SLUSIK Policy Paper

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CONTENT

SUMMARY

Policy-makers should enable schools, through financial and policy support, to create a space in educational curricula and learning programs for diverse service-learning experiences set in a 'real-life' context with not-for-profit community partners that combine both formal and informal learning outcomes with a positive impact on social inclusion and preventing social exclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The following recommendations have been compiled as a result of the activities conducted as part of the SLUSIK (Service-Learning Upscaling Social Inclusion for Kids) Erasmus+ project 2020-2022 (see Annex). They provide suggestions on how policymakers can support service-learning in formal education secondary school curricula leading to increased social inclusion.

Service learning for secondary school children is proven to:
improve and develop social and civic competences, increase motivation and engagement in schools and foster knowledge, understanding and ownership of values and fundamental rights in secondary school children ages 12 - 16.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

2.1 EFFORTS TO PROMOTE THE WIDER UNDERSTANDING OF THE VALUE AND BENEFITS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Policy-makers should both enable and encourage a deeper understanding of the value and benefits service-learning can bring to the school environment, students, teachers and wider society. The unique qualities of democracies require citizens who are prepared to contribute to the political process in a collective manner, and the benefits of service-learning for laying the foundations for future civic behaviour and in terms of citizenship education related to this should be thoroughly expressed.

In other words, to create new (young) cohorts of citizens who are committed to civic engagement and able to effectively carry out the complex responsibilities of democratic public life, schools cannot postpone or displace opportunities for students' civic engagement until an arbitrary age of "readiness." Instead, they must engage students in participatory citizenship education, like service-learning is, including critical analysis of various societal problems occurring in their own local communities. Accordingly, we propose that service-learning is a method of teaching/learning in which students apply academic and civic knowledge and skills in order to address a public societal problem and contribute to the public good. As a type of teaching and learning, service-learning is anchored in social constructivist methods and experiential learning, including inquiry and project planning, to help students meet community needs while at the same time deepening their content area and civic understanding and skills.

Service-learning creates space for communication and intensive teamwork among students, meaningful social interactions with communities, learning in connection with real life and opportunity to contribute to solving local or global challenges. Through these students develop social and civic competences and are more engaged in the school, so they have a lower intention to drop-out and better chance for social inclusion also in the future. Service-learning is not beneficial only to the students, but also to other stakeholders involved in the process. It is reciprocal, so it means it brings benefits also to the communities, schools and teachers.

2.2 EFFORTS TO INCLUDE SERVICE-LEARNING IN EDUCATIONAL CURRICULA AND LEARNING PROGRAMMES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Policy-makers should enable schools, through financial and policy support, to create a space in educational curricula and learning programs for diverse service-learning experiences set in a 'real-life' context with not-for-profit community partners that combine both formal and informal learning outcomes. Students will work together and are empowered to take action, learning about themselves and the community by reflecting on their experiences, while also developing their knowledge, skills and social and civic competences. Secondary school's teachers will practise an educational method that merges formal (structured) learning and informal learning within a framework of community partnership. They will guide students in 'hands-on' experiences in the surrounding community, to pursue self-designed projects that affect social change; provide additional perspective on what students are learning, empower and expand civic engagement, while developing a greater understanding of their community and engagement also in the future. In short, teachers will become transformational educators, directly architecting future societal attitudes and behaviours and helping to unleash the often-missed potential of students who do not learn solely by traditional methodology.

2.3 BUDGETS SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO PILOT SMALL SCALE SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMMES

Policy makers should ensure that funding is available for the piloting and evaluation of small scale schemes, as an essential step in collecting knowledge related to best practice and evidence-based practice for the implementation of service-learning programmes, which can further improve future programmes and better inform future policy decisions. Furthermore, these piloting schemes will increase awareness of service-learning programmes, generating a conversation within the public sphere about the benefits of service-learning and further opening the door to successful future programmes. Universities could collaborate and/or provide support and training to evaluation and impact measurement processes. Policy makers must understand that service learning is ultimately based on the power of relationships to create change in society. Resources that support time, effort and energy will be required to initiate, nurture and sustain those relationships.

2.4 AWARENESS AND USE OF THE "PLACE" MODEL OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Policymakers should enable and encourage the usage of the PLACE model, which focuses on enabling young people (secondary school level) to acquire social and civic competencies, fostering knowledge and ownership of values and fundamental rights. Through the use of the PLACE model secondary school teachers can easily create quality opportunities for young people to engage with community partners on local and global challenges within a structured environment that fosters both formal and non-formal learning and, in this way, enhancing social and civic competences. The PLACE model brings secondary level schools and universities together at the nexus of community needs and service-learning. This model offers the possibility to cooperate with universities and to set up sustainable relationships with them. This is done through the engagement of role models who were engaged in service-learning at the university and who can help facilitate and guide the service-learning at the secondary school. Role models will be willing, as volunteers or as part of their university course, to share their time, experience and enthusiasm with younger peers in secondary schools and accompany them as they go through their own service-learning experience.

2.5 PROMOTE AND FUND THE ROLE MODELS IN RELATION TO SERVICE LEARNING

The university students (undergraduate or postgraduate) with previous experience in service-learning programmes and who can support school students in meaningful learning experiences set in a 'real-life' context are important for the PLACE model. They have an influential presence as an enabler for social change, by supporting the successful implementation of the PLACE model in their local environment. It is important policy-makers enable role models to be part of the SL, because they will contribute to a youth led education initiative that stimulates wider civic engagement, they will receive training to empower school students in service-learning project implementation and they will support

teachers, students and community partners, on various projects that respond to issues in the local communities.

2.6 PROMOTE THE BENEFITS OF SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMMES THAT CONNECT UNIVERSITIES AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS COLLABORATING TO IMPLEMENT SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMMES ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS.

For some participants this kind of engaged teaching and learning is related to the fulfilment of the universities third mission and thus institutional intentions to address societal needs and their contribution to solving identified problems in the community. As one of the participants highlighted - "The objectives of the universities are to promote knowledge, research, and transfer of that knowledge into solutions for society's needs and/or problems". Following the idea of the universities third mission, some of the participants discuss the importance of developing long-term university-community partnerships. Another institutionally related benefit recognised by the study of participants is connected with service-learning actually contributing to and enhancing universities' reputation, not only in local communities, but on the national and international scale as well. The PLACE model pro-actively allows for an efficient transfer of knowledge from the university to schools to students and then from those same students back through to the university.

2.7 SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN THE CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR TO ENGAGE WITH SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELIVERING SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAMMES

Strong partnerships and collaboration between the civil society sector and schools is essential in ensuring the successful implementation of service-learning programmes. Policy makers should therefore support the sector in engaging with schools, encourage partnerships with give the local community, third sector, and participants a sense of ownership regarding their contributions made through service-learning programmes. Furthermore, policy makers should ensure that the civil society sector's ability to identify, and find solutions for, issues within the local community is strengthened as much as possible. Doing so will better ensure that service-learning programmes bring the most benefit to both the local community and to the pupils who are taking part in it.

2.8 SUPPORT SCHOOLS IN ENSURING TEACHERS HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS

Policymakers should enable and support schools in ensuring that teachers leading service- learning projects are equipped with the right knowledge, competences, awareness and skills. Schools must allow teachers the capacity to engage with this work as core to their role and for that work not to be seen as an extracurricular addition. Studies have shown that one of the biggest reported factors in the success of service-learning participation, is the motivation, enthusiasm, and engagement of local/community issues of teachers themselves. Supporting training programmes and offering meaningful recognition to the efforts of teachers involved in service-learning can help achieve this level of motivation, thereby ensuring students are also motivated and get the most out of their service-learning experience.

2.9 GIVE SUPPORT TO THE INTEGRATION OF PUPIL VOLUNTEERING WITHIN SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS

Policymakers should support schools in providing integrated schemes of pupil volunteering within service-learning. This has been highlighted through research as a hugely beneficial way of giving students an experiential learning experience which builds their engagement in the community and active citizenship skills, while also being a fun and rewarding experience. Bringing in the benefits of volunteering to the service-learning context will only enhance these factors, while also offering students a chance to gain a sense of self-satisfaction and recognition through seeing the results of their volunteering actions benefiting the local community. For some of the participants previous volunteering experience associated with NGOs in their local communities was a stimulating factor for engaging in creating service-learning courses/projects, as they described service-learning as "a way to address two objectives with one shot, that is, integrate learning and social commitment." For some, motivation for introducing service-learning in their own courses was the connection of learning with real life, "which translates into genuine connections between academic learning and real-world environments." Involving students in service-learning is an effective way of education for volunteering.

2.10 RECOGNIZE AND AWARD BEST PRACTICES OF SERVICE-LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

To support schools in service-learning it is important to recognize the effort of teachers and students and the impact of that effort. It is proper also to motivate others by awarding the good practices of service-learning.

Annex: Project Description and project objectives

This project explores service-learning outside of Higher Education (where it is most commonly found in Europe). The existing models, types, trends & practices within and outside of the SLUSIK consortium, are published in the State of the Art Report. Good practices from the 5 partner universities were used as the basis of the development of the upscaled "PLACE" model. In order to support its widespread take up, an accompanying ToolKit (in 5 languages) has been developed to build capacity in the secondary school teachers and role models responsible for the delivery of this innovative educational programme that relies heavily on non-formal education methodologies.

Secondary schools are partnering with the project partners and community organisations to test the upscaled method in pilot actions in 5 participating countries. Control groups have been established alongside the participating students in order to better measure the usefulness of the model. The evaluation methodology relies on self assessments from the students and observations from the teachers. The results of the evaluation provided evidence that was used as the basis for the advocacy work with policymakers for policy change for higher investment in service learning programmes in secondary schools in Europe.

The partnership has implemented Local & European Advocacy Plan. First, they identified the specific policy objectives that they want to achieve, then they identified the stakeholders and target audience and thirdly, approaching the stakeholders and target audience. The partners approached: EG Volunteer Centres, Specific NGOs, specific education providers; Regional/National for Education & Parliaments; Social Service actors; Public and private stakeholders & local actors and finally 5 schools to adopt the SLUSIK methodology. Partners also attended events already foreseen on the local/national or European level that included input from the SLUSIK experience in those events. They also organised multiplier events that involved at least representatives from 15 schools, 5 universities, 5 policymakers, and 5 local NGOs/CSOs to foster the cooperation between stakeholders of education providers, policymaking.

Partners wanted policymakers to gain the opportunity to observe the process of application of new teaching and learning methods in schools and will gain deeper understanding on actions needed in order to advance the adaptation and mainstreaming of role models component and NFE methodology in school education. After the project has ended, based on the results achieved and evidence gathered, policy makers of the local, national and international context will gain new resources to include in the formal curricula that will enhance social and civic competences, fostering knowledge, understanding and ownership of values and fundamental rights.

State-of-Art Report on service learning in Europe

This Report has been successfully completed and provided an overview of the approaches to service learning used by project partners and beyond. The report enables more stakeholders not so familiar with service learning to have a general overview and also understand in more detail specific situations in 6 European countries as regards service learning with specific reference to secondary education level. The report is research describing the state of the art around Europe concerning service learning and its contribution to social inclusion of young people including the examples of good practices as well as the lessons learnt from other EU funded projects tackling the same topics.

SLUSIK PLACE Model

The SLUSIK "Place" Model (Upscaled model(s) of service learning) is a service learning curriculum/education programme to be used in secondary schools for students aged 12-16 incorporating a role model component and NFE methodology. It will also impact the learning and social inclusion practices of participating stakeholders from the NGO and public policy sectors. The intention of this project output, which has been successfully completed, was to incorporate the experiences and knowledge of project partners (i.e. with successfully completed service learning models at higher education level training courses) into a single upscaled model suitable for use in secondary education. Central to the model was the service learning community-based project and various perspectives had to be reconciled in the model preparation, e.g. regarding what aspects the preparation phase should entail. On one hand, the practicability argument would favour a secondary school and university developing cooperation with a non-governmental organisation at which students could perform their service learning projects. On the other hand, the student-engagement argument would favour giving students the freedom to pick non-profit organisations of their own choice based on the outcomes of their own needs assessment activities.

SLUSIK ToolKit (Teacher and Role Model Training Toolkit)

The Toolkit builds the capacity of teachers and role models to deliver the upscaled model of Service Learning "PLACE". It's a training programme for school teachers and role models involved in the programme in order to prepare the teachers and role models to deliver service-learning modules in schools to young people. This freely available Toolkit focussed on building capacity for service learning in secondary schools is the first of its kind in Europe. The partners maintain the high ambition for it to be readily applicable in various countries and cultural settings, by schools of different sizes, and operating under different legislations according to different school year calendars, the project consortium. The Toolkit manages to strike a delicate balance between being detailed enough to be ready for practice and flexible enough not to create unnecessary constraints. The Toolkit has been translated into 4 languages: Croatian, German, Slovak and Spanish and has been used as a basis for training of teachers and role models in the first pilot phase.

Upscaled Model Pilots

The upscaled service-learning models have been tested in secondary schools in 5 countries enabling the gathering of evidence concerning the effectiveness of the models for combating social exclusion and supporting the acquisition of social and civic competences. Piloting has been successfully rolled out even if cooperation with secondary schools and not for profit community social partners (CSOs) (or the engagement of role models for that matter) had not previously been customary practice for some of the partners. The entry bar to launch such cooperation has been negotiated in a way that meets the objectives for the piloting evaluation and does not overburden schools with very high demands on resources, with some variation in dynamic among countries. Each partner established cooperation with two schools to ensure project indicators for piloting are met. The focus in evaluating the pilot was put on students and their self-assessment as well as observation from the teachers.

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