

**Title:** Making the Connection Explicit: Service Learning, the SDGs, and the University's Third Mission

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### **Purpose of the study**

Drawing on primary research conducted in Spring/Summer 2022, our presentation addresses the question posed in the Call for Proposals, "How can Service-Learning courses be used to change HEIs to become more SDG minded?" We contend that this query should be inverted to instead focus on how European HEIs can proactively support the relationship between service learning (SL) and the UN's SDGs.

### **How and to what extent the presentation advances knowledge and practice**

An inherently community-focused form of hands-on pedagogy, SL is geared towards advancing the public good and thus the third mission of the university. Ensuring that SL is ethically facilitated requires robust material and immaterial institutional support. These resources (e.g., financial, staffing, mental health assistance, political commitments via strategic plans) provide faculty and staff coordinating and facilitating SL activities with the tools they need to productively address the SDGs. However, our European-based primary research indicates that, at an institutional level, the relationship between SL, the SDGs, and the university's third mission may be implied but is not made explicit. Consequently, the responsibility of addressing the SDGs is almost exclusively passed onto SL faculty and staff members, adding more to their already full plate of responsibilities.

### **Methodology**

Our primary research consists of a thematic analysis of publicly available institutional 1) strategic plans; 2) mission statements; and 3) relevant website content of a diverse set of public HEIs in 11 European countries. As this study examines the connections drawn between SL, the SDGs, and the third mission, we examined institutions with a demonstrated interest in SL as reflected by their membership in the EASLHE.

### **Specific results and their impact**

Of the European universities studied, 75% make clear their commitment to the public good. However, only 17% connect SL and their institution's third mission, 8% explicitly link SL with the SDGs, and none connect all three factors. Our research thus indicates that, at an institutional level, the relationship between SL, the SDGs, and the university's third mission is implied. This assumption serves to undermine the labour-intensive nature of SL undertakings; labour, which often includes hidden care work, that has only been exacerbated by the pandemic (for myriad reasons we will outline in the presentation). We will offer specific examples of institutional models that explicitly connect aspects of SL, the SDGs, and their university's third mission. These case studies offer recommendations for wise practices in other contexts.

### **References**

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