Critical Service Learning in the context of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) integrating the three perspectives of students, university and practice partners

Action Atelier, Moving from learning about to learning for and as sustainability

Currently, higher education is still strongly disciplinary and oriented towards the teaching of systems knowledge ("knowlege about what is"). A stronger focus on imparting target and transformation competencies (i.e. competencies about what should be and how we come from whre we are to where we should be, cf. ProClim, 1997) is crucial. However, this requires a broader understanding of education and learning at universities. The format of Critical Service Learning[1] (Mitchell, 2018), which is still largely unknown in Europe has great potential with regard to the goals of ESD and holistic ESD approaches due to its practical orientation, the equal exchange with practice partners and students, the didactically supported reflection of theory and practice, and the focus on social change.

In this Action Atelier, we would first like to briefly introduce the format of Critical Service Learning and, based on the experience from a concrete project, the potential it holds for ESD and which aspects can favour the development of this potential. The perspectives of the university, the students and the practice partners are explicitly examined. Afterwards, we would like to discuss the following and other questions with the workshop participants in the setting of an exchange of experiences: How can (critical) service learning be introduced at universities? What institutional change might be needed for this? What role can the format of Service Learning and especially Critical Service Learning play within the framework of a whole institution approach as well as for universities contribution to a "futur-proof economy"? How can the university as a whole benefit from such teaching and learning approaches? How can we create an exchange at eye level between lecturers, students and practice partners?

The workshop will be jointly led by a lecturer, a student and a practice partner with service learning experience. The results of the workshop will be compiled in a short documentation and made available to the participants. If there is interest, a more in-depth exchange between interested universities on this topic will be initiated.

Literature

Mitchell, Tania D. (2008): Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models. Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 14(2), S. 50-65

Proclim/CASS [Konferenz der Schweizerischen Wissenschaftlichen Akademien] (1997): Visionen der Forschenden: Forschung zu Nachhaltigkeit und Globalem Wandel - Wissenschaftspolitische Visionen der Schweizer Forschenden. Bern: ProClim - Forum für Klima und Global Change, Schweizerische Akademie der Naturwissenschaften SANW

UNESCO (2021): Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development. UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development. Learn for our planet. Act for sustainability. Berlin: UNESCO.

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[1] While traditional service learning ("service to the individual") focuses primarily on students and their pre-professional development, critical service learning ("service for an ideal") focuses on social change, power structures and authentic relationships in addition to students' skills acquisition. Critical service learning approaches thus encourage students to see themselves as "change agents" for social change.