, autonomy in learning stands out. The possibility of actively participating during the various phases of the projects and having the ability to direct one' own learning is an aspect that contributes to acquiring a greater commitment throughout the process. The experience of contributing from the first moment to the implementation of projects gives a sense of responsibility and at the same time motivation.

> *We are the ones who direct what we learn; of course, professors help us, but we cannot go to a tutorial without having prepared for it, or visit the centre without knowing what to ask, or participating in the intervention without having practiced and making sure that we are in command of the subject matter. (Student)*

The relationship between students and professors in service-learning projects also varies with respect to classical parameters. Sharing a common goal makes the relationship between them go beyond the fact of learning/teaching. The joint planning of a service to the community makes it possible to establish relationships of interdependence in which everyone is needed. In this context, recognition from professors is an indispensable element for achieving learning of the highest level or intensity, learning that goes beyond mere academic achievement. Professors can become role models in aspects that are difficult to learn, such as involvement, responsibility, teamwork, etc.

> *The availability of the professor during the preparation phase and throughout the execution helps build confidence and progress because errors can be corrected. (Student)*

> *Throughout the project, we received feedback from the professor, and this makes us learn more, because it motivates you and you can improve. She has communicated her involvement and enthusiasm to us. (Student)*

> *You guided us and you encouraged us... You answered (our questions) at any time of day... And that's appreciated. (Student)*

In addition to the support of professors, students also identify as an important element the recognition they receive from the entities. Thus, they perceive that their intervention makes sense and serves a purpose that is valued by a community outside the university. In addition, the willingness of the entities and the personalised attention that students receive make them feel more secure and supported in their practice.

This aspect can be very important in the subsequent assessment made by students and in their willingness to participate in future projects with different entities.

> *Sure, the positive reinforcement that has also been verbalised because they thanked us, but we've also seen it in how they've provided us with all the support. That helps a lot and makes you have a good attitude. (Student)*

This feeling of support is reinforced by working collaboratively with classmates. Thus, students develop teamwork competency, see the difficulties involved, and value its positive aspects based on their own experience. Transversal competences such as creativity, ethical responsibility, and teamwork are often complicated to develop in contexts outside the "real world", and, in this sense, service-learning projects can facilitate mastery.

> *I think first, among us, meaning the reinforcement we've given each other as a group, has been really positive because it's always been a helpful attitude, never about replacing, and we've all been there for each other, seeing what they needed, and well, I'll help you and you help me. (Student)*

> *We have been able to develop materials and do more creative activities. (Student)*

An important element in service-learning projects is reflective learning, the students' awareness of their competency acquisition process. This awareness endows them with a critical capacity that they do not obtain with other teaching methods and that prepare them for future learning.

> *And I think the reflection activities have also helped us learn about who you are and what your way of learning and explaining things to other people is like. (Student)*

> *Learning to teach others helps us achieve a very high level of knowledge: We reflect on everything because we have the responsibility to convey information in an appropriate way. (Student)*

This self-reflective process, of personal and professional growth, also results in a feeling of self-realisation in the student. Experiencing the participation process in various projects, when it's reflective, whether individually or collectively, generates the feeling of undergoing high-quality learning. The difference is perceived with respect to other ways of learning, and this leads to a more positive self-assessment, a self-perception of greater capacity, and, consequently, high self-esteem.

> *We feel very fulfilled through this experience for many reasons: we've better integrated the knowledge related to the workshop and corresponding to our discipline; we've developed important communication and teaching skills in the field of health education; we've enhanced our abilities in bibliographic research and database usage; we've improved our teamwork skills; we've gained confidence, trust, and judgement. (Student)*

Another key element of service-learning is learning by doing; that is, the importance of practice in the learning process. Working with the community stimulates the implementation of cognitive and emotional abilities that contribute to acquiring specific competencies. Furthermore, linking back to the aforementioned idea of reflection, if it's done on one's own practice, it allows for deeper and more meaningful learning.

These are techniques we wouldn't have been able to learn without practicing them, and thanks to that, we've been able to try them out and learn. And it's not just about doing theoretical work and going to class, presenting it, and saying "I'm done". It's about doing a project, feeling like it's yours, and once you feel that ownership, everything becomes easier. (Student)

This system of carrying out real interventions while learning theory at university enables us to gain valuable experiences for our future professional development. (Student)

This practical and meaningful learning of involvement with the community makes students feel challenged in personal and social aspects that can shape a new vision of themselves, their abilities, and new professional alternatives that incorporate social and ethical responsibility.

Thanks to this project, it's as if I have seen another side of nursing. I don't know, during your degree it's like you focus a lot on the healthcare part, and I've realised that what I like the most is health education, because that has a social impact. You realise that you are doing an activity that is relevant to society. (Student)

I was looking for what I wanted to achieve as a social educator. At that moment you don't realise it, but when you stop and come home and say, "Wow, you know what? A lot of things have happened", a lot of doubts that arose in me, a lot of feelings, sometimes anxieties, when you're doing an internship... I think it allows you to dig deeper, that is, it allows you to search a little bit and go a step further. (Student)

Finally, students who participate in this type of project have a more satisfactory perception of the university: They value practical training and, above all, training in real-world contexts very positively. Experiences like these also make them attach more importance to theoretical academic training, as they see the significance of what is taught in the classroom. In this sense, they make a more positive assessment of the university.

The faculty has also opened many doors for us to be able to do everything. Additionally, it has been great to complement the more classroom-based, study-oriented training with more active participation in real-life situations; it helps you understand a lot of things that didn't make sense before. (Student)

I appreciate that you are carrying out projects like this. We would like other subjects to implement similar initiatives and allow us to work and learn in real-life situations. (Student)

The entities that participate in service-learning projects are motivated by very diverse aspects, including the opportunity to respond to unmet needs and the interest in collaborating with the university. The involvement is often linked to the significance that the educational function of the service has for these entities, in addition to the service itself. Feeling that they are a part of the training of young future professionals contributes to the centres' implementation of organisational strategies that favour the projects.

We think it's important to help train young people. Sometimes, the fact that it is very important is underestimated. We try to help and facilitate it as much as we can. (Entity manager)

For some entities, students in higher education courses have sufficient skills and are confident enough to participate in ad hoc support teams and carry out activities that would be difficult to conduct without their participation.

I think it could be an opportunity to consider some interventions with the community. We have identified some needs that could be channelled through these projects. (Entity manager)

Some entities view collaboration in the training of university students as a way to improve the organisation itself. They consider it an opportunity that stimulates and motivates the mobilisation of their own resources and provides added value to the centre. On the one hand, it offers a service that did not exist and that complements or improves those of the entity, while enjoying the prestige of the university.

For us it's a good opportunity to participate with the university in joint projects. This stimulates us and is an added value to the training in our centre. Our students learn from college students, and they are an example. They see that soon they can be like them, in college. It's a good reference for high school students who want to study a degree in the health field. For families it's also important that resources like this are offered at our centre. (Entity manager)

On the other hand, the same service-learning projects can serve as a link between different entities, and these can find points of synergy that allow them future collaborations.

At the meeting with the representatives of the organisations involved in the project, suddenly, they started talking among themselves and a collaboration was established between two of the organisations: one was looking for an entity where high school students could do a research project on social sustainability, and the other had a project they wanted to develop about the historical recovery of the neighbourhood. We couldn't believe it! It was an idea that we had in mind, something we had written in the project, "to establish synergies between organisations", and we saw it happening without even actively seeking it. (Entity manager)

In relation to teaching staff, the idea of incorporating service-learning into university teaching activity often comes from the teaching staff themselves. The motivations can be diverse, but in all cases, there are certain common points that are repeated, interrelated, and constitute the basic elements of the process itself: the need to innovate in teaching activities, providing them with a practical aspect and contact with the real needs of society; the desire for civic engagement and offering a useful return to society, with the involvement of students; the intention to maintain a closer relationship with the "outside world" than the university, allowing for a reciprocal relationship for improvement.

The integration of these aspects makes service-learning a way of understanding university educational practice. The interaction between professors and the local community allows professors to become aware of conditions on their ground and their ability to improve them.

I participated in the project because I felt that integrating community service training was a good opportunity for students to increase their learning options to care for the community and promote health, combining learning, action, and civic engagement with the community. (University professor)

Service-learning gives a clear boost to the subject; it gives meaning to theory: what we have worked on, a little or a lot, the students use it, it is an undeniable gain for the subject, and likewise for society. (University professor)

Service-learning projects make it possible to work together, side by side, with students, which gives a more personal component to the educational relationship and facilitates the acquisition of professional identity.

The relationship with the student changes: They see you as more approachable and, at the same time, as a professional role model, someone to follow, with a part of social activism that is very necessary in some professions. (University professor)

We talk a lot about the need to educate citizens and not just professionals, and service-learning is a great opportunity to do so (University professor)

Another aspect highlighted by professors is being able to share projects with colleagues who have the same motivations, which establishes synergies in teaching.

The presentation of the subject to the students was an emotional moment, seeing their reaction, but the best part was being able to share it with colleagues with whom I feel a great bond and who understood perfectly what I was going through because they felt the same. (University professor)

Professors who participate in service-learning projects consider that the return of the university to society is often limited to the field of research, with applied research or the generation of patents.

Service-learning enables this return from teaching and, at the same time, a civic and social action towards the citizens that connects with the real needs of society. In addition, the involvement of students throughout the process makes them engage with the society around them, thus fostering their formation as citizens. All these aspects give meaning to the profession.

On the other hand, one of the phases with great training value was the moment when we met with the heads of the entities. In my opinion, this aspect has great educational value, as it places students in a real context

in which they have autonomy and act as leaders. It thus becomes a differentiating element with respect to curricular internships. (University professor)

I link it professionally to real-life involvement, with the high commitment that students end up having to the people they serve with. These aspects are difficult to learn in other ways, and service-learning makes this possible. (University professor)

This contact with the community also enhances teaching practices, as it provides real-life experiences that complement theory, showcasing the applicability of certain procedures discussed in class and the actual results they yield.

There are aspects that I used to explain in class with complete naturalness and as if they were absolute truths which, since I had contact with the organisations, I now qualify much more and always try to put them in the appropriate context. (University professor)

"In conclusion, and considering some experiences, it can be considered that having the testimony of the participants allows us to understand and learn, from their own voices, key aspects of service-learning projects. The overall view of what happens, who participates, and how learning and service processes develop offer the opportunity to understand the value and meaning of service-learning. It also facilitates assessment and change to improve them.

7. Find out more

Below are the email addresses of some organisations, associations and journals that offer different resources, either to launch a service-learning project, to institutionalise service-learning at the university, to create institutional alliances, or for other needs.

Table 6. **Find out more**

Campus Compact	http://compact.org/initiatives/service-learning
	National coalition of the United States formed by more than 1,100 colleges and universities (public and private). It has different online materials to get started in the subject and for a more advanced level in the subject.
Latin American Centre for Learning Solidarity Service (CLAYSS))	http://www.clayss.org
	Argentine association that aims to develop service-learning at all educational levels. It contains various materials of interest.
National Service Learning Clearinghouse	https://gsn.nylc.org/clearinghouse
	Main library of service-learning resources in the United States. It offers online resources for all educational levels.
The Taillores Network	http://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu
	International association of institutions committed to strengthening the civic role and social responsibility of higher education. It offers interesting bibliography on the subject.
Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement	http://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/index.php/jheoe
	Academic journal focusing on theory and practice related to all forms of dissemination and engagement between higher education institutions and communities. This includes describing innovations, critically examining emerging issues, trends, challenges and opportunities, and reporting on impact studies in the areas of public service, outreach, participation, extension, engaged research, community research, participatory community research, action research, service-learning, and community service.
The International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement	https://journals.sfu.ca/iarslce/iarslce/index.php/journal/index
	Scientific journal aimed at publishing research focused on service-learning, community engagement, and the promotion of citizenship through education.
Ibero-American Journal of Service Learning	http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/RIDAS/index
	Scientific journal of the Red Iberoamericana de Aprendizaje Servicio and the Red Universitaria Española de Aprendizaje-Servicio. It publishes articles related to the field of solidarity, citizenship and education, and its axis is the concretion of service-learning in different areas and educational stages. Articles can take the form of theoretical, conceptual, and historical reflections; articles on research; analysed best practices, case studies; bibliographic reviews or short experiences, and testimonials.

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