

Service-learning, a pedagogical proposal for individual and societal transformation

Join us as we explore the individual and societal transformative potential of service-learning projects in higher education

Service-learning is an innovative pedagogical proposal. Wide consensus defines three essential 'programmatic' characteristics: (1) effective solidarity action, (2) students' protagonist role, and (3) deliberate integration with learning content. In short, students undertake solidarity activities in which they apply knowledge and skills to solve concrete challenges within the community.

Service-learning clearly is a form of experiential learning, taking students and teachers outside the classroom walls. Through a well-designed service activity, students have the opportunity to experience a given reality rather than merely study it. And through purposeful reflection on these experiences learning occurs.

After a short introduction into the service-learning pedagogy as such, we will look into its **individual transformative potential**. For obvious reasons, we cannot within the time and place constraints of this workshop go through a real service-learning experience, and are therefore limited in our endeavor. We can however, by means of a thought experiment, approximate this potential.

For that, we invite you to go down memory lane and travel back in time and into space to a critical moment, a meaningful experience, a 'point of no return'. A short reflection on that personal past experience will enable you to investigate your own individual transformation in that specific situation. From there, we will return to service-learning as a pedagogy to explore the ways in which students can learn from their serving experience, what a student's transformation could look like, how reflection can facilitate this process, and how these experiences find their place within the curriculum.

We will then expand our scope and turn to the **societal transformative potential** of the service-learning pedagogy, for which we will first briefly study the Latin American experience. In this case, the concept of solidarity, 'solidaridad,' defined as working together and as being aware of the common good and rights perspective, is regarded key for a solidarity action to be effective in its transformative capacity. We therefore aim to gain a better understanding of this specific concept of solidarity and in what way the application of this principle unlocks the effective societal transformative potential.

With this in mind, we will examine some concrete examples of service-learning experiences within the European context to investigate what aspects within the design of a service-learning project are responsible for a societal transformation to take place. Participants are welcomed to share their own examples or cases to be discussed.

Inspired by [Tapia, María Nieves: Social Engagement in the Higher Education Curriculum. CLAYSS, 2021.](#)