

UNICORN

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY LEARNING

LINKING INTERNATIONALISATION WITH THE THIRD
MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS:
A UNICORN APPROACH THAT WORKS

RECOMMENDATION PAPER FOR POLICY MAKERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The UNICORN initiative, outlined in this report, contributes to the ambitious vision of the European Commission to develop an innovative, globally competitive and attractive European Education Area (EEA) and European Research Area (ERA) in synergy with the European Higher Education Area. In addition, it furthers the goals of the European Strategy for Universities (EU Commission 2022), which states that Universities have a unique position at the crossroads of education, research, innovation, serving society and economy and engaging effectively in transnational cooperation, based on shared values. Service-learning (SL), and particularly the model of international service-learning (ISL) advanced by UNICORN, contributes strongly to promoting common European values, not only by bringing together students, staff and community partners from across Europe, but also by doing so in a way that is inclusive and co-creative with societal partners. UNICORN's goal is the creation of a diverse community of students, teachers and community partners, co-producing and co-creating knowledge together. Service-learning brings knowledge and learning from universities into dialogue with societal partners, but also conversely brings societal challenges into the heart of university teaching and learning. Furthermore, UNICORN aligns to the core principles of the Bologna process: applying an inclusive and innovative co-creative approach to learning, teaching and research; integrating transnational cooperation into higher education, research and innovation and securing a sustainable future through higher education.

In this report, the UNICORN consortium proposes a model for serving society through embedding service-learning in international student mobility through the Erasmus+ programme and other student mobility schemes. We are proposing a model for international service-learning that is unique, in that it places significant emphasis on developing student's democratic competencies (Council of Europe 2013), as well as on inclusion and sustainability. In contrast to other ISL models, it is conceived and designed to be fully integrated in the student curriculum and in the regular international student mobility schemes. Our report aims to delineate the model, its relation to higher education policy objectives, the fundamental aspects needed for its implementation and sustainability, the benefits of its adoption and specific recommendations for its implementation.

Service-learning, a form of community-based learning, is a high impact educational approach that combines academically relevant and real-world learning objectives with service to the community, thus providing an experiential learning experience, while meeting societal needs. SL is a relatively new endeavour in higher education as it has grown in popularity, it has been understood and embraced differently in diverse higher educational contexts (Pollack, 2015). Nevertheless, SL can be defined as an experiential educational method in which students through the formal curriculum engage in community or public service, reflect critically on this experience, and learn from it personally, socially, and academically. SL is appropriate for the development of both disciplinary and transdisciplinary competencies. It is especially appropriate for educators and education systems wishing to equip students with the transversal competences needed to participate effectively in a culture of democracy, and to live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies.



2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The contemporary models of university include two strategic objectives that are gaining relevance and centrality, in addition to the traditional missions of the university in the field of teaching and research. On the one hand, the objectives that revolve around the so-called “third mission” of the university refer to the linkage of higher education institutions (HEIs) with the society in which they are inserted and its needs and problems. On the other hand, universities are experiencing increasing pressure towards internationalisation in the field of teaching and research. The UNICORN model of international service-learning is a proposal to address these challenges. Specifically, the UNICORN model has three objectives:

1. Contribute to the fulfilment of objectives related to the third mission of universities through service-learning.
2. To foster a change in the paradigm of internationalisation and international mobility of students, improving their experience and contributing to the development of the notion of European citizenship.
3. To increase and multiply the benefits of SL by incorporating this innovative teaching approach in international mobility programs.

The UNICORN model of ISL

The UNICORN Toolkit

It is a set of five tools designed to fulfil specific functions and aimed at all the actors involved in the implementation of the UNICORN model

The UNICORN toolkit is composed by the following resources:

1. UNICORN Living Catalogue: a catalogue of 16 existing SL projects implemented by the UNICORN partners and open to exchange students, including a template to map and describe any existing or anticipated SL project
2. UNICORN Staff Training Handbook: a training resource for academics and community organisations staff on how to design UNICORN ISL projects. The Handbook relies on the UNICORN Taxonomy that works as a self-assessment, benchmarking, training and guiding tool to develop SL projects that fit the UNICORN model of ISL.
3. UNICORN Administrative Toolkit: a guide for mobility experts on how to implement the UNICORN ISL through different formats of international student mobility
4. UNICORN Massive Online Open Course (MOOC): an open educational

resource designed to provide students with the necessary knowledge and competences required to make the most of their international SL experience

5. UNICORN Recommendations: the present document, designed for policy makers.

The 7 dimensions of the UNICORN Taxonomy

Mobility and online exchange

Meaningful reciprocal partnerships that meet actual community needs

Academically relevant, real world student involvement in the community

Explicit global civic and cultural competencies

Critical reflection to facilitate learning

Integrated assessment of student learning

Attention to community impact of service

The Benefits of the UNICORN model

While ISL affords an important community immersed learning experience to students engaged in international exchange, its benefits extend to all aspects of higher education systems. For Higher Education Institutions, the benefits of ISL include (1) meeting the policy level obligations of universities under national, EU and international directives to engage *with* society through research and teaching, (2) enhancing the overall *quality* of education, the student experience and learning outcomes of education programmes, (3) increasing *internationalisation* through enhancing the diversity of the educational experience and networking HEIs (4) enhancing the external reputation, *value* and *accountability* to society of academic institutions.

For Community Partners, SL and ISL initiatives are often specifically co-designed with external partners to address societal challenges, bringing practical support to co-create community informed responses to the needs of the NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) and their beneficiaries. SL and ISL initiatives very often lead to fresh insights that bring new perspectives to the societal challenges being addressed by civil society organisations.

These direct benefits are often accompanied by indirect benefits, given that SL and ISL initiatives are shaped and informed by a strong values base that often align with and reinforce the key values underpinning the work of community partners, such as promoting local democracy, advocating for social justice and equality, among others. In this manner, SL and ISL create spaces to advance common democratic values and they afford opportunities for community partners to develop alliances and solidarity with students and academic staff to extend and deepen these values in society.

For Academics, SL and ISL programmes promote excellence in teaching and learning, as they are grounded in evidence-based high impact pedagogies. Engaging in teaching innovation is now a requirement of national systems, and SL and ISL are highly innovative pedagogies that shape the curriculum content according to real world challenges reflected in the needs of community partners - thus significantly enriching the teaching experience and bringing practical value to society. Overall, engagement in SL and ISL programmes provide a strong evidence based ontological approach and epistemological method to teaching faculty to develop, refine or extend community engaged teaching activities in a manner that is grounded in best international practice. An additional benefit is the promotion of research-based teaching, where faculty research becomes community based and is integrated with student learning, bringing student-staff-community together to co-create research informed responses to community articulated need.

Main Recommendations

A summary of recommendations is included below.
The complete list can be found in the main recommendations document resulting from the UNICORN model.

At HE Policy Level:

1. Develop new policies and programmes to establish the societal role of universities as a priority, and incorporate community engagement through ISL into existing programmes, tools and initiatives where potential exists for synergy, e.g. Erasmus+.
2. Consolidate, strengthen and create synergies with existing thematic networks and initiatives to support community engagement and ISL in higher education.

3. Review or create reward structure for academics and community partners involved in ISL.

At Societal Partner Level:

1. Emphasise SL as an equal & reciprocal partnership between university, student & community partner.
2. Create the necessary administrative structure to support & involve community partners, including municipalities in SL and ISL initiatives and involve them in the entire process.

At Local/ National policy Level:

1. Local and national governments should foster and fund the development of SL and ISL initiatives as a way to address societal challenges and priorities of public policies defined in their development agendas. This includes developing performance-based indicators and allocation of financial resources.
2. Develop a Community of Practice or other mechanisms to provide academics with national policy insights and other materials relevant to societal challenges, to support SL and ISL initiatives that are grounded in community articulated need that is evidence informed.
3. Develop a Portfolio of Partnership Best Practices to exchange experiences and strategies among ISL involved organisations.
4. Incentivise or create Centers of Excellence within HEIs to prioritise SL and ISL and support leadership and management functions that will develop a critical mass of impactful SL initiatives.
5. Through national research and teaching funding agencies prioritize allocated resources, grants and calls for HEIs around student-faculty-community led initiatives that advance community engaged research and teaching, through SL and ISL projects that focus on engaging with community actors to co-create responses to societal challenges.

At Institutional Level:

The optimal policy approach is capacity-building and symbolic actions that support institutional change and improvement.

3. CLARIFYING CONCEPTS, POLICIES AND DEFINITIONS

3.1. THIRD MISSION

The relationship of the modern university or higher education institution with its external environment is referred to as a 'third mission', where Universities go beyond their traditional research and teaching missions to take an active role in working with societal partners to create impact. Scientific studies typically focus on the interdependencies between university, state, and market. That is, since the 1980's HEIs' third mission policies and practices have most frequently focused on economic development (Benneworth, 2018) and the knowledge economy (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997), e.g. the commercialisation of research, technology transfer, business engagement, entrepreneurial learning etc. However, more recently a turn towards the societal has been observed. Since the mid-2000s, HEIs' engagement that addresses challenges facing societies has emerged as a response to recession, growing inequality, climate change, migration and challenges to democracy.

Our position is that the mission of Higher Education Institutions in the 21st century should include engaging systematically with external communities in responding to societal needs. We note an important distinction 'between the idea of universities as having benefits for their sponsor society, and universities engaging with society to deliver those benefits' (Benneworth, 2018, p. 20). We argue that external engagement is a complex phenomenon that is principally a moral obligation and commitment to contribute to societal development, imbued with an ethic of mutuality and reciprocity. It is also a method, involving co-creation, partnership and collaborative working. Most importantly, it is a horizontal activity, cutting across all functions of the university, becoming everyone's responsibility, and especially integrating with and enabling the universities missions of teaching and research.

Thus, in our view, the modern university, in addition to and deeply integrated with its teaching and research functions, called the first and second mission in scientific literature, has an important task, which is building and developing relations with its external environment, referred to as the third mission (Gulbrandsen and Slipersaeter 2007; Montesinos et al., 2008; Inman and Schuetze, 2010; Cai and Hall 2015; Giusepponi and Tavoletti, 2018; Backs et al., 2019).

Indeed, the Third Mission of HEIs is now an important element of international policy. At intergovernmental level, the United Nations has significantly elevated universities as a prominent actor. For example, UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education called out universities' social responsibility, describing higher education as a 'major force in building an inclusive and diverse knowledge society and advancing research, innovation and creativity' (p. 4). In the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, HEIs have been recognised as playing a key role in contributing to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Salmi, 2016; GUNI, 2019). UNESCO has also Chair in Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. At the intergovernmental level, the OECD report on *Higher Education and Regions: Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged* (OECD, 2007) argues that universities play a role in the economic development of their regions, but also in their cultural and social development. Its report *Benchmarking Performance in Higher Education* (OECD, 2019), includes a specific chapter on universities' 'engagement with the wider world', in which community engagement features prominently.


The third mission of HEIs is now an important element of EU policy.

At the European Union level, already the Lisbon Strategy (2000-2010), placed a strong emphasis on the role of universities in contributing to the economy by developing human capital, cooperating with business and driving innovation (European Commission, 2003). However, subsequently the EU2020 Strategy, placed an additional emphasis on 'societal development'. This recognition of the 'societal' was strengthened further in the EC's Renewed Agenda for Higher Education (European Commission, 2017), becoming the first EU policy document to prioritise broader societal engagement by universities. Indeed, one of the four priorities of the Renewed Agenda is 'building inclusive and connected HE systems', reflecting a strong community engagement focus that is distinct from innovation. The Renewed Agenda notes that 'higher education institutions are not ivory towers, but civic-minded learning communities connected to their communities' (p. 6). It argues that 'some institutions are developing their profile as 'civic universities' by integrating local, regional and societal issues into curricula, involving the local community in teaching and research projects, providing adult learning and communicating and building links with local communities.



HEIs should be engaged in the development of their cities and regions, whether through contributing to development strategies, cooperation with businesses, the public and voluntary sectors or supporting public dialogue about societal issues...’ (p. 7). Parallel to this, the issue of universities’ ‘engagement’ was addressed by the European Economic and Social Committee in its communique *Engaged universities shaping Europe* (EESC, 2016), which mentioned the importance to the development of Europe of balancing both ‘entrepreneurial and civic universities’. Significant funding has followed the EU’s recent strong commitment to promoting HEI societal engagement. Indeed, the *European Research Area* includes the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and subsequently the current Horizon Europe funding programme, which places a leading focus on research that addresses societal needs through challenge-based research. Horizon 2020 included a headlining initiative called SWAFS or Science with and for Society (SwafS), with actions including open science, citizen science and responsible research and innovation (European Commission, 2017). In the *European Higher Education Area*, key policy and funding initiatives supportive of societal engagement include Erasmus+ (Key Action 1 - Individual mobility; Key Action 2 - Strategic partnerships; European Universities Initiative: Knowledge Alliances). Horizon Europe 2021-2027, is the EU’s key funding programme for research and innovation with a budget of €95.5 billion, it emphasises the green transition and the achievement of the SDGs, adopting a grand challenges approach to societal transformation. Indeed *Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD) is a key element of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnerships. ESD promotes and supports the development of the requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes that help everyone to take action for a sustainable future and planet.

“ESD empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society empowering people of all genders, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. ESD is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education that enhances cognitive, social and emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning. It is holistic and transformational and encompasses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment itself” (UNESCO, 2020).




UNESCO, as the lead UN agency on ESD, has developed a ‘roadmap’ to guide national policy makers in mainstreaming ESD, inclusive of community-based learning modalities such as service-learning, in education systems and to support the achievement of the SDGs. It states that “educators, learners, and administrative staff should cooperate with community-based local leaders, families, as well as non-governmental and private sector actors working for sustainability in order to engage the local community as a valuable setting for interdisciplinary, project-based learning and action for sustainability” (UNESCO 2020, p.28).

Furthermore, the *European Declaration on Global Education to 2050: The Dublin Declaration*, (2022), led by the Global Education Network in Europe (GENE) , builds on the 2002 Maastricht Declaration on Global Education and international and European commitments to global sustainable development, human rights, peace and global justice, which recognise the importance of global education and public engagement. Global Education is an intersectional umbrella term which encompasses a variety of related terms that are used at national and international level, including, inter alia: Education for Global Citizenship, Development Education, Diversity and Inclusion Education etc.

Civic engagement of international students during their mobilities emerged as a relevant priority in the last few years of the previous Erasmus+ programme. The Erasmus Student Network – one of the biggest student associations in Europe and key stakeholder for EU education policies – advocates for a more “social” Erasmus+ programme where interaction with local communities is placed at the centre.

This demand responds to a long-standing challenge of Erasmus+, the lack of interaction between international students and their local communities, and is meant to maximise the broader impact of mobilities beyond the individuals. “Concrete measures to foster civic engagement should be incorporated into the inclusion and diversity action plans of the National Agencies, in order to build capacity among Higher education institutions” ((ESN, 2022, p.9).

To finalise this section, we feel it vitally important to comment on the area of values. We believe that if universities are to have an impact on society, they must stand up for democratic values such as truth, freedom, justice, equality, diversity, and respect for the dignity of every human being.



They must express these values in their research activities, and even more so in teaching and education, thus becoming morally responsible for what they create. In the educational space, the occasional mention of ‘values’ is not enough. Today it is necessary to identify what values, and specifically democratic values and implement them in the entire sphere of university activities. It is essential to prepare graduates to have democratic knowledge, attributes and competencies, enabling them to contribute to society, and the strength, and courage to defend these values in both professional and social spheres. The university must once again become a community that preserves the most valuable social values that underpin our democracies, and not just as a masterpiece hanging beautifully in a “museum” but something that is put into practice, and creating and implementing authentic and reliable mechanisms to make this happen.

However, Democracies and their institutions cannot function unless citizens practise a culture of democracy and hold democratic values and attitudes. Even though principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law have been cornerstones of European societies and political systems for decades, in times of rapid social, economic and political change, they need to be continuously maintained and fostered. Thus, Educators have a unique opportunity and responsibility to use their various contexts as spaces for working to expand democratic values and practices. *Democratic Education* should be part of a comprehensive and coherent vision of education, and of an education of the whole person over their life course. A significant approach to achieving Democratic Education in practice is Service Learning, which has its theoretical roots in the works of Dewey (1916). Forms of *Democratic Education*, such as Service-learning, extend opportunities for democratic participation through learners being empowered to take part in the co-production of knowledge. For learners’ this means inclusion in deciding and actively shaping curriculum through inquiry and problem-posing (Freire, 1970, p. 70).

Indeed, Democracy is not merely a form of government, but primarily a ‘mode of associated living’ (Dewey, 1916). Dewey in his discussion of democracy as ‘primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 50), underscored the significance of recognising shared common interest and communicating freely as a means of readjusting or negotiating the common good. According to Dewey (1916), a democratic curriculum, then, is inclusive of diverse voices and perspectives and incorporates a participatory approach.

Thus, in a democratic community, intercultural dialogue has a fundamental role.

It is where shared interests and experiences are negotiated through diverse perspectives, made possible by the breaking down of cultural barriers that tend to separate individuals within the community, and individual actions are both independent and interdependent as each member influences the group and the group influences each member.

The Council of Europe’s *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* (2008) points out that the competences that underpin this type of approach are not acquired automatically but instead need to be learned and practised. They argue that democracy and intercultural dialogue are interchangeable. Intercultural dialogue is, first, the most important means through which citizens can express their views to other citizens with different cultural affiliations. Secondly, it is the means through which decision makers can understand the views of all citizens; taking account of their various self-ascribed cultural affiliations. Education is in a unique position to guide and support learners in this, and by doing so, to empower them. They acquire the capacities which they need to become active and autonomous participants in democracy, in intercultural dialogue and in society more generally. It gives them the ability to choose and pursue their own goals while respecting human rights, the dignity of others and democratic processes.

The Council of Europe has produced a Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) (2018), which underpin the UNICORN initiative. These are a set of materials intended for use by education policy-makers and practitioners in all sectors of education systems, from pre-school through primary and secondary schooling to higher education, including Adult Education and vocational education. The RFCDC provides a systematic approach to designing the teaching, learning and assessment of competences for democratic culture, and introducing them into education systems in ways that are coherent, comprehensive and transparent. The Council argues that public authorities have a responsibility to provide an adequate system of lifelong learning to support the democratic purpose of education. The Council’s vision of education includes four major interrelated purposes – preparation for the labour market, for life as citizens in democratic societies, personal development, and the development and maintenance of a broad advanced knowledge base.

Table 1: Summary of main dimensions and examples of activities of the third mission.

DIMENSIONS	ASPECTS OF SPECIFIC DIMENSION	EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES
Knowledge and technology transfer	(i) Co-operative knowledge creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research co-operation • Strategic partnerships and networks • Joint scientific quarters or laboratories • Joint professorship
	(ii) Knowledge and technology communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract research • Scientific consulting
	(iii) Knowledge and technology commercialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spin-offs • Patenting and licensing
	(iv) Personal transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Dual studies • Cooperative career service • Alumni networks • Parallel employment within and outside higher education institutions
Further education	(i) Advanced study programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced degree studies for working professionals (B.Sc. or M.Sc.)
	(ii) Certificate studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term qualification offers for specific professional groups
	(iii) Informal education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guests studies • Open seminars or lecture (series)
Societal engagement	(i) Widening participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of open admission procedures • Access to higher education for underprivileged groups

(ii) Citizen science and public engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of the public into the research process
(iii) Science literacy, science education and open science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popular scientific publication • Laboratories for children and high school students • Science festivals / “nights of science” • Open access, open review, open metrics, open access to software and research data
(iv) Service-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of service and outreach activities into student curricula
(v) Community outreach, Community service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of infrastructures (libraries, etc.) • Outreach activities by members of higher education institutions
(vi) Civic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support activities at elections • Participation in campaigning
(vii) Social entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Entrepreneurship as part of student curriculum • Social entrepreneurship by staff or higher education institutions

In summary, HEIs’ societal engagement has become part of the university, expressed as its “Third Mission” and is now a common strategy of HEIs all over the world (Zomer & Benneworth, 2011). However, the impact of societal engagement and related activities is still often considered and focused predominantly on the national or regional level, which is surprising considering the interconnectedness of the globalized world. The next section will elaborate further.

3.2. INTERNATIONALISATION – A SHIFT IN THE PARADIGM

Internationalisation of Higher Education is a relatively recent concept, which has however evolved rapidly in the last forty years (de Wit & Hunter, 2015, p. 41). In Europe, the phenomenon has been stimulated by the European Union’s Programmes promoting the mobility of students and staff, in particular the Erasmus and the Marie Curie Programme in the late eighties and nineties (de Wit & Hunter, 2015, p. 27).

Teichler (1999) identified three stages of Internationalisation in Europe. A first stage of the vertical pattern of mobility of students, with students moving predominantly from less to more developed countries, which evolved towards international relations on more equal terms (Teichler, 1999, p. 10). This change of pattern was mainly due to the rise of the Erasmus Programme in Europe. A second stage characterised by the institutionalisation of Internationalisation, which became systemically addressed by HEIs in their strategies and not any more “casuistic” as in the previous stage (Teichler, 1999, p. 13). In this phase, the number of mobility exchanges in Europe considerably grew and Erasmus moved from a pioneering phase towards routinisation with the growth of International offices. A third stage, or “leap”, consisted in the connection of the international mobility of students and staff with regular teaching and learning and research (internationalisation at the core of Higher Education). (Teichler, 1999, p. 20).

The third quantum leap is a step forward towards the introduction of the working definition of Internationalisation of Higher Education developed by Jane Knight (2003):

“Internationalisation is the process of integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the goals, primary functions and delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels” (J. Knight, 2003).

This definition moves the rationale of internationalisation from the activity (input) to a “rationale” approach (defining Internationalisation in terms of its purposes and outcomes), to a “competency approach” (describing Internationalisation developing competences and skills of students and staff) and to a “process” approach (defining Internationalisation as process integrating international dimensions into the principal functions of the University) (de Wit, 2010, p. 10).

In addition, in the first decade of 2000 the concepts of “Internationalisation at Home” and “Internationalisation of the Curriculum” developed and progressively converged, shifting the focus of Internationalisation from “mobility” to any Internationally related activity (Crowther et al, 2000) or, to use a more recent definition of Internationalisation of the Curriculum, to *“the incorporation of international, intercultural and global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study”* (Leask, 2015, p.9).

In the same period, as observed by Brandenburg (2019), the Mobility of students in Europe developed its rationale from an individual “nice to have” practice to a more systematic learning experience becoming more structured and shifting the purpose from an individual benefit to an educational requirement for students, to become responsible global citizens.

Guerreiro (2015) attempts to summarise the different motivations for the internationalisation of the HEIs as listed in table 2. Apart from the four main groups of rationalities, Guerreiro placed the fifth category that institutions are investing in branding or establishing a solid international reputation.

Table 2: Reasons for the internationalisation of HEIs.

GROUP/ REASON	ASSUMPTIONS
1 st group Political reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National security • Peace promotion • Mutual understanding among nations • National and regional identity formation
2 nd group Economic reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic growth • Increased competition • Labour market response • Financial incentives • Additional revenue generation
3 rd group Socio-cultural reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of citizenship • Community development • Promotion of intercultural understanding • Natural cultural identity

4th group Academic reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International dimension in education and research • Academic quality improvement • Achievement of international standards • Development of the HEI itself
5 th group Market reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation of the HEI and its brand • International renown and reputation of the HEI

Source: Guerreiro, 2015, p. 9.

The mobility of students and academics is still essential as a crucial dimension of the internationalisation of HEIs. Student mobility increased from 800,000 worldwide in the mid-70s to 3.5 million in 2016. On the other hand, experts and researchers in the internationalisation of higher education agree that perceiving students' mobility in quantitative terms does not say anything about the value of the mobility activities (Teicher, 2017, p. 196). Nevertheless, studies also identified the strengths and benefits of international student mobility and measured its effects (Roy et al., 2018).

The developments of the rationale of student's mobility and of Internationalisation of the Curriculum leads to a new definition of Internationalisation of Higher Education, developed as a result of a study commissioned by the European Parliament to the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation of the University Cattolica Milan, which adapts and enlarges Knight's definition into:

Internationalisation of HE is *“the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society”* (de Wit, et al, 2015, p. 3).

This new working definition emphasises both the purpose of the internationalisation process, which is not a goal in itself but is functional to quality improvement, the need for intentionality to develop the process and the envisaged impact on society. Indeed, impact on society, civic outcomes, global citizenship are key concepts that connect Internationalisation with Service-learning and, more generally, to the Third Mission of universities.

This connection leads to the recently developed concept of “Internationalisation of Higher Education for Society” (IHES), which is a shared space between Internationalisation and Social Engagement (Brandenburg et Al., 2019). This concept, which is continuously evolving in scholarship, locates service-learning, either at the local level or in connection with an experience abroad for students (international service-learning), in the area of Internationalisation of Higher Education for Society (Jones et Al., 2021; Brandenburg et al., 2019).


3.3. SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning (SL) is an educational approach that combines learning objectives with community service and thus provides an experiential learning experience while meeting societal needs. This approach is applied in different educational sectors. While the specific procedures for SL may differ, however, the three necessary conditions for the benefits of SL to be achieved are *service, learning, and reflection* (Sandaran, 2012; Pacho, 2019). ‘Community’ in this context refers to the external engagement context in which the HEI operates. It is a complex and multi-layered concept that embraces locality, identity and functionality. Community in all its diversity includes places (local, national and global), and communities of interest across social, cultural, political and economic forms.

SL is a relatively new endeavour in higher education. As it has grown in popularity, it has been understood and embraced differently in diverse higher educational contexts (Pollack, 2015).

“Service-learning (sometimes referred to as community-based or community-engaged learning) is an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates meaningful community service or engagement into the curriculum and offers students academic credit for the learning that derives from active engagement within the community and work on a real-world problem. Reflection and experiential learning strategies underpin the process, and the service is linked to the academic discipline” (McIlrath et al., 2016, p. 5).

The *European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education* added an emphasis on social justice, as a dimension that should underpin the experience of service, inform the reflective process and contribute to the development of social responsibility:



“[SL 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 ECTS.” (Ribeiro, Aramburuzabala, Paz-Lourid, 2021)

Research has provided evidence of the positive effects of service-learning on:

- a) Personal outcomes, such as the improvement of communication skills, critical thinking, analytical skills, ability to create new innovative solutions, problem-solving skills (Billig, 2002; Eyler et al., 2001; Yates & Youniss, 1996; Barth et al. 2014; Bowie & Cassim 2016; Fullerton et al. 2015);
- b) Social outcomes, such as the ability to work both in independent and collaborative environments, teamwork, and attitudes toward the population one is serving (Billig, 2002; Eyler et al., 2001; Yates & Youniss, 1996);
- c) Citizenship outcomes, such as social awareness, sense of civic responsibility, and civic engagement (Billig, 2002; Compare & Albanesi, 2022; Yates & Youniss, 1996; Salam et al., 2019; Celio et al., 2011);
- d) Academic outcomes, such as positive attitudes toward schools, higher motivation to learn, and ability to apply knowledge (e.g., Celio et al. 2011; Billig, 2002; Eyler et al., 2001; Yorio and Ye 2012; Salam et al. 2017, 2019).

SL projects strengthen students' involvement in the community, providing, at the same time, an impulse for their personal development and more substantial participation in civic life (Waldstein & Reiher, 2001). In addition, students get an opportunity to engage in real projects with ongoing support from teachers and tutors to reflect on their experiences simultaneously (Sprinthall, 1991).

Service-learning differs from other forms of experiential learning such as traditional professional learning placements or internships. It is a collaborative approach that has the aim of combining knowledge with action to achieve social change (Israel et al. 1998). It has a social justice orientation, developing community capacity to solve problems (Cook and Nation 2016)

and sharing responsibility for achieving each other's goals. Staff and students involved in Service-learning are actively involved in community problem-solving, and are in circumstances where they are part of community efforts to advance the common good, co-learning with the community (Cook and Nation 2016; Stoecker 2014; Reiff and Keene 2012).

3.4. LINKING COMMUNITY SERVICE AND MOBILITY: INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING (ISL)

Although the approach to service-learning is still very much one that is applied at the local micro-level, there is a wide range of courses and programs that are referred to as “international” (or “global”) service-learning.

The international service-learning experience provides opportunities for additional learning goals, activities, and relationships that are not available in the same domestic service-learning course. If the experience is in an international setting, then international learning must be occurring and must be intentionally prepared before, during, and upon completion of an ISL experience. Understanding local culture, customs, social norms, history, and language are contextually important elements of pre-departure orientation and preparation for ISL as well as cross-cultural competence, cross-cultural communication skills, and cross-cultural empathy as learning objectives. Hovey and Weinberg (2009) note that “civic education and study abroad need each other” (p. 33) and the best means for enhancing civic education in study abroad and international education is through service-learning.

Students who participate in ISL experiences are said to awake to a better understanding of the self, the other, or the world at large (Crabtree, 2008). More quantifiable changes in students having undergone ISL programs have been found to include increased knowledge, confidence, and language skills; and the development of more complex and personal understandings of other cultures and cultural others, community, poverty, and justice (Crabtree, 2007; Kiely, 2002, 2004). Pless et al. (2011) identified three mechanisms that explain how participating in international service-learning programs leads to transformative experiences. These mechanisms were described as resolving tensions and paradoxes, constructing a new lifeworld, and coping with adversity and strong emotions.

3.4.1. DIFFERENT FORMATS OF ISL

ISL projects can be implemented through different formats: virtual, blended and physical. In online/virtual ISL projects, the international service-learning experience is processed through online courses and collaborative learning activities, also resulting in intercultural competencies and international online communication skills. These kinds of ISL projects usually focus on a global challenge that impacts on the communities of reference of all the classrooms / student groups involved; collaborative online activities are foreseen throughout the course / program. For example, students in an online grant-writing class might help write grant proposals for a non-profit community partner in a different country.

A recent guide on eSL (the term identifies different forms of virtual/online SL) has been developed by the European Association of service-learning in Higher Education (EASLHE, 2020). It includes different examples of eSL and suggestions on how to implement it.

Blended mobility is also an option for implementing ISL. Blended ISL is a deliberate combination of both physical and online mobility that can go in two directions: either a predominant physical mobility course, supported by online mobility, or a predominant online course supported by physical mobility (e.g. at the start or the end of a one-year online project or seminar). In this case, the advantages of a (short or long) immersion experience are combined with the advantages of a flexible implementation of mobility, capturing both the benefits of physical and virtual mobility.

When ISL implies physical mobility, the experience can be described as follows:

“A structured academic experience in another country in which students (a) participate in an organised service activity that addresses identified community needs; (b) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (c) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a deeper appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally.” (Bingle and Hatcher, 2011, p. 19). Compared to regular study abroad programmes, ISL that implies a physical mobility is a much deeper experience that really connects students to local communities. It is community-driven and leads to tangible benefits for both students and the hosting communities.

During an ISL experience implemented through physical mobility, students engage in activities that:

- a. complement and augment their classroom learning;
- b. contribute to the community in the host country;
- c. support face-to-face interaction with others;
- d. increase cross-cultural understanding of others;
- e. challenge students to clarify and reconsider their role as a citizen or community member.

Even so, physical ISL can be implemented in different ways. The format that has been most implemented so far is the US model. Many American HEIs have developed various study-abroad programs, extensive community service networks, and some form of service-learning components embedded in their programs. The American model mainly frames the experience of SL as follows:

- The ISL experience is either embedded in a curricular course or it is an optional course – not always leading to curricular credits;
- The ISL experience lasts approximately 4 to 8 weeks;
- Even when the ISL experience is embedded in a curricular course, it remains optional, as it entails an extra (and not irrelevant) cost for the “package”;
- The student group is accompanied abroad by faculty members;
- The “ISL package” includes local arrangements for lodging, meals, transportation, interpreting services and cultural activities that are usually handled by a local organisation.

The UNICORN model of ISL encompasses the 3 main formats of mobility (virtual, blended, physical). When it entails physical mobility, it represents a significantly different alternative to the US model.

The next chapter will present the UNICORN model in detail and will highlight why this model is, at the moment, quite unique.

4. THE UNICORN MODEL OF ISL

According to the UNICORN model, the purpose of combining international mobility with SL is twofold:

1. Boosting international mobility through SL (engaged mobility)

Mobile students often fail to connect to the local context. By participating in a SL project offered by the host university and community partner, mobility students have the opportunity to immerse deeply in the local context. This ensures that the students' experience abroad can be a deep, transformative learning experience that can foster the development of civic and democratic skills.

2. Boosting SL through international mobility

By adding a mobility component to a SL experience in the community, international exchange students can participate in local SL projects, thereby making each UNICORN project transnational and intercultural. Thus, the impact of the SL experience on the civic and democratic competences acquired by all students involved - even local ones - is further enhanced.

In order to understand the basics of the UNICORN model, it is important to specify that its implementation requires at least a sending HEI, a receiving HEI and a mobility agreement in place between them. The UNICORN students start their journey from the sending institution (where SL is not necessarily implemented) and make the UNICORN experience of ISL abroad, where the SL component is integrated in some curricular activity offered by the receiving HEI (e.g. course unit / summer school / research activities). The term "UNICORN project" actually identifies a learning activity that has a SL component and that fulfils the quality criteria highlighted in the UNICORN Taxonomy (ref. UNICORN Staff Training Handbook), among which is the fact that the activity has to be suitable to the participation of international exchange students.

In the UNICORN framework, ISL can be implemented in three different ways, i.e. through physical (long- or short-term), blended or virtual mobility. While the first format is definitely the most widely adopted and overwhelmingly preferred over the others, alternative formats are not ruled out, especially after the recent experience of the pandemics that affected the world of higher education, and prevented any kind of physical mobility for a long while. During this period, the value of virtual or blended formats of ISL was confirmed.

Whatever the form of mobility is, either- physical, blended or virtual - none of these scenarios involve ISL is being conceived or offered as an extracurricular activity. On the contrary, in the UNICORN model the SL component is designed to be fully integrated in the student curriculum for ECTS credit and, when it entails physical mobility, it does not require extra funding by students. Also, from an institutional and organisational standpoint, the UNICORN mobility is not a disruptive addition to the regular mobility patterns of HEIs, but rather it is embedded in usual mobility procedures. Given these features, the UNICORN model of ISL is very inclusive for students and sustainable for the institutions involved.

The UNICORN Toolkit is designed to support any HEI through the process of setting the UNICORN mobility scheme in place. The toolkit is comprised of the following resources:

1. UNICORN Living Catalogue - for HEIs and community organisations;
2. UNICORN Staff Training Handbook - for academics and community organisations' staff;
3. UNICORN Administrative Toolkit - for mobility experts (mainly International Relations Offices);
4. UNICORN Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) - for students and for a larger audience;
5. UNICORN Recommendations - for Policy Makers.
6. The next paragraphs will illustrate the function of each of these tools.

UNICORN LIVING CATALOGUE

It presents the details of 16 SL projects, ranging from 3 to 6 ECTS credits, which are included in the educational offer of the UNICORN partner universities and are open to students from any sending HEI, as long as there is a mobility agreement in place between the two HEIs. The Catalogue is called "Living" since it is obviously subject to changes throughout the years. The description of the UNICORN SL projects is articulated following a series of descriptors that were considered as necessary to be tackled. The template for the description of the SL projects is also provided at the end of the Catalogue.

The Living Catalogue serves a threefold purpose:

- It provides examples of course units that fit the UNICORN model (ref. the "UNICORN Taxonomy" introduced in the next paragraph). These examples can be used by academics as a source of inspiration to design new UNICORN SL projects together with community organisations.

- The template for the description of the SL projects can serve as a tool to map existing modules / course units already in place at some institution which have a community engagement component, and which might be used to become a receiving institution in a UNICORN mobility scheme.
- The same template for describing the UNICORN projects can be used as a checklist during the design phase, in addition to the resources of the UNICORN Handbook.

UNICORN STAFF TRAINING HANDBOOK

The Staff Training Handbook aims to help academics and community organizations co-design UNICORN projects that can be embedded in the UNICORN international service-learning mobility scheme. A “UNICORN project” is an experiential learning activity that is part of the regular educational offer of the institution and which has a SL component that addresses the seven identified dimensions outlined in the UNICORN Taxonomy presented in this document. The Handbook is meant both as a tool for self-training of academics and community organisations’ staff and also as a tool for higher education institutions and community organisations to replicate further training on how to design UNICORN projects suitable for international exchange students. The Handbook is conceived as a tool for group self-training activities, where academics and community organisations’ staff have a space to collaborate and confront each other on the presented contents. Nevertheless, it was structured in such a way as to be also a reliable individual self-training tool. The UNICORN Staff Training Handbook was not designed as an “how-to” but rather as a reflexive tool, where key questions are provided to navigate across core concepts of SL. Key queries are proposed, calling into question SL principles and their practical application.

The Staff Training Handbook revolves around the “UNICORN Taxonomy”. This tool represents a comprehensive common framework of what are the essential component parts of a SL project that can be embedded in the UNICORN ISL mobility scheme. The seven dimensions of the UNICORN Taxonomy are the following:

1. Mobility and online exchange
2. Meaningful reciprocal partnerships that meet actual community needs
3. Academically relevant, real world student involvement in the community
4. Explicit global civic and cultural competencies
5. Critical reflection to facilitate learning

6. Integrated assessment of student learning
7. Attention to community impact of service

These dimensions have been identified as the essential components that make-up a SL project that can fit the UNICORN model. Each dimension of the Taxonomy is described at three distinct levels of development: “Emergent Practice;” “Developing Practice;” and “Well-Developed Practice.” This can provide HEIs and community organisations with a clear roadmap for the further development of SL projects.

The UNICORN ISL Taxonomy grew out of previous efforts to identify “essential elements” of a service-learning course or module. The team started with two important source documents:

1. The Quality Standards for Service-Learning Activities developed by the 2016 EU-funded project Europe Engage;
2. The service-learning Taxonomy developed by the California State University system.

The two documents were synthesised, and six core dimensions were identified as core components of the Service-Learning Taxonomy. As mobility and internationalisation are at the centre of the UNICORN model, a seventh dimension was added, focusing explicitly on clarifying the distinctive aspect of mobility-based service-learning.

The UNICORN Staff Training Handbook for academics and community organisations’ staff is the very basis from which to start to build the UNICORN model and to foster its adoption among HEIs and community organisations. It is therefore key to unfold the potential of the model.

UNICORN ADMINISTRATIVE TOOLKIT

This tool illustrates how to embed service-learning pedagogy in different formats of international mobility: long-term mobility, short-term mobility, blended mobility and virtual mobility. An Information Card is provided for each one of these mobility formats which summarises its main features: key facts (e.g. prerequisites, duration, possible funding), advantages, challenges and organisational issues/steps (with reference to both outgoing and incoming mobility and to the 3 phases of the mobility - before, during and after). These cards focus mainly on the administrative and organisational aspects of the UNICORN mobility and are intended for use by professionals involved in the implementation of mobility processes in HEIs. A set of practical tools/examples that can support the implementation of the UNICORN mobility are provided as appendices to the toolkit.



UNICORN MASSIVE ONLINE OPEN COURSE

The MOOC is designed for UNICORN students, who are combining an international mobility experience with service-learning abroad. This tool is meant to support these students in acquiring a set of competences that will be useful to make the most of their experience abroad and in the community. The MOOC actually provides students with some conceptual understandings which is crucial to make sense of their first-hand experience of studying abroad and service-learning. It can support the student's learning process and contribute to making it effective for their personal and professional development.

The UNICORN MOOC focuses on two main topics: (1) service-learning & community engagement (definition, methodology, philosophy, objectives, requirements, conditions, phases, etc.) and (2) Intercultural Competences. Both are areas of competence in which students should develop at least some basic knowledge and skills before participating in an SL project. Altogether, the MOOC contributes to help students develop civic and democratic competences such as critical reflection, teamwork, civic mindedness, openness to other cultures, respect for cultures and human rights.

Specifically:

- Week 1 is an introduction to what civic, democratic and intercultural competences are and why they are so important in contemporary global society;
- Week 2 is an introduction to the service-learning approach and its application in intercultural contexts;
- Week 3 is about the implications of engaging in the community at local and international levels. It will give an overview of different types of community organisations;
- Week 4 argues that power dynamics have to be always taken into consideration when working/serving in the community and in all intercultural relations;
- Finally, week 5 shows how critical reflection is crucial both in service-learning and in intercultural learning.

The UNICORN MOOC is a training/learning resource that can complement the more specific training that students will receive as part of a specific UNICORN project. This tool can be used by academics in the ways that best suit their SL course and relevant learning outcomes, e.g. they may ask students to take the course pre-departure, or to take it upon arrival at the

receiving institution. They may use it integrally, or else they may select only some parts of it. Being modular, this tool is very flexible in its use.

More in general, however, this 'massive' course is actually open to anyone involved or interested in setting up an international mobility scheme combined with SL. It is therefore a very practical, flexible tool that, in addition to supporting the learning process of students, can help disseminate the knowledge and concepts on which the UNICORN model is based.

While there are many ways that international service-learning is defined in academic research and can be interpreted in various ways depending on the context, there is a consensus on the variety of benefits such a programme may yield. These benefits are directed towards not just the student participants involved in the programmes but also academics, faculties, the institutions offering the programmes, and societal partners. All stakeholders involved, benefit from international service-learning programmes, making SL a high impact learning and pedagogical approach. The following subsections briefly introduce the benefits to different stakeholder groups from their engagement with ISL projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

The present document is an integral part of the model, since it supports the promotion, exploitation and institutionalization of the UNICORN ISL scheme. The adoption of the UNICORN model beyond the consortium that developed it is actually key for the sustainability and impact of this ISL scheme.

5. BENEFITS OF SL AND ISL ADDED VALUE?

5.1. FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS)

Four main categories of benefits are identified for Higher Education Institutions when they adopt the UNICORN model. These benefits concern (1) meeting the policy level obligations of HEIs under national, EU and international directives to engage *with* society through research and teaching (2) enhancing the overall quality of education, the student experience and of the learning outcomes of education programmes (3) increasing internationalisation through enhancing the diversity of the educational experience and networking universities (4) enhancing the external reputation, value and accountability to society of academic institutions.

Benefit 1: Policy level: UNICORN as a policy instrument: Translating strategies (*papers*) into practice (*reality*).

Strategic plans of HEIs often include reference to SDGs as well as Third Mission objectives or to the social responsibility obligations of the institution towards society. Each one of the 5000 HEIs participating in the Erasmus+ Programme have defined their Internationalisation strategy in the “Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)” as valid until 2027. One of the fundamental principles of the Charter is the promotion of civic engagement and active citizenship among incoming and outgoing students. The UNICORN Model is a practical exemplar model that is ready to be adopted, to meet this policy aim. Very often, universities’ strategies state a commitment to developing links and cooperation with their external communities, regions and cities. However, it is rare to see clear and practical actions in these strategies that are aimed at realising these ambitions and to put the commitments expressed into practice.

The UNICORN model provides a means of addressing a university’s desire to engage with external stakeholders, providing an institutional tool to respond to social responsibility obligations through the curriculum.

The UNICORN Model can be implemented through collaboration with several types of external community actors e.g. local government/municipalities, NGOs, foundations, social enterprises, associations, schools, citizens etc. It is designed to support university engagement with public institutions, agencies and organisations, as well as civil society and ‘third sector’ organisations. It thus represents an effective policy tool to operationalise HEI 3rd mission and social responsibility policy objectives.

Benefit 2: Quality of Education: UNICORN benefits for improving the quality and impact of curriculum.

Embedding the UNICORN model into university curricula is a means of improving quality and achieving impact through the inclusion of civic and democratic competences as specific learning outcomes of the study programme (ref. Competences for Democratic Cultures Framework, Council of Europe). In addition to these key learning outcomes, the International Service-learning pedagogy can be utilised as a “challenged-based learning” methodology, when needs identified by the communities are presented to local and international students as societal challenges. Challenge Based Learning is a pedagogical approach that actively engages students in a situation that is real, relevant and related to their environment. It involves students working with stakeholders to define a challenge and collaboratively develop a solution that is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable.


In addition, service-learning is intrinsically interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary through positioning community needs as part of the HE curricula. Responding to need requires an appreciation of intersectionality, and going outside one’s discipline to develop broader and multidimensional understanding of community articulated need. This fostering of interdisciplinarity improves the richness of the curricula.

In addition to the long-term effect on the institution and on the quality of education, the application of the UNICORN model, which includes training for academics, fosters the professional growth of academic staff and grows the capacity of the institutional community.

Benefit 3: Internationalisation: UNICORN can improve the Internationalisation objectives of participating institutions.

The UNICORN model is a driver of Internationalisation of Higher Education in at least three dimensions:

- 1. Enhancing and strengthening collaboration among HEIs and Networks of Universities.** The UNICORN Model requires the bilateral cooperation of the sending and receiving institution, connected through specific mobility agreements for the recognition of the students’ curricular experience abroad. It fosters the improvement or further development of Erasmus+ agreements and it facilitates the interlinks among institutions within HEI networks. Many European Alliances funded under the EU are



developing initiatives to involve their local ecosystems, to foster civic engagement of the institutions and of students and academics and to support the SDGs. The International Service-learning Model developed by UNICORN matches these Alliances' goals.

2. **Further enhancement of transnational student mobility.** The traditional mobility for study approach is enriched through engagement with the local community and through the development of students' democratic competencies through bespoke service-learning projects co-designed with community partners.
3. **Internationalisation at Home (I@H):** The UNICORN Model is a driver of internationalisation within the curriculum of the receiving institution, enhancing study programmes that include a Service-learning component and that receive the international students for their mobility period. International students closely work in teams with local students, bringing their cultural background to the projects and making the local experience intercultural and international.

Benefit 4: Enhancing the external reputation, value and accountability to society of academic institutions. UNICORN can support HEIs' international reputation and societal impact.

The UNICORN Model can support the measurement of the achievement of third mission goals and, more generally, the societal impact produced. Measurable indicators can easily be achieved through the UNICORN model. Examples of these indicators include: the number of students involved in Service-Learning projects; the number of agreements signed with local associations and community partners, the number of international students working with the local community, the number of students' projects developed in response to societal needs, etc.

Measurable indicators for third mission' goals are gaining and increasing in importance both for fundraising and for international reputation. International rankings for Higher Education Institutions often include Third Mission elements. In recent times some traditional HEIs' rankings have developed a special classification for impact on society or new rankings on third mission activities have been created from scratch. Some examples are the Times Higher Education "Impact Ranking", and "UI Green Metrics World Ranking".

As a mid to long-term benefit, where adopted as an institution wide policy approach, the UNICORN exemplar, can result in additional funding accruing to Higher Education Institutions. State funding for HEIs is often contingent

on indicators that require evidence of achievement of Third Mission goals. In addition, increasing a HEI's reputation and social responsibility accountability is a key driver of international students' recruitment, which in turn can increase a HEI's global positioning and attractiveness to sending institutions and their students.


5.2. FOR CITIES AND LOCAL/GLOBAL COMMUNITY

When talking about community partners in international service-learning practices, it is relevant to make a distinction between two main beneficiaries: cities and municipalities on the one hand, and community networks/social organisations on the other. Cities and municipalities are part of the governmental apparatus, meaning that they have a specific mandate towards the local citizens and have assigned resources to provide services for them. Because the management of cities and municipalities is elected, they also often have a political agenda underpinning their actions. Community networks and social organisations on the other hand, have limited governmental power and their resources are often limited. Many social organisations therefore depend on volunteers and often time bound or ad hoc funding for their initiatives or specific projects.

It is important to add that when a municipality, a HEI and a community organisation collaborate around a community-based service-learning project, they empower and enrich each other, and consequently the public dividend created and public good served by this form of tripartite engagement is enormous. UNICORN has the potential to further enhance this type of tripartite collaboration through HEI curricula, and acting as a catalyst for and driver of local community development.

The different contexts of cities/municipalities and community organisations lead to different interests in international service-learning collaborations. Therefore, some of the benefits that we describe might be more or less applicable for certain community partners. Yet, we believe that for both types of community partners, international service-learning trajectories can bring strong added value, recognising also that involvement in service-learning projects is often challenging and time-consuming. However, its benefits far outweigh these challenges.

We describe two types of benefits of international service-learning in this context: direct benefits, that are short-term with an immediate impact on the work of community partners, and indirect benefits, that are more long-



term and less observable. Often, both types of benefits are interlinked, and direct benefits can have more indirect, long-term effects. Therefore, the division between direct and indirect benefits is somewhat artificial. Though, it helps us understand the processes at hand.

Direct benefits

Lack of time and resources is a problem both cities and community organisations face. However, involving an (international) student that can share his/her time and expertise with the organisation, can help tackle acute needs of the receiving organisation and its beneficiaries. For example, Forikolo, a UNICORN partner that is an international development social organisation located in Leipzig, Germany, called upon a student in communication sciences to strengthen their organisations' social media presence. While regular staff members lacked the time and expertise to develop a sustainable social media strategy, the student, with a vast knowledge of communication strategies and social media platforms, created a meaningful contribution that is still used in the daily practice of Forikolo today. Especially when being a sustainable partner in a service-learning project, the contributions a student can provide outweigh the time and effort staff members have to invest to support that student.

Involving a student in the practices of a city/municipality or community organisation also brings in new eyes and ears in the work that the organisation is doing. Students, and especially international students, can bring in a unique outsider perspective that can help understand local problems within a more global and European context. Elisa from the municipality of Cesena (Italy), a UNICORN partner organisation, describes how the insights of foreign students helped in improving the housing services Cesena offers in Bologna. Although the housing market is locally embedded, the structural problems and inequalities underpinning the local situation are often of a more systemic and global nature. The international students involved in the organisation's day-to-day work, informed Cesena about housing policies in other countries, which helped the organisation understand the interlinkages between the local and global housing market, giving inspiration to strengthen its own services.

Indirect (long-term) benefits

When international students become involved in the practices of a city/municipality or community network/organisation, they share their time, experience and expertise with the organisation. In return, the student receives knowledge, skills and attitudes from the experience and the expertise that the organisation offers. This reciprocal way of learning, with both parties giving and receiving, can create windows of opportunities for long-term, broad impact.

Cities and municipalities' have a key interest in creating a strong local democracy with active citizens engaging in it. Community networks and social organisations often strive for social justice and equality for the groups that they represent. International service-learning aligns with these core values underpinning the work of community partners and creating opportunities for community partners to propagate these values to students and university staff. A student working in a city or social organisation is not only helping out, but most likely also taking interest in the social structure and its improvement as a whole.

As previously mentioned, the contribution of international students can create understanding in the community of the interlinkages between their own local needs and challenges on a more international level. It creates possibilities for cross-border partnerships to tackle European and global challenges with local implications. This helps empower and amplify the voice of the community, giving them the increased capacity to contribute to policy and influence policy makers. As was the case with Cesena, the inspiration from other countries' housing policies helped attract the attention of the local government to adapt its own services and policies.

Following the above, collaboration between universities and community partners in international service-learning projects can be a key method to create meaningful opportunities to strive for the development of democratic and civic competences and for the development of SDG 16 "peace, justice and strong institutions". International students can become advocates of this value-base, bringing these principles back home after their experience and therefore strengthening cross-national partnerships and mutual understanding. International service-learning could then become part of a social movement in strengthening local and global democracy and active citizenship.

5.3. FOR ACADEMICS

International service-learning is a reflective and relational pedagogy that combines community or public service with structured opportunities for learning. ISL is premised on experiential education as the foundation for intellectual, moral, and civic growth. This focus on the synergy of the academic, ethical, and civic dimensions of learning distinguishes service-learning from other forms of experiential education. Rather than focusing on preparing students for a particular job, service prepares students for practical community-based problem-solving. International service-learning pedagogy, challenges faculty to re-conceptualize not only their curriculum but also their disciplinary training and their role as educators.

For academics involved in UNICORN ISL programs as well, there are numerous benefits of such involvement. These benefits take the form of multiple forms and can be seen from the perspective of different roles that faculty members need to perform in their jobs. Faculty members' first benefit from engaging in ISL programs is their teaching responsibilities. ISL programmes present an excellent opportunity to engage in a new, more effective pedagogy and enrich the teaching experience of faculty members.

The classroom interaction becomes significantly more intense and richer in content including broader civic engagement of international students and increasing awareness of the realities and needs of the surrounding communities due to the stronger and closer connection between both parties. Normally, daily academic activities hamper the possibility to take a deeper look at the social problems happening in the real world and are neither included nor discussed in the common curricula. Therefore, the direct interaction with communities and their main concerns provide first-hand problems that can be further discussed and analysed in class.

More interestingly is when academics are able to run innovative ISL projects providing a broader perspective of real needs in different parts of the world as within the UNICORN ISL projects. This approach also gives academics the possibility to update and shape the curriculum content according not only to theory-based cases but also to real worldwide challenges reflected in the needs of community partners and beneficiaries. As a result, practical and situated content will allow students to perform better during their future professional careers.

ISL also provides the possibility to develop skills to both lecturers and students. Lecturers on their side broaden competencies to teach in the classroom bringing two perspectives, from the university and from the real world. These competences include the development of leadership and management skills in terms of coaching, supporting and motivating students. Another benefit for academics is the opportunity to increase and develop networks with community partners. The permanent interaction with third parties paves the way to develop further alliances with different types of partners and stakeholders. In this way, positive project results generate a snowball effect to reach out new actors for the ISL projects or financing sources in the future.

Through relationships established with external partners, academics are also often exposed to a transdisciplinary experience emerging from the opportunity to engage with partners from different fields, which in turn also provides real-world authentic exposure to and knowledge of the particular challenges faced by their community. In addition, a more equal and mutually beneficial learning relationship is often established, which can contribute to building trust between community beneficiaries, academics and students. In the case of service-learning the relationship strives to be transformative and not transactional, where for example academics and students may be solely gathering data from community participants.

From a more holistic perspective, ISL projects also contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It empowers *learners* with the requisite *knowledge, skills, values and attitudes* to make *informed decisions and take responsible pro-environmental actions*. *Where service-learning is part of a lifelong learning continuum from primary through to higher education and beyond, it forms an integral part of quality education that enhances learners cognitive, social and emotional and behavioural development.* *Where learners across European education systems are encouraged and supported to develop common democratic competencies and values, such as equality and global citizenship; this in turn strengthens bonds across Europe and promotes common European values.*

6. TESTIMONIALS

6.1. COMMUNITY PARTNERS



“As a non-profit organisation we rely a lot on students to help us with the different tasks we are facing. The ever changing and dynamic field of PR and fundraising gives us many hurdles, especially with our line of work as an NGO active in the development aid. In the SL project the students taught us a lot on how to use social media for exactly that. In addition, having international students with different possibilities on how to approach that big task helped as well. Challenges we feared to occur beforehand turned out to be an advantage; breaking the language barrier made our social media texts understandable for both sides, and therefore for a broader audience! We would definitely recommend getting involved in such a project!”

Klaas Jerit Witte, Project Manager - Forikolo e.V., Germany



“For the Municipality of Coslada, participating in the UNICORN project has been of great interest because it has allowed us to intensify the relationship with the university and open a way of collaborating with students from very diverse disciplines. On the other hand, it has allowed us to bring the European dimension closer to our young people, since through contact with students from other countries of the European Union, they have been able to learn about the options offered by the Erasmus + Program and the opportunity to get involved in a service-learning initiative to be able to better understand the reality of the country to which they have to go to study. And finally, to say that the people in our community who have contacted the Erasmus students have appreciated their interest and involvement and have especially appreciated that they have wanted to dedicate their time and attention to them.”

Mar Cruz, Coordinator of the Service-Learning Office of the Municipality of Coslada, Spain



“We can consider the UNICORN experience in an extremely positive way. The first positive aspect has been the possibility to work with a heterogeneous group of students, either for the academic background and for the different countries of origin. The project we proposed to the students was related to the issue of housing solutions and access to these solutions by vulnerable groups, and also the quality of services provided by ASP. The participation in the service-learning projects, and in particular in those that foresee the international mobility, gives the community partners the opportunity to improve the quality of their work through an exchange of competences, the reciprocal cooperation that meet actual community needs, the possibility to deepen the work with and for the community and to intervene on specific needs or critical aspect in the community sustained by an external point of view and an academic background.”

Elisa Nardelli (left), Laura Perri (right)
Asp Cesena Valle Savio, Italy



Cork City Council were attracted to UNICORN as a recognised UNESCO Learning City. It fits with the concept of community learning whilst benefiting the community project or municipality where the service-learning takes place, especially as it has the reciprocal international learning opportunity for students.

It offers opportunities to learn and deepen the understanding of community development and civic engagement for all participants (students, faculty and community partners). Students who engage in International SL have a unique opportunity to bring a different perspective and experience to a new community and equally can learn new solutions, new techniques and new democratic perspectives. This civic learning model enhances social inclusion and cultural expression in our communities. It has been a joy to collaborate (even in a limited capacity) with the other community partners, with other universities and to enhance the relationship between UCC and Cork City Council.

Kieran O'Connell (on the left)
Community, Culture and Placemaking Directorate,
Cork City Council.

Remembering our UNICORN colleague, Mr Tony Power (RIP) (on the right)
Formerly Community, Culture and Placemaking Directorate, Cork City Council.

6.2. ACADEMICS



"A service-learning concept is an exciting tool to enrich our teaching and highly increase the learning experience from the students. Getting to know the work environment of social enterprises in Germany is for many international students a unique experience. This, combined with applying recently acquired skills, brings the academic experience to a new level."

Gunnar Kassberg, Leipzig University
Project Coordinator Online Marketing Challenge



"And this also has to do with developing the capacity to understand that there are multiple levels of influence between the local and the global. So this sometimes may also be quite frustrating because it's not always easy to be able to change the world. But in a way, to do something really concrete does matter. Students learn this directly. This has really to do with developing civic competencies."

Dr. Bozena Cierlik, University College Cork
Lecturer, School of History



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“Students who have taken the research placement and gone out and worked with graffiti come back with a much greater understanding of the practicalities of the work as opposed to just the theoretical ideas. They see how you work with young people. There’s a much better understanding of how to be flexible: ‘This is the plan. And this is the reality. And now I see how these things diverge.”

Fionn Woodhouse, University College Cork, Lecturer, Theatre Department



“They learn what youth workers can and should do as educators as well as practitioners, while being realistic. They can’t change the world, but there are things that they can do; things they can talk about with communities. Things that they can do with communities that can make a difference. And that is really powerful learning.”

Dr. Catherine Forde, University College Cork, Lecturer, School of Applied Social Sciences



“One of the important things for the participants is that it helps them gain lots of self-confidence. A sense that they can do things, that they are not only passive subjects receiving learning, but they can actually deliver something real, they can interact and make things happen. That’s really, really rewarding.”

Dr. José Aguirre, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Professor



“And I really believe that students having contact with vulnerable people is a very strong way to open up their perspectives and translate their particular academic competencies into something more powerful and personal, into civic competencies. It’s a good way of preparing the students to do the next stages of their lives after they graduate. They’re stronger, and they have more confidence after service-learning. I see incredible growth during the year. They take on responsibility. They become capable problem solvers. They grow as critical thinkers and actors in the world.”

Dr. Eva Van Moer, University of Antwerp, Instructor, Peter Gilles Centre



“They learn how to critically think about how you can improve society. What can be done to support people in the community. It’s all the civic competencies are there for the learning, right in front of the students. It’s presented to them in the form of being out there in the community, talking to the people in the community, and learning from them. They develop a deep connection to the community and the work. They become activated as agents for social change. That’s the added value of service-learning.”

Dr. Anna Kingston, University College Cork, Coordinator, Community Academic Research Links (CARL).



“Participating in the OMC is definitely a very good experience, especially for international students, as it gives them the possibility to get to know the working climate and the organizational culture of German social enterprises. Every company is a different universe; however, I had the advantage of finding a partner organization that really appreciated our work and tried to continue with our ideas even after finishing the OMC. This experience is a win-win and is significant both for us as students and for the enterprises, as the fresh and disruptive ideas of the students instead of being locked into the constraints of time and money, focus on creatively overcoming these obstacles. More practical projects like the OMC are definitely needed, not only in Marketing, but in many other aspects of business and social life. I highly recommend the OMC.”

David Pena, Leipzig University
Participant Online Marketing Challenge



“The first time we ever heard about the Unicorn project was in Madrid, after it was recommended to us by a teacher. It was described as a subject which, instead of having lots of theoretical contents, included a practical experience in Cesena, working with the Azienda Pubblica di Servizi alla Persona del Distretto Cesena Valle Savio. We had a few lessons to prepare ourselves and finally, three sessions with the users of the ASP services, mostly users who lived in the centers or infrastructures provided by Asp. We were able to see their reality and, above everything else, we had the opportunity of helping them, trying to reach out for possible solutions for their specific situations. In conclusion, it was a great experience which gave us advantages and knowledge that we wish to apply in our future”

Sara Gabino Fernandez and Miguel Martín-Caro Marrón,
Universidad Complutense de Madrid
Project: Reflecting Diversity



“This SL activity [...]has been a huge opportunity to look at various realities through the eyes of the people that we met: It made us fully realize how often those we consider ‘different’ are not so far away from us, and the focus groups we did with them were essential in order to deconstruct all those stereotypes that each of us possesses, even if unconsciously, and to reflect on our privileges and about many things we take for granted. Moreover, this SL project gave us the opportunity to step out of our comfort zone. This last point is related to everything cited above: getting to know new realities and different cultures, deconstruct stereotypes, reflect on our privileges, but even working in a team, organizing and leading a focus group, reflecting together, working towards a common goal... these are all activities that we think have made us grow a lot, both professionally and personally. And even to report our activity to the audience in Bologna was a big step outside our comfort zone, and we are really grateful to this activity for giving us the opportunity to test ourselves in this context as well.

This experience has been proof that it is possible to learn and to improve academically and personally in an “unconventional way”. Working in a group, with people that you don’t know at first, who don’t even have the same first language as you, is a challenge in itself. Our group came quite well together, without so many problems, and it is precisely because of this that we have been able to work in a good way as a team, adapting to each other’s circumstances and needs and helping each other to move this project forward. In addition, when establishing contact with ASP workers and users, it was essential to be united as a group despite the difficulties we encountered and tried to overcome.

Overall, this class has given us more than any other class could have, as, in addition to general knowledge and social and group skills, it has had a great personal and professional impact.

7. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Below we identify and provide of some final recommendations:

At European Policy Level:

- Establish the societal mission and role of universities as a priority within future policy frameworks and/or EU guidance for national level systems strategies, this should include ISL. A tool such as U-Multirank should develop an indicator related to Service-learning to give symbolic attention to societal engagement through teaching.
- Develop new policies and programmes to support this objective, and/or incorporate community engagement and ISL into existing programmes, tools and initiatives where potential exists for synergy, e.g. Erasmus+.
- Consolidate, strengthen and create synergies with existing thematic networks and initiatives to support community engagement and ISL in higher education. For example, the European Universities Initiative should play a key capacity-building role in driving ISL. This stems from the initiative's focus on connecting academics, researchers and students with regions, cities, businesses, civil society and citizens to co-create solutions to the most pressing societal challenges linked to Sustainable Development Goals.
- Review the reward structure for academics and community partners involved in ISL to enable the investment of time in appropriate partnerships activities to support the design, implementation and evaluation of ISL.

At societal level:

- Emphasise SL as an equal & reciprocal partnership between university, student & community partner
- Create the necessary administrative structure to support and involve community partners/cities in the entire SL process (conception, design, implementation & evaluation):
 - informing partners about the service-learning process
 - investing in developing their understanding
 - resourcing community partner involvement
 - employing and leveraging good practices utilised by community partners
- Cities and community partners should promote service-learning as a way to build a strong participatory democracy and strengthen democratic values and citizenship (locally and on a EU level), and create viable career paths for students to become future civically-engaged professionals.

At local/national policy level:

- Local and national governments should foster and fund the development of S-L initiatives as a way to tackle the challenges that are prioritised in public policies or defined in their local and national development agendas.
- They should develop performance-based indicators and allocate financial resources as part of compact agreements or societal engagement charters with HEI's.
- They should develop national networks to support the sharing of insights and innovations among community-engaged academics.
- Consider developing a Community of Practice to provide academics with insightful material related to various societal challenges to support them in carrying out their ISL courses and projects.
- Develop a portfolio of partnership building best practices to support the exchange of insights, experiences and strategies among ISL involved organisations. This initiative could also contribute to strengthening partnerships and trust-building and improving impact in local communities.
- Those HEI's achieving strong commitment to ISL initiatives should receive preferential access to financial benefits sponsored by local and national governments.
- They should especially incentivise centres of excellence within HEIs who are prioritising ISL and leading and managing a critical mass of impactful SL initiatives.
- Through national research and teaching funding agencies they should prioritise allocated resources, grants and calls for HEIs around engaged research and teaching, especially ISL projects focused on engaging with community actors.
- Provide mechanisms and incentives to improve the agility and responsiveness of HEI administrative procedures in order to be more agile in responding to the needs of SL and ISL projects.
- Develop certified career pathways that recognize student accomplishments through ISL and reward them with access to future civically-engaged professional careers.

At institutional level:

The optimal policy approach we believe is capacity-building and symbolic actions that support institutional change and improvement.

- Integrate the symbolic concept of "Internationalisation with a societal purpose" in the Strategic Plan / Action Plan /mission of the institution

8. APPENDIX

THE UNICORN PROJECT MEMBERS:



Alessia Marchi has been an International Relations Officer at the University of Bologna since 2007. She was involved in the design and management of several Education & Training EU-funded projects. Over the years she has developed an interest for the topics of global competences for democratic culture, service-learning and community engagement in higher education, intercultural competence. She was the Project Manager of the UNICORN project.



Dr Anna Kingston holds a part-time position as University College Cork CARL-coordinator (Community & Academic Research Links) promoting collaborative research between community groups and students. <https://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/>



Dr Martin Galvin is the Head of Civic & Community Engagement in University College Cork (UCC). UCC, ranked 8th on *The Times Impact Rankings* in 2021, is a globally leading community engaged university. Reporting to the Rector, Martin provides direction and leadership for the integration of community engagement across the university, especially within its research and teaching missions. He represents UCC on the national *Campus Engage* initiative and leads the societal engagement activities of the *UNIC European University* initiative. Martin's previous background is in multicultural education, working with disadvantaged populations in *Philadelphia* and *Trenton* in the US, where he pioneered Service-learning initiatives both at the individual school and the education systems policy level. He was a member of the *Pennsylvania Service Learning Alliance* and *PHENND Service Learning Leaders Roundtable* in Philadelphia. He led a *Community Schools 'Service*

Learning Academy', a partnership initiative of the *Netter Centre for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania and the School District of Philadelphia*. Martin has testified and presented on Service-learning in the *US Congress*. He is a co-winner of the *US National Academy of Sciences W.T. Grant Foundation Prize for Youth Development*, and his Service-learning initiatives were featured in *Newsweek Magazine* and a national American Television *PBS Documentary*.



Kaat Somers works at the University Centre Sint-Ignatius Antwerp (UCSIA) as coordinator of the Flemish Network for Service-Learning in Higher Education and project manager of the Erasmus+ project 'Service-Learning as a pedagogy to promote Inclusion, Diversity and Digital Empowerment' (SLIDE). Previously, she worked as a teaching assistant at the Centre for Sociological Research at KU Leuven. Kaat has a teacher degree (University of Antwerp) and a master's degree in Social Work and Social Policy (KU Leuven).



Francesco Girotti is currently Senior Local Lead of the Una Europa alliance Unit at the University of Bologna and he is adjunct professor at the Department of Education since 2018. He was the head of the EU & T Projects Unit at the University of Bologna for 14 years and former President of the Utrecht Network. He collaborates with the DG EAC and EACEA as external expert since 2012. He is currently enrolled in the PhD course in Internationalisation of Higher Education at the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (CHEI) at the University Cattolica of Milan. He is researching on the European Universities Initiative.



Mr. Kassberg is experienced in the management of international projects and has worked for various institutions in Development Cooperation, Knowledge & Technology Transfer, Business Development & Start-up Promotion. For the project UNICORN he implemented an Online Marketing course with a service-learning component in collaboration with social enterprises in Leipzig, Germany.



Wojciech Muras works as a research fellow at the Leipzig University at the Faculty of Economics and Management Science 2020 supporting young entrepreneurs and start-ups from the university, linking international students with social enterprises, community partners as well as with local companies. Wojciech is one of coordinators of the Online Marketing Challenge project.



Klaas Jerit Witte is a project manager at Forikolo e.V., an NGO based in Leipzig which is dedicated to improve the living conditions of children and young people in the areas of education, nutrition and health in the Port Loko region in western Sierra Leone. He holds a master degree in civil engineering and is coordinating the team and work in Sierra Leone as well as the volunteers helping in either Sierra Leone and/or Germany.



Dr. Esteban Sánchez Moreno is a full professor in the Department of Sociology: Methodology and Theory, at the Faculty of Social Work of Complutense University, Madrid. Currently, he is the head of the Institute for Research in Development and Cooperation (IUDC-UCM, for its Spanish initials).



Alejandra (Sandra) G. Bonilla: While pursuing her double BA Degree in Medieval and Modern History, she also studied at University of St Andrews (UK), Rouen (France) and Bologna (Italy). In 2004 she joined the Administrative Staff at Complutense University). For more than 15 years she has been involved in International Relations, international projects, student exchanges, and international cooperation. She is currently in charge of the Teaching & Research Support Office at the Faculty of Social Work.



Mar Cruz Mora: BA Degree in Social Psychology and Expert in Youth Information. Her long professional experience has always been related to Public services devoted to the promotion and enforcement of Youth participation in the local environment. She is currently Manager of the Youth Office, and Coordinator of the City Office for Service-Learning at Coslada City Council.



Juan A. Escudero has a BA in Philosophy & Humanities, a BA in Law, a BA Psychology and a MA in Local Public Management. His professional background is related to Local Public Management, and he is a specialist in design, planning and management of Youth public policies at Coslada City Council.



Eva Van Moer is a doctor in Educational Sciences. Since 2019 she teaches the course 'Community Service-learning' at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). She is liaison and coach for students, organisations and lectures who participate in Community Service-learning or want to work with Service-learning methodology. Since 2022 Eva coordinates the Antwerp Science Shop. Non-profit organisations can use this service to access scientific support in the form of research or advice. In return, their questions generate opportunities for socially relevant dissertation research.

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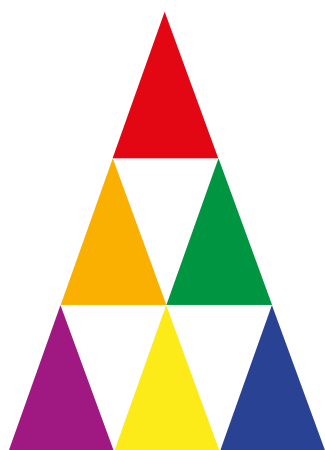
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