



European Observatory
of Service-Learning
in Higher Education

SETTING A GLOBAL RESEARCH AGENDA for Service-Learning and Community Engagement

THIRD EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON SERVICE-LEARNING IN
HIGHER EDUCATION, SLOVAKIA, July 2020

International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE)

The International **Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE)** is an international non-profit organization devoted to promoting discussions to advance the quality and quantity of research on service-learning and community engagement.

Following a series of annual international conferences focused on service-learning research, IARSLCE was launched in 2005, with the aim of expanding the development and dissemination of research on service-learning and community engagement internationally and across all levels of the education system.

Its objectives are to advance the fields of service-learning and community engagement research across the educational spectrum.



- to promote the exchange of ideas, experiences, data and research among its members
- to disseminate knowledge and research on service-learning and community engagement
- to encourage continually improving the quality and rigor of research in these fields
- to provide a forum for the presentation of research findings, ideas, methods and opinions across educational systems
- to facilitate the exchange of information and creation of collaborations among scholars and practitioners around the world
- to support and facilitate the development of new scholars entering the fields of research on service-learning and community engagement
- to create venues for ongoing learning and communication among the members
- to establish communication strategies that facilitate the dissemination of research beyond the members to other communities of scholars and practitioners. to initiate other activities and programs that support the interests of members and advance the fields of service-learning and community engagement

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the annual international research conference on service-learning and community engagement, IARSLCE has been working on an eighteen-month effort to develop a comprehensive, global research agenda to guide the future study and practice of service-learning and community engagement.

A Research Agenda for the Future

The research agenda to be developed will focus on identifying the key research questions, areas of research focus, needed methodological considerations, and other research-related issues that will guide the field's research activities over the next five to ten years and beyond. The research agenda will build on the current body of research, identify gaps in that research, and consider the research needs of contemporary and emerging conceptualizations of service-learning and community engagement across the educational spectrum (primary, secondary, and higher education) and across national and cultural contexts. In this regard, the research agenda should be forward-looking and forwarding-thinking, building on the extant knowledge and understanding within and across a varied, broad, expanding, and quickly maturing field.

Throughout 2019 and 2020, IARSLCE has been facilitating a series of *Research Agenda Setting Forums* in different regions of the globe. Each forum, which lasts between one hour and three hours focus on gathering information, perspectives, and ideas that will shape the global research agenda, to be unveiled at the 20th annual research conference, scheduled to be held in October 2021.

Agenda Setting Forum Meetings

MARCH 2019	HONG KONG
JUNE 2019	SINGAPORE
JULY 2019	JAPAN
AUGUST 2019	ARGENTINA
SEPTEMBER 2019	BELGIUM
OCTOBER 2019	UNITED STATES
DECEMBER 2019	MEXICO
DECEMBER 2019	KOSOVO
MAY 2020	UNITED KINGDOM
JULY 2020	SLOVAKIA THIRD EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON SERVICE- LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION
SEPTEMBER 2020*	AUSTRALIA
OCTOBER 2020*	SOUTH AFRICA

**In development*

Research Focus Areas

Each forum addresses a broad range of issues pertaining to advancing the study and practice of all forms of service-learning and community engagement, with a focus on addressing some of the emerging issues in the field that will be of significance and importance in the years to come. Each forum is conducted in the same manner. Facilitators of the forums engage participants in discussing each of the eight research focus areas listed below.

I. Impact Studies

These studies focus on assessing the impacts of service-learning and community engagement on participants, including students, faculty, staff, institutions and the community. The impact studies across a broad range of short-term and long-term outcomes.

The research agenda should identify questions that explore the impact of service-learning and community engagement across all participants and stakeholders. The questions should be nuanced, and the impacts on specific participant populations should be considered.

II. Implementation/Process Studies

Implementation studies focus on examining the practices service-learning and community engagement and the ways in which these practices are effective in achieving particular goals. Implementation studies seek to improve practice and provide guidance on best practices across a broad range of service-learning and community engagement programmatic approaches.

The research agenda should identify questions that center on the process of delivering service-learning and community engagement across a broad range of community, cultural, geographic, disciplinary, and institutional contexts.

III. Institutionalization Studies

Institutionalization studies focus on examining the factors that promote the sustainability and institutionalization of service-learning and community engagement across institutional and community contexts.

Studies in this area seek to conceptualize the idea of institutionalization in light of the changing contexts of educational institutions and the varied approaches to service-learning and community engagement.

IV. Conceptual Framings and Theory Development

The field of service-learning and community engagement has been criticized for being undertheorized and for lacking well-developed and well-tested conceptual frameworks.

Studies in this area of work focus on theory testing and build conceptual models and framework that explain various phenomena in the study and practice of service-learning and community engagement.

V. Methodological Considerations

Over the years, there has been much debate over the kinds of methods that are appropriate for the study of service-learning and community engagement.

A broad range of research designs, methods, and approaches are needed in order to gain a full understanding of the nature of the field. A broad range of epistemologies is required in designing and operationalizing today's research on service-learning and community engagement.

VI. Instruments and Measures

Securing quality research requires valid and appropriate instruments and measures that can secure the best data and provide opportunities for thorough, systematic analyses. Many of the instruments that have been developed for study of service-learning and community engagement are home grown instruments that are often applied to single studies and are not cultivated further for potential use in other studies. In addition, there are many instruments that are available for studies of service-learning and community engagement, but it is sometimes unclear regarding the suitability of such studies for programs or populations for which they were not initially designed.

The research agenda seeks to identify issues for improving the instrumentation and measurement of service-learning and community engagement across the many contexts in which the work takes place.

VII. Replication

No one study provides all of the evidence, understanding, or knowledge that is needed to draw firm conclusions about service-learning or community engagement. Replication is a critical feature on scientific inquiry and research.

Only a handful of service-learning and community engagement studies have been replicated. Replicating high quality studies is a way for strengthening evidence and building more conclusive evidence about the strengths and limitations of service-learning and community engagement practices, outcomes, and approaches.

VIII. Cultural/Regional and Cross-Cultural/Regional

At each regional meeting, issues that are particular to certain practices and contexts within cultures and regions are likely to emerge. Also likely to emerge are research interests in how service-learning and community engagement is practiced and studied across cultures and regions. These issues should be embraced and discussed, with an eye toward identifying questions or action steps for the research agenda. The issues might include, but are not limited to:

- *Conducting research within and across different cultural or geographic settings.*
- *Examining service-learning and community engagement across the educational spectrum.*
- *Community voice.*
- *Multiple frames of service-learning and community engagement.*

Selected Findings and Recommendations from the Research Agenda Forum at III European Conference on Service-Learning in Higher Education.

I. Impact Studies

- What are the impacts on staff being involved in service-learning?
- What are the outcomes and impacts on employability of students (i.e., supporting their next step to secure employment, transversal skills + gender differences in development of skills)?
- What are particular impacts on community partners within engaged institutions?
- How does service-learning help students to broaden their horizons to boost their soft skills and interpersonal competencies?
- What are the impacts of service-learning on faculty members' views on their professional role and ways of teaching?
- Why is the field dominated by females?
- What are the ways to identify and measure the benefits and negative impacts of the use of service-learning on students, teachers, and community members? What are the risks of service-learning? What happens when service-learning goes wrong?
- What are the indicators that optimize the positive benefits of a service-learning experience?
- To what extent does participation in service-learning experiences/projects in particular contexts contribute to the development of "solidarity"?
- Is there/what is the relation between existing service-learning practices in higher education and the way how evaluation of those practices influences/impacts the (future) design of degrees in certain disciplinary fields (subjects/courses and engagement activities for students)?
- Does the service-learning today impact how the study programme(s) will be (re)designed for the future generation(s) of students?
- How does interdisciplinary setting of service-learning platform/course/project impact actors/participants? What are the benefits of placing a service-learning project in an interdisciplinary context vs. a disciplinary-centered one?
- Is there/what is/how diversified is the impact of a professional degree(s) that focus on the teaching of community engagement/service-learning on diversity, structure, sustainability of service-learning projects? (context -teachers/academics that have been educated to implement service-learning vs. those that haven't but are enthusiastic in continuing their work with SL and self-education)?
- Acknowledging the differences of service-learning projects and possibilities in the context of different educational levels, what tools should be adopted to measure the impact at primary, secondary and tertiary level?
- What is the best way to organise the holistic approach in collecting data, acknowledging the voices of all actors/participants while studying certain service-learning-related phenomenon?
- What is actually the tangible legacy of service-learning courses/projects on our communities?
- Can we/how can we study the impact of service-learning experiences on empowerment and emancipation of students?
- How do service-learning experiences shape students' (further/future) biographies? (service-learning biographical legacy)
- How do service-learning experiences shape/contribute/impact participants' tolerance and intercultural competence?
- What is the impact of long-term collaborations on all parties engaged, and the community development? Do project-based service-learning activities still have capacity to contribute or only long-term sustainable partnerships seriously tackle community issues?
- How does service-learning impact alumni in their further work life, social skills, and empathy?
- What long-term changes are notable within partner institutions?
- What themes are taken back to university from service-learning and community engagement experiences?

II. Implementation/Process Studies

- What are the differences between bottom-up and top-down SL projects? What are the differential impact of these approaches on students, community, university, staff?
- What is the lifecycle of SL implementation? Is there a lifecycle? What are the critical/essential elements of SL lifecycle?
- To what extent does “appreciative reflection” enhance the benefits of service-learning for students?
- What are different types of implementation of service-learning?
- What are the different ways to design service-learning projects?
- To what extent are students involved in developing service-learning projects from the beginning? Do they choose the community partner or need?
- Are students more motivated or do service-learning when the experiences become more relevant for students?
- What works in facilitating the implementation, strengths, and weaknesses of service-learning?
- Which are the main constraints to develop service-learning projects? Which guidance should offer to the students? Contents and tools that will facilitate?
- What does the map of application of stakeholders’ resources, specific roles, and tasks look like in service-learning?
- How are the resources available being used in service-learning? Are those resources well known?
- How does service-learning benefit from better research?
- How do we minimize the negative side effects of service-learning implementation? What are the appropriate implementation strategies in service-learning to minimize the negative side-effects, such as negative biases of hierarchy?
- How much service should students provide (frequency and intensity) to achieve positive effects on the community. Is there a consensus on the amount of service students should conduct?
- How relevant are service-learning projects that to students’ career development?
- What are effective methods for encouraging students to adopt service-learning?
- What is the influence of service-learning in “how to live your life”? Does service-learning have an impact on people's life philosophy?
- How do the planning processes of service-learning differ in terms of the roles different actors play in the process (e.g. students, community members)?
- What roles do students and community members have/play in co-creating the service-learning course/project?
- How do different cultural contexts shape/influence the process of building partnerships and developing relationships?
- What are best practices for online service-learning as a ‘new normal’? Studies needed to reflect on this new context and compare implementation/processes ‘online - offline’?
- How do particular forms of service-learning - as course, project, extracurricular activity in schools - shape and limit possibilities/opportunities for participants’ experiences?
- The current context is showing us that those ‘embedded service-learning institutions have managed better this whole situation and were able to continue their engagement activities despite the pandemic. Is there a relationship between what how embedded and institutionalized service-learning is and how service-learning is continuing during this pandemic time and online platforms?
- Studies need to consider all the parts and actors involved, including the preparation, pre-planning, what partners you are working with, and take into account all the voices.
- How does the training on implementation affect the implementation process or the level of engagement of students?
- To what extent is reflection biased by cultural or religious contexts?
- What motivates teachers to conduct service-learning?
- Is it better to have compulsory or elective service-learning courses?
- Is extra effort from teachers required to conduct high quality service-learning?

III. Institutionalization Studies

- What impact has the institutionalisation of service-learning on university and community?
- How the traditional structure of universities limits the normalisation of service-learning activities?
- What are the barriers of service-learning institutionalization?
- How to manage the processes of institutionalisation of service learning in higher education to move from one level of institutionalisation to another, according to the Furco rubric?
- What is the best way to succeed in institutionalization?
- Establish a best practices repository and meta-analysis on institutionalisation.
- Which institutionalisation strategies are more successful? Advantages and disadvantages of the bottom-up approaches service-learning institutionalisation.
- What is the impact of the implication of higher education institution decision makers in the institutionalisation process?
- Should we try to convince as many faculty members as possible to engage in service-learning? Is the best strategy for institutionalization to engage more skeptical faculty or to focus on the motivated faculty? What are the trade-offs of having more people joining?
- How and where should investments be made to have higher quality service-learning?
- Should service-learning training and basic training about ethical engaged scholarship be compulsory for department heads, those who do promotion evaluation?
- What are strategies to strengthen the sustainability of service learning that does not depend on leaders of the university? What bottom-up strategies can be put in place to strengthen sustainability of community engagement?
- What is the relevance of the service carried out to the community?
- How can community engagement be better resourced to be effectively institutionalised?
- How do cultural differences in the context of the power of authorities in institutions shape/influence the process(es) of institutionalisation?
- What are the best ways to 'transfer' great strategies from one context to another while acknowledging contextual particularities?
- What is the role of executive and middle level leadership on facilitating the service-learning implementation process?
- What impact does the existence of a center/office for service-learning facilitate the sustainability of service-learning at institutional level?
- Does the availability of internal budget allocation impact the sustainability of service-learning?
- Does the availability of external budget allocation impact the sustainability of service-learning?
- What types of institutional structures are associated with long-term institutionalisation of service-learning?
- Conduct research on different models of institutionalisation.
- What are the political implications (obstacles and facilitators) for service-learning institutionalisation?

IV. Conceptual Framings and Theory Development

- What elements of complex systems theory can be used to analyse the success of service-learning?
- What elements of the following theories or conceptual frameworks can be used to assess the operations, impacts, and/or institutionalization of service-learning?
 - governance theory from political science
 - digital participation theory and digital literacy
 - social learning
 - social constructionism
 - generativity
 - feminist theories

- care ethics
 - sustainability and environment
 - responsible research and innovation (RRI)
 - change models
 - practical theory development
 - appreciative inquiry
 - cultural theories
 - sociological theories
 - psychological theories
 - social empathy development
 - ecological models
- Develop a theory about critical reflection and awareness.
 - Establish a conceptual framework on the difference models used in service-learning.
 - Establish a conceptual model to evaluate achievement competencies.
 - Explore a conceptual model or framework for that articulates democratic competencies or/and global competencies relevant in service-learning.
 - How can we use appreciative inquiry to develop theoretical and practical theory simultaneously?
 - Looking at the interdisciplinary, trans and cross disciplinarily of our work, do we need new theories or do we need to sync what we have?
 - What are the best ways to learn from the indigenous knowledge system - culture and practices? How can our communities' knowledge actually inform current and new theories?
 - Create a model (rather than a theory) that present moderator and mediator variables.

V. Methodological Considerations

- Conduct more comparative studies involving different institutions and different countries.
- It is important to examine the types of analyses we are using to analyse focus groups. For example, there should be more and deeper discourse analysis and content analysis.
- Apply a more phenomenological approach to studies.
- Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) are very useful to generate consistent knowledge that dialogues with different audiences in academia and with the community/society; these methods should be applied more to the study of service-learning and community engagement.
- Studies should include more participatory action research.
- Have more experimental studies with random assignment.
- Use more qualitative methods that triangulate qualitative data with quantitative data.
- What are steps to plan a research study when the definition of service-learning is not clear in a particular context?
- How can we apply Asset Based Community Development to strengthen community's contribution?
- How can we provide evidence on the attributes of service-learning through longitudinal and retrospective studies?
- What are the impacts/elements that need to be included to measure the community voice?
- How do we improve the value of community knowledge to our service-learning research and practice?
- How to methodologically capture and preserve oral history that is so important in some communities? (an example of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)
- Studies should take into account (control for) the professional bias of the researcher regarding the particular methods/tools being used.
- More definition and clarity is needed regarding the variables, interventions, and outcomes.

VI. *Instrument and Measures*

- Use a social return on investment (SROI) approach to investigate the benefits of service-learning and community engagement.
- Instruments need to include information about contextual factors.
- Develop instruments that measure the time needed to commit to service-learning activities.
- Develop instruments in collaboration with service-learning alumni and partners. The participation of all actors is very important in the design and consolidation of the instruments.
- Establish instruments that can measure the long term impacts of service-learning are needed.
- Conduct more collaborative research involving all the relevant stakeholders.
- Create spaces to exchange tools and methods among researchers.
- Establish a glossary that standardizes terminology so that there can be consistency in measurement
- Establish a repository or online platform of instruments, perhaps through EOSLHE.

VII. *Replication*

- Develop a list of service-learning and community engagement studies that have been replicated.
- Develop a repository of instruments that can be used to replicate studies.
- Publish more studies with greater details to facilitate replication.
- Replicate more randomized control studies.
- As long as there are so many different nuances of service-learning and community engagement replication of studies in various educational contexts might not prove to be the right methodological choice.
- Quantitative studies and surveys can be replicated, what about qualitative studies? What are strategies for replicating qualitative studies?
- Be attentive to disciplinary cultures in term of quantitative and qualitative approaches when replicating studies.
- Find research studies that have used evaluation of impact of service-learning. What kind of tools were used? Is it possible to replicate those studies?
- Conduct a literature review to identify studies that could be replicated? What components of service-learning facilitate replication?
- Replicate studies of service-learning programs that are done in institutions that have similar service-learning institutionalization situations or are conducted in the same disciplines that include service-learning programs over time, i.e. same intervention and same measures.

VIII. *Cultural/Regional & Cross-Cultural/Regional Research Issues and Considerations*

- Establish a set of common expectations and rules of cooperation for service-learning and community-engagement research.
- Develop a plan to 'reconcile' differences in disciplines around the globe (e.g. pedagogy is a scientific discipline in Europe, but not in the USA). Invite scholars to consider this aspect when familiarising with theories from kindred fields of study.
- Conduct comparative studies on service-learning and community engagement incorporation into various educational policies and how are they communicated with relevant actors (teachers, academics, etc.).
- How do cultural differences facilitate the capacity of community members to co-create research agenda?
- How do different cultural contexts shape/influence reflection practices?
- How do different educational (historical and present) contexts shape/contribute to the implementation of service-learning courses/projects?

- Different cultural/national/educational contexts shape the 'battle' of disciplinary vs. interdisciplinary approach. How does this 'battle' and the centrality of disciplines (the power of discipline) shape/influence research on service-learning and community engagement?
- How do cultural/historical/governmental/institutional contexts shape strategies for keeping/strengthening service-learning courses and students' engagement in time of crisis (e.g. Covid-19)?
- What is the best way to learn from each other as communities of practice while acknowledging contextual particularities in terms of culture and institutional context/history/culture?
- What are the qualitative differences among implementing models of service-learning across cultures?
- Identify the roles of the actors in service-learning across cultures.
- What factors influence the community engagement across cultures (e.g., the roles of professors on the perception of service-learning as normative in different cultural contexts)?
- Use the existing databases (e.g. European Service-Learning Observatory) to identify potential contexts to compare and contrast.
- Develop a map of the differences of key partners and networks across cultures, geographies, and
- Set up regional research partnerships to conduct joint studies.



Working session in progress at the RESEARCH AGENDA FORUM (59 attendees)

EOSLHE wishes to thank Andrew Furco and IARSLCE for their generosity in sharing the findings of the Research Agenda Forum.

CONGRATULATIONS to Alzbeta Brozmanova and the organising team of the 3rd European Conference of Service-Learning in Higher Education who had to face a huge challenge reorganising it as an online meeting. It was a great success!



The goal of the Association is to promote service-learning in higher education in Europe and to foster scholarly activities related to it. These include, but are not limited to the following activities:

- to disseminate information and knowledge about service-learning
- to foster and develop training activities and resources
- to establish links between local, transnational and global networks
- to organize meetings, exchanges, seminars, conferences, congresses and other events, alone and/or with groupings pursuing the same objective
- to advocate service-learning development in higher education institutions
- to contribute to the development of policy recommendations and initiatives
- to support individuals and institutions in developing service-learning projects
- to conduct and encourage research and scientific publications on service-learning
- to raise funds, receive legacies and donations to realize the goals of the association



Membership

To become a member of the association, you can apply at [JOIN EASLHE](#) and for more detailed information, please visit us on [EASLHE website](#)

The **annual fee is 20,00€** with a student discount fare of 10,00€.

For further information you can write to contac@easlhe.eu

News and Events

NEW CONFERENCE DATE
7th to 9th of July, 2021

**10th National Conference and 5th International
Conference for University Service-Learning**
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain

The ApS(U)10 conference is structured around the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015).



6th International Congress of Educational Research
USAL-PALECH "CLIE 2021" to be held at the University
of Salamanca Spain on **March 24, 25 and 26, 2021.**

The conference takes the transformation of
universities as its backbone focusing on:

Internationalisation | Inclusion | Social Responsibility



Place your S-L experience on the map



CHALLENGE!!!

At least 100 EXPERIENCES SHARED
from 20 different COUNTRIES
by 31st December 2020

Share your S-L Experience

Please, do not hesitate.
This is the [right time](#)

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