

# EVALUATING SL EXPERIENCES

ITALIAN FOCUS GROUPS



# METHODOLOGY

- We conducted two focus groups, one with FACULTY members and one with COMMUNITY members.
- The focus groups aimed at exploring 5 dimensions of evaluations:
  - Function of evaluation;
  - Relevance, what is important to assess;
  - Typology, what kind of instruments to evaluate;
  - Timing, when to evaluate;
  - Role, who should evaluate.

# PARTICIPANTS

## FACULTY MEMBERS

- 10 faculty members from 4 different university department:
- 2 men;
- 8 women.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- 11 site supervisors from 10 different community organizations:
- 1 man;
  - 10 women.

# FUNCTION OF EVALUATION

## UNIVERSITY

- A means to provide feedback to students;
- A way to recognize students' work;
- A tool to value the experience

## COMMUNITY

- A tool to start the reflection on the experience (pros and cons);
- A way to provide evidence of the work accomplished to the local stakeholders;
- A way to collect data about the impact of the SL experience on the community.

Scholars are more student-centered, while community partners are more interested in understanding the impact of the experience on the community

# RELEVANCE: WHAT TO ASSESS

## UNIVERSITY

- Students' competencies (less relevant);
- Impact of the experiences (more relevant):

*“We evaluate the impact. I think it's not related to students' evaluation, but to the work and the impact the experience had on the community context”*

## COMMUNITY

- Students' knowledge of the community organizations;
- Developed professional competencies;
- The impact of students' service on the organizations.

Scholars are more concerned to understand the impact of the experience, while community partners are also interested in understanding the students' acquirement of professional competencies

# TYPE: WHAT KIND OF INSTRUMENTS

## UNIVERSITY

- Qualitative instruments to collect students' perspectives of the experience (interviews, field notes);
- Quantitative instruments to testify change produced by the experience –mainly competencies (survey).

## COMMUNITY

- Informal reflexive sessions to gather students' initial and final expectations;
- Informal moments with colleagues to reflect on the experience.

Scholars use more structured instruments and dedicated moments to evaluate the experience, while community partners use more informal strategies to reflect on the experience and discuss about it with students

# TIMING: WHEN TO EVALUATE

## UNIVERSITY

- Pre/post evaluation - usually quantitative;
- In itinere -ongoing- evaluation of the process (perceived as more relevant);
- Possibility to include a follow up moment.

## COMMUNITY

- Pre/post evaluation;
- In itinere –ongoing.

Scholars and community partners agree on the timing of the evaluation. Some participants already implemented evaluation strategies that include pre, post, and ongoing evaluation.

# ROLE: WHO SHOULD EVALUATE

## UNIVERSITY

- University staff;
- Students;
- Community partners.

## COMMUNITY

- Students;
- University staff;
- Community partners (just informal evaluation).

Scholars and community partners considerations seem to converge. Nevertheless, community partners remark that their role in evaluation should be more informal and not systematic.



# MAIN CHALLENGES OF EVALUATION

## UNIVERSITY

- To let students understand that their evaluation is not referred to the effort but to the actual learning;

- Evaluating students with the grades logic:

*“we evaluate students because we have to, we are forced to align innovative education with the university individual and numeric frame”*

## COMMUNITY

- To be formal evaluator of students' experience:

*“It would not be appropriate to add official evaluation tools here [in the organization], it would be invasive. Besides, we would probably detect the same information that the university already collects. It would be more interesting to share information than to collect more. The relationship we establish with students is equal and informal. Asking to administer a questionnaire would be excessive.”*