

# WHAT ABOUT SERVICE LEARNING IN EUROPE?

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## 1. A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SESSION

The rise in service learning initiatives that we live in today responds to current challenges society faces with situations that threaten our democracy and values of fairness, responsibility and social cohesion. Different educational institutions are intended to provide educational measures that take into consideration the development of a participatory democratic culture, to arouse the interest of youth for being active in public life with responsible behavior and commitment to the environment, promoting coexistence in multicultural societies from understanding and dialogue and to combat exclusion in favor of social cohesion.

The expansion of service learning in the North and South American context in the 90's is the result of concern about linking the formal education curriculum with educational opportunities offered by the Community framework to make education more meaningful and relevant to students. In the North American context, the development achieved by service learning programs is rooted, first, to improve the quality of life of communities through the development of agriculture, while remedying the concern of civil society regarding the low level of social involvement of students. Therefore important institutional initiatives contributed to promoting service learning practices in all educational levels during the 70's.

The rise and popularity achieved by the service learning in Latin America, particularly in countries like Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, is associated with a vocation for solidarity and help that the students learn from an early age performing services in a

nearby community; hence it is preferred to talk more about *solidarity service learning* for service-learning. Also the first practice took place in the eighties but continued into the nineties when consolidating a number of initiatives culminating in 2000 with the creation of the Latin American Center of Solidarity Service Learning (CLAYSS) in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In the European context, service learning practices are still incipient, the first systematic attempts started in the twenty-first century with the creation of various organizations and programs such as the following:

- 2002 European service learning association.
- 2005 Service Learning: Dialogue Between Universities and Communities (Leonardo Project: CIVICUS).
- 2005 Forum Civic Education (Madrid).
- 2005 Promoting Service Learning Center (Barcelona).
- 2007 The first international conference on service learning in teacher education (Brussels, Belgium).
- 2009 The second conference on service learning in teacher education (Galway, Ireland).

The purpose of this presentation is to expose:

- an overview of Service Learning in the European context and those advances in philosophical or methodological practices that have been made in the last decade,
- different European countries who are doing service learning projects at the university level, and
- the status of service learning in the context of Catalonia (Spain).

## **2. MOTIVATIONS/FOUNDATIONS FOR THE SESSION**

This presentation is aimed at those who are motivated by service learning in Europe, particularly regarding these two topics:

- Theoretical aspects related to the birth and evolution of service learning in the European context.
- Results of research conducted in the Catalan context on the satisfaction level of university students involved in service learning projects.

### **3. UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS TO BE ACHIEVED AT THE SESSION**

- Acquire an overview of the current state of service learning in the context of European universities.
- Understand in more depth the case of Catalonia (Spain).

### **4. OTHER INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS**

Some aspects to consider in relation to the presentation:

- The research presented in the Catalan case has already been conducted. It was a novel research, and was held last year (2010) on behalf of the University of Barcelona.
- Approach the current debate on service learning as a methodology in the new curriculum, "European Higher Education Area (EHEA).