Engaged Learning in Belgium

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Courtney Marsh and Noel Klima

1.1 Introduction Engaged Learning

Increasingly, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are expected to interact responsibly with society and meet societal challenges (Molas-Gallart et al., 2002). Not only is research required to demonstrate the societal relevance and its value to society (Bornmann, 2013), but also in teaching a rise can be observed in interaction with societal actors related to real-world challenges and contexts instead of purely theory-based teaching. Engaged Learning refers to a wide range of methods, programmes, and initiatives with which HEIs try to meet the needs of students and society. The following definition embraces a variety of practices that address society in teaching such as Community Service Learning (CSL), Science Shops, or others intending to interact with society in a teaching context. Though the terms CSL and Engaged Learning will be used interchangeably throughout this book, they all refer to a common set of core values. Namely that:

> *Students apply the theory learned at Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to a context outside of HEI by addressing societal concerns, challenges or needs, while producing knowledge in an equitable, mutually beneficial partnership.* (Chmelka et al., 2020, p.8)

Previous work in this domain has been published by the Erasmus+ Communities and Students Together (CaST) project.[1] The initiatives covered were wide-ranging in practices from Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Finland, Spain, and Italy (Chmelka et al., 2020). Within the scope of the CaST project, while there were recurring themes, there were no real patterns present, thus cementing the flexible and diverse nature of Engaged Learning across Europe (Chmelka et al., 2020; Marsh et al., 2021).

One common area taken from the European context was the benefit to the educators and/or staff associated with the initiatives (Marsh et al., 2021). Many of the stated benefits in this category focused on publications and other, often emphasised in academia, important output opportunities or testing of their own research. Many of the

[1] https://www.cast-euproject.eu/.

stated benefits were tenuous, and even those that seemed more fulfilling to the staff involved (i.e. connecting to the community, experiencing a new type of teaching, updating course material based on student/community involvement), were largely based on benevolent acts with little recompense despite going above and beyond their required and/or expected obligations. The involvement and time put into these courses are often far beyond what would be expected of 'traditional' courses found in universities, and yet these initiatives are undertaken with typically no extra assistance or funds provided (Marsh et al., 2021).

From a broader European context, perhaps the most common theme is the diversity of Engaged Learning policies within each of the countries (Marsh et al., 2021; Chmelka et al., 2020). These variances further cement the idea that Engaged Learning across Europe are quite diverse.

1.2 Themes/Common Features of Engaged Learning in Europe

The varied nature of Engaged Learning courses observed is seen as a strengthening factor for the state of Engaged Learning across Europe. The examples reviewed illuminated the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration among students within the Universities as well as the communities they are working together with. The focus within these approaches is how students and communities come together to learn with and from one another to work toward a larger purpose. Engaged Learning thrives in its uniqueness and flexibility, and those principles will be explored further specifically in the Belgian context.

Perhaps one of the biggest takeaways from Marsh et al. (2021) is that without the dedication of the staff involved, there simply would be no initiatives of which to speak and this is expounded on in the Belgian context in this publication. The staff involved throughout the six countries were paramount in the success of the initiatives, without whom they more than likely would not have begun (Marsh et al.,

2021). This even more so highlights the necessity of the dedicated staff members who keep the initiatives alive to benefit all involved.

This considered, one of the issues evident when looking at Engaged Learning initiatives is the lack of incentives or rewards given to the staff involved with the initiatives from the University or otherwise. Typically, the benefits to both the students and community with Engaged Learning initiatives are demonstrated very clearly, but the benefits to the staff can be less clear. Of course, to consider is the potential for publication and personal fulfilment of undertaking such a task, but this is on a personal level rather than an institutional one. This then begs the question, is this enough? Is the intense, and time consuming, dedication for personal fulfilment enough to keep an Engaged Learning initiative sustained; further, what happens when those involved leave the institution? While Marsh et al. (2021) have not necessarily provided the answers to these questions in the European context, this same question will be asked in the Belgian context. However, similarly, if not to answer this question we hope, at the very least, to identify many of the benefits and challenges which have been brought to the forefront to help further reflection.

Funding is another aspect of Engaged Learning across the European countries represented that is an important, yet widely varied, factor. From the authors' experience, Engaged Learning, when officially recognised, is done on a mostly ad hoc basis within universities and varies, even more, when looked at from a country-level perspective. Certainly, within the EU there is no systematic approach to Engaged Learning at the HEI level (Marsh et al., 2021; Chmelka et al., 2020). Though these initiatives take a lot of personal dedication and commitment to oversee the completion, they cannot be sustained without funding and this is a serious issue many HEIs face. Strategic planning for how to plan successful and sustainable Engaged Learning initiatives with tight budgets is an important consideration that perhaps universities could, or should, be more involved with. The diverse Belgian approach to funding is indeed something that will be further looked at in this book.

1.3 Belgian Education Context

Though Belgium is divided into three regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels), the education systems are typically divided by language communities (Flemish, French, and German) with Brussels comprising both French and Flemish-speaking schooling systems. Flanders, and thus the Flemish-speaking education sector, constitutes the largest proportion of the population, followed by French-speaking Wallonia, and then the German-speaking areas which comprise only 5%. There are differences in education systems between the two main regions, due to different response rates on the call for contributions, the Flemish context provides most examples in this overview, as well as within this book, with regard given to Brussels.[2] The Flemish higher education system consists of universities, higher education institutions, and arts colleges.

Because of the autonomous nature of higher education systems in Flanders, the use of Engaged Learning in universities is quite fragmented. Social engagement (maatschappelijk engagement) or Community Service-Learning (CSL) are often used as the equivalent to Engaged Learning in Flemish universities and this is indeed seen in the case studies presented in this book. This considered, many initiatives identified to fit our definition of Engaged Learning are not necessarily marked as such. In other words, one would not know the programme they are taking part in is technically an Engaged Learning module if they were not already familiar with the terminology. There are, in some cases, exceptions for instances using and labelling according to the Community Service Learning (CSL) methodology.[3] The lack of consistency in marking these programmes may also come down to a lack of familiarity on the part of the educator that stems from a lack of steady provisions for what Engaged Learning is at a higher level. However, the takeaway from this is that Engaged Learning initiatives

[2] See footnote 5.

[3] See for example Ghent University https://www.ugent.be/nl/univgent/waarvoor-staat-ugent/onderwijsbeleid/doelstellingen/talentontwikkeling/community-service-learning.

do exist, successfully, in Flanders and Brussels, regardless of their official status as such. Recently, CSL administrators started an informal network of Flemish CSL support professionals exchanging on good practices through conferences and regular meetings.[4]

In terms of funding, higher education systems are granted a lump sum with mostly autonomous decision making on how to allocate the funding. Though they are supervised by the Commissioner of the Flemish Government and an inspector from Federal Public Service Finance, the power is limited to provide oversight rather than limit university autonomy. While external control over financial decisions is limited, so too are controls over course development so long as they meet the criteria necessary for the structured degree requirements for all universities. The universities determine programme content and learning outcomes as well as the teaching methods and tools; however, because of this freedom in content decisions, it means there is no standardised use of Engaged Learning in Flemish (or Belgian) higher education settings, which is a core component to how these initiatives are approached and can be seen throughout the rest of this book.

Thus far, there has been no in-depth review of Engaged Learning initiatives within Belgium specifically. This book encompasses eight diverse Engaged Learning Initiatives from six higher education systems across Belgium (Flanders in Brussels). We are, however, notably missing the inclusion from universities in the Southern (Walloon) region of Belgium.[5] What follows below is an overview of each of the initiatives that can be found in the following chapters.

[4] https://www.servicelearningvlaanderen.be/.

[5] Several attempts were made to reach individuals and universities in Wallonia without success. Therefore, unfortunately, no Walloon examples are presented in this book.

1.4 Case Studies from the Participating Institutions

1.4.1 Ghent University - Community Service Learning: Engaging Social Science Students

In light of the call for Higher Education (HE) to become more engaged, the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University offers Community Service Learning (CSL) in the context of several modules at the master's level. Since its inception in 2015, the faculty's approach to CSL has not shied away from acknowledging that pedagogical choices about student engagement in HE are inevitably entwined with issues of justice and wider, political choices. The modules consist of three components: an academic component, a practical-professional component, and a component of organised reflection. By asking students to address a specific question of a societal organisation, students not only learn to apply their knowledge and skills to a 'real-world' problem but are also encouraged to reflect on the structural issues concerning social justice. An in-depth evaluation of the modules suggests that the learning outcomes are strong, particularly with regard to the sense of (self-) efficacy. Given the positive feedback of all actors involved (students and organisations), this indicates that the pedagogic approach (three-fold structure of the modules) offers strong learning opportunities.

1.4.2 Odisee University of Applied Sciences - Community Service Learning: An Appropriate Model for Social Work Education in Complex Urban Settings? Findings from Brussels

This chapter outlines a short case description of a possible situation students can be confronted with, illustrating urban complexities before Situating the CSL project in the international course in which it was embedded (setting the context). A discussion of the hypothesis that CSL is a promising model of social work education in complex urban settings is constructed by describing four literature-based hypotheses:

- Students would better sense the ethical urgency to come to a fresh and renewed understanding of urban complexities.
- The learning process would become cooperative and enhance the capability of matching appropriately different kinds of knowledge.
- Attributing a crucial role to collectively and individually reflecting on lived experiences would enhance the capacity to retrieve practice wisdom that, at least partly, address urban complexities.
- CSL would enhance critical awareness of the ambivalent, and conflicting nature of learning processes in complex and diverse urban settings.

Following this is an introduction to the setting of Brussels (generally) and the two sites in which the initiative took place (concretely) as well as a reflection on the promises and pitfalls of introducing CSL as a model to prepare social work students to work in complex urban settings (comparing the four main hypotheses with the experiences in the field).

1.4.3 Ghent University - Community Dentistry UGent

Community Dentistry is an example of CSL being taught at the Dentistry Department at Ghent University. It aims to enhance the contact and mutual understanding between future dentists and specific underserved social subgroups in society, including people in deprivation, patients with disabilities, and frail elderly. CSL is incorporated in the undergraduate training by a real-life encounter in a non-judging context, where the focus gradually shifts from theoretical cases to structured outreaching community projects.

-1st Bachelor year: tutorial sessions in which patient cases are discussed in small groups, accompanied by an experienced tutor.
-2nd Bachelor year: Health-promoting School concept: students have to develop an educational programme on oral health and healthy diet, and have to teach it in a primary school with high social and ethnic diversity.
-1st Master year: In small groups of 3-4, students have to develop a specific intervention within a social organisation of their choice. Their

project has to structurally improve the oral health (or its determinants) of the target population. The intervention is developed over the entire academic year and follows the precede-proceed model, including problem analysis, determinant analysis, implementation and process, and effect evaluation.

1.4.4 Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) - Exploring the Use of Walking Methods to Set Up Reciprocal CERL Partnerships in Brussels

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) is pioneering so-called sustainable transition labs: learning networks of students, researchers, teaching staff, and local community members who seek to tackle local, urban challenges together in an impactful and sustainable way. Authentic CERL partnerships require carefully maintaining reciprocity and equality, especially when fragile urban communities are involved. They are challenging to initiate and perpetuate, often resulting in misunderstandings or tensions between the different actors that take part in them.

To navigate these challenges in the exploratory stages of CERL-partnerships, we have experimented with walking methodologies. Interviewing on foot is on the rise in qualitative social research. It is said to have the potential 1) to explore the manifold ways in which people connect to themselves, local spaces, and communities; 2) to map out existing social ecosystems; and 3) to build rapport between researchers and participants. Considered associative and inclusive, they are praised for carrying the potential of institutional and methodological innovation. Reflecting on eight walking interviews through Brussels, it is argued that the walking interview can be a fruitful methodology to handle the different tasks that need to be simultaneously tackled in the first stage of establishing CERL-partnerships: 1) mapping networks of actors and organisations; 2) exploring divergent subjective understandings of the neighbourhood; 3) validating experiential knowledge and finding ways to connect it to academic knowledge; 4) building interpersonal relationships and trust; 5) being reflexive about positionality and power imbalances; and 6) eventually finding a niche where the University could engage itself in

the future. To be fruitful, however, both CERL-projects, as well as walking methods, need to be well thought-through and carefully catered to each unique encounter. If not, they risk being ineffective or even conflicting and harmful.

1.4.5 KU Leuven - Community-Engaged Architectural Design Learning in the Solidary Mobile Housing project

In this chapter, we introduce 'Community-engaged Architectural Design Learning' (CEADL): a fluid concept, meandering through different subjects and academic years, and combining Engaged Learning with outreach-based community work and critical spatial practice. We elaborate on how CEADL enabled several students from the Faculty of Architecture of KU Leuven to get involved as fully-fledged project partners in the 'Solidary Mobile Housing' (SMH) project. After briefly presenting the SMH project, we explain how practice-based, design-driven participatory action research cycles transformed courses to facilitate community-Engaged Learning. We elaborate on the approach and methods we used, the output generated, and the impact on the various involved parties. Through this discussion, we illustrate how Engaged Learning can contribute to students' academic and personal growth, play an integrative role across disciplines, and instigate the collaboration of various actors, from different sectors, including vulnerable end-users. We conclude by reflecting on the challenges we faced and potential directions to address these and introduce suggestions for making a broader impact on society through CEADL.

1.4.6 VIVES University of Applied Sciences - Toward a connected curriculum for Interdisciplinary Engaged Learning in VIVES University of Applied Sciences

Since its inception in 2013 as a merger of two (and originally 12) university colleges with seven campuses in West-Flanders, there has been a focus on interdisciplinary learning, and connecting with societal actors. Meanwhile, the connected curriculum framework (Fung, 2017)

created a space for higher education institutions to rethink their curricula and improve the relationship between research and education. The educational vision 'Drive, Connection, Innovation', reflects these dynamics. In the period 2013-2022, the educational policy plan focused on three dimensions within the keyword Connection: (1) learning from and with each other; (2) collaboration with educational partners to support students in making the best choices; and (3) continuous dialogue with the field of work and society/societal actors.

This led to some concrete actions and results on different levels. At the level of the different bachelor degrees, students' societal engagement can be formally recognised with ECTS. The notion of the connected curriculum has been taken up in different study areas creating interdisciplinary courses (e.g. emerging technologies++ in the area of industrial science and technology, or the interdisciplinary bachelor thesis in the area of social work). Finally, at the level of the Institution, compulsory institution-wide courses have been created for students in the last phase of their programme.

This chapter starts from the educational vision of VIVES and the connected curriculum framework and outlines how this led to changes within the Institution before going deeper into the institution-wide courses and the interdisciplinary courses in the different study areas. These examples will be enriched with the experiences of the lecturers of these courses. The chapter concludes with a glimpse toward the future. Engaged connected learning will be more prominent in the coming updated educational vision of VIVES and some insight into how we will proceed in promoting Engaged Learning in the near future is included.

1.4.7 Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) - Retooling Higher Education in an Age of Rising Inequalities, a (Post)-COVID-19 Reflection on the Importance of Engaged Urban Pedagogies

The global pandemic has amplified the need for a more drastic re-appreciation of the so-called 'social dimension' of higher education.

The ministerial communiqués of the European Higher Education Areas describe this social dimension as ‘the creation of an inclusive educational landscape’, emphasising the need to ensure equity of access, participation, and successful completion for learners with increasingly diverse backgrounds. In this chapter, it will be argued that shaping socially responsible and just universities is not only an issue of ‘access’ but also ‘access to what’. Drawing on local experiences and relevant literature, this contribution explores in what manner urban universities can act as ‘critical change agents' building on engaged pedagogies. It will be argued that European universities need to move beyond overly optimistic and simplistic rhetoric of ‘doing good’ and adopt more self-critical approaches to realise their progressive potential. Appeals for reclaiming 'the right to the city' will be paralleled with a call for a more active consideration of 'the right to the university', advancing this intertwined struggle to prepare a more desirable post-pandemic future.

1.4.8 Ghent University - “Coaching and Diversity”: Curriculum-Based Engaged Learning at Ghent University

In this chapter, we focus on curriculum-based Engaged Learning, initiated in working with students involved through the course ‘Coaching and Diversity’. This is a university-wide organised course, running since 2013 at Ghent University (UGent). Student-mentors take this course to be trained in providing support to newly arriving students at the level of study guidance, finding their way around the city of Ghent, and getting to know the wider UGent community. The course is a combination of online academic components, small group supervision, and portfolio tasks besides the regular meetings between mentor and mentees. Community service learning is put central with a focus on engagement with diverse communities. The course cannot run without the involvement of student trainers, support, and teaching staff exchanging expertise concerning the diverse needs of students. It illustrates the reciprocity and entanglements between the students, faculties, and the UGent community. We start with an

overview, situating the course, including essential aspects related to running this course within the Higher Education context. We explain and share the experiences of all those involved before sharing our thoughts concerning impact, necessary commitment, and difficulties in finding indispensable support within a highly competitive environment.

Chapter 2 Community Service Learning: Engaging Social Science Students

Ghent University

Ernst Buyl (Faculty Education Services), Lesley Hustinx (Department of Sociology), Tony Valcke (Department of Political Sciences), Fabienne Bossuyt (Department of Political Sciences), Melissa Ceuterick (Department of Sociology), and Liselot Hudders (Department of Communication Sciences)

2.1 Introduction

Community engagement of students in (higher) education is a 'hot topic'. An awareness has emerged that educational institutions and practices cannot see themselves as detached from society. At all levels, including the OECD[6], there is now an acknowledgement that educators should not merely transfer and assess academic and cognitive competencies in learners. Rather, a critical sense of citizenship and professional competencies are needed to enable young people to function in a quickly evolving, interconnected, and super-diverse global society. This renewed focus on this aspect of its mission is particularly relevant for the higher education sector, where the forces of neoliberalism have also affected the world of learning and teaching. For instance, consumerist approaches to university education are increasingly prevalent amongst students, leading to corresponding expectations about teaching (Wong and Chu, 2019). Similarly, the assessment of research output encourages lecturers to opt for merely safe, strategic approaches to teaching in which risks are avoided, a compliant mode of teaching identified as 'vanilla teaching' (Harland and Wald, 2018). These structural challenges cannot be sufficiently addressed by advocating different pedagogies alone. However, as a counterweight, we would like to share our experience with Community Service Learning (CSL) as a form of Engaged Learning which radically re-centres notions of citizenship, community involvement, and an emancipatory re-thinking of pedagogy. By sharing our pedagogy and a number of findings, we hope to inspire colleagues.

2.1.1 CSL in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences

2.1.1.1 Development

The Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University is one of the pioneers of CSL in the Flemish (Belgian) HE landscape. Unlike

[6] https://www.oecd.org/pisa/innovation/global-competence/

their counterparts in the USA, Flemish universities do not have a tradition of credit-bearing community engagement. This is also the case for our faculty, which offers study programmes in Communication Sciences, Political Sciences, and Sociology at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It was only in the academic year 2015-16 that CSL was formally introduced in a study programme, namely in the Master's programme of Sociology. A major impetus was given through the strategic plan of Ghent University (2012-16) and it served as a pilot of Ghent University as part of the Erasmus+ project Europe Engage.[7] In the subsequent years, CSL was gradually scaled up throughout the faculty and it is now offered as an elective module in all Master's programmes taught at the faculty.

As will be explained in the subsequent sections, the philosophy and practical approach to Engaged Learning, as enacted in our CSL modules, encourages our students to expand and critically apply their existing academic knowledge of society and social scientific research to a real, problem-based context at either a societal organisation or a public organisation. This specific approach has its roots in an understanding of citizenship education, which does not shy away from acknowledging that pedagogical choices about student engagement in (higher) education are inevitably entwined with questions about justice and wider, political choices. Therefore, it is necessary to first consider these 'politics of citizenship education'.

2.1.1.2 CSL and the politics of citizenship education

A central point of departure of Engaged Learning in HE should be that citizenship education is not a neutral or strictly formal pedagogic practice. Instead, it is an inherently political activity that embodies a "spectrum of ideas about what good citizenship *is* and what good citizens *do*" (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p.237 - emphasis in original). Given that a central aim of Engaged Learning is to attain

[7] https://www.eoslhe.eu/europe-engage/

competencies in students that relate to their participation as citizens in democratic societies, the design of civic education courses unavoidably involves active deliberation and choice among educators about the kind of citizens that are needed to achieve democratic ideals. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) therefore rightly speak of a 'politics of educating for democracy' in which different conceptions of citizenship can be embraced, with different learning outcomes and political consequences as a result. Based on an empirical study of service-learning programmes in the US, these authors delineated three dominant visions on citizenship as reflected in the diverse practices observed: the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen. Before we elaborate on the three visions, we must emphasise that the context of HE (and the role of government therein) significantly differs between the US and Belgium/Europe, which means we must be careful when interpreting and transferring findings. However, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) do provide meaningful angles to look at contrasting conceptions of citizenship education.

First, the *personally responsible citizen* reflects a more liberal and privatised conception of citizenship. This kind of citizen acts individually by taking personal responsibility in one's own neighbourhood and community (e.g. picking up litter, giving blood, volunteering to help those in need). It is a duty-based conception of citizenship, focused on obeying laws, paying taxes, and being economically active. According to Westheimer and Kahne (2004), programmes that aim to nurture personally responsible citizens build on the core assumption that "to solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community" (p.240). Pedagogic practices will focus on building civic virtues such as honesty, integrity, compassion, self-discipline, and hard work.

Second, the *participatory citizen* mirrors republican ideals of good citizenship in terms of active participation in civil society and politics

at the local, regional, or national level. Core assumptions underlying this type of civic education are that "to solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures" (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p.240). Educational programmes aimed at developing participatory citizens consequently focus on teaching civic knowledge and civic skills necessary for active participation in community organisations and for organising community initiatives. This includes knowledge of how governments and organisations work, how to plan and mobilise for collective action, and developing cooperative and leadership skills (e.g. how to run a meeting).

Third, the *justice-oriented citizen* is inspired by more radical-democratic conceptions of citizenship aimed at disrupting the status quo and seeking fundamental social change. The central conviction of justice-oriented educators is that "to solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time" (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p.240). Students, therefore, need to be trained to critically analyse the structural root causes of social problems and build competencies to effect social change. Rather than the charity and volunteering of the personally responsible citizen, and the participatory citizen's community organising efforts alleviating existing social needs, the justice-oriented citizen will seek involvement in social movements aiming for systemic, justice-oriented change.

Given the complexity of the present-day challenges (climate change, sustainability, structural inequalities, migration …), it is logical that the approach which underpins our CSL modules should gravitate toward the third conception. This is particularly the case for Master's students in the social sciences. For this reason, partnerships were sought and developed with those organisations willing and able to offer these

educational opportunities to our students, such as NGOs or public authorities (e.g. city council departments).

2.2 Overview of the Chosen Initiative

Our CSL activities are fully embedded in modules at the Master's level. These modules are the following:

- **Seminar Political Sociology: Community Service Learning** (5 ECTS; Master Sociology -major Political Sociology)
- **Seminar on Social Demography and Health Sociology** (5 ECTS; Master Sociology -major Health and Social Demography)
- **Community Service Learning: Seminar Political Sciences** (7 ECTS; elective module in the Master Political Sciences, the Master EU Studies and Master Conflict and Development)
- **Strategic Communication Challenges** (7 ECTS; Master in Communication Science -main subject Communication Management)
- **Community Service Learning: Citizenship in a Digital Society** (7 ECTS; elective module in all Master's programmes in Communication Science)

The first CSL module in our faculty was the 'Seminar Political Sociology', which was introduced in the academic year 2015-16. The following year, it was joined by a second sociology module: 'Seminar on Social Demography and Health Sociology'. In 2017, CSL was introduced to students in Political Sciences and EU Studies: 'Community Service Learning: Seminar Political Sciences'. From 2022 onwards, this module will also be included in the Master's programme in Conflict and Development. Finally, since 2019, communication science students have been given the opportunity to participate in CSL, initially only through a designated track of the existing module 'Strategic Communication Challenges'. In 2021, a separate module with an exclusive CSL-focus was set up, namely 'Community Service Learning: Citizenship in a Digital Society'. The two sociology modules

run during a single term, the other modules are spread out across the whole academic year. Despite differences in terms of academic background, the approach and structure of all CSL modules offered within the faculty remain analogous.

2.2.1 Structure of the CSL-modules

Since their inception, the CSL modules at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University have consisted of three major components, which all CSL students participate in throughout the year or the term: an '*academic component*', a '*practical-professional component*', and a '*reflective component*'. The three components run concurrently throughout the year or the term. Although the components interact, each component fulfils a specific function within the pedagogic approach of our CSL modules.

1. **The academic component** consists of a limited number of plenary sessions, led or coordinated by the lecturer. These sessions focus on preparing the master's students for their practical engagement in the field, regarding their knowledge and skills specific to their course. The topics, which are discussed in these sessions or lectures may include, for instance, citizenship and citizenship education, structure and governance of the not-for-profit sector and/or local authorities, decision-making, and communication strategies in organisations. In addition, a small number of plenary response seminars are organised. In this way, these lectures and seminars aim to stimulate students to apply their previously acquired forms of social scientific knowledge and specific research skills. Students are thus encouraged to consult and synthesise those forms of academic research relevant to the needs of the organisation and their chosen project.
2. **The practical-professional component** consists of the students' actual interaction *with* and *for* a societal or public organisation. After the allocation of students (either as individuals or as a small team) to an organisation, the students make the first appointment

with the organisation in which the details of the assignment and its expected 'deliverables' or end product are discussed and agreed upon. Subsequently, under normal circumstances, 'field work' takes place (9-10 weeks). During this time the students spend 40 hours (half a day per week) at the organisation itself. When this is not possible, alternative forms of interaction are scheduled (e.g. weekly video calls between the organisation and the student).

The time spent there is employed to immerse oneself in the ways of working of the specific organisation. The main goal, however, remains to use this time to address the assignment through a form of research. After a comprehensive review of the relevant social scientific literature, quantitative (e.g. surveys) or qualitative data (e.g. interviews) are collected and analysed. Finally, at the end of the term or year, students give a formal presentation of their 'end product', a document that addresses the given assignment and in which (policy) advice is given to the organisation. This presentation is also attended by the lecturer.

3. **The reflective component** links the academic and practical components of the module. Throughout the year or the term, the reflective component aims to stimulate a sense of questioning amongst the students. This happens through several reflection sessions. In these sessions, a formal reflection model is used, such as Korthagen's reflection cycle (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005). After an introductory session on reflection, students are asked to reflect on specific topics. How do they expect to apply their personal skills, values, and attitudes to their CSL project? What does 'being a citizen' mean to them, and why? How is the cooperation with the organisation going? Which problems do they encounter with their assignment and/or in their cooperation with the organisation?

At the end of the module, a concluding reflection session aims to probe into the changes in the student's attitudes by asking them to consider how their CSL-experience strengthened their personal vision on

citizenship. Additionally, they are challenged to consider how and whether this experience changed their thinking about the relevance of their discipline. On average, a student takes part in three reflection sessions. These sessions take the form of student-led teaching, as they are coordinated by the teacher training students in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences. Similar to the two other components, the reflective component is also assessed. This happens utilising submitted documents (such as a reflection essay) and by participation in the sessions.

Table 1 illustrates the practical roadmap of our CSL trajectories for one of our CSL-modules, namely the *'Seminar Political Sociology: Community Service Learning*', as it was organised during the first term of the academic year 2020-21. Although some details differ between the different CSL modules, it gives a good overview of the organisation of the modules' three-fold composition and the types of activities students engage in throughout the term or the year.

Week	Date	Activity or deadline	Location
WEEK 1	22 Sept	Introduction to the course, introductory lesson on citizenship and participation	On campus
	22 Sept	Presentation of available CSL-projects	On campus
	25 Sept	Deadline to indicate student preference for a project	/
WEEK 2	28 Sept	Allocation of projects to student/small teams	/
	29 Sept	Citizenship Education: Theory and Practice	On campus
	By appointment	Students visit the organisation in their teams to develop their focus and planning	At the organisation
WEEK 3	06 Oct	Lesson: sociology of the not-for-profit sector and volunteering. *Feedback about the focus of the task and a 'literature brainstorm'*	On campus

WEEK 4	By appointment	Start field work: **9 participation sessions of 3 hours each** (continues until week 12)	At the organisation
	13 Oct	**Lesson on reflection** by teacher training students and presentation of the projects by the CSL-students	On campus
	16 Oct	Deadline to submit planning (includes participation planning @the organisation): 1 to 2 pages	/
WEEK 5	20 Oct	Feedback on planning + *response seminar 1*	On campus
WEEK 6	27 Oct	**Reflection session** coached by teacher training students	On campus
WEEK 9	17 Nov	**Reflection session** coached by teacher training students + response seminar 2	On campus
WEEK 12	08 Dec	**Reflection session** coached by teacher training students	On campus
	11 Dec	Deadline submission of final report (draft)	/
WEEK 13	By appointment	Feedback on the final report	
Examination period	By appointment	Presentation of the final report	At the organisation
Examination period	22 Jan	Definitive version of the final report; hand over to the organisation	/

Table 1: Term planning 'Seminar Political Sociology: Community Service Learning'

2.2.2 How the community is matched with the initiative

The matching of the organisations with the students is a two-level process. The first level of the matching process involves the selection of organisations. In many cases, these organisations (and their contacts) had cooperated in past projects or research, conducted by lecturers or their research groups. Through these informal networks, a still expanding pool of organisations has emerged. These are either

NGOs or governmental organisations (including city council departments). To enable short feedback loops and to reduce financial and environmental transport costs, most organisations are either based in Ghent or are easily accessible by train (e.g. Brussels).

The second level of matching involves the allocation of students to specific organisations and projects. First, at the start of each CSL module, organisations present themselves, their aims, and a specific research question, which they would like to see addressed. This may take the form of short 'live' on-campus presentations by a staff member of the organisation or it may happen via the upload of info sheets or short video-'pitches' via the University's electronic learning environment. Afterwards, students are given a short period to indicate and motivate which project they would preferably like to engage with.

At present, a university-wide electronic 'stakeholder platform' to match organisations, potential CSL projects, and university departments is under development. This will widen the choice, enhance the matching process, and alleviate some of the administrative workload.

2.2.3 How the initiative is resourced

Currently, the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences does not receive any separate funding for the organisation of its CSL modules.[8] In terms of staffing resources, the major cost is, not surprisingly, the time spent organising the whole module, teaching and assessing the students, and liaising with organisations throughout the whole process. As the presentations of the 'end product' in organisations are usually attended by the lecturers, time may also be spent travelling to different sites. All these aspects make the running of CSL modules a

[8] However, some additional costs are covered by the Faculty. For instance, from the academic year 2020-21 onwards, the faculty offers a "Community Service-Learning award" (worth 250 euros). This annual award goes to those students who have delivered the best and most valued CSL end product.

particularly labour-intensive undertaking, even in comparison to other forms of experiential learning, such as internships or field exercises. Fortunately, a significant part of the teaching workload is taken up by teaching assistants and doctoral students within the faculty departments.

2.2.4 Outputs of the initiative

The principal outputs of the CSL projects are the end products, which students produce *with* and *for* the organisations in response to their research question. Subject to an iterative process of negotiation in which the initial question may be further delineated, the question is then addressed using a literature review and a section of empirical research (qualitative or quantitative). Generally, the outcome is a report (of approximately 30 pages) that not only addresses these dimensions, but also contains several concrete recommendations for the organisation.

In several cases, the end product may take the form of a practical tool, such as a validated questionnaire, a roadmap, a communication plan, and/or campaign or a self-evaluation instrument, to name just a few. To give an indication of the type of research topics which are addressed in these reports, a small number of (past) projects are listed below.

Projects in the field of Political Sciences:

- The development of a questionnaire to evaluate a community currency for grassroots organisations from a user's perspective
- Critical evaluation of a city council district policy on 'citizen participation' initiatives
- An analysis of the outreach strategy of Europe Direct toward local authorities in East-Flanders
- The development of a practical checklist on gender intersectionality, to be used by a Belgian development NGO in the Philippines

Projects in the field of Sociology:

- Engaging refugees in voluntary work: an analysis of limitations and possible incentives
- Retention strategies for a walk-in centre for young people's psychological well-being
- The development of an evaluation instrument to assess and effectively address 'discriminatory remarks'
- An educational game to learn about barriers to initiatives that aim to tackle loneliness

Projects in the field of Communication Sciences:

- Recommendations concerning international expansion plans for a patient-centred, informative television channel
- The development of a health calendar as a communication tool for vulnerable groups
- Analysis of prejudice toward vegan lifestyles and possible strategies to address these forms of prejudice

2.2.5 How the initiative was evaluated

From its inception onwards, the CSL projects in our faculty have been positively received. Various forms of informal feedback from both students and partner organisations in the community principally pointed toward positive learning experiences and project outcomes. In addition, the formal student evaluations of teaching, as coordinated by the central education office at Ghent University, had been decidedly positive in terms of the experienced learning effects.

However, given the specific scope, it was necessary to explore a number of issues more in-depth. What are the principal learning outcomes of a CSL module? How do these learning outcomes differ from project-based work in 'regular' academic modules? From a practical perspective, how can the CSL experience be improved? What do the organisations think? And, more importantly, is our way of

organising CSL projects compatible with the type of Engaged Learning with which we would like to associate ourselves? To address these questions, a qualitative evaluation was rolled out. During the second half of 2019, all students who had been up to then involved in our CSL modules were contacted with a request to participate in this evaluation using an in-depth interview. This evaluation thus covered the CSL experiences of four different academic years. In addition, the organisations were also interviewed.

In total, 29 interviews were conducted:

- Fourteen individual interviews were conducted with (former) students from different cohorts (sometimes in the original configuration of the small student teams);
- Twelve interviews were conducted with employees from organisations where students had worked on their CSL projects; and
- Three interviews were conducted with former teacher training students who had facilitated the reflection sessions.

The range of respondents implies that, in some cases, past CSL projects were subjected to complementary, critical perspectives: the views of former students, the organisational views, and the views of the students who facilitated the reflection sessions, enabling a triangulation of perspectives. To ensure a sense of critical distance and to guarantee full openness by all interviewees, the interviews were conducted by a member of staff from the faculty who had not been involved in the organisation of a CSL module or the assessment of (former) students.

2.3 Engagement with Participants

2.3.1 Students

The learning effects in relation to their CSL projects as reported by the interviewed students tended to cover various, yet entwined

dimensions. For analytical reasons, we present them here in two separate categories. The first category of 'generic competencies' is undoubtedly less specific to the nature of our CSL projects. Therefore, these will be reported relatively briefly in the first sub-section. The second section will discuss, more extensively, the most relevant learning outcomes of our students, namely an increased sense of efficacy.

2.3.1.1 Generic competencies and learning gains

Not surprisingly, many of the reported learning gains tend to echo those of other forms of project-based learning in the 'real world', such as internships. For instance, the students reported that writing policy recommendations for an organisation, a type of writing they did not have any prior experience with, was a major learning gain. In addition, the 'real-life' application of previously acquired research skills (qualitative or quantitative) in an authentic problem-based setting often emerged as a highly positive learning effect from the CSL experience. Finally, some students reported that their work for a local city council or in a community organisation enabled them to reflect on the types of employment they would seek when entering the labour market.

2.3.1.2 Sense of efficacy

In general, students reported that the project enabled them to discover and enhance their sense of 'self-efficacy'. Having to plan and conduct a research project for a non-academic partner within a set timeframe and, particularly, within an unfamiliar context was reported as challenging. Many interviewed students reported that it was this difficulty that required them to connect to and develop their sense of self-efficacy. This was certainly reinforced by the students' reported sense of unfamiliarity, which encompassed a myriad of dimensions: the practical ways of working for organisations, the perceived 'seriousness' of some organisations (as opposed to the informal

characteristics of interaction at the University campus), and, at times, their perceived bureaucratic character were mentioned. However, it is principally the difficulty of the task and, quite often, the unfamiliarity with the exact nature of the domain which was reported as a catalyst for growth. Sometimes, students reported that they had felt a significant sense of 'doubt' at the start of the project.

Take, for instance, the account of a sociology student, whose CSL project involved the programme evaluation of a mental health care initiative, which had been coordinated and funded by a city council department. This initiative, which was about self-care education for citizens, needed an 'expert gaze' to assess its relevance and success criteria. The student was given the brief to interview a set number (8) of nationally known mental health experts on the merits of this local initiative and report back on their assessment to the city council department. In her own words, the immersion in a very complex field that felt 'unknown' was a real catalyst:

> *I had to immerse myself into the project, because you are thrown into it. You have to conduct a policy evaluation but you have really not been involved in the running of the project. So you have to get to know it really, really well before you can ask questions about it. Then, afterwards, my data, I coded these and I wrote a policy evaluation document with recommendations for future practice. And then I gave a presentation for that department, with its team leader and a few other people present. They were very happy'. And getting to know a new sector very quickly, that was, I felt, something awesome, how fast that can go. Because I only knew so little about the health care sector, we had not had that much information about that, mainly theory in some university modules. And when you arrive 'there', that was really much more practical. And the health care sector is so complex and yet, at the end, one started to grasp how it works. And that's what they told me: 'ah, Ingrid, were you acquainted with this sector before'. And I said: 'very little'. And then they told me that it was awesome that I had got to know the sector in such a short period of time. Well, that's how one gets confidence in oneself, to know that*

> *you can do that fast.* (Interview with Ingrid, Seminar on Social Demography and Health Sociology)[9]

Many other interviewees also reflected in highly positive ways about the iterative nature of their CSL project. Intellectual and planning-related uncertainties often contributed to a major learning effect: the growth of internal efficacy.

However, it is our understanding that projects generating individual success experiences should not obfuscate the wider view of the political, a risk Westheimer and Kahne (2004) have warned against. In a follow-up publication, they rightly argue that "students need to consider issues of external efficacy - to whom and in what contexts do government and other institutions respond. Attention to politics and to the ways institutions respond to or create social problems is essential" (Kahne and Westheimer, 2006, p.294). For a number of students, the accounts in which they expounded on their sense of growth of internal efficacy also contained a reflection on this sense of external efficacy. For instance, some students expressed a sense of disjointedness between, on the one hand, the structural perspectives offered by their degree in political sciences and, on the other hand, the project-based practices of a certain NGO. Whereas the degree programme was felt to encourage a critical, structural understanding of development in the Global South, the activities of this particular NGO were perceived by the student as being informed by 'good intentions', but nonetheless decontextualised and lacking in structure. Whilst not all students openly reported such a sense of disjointedness, a number of them certainly expressed the view that their CSL experience had made them reflect on the actual limits of external efficacy. Take, for instance, the account of a student who had conducted a successful research project at an organisation involved in the training and coordination of volunteers in health care:

[9] The names of the interviewees are pseudonyms. All interviews were originally conducted in the Dutch language.

> *The CSL experience taught me to look at the world of volunteering in a more critical manner … This in spite of the fact that I used to be a volunteer myself in the field of youth work, helping young people to learn things, mean something to them …*
> *And when I now look back on that, particularly when you're involved in volunteering coordination in residential care… that's all ok, but there are also the ideological issues and a certain engagement…*
> *There's also the whole idea of getting more volunteers in health care, it's linked to the notion of the austerity state, that it's also a means to cut costs in care. And that is the effect that it had on me in terms of citizenship, learning to look at things in a more critical way, even those things which had become dear to oneself through past experience. Learning to appreciate that social engagement is also embedded in greater social logics, rationalities.* (Interview with John, Seminar Political Sociology)

Here, the CSL project led to a reflection on the wider rationalities in which the organisation's activities are implicitly embedded, clearly going *beyond* a perspective that focuses on personal responsibility.
It is obvious that a delicate balance needs to be guarded between, on the one hand, enabling efficacious project assignments that permit students to experience success and increase their internal efficacy, and, on the other hand, allow for authentic experiences of real-world barriers to change. The latter aspect, though, will raise students' awareness of limited external efficacy and may result in experiences that are somewhat frustrating or disappointing. From several student accounts, it appears that our approach to CSL has achieved this delicate pedagogical balance.

2.3.2 Community

In the interviews, the people from the organisations praised the opportunity to learn from the students' work. Mostly, appreciation was expressed for the students' methodological insights and expertise. This was felt to be an important form of added value, as some interviewed people from organisations explained that they either

lacked the time or the expertise to conduct social scientific research *in* or *for* their organisation. As a form of co-creation, the combination of different types of experience that the students brought into the organisation and the local 'field knowledge' of the organisation was felt to have worked well. This was particularly the case where students conducted forms of empirical research. The CSL-formula was appreciated as a fruitful way of adding 'research expertise' to a specific issue or concern of the organisation. Nevertheless, some frustration was expressed. Because of the relatively short period the students could spend at an organisation (on average, 3-4 hours per week during nine weeks), the data which students could either collect or analyse during the allocated time period remained limited. In a number of cases, the end report which students produced was appreciated as an inspirational pilot study, yet deemed to be somehow limited in terms of its practical use, because any policy recommendations were inevitably based on a small body of empirical work.

In general, the commitment of individual students was positively appraised. Although the interviews did not explicitly examine the capacities of individual students, praise was often given for their maturity, the capacity for independent work, flexibility, and a committed attitude.

2.4 Added Value for Impact

2.4.1 What worked well and what didn't?

From our findings, it appears that our approach to Engaged Learning achieves a good pedagogic balance. The reported learning outcomes by the students cover a wide range of competencies. In addition, as reported, the realistic character and the project-based nature of the CSL modules lead to a sense of growth of 'efficacy' in students. From the perspective of the organisations, our specific approach to CSL is highly appreciated. This is supported by the established nature of the partnerships and the fact that every year various organisations

approach us with an explicit request to have our students address a specific research question.

However, there are still a number of challenges. For a start, the one-year master's programmes at our faculty have a high workload: in addition to various (compulsory) modules, students are required to write a master's dissertation, mostly based on empirical research. This makes it hard to allocate more credits and time to the CSL-modules without a substantial programme reform. Inevitably, this implies that the deliverable outputs for the organisation have limitations in terms of scope and length. Although the organisations are fully aware of these limitations, a number of them have suggested that longer and more substantial CSL-trajectories would be a desirable option.

A second challenge is linked to the organisation of our modules. At present, students in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences take up separate CSL modules, depending on their master's programme. As yet, there is relatively little interaction between the CSL students from our different master's programmes. The organisation of a single overarching 'CSL module', available to *all* of our students at the master's level would enable the organisation of interdisciplinary teams (e.g. a political science student and a sociology student) conducting research for an organisation. This would, in the future, facilitate the organisation of cross-faculty CSL projects (e.g. CSL teams consisting of law students and social science students). Given the interdisciplinary nature of the 'real world', such a mode of organising CSL projects would be a real enhancement.

2.4.2 Facilitating factors

There are various factors that facilitate the beneficial outcomes of CSL modules, such as staffing support within the University departments. Without the engaged support of the teaching assistants, it is unlikely that the lecturers would have been able to sustain the organisation and supervision of the CSL modules. From the interviews, a number of

factors emerged, of which we will discuss the two most significant ones.

The first major factor is student intake. Nearly all interviewed students explicitly described their decision to opt for a CSL module in terms of an intrinsic interest in the field. Sometimes, this interest was principally explained in intellectual terms. For instance, a student decided to opt for a CSL-project in the field of reproductive medicine because of a personal interest in debates surrounding gender and sexuality. Others had been active for many years in volunteering. By taking up a CSL-module, they wanted to supplement their past personal engagement with a more analytical perspective. Conversely, merely pragmatic or purely instrumental motives, such as wanting to brush up one's CV, rarely emerged. The strong commitment of the students was corroborated in the interviews with the staff from organisations and in their evaluations. Some employees from organisations indicated that this was due to a self-selection effect, suggesting that our approach to CSL -even in the hypothetical scenario of unlimited staffing and resources- should not be recommended to every master's student. Intrinsic interest and engagement are pivotal to avoid the risk of instrumentalisation of Engaged Learning in HE. A final observation regarding the student dimension is that those students who conducted their CSL project in a small team (as opposed to individual projects) strongly valued this option, as it allowed them to collect or analyse more data and produce a much more substantial 'end product' for the organisation.

A second facilitating factor is the established links between the University and the community organisations. From the accounts of the interviewed students and people at the organisations, the open lines of communication between the University and the contacts at the organisation were definitely seen as essential. With a handful of organisations, there are continuing partnerships that have existed since the start of CSL in our faculty. An additional advantage is that the contacts in organisations are thus fully familiar with the CSL-concept,

its goals and modes of assessment. This makes the coordination easier and less time-consuming, also for the lecturers. Nonetheless, these established links do not prevent that every year, additional CSL partnerships with different organisations are set up.

2.4.3 Broader societal impact

The societal impact is, in a sense, both extensive *and* limited. On the one hand, as a form of Engaged Learning, societal impact is there, as our CSL-modules continue to challenge different cohorts of motivated students to consider issues pertaining to social justice, in close interaction with societal organisations. Whereas the long-term effects for all actors may be extremely difficult to assess, our CSL programmes have nonetheless forged stronger links between academia and the 'real world'.

On the other hand, the tangible, wider societal impact is still limited, as the number of students and projects is relatively small. Because of their scale, the outcomes of the CSL-projects conducted by our students can only shed light on a highly specific, sometimes micro-level, aspect of the ways of working of an organisation. The wider impact for the organisations depends on whether and how the student research and recommendations for practice can be taken into consideration, followed up, and implemented. Here, organisational dynamics, budgetary constraints, staffing, and other dimensions internal to the organisation play an important role in the follow-up of the students' work. Thus far, there has been no longitudinal analysis of how and whether organisations actually make use of the growing body of student research which was conducted at their request. Nonetheless, there is some evidence of the actual take-up of the outcomes of students' work. For instance, some organisations are

currently making use of specific tools or instruments, which were developed or refined during CSL-projects.[10]

2.5 Conclusions

Since 2015, CSL has established itself as a pedagogic approach of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University. In our CSL modules, motivated master's students critically apply their research expertise to a specific problem or challenge, which organisations (societal or public organisations) have, in close dialogue with the organisations themselves. Feedback and an extensive qualitative evaluation reveal a positive appreciation by the various actors involved.

In our view, these positive outcomes are precisely made possible by a specific conception of CSL, which encourages students to critically consider the structural, root questions of social (in) justice and present-day societal challenges. This conception entails a number of concrete, strategic-pedagogic choices, particularly concerning student intake (master's level and intrinsic motivation), the balance and interaction between the three components of a CSL-project (academic, practical-professional, and reflective), and a suitable project/challenge at an organisation willing to work with students on their iterative process of addressing that challenge. As a pedagogy of Engaged Learning, there are obvious limits to an uncritical expansion of CSL. This would run the risk of instrumentalisation and dilution of the intensity of the programme. However, with careful monitoring and calibration of the balance between and within the different components, our approach to CSL offers strong learning opportunities

[10] A good example is the 'Stoempchecker' tool. This is a checklist for professionals to assess healthy and sustainable food provision in primary schools https://assets.goodfoodatschool.be/paragraph/attachments/tool_stoempchecker_voor_de_lager_school.pdf.

for those organisations and motivated students willing to engage themselves.

Chapter 3 Community Service Learning: An Appropriate Model for Social Work Education in Complex Urban Settings? Findings from Brussels

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CHAPTER 3 COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING: AN APPROPRIATE MODEL FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN COMPLEX URBAN SETTINGS? FINDINGS FROM BRUSSELS

3.1 Introduction

Rachida, a Belgian-Moroccan mother living in Brussels, has been living in Molenbeek, one of the 19 municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region, for almost 20 years. She recently moved to another neighbourhood, near the canal and Brussels South railway station. Her new neighbourhood is an arrival neighbourhood, where migrant families come and go. Rachida does not feel entirely safe on the street. She feels uncomfortable with the drug trade, the street sales of stolen goods, and the hostile looks of men. Children are up late at night, and large groups occupy the park at the edge of the canal. She is especially worried about her second daughter who does not wear a headscarf and who is regularly insulted and harassed in the streets.

A few months ago, there were two ambulance vans parked near her flat, and Rachida saw police cars coming from everywhere.

> *I heard the voices of women, screaming and shouting. From my window I saw six Syrian women and a man with a child. They were all dragged out of a flat by the police. I heard my neighbour, a man from Lebanon who sells car, say to other people: "He killed his wife". The crime had been committed in a flat housing a large family of Syrian refugees who had come to live here a year ago. Meanwhile, members of the Syrian community gathered in the streets. When traffic was allowed again, a group of about 50 Syrians gathered near the flat where the tragic events had taken place. The streets were filled with carpets. I saw members of the Syrian community praying and mourning.*

Rachida expressed her helplessness in this situation, but also her disillusionment with the local authorities.

> *Me and my neighbours, we are all powerless. We cried on each other's shoulders. What we need is safety. I left my previous apartment because of what I went through when I witnessed the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, and then I come here, and again a part of*

CHAPTER 3 COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING: AN APPROPRIATE MODEL FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN COMPLEX URBAN SETTINGS? FINDINGS FROM BRUSSELS

Syria haunts me. We had to bear the consequences of IS there, and now we have the refugees here. They cram the neighbourhood with Syrian people. They place heavily traumatised families in communal flats, with almost no professional support.

Rachida's testimony is illustrative of the complex urban reality in which many social workers work today. Many cities face an accumulation and intersection of conflicts and fracture lines between and within groups, and with their institutional and political environments (Claes et al., 2020). In her book 'Social Work and the City', Williams (2016) argues that social workers need to be aware of the impact of the urban context on their work: they have to be able to 'read' the city, its spatial dynamics, and its impact on living conditions. Rapidly changing urban conditions inevitably put pressure on social work to reposition its roles, missions, habits, routines, and underlying normative beliefs, according to Williams.

How, then, should social work students be trained to obtain a clear understanding of urban complexities? What pedagogy is suited to teach them how to navigate these – sometimes competing, contradicting, and paradoxical – urban realities and to properly address the needs of Rachida, her neighbours, and Syrian families? In this chapter, we will address these questions in three steps. First, we recapitulate some central ideas that emerged from an earlier publication (Claes et al., 2021). These ideas revolve around Community Service Learning (CSL) as a promising, alternative approach to social work education in the city. Second, we briefly describe the urban geography of Brussels and outline a Brussels experiment of CSL that was rolled out in 2020-2021 as part of the Erasmus+ project 'Urban diversities: Challenges for social work'. We describe the urban settings and trajectories around which CSL was initially designed and in which the learning process evolved. Third, we critically examine the extent to which the CSL in Brussels has fulfilled its promising role in addressing the many epistemic challenges arising from urban complexity, based

on our own experiences, complemented by three focus group evaluations of the CSL experiment.

3.2 CSL as a Promising Model of Social Work Education in the City

In an earlier publication, we explored the tentative claim that CSL could be an alternative and promising learning approach in social work education, in particular, to prepare social work students to work with the complex challenges they will face in urban settings (Claes et al., 2021). CSL is a "pedagogical model that intentionally integrates academic learning and relevant community service" (Howard, 1998, p.22). Although different concepts and practices of CSL co-exist, many models encompass three intertwined basic principles, namely (1) student learning is driven by civic engagement, (2) learning is cooperative and reciprocal, and (3) the construction of knowledge is highly reflexive and experiential (Butin, 2006; Donaldson and Daughtery, 2011; Eyler and Giles, 1999).

Figure 1: The wedding cake model (drawing by Erik Claes)

Departing from the model, presented in Claes et al. (2021), we can visualise CSL as a wedding cake, each layer forming the basis of another. In a context of urban complexity, civic engagement is considered the most basic layer because it is the shared motivational and value-oriented dynamic on which processes of mutual or cooperative learning between students, lecturers, social work professionals, and service users or residents of a neighbourhood are built. In this wedding cake model, reflexive learning through and on experience is placed at the top of the cake because of its specific and valuable contributions. It is the beating heart of CSL.

Our reflections on the potential of using CSL in a social work programme to appropriately address urban complexities can be summarised in three arguments. First, by moving the classroom to real and more complex urban life situations and anchoring the learning process in civic engagement, students open their ethical awareness. They better feel the ethical urgency to come to a renewed understanding of urban complexity. Second, by broadening the scope of the learning process to different stakeholders (students, residents, social professionals, lecturers), making it cooperative and enhancing experiential knowledge, the ability to appropriately align different types of knowledge is increased. Third, by assigning a crucial role to collective and individual reflection on lived experience, it enhances the ability to uncover, refine, and even produce (often tacit) practice wisdom that addresses, at least in part, urban complexities.

In what follows, this chapter will assess these claims through concrete findings resulting from a one-year intensive experience with CSL in Brussels. This was embedded in the Erasmus+ project 'Urban diversities: Challenges for social work', in which a consortium of five schools of social work – Odisee University of Applied Sciences (Belgium), University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (Netherlands), Manchester Metropolitan University (United Kingdom), University of Debrecen (Hungary), and Turku University of Applied Sciences

(Finland) – developed and piloted a blended learning course aimed at strengthening the capacities of future social work professionals to intervene in situations of urban tensions. The blended learning course consists of a CSL track at the local level, combined with the transnational virtual exchange.[11]

The CSL trajectory in Brussels was prepared in the academic year 2019-2020 and was piloted between September 2020 and May 2021. The pilot was spread over several settings and CSL trajectories, which will be introduced in the following section. Eight students participated in the pilot, as well as 17 residents, seven social work professionals, and three lecturers.

3.3 CSL in a Complex Urban Geography

To paint a clear picture of the settings and trajectories of CSL, a few general brushstrokes are needed to contextualise CSL in the urban geography of Brussels. The city of Brussels can easily be described as an ideal case of urban complexity. Brussels is the capital of Belgium and of Europe. With a population of approximately 1,200,000, it is a cosmopolitan area with a dense, super-diverse, and growing population.

Brussels has a fragmented and segmented political structure. Several authorities are active on the territory of the Brussels-Capital Region: three community commissions, one region, two communities, the Federal Government, 19 municipalities, and supranational and international institutions. These different authorities each exercise their powers on the same territory, but they are also interdependent. For example, a particularly complex division of powers has been worked out for personal matters. The labyrinthine character of these interacting local, regional, and federal policy levels shapes the urban

[11] See https://deb.tuas.fi/urban/ for more detailed information.

complexity of Brussels and is complemented by a rich, organically developing web of bottom-up initiatives and new ways to reinvent urban solidarity.

Brussels has sharp, geographically visible contrasts between rich and poor. Most poverty indicators show that the proportion of people living in poverty is higher in the Brussels Region than in the other two Belgian regions (Schrooten et al., 2017). Within Brussels, this poverty is distributed in a very unequal social and spatial manner. On the one hand, there are large differences between the impoverished city centre and the richer periphery. On the other hand, Brussels also has a large internal geographical, social, and economic dualisation between the western and eastern neighbourhoods, with poverty being strongly concentrated in the 'poor crescent' or the 'croissant pauvre', a crescent-shaped zone on the northwest side of the city centre (Vandermotten et al., 2009).

The CSL experience in Brussels took place in two different settings: a team of community workers developing advocacy for service users who depend on last-resort social assistance benefits (Team Baskuul), and a citizens' collective called Wijkacademie, working with residents living in a social housing complex. Students participated in the activities of one of these organisations for at least half a day each week. Two lecturers supported the students both in the field and online.

3.3.1 Team Baskuul and Collectif Cartach: An introduction

Team Baskuul consists of five community workers employed by SAAMO, an association of community workers committed to facilitating access to basic human rights. Since 2020, these community workers have been developing a participatory project with a collective of service users called Collectif Cartach. Collectif Cartach works to ensure proper access to social protection around the right to last-

resort social assistance benefits, which has become more and more conditional in recent years.

The genesis of Collectif Cartach is intertwined with a process of digital storytelling that was facilitated by lecturers of the Odisee University of Applied Sciences from November 2019 until June 2020.[12] The collection of digital stories from service users stemmed from the conviction of both the community workers of team Baskuul and a lecturer from Odisee that these short visual stories could be a useful pedagogical and political tool to reveal the world of people who depend on a minimum basic income, and also to open a space for meeting and dialogue with the staff of the municipal social action centres or other selected target groups.

These expectations turned out to be justified. During the process of digital storytelling, participants discovered themselves as owners of experiential knowledge. They also discovered their willingness and ability to use their digital stories as leverage for political action. The team of community workers supported this process of collective citizen action through the participatory project mentioned above, with the ambition of shifting the balance of power between service users and service providers, both through individual social and legal assistance and collective actions, discussions, and interventions with beneficiaries of last resort social assistance benefits as engaged citizens.

Together with service users, community workers seek a systemic change in federal and local policies, whereby the conditionality of entitlement to last-resort social assistance benefits is reduced. They do this by making visible the many dependencies, insecurities, and vulnerabilities of service users who depend on these benefits, as a first step in removing the many barriers in the power relations between

[12] For more information on digital storytelling, see Lambert (2010).

service users and service providers and in strengthening the position of service users as full citizens and holders of basic social rights.

The Baskuul team also decided to repeat the process of digital storytelling with a new group to enable another collective process of political awareness-raising. It is in this context of collective action, triggered by digital storytelling, that the opportunity arose for a CSL experiment based on citizen engagement. Initially, two CSL trajectories were designed in cooperation with the Baskuul team. In the first trajectory, students participated in a two-month collective process of digital storytelling. Each of them moderated a parallel group of four service users. The second trajectory was embedded in the casework of social legal advice. Here, three students would complete a CSL trajectory, consisting of listening and guiding individual service users depending on last-resort social assistance benefits. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, it became extremely difficult to make this learning environment operational. In total, only three meetings took place. After a month, the students were integrated into the final sessions of the digital storytelling trajectory.

At a later stage, a third short CSL trajectory was added. The students participated in two group sessions with Collectif Cartach. In the first session, Cartach members showed their digital stories and asked for a reaction from the students. In a second session, members of Collectif Cartach, participants in the digital storytelling process, and the students came together to listen to all the stories collected from 2020 to 2021. The aim of the meeting was threefold: to share the stories, to valorise the storytellers' experiences, and, not least, to identify unmet needs in order to communicate these needs to target groups in a further stage.

3.3.2 Learning with a collective of citizens in Molenbeek

The second urban setting for CSL was the super diverse and underprivileged municipality of Molenbeek. The CSL trajectories in Molenbeek were linked to the activities of a citizens' collective called Wijkacademie, which literally means the academy of the neighbourhood, a place or space where Molenbeek residents share their experiences and learn from each other through workshops, debates, storytelling, and dialogue tables.

In 2016, three mothers started this collective mainly as a reaction to the attacks in Paris and Brussels, and to the subsequent global negative framing of Molenbeek because of its link with Salah Abdeslam and his terrorist companions. Wijkacademie easily attracted a super diverse mix of – mostly – women with a migration background and succeeded in creating a safe space for residents to express their often-unheard stories, experiences, and opinions. This was much needed in a particularly difficult period of collective trauma and stigmatisation. Wijkacademie was able to bridge the often-missing link between local residents living in precarious conditions and more formal social services (Claes and El Miamouni, 2019).

By the time of the CSL project, Wijkacademie had become an independent NGO, temporarily receiving government funding. It had also moved its scope to a precarious neighbourhood near the metro West station, where it initiated informal street talks, street walks, and workshops with residents. After a four-month exploratory phase, the staff decided to focus on community work within a social housing complex called Cour Saint-Lazare, using door-to-door conversations as a lever to listen, identify urgent needs, build trust, and understand urban complexities.

Within the setting of the Wijkacademie students took part in two CSL trajectories. One student participated in the exploratory work of

Wijkacademie. During the first semester, she took part in weekly street walks and talks, participated in workshops, and reflected with staff and residents on pressing issues. In the second semester, she facilitated a process of digital storytelling with residents of the Cour Saint-Lazare.

A second trajectory was anchored in the door-to-door conversations with residents of Cour Saint-Lazare. Together with the two community workers of Wijkacademie, students listened attentively to the needs of residents about their wellbeing, living conditions, and relationships with their neighbours. They gradually discovered how these needs constantly revolve around the balance of power between social tenants on the one hand and the local social housing companies on the other. At the end of their CSL trajectory, students participated in a collective preparation of participative action research[13] on living conditions in the Cour Saint-Lazare.

Through reflection on experiences and the creation of a collective digital story about the challenges of living together in a social housing complex, the students engaged in a process of cooperative learning with residents, community workers, and Odisee lecturers. Participating in this process gave the students a different insight into current social housing issues, while for the first time they worked with social intervention methods such as door-to-door conversations, digital storytelling, and participatory action research.

3.4 Lessons Learned

In this chapter, we bring together the lessons learned from our experience. Based on the experiences from the different CSL trajectories, as well as field notes and three focus group discussions, a few sets of findings can be outlined. First, we address the settings of reflexive learning. Then we will look at whether the three claims we

[13] See Van Acker et al., 2021 for more information on this method.

made in the second part of the chapter – CSL opens up an ethical consciousness and a new perspective on urban complexity; CSL opens up the possibility of aligning and uniting different types of knowledge; and CSL creates practice wisdom to address urban complexities – were confirmed or invalidated in this experiment. We also add some reflections on time as an important aspect of CSL.

3.4.1 Reflexive learning comes in different forms and scales

The CSL trajectories taught us that reflection takes different forms depending on the contexts and the type of interventions. Whereas in the walk and talk trajectory intensive reflection on conversations and meetings were often made possible through careful transcription and initial interpretation of audio recordings, other reflection moments were informal during phone conversations between the lecturer/mentor and social work professionals. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis and its limitations inevitably resulted in an alternation between real-life reflective encounters and online meetings.

Depending on the changing circumstances, the scale and plurality of the collective reflections also changed constantly. While some reflection meetings took place in a rather large group with a variety of stakeholders (students, residents, lecturers, and social workers), most reflection took place in small groups, mostly including only two types of stakeholders. This variety in form, scale, inclusiveness, and intensity of reflexive learning as such seems inevitable and in line with the CSL idea of multiple learning. However, at least two threats to CSL emerge when this variety is not well managed. First, there is a risk of losing an overview of all these processes, which may weigh on the ability to map and systematise these learning processes. Second, there is a risk of missing links and communication gaps between the stakeholders involved, which can easily create confusion, uncertainty, and lack of transparency.

3.4.2 Ethical awareness and a new perspective

One of our basic assertions was that by prioritising civic engagement in CSL, students would fully open up to the lived urban realities of others. This would make them more sensitive to the ethical nature of these complex realities, and at the same time make them look at urban reality differently. Piloting CSL in Brussels revealed some important findings that support, refine, and nuance the above claim.

The first finding concerns the awareness of a shared sense of equality. In the group discussions and interviews, students and community workers saw a clear difference between an internship and the CSL's civic engagement.

> *During an internship, I have to check a list of competencies. Here I can simply guide the students to the essence, to what really matters in the field. The students came along and I could help them experience the basic commitment of social work. This commitment is crucial because it helps you not to give up. (Community worker from Wijkacademie)*

For some students, this difference with an internship was a source of uncertainty that they had to overcome. Others experienced it as something positive, as liberating, as an opening up to be of significance to others.

> *Unlike an internship, you are not constantly assessed on competencies. You are free to be there and to be of significance to others. You act, do something instead of delivering and proving. You do something according to your own choice. You can be yourself. (Student)*

Students also connected this free space with an enhanced sense of equality in their relationship with their lecturer. They experienced a shift in the latter's position.

The relationship with the lecturer was different. He was also there in the field, to be of significance to others. There was much more open communication. We had more of a say in the process. (Student)

There was less distance. It wasn't like…, in general, a lecturer-student relationship. I saw the lecturer less as a lecturer and more as a person, as someone who was also involved in the project. That was very positive for me. (Student)

Students also experienced this sense of equality in the attitudes of others involved, especially in the interaction between residents and social workers in the field. One student pointed out that this sense of equality was the essence of what she learned from CSL, both in theory and in practice. In a conversation with her lecturer, she even noticed that this sense of equality is a prerequisite for authentic speaking and listening.

Everyone took the attitude of equality and respect, and didn't put themselves above someone else. I think that was important, because you also noticed that the service users felt that. The things they said, they wouldn't have said if there hadn't been this sense of equality. (Student)

One might critically ask whether this enhanced sense of equality within the CSL experience also influenced the students' understanding of complex urban realities. Did it open up a new perspective of these realities? For community worker Marie, this deepened sense of equality is intertwined with a deeper understanding of the essence of social work. For her, a stronger sense of equality does not directly lead to a better understanding of urban complexity, but it sharpens the most essential tool for a more refined reading of this complexity.

For me, the essence is the ability to hyper-listen, the ability to really listen, to really hear what is being said, rather than hearing what you think you have heard. (Community worker from Wijkacademie)

Students involved in the Baskuul project explicitly mentioned a shift in vision toward caseworkers providing social service in public centres for social action. The latter's visual and narrative representation contrasted sharply with the sense of equality experienced by service users and community workers. By being immersed in the CSL experiment of the Baskuul project and seeing the contrast between a context of equality and a perceived context of power relations, the students were able to see a multiplicity of positions and roles of social workers in a complex urban setting. In addition, students took a critical view of their own profession and the mental representations of service users.

> *I discovered that there are many pitfalls in social work. You can easily get into a vicious circle, where you work like a robot, because you have to follow the procedures, the rules, and that you lose the humanity of it all. […] I was a bit in conflict with myself, because I really want to practice my profession to help people, and then suddenly you realise that not everything in social work is positive and not everything goes as it should. And that touched me, because I had the feeling that there are a lot of people who have a negative view of our profession. (Student)*

3.4.3 Combining different types of knowledge

Williams (2016) emphasises how crucial knowledge about the city and its spatial dynamics is for social workers to become full actors in these spatial dynamics. Knowledge building is an important aspect of the spatial practice of urban social workers. However, Williams gives little indication of which the vital kinds of knowledge are and how they should be adequately combined. A plausible answer could be the idea of a multifocal knowledge base (Schrooten and Veldboer, 2021): a combination of a broad sociological vision of urban transitions with more partial and contextual field knowledge. This still raises the question of which specific type of knowledge should preferably be

combined for which purpose, and in which conditions. Some insights can be gleaned from the CSL experiment in Brussels.

In terms of types of knowledge, both the Baskuul teams' CSL experiment and the CSL experience on Cour Saint-Lazare have taught us a privileged interaction between conceptual knowledge on the one hand, and experience-based knowledge on the other. For community worker Floor, key concepts, and conceptual insights can help clarify experiences, and even temper inner doubts and hesitations.

> *I remember an informal telephone conversation with lecturer Erik. He explained to me Hartley Deans' distinction between interpreted needs, needs as they are subjectively interpreted by service users in their daily lives, and inherent needs, abstractly formulated, defined and conditioned needs as they are articulated by scholars, legislators and lawyers. That distinction helped me to better understand and address a puzzling experience that happened to me at the time. One day in the middle of a session on digital storytelling, a lawyer called me. She was upset with a service user who was involved in our participatory project. The latter refused a home visit of her case worker. She wanted to be protected in her need for privacy, because the personality of the caseworker had triggered a traumatic experience. 'Why is this lady acting as if she does not know the law?', the lawyer asked me with a judgmental undertone. I was stunned by this phone call. Why was this lawyer unable to stand by her client? (Community worker from Baskuul)*

Dean's theoretical framework (2015) helped her to better understand her witnessing of tension between needs that were concretely experienced by individuals on the one hand, and the needs as defined and limited within the legal discourse of legislators and lawyers.

> *Theoretical distinctions also gave me practical insight into my position as a community worker. I discovered that I fulfil a bridging function here, to mediate between service user and lawyer, to link interpreted needs to inherent needs, to give the service user*

> *negotiation space in her relationship with her lawyer. I am fully aware that conceptual knowledge does not give me a ready-made answer to my position as a community worker. It is not a recipe book, but it leads me to what I have to invent again and again. […] Theory turns into flesh and blood when I discover that it is about me. These are not just concepts. They are immediately about me, my role as a community worker, and what I do there. (Community worker from Baskuul)*

She further adds that the added value of sharing conceptual knowledge in CSL takes on a specific value in complex urban settings.

> *As community workers, we are often confronted with unexpected and unforeseen problems that arise in the midst of other activities. Difficult problems often occur at the wrong time. You are taken by surprise and have no routine adequate response to these problems. This complexity makes us insecure. Having space to reflect on your experiences and share conceptual knowledge helps to build self-confidence to deal with unforeseen problems in the future. (Community worker from Baskuul)*

The match between conceptual knowledge and reflexive experience does not work in one direction only. Experiences and stories of residents or service users also contribute to refining concepts. In April 2021, lecturer Erik gave an online lesson to the CSL students and community worker Floor on yet another Hartley Dean distinction: the difference between 'thin' and 'thick needs'.[14] This conceptual distinction was an analytical framework for the community worker to interpret the deeper meaning of service users' experience of dependency and powerlessness, but also to discover similarities between different stories.

[14] 'Thin needs' are needs that a person must fulfil in order to survive (hygiene, food, water, shelter, safety). 'Thick needs' are needs that enable people to develop as full human beings (Dean, 2015).

The conceptual framework was seen as a useful instrument to uncover more systematically what service users called the invisible part of their iceberg. During the discussion between students, community workers, and service users, it also became clear how the digital stories and narratives made it possible to refine the conceptual distinction between 'thin' and 'thick' needs. Service users pointed out how thin needs (shelter) and thick needs (love, sexuality, personal development, and the capacity to live fully in one's own space) interact and how a strict hierarchal dichotomy between thin and thick needs might easily support a political discourse that last resort social assistance benefits only serve thin needs and service users only deserve to survive rather than the fulfilment of thick needs.

3.4.4 A path to practice wisdom

In social work research, there is substantial literature on what is called 'practice wisdom', a term that refers to the ability of social workers to know how to judge, decide, and act in concrete and specific situations (Chun-Sing Cheung, 2016). Practice wisdom is more than the sum of theoretical concepts, empirical knowledge, and a set of practical tools. It refers to a certain inner disposition to find the right orientation and the right match between different types of knowledge to define one's course of action in a concrete and uncertain situation. This inner disposition is developed through experience, through repeated exposure to challenging and uncertain situations.

Practice wisdom can come in different shapes. It may manifest as a tacit, unarticulated ability to know how to proceed. Yet often practice wisdom implies a deliberative practise in which an individual or a group interrupts its course of action and has to reflect on the situation, discursively discern salient features of the context, and articulate relevant values and principles to find an appropriate course of action. In complex urban settings, with their accumulation of intersecting fault lines, practice wisdom plays a central role in the practice of social

work. Practice wisdom enables social workers to anticipate conflicts, diffuse tensions, and position themselves as full actors in the city, as space makers, builders of bridges, community builders, and policy influencers.

In Claes et al. (2021), we argued that CSL offers a promising avenue for mapping and acquiring new practice wisdom. Again, our experiences nuance and refine this statement. First, we experienced that shared civic engagement is a necessary basis for reflexive learning. The quality of civic engagement depends to a large extent on the degree of shared commitment to basic principles of interaction, to common goals, and to the shared ability to translate private concerns into public issues.

> *Social workers are only fully prepared to participate in the reflexive process of CSL if they themselves embody a strong civic commitment and have a strong, articulate vision of the need for structural change. Such social workers are also needed in the process of guiding CSL with students. Such engaged social work will provide a framework that helps to understand students' experiences. In the absence of these assets, social workers will be tempted to abandon reflection through experience. (Community worker from Wijkacademie)*

Personal ambitions and individual desires for recognition, acceptance, or social advancement can damage the ability to focus on public issues. It can also weigh heavily and negatively on the trust base of a collective civic engagement. Moreover, multiple 'blessures de l'âme' from the past, provoked by certain events, can discourage civic engagement for fear of being disappointed or rejected again by fellow citizens or by institutional partners.

Second, the importance of equality, a theme we developed in the section on ethical awareness, emerged strongly as a prerequisite for deep and sincere reflection on experiences.

> *Creating an equal space for each participant allows you to show your vulnerable side, to express and share the different thoughts and considerations that were in your head just before you made that decision, or said what you said. The reassuring prospect of being allowed to show your vulnerability. This is important because you sometimes have to make difficult choices, or you make wrong choices. This can have an impact on your mental well-being. CSL makes it possible to share this mental process, to reflect on it and learn from it. (Community worker from Baskuul)*

The importance of equality and reciprocity as a route to practice wisdom is not limited to the relationship between social workers, students, and residents or service users; it is also reflected in the joint learning process of lecturers and students. Joint reflections and practice in giving meaning appear to be essential for the acquisition of practice wisdom. Open, horizontal discussions between student and lecturer deepen the process of meaning-making.

At the same time, the community workers also stress the vulnerability of this reflexive learning. They point to the fragility of emotional safety, which must be seen as a very fragile condition for this kind of learning.

> *Many residents live in a survival mode. Their attitude is generally hostile towards institutions and social workers. There is so much distrust. And in their survival mode they are unable to be kind to others. […] Social media also reflects and reinforces our inability to really listen to each other's needs. We are marinated in blaming and judging each other. (Community worker from Wijkacademie)*

So how can we strengthen this crucial condition of emotional safety for students and service users? A powerful way to build emotional safety is when students can reinforce each other.

> *Before the start of the CSL, we as lecturers very carefully composed the subgroups and distributed them among the different trajectories. Our advice to students was: form a pair with another student with whom you feel comfortable. And so, the students who participated in the door-to-door conversations at the Cour Saint-Lazare were able to stimulate each other, to share, share experiences, create emotional security and build up trust. (Lecturer)*

Moreover, community worker Marie stresses the importance of limiting the boundless responsibility of social workers in complex urban settings.

> *In difficult stories and cases, such as in Cour Saint-Lazare, things are so complicated and the needs are so multiple that you can often only intervene when there are urgent needs to be met. You have to make such decisions for your own emotional safety. For the rest you have to keep listening. (Community worker from Wijkacademie)*

Regarding service users, Floor emphasises the importance of supporting group sessions of cooperative and reflexive learning, combined with private sessions of preparatory care and aftercare with individual service users. It is crucial to make time for each, to listen carefully, and adjust interventions when necessary.

> *The process of digital storytelling with service users is very powerful, but also throws up many issues. Participants often go back to a difficult and painful period. And they expose themselves. That is tough and has an impact, perhaps not on the spot, but afterwards. Emotional safety can also be at stake when participants bring out their story out in a workshop or in a classroom with students. Emotional safety has to be reinvented again and again. (Community worker from Baskuul)*

3.5 CSL and the Question of Time

The issue of time brings us to the last set of findings on the CSL trajectories in Brussels. Most of these trajectories took place within a period of 10 weeks. Students, lecturers, and community workers agreed that this time frame was too tight for the participants to fulfil the promise of cooperative and reflexive learning through civic engagement. Sufficient time is needed for focus, mental space, and concentration, for reflection and communication to articulate inner processes, thoughts, and intentions, and to clear up misunderstandings. But also for investing in trust, care, and safety, for celebrating, valorising, and enjoying each other's presence.

> *Time of reflection allows me to make explicit what I have in my mind, what goes through my head when I about to make a decision. It allows me to discover my doubts, my not yet knowing, and to see with delay how things can be made better. (Community worker from Baskuul)*

Lecturer Anja, who coached the students involved in the door-to-door conversations, points out the difficulties related to the type of timeframe in which the CSL trajectory took place.

> *The students told me that they needed time to familiarise themselves with the context and the residents. By the time they felt they could start, the project had already ended. (Lecturer)*

Another observation around time is that every learning process has its own time. Each CSL trajectory has its own rhythm that often exceeds the planned timetable within the students' course programme. As a result, the CSL process informally and organically expanded beyond the pre-planned time scale. In the context of the Wijkacademie, a student extended her civic engagement by volunteering to facilitate and conclude a process of digital storytelling with residents. To some extent, she acted ethically toward residents and social workers by

finishing what she had started. Loyalty, rather than what one is academically obliged to do, seems to drive the learning process to a great extent.

In the setting of Team Baskuul, the interest of service users in exchanging with social work students extended beyond the time frame of the Odisee students. In the autumn of 2021, the service users presented their digital story in a full class of another school of social work. During the seminar, the students' interpretations of the stories were used as a starting point for further cooperative reflection with the service users.

3.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, we started from the need to find an alternative pedagogical approach for (future) social workers to tackle urban complexity. We distinguished three epistemic challenges: the need for a fresh understanding of the city, the need to find the right match between different types of knowledge, and the importance of practical wisdom. Based on an evaluation of a pilot case in Brussels, we confirmed, refined, and nuanced our initial claim that CSL is a promising pedagogical approach to address the aforementioned challenges. At the end of this chapter, we recapitulate three nuances that deserve attention for those who want to further explore the added value of CSL in urban social work education. They all revolve around the beating heart of CSL: reflexive learning.

The first nuance concerns the complexity of reflexive learning with different perspectives and stakeholders. The variety of different forms and scales of experiential reflexive learning threatens to lead to communication gaps, lack of transparency, and confusion among those involved. To prevent this, we recommend the establishment of a working group with the task of coordinating the reflexive process,

consisting of a lecturer, a social worker, a resident (or service-user) and, if possible, a student.

The second nuance links reflexive learning and engagement. A strong shared civic engagement between lecturers and social workers is needed to process reflexive learning and gain practice wisdom through trial and error. A recommendation in this regard could be the collective drafting of an ethical charter or the creation of a collective narrative that embodies a shared attachment to core values and a perspective on social change.

The third nuance concerns the preconditions for reflexive learning: emotional safety and time. The focus groups with students, lecturers, and social workers emphasised the importance of revealing one's thoughts, feelings, and needs, as well as the ability to listen carefully and non-judgementally to the feelings and needs of others. However, such an open and authentic space requires that people feel safe and have sufficient time to construct that safety together.

Chapter 4 Community Dentistry UGent

Ghent University

Martijn Lambert

4.1 Introduction

Modern societies are characterised by **super-diversity**, a concept introduced by anthropologist Steven Vertovec (2007) to indicate the growing diversity in Great Britain and the western world since the fall of the Iron Curtain. Due to social and international mobility, former mono-cultural cities and regions developed into metropoles in which various ethnocultural and socioeconomic subgroups interact and live together on a small surface. However, this increased interaction does not automatically imply that diversity is structurally embedded in all social domains. In ideal circumstances, it should be expected that patients and care providers in medical centres, such as dental offices, reflect the same diversity as seen on the street and that oral diseases are equally distributed among the different social subgroups. Today, this is still an illusion. Structural socioeconomic and demographic inequalities persist, both in care providers and care demanders.

Although oral health problems, such as untreated tooth decay and gum diseases, are widespread, their prevalence is mainly concentrated in specific high-risk groups (Schwendicke et al., 2015). Like many other domains, oral health follows a social gradient (Sanders et al., 2006). The higher people's rank on the social ladder, the better their oral health status will be and the lower their risk of future oral health problems. More specifically, oral health and oral health behaviour are associated with health literacy, ethnicity, educational level, employment, and care dependency (Cohen-Carneiro et al., 2011; Hakeem et al., 2019; Riggs et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2013). Despite their higher dental needs, these vulnerable subgroups are often underrepresented in the dental chair. The Belgian Health Care Knowledge Centre (KCE) revealed that regular dental visits are strongly related to income and educational level (Bouckaert et al., 2021). This means that patients with higher treatment needs make less use of care, which is known as the **inverse care law** (Hart JT, 1971). According to Devaux and Looper (2012), socioeconomic inequalities in the probability of a dental visit were much more extensive than disparities in visiting a general practitioner or any other medical specialist.

When ethnic and social diversity is not self-evident among dental patients, it is even more challenging to be established among health care workers. Rotenstein et al. (2021) demonstrated an apparent lack of ethnic diversity within teachers at American medical faculties. Moreover, the extent of overrepresentation by White staff members was related to the rank, increasing gradually from instructor to full professor. In Belgium, diversity in medical and dental professionals is also hampered. For sure, intellectual homogeneity is somewhat inherent to higher education, but this characteristic is even more pronounced in Belgian medical faculties. Since dental and medical studies in Belgium are the only ones in which the influx of students is restricted and regulated by a competitive theoretical entrance test, the student population almost exclusively consists of intellectually strong students from the higher socioeconomic background with little ethnic diversity. The privileged social position of Belgian dentists might isolate them as a peer group, leading to further alienation from other social subgroups whom they do not meet either in their daily life or in their practices. Even for trained professionals, it is hard to shut down their own personal frame of reference. When care providers lack a common ground and an interpersonal connection with their patients, the care itself can be affected.

Not only can cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication lead to misunderstandings, but also subconscious prejudges can lead to biased interpretations by care providers and patients. Thibodeau and Mentasti (2007) inventoried how dentists are depicted in movies and television series and concluded that they are often framed as sadistic, immoral, and corrupt. On the other side, **confirmation bias** also occurs among dentists. In an Italian survey, dentists received an identical theoretical case, for which their treatment plan was asked (Patel et al., 2019). Yet, they were divided at random into two groups, in which the patient was Black or White. The authors observed that dentists were significantly more inclined to extract the tooth instead of repairing it when the patient was Black, compared to the White patient in a similar context. This shows that future dentists should be taught about their own potential confirmation bias and receive early training on how to provide care to

a wide variety of patients, including adequate communication skills and cultural competencies.

4.1.1 UGent and Engaged Learning

Engaged Learning is an essential part of the educational programme at Ghent University, although its synonyms Community Service Learning (CSL) and Challenge-Based Education (CBE) are more commonly used.

Community Service Learning aims to create a community impact by providing practical training for students in non-profit organisations. In other words, students are asked to offer a service to the community as part of a specific course in their undergraduate curriculum. CSL is more than voluntary work but ideally includes training and preparation, an evidence-based intervention, a proper impact and effect evaluation, and room for self-reflection. UGent lists existing good practices on its website and offers practical tools to set up a CSL learning path.

UGent also emphasises the broader concept of **Challenge-Based Education**. Besides the social and non-profit sector, external partners can submit challenges of any kind to be resolved by students, including design and development of products, pilot testing, and consultancy in all fields. The university launched an online platform (**callforchallenges.be**) to reach a wide range of external partners and provide students with real-life challenges in which they can make a difference.

On an international scale, UGent takes part in the **ENLIGHT Consortium**, connecting nine European universities. ENLIGHT stands for 'European university Network to promote equitable quality of Life, sustainable and Global engagement through Higher Education Transformation.' In their mission statement, the consortium aims to contribute to the fundamental transformation of European Higher education and to empower students as globally engaged citizens. Practically, the consortium will act as one open international

university, promoting geographical and cultural exchange programmes and sharing curricula and expertise.

4.2 Overview of the Initiative

The present dental educational programme, **Community Dentistry**, is part of the dental undergraduate curriculum at the Department of Oral Health Sciences of UGent taught by the University team of Equal Lifelong Oral Health for All (ELOHA). It aims to improve the oral health of vulnerable patient groups, such as children, frail elderly, people with disabilities, and people in social and material deprivation.

The basic rule of the community dentistry educational programme is that nobody can be blamed or praised for their social environment and background, not the student nor the patient. This **non-judging context** allows us to explore and assess the existing differences with an open mindset. Specifically, community service learning is incorporated in the undergraduate training by **real-life encounters**, in which the focus gradually shifts from theoretical cases toward structured outreaching community projects. This gradual approach will be explained in the next section.

4.2.1 Structure of the educational programme

Community Dentistry is taught in the first, second, and fourth year of the five-year undergraduate curriculum.

- Community Dentistry I (CDI): first bachelor year
- Community Dentistry II (CDII): second bachelor year
- Community Dentistry into practice (CDP): first master year

As mentioned previously and illustrated in Figure 1, the proportion of practical exposure increases over the years, whereas the input of new theoretical knowledge gradually declines. This pattern follows the same logic as any other practical course in dentistry.

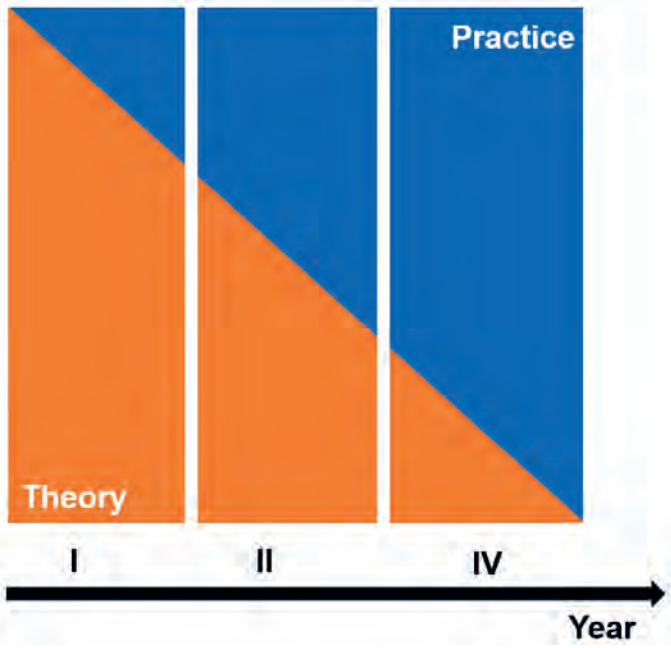

Figure 1 Proportion of theoretical knowledge and practical exercise throughout the Community Dentistry educational programme

4.2.1.1 Community Dentistry I

The Community Dentistry I (CDI) course consists of 32.5 contact hours over the two semesters and amounts to four credits out of 60 in the first bachelor grade. The theoretical body of the course comprises Medical Sociology, Psychology, Dental Epidemiology, and Oral Health Promotion. Students will encounter some essential key concepts, which will guide them through further Community Service Learning:

- **(Social) determinants of health:** health is not the simple consequence of individual free-choice behaviour but is directly and indirectly affected by all physical and social conditions in which people are born and live. Particular emphasis is put on the critical role of people's social network (**social capital**) in obtaining good oral health and health behaviour, illustrated by medical and dental examples (Rouxel et al., 2015).

- **Health literacy:** the degree to which individuals can obtain, process, and understand basic health information needed to make appropriate health decisions is one of the principal determinants to make oral health promotion succeed or fail. Students learn that there is not such a thing as an 'all-fitting intervention' that can magically solve the oral health issues of all patients. When health promotion is offered to the entire population, a **Matthew effect** can be expected, showing better additional outcomes in patients with less objective needs, leading to broader health inequalities (Perc, 2014).
- **Proportionate universalism**: this concept, introduced by Sir Michael Marmot (2010), is an approach that balances targeted and universal health interventions. It implies that all individuals need health interventions and information, but that actions should be proportionate to the needs and levels of disadvantage in a population to enable all members of society to reach a universal health goal. Proportionate universalism tries to improve individual health by tackling the upstream determinants that lead to health inequalities, such as education, housing, and employment.

Provided with the necessary theoretical framework, the concept of CSL is put into practice in the second semester through **tutorial sessions**, in which students are discussing two real patient cases in small groups of 10-15 students. Each case consists of an A and B session with a two-week interval between both sessions. During the first session, the case is presented, followed by a group discussion, guided by a list of predetermined questions:

- Are there any words or concepts you don't understand?
- What are the primary oral health problems of the patient?
- Do you find in the text possible explaining factors that could have contributed to the problem?
- What can be the specific pathway or chain reaction between the explaining factor and the eventual oral health problem?
- Defining learning goals: What will we look up until the next session?

In this opening discussion, students are discovering the natural working environment of the dentist, something they are longing for themselves. However, since they usually do not have any foreknowledge on oral diseases and possible treatments, they will not stick too much to the medico-technical aspects of the case but automatically move on to the broader context of the patient. For this reason, theoretical cases are an attractive instrument to introduce CSL to inexperienced students.

Before starting the first session, one random student is assigned as president, who will animate the debate. Another student is asked to take notes during the discussion, and a third one summarises the meeting notes into a small report. Every student group is accompanied and supervised by a dental expert, but staff members have a rather observing role. They do not lead the discussion but leave the floor entirely to the students. They are also asked not to answer specific questions about the content of the case during the first session but invite the students to look at the existing evidence instead.

During the B-session, the group members bring together the information they searched for individually between the two sessions to answer the questions defined as learning goals. The discussion of the first session is reopened, and the questions are answered by referring to online information. Equivocal information is discussed by validating the source of information, progressively leading to general conclusions on each of the research goals.

After the tutorial sessions, all students receive a comprehensive summary based on their own collected information, which is added to the existing syllabus and accounts for 10% of the theoretical exam questions at the end of the year.

As mentioned at the beginning of section 2.2, the entire educational programme of Community Dentistry advocates for **encounters in a non-judging context**. This principle is adhered to from the very beginning. Obviously, the encounter is simulated, but it still describes

an actual patient. Creating a non-judging context is also challenging when students need to be evaluated and pass the course at the end of each year. To create a safe space during the tutorial sessions, students are only evaluated on their participation during the session. Their ideas do not need to be theoretically correct, especially in the first session, nor socially desirable, as long as students can support their opinions with arguments and accept possible counterarguments from other participants.

4.2.1.2 Community Dentistry II

In the second year, Community Dentistry II (CDII) covers 27.5 contact hours and three credits. It builds on the base created by CDI in the previous year. More specifically, the known theoretical concepts related to health inequalities are used as a framework to explore the **actual health care policy**. What is the impact of social security and universal health care on inequalities? How is it organised? Where can our Belgian health care system be improved? All policy levels and their legal competencies are identified, and the students get to know all governmental boards and institutions with a direct impact on the work of dental professionals, their income, and their patients. At first sight, this does not seem to link with CSL directly. However, unravelling the political structure and the health care system is only a first step to setting up a correct framework. The entire course of CDII is designed as a simulation in which the students pretend to be graduated dentists. In the lectures, the students are trained to approach, inform, and refer any patient most appropriately, from asylum seekers and refugees to people with disabilities and frail elderly. They learn which treatments are covered by the health insurance, how much and for which patients, and where to find exact information. They discover the positive aspects of working in daily practice, but also its limitations and pitfalls, and receive up-to-date information on which specific minister or institution is in charge of the topics provided during the lectures. To emphasise the practical aspects, 40% of the final exam (25% of the total score) is covered by a theoretical patient case, in which the student needs to reply and act as a dentist in the most appropriate way.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the proportion of practical work in CDII should be higher than in CDI. Indeed, one-third of the total score is reserved for a practical exercise. Since the students are still not technically capable of working with real patients in a clinical setting, they are sent to primary schools to set up an intervention related to the **Health Promoting School concept** developed by the World Health Organization (Langford et al., 2014). This concept strives to integrate health promotion into the entire school context. This means that health is promoted through theoretical knowledge provided in class and by transforming the school into a supportive environment, making the healthy choice the easiest choice for pupils, teachers, and the community.

In CDII, the Health Promoting Schools project is performed by small groups of 3-4 students. The students can choose in which grade of primary school they want to operate. The exercise starts with a social diagnosis of the school and the specific class. The students have to gain background information on the profile of the pupils, their learning abilities, and reading skills by consulting online data and consulting the class teacher. After the background check, goals have to be set according to the SMART principles. An educational programme for three hours has to be developed, in which three topics should be covered: healthy diet, oral hygiene, and a regular dental visit. The first draft of the educational programme is submitted halfway through the academic year and reviewed by a panel of dentists, pedagogical experts, and professional health promotors. This **expert panel** evaluates the correctness of the information, the proposed pedagogical methods, the creativity, and the estimated timing of the educational package. After receiving feedback from the supervisors, the students can finalise their work. Since the students are inexperienced in teaching to schoolchildren, they are offered the opportunity to test a part of their programme in a **test school**. In this school, the students can practice teaching for one hour without being punished by a negative evaluation to experience where their methods can be refined or improved before implementing them in a three-hour course.

During the teaching exercise, the students are permanently monitored by the class teacher and one of the university staff members. Table 1 illustrates the items on which the students are evaluated.

	Item	Maximal score
Preparation	Creativity and attractiveness	5
	Pedagogical methods	5
	Correctness of the information	5
Intervention	Creativity and attractiveness	5
	Pedagogical methods	5
	Correctness of the information	5
	Language and performance	5
	With-it-ness	5
	Group Alerting	5
	Reporting, including self-reflection	10
	Total	60

Table 1 Overview of the items evaluated during the Health Promoting School exercise

4.2.1.3 Community dentistry into practice

As a final chapter of the Community Dentistry trilogy, the students conclude the educational programme by combining all theoretical and practical concepts into a last practical exercise, Community Dentistry into Practice (CDP), during the first master grade. The course spans the entire academic year and accounts for three credits. It starts with two introduction sessions, followed by 22.5 hours of project work and 75 hours of study and preparation time.

In small groups of 3-4 students, a targeted intervention has to be developed and implemented within a social organisation of their choice. This intervention has to have a sustainable impact on the target population's oral health (or its determinants).

The students must follow a stepwise protocol based on **the precede-proceed model** to ensure that the intervention is developed and implemented correctly. In this model, designed by Green and Kreuter (2005), the development of a health promotion intervention should be preceded by several preparatory steps and followed by a proper evaluation. Translated to oral health-promoting interventions, this includes:

- Description of the organisation and the target population
- Problem analysis: which oral health problems are prevalent in the target population?
- Determinant analysis: which distal and proximal factors are associated with the oral health problems within the specific target population?
- Objectives (SMART): which of the determinants will be focussed on, and how can the possible effects be measured?
- Preparation: are there existing evidence-based interventions that could be implemented or adapted?
- Implementation
- Effect and Process evaluation

The students need to submit their action plan after the first semester as a written report of their work up to the preparation phase. In this way, students are obliged to hold their horses and focus on making an adequate diagnosis before starting unprepared actions. It is important to inventory the existing problems and their determinants first to set up an intervention that responds to an actual need. The problem and determinant analyses can be performed by clinically examining a sample of the target population or by referring to existing evidence in scientific literature.

At the end of the year, students will be evaluated in three different ways. They will submit a written report (40% of the final score), will be evaluated by the social organisation (30%), and present their project during an oral presentation (30%).

The report should describe all intermediate steps and the evaluation process of the intervention. It will be scored using a predetermined checklist by two independent reviewers. Apart from what students write about their intervention, it is also essential to valorise what they did in the community and how they interact with the different stakeholders and the end-users of the intervention. Since the university staff is unable to supervise all actions on the field, a team member of the social organisation is asked to operate as an external evaluator and to score each of the students based on the following criteria:

- Insight into the relationship between the social environment of the target population and the actual oral health status
- Intervention tailored to the target population (understandable, accessible, to the point, interactive)
- Interaction with the target population (empathy, respect, willingness to listen)
- Interaction with the staff members of the organisation
- Independency and sense of responsibility

The organisations receive the evaluation form and all additional information before the students' intervention to make sure that they can evaluate the individual group members during the different actions of the implementation stage instead of afterwards, resulting in more accurate scores. Finally, the remaining 30% of the course evaluation can be earned during an oral presentation. The students present their work and answer questions from a mixed panel of staff members and a representative of the social organisation they worked in.

4.2.2 How the community is matched

In CDII, primary schools are the first external partners to engage in the educational programme. Preferably, schools from underprivileged neighbourhoods in Ghent are visited in an attempt to reduce the existing socioeconomic inequalities. However, it is important to alternate between different schools. Since the different student

groups cover all primary school grades, saturation or even overload can be created when pupils and teachers get similar oral health activities every year. Over the years, the University has built an extensive network among the local schools so that the different schools can be visited with a time interval of a few years between every visit.

The most substantial match between the community and the students is created in the first Master's year (CDP). For one year, student groups collaborate with a social organisation dealing with poverty, people with disabilities, or institutionalised elderly. For each of these three target groups, an experienced staff member is assigned to ensure that the intervention is evidence-based and adapted to the target population. The department disposes of a limited list of potential candidates for the selection of organisations, although it is recommended that students try to find an organisation by themselves. In this way, there might exist or arise a personal match between the students and the organisations. A second advantage is that the network and reach of the educational programme will grow over Flanders, instead of keeping the students within the known organisations in or close to the university town.

4.2.3 Resources

The current educational programme does not receive any external funding. It entirely relies on the existing faculty members, supported by a group of voluntary ad hoc experts. Table 1 summarises the current staff (2021-2022) running the entire CSL educational programme, as presented in this chapter.

Community Dentistry I (70 students)	
Permanent staff members	Ad hoc support
1.0 FTE Teacher 0.2 FTE Assisting Personnel 0.2 FTE Administrative Support	Three additional tutorial supervisors for four sessions
Community Dentistry II (62 students)	

Permanent staff members	Ad hoc support
1.0 FTE Teacher 0.2 FTE Assisting Personnel 0.2 FTE Administrative Support	Six additional dental supervisors to follow the courses Three pedagogical experts to review the preparatory work 20 primary school teachers
Community Dentistry into Practice (63 students)	
Permanent staff members	Ad hoc support
1.0 FTE Teacher 0.2 FTE Assisting Personnel 0.2 FTE Administrative Support	One expert in oral health care for the elderly One expert in oral health care for people with disabilities 20 external social organisations

Table 2 Overview of the number of students and staff members for the year 2021-2022

4.2.4 Outputs

The physical output of the Community Dentistry educational programme consists of **oral health promotion materials and programmes** developed by undergraduate dental students, following an evidence-based protocol, in collaboration with primary schools or social organisations. Before implementation and further distribution, all materials are reviewed and validated by an expert panel of dental, pedagogical, and other experts. After the academic year, the schools and organisations can freely dispose of the developed tools and materials.

The educational programme fits in both Community Service Learning and Challenge-Based Education concepts. The interventions are custom-made, based on an in-depth problem and risk analysis, and developed in consultation with the schools and social organisations.

In terms of quantity, the yearly output consists of primary school educational packages directly delivered to 20 primary school classes

and indirectly distributed to other interested schools and teachers. Further, a custom-made intervention is implemented in 20 different social organisations in Flanders.

4.2.5 How the initiative is evaluated

Community Dentistry is evaluated on three different levels. First of all, students are assessed during and after the practical exercises. The specific evaluation procedures for each of the modules are mentioned previously. Still, it is important to emphasise that the external partners are strongly involved in the evaluation process of the students.

Secondly, the students must evaluate their own work, including effect and process evaluation and self-reflection, as an integral part of the final report for CDII and CDP. The effect evaluation of the primary school programmes almost exclusively consists of a knowledge test, measured just before and at the end of the three-hour course. This means that only very short-time effects can be demonstrated. Increased knowledge scores at the end of the class do not imply that this effect will last longer and neither that the increased knowledge will lead to better oral health outcomes. The short follow-up period is a considerable limitation, also for the intervention in CDP. Since the implementation itself takes place at the beginning of the second semester, and the submission of the final report is already expected in the last weeks of May, possible effects can only be evaluated over a few months, which does not allow us to draw any conclusion in the longer term. Preferably, the staff should perform a long-term effect evaluation over several years. Besides effect evaluations, process evaluations are performed using a SWOT analysis. The students identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that influenced their intervention or can affect it in the future.

As a final evaluation tool, the students score the three different Community Dentistry modules every year. This course evaluation is organised by the central university authorities and completed anonymously by the students after the exam period. They are asked to give a score out of five on various items per domain. These domains

are 'learning effect', 'active learning', 'evaluation process', 'course material', 'exercises/practicals', 'coaching', and 'the individual lecturer'. Table 3 summarises the results of the student evaluations for each of the three submodules, based on data from 2020 to 2021.

In conclusion, the current evaluation process lacks information on the interventions' long-term impact on the end-users. Furthermore, the experiences of the end-users and the different stakeholders of the social organisations should be explored more profoundly to improve the educational programme. The organisations are only asked via e-mail to send their feedback and remarks to improve the practical programme. However, this cannot be considered as a structured and valid evaluation.

Community Dentistry I			N=44 (69.84%)		
Learning effect	Active Learning	Evaluation	Course Material	Exercises/ practicals	Individual lecturer
4.06	3.98	3.87	4.05	4.05	4.54
Community Dentistry II			N=32 (62.75%)		
Learning effect	Active Learning	Evaluation	Course Material	Exercises/ practicals	Individual lecturer
4.19	4.16	4.2	4.15	4.15	4.59
Community Dentistry into Practice			N=36 (70.59%)		
Learning effect	Active Learning	Evaluation	Course material	Coaching	Organisation
4.10	4.53	4.49	4.36	4.40	4.24

Table 3 Student evaluation of the three modules within Community Dentistry (2020-2021)

4.3 Engagement with Participants

4.3.1 Students

The students of today are the dentists of tomorrow. Besides Paediatric Dentistry, Community Dentistry does not provide a complete postgraduate specialist training programme but is considered an **undergraduate training programme**, combined with short training

sessions for graduated dentists. Teaching it as a specialism would suggest a separate field in dentistry where socially vulnerable patients can or should be referred to. So it would make a distinction between dental care for the privileged and care for the underprivileged. We believe that all dental professionals can treat patients of all social backgrounds. The general dentist should be able to include critical social determinants of patients into the diagnosis and should be able to adjust their communication strategy to the individual needs of the patient. Obviously, this requires proper training. To optimise the chances of a long-term effect of the Community Dentistry educational programme after students' graduation, the courses should be perceived and remembered as a **positive experience** by the students. We need to be aware that Community Dentistry might not be the first subject that comes to mind when students start dental studies and that a certain reticence and suspicion can be present in some students. Nevertheless, we are delighted to see that the different courses of the educational programme are evaluated very positively by the students, according to table 3. As mentioned in section 2.2, the open and non-judgemental context is crucial to make students feel safe. If they are taught to accept patients no matter who they are and where they come from, students should feel accepted too, with their background, doubts, and questions.

Besides a positive and open learning environment, Community Dentistry emphasises **co-ownership** by the students. This requires sufficient freedom to allow the students to create their own personal projects. As mentioned earlier, a free choice is offered to students to select a social organisation in CDP. This personal choice is a strong supporting factor in students' engagement during the course. Every year, students propose organisations in their neighbourhood or want to work in an organisation that is somehow related to them personally or to family members, friends, or acquaintances. This personal connection can lead to long-term collaborations between young dentists and social organisations, although this needs further investigation. Following the same hypothesis, 2nd bachelor students (CDII) will be allowed in the upcoming years to perform their teaching exercise in a primary school class of their choice, e.g. in their own

primary school. This contributes to the co-ownership but is also a response to the growing number of students, making it practically impossible to roll out CDII in one school simultaneously.

The last advice to engage students from our experience in Community Dentistry is to never separate Community Service Learning (CSL) from the head topic of the study curriculum. If students want to become engineers, let them be engineers in a challenging social project. If they're going to become dentists, let them be dentists in a different setting. The first lesson of CDI is given in the first semester of the first year, making it the first dentistry-specific course of the whole curriculum, apart from the general medical courses students are receiving during this first semester. This is an interesting detail because it offers an excellent opportunity to introduce dentistry to dental students so that the patient's social environment and psychosocial context are naturally linked to dentistry. The whole Community Dentistry curriculum is set up similarly, seeing social diversity as an inherent characteristic of dentistry, with its challenges and opportunities, requiring cultural and communicative skills that can be trained and developed.

4.3.2 Community

Community involvement requires more than only putting the word community into the courses' names. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the role of the community in the educational programme of Community Dentistry is clearly visible. From the first bachelor year (CDI), dental students must be as much as possible exposed to the existing social diversity. However, this does not automatically imply that socially vulnerable patients should be exposed directly to unprepared and inexperienced dental students, which could lead to negative experiences on both sides. For this reason, the community is first explored and analysed using theoretical cases and gradually involved as a partner when students are sufficiently prepared to offer effective services to the community. Expecting engagement and time investment from external social partners cannot be seen without a mutual benefit for all parties.

Regarding the school project in CDII, the intervention not only focuses on teaching the children but also aims to engage the teachers and school board by involving them in the development process and the evaluation of educational materials. On a city level, all educational materials developed by the students are also reviewed by health promotors of the different community health centres in Ghent and further distributed among other schools and teachers in Ghent to increase the impact and reach a broader audience.

To keep a close connection with the different external organisations, the students are asked to send the data of their contact person(s) within the organisation. These contact persons receive all necessary information and evaluation forms by mail and are actively involved from the development until the final evaluation. Organisations can always apply to become a permanent partner, which means they will appear on a list from which the next cohort of students can choose. However, the students are always free to come up with a new organisation, so partner organisations cannot be sure of receiving student groups every year. This might be a risk for an uninterrupted long-term partnership.

4.3.3 Staff

Integrating CSL into undergraduate curricula is a demanding and labour-intensive process. Table 2 indicates the required staff to implement and maintain the Community Dentistry educational programme. Unlike ex-cathedra courses with one teacher, tutorial sessions simultaneously require five supervisors. For the extramural activities, one supervisor is needed per three to five student groups (10-15 students), depending on the action. Without additional support from many volunteers, CSL educational programmes would have difficulties to survive.

When a faculty offers CSL education, it is crucial that the Engaged Learning is not exclusively restricted to an individual course but should be carried out by the entire curriculum and staff. For this reason, it is important to emphasise that CSL at UGent would not be possible

without the support of colleagues from all specialities, sharing a common vision of inclusive oral health care education over the five years of undergraduate education. As a practical example of this holistic community approach, the evaluation forms for all clinical exercises include an item on how the student deals with the patient's socioeconomic background. Furthermore, the clinical internship during the last year of undergraduate education contains outreaches to nursing homes and a community health service, where students perform dental treatments with mobile clinical equipment under the supervision of an experienced dentist. These external visits are officially not part of the courses presented in this chapter but are supervised by or in collaboration with members of the ELOHA team, illustrating the close link between community service and clinical skills and the engagement of the entire clinical staff of the UGent dental school.

4.4 Added Value for Impact

4.4.1 What worked well and what didn't in the initiative

The Community Dentistry educational programme has gained its place as an indispensable part of the dental curriculum, thanks to the work of many internal and external collaborators. The distribution over several years makes it possible to gradually build up the intensity of community service, going from theoretical cases to external outreaches. This step-wise approach is an important pedagogical trump. Another success of the programme is that it is well-accepted and positively evaluated by the students, making it more than an obliged course.

The external organisations are enthusiastic about participating in the different programmes and appreciating the students' effort by giving them positive evaluations and not reporting specific negative experiences. Nevertheless, the view of the partners could be evaluated in a more standardised manner. The programme also could not demonstrate its impact within organisations in the long term

because of the academic calendar structure, consisting of courses of maximum one year.

It is not always easy to motivate all individual team members of an external organisation. Getting the consent and engagement of the direction does not guarantee the full support of the entire staff. Social organisations face many challenges with limited personnel, so oral health activities might not always be the top priority. This is very understandable, but it can be a risk to hold down the students' engagement. Especially when working with schools, it often occurs that individual teachers are hard to reach by the students, leading to a less profound preparation of the project and possible frustration among students. This is another reason to let students choose where to perform their school project, probably leading them toward fully motivated teachers. On the other side, the tight schedule of the dental students does not give them a lot of flexibility to plan their activities during the regular opening times of the organisations. Moreover, the inter-semester exam period hampers a continuous activity.

As a final limitation, we should consider that our CSL projects focus entirely on health promotion and prevention. In the introduction section, the oral health disparities in the population are described, implying that many of the people within the participating organisations will have acute treatment needs. Within this educational programme, the students cannot offer any curative treatment and so will not be able to reduce the care deficit. They only can try to facilitate partnerships between their organisation and external dentists.

4.4.2 Facilitating factors

- Educational programme over different years
- Sufficient support of the faculty as part of a shared vision
- Positive dynamics in a safe environment for all actors
- Protocol guiding students from preparation toward implementation and evaluation
- Volunteers and other partners

4.4.3 Broader societal impact

It is hard to measure the real societal impact of an educational programme, but some suggestions can be made. First of all, the students offer their services to existing social organisations. Since there is a lack of dentists in most cities in Flanders and vulnerable subgroups often do not find access to oral health care, the involvement of undergraduate students can be a first step to guide the organisation to professional dental care. The students can do preparatory actions and build bridges with external dentists because of their closer connection with the dental field. Furthermore, the students can try to eliminate barriers and misperceptions on both sides.

Apart from helping individuals with their oral health needs, the CSL project increases awareness. Oral health is often neglected as a priority within social risk groups, but on the other hand, these high-risk groups have difficulties finding access to oral health care, leading to an underestimation of the extent of the problem. Oral health projects within social organisations can be an eye-opener for both students and other professionals.

Finally, all students will become dental professionals one day. When undergraduate students have obtained the right competencies to deal with different patient groups during their training, they will feel more comfortable treating these patients during their further careers. This statement is not supported by hard evidence, but we believe that the positive encounter during the CSL programme can lead to more empathy and more willingness to work with underserved and underprivileged patients after graduating.

4.5 Conclusions

The Community Dentistry educational programme aims to build bridges between future dentists and underserved patient groups. Over three different years, the programme evolves gradually from theoretical cases toward real-life outreaching projects. In each

module, a step-wise and evidence-based protocol is followed from preparation to evaluation. Furthermore, emphasis should be put on creating an open and safe environment for all actors to create a positive encounter.

Chapter 5 The Potential of Walking Methods to Set Up Reciprocal CERL Partnerships

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Brecht Van der Schueren

5.1 Introduction: The Search for Reciprocity in CERL Partnerships

In order to tackle the wicked societal challenges we are facing, it is urgent to reconsider the societal role of higher education institutions (HEIs) and their educational and research practices (Biberhofer and Rammel, 2017). Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) has been praised as a valuable framework that can help universities to reshape both what and how they teach and do research and how they are interacting with other actors and dynamics in society. CERL has been described as being both a method (focused on partnerships in and beyond academia); a principle (stressing reciprocity); and an objective (tackling societal challenges) (Farnell, 2020). Several studies have shown that CERL-projects can be valuable for both students (who are immersed in complex learning experiences), staff (who can keep their research societally relevant), and local communities (who can acquire help to tackle local challenges) (Farnell, 2020).

A point of particular interest in CERL projects is findings ways to carefully build and maintain trust, reciprocity, and equality among all the actors involved (Bloomgarden, 2017). Authentic CERL initiatives go beyond a one-way process: they search for mutually beneficial partnerships that meet both the needs of the partner organisations as well as the University's educational and research goals (Moriau et al., Forthcoming). This demands remediating imbalances of knowledge and power. It equally requires approaching communities holistically, acknowledging their struggles but equally recognising them as vibrant places full of action, wisdom, and possibilities (Mitchell and Donahue, 2017). Even though reciprocity is often put forward as a crucial precondition for CERL initiatives, both the voices of community partners as well as the quality of the community experience are underrepresented in the literature (Chmelka et al., 2020).

In the following years, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) aims to install so-called sustainable transition labs: learning networks of students, researchers, teaching staff, and local community members who seek to tackle local challenges together in an impactful and

sustainable way, drawing on CERL theory and practice. An important concern therein is the desire to take the need for reciprocity seriously, equally in the early phases of the partnership. Is there a possibility that VUB students and staff can help to address certain challenges that are defined by local communities in Brussels through CERL partnerships? How can we find ways to bring the struggles and dreams of local actors to the attention of the University, instead of one-sidedly projecting academic goals on communities? How do we build interpersonal trust and equality between different stakeholders?

As the VUB CERL team, we have experimented with walking methodologies to find answers for the manifold questions that pop up in the exploratory stages of CERL-partnerships. Interviewing on foot is on the rise in and beyond qualitative social research (Bates and Rhys-Taylor, 2018). Reflecting on both the methodological literature and eight walking interviews conducted by myself in Brussels, I aim to show in this chapter how the walking interview can be seen as a fruitful methodology to cope with some of the different tasks that need to be simultaneously tackled in the first stages of establishing CERL-partnerships:

1) Map networks of actors and organisations;
2) Explore divergent subjective understandings of the neighbourhood;
3) Validate experiential knowledge and find ways to connect it to academic knowledge;
4) Build interpersonal relationships and trust;
5) Be reflexive about positionality and power imbalances; and
6) Find a niche where the University could engage itself in the future.

In order to be fruitful, the use of walking methods to facilitate CERL projects needs to be well thought-through and carefully catered to each unique encounter. If not, it risks being ineffective or even conflicting and harmful.

This chapter is a shortened version of my own master's thesis research, conducted as an urban studies student at the VUB (Van der Schueren, 2021). This chapter mostly aims to present some methodological reflections for those who also seek to use walking methods in CERL partnerships. Crucially, these reflections are not to be read as best practices that can be simply copy-pasted into another CERL-design. Precisely because they do not endorse single, empirical truths, they can only be seen as inspiration for new trial-and-error attempts in different contexts. I hope that the insights I have harvested from the literature and my own walks can shape one's own unique community–campus engagements. Hopefully resulting in stronger, warmer, more equal partnerships and transformative local action.

5.2 Burgeoning Theory and Practice of Walking Methods

During the interbellum, the urban sociologists of the Chicago School were among the first to use walking as a research method in conducting studies of homelessness, street gangs, and sex workers (King and Woodroffe, 2019). In more recent years, walking methods have been used in disciplines such as geography (Curl et al., 2018), urban studies (Holgersson, 2017), social work (Ferguson, 2016), anthropology (Kusenbach, 2003), critical psychology (Bridger, 2010), medical education research (Dubé et al., 2014), or outdoor and environmental education (Lynch and Mannion, 2016). This diversity resulted in a wide variety of research designs and a myriad of concepts such as *go-alongs*, *mobile interviewing*, *participatory walking, walk-alongs*, *or walking fieldwork* (King and Woodroffe, 2019). Walking research methods include a plethora of different ontological and epistemological assumptions, different techniques, tools, and types of generated data (Kowalewski and Bartłomiejski, 2020). As such, it is

better to approach walking as a wide methodological landscape rather than a single and delineated method.

5.2.1 Relaxing, surprising, challenging

What makes walking such a promising methodology? Let's first state the obvious: walking is often considered pleasant and relaxing. This can be reason enough for participants to take part in a project, where they might not consider joining other kinds of research for a lack of time or interest (Dubé et al., 2014). Because of their intimate nature, walking methods are said to be beneficial in the process of building confidence and empathy between interviewer and interviewee (Macpherson, 2016). Slow-paced walking leads to more spontaneous talking (Evans and Jones, 2011).

Walking through urban landscapes can incite unexpected conversations and reflections. Clark and Emmel (2017, p.2) wrote how a racist graffiti tag "prompted a discussion about cohesion and tolerance that may not necessarily have been considered in a room-based interview." This is an interesting example of serendipity, a recurrent concept in walking methods literature. It can be described as unanticipated encounters or events that enable a deeper understanding than static interviewing (Dubé et al., 2014). Furthermore, walking has been described as a way to 'reawaken the body' and explore more sensuous forms of scholarship that go beyond the dominance of sight (Vannini et al., 2018). Lastly, walking interviews have the potential to be less methodologically stringent, allowing for more open-ended encounters that take into account interviewees' own interpretations, desires, and expertise (Clark and Emmel, 2017).

At the same time, the walking interview has been described in the literature as an advanced research technique because it requires the interviewer to simultaneously execute different physical, social, and cognitive tasks. These include navigating unknown terrain, building rapport with the interviewees, and dealing with unexpected circumstances (King and Woodroffe, 2019). Walking interviews are

very time-consuming because they require moving to and from the walking area and conducting the walk itself. Transcribing and proper analysis can be challenging because of background noise and fragmented conversations. Because of its distinct public character, it is not possible to maintain the confidentiality of interviewees while walking (Clark and Emmel, 2010). The urban topology and weather also have an important impact on the pace and profoundness of the conversation. Because of its pleasurable character, walks can generate and reveal certain topics and emotions while occluding others. This requires attention and clever balancing from the interviewer, especially if the topics discussed are sensitive or taboo (Macpherson, 2016).

5.2.2 Understanding of self, community, and place

American scholar Kusenbach (2003) pioneered the 'go-along' as a research tool in ethnography. She described the method as an interesting hybrid of participant observation and static interviewing. She has distinguished five thematic elements that the go-along helps to explore. Drawing on her work, Holgersson (2017) has added a 6th element:

1) *Perception* (how different people perceive the same environment)
2) *Spatial practices* (the meaning that people put into the same activities)
3) *Biographies* (how people connect their life stories to specific places)
4) *Social architecture* (how people relate to others inhabiting the same space)
5) *Social realms* (how place shapes social interaction)
6) *Role of the researcher* (walking as a common activity and more of a conversation than an interrogation)

At first sight, it might appear to us that we are walking together through the same streets, noticing the same things, and thus have a

shared experience of the world around us. But starting from a social constructivist point of view, social scientists have come to understand how our perception of place is multi-layered, dynamic, and deeply personal (King and Woodroffe, 2019). Depending on who you are, you tend to see, smell, sense, cheer, or fear different things whilst walking through streets or landscapes. Walking methods have been praised for their potential to uncover different knowledge, emotions, or perceptions and allow for exchange.

However, when reading some of the walking methods literature, it seems as if walking would allow researchers to almost effortlessly reveal the enigmas of the human mind, body, and soul. Human geographer Anderson (2004) explicitly positions his idea of 'bimbling' (relaxed and relatively aimless strolling) in a "wider post-modern project that seeks to challenge externally generated knowledge and find ways to create more equitable and collaborative forms of knowledge" (p.260). Although this resonates with the ambitions of CERL and arguably has become quite mainstream in the social sciences more broadly, it is important to remind ourselves that this post-modern project was and is contested both in and outside academia (Pluckrose and Lindsay, 2020). Examining the ontological and epistemological roots of the diverse walking methods literature can help us to assess to what extent we want to share this enthusiasm (Macpherson, 2016).

5.2.3 Epistemological and ontological questions and critiques

Theory and praxis of walking methods are inevitably underpinned by certain conceptions of being and knowing. The constructivist conceptions outlined above have been critiqued from different angles. Starting from a quantitative empiricist perspective, some authors have claimed that the open-ended and unstructured way in which data is gathered while walking leads to observations that are "not rigorous, cannot be verified, and thus should not be trusted" (Lawhon et al., 2016, p.4). From a post-structural or feminist point of view, walking based research can be denounced as masculine voices that have the

privilege to make "inappropriately generalized truth claims based on their specific perceptual experiences" (Lawhon et al., 2016, p.4).

Indeed, certain forms of privilege are important prerequisites for an untroubled walking experience. Social differences and the unequal power relations that result from them are not simply left behind when going for a stroll. For a lot of people – and women in particular – walking in public spaces can be a tense or even dangerous experience, accompanied by constant feelings of caution or fear (Gilow, 2015). For disabled people, walking might require certain adaptations or it might even be a sheer impossibility, requiring so much variation that it outweighs its benefits as an innovative methodology. A Eurocentric bias could neglect the fact that walking as a way of knowing has been practised by indigenous peoples around the world for centuries (Vannini et al., 2018). Also, going along with the open-ended and co-creative nature of walking methods can be challenging for some people because they are forced to reconsider the complex set of expectations that are linked to their own identity as researchers.

These critiques learn that it is important not to be overly optimistic about the benefits of walking methods. In order to overcome them, reflexivity and transparency about our own beliefs and assumptions as researchers/citizens/humans is crucial. All the more because CERL projects demand that people with very different ontological and epistemological conceptions work together. Intersectional thinking can help us to carefully cater walking methods to the different people and contexts we engage within CERL projects.

5.2.4 Intersectional thinking as a valuable lens?

Intersectional thinking starts from the idea that every individual's unique identity can be seen as a complex mix of societal privileges and oppressions. The interplay of determinants such as gender x ethnicity x ability x culture x religion facilitates or constrains our opportunities as individuals in a certain societal context. Intersectionality as a concept/theory/method has been used in social sciences to grasp how

knowledge, identity, and power are closely interwoven (Potter, 2013). It has also been used in non-academic writings and civil rights protest movements to condemn structural barriers and forms of violence that certain people are facing in society. As such, intersectionality further complicates the question of how we can find ways to explore and take into account other people's perceptions of the urban. It equally complicates efforts to incorporate their voices in CERL projects in reciprocal ways.

I want to argue that an awareness of intersectional differences is vital before going out on foot, especially in precarious neighbourhoods. Precisely because this implies interacting – and also trying to share power – with people who have very different intersectional profiles than yourself as a university actor. I think it is important to acknowledge the fact that we have a unique intersectional profile ourselves, that we cannot in any way leave behind before entering the field on foot. Even the labelling of certain neighbourhoods or communities as 'precarious' or 'fragile' – solely based on scientific socio-economic criteria – needs to be done carefully (Venkatesh, 2008). This forces us to critically renegotiate our own convictions, experiences, and worldviews. Ultimately, it raises important questions about how, where, when, by whom – and if at all – walking interviews should be conducted. If reflexively and carefully catered, however, I think walking methods have the potential to explore these complex intersects and open up ways to collaborate with people who have different lived realities than ourselves. Let us briefly explore the intersects of culture/religion and ability, before moving on to the results of my own research.

In her article about how Muslim women navigate through public spaces, UK scholar Warren (2017) argues that walking methods research is often underpinned by Eurocentric and secular assumptions. Consequently, ethnic, gendered, and moral dimensions are often disregarded. Since local urban communities increasingly became spaces where people with different intersectional profiles co-exist, she stresses that a greater sensitivity to the role of faith,

spirituality, and morality is needed in our walking praxes. Warren is critical for authors who claim that walking is an easy way to build rapport and counterbalance power inequalities because "there are multiple structural barriers, both physical and perceptual, that are presented in the act of walking in the city for different people" (Warren, 2017, p.790). Walking and talking *can* generate valuable insights into the lived reality of others *if tailored sensitively*, but it is often also a difficult and discomforting process.

Dis/ability is another valuable intersect to take into account. We are reminded that walking – or mobility more generally – is all too often assumed to be normal or a given (Butler and Derrett, 2014). Substantial reflections on dis/ability are often lacking in the literature that I have found – including the possibility that researchers themselves are disabled. Professor Oliver (1993) reminds us that the praxis of walking is deeply entangled with our identity, our cultural archive, and our societal infrastructures. He stresses that it is hard to live in a society constituted of ableism (discrimination of people with disabilities) where everything is put into place to make sure disabled people are forced to live up to what is considered 'healthy' or 'normal'. These cultural standards make ableism invisible and thus incontestable. He argues that it is important to make sure we expose physical, cultural, and discursive barriers that prevent disabled people to take part in society in a decent and human way.

How do we incorporate these insights into our search to pluralise walking practices and use them in CERL-projects? I think it is necessary to cater to the needs of every unique dis/abled person you are about to co-create with. This requires empathic skills and time to build up trust. Starting from their own lived experience, disabled people can be considered experts, but they need to be able to raise their voices in an emotionally safe way. For some people, if they can walk independently in the first place, the very act of walking requires a lot of focus and can be very energy-consuming (Butler and Derrett, 2014). Maybe the combination with reflection, focusing on the environment, and recalling memories is just too much. It is crucial to remind ourselves

that walking is always just a means and not a goal as such. If meaningful CERL encounters require walking differently, remaining seated or going on a bike, by tram, or car instead, these alternatives are to be chosen.

5.3 Exploring the Use of Walking Methods to Set Up CERL Partnerships in Brussels

In my own search to explore the potential of walking in the exploratory stages of CERL partnerships, I have conducted eight interviews (see figures 1 and 2 below). I have deliberately opted for an open-ended, participant-driven interview. This resulted in 43km of recorded walks through Molenbeek, Brussels and 16.5 hours of recording. In this last section, I want to share some insights about these walks and connect them with the topics found in the literature, as described above.

	Respondents	Duration	Length	Language	Description
1	E.	1h45	4,7 km	English	Artist working on a co-creative project with local youth
2	J.	2h10	6,6 km	Dutch	Exploring wandering practices from architectural and artistic points of view
3	A.	1h45	6 km	French	Youngster working together with E. in co-creative project
4	M.	1h10	4,4 km	Dutch	Leader of a local youth group
5	N.	1h40	5,9 km	Dutch	Social worker in Molenbeek
6	C.	1h20	5,2 km	Dutch	Experience with engaged practices in Molenbeek in social work research & education
7	S.	1h40	Static interview	French	Active in diverse community building activities in Molenbeek
8	F.	2h00	10 km	French/ Dutch	Youngster working with F. in community building projects
	Total	16,5 hours	43 km		

Figure 1 - overview of interviewees

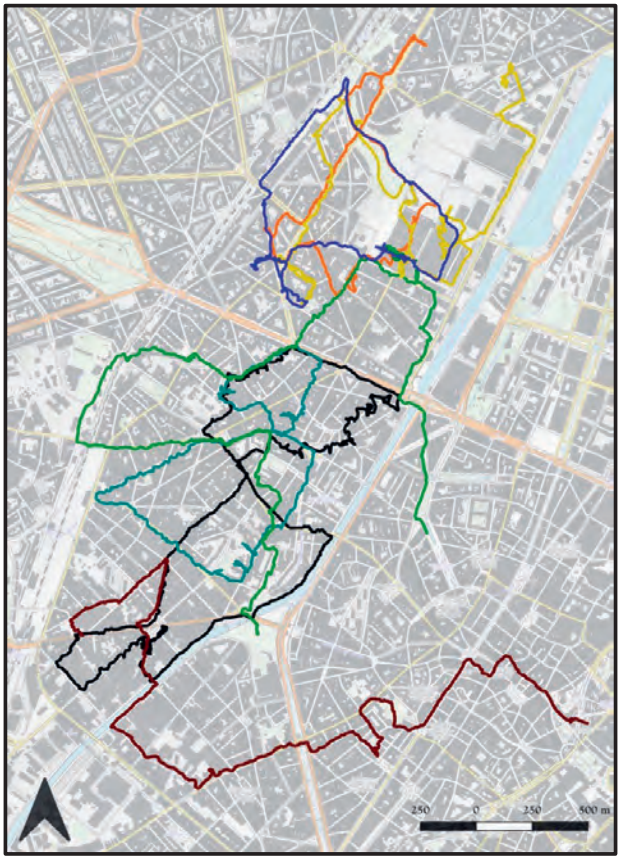

Figure 2 - overview of the walking interviews through Molenbeek

First some technicalities. The walks were geotracked using Strava, allowing GPX-data files to be exported and then create maps using QGIS. The conversations were recorded with two small clip microphones, one attached to my own jacket and one for my interviewees. This double taping was useful both as backup and to check elements that might be difficult to hear because of background noise. In order not to interrupt the natural flow of the conversation, I decided not to take extra notes on a clipboard. After the walks, I wrote down short field notes from memory. The interviews were transcribed

in part manually and in part with Happyscribe software, the latter working best for French and English recordings.

I asked my interviewees to walk me through their everyday urban environment and talk about their projects, passions, and struggles. I wanted to know what was driving them as human beings, going beyond the official mission statements and project proposals I could easily find online. The main aim for these walks was importantly different from the aim of most walking methods literature that I have presented above. A key ambition of CERL is to go beyond the classic goal of scientific research (documenting and understanding reality) and strive to take action for social-ecological transformation on a local scale. Could the people I walked with imagine working together with students or academic staff in their local communities to co-create a certain change in the future?

5.3.1 Map ecosystems and divergent understandings of the neighbourhood

The rich data generated with my walking interviews allowed me to map out social ecosystems and their spatial manifestations in Molenbeek. Figure 3 illustrates how such a mapping could be visualised, drawing on the transcript of one of my walking interviews. Reading through the different transcripts afterwards, I came across several names of individuals, civil society organisations, institutions, public spaces, or single events. Some of them figured in different interviews, allowing me to make connections across interviewees. A remarkable benefit of walking to map ecosystems is that you are likely to meet people who occupy key nodes in it. This allows for a spontaneous first contact, a brief explanation of their projects in the neighbourhood, and even an exchange of phone numbers. My interviewees acted like gatekeepers on the move, slowly opening up their social world for me. Depending on the ambitions and specific phase of a given CERL-project, investing time into making such thick descriptions could be a helpful tool to further prepare a local engagement.

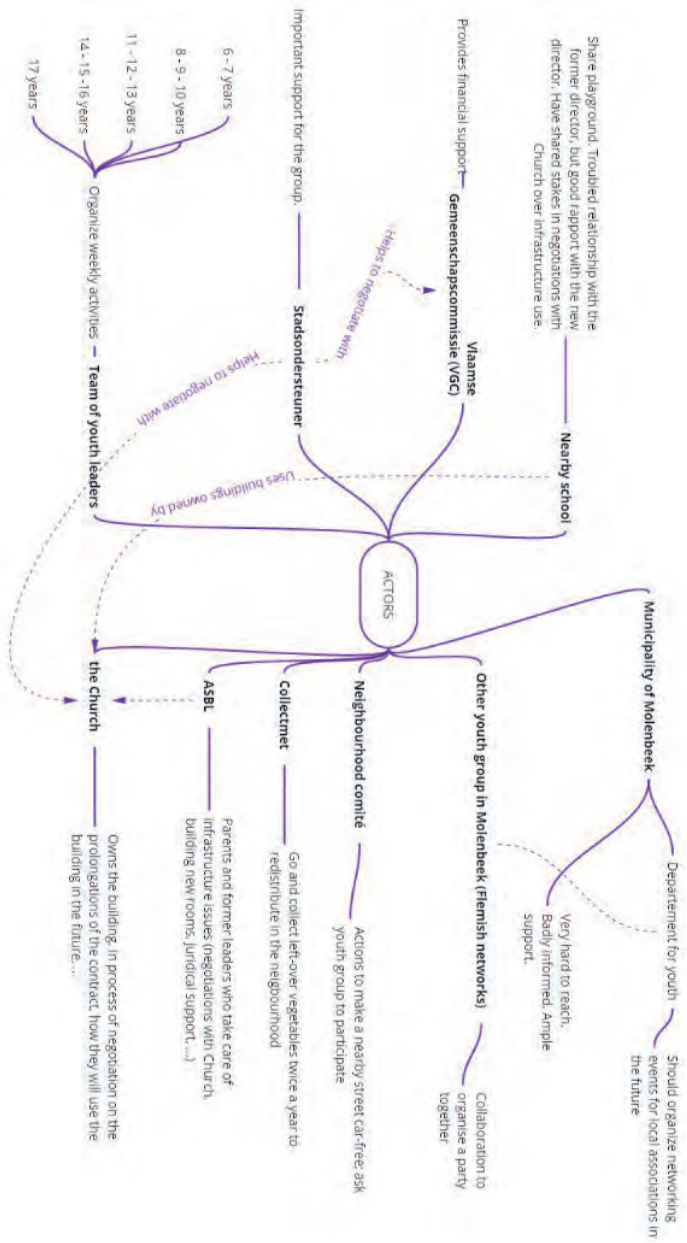

Figure 1 - mapping of local ecosystem based on one interview

It was remarkable to hear how different interviewees had strikingly different views on the same local spaces. Going through the different transcripts, I realised it could be valuable to create a kind of 'sediment' of all these narratives, allowing them to communicate with each other. Figure 4 below presents such a sediment about the controversial Tour and Taxis site, an important part of the bigger urban renewal plan along the canal in Brussels. It highlights both an amazement of its architectural beauty, a fear that processes of gentrification might be intensified, and a relief to finally have a place nearby to play with the kids on rainy days. These sediments could reveal the complexities of local spaces or organisations and help prepare for CERL engagements in the future.

Figure 2 - sedimented narratives about Tour and Taxis site

Interestingly, these sedimented narratives also showed uses of space that might be difficult to grasp as an outsider. Interviewee N. remarked that one of the central squares of Molenbeek is often used informally to play cricket. M. had told me that her youth group indeed avoided

this place, even though it was the square closest to their building. E. and A. had told me how the same square was simultaneously claimed by Moroccan-Belgian youngsters, Eastern-European men, and West-African people. Invisibly, there was a territory battle going on between these different groups in the neighbourhood. During the walk, E. proclaimed "But the public spaces is, yeah, it's burning, it's exploding, you know, and we don't see it when we go walk by. But there's a lot of, uh [...] unwritten rules and boundaries."

I would argue that walking with local actors can help to gain insight into these unwritten rules and boundaries. Before academic actors set up projects, they need to figure out where an initiative could be launched, how this could happen, and in collaboration (or negotiation) with whom. Perhaps the most fundamental question to be asked is: is such an initiative wanted or valuable in the first place? Meticulously preparing CERL projects by using these sediments can greatly help answer these questions and work toward reciprocal relationships.

5.3.2 Be reflexive about your intersectional profile

Even though I tried hard to be reflexive about my intersectional profile when navigating through Molenbeek, I could not prevent that interviewee S. immediately defined me as 'academic' or 'scientist' and therefore 'belonging to another world'. Luckily, in this case, my intersectional profile (which can still be considered atypical in academia) was not seen as too odd, malicious, or intimidating to nonetheless conduct a walking interview. But it is easy to imagine that it would keep other doors firmly shut. This common insight in social scientific research – you are never a just fly on the wall – became extra important when walking through Molenbeek. As we have seen in the literature review above, conducting a walking interview in an urban context is an active intervention in the social dynamics of the neighbourhood.

You do not only observe the neighbourhood you walk through with your interviewee, your presence influences this neighbourhood in

ways that are difficult to grasp. As other people noticed my presence (as an intersect of white x male x student x vintage-clothing-hipster-look x …), this undoubtedly influenced how they perceive, and thus act upon, the neighbourhood. Discussions on gentrification are but one way to illustrate this so-called performative character of walking. Several interviewees expressed concerns that their neighbourhood would be taken over by 'rich bobos'. According to them, they threatened to cast out the current populations by elevating rent prices and changing the commercial fabric of Molenbeek. Ironically, the act of walking through a neighbourhood with the explicit intention to contribute to a social-justice agenda could potentially reinforce these fears. All the more because some of these local youngsters already have the feeling that they are, as E. put it, "not belonging, not to here, not to Morocco, not to anywhere." This only underscores the need to have a rich diversity of intersectional profiles as part of the CERL-team, so these performative effects can be somewhat tempered.

5.3.3 Find a niche to co-create – but always on their terms

My walking interviews were evidently not only fruitful to map the bigger ecosystem in which interviewees situated their projects, but also to gain a multi-faceted understanding of these projects themselves. The first element is linked to a rich timeframe. How did they end up doing what they were doing? What were the joys and challenges they were currently facing? What were they hoping to establish in the future? Walking interviews helped me in slowly getting a rich understanding of local projects, revealing both their genesis, present realities, and potential (un)desired futures. This understanding was very helpful in the process of figuring out how a collaboration with university students or staff through a CERL-initiative could potentially contribute.

These walks equally revealed crucial conditions for this collaboration to be fruitful. Different respondents warned me that a long-term commitment was necessary to come to valuable local engagements. Working in local communities on structural challenges is not

something that is easily and rapidly done. It requires time, goodwill, and perseverance. It also implies sticking to the goals and agreements that were mutually recognised. Both E., S., and C. were very clear that they saw this as an important precondition for collaboration. Equally, they saw the lack of these conditions as grave hazards for a potential partnership. To finish this section, I want to share how they envisioned possible reciprocal collaborations in their own words.

> E. *"And my experience told me that it's better to look for something more stable, to stay for a longer time because only like that you can really make a difference."*

> S. "*Vous savez, ça fait des années qu'on vient me trouver pour poser des questions - je suis pas la seule, mais on veut pas être vus comme dans une cage comme on vient de visiter dans un zoo et puis qu'on fait rien avec ça - on est des êtres humains. On est ce qui peut constituer aussi votre réussite - et vous la nôtre. On vous donne des outils, vous me donnez des vôtres."*[15]

> C. "*[Zo een samenwerking] gaat echt slow science zijn. Heel traag. Met weinig volk. Lang werken. Veel vertrouwen opbouwen. En u vooral niet opdringen met uw academische agenda of met uw eigen prioriteiten. Want als ge dat doet dan is het foutu. Foutu. Dan dreig je ook mensen, als je daar te agressief in zijt, dreig je mensen eigenlijk voor een zoveelste keer te ontgoochelen en te victimiseren. Dus daar ben ik als des duivels voor, voor dat soort van praktijken waarin eigenlijk een hogeschool of een universiteit zijn agenda oplegt aan mensen in kansarmoede onder het mom "we gaan ze helpen", maar eigenlijk zijn eigen mensen prioriteit geven, en zo eigenlijk parasiteert op de kansarmoede - nog eens parasiteert op de kansarmoede."*[16]

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[15] *You know, people have been coming to me for years to ask questions - I'm not the only one, but we don't want to be seen as if we were in a cage like you visit in a zoo and then do nothing with it - we are human beings. We are those who can also potentially be your success - and you are ours. We give you tools, you give me yours.* (Own translation)

[16] *[Such a collaboration] is really going to be slow science. Very slow. With few people. Working for a long time. Building up a lot of trust. And above all, don't impose your academic agenda or your own priorities. Because if you do so, it's messed up. Messed up. Then you also threaten people – if you are too aggressive with it – you actually threaten to disillusion and victimise*

5.4 Conclusions

Reflecting on several walks through Brussels with local community partners, I have argued that conducting walking interviews can be a fruitful methodology to help navigate the first phases of CERL partnerships. It has become clear that these first phases are both thrilling as well as challenging. Several different goals need to be pursued at the same time, going from mapping local ecosystems to building trust between community partners, university staff, and students.

Preparing for CERL-partnerships requires balancing simultaneously on several shaky tightropes. Being a self-reflexive person, capable of empathising with others, without losing a critical attitude, and keeping a sufficient distance between yourself and the community actors. Valuing and incorporating the experiential knowledge of local actors without carelessly renouncing rational-scientific paradigms and methods. Striving for the incorporation of partners' goals and desires, without losing sight of the specific educational and research ambitions of the University. Carefully mapping out and participating in local ecosystems, without overburdening yourself as a CERL-team – making promises that are impossible to keep. Being engaged in local communities without overrunning them. Working toward the rebalancing of privilege and oppression without reinforcing existing disparities. In this chapter, I have shown how walking methodologies can be used as a tactic to navigate these complex balancing acts. Due to their ability to open up complex understanding of self, community and place, these innovative methodologies can help to establish reciprocal, durable, and impactful CERL-partnerships.

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people for the umpteenth time. So that's something I am furious about, for those practices where a college or a university actually imposes its agenda on people in disadvantaged circumstances under the guise of 'we're going to help them', but actually prioritises its own people, and so actually parasitises on the disadvantaged - yet again parasitises on the disadvantaged." (Own translation)

Chapter 6 Community-Engaged Architectural Design Learning in the Solidary Mobile Housing Project

KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture

Aurelie De Smet, Burak Pak, and Yves Schoonjans

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The Solidary Mobile Housing Project

The Solidary Mobile Housing (SMH) project is a trans-disciplinary and trans-sectoral project characterised by applied research and experimental development. SMH endeavours to address two main challenges in the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR). On the one hand, it explores novel ways to address the acute shortage of affordable housing and the increasing number of homeless people. On the other hand, SMH researches alternative ways to appropriate the plethora of un(der)used, residual and derelict spaces in the Region. The project's overarching aim is to investigate how the BCR's housing system could become more resilient by providing (temporary) affordable housing for the most vulnerable citizens in urban Waiting Spaces. At the same time, the project strives to revitalise the urban fabric through the co-development of collective neighbourhood projects on these sites.

In the context of this project, eight homeless inhabitants of the BCR have been working together since 2017 with social workers from *Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel* (SOB), counsellors of *Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk Brussel* (CAW), teachers, researchers, and students from the Faculty of Architecture at KU Leuven, and several other partners from civil society, the professional sector, academia, and the Government. Together, they have developed an innovative and resilient model and an architectural design prototype for the co-creation of solitary living in mobile houses on Waiting Spaces in the BCR. The primary funding resources of this co-creative project were Innoviris, the Institute for Research and Innovation of the BCR, the Region's Cabinet for Housing, and the *Koning Boudewijn Stichting*.

The SMH project has four distinct objectives: (1) developing new forms of help and guidance for homeless people, (2) creating an innovative, mobile, and modular housing solution, (3) strengthening small-scale solidarity networks in the city, and (4) involving vulnerable citizens in the temporary use of un(der)used urban spaces in interaction with the surrounding neighbourhood. Consequently, the SMH project is being

developed through a far-reaching design-driven participatory action research (PAR) in a Living Lab context.

Since 2017, three PAR cycles have been implemented (the co-planning, co-design, co-construction phases), a fourth is currently going on (the co-testing or Proof of Concept phase), and a fifth one is in preparation (the co-upscaling phase) (see Figure 2). Since the start of the project, more than 60 students from the Faculty of Architecture have been involved at different stages throughout the process, under the guidance of the academic project supervisors (authors of this paper). Each time, the students joined as fully-fledged project partners, collaborating with the involved end-users and professionals from the social, architectural, and spatial planning and construction sectors.

Figure 1: Co-creation in the SMH Living Lab

6.1.2 Engaged Learning in architectural education

From a historical perspective, Engaged Learning is a relatively novel approach in architectural design education. Since the formalisation and institutionalisation of architectural design learning, architectural education aims to develop the "creative and aesthetic capabilities that will generate good designers and ultimately good buildings and spaces" (Harris, 2012). However, how 'good spatial design' is

understood is inevitably bound by the *Zeitgeist* of society and thus bound to evolve.

Today, there seems to be a general understanding that learning to design, amongst others, involves practising how to address today's 'ill-defined' societal, environmental, and economic problems. This process commonly aims at designing inclusive environments through iterative and cyclical tasks: (1) researching the issue, (2) defining the core problem, (3) generating ideas, (4) designing prototypes, (5) testing, and (6) evaluating these prototypes and improving the proposed design solution by re-taking these steps from the start (Buchanan, 1992; Ramaley, 2015; Geitz and de Geus, 2019). The design studio course stands out as a relevant learning model in this context. As a result, it has become a core element of the curriculum of most architectural education. In this model, students learn experientially by designing a unique project, reflecting 'on-action' and 'in-action' (Schön, 1983; 1987; Gregory and Heiselt, 2014). However, when design studios are configured as mono-disciplinary and teacher-student centred settings and present students with design briefs by fictional clients with unlimited budgets, they risk failing to equip students with the skills needed to situate their creative thinking within complex, real-world contexts (Harris, 2012; Salama, 2015; Pak et al., 2019; Pak, 2017).

In his book '*Spatial Design Education: New Directions for Pedagogy in Architecture and Beyond*' Salama (2015) points to the fact that, from the '60s and '70s on, a myriad of alternative typologies and the new model of design studio teaching have been (and continue to be) developed. This novel model aspires to induce a collaborative and inclusive turn in architectural and urban design pedagogy. Salama (2015) also elaborates on how community-based design learning, design-build, and live project pedagogies are today "resurrected and reinvigorated (…) as interchangeable unconventional student-centred pedagogies." Canizaro (2012) has identified various reasons architectural schools adopt such programmes. These are: providing construction experience to the students; framing learning as a form of

community service; as training for professional practice; for critical approaches to learning; as a critique of academia; to improve the design sensibilities of the students: enhancing awareness of place; to strengthen collaborative skills; to explore new methods of project delivery; and to explore novel materials and materiality.

6.1.3 Engaged Learning in the context of SMH: The Community-Engaged Architectural Design Learning (CEADL) approach

As mentioned above, since the start of the project, various students from the Faculty of Architecture have joined the SMH Project's Living Lab as active project participants. To make this possible, several (often interactive) courses at the Faculty of Architecture of the KU Leuven - not necessarily all marked as 'Engaged Learning' subjects - were transformed to enable 'Community-engaged Architectural Design Learning' (CEADL).

In a nutshell, CEADL is a specific form of research-driven service-learning integrating community-engaged, collaborative research and design, addressing community-identified needs, validating community knowledge, and aiming to contribute to social change (Strand et al., 2003). As such, CEADL combines Engaged Learning with outreach-based community work and different forms of critical spatial practice. Critical spatial practice is a notion forwarded independently by Rendell (2006) and Miessen (2010; 2017), which can broadly be described as a method for critical design, transforming and reinventing the existing normative architectural discourses and frameworks through practice. According to Miessen, critical spatial practice involves *crossbenching* - as a far-reaching mode of collaboration, blurring disciplinary boundaries and inviting other societal actors, who previously would have been considered as non-professional outsiders, into spatial design processes. As such, critical spatial practice pushes all involved actors to 'turn off the autopilot', leave the boundaries of what is known, and critically rethink the established protocols and codes of conduct of their respective fields (Pak et al., 2019).

In what follows, we will elaborate on how the application of CEADL in the context of the SMH project enabled the collaboration of the different SMH partners and resulted in the inclusion of various actors, from other sectors, including civil society organisations and vulnerable end-users, in research and education at the Faculty of Architecture of the KU Leuven.

6.2 Overview of the SMH Community-Engaged Architectural Design Learning Approach

6.2.1 Structure of the initiative

Situated within the framework of the SMH project, six different courses of the International Master of Architecture at the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture were transformed to enable CEADL (see Figure 2 and Table 1). In this context, the participating teachers either re-framed their own courses or coordinated and negotiated with other tutors to explain the why and how of 'hacking' their course in the context of the SMH project. At the start of the lessons, the students were introduced to the theoretical context of the course as well as to the SMH PAR process and partners and the specific challenges the project was facing at that time. After that, they started to work on those in the context of the classes.

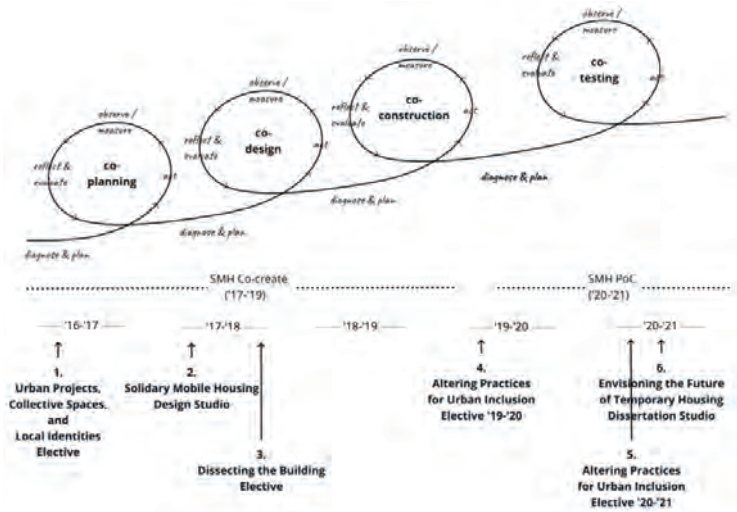

Figure 2: Timeline of the SMH CEADL Courses from 2017 until 2019, Cross-linking to the SMH PAR Cycles

The consecutive CEADL courses thus constituted a constellation of Engaged Learning courses, structured by the ongoing practice-based SMH PAR project. In each course, a hybrid theoretical framework was constructed with and used by the students, reflecting upon the notions of 'temporary use of Waiting Spaces' (De Smet, 2013), 'participation in and through design' (Pak, 2016), 'housing as a verb' (Turner and Fichter, 1972), 'architectural design justice' (Romero and Pak, 2021), and 'Social Resilience Cells' (Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2017; 2018). These also functioned as themes running like a red thread through the courses, enabling sense-making across several semesters.

6.2.2 How the community is matched with the initiative

The interaction with the community was organised differently in each SMH CEADL course. The openness of the PAR approach enabled us to use numerous methods and tools adapted to the needs of the participants and the specific goals of each of the stages of the research and development process. However, various basic principles were shared across different learning plans:

1) The course supervision was actively done by at least two parties involved in the SMH project: teachers affiliated with the faculty and guiders from the social organisations. All the other SMH partners, including the future inhabitants, frequently joined the weekly course sessions.
2) Structured co-creation moments were organised regularly during each course to facilitate informal but structured place-based discussions, sharing of concerns and choices, collaboration and co-creation of knowledge, and hands-on engagements with the physical surroundings and the social context. The methods we used for this included on-site engagement with the co-creation community, collective site visits, participatory mapping, community-engaged participatory design workshops, on-site design-build activities, and inclusive feedback and evaluation sessions. During these moments, the students' work in progress was presented to the whole SMH team. Everyone, including the future inhabitants, worked together to discuss, explore further, and improve the concepts, ideas, and proposals.
3) Furthermore, we also organised a public event, exhibition, or on-site intervention at the end of most of the courses. These were to receive input from other external stakeholders, such as the SMH Advisory Board members, other professionals from the BCR, or the broader public.

The fifth and sixth SMH CEADL courses were unique because they took place during the confinement declared by the Belgian Government in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, these had to be organised as fully online courses. In this context, we used Miro, Zoom, and Blackboard Collaborate to communicate weekly with the course tutors and bi-monthly with the other project partners during these courses. A significant drawback of this online approach was its unfeasibility to involve the future inhabitants directly (due to the technical complexities). The participation of the user community during this phase was nevertheless ensured through an indirect strategy. The inhabitants were briefed on the course progress by social

guiders involved in the project (*Samenlevingsopbouw*). Their feedback was included in the process to the furthest extent possible, within the limits of the course.

6.2.3 Outputs of the initiative

Each CEADL course was deliberately organised differently to experiment with the different approaches, aims, and evaluation criteria tied to the specific courses. As a result, the outputs were also very different in every case (see Table 1 and Figure 3). While the results had to fit the Faculty of Architecture's course requirements, we ensured they would also be usable and feed directly into the SMH project and its participatory aims. Therefore, based on the questions and challenges the project was facing, we carefully chose which course to 'hack' at each stage.

As a result, the output of each of the CEADL courses could be used to build further upon in the current or next SMH PAR cycle. For example, the architectural programme and design brief co-developed during the Urban Projects, Collective Spaces, and Local Identities Elective later formed the starting point for the co-design in Solidary Mobile Housing Design Studio. And the case study reports produced by the students of the Altering Practices for Urban Inclusion Elective '19-'20, including critical reflections on exemplary projects, as well as on the current and potential future SMH process, which are now feeding the partners' reflections on the positioning of the SMH Model and on opportunities and thresholds for upscaling.

6.2.4 How the initiative is evaluated

To evaluate the CEADL courses, feedback was gathered from the directly involved students and partners, both before (expectations), during, and after each course cycle. All the activities and output produced in this context were also collectively evaluated by the whole SMH team during the partner meetings. However, since each course cycle was organised differently, took on a different form, and had different aims, the feedback collection and evaluation were also tailor-

made and used qualitative rather than quantitative methods. Examples of the methods we used in this context are group discussions, (one question) interviews, collective writing, directed writing, structured (team) journals, questionnaires, and (self-) evaluation sessions (in which we employed tools such as photo-elicitation, timelining, and the Socratic Wheel). Moreover, using a structured logbook/diary, the project researcher also documented the aims, strategies, tools, and lessons learned from all the co-creation workshops and activities organised in the context of the SMH PAR. Finally, the output of the different courses was also 'evaluated' through the SMH PAR itself, for - as explained above - we were each time building further on this for elaborating the project. The feedback and evaluations from the previous cycles were used throughout the process to constantly improve the CEADL approach in the subsequent cycles.

Course	Organisation	Engagement Methods	Output
1. Urban Projects, Collective Spaces and Local Identities Elective Course	Prof. Yves Schoonjans, Prof Burak Pak & Drs. Aurelie De Smet (Urb. Proj., Coll. Space & Loc. Ident. Research Group) (15 Students)	- on-site engagement with the co-creation community (potential end-users at the Bodegem houseless reception centre, 2x) - participatory mapping of Brussels urban waiting spaces - inclusive feedback and evaluation sessions (monthly)	- needs and requirements analysis and survey - temporary use sites discovery and selection method (GIS-based) - four site selection scenario reports - case studies booklet - architectural programme and design brief for SMH
2. Solidary Mobile Housing Design Studio	Prof. Yves Schoonjans, Prof. Burak Pak, Drs. Aurelie De Smet & Ken De Cooman (professional architect) (17 Students)	- community-engaged participatory design workshops (monthly) - collective site visits - on-site design-build activities (workshop week) - inclusive feedback and evaluation sessions (3x)	- seventeen alternative preliminary architectural design proposals for the SMH units, collective space(s) and semi-public landscape - seventeen design journals (including visions and design concepts, architectural plans and representations, and short individual reflection papers)
3. Dissecting the Building Elective	Building Technology Course (Tutor: Ken De Cooman) (4 Students)	- community-engaged participatory design workshops (bi-monthly) - inclusive feedback and evaluation sessions (3x)	- technological construction details, - architectural representations (such as perspective and renders), and - physical and virtual 3D-models of the SHM Architectural Design

4. Altering Practices for Urban Inclusion Elective '19-'20	Prof. Burak Pak, Drs. Aurelie De Smet & Drs. Rosie Romero (Altering Practices for Urban Inclusion Research Group) (13 Students)	- community-engaged participatory design workshops (bi-monthly) - on-site engagement with the co-creation community (neighbourhood) - on-site design-build activities (2x)	- four documented on-site architectural micro-interventions (multifunctional urban furniture, greenhouse, mural and 'enterfence') - neighbourhood map and walk - comparative case study reports (including individual reflections on the current and potential future SMH process)
5. Altering Practices for Urban Inclusion Elective '20-'21	Prof. Burak Pak & Drs. Aurelie De Smet (Altering Practices for Urban Inclusion Research Group) (4 Students)	- online feedback and evaluation sessions (bi-monthly)	- (draft) toolbox for the investigation of socio-spatial appropriation - report on the adaptability of the SMH Architectural Design - SMH project presentation folder - preliminary proposal for the SMH Virtual Exhibition website - short individual reflection papers
6. Envisioning the Future of Temporary Housing and Inclusive Collective Spaces in Brussels Dissertation Studio	Prof. Burak Pak & Drs. Aurelie De Smet (10 Students)	- online feedback and evaluation sessions (bi-monthly) - on-demand individual online or on-site participatory design/reflection workshops	- five detailed architectural design dissertations on topics related to 'futuring SMH' (including theoretical reflection as well as design proposal and short personal critical reflections) - 'futuring SMH' presentation videos

Table 1: Overview SMH CEADL Courses, Engagement Methods, and Outputs

6.3 Engagement with Participants

6.3.1 Student perspective

For the architecture students, participation in the CEADL courses resulted in not only academic and professional growth but also personal growth. Working together with civic organisations and vulnerable end-users made them question their reference framework and triggered them to think about their future self. This important finding was evident in official feedback moments with our students and visible through the following sample quotes:

Figure 3: Examples of Some of the SMH CEADL Course Activities and Outputs

During our studies, we learn how to design a space, how to construct a stable building and many other things. But unfortunately, we rarely tackle the reality and the difficult role of being a social architect, someone who cares for the future inhabitants, works with them in a participatory process and finds solutions, again and again, to face the economic reality. I was personally challenged by this project. I'm convinced we need to search for another model, a new model. We need to assure that architectural services are affordable as the ones who really need us, cannot afford us today. (Julie, KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture Student)

At the beginning of the studio, we all had a specific idea of what this project should be. After a little chat with the future inhabitants and NPO's we quickly understood that those ideas came from our own perspectives but not from the actual reality. (Julie, KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture Student)

This course changed the way I think about the future, not only about my role as an architect, but about my role in life in general. (Boryana, KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture Student)

6.3.2 Community perspectives

For the homeless, participating in the CEADL courses contributed to helping them to (re)discover their talents, share their knowledge and expertise, and feel heard and valued. To facilitate this, part of the guidance and skill-building - offered throughout the whole SMH project process - was explicitly aimed at enabling the end-user participation in the educational activities and the co-creation with the students. To achieve this aim, we regularly organised extra activities, such as intermediary (de)briefings, thematic elaborations by internal or external experts, study visits or field trips, and communicative and collaboration skills training. As the project has not yet been finalised, it is too early to make definitive statements on the empowerment of the end-users. However, the first results of the social impact analysis, executed by an independent external organisation, are looking promising (RéseauMAG, forthcoming). In any case, the least we can say at this point is that the end-users are taking up co-ownership in the

project. These findings are apparent in the following quotes from end-user feedback moments:

> *What I find very special is to be part of a pilot project. This should really be rolled out further, first in Belgium, but I also see a lot of opportunities, for example in Africa. (…) Once we are launched, we really need to study how we can expand it. (SMH Future Inhabitant 7)*

> *What I also look forward to is giving feedback to new projects. From our experiences we will be able to give real advice on what we should do the same or what can be done differently. (SMH Future Inhabitant 3)*

Besides the future inhabitants, we also considered the participating civil society organisations - who will later apply the SMH Model in their practice - as part of 'the community'. Participation in the CEADL courses had many effects on these professionals as well. Among those were the acquisition of new skills, the ability to act and realise something tangible, and developing a networked practice in collaboration with all the other involved parties. As evidenced by the following quotes, this is triggering them to address critically and even alter their traditional role:

> *[In this project,] in a certain way and at times everyone becomes an architect, a researcher, a community worker, a participant… We all learn an awful lot. (…) I find it very interesting to work on a project with so much impact on poverty, but also to be able to build something myself, to build the project together (…) It was time for a new approach (…) By showing in real life how things can be done differently, we are now reaching the policy makers as well. (Geraldine, Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel Employee)*

> *[The students] often provide a new perspective and sometimes question the evidence because they miss the point completely. But this can also help us to look at our own project with new eyes. What I also find very interesting is to gain insight in the theoretical frameworks you are providing to the students and then also see the (more or less) practical application of those. (Tineke, Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel Employee)*

This project has also taught me that sometimes we can expect more from our target group: we constantly underestimate them, keeping them unconsciously small. Maybe we can raise the bar a little higher. Of course, we also need sufficient intensive support in return. The height of the bar is proportional to the intensity of the guidance. (Bob, CAW Employee)

6.3.3 Staff perspectives

While planning and organising the CEADL courses, we too, as tutors, were challenged to "get out of the comfortable boundaries of traditional expertise in architecture, toward the unknown, the intentional, and skilful mastering of incompetence in the ocean of practices" as described by Miessen (2017). Organising and stimulating knowledge exchange and knowledge production amongst the participants required finding innovative methods and tools for moving the University into the real world and vice versa. This included redefining roles and restaging relationships, and activating the networks of the involved core, relevant, and peripheral actors to develop a joint collaborative practice as a learning environment (Pak et al., 2019).

As a result of this '*Crossbenching practice'* (Miessen, 2017), we started to re-frame our own teaching, learning, and research practices. Over these three years, we started up one new official service-learning course at our faculty and re-framed another existing course to include service-learning. Moreover, we have started to establish a structural service-learning track and support for the whole faculty.

6.4 Added Value for Impact

6.4.1 What worked well and what didn't in the initiative

On the one hand, organising the CEADL as a series of Engaged Learning courses, structured by the ongoing practice-based SMH PAR project, offered many exciting opportunities. Firstly, the 'hacking' of several existing courses allowed us to build upon knowledge and expertise of the various (sub-)disciplines at the Faculty of Architecture. This helped

advance the SMH project and provide a challenging, trans-disciplinary learning environment for the students. Moreover, this also helped to inform and include (1) our colleagues and (2) a wide range of students into the SMH PAR (from 2017 to 2019, over 60 students were involved). Secondly, the CEADL courses functioned as platforms for 'collaboration'. Acting as laboratories for 'reflection-in-action', they became the materialisation of the SMH Living Lab, offering space and time for the project partners to, together, take a step back, look at the project through a new set of eyes, make links to theory, and learn from each other. In this context, the theoretical framework, running like a red thread through the CEADL course, offered support for the students and fuelled critical reflections amongst all the other participants.

Moreover, through the CEADL courses, we also transformed the Brussels urban waiting spaces, often perceived as 'spaces of conflict', into 'spaces of negotiation' (De Smet et al., 2018). This is in line with what Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) are calling 'the opening of communicative space'. Thirdly, the CEADL courses also functioned as platforms for 'crossbenching' and critical spatial practice. During the co-teaching and co-creation sessions, everyone took on different roles, constantly transgressing the boundaries between 'the social' and 'the spatial' and between 'the public' and 'the private' (Rendell, 2006) and exploiting the productive encounters between different disciplines. As a result, we all had to rethink and redefine our respective fields' established protocols and codes of conduct. Fourthly, the specific skills of the architecture students (and tutors) proved very suitable in this research-based trans-disciplinary co-creation project. Using practices of 'prefiguration' of solidary modes of living embedded in design proposals, they demonstrated that 'an alternative is possible'. We were able to counter the recurrently prevailing 'there is no alternative' discourse and help the students and other participants move from thinking about 'the world as it is' to thinking about 'the world as it can be' (De Smet et al., 2021).

Using 'design thinking' and 'mediation', the students dealt with the wicked problems faced in the SMH project by collecting all the

different angles and viewpoints and synthesising those. And using 'co-design', they invited all those involved around the table to work together on the socio-spatial design of the future of a place. This finding brings to evidence what Jeremy Till describes as 'the agency of the artifact' (Awan et al., 2013) and fits within the context of 'place-based solidarity' forwarded by Oosterlynck et al. (2016). It also highlights the relevance of design-driven PAR for handling today's societal, environmental, and economic problems.

On the other hand, as this was an unprecedented undertaking at our faculty, involving an innovative project, we also faced several challenges. As with any Engaged Learning course, finding the proper balance between 'service' and the 'learning' activities turned out to be a continuous exercise, both for us and the partners. Furthermore, the PAR method, applied in the context of the real-world, multi-stakeholder SMH project, turned out to be complex and confusing for some students (and partners). Therefore, we had to clearly explain and re-explain the methods, aimed for outcomes, and evaluation criteria of the courses. Moreover, we also found that the rhythm of academia and the pressure to make weekly progress did not always align well with the rhythm of the real world and the future inhabitants' everyday life. In some cases, collective and private issues surrounding the SMH project were more urgent and personal agendas needed to be synchronised.

Part of our time thus had to be spent on communicating and negotiating with the partners and the faculty for the practical organisation of the courses. In this context, we also had to deal with financial and legal issues such as getting offers for buying workshop materials, dealing with insurances in the context of off-campus building activities, and making clear arrangements about the intellectual property of the co-created results. In addition, we also encountered some language issues, both literally - as most of the future inhabitants are French or Dutch-speaking and most of the international Master of Architecture students were English speaking - but also figuratively. As every involved discipline uses a specific

professional jargon, we had to be attentive to allocate sufficient time, not only for the development of a 'common language', but also for the establishment of clear and workable protocols for collaboration. Finally, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found that organising Engaged Learning online is much more complicated than doing this through face-to-face courses, especially when this involves collaboration with vulnerable end-users. As the distance between the participants was much more considerable in the online courses, these became much more operational and less 'personal'.

6.4.2 Facilitating factors

The main facilitating factor was integrating practice-based action research in design learning. All the Engaged Learning initiatives were supported and tied together through the Innoviris SMH co-creation project, which mobilised various actors under a common goal. The organisation of the CEADL courses was mainly facilitated through our 'infrastructuring' and mediating roles. In this context, it is necessary to recognise the vital part of the social workers for guidance during direct engagement moments and acting as a buffer and an interface between vulnerable future inhabitants and the students.

Our roles as coordinators included negotiating with the other SMH partners and our fellow course tutors, recruiting students, and aligning the course timing and activities with the inhabitants, practitioners, and faculty agendas. We also had to deal with practicalities such as finding suitable meeting and working spaces and at the same time keep an eye on the bigger picture and long-term goals, orienting the courses' and SMH project's aims and outcomes toward each other to ensure perpetual real-world relevance and rigorous research output at the same time. In addition to these, we also noticed that the genuine willingness of the programme directors to collaborate was a major facilitating factor that opened the faculty to the re-framing actions we were aiming at.

6.4.3 Broader societal impact

Based on our research and experiences, we deduced that the CEADL courses integrated with the SMH project made a broader societal impact on three levels: the individual, the organisational, and the structural. On the individual level, the SMH project offered homeless citizens 'a seat at the table' in discussing the temporary use of waiting spaces. The CEADL courses contributed to this by, amongst others, transforming waiting spaces into spaces of negotiation, as explained above. Still on the individual level, we are also noticing a changed attitude among the architecture students who participated in the CEADL courses. They continue to follow a community-engaged and critical spatial practice approach even if they are not enrolled in Engaged Learning tracks afterwards. This phenomenon was evidenced in their choice of socially engaged thesis subjects.

On the organisational level, we observed how the collective learning environment, created through the CEADL courses, empowered the students and end-users and all the participants. In this context, all of us could learn and improve our practice. Based on the SMH CEADL experiences, two official service-learning courses were started at the Faculty. Moreover, the two involved civil societal organisations (*Samenlevingsopbouw* and *CAW*) also entered a long-term collaboration as a result of the SMH PAR project.

From the societal perspective, the SMH project has demonstrated, in practice, that 'an alternative is possible', through the creation of a small scale 'heterotopia' (Foucault, 2013) in the form of a 'Social Resilience Cell' (Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2017; 2018). However, as Paidakaki and Moulaert (2017) are pointing out, for creating long-lasting impact and resilient initiatives, "solidarity-inspired socially innovative actions cannot take place in a vacuum; they need to be embedded in bottom-linked governance structures which are 'neither strictly 'bottom-up' nor 'top-down' but emerge from positive interplay across governance levels between public institutional initiatives from

'above' and active and empowering involvement from 'below'" (Paidakaki, 2017).

Nevertheless, in this context, we also observed an impact of the SMH project (and other temporary housing projects) on the structural level in the Brussels-Capital Region. Recently, the Regional Town Planning Regulations (RRU/GSV) were also adapted to include the concept of 'modular housing' and, as the Brussels Town and Country Planning Code (CoBAT/BWRO) is now also being revised, it will, amongst others, include more details concerning building permit exemptions and temporary building permits. Furthermore, to facilitate all kinds of temporary use projects, the Region is installing a 'counter for the in-between'. In this context, the designs, interventions, tools, and discourses developed by the SMH CEADL students helped open the discussion on the preconditions and issues related to upscaling initiatives such as the SMH Model.

6.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, we presented the SMH CEADL approach, consisting of a series of Engaged Learning courses structured by the ongoing practice-based SMH PAR project. We explained how approaching CEADL as a fluid concept, meandering through different subjects and academic years, fostered trans-disciplinary and trans-sectoral collaboration of various actors, including vulnerable citizens. We elaborated on how the CEADL transformed the classroom into a 'platform for reflection-in-action', the SMH Living Lab to a 'collective learning environment', and the Brussels urban waiting spaces to 'spaces of negotiation'. As such, we illustrated how CEADL combined Engaged Learning with outreach-based community work and critical spatial practice.

As a result, the SMH CEADL approach stimulated all the participants to critically assess their own reference framework and the prevailing viewpoints and practices of their (professional) environment. This resulted in double and even triple loop learning. The students

experienced academic, professional, and personal growth, and the project also resulted in structural changes, both within the involved organisation and within the Brussels-Capital Region.

Furthermore, the fluid SMH CEADL approach spanning several academic years allowed various students to become full-fledged partners in the SMH community. Over time, the number of participants (along with the topics and the funding) in this community are growing, following the 'snowballing' structure of the PAR method as a meta-framework. This expansion has allowed a constant increase in knowledge co-production in novel forms and formats. The SMH CEADL courses resulted in (a) socially constructed, situated, and live form(s) of knowledge, (b) while being purposeful, pragmatic in its nature, and (c) it is simultaneously critical and procedural: CEADL alters how architectural design knowledge is taught and learned *in* and *through* engaged practices.

Reflecting on the experiences shared in this chapter, we can conclude that CEADL is a valuable and inspiring approach that enabled us to re-frame and integrate research and teaching as a critical practice. The successful output of the students recognised by future inhabitants, external experts, social guiders, neighbourhood residents, and the international jury members proved that CEADL provided students with a broad range of skills needed to situate their creative thinking within complex, real-world contexts, enabling them to shape these as inclusive and sustainable environments. However, as it is clear from the challenges we faced, the community-engaged architectural design learning approach is still in its infancy. To develop CEADL further, academia and architectural design learning programmes need to adopt a novel and more inclusive stance on design knowledge production such as Carayannis and Campbell's (2012) *Mode 3 Knowledge Production Framework*, recognising the co-existence and co-development of diverse forms of knowledge in architectural design as well as the potentials of society-engaged modes of design innovation. In addition to these, trans-disciplinary and trans-sectoral networking and collaboration need to be reinforced and structurally

supported through the development and co-creation of a broad community of practice, including various academic, professional, societal, and governmental actors.

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Chapter 7 Toward a Connected Curriculum for Interdisciplinary Engaged Learning in VIVES University of Applied Sciences

VIVES University of Applied Sciences

Bram Pynoo and Ele Holvoet

CHAPTER 7 TOWARD A CONNECTED CURRICULUM FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY ENGAGED LEARNING IN VIVES UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

7.1 Introduction

Since its inception in 2013 – as a merger of two (and originally 12) universities of applied sciences with seven campuses in West-Flanders (Belgium) – there has always been a focus in VIVES on interdisciplinary learning and connecting with societal actors in order to prepare its students for the professions and society of tomorrow. Programmes should be geared toward the increasingly complex requirements of society and the professional field. This means that not only subject-related professional competencies are important to develop, but also competencies such as dealing with information, problem-solving ability, and social and personal skills (Crevits and Muyters, 2017). These competencies are included in the so-called VIVES competencies for the 21st century (VIVES, 2016). An up-to-date study programme should be able to permanently respond to the increasingly complex demands and challenges of society and the professional field. This requires not only adjustments in the learning content, but also organisational changes in the study programme to provide room for individual learning processes, workplace learning, internationalisation, partnerships with the professional field, interdisciplinarity, etc.

The curriculum as the organisational cornerstone of a programme is crucial in this respect. By building sufficient openness into our curricula, we can meet these challenges as a university of applied sciences. It is also a call to our programmes to profile themselves based on these common challenges while retaining their own strengths.

7.1.1 A connected curriculum as a starting point

Connected curriculum is a term often used in education, but the term 'connected curriculum' is interpreted in various ways and there is no unambiguous definition. Central to the idea is that in order to develop a powerful learning environment, a well-thought-out curriculum is necessary, with the necessary attention for mutual connections

between the important actors and aspects of (higher) education. We are thinking here of the students and teachers, but also of the (research) disciplines, the professional field, society, etc.

One of the first descriptions of 'connected curriculum' came from Perkins (1993). This interpretation was rather limited and mainly concerned the content taught to students. Perkins (1993) emphasises that not only the way in which we teach (instructional method, classroom environment, evaluation) is important, but also the learning content itself. It is therefore important to fill these with meaning, and to make the necessary 'connections' to the prior knowledge of the students, as well as to the practically relevant interpretation of the content. The connected curriculum is thus rather interpreted from Dewey's idea of 'generative knowledge'.

> *Students [and teachers] who see the connections, are more likely to understand and remember what they learn. (Perkins, 1993, p.90)*

Another example is the conceptual connected curriculum framework of University College London (Fung, 2017). In this framework six dimensions are outlined, and the institution is challenged to create sufficient connections between them. The focus of this framework is on the integration of the domains of research and education (i.e., 'learning through research and inquiry'); and connections between different disciplines and the broader society are also included.

VIVES defines the concept of 'connected curriculum' more broadly than is commonly done. We do not only talk about the way in which education can integrate research (Fung, 2017), or limit ourselves to the learning content (Perkins, 1993), but also give the professional field and connections with (innovative) practices and society an equally prominent place, as well as internal connections (between various departments and study areas; among lecturers and students).

We aim for a stronger connection between all crucial actors in the higher education landscape. Programmes can (re)design their curriculum based on this principle with the necessary space for a learning objective-oriented use of technology. In this way, we want to prepare students for the professions and society of tomorrow, by teaching them to deal with the complexity (of connections) with which they will be confronted as professionals.

7.1.2 Why a connected curriculum in VIVES?

In VIVES the curricula consist of 90 (graduate degrees) to 180 (professional bachelor degree) credits. Research, social evolutions, and new educational activities or technologies regularly introduce new emphases in the curriculum to prepare students for the 21st century.
We can best illustrate the why of a 'connected curriculum' by means of an image. Anyone who has ever travelled through Flanders by train is familiar with the backyards where cottages sometimes form a surreal and orderly whole. There is a main building and then sometimes a whole string of additional 'cottages', one stuck against the other, all in different styles. Apparently, it is in our national nature to adapt and expand what we have according to the needs that arise, without much preliminary study or anticipation of possible future needs. We also see this approach in curricula.

All too often, because the house is already full or even bursting at the seams, a new compartment is added... for internationalisation, for entrepreneurship, for research competencies, for a learning company, for digital competencies, for cooperation with the professional field, etc. In this way, we do respond to challenges for the future but the pressure on lecturers and students increases. Perhaps we forget to ask ourselves whether all the rooms in the house are still useful. Perhaps we should look at throwing out superfluous and outdated ballast.

Perhaps we should redesign the house with open and wide windows to the outside world. Moreover, every programme has a large network

of quality partners with whom we can connect, share, and strengthen our curriculum. The idea of a connected curriculum is to invite study programmes and fields of study to seek connections with, for example:

- International partners;
- Other programmes in VIVES to organise parts of the curriculum together, or to realise interdisciplinary projects;
- VIVES centres of expertise to jointly implement research competencies;
- The professional field and companies; society;
- Knowledge that is available everywhere and at all times; and
- The informal learning of students.

In order to maximise the realisation of 21st century competencies, curricula must incorporate or enable some of these connections in an open space. The Education Policy Plan 2017-2022 'Drive, Connection, Innovation' focuses on some of those connections.

7.1.3 Connected curriculum and our vision on education

The educational vision of VIVES focuses on the future. Drive, connection, and innovation are central to this vision. Connection entails three dimensions: (1) learning from and with each other; (2) collaboration with educational partners to support students in making the best choices; and (3) continuous dialogue with the field of work and society/societal actors. New educational developments and innovations respond to the results of research and to the expectations of current and new generations of students, the professional field, and society. The interaction between theory and practice challenges them to push back frontiers. To this end, education, practical experiences, and our own practice-oriented research are interwoven. Study programmes are encouraged to strengthen the connection with the professional field, society, international partners, research, and other disciplines in their curriculum.

The educational policy plan provides a guiding framework for the development of connected curricula in the programmes. At the same time, it ensures the necessary autonomy for programmes and lecturers to help shape the curricula from the inside out, based on their own professionalism. There are a lot of external stimuli coming at programmes. A 'connected curriculum' is a curriculum in which not everything is sharply delineated, but in which space and time are considered in advance for interdisciplinary projects, social engagement, projects in cooperation with the professional field, internationalisation, etc. The programmes are challenged to make clear choices to which the teachers and staff members can then give value and content based on their own professionalism.

7.2 Social Engagement and Service-Learning in VIVES

A ‘connected curriculum’ supports the personal development of students in various ways; for instance, by filling in learning content meaningfully and thereby making the necessary connection with students' prior knowledge, with society at large and with the professional field (VIVES, 2017a). In the current educational policy plan, this is concretised in the following policy goal:

- We are a university of applied sciences in which the professional field and society are an integral part of the learning environment.
- Each degree programme validates the student's informal learning, linked to social engagement.

By including social engagement, students grow in terms of leadership qualities, communication skills, critical skills, and skills in teamwork (Cress, 2004; Eyler and Giles, 1999; Furco, 1996). This development can appear as an informal learning process during social engagement: it happens unconsciously, not purposefully and spontaneously. Social engagement can therefore form a powerful and meaningful learning environment. By linking informal learning processes as a result of social engagement to formal training, the student can develop

competencies in a goal-oriented and active way, in collaboration with others in an authentic context. Promotion and recognition of social engagement in a connected curriculum can be elaborated in various ways; this is discussed in the next sections.

7.2.1 Validation of social engagement

In a first concept note (VIVES, 2017b) the boundaries and conditions were set for intra- or extra-curricular validation of intra- or extra-curricular social engagement. Learning through social engagement is defined here as a form of education in which engagement, learning, and reflection are central; and in which students place themselves at the service of society and its citizens by engaging themselves while reflecting on their experiences in a structured manner and thus learn on an academic, social, and personal level (VIVES, 2017b).

First, there must be a social commitment that the student takes on. This can be done in various ways, as depicted in Figure 1. As you move toward the right on the continuum in these dimensions, there is more of a focus on learning rather than serving, more emphasis on the vocational nature of learning, and a shift from extracurricular engagement to (intra)curricular activities.

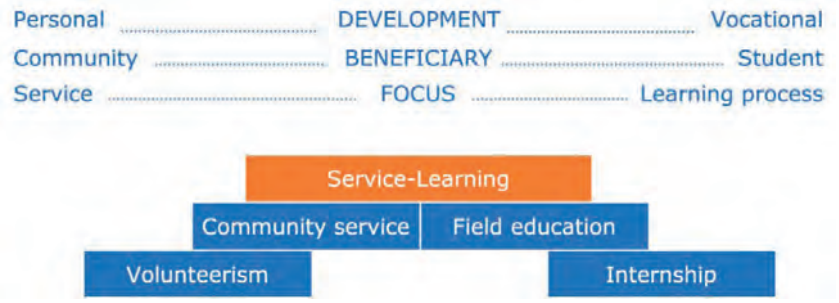

Figure 3 Overview of approaches to learning through social engagement (adapted from Furco, 1996)

These different types of student social engagement can be validated in the programmes. We make a distinction between social engagement that is initiated and organised by the programme itself and social engagement that is taken up as an extra-curricular by the student (voluntarily and at his or her own initiative). In the latter case, the programme may or may not validate this extra-curricular engagement within the curriculum. In Figure 2 we present these different possibilities visually. Reflection is in each case the link between engagement and learning experience, as the learning effects of social engagement are higher when reflection is built in in a structured way (Conway et al., 2009).

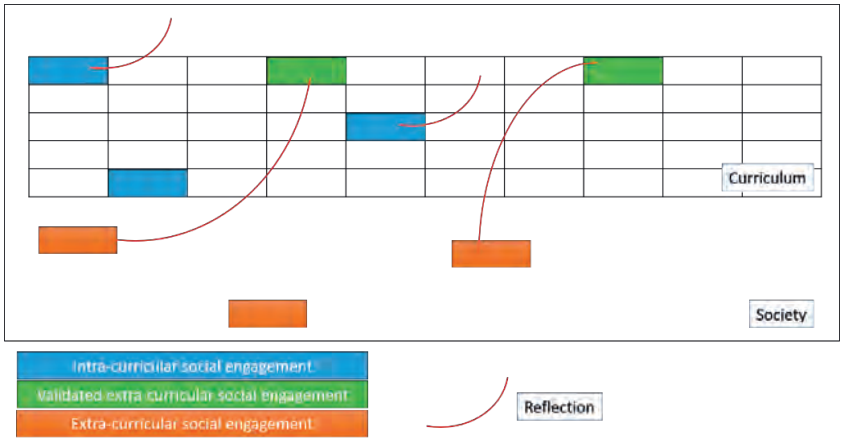

Figure 4 Visual representation of societal engagement in or outside the curriculum (based on "Buiten leren, binnen valideren" http://slideplayer.nl/slide/1935935)

By extra-curricular social engagement, we mean an engagement that the student takes on outside their programme. The student does not start the engagement as a function of the programme, as is the case with an intra-curricular commitment. The programme provides an explicit incentive to take up the social commitment. The validation of the commitment can also take place as an intra- or extra-curricular. In case of intra-curricular validation, the social commitment that the student takes up is integrated within the framework of the programme and validated in the form of credits. An extra-curricular validation

means that the social engagement is valued, but not by granting credits. This can be done, for example, by issuing an extra attestation or certificate.

Intra-curricular validation can be done both by validating extra-curricular engagement in the curriculum and by organising and validating social engagement within the curriculum. This integration within the curriculum constitutes an important difference with granting exemptions based on previously acquired qualifications (EVK) or previously acquired competencies (EVC). EVC and EVK focus on whether several competencies have been obtained earlier and thus on the learning outcome. Validating social engagement, on the other hand, essentially aims to bring the learning process linked to the engagement into the training. Service-learning is then an example of intra-curricular social engagement that is validated intra-curricular.

7.3 Overview of the Chosen Initiatives

Following this concept note, actions were taken at different levels (programme, study area, institution). At the level of the bachelor degree programmes, students' extra-curricular social engagement can be formally recognised with ECTS, e.g., students who take up some volunteering work can earn – in some bachelor degree programmes – ECTS. And the first service-learning courses were developed and implemented.

Second, in different study areas interdisciplinary courses (e.g., emerging technologies++ in the area industrial science and technology, or the interdisciplinary bachelor thesis in the area of social work) were created. Some of these courses were designed from the start as (or evolved into) service-learning other are conceived only in an interdisciplinary manner.

Third, at the institutional level, several elective courses were created, targeted at students in the final phase of their program. These elective courses offer a wide choice to every VIVES student. Students do not

need any prior knowledge about the content or theme of the course unit and every student – either regular or in distance education – can take these courses. The range of elective courses focuses on contents or competencies that we consider important; and mainly on one or more of the 21st century competencies. The elective courses are offered as semester or year-courses, and count for 3-5 ECTS. Students need to apply for some of these courses. We discuss in the following paragraphs four of these (service-learning) courses.

7.3.1 Student participation (institution-wide // extra-curricular engagement; intra-curricular validation; 3 ECTS)

Students can follow the course unit Student Participation in each program. Within this course unit, the student fulfils a role as student representative and sits in different participation bodies, such as the VIVES Student Council, the Academic Council, the local student council, the Permanent Education Committee... At the start of the course unit, the tasks and expectations are made clear for the student by formulating objectives. This is done in consultation with the VIVES student participation coach and the student participation coach of the student's study area. Within these objectives, different aspects can be expected. In addition to the above-mentioned participation forums, the student can be expected to join other participation forums. The student defends student viewpoints, addresses problems, actively participates in decision making, and takes care of communication with the constituency. The student is expected to be involved and actively engaged. He or she takes on the following tasks: preparing a meeting, reporting, deepening the content and preparation of a relevant theme, writing a concept note, chairing a working group, communication, and consultation with contacts inside or outside VIVES.

VIVES can also count on the cooperation of the student during an institutional review or an internal programme audit by, for example, being part of the student group of a focus group. The student can also be invited to board meetings of the study area where the board can

ask for input from the student on agenda items. Entering this course unit is only possible if the student has already shown commitment to student participation in the previous year and is permanently motivated to do so in the coming academic year. This is assessed during an intake interview with the student participation coach. In this conversation, the student describes the activities as student representative up to this point, e.g., participation in the various consultative bodies and function therein, initiatives taken, and training attended. This allows the student to demonstrate his motivation and commitment. At the start of the elective course, the student receives information on the following topics: structure of the consultative bodies, relevant decrees and regulations, internal regulations regarding student participation in VIVES, basic principles of meetings, and other relevant themes for student representatives (e.g., internal and external quality assurance, structure of higher education, rights of student representatives, structure in VIVES ...).

Students describe in a portfolio what they learned during their role as a student representative. They do this by describing the commitments, functions, and tasks they took on, systematically keeping track of the consultation moments and consultation bodies they attended. Students demonstrate how they worked during this year on the predetermined objectives. This portfolio also contains a final reflection in which students describe the added value of their engagement as a student representative for their professional and personal development and which elements have played a role in this.

Conversations take place at the start of the course, in between and at the end. In these conversations, progress and difficulties can be presented and students receive feedback about their functioning. Students always take the initiative for this coaching conversation. In addition to these coaching talks, both the student and the student participation coach can request a consultation moment. The course is evaluated based on the portfolio that is assessed by the VIVES student participation coach. In the first examination opportunity it is assessed

whether students invested enough time in their engagement as a student representative; whether the quality with which the students fulfilled their role of student representative throughout the academic year meets the objectives set for this course; and whether the final reflection gives a true picture of the evolution, and the process students went through during the academic year. The score is a pass/fail based on an evaluation on the above evaluation criteria. The second examination opportunity consists of a written assignment in which students elaborate on a related topic. This topic is chosen in consultation with the VIVES student participation coach. Again, a pass/fail score is given based on the evaluation criteria.

7.3.2 Practical experience and reflection (Bachelor of Social Work // intra-curricular engagement; intra-curricular validation, 5 ECTS)

The course 'Practical Experience and Reflection' is a first bachelor year-long course unit that is taken by all social work students. In this course, students gain practical experience as 'volunteers' in an organisation within the social work field. In addition, through tastings and visits, they meet inspiring grassroots workers from the field and users of Social Work. This immediately connects to the finality of the program: the professional relationship between social worker and client or target group is only meaningful when it is embedded in a human relationship. The practical experience as a volunteer is focused on developing group dynamics skills, communication skills, and reflection skills.

The course links the practical volunteer experience to several domain-specific learning outcomes that are represented in clusters: the cluster contacting and orienting, and the cluster professional working and development are central to this. The students are expected to commit themselves from the position of 'volunteer' within an organisation in the social work field. They carry out at least 40 hours of practical experience in the period from October to April. They will look for a suitable organisation themselves. The programme requires that the organisation employs people with a social work diploma and that the

student, through the organisation, connects with people from the social work target group. Possible examples are community centres, night shelters for the homeless, study support for vulnerable families, home care services, reception centres for asylum seekers, youth work, camps for people with disabilities, OCMW, residential care centres, or organisations within the social economy.

The student is expected to make a concrete proposal and submit it to the supervising lecturer for approval. Flanking the practical experience, the programme organises meetings. During these so-called campfire moments, students discuss their experiences in group. Students prepare this in a structured way using a reflection scheme. Throughout the course three such moments take place. There is also an individual contact moment between teacher and student. The student keeps a reflection notebook throughout the practical experience. Herein are written down events that impress or make you think. This written reflection is also done in a structured way, using a reflection scheme.

The supervising teacher oversees the campfire moments, the individual interviews, and collects the info about the students' practice sites. The places of practice fill out a certificate stating that the student has performed 40 hours of practical experience there. These certificates are also kept by the supervising teacher. The course Practical Experience and Reflection is continuously evaluated, including a final individual interview. The evaluation looks at the whole of the students' activities against the background of the learning goals to be achieved. The students are given insight into the evaluation criteria in advance. The evaluation criteria are divided into two sections: attendance at the internship site and taking charge of the learning process.

7.3.3 LiveLab and LiveLab international (interdisciplinary // intra-curricular engagement; intra-curricular validation; 3 ECTS)

Within the LiveLab, students and teachers of VIVES get to work with professionals and inhabitants of Flemish municipalities and cities. In

this real-life setting, an innovative learning and working environment is created in which interdisciplinary cooperation is central.

During the LiveLab, students are looking for solutions to care issues that residents face in their own home environment. Students are divided into various interprofessional teams (students from the nursing training, occupational therapy, speech therapy, nutrition and dietetics, social work) who will work together with a resident of a city or municipality. Each interprofessional team is matched with a random case of a resident that corresponds to one of two themes: elderly people living at home or children in a socially vulnerable family. Each interprofessional team works together with professionals on a real-life problem of this resident.

In addition to the regular course 'LiveLab', there is also an international variant 'LiveLab International', which is digitally organised. Students work together in international and interprofessional teams from the nursing, occupational therapy, speech therapy, nutritional programmes, occupational therapy, speech therapy, nutrition and dietetics, and social work programmes. They exchange expertise and work on innovative solutions to global challenges in healthcare.

The principle of LiveLabs offers several advantages. Involving residents at an early stage ensures that work is done based on realistic needs and possibilities of those residents. Products and/or services can be developed to measure. In addition, LiveLabs ensure that the implementation of the developed product and/or service is accelerated. All this can be followed up scientifically with the intention of increasing the quality of learning. It creates a unique dynamic between students, professionals, and residents. It also stimulates new,

efficient, and innovative partnerships. In addition to learning in a realistic home environment, innovative teaching methodologies are also provided, developed, tested, and implemented in a classroom, in the municipality or city.

7.3.4 Global sustainability and engagement (institution-wide elective course // intra-curricular engagement; intra-curricular validation, 3 or 5 ECTS)

This course uses the Sustainable Development Goals as a frame of reference to allow students to gain awareness and insights about global challenges and global citizenship. The specific contents of the lessons, such as ocean literacy, migration, climate change, and resource issues, are provided by experts. In addition to these global issues, this course also focuses on the 21st-century competencies intercultural and interdisciplinary collaboration and active global engagement. The course is offered in English and targeted at both international and local students; and can be followed online or on campus during the first or second semester. There are 10 contact moments – nine guest lectures on the SDGs by experts and a final poster fair (students in the three credits version must follow less lectures).

Since the academic year 2020-21, students must choose at the start of the course between the engagement (= service-learning) and the theoretical track (which was the original design of the course). The engagement track was partly initiated by several VIVES students from the sustainability working group, who see a commitment within VIVES in the field of sustainability honoured in this way. In addition, it also meets the increasing expectation to pay attention to active civic engagement within the Erasmus programme and is part of the global engagement strategy that VIVES also endorses. In the engagement track, students work in groups of 3-5 on a case provided by a societal actor and present their product at the end of the course to the whole group. They are required to attend only three lectures so that there is sufficient time to work on their group project. Students in the

theoretical track are expected to attend all lectures and they must write a scientific paper at the end of the course.

7.4 A Glimpse on the Future of Service-Learning at VIVES

The concept note 'Learning from Social Engagement' laid a foundation for developing service-learning courses step-by-step and bottom-up (in addition to top-down initiatives). The current educational policy plan ends in 2022 and a new educational policy plan – in which the keywords Drive, Connection, and Innovation remain central – will be presented in mid-2022. In this new plan, service-learning will be proposed as one of the educational strategies to prepare our students for the society of tomorrow.

Meanwhile, VIVES is also engaged in the Uniservitate-project[17] as part of the Northwestern-European Hub chaired by KU Leuven. The aim of this project is to institutionalise service-learning according to the service-learning model that was developed by and has been used in practice for decades by CLAYSS (centro latinoamericano de aprendizaje y servicio solidario).

To achieve the goals put forward in the new educational policy plan and by Uniservitate, the service of educational support and professionalisation is further developing a support and professionalisation offer for interested lecturers and teams. Furthermore, as part of the Uniservitate-project, two new (or updated) courses will be presented as service-learning courses.

[17] https://www.uniservitate.org/

Chapter 8 Retooling Higher Education in an Age of Rising Inequalities, a (post)-COVID-19 Reflection on the Importance of Engaged Urban Pedagogies

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CHAPTER 8 RETOOLING HIGHER EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF RISING INEQUALITIES, A (POST)-COVID-19 REFLECTION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGED URBAN PEDAGOGIES

8.1 Introduction

Over the past decades, as is the case in many European countries, Belgian universities have seen a rapid increase in their student numbers and the diversity of their student bodies (Consuegra and Cincinnato, 2020). Yet, equal educational opportunities are still far from being established. Structural barriers, including the curriculum, conflict with the ambition to make tertiary education accessible for all (Hemelsoet, 2021; Unia, 2018; VLIR, 2021). This is problematic, since higher education is an important lever to strengthen our society and promote social justice; improving one's employment opportunities, living standards and upward social mobility (Hirtt, Nicaise and De Zutter, 2007). In order to maximise its individual and societal benefits, the EU has formulated clear ambitions for further democratisation of higher education. The aim is to increase participation and study success, regardless of personal backgrounds, origin, sexual and philosophical orientations, or disabilities (Conference of European Ministers responsible for higher education, 2007).

The current pandemic has reinforced the need for such a 'social engagement' (e.g., Bloch, 2020). However, in this chapter it will be argued that shaping *engaged universities* is not only a question of 'access', but also 'access to what': What kind of (learning) activities, environments, interactions, and content do we propose to our students? What are we aiming for, and when do we consider those goals achieved? Who benefits most from our offerings? Who pays the costs or is excluded from taking part?

This contribution will call for more careful considerations about the way in which efforts to become more 'engaged' and 'relevant to society' are framed and - even more important - put into practice. It will be stressed that if higher education is to play a role as a 'critical

change agent', both universities and cities need to be recognised as complex spaces, characterised by diverse - quite often conflicting - interests, opportunities, and developmental dynamics. The term 'critical' will be used in the sense of 'questioning' and in some cases 'challenging' traditionally accepted assumptions, theories, and policies - *established orthodoxies* as they are called by Davies and Imbroscio (2010) - and identifying openings for new ways of thinking and acting. Pendras and Dierwechter (2012, p.310) defined critical as "a commitment to social justice and to questioning and critiquing the status quo." They foregrounded the classroom as an undervalued space in that regard, having what they coined as "the problematic potential to advance transformative developments." Addie (2017) argued that urban environments,[18] because of the contradictions that they internalise and expose, are of a particular interest in this regard.

Building on these arguments, this chapter will explore how 'engaged urban pedagogies' can act as levers for positive change. The call for engaging with the 'struggle for the right to the city' will be paralleled with an appeal for reclaiming 'the right to the university'. Special emphasis will be put on the importance of critically considering the modes of participation that engaged pedagogies allow for, as spaces to execute these rights. First, the interaction between universities and their urban environments will be problematised, building on the concept of superdiversity and Brussels-specific data. Next, the social crisis that flaws European institutions for higher education - universities in particular - will be sketched. Then, the accelerating effect of the pandemic will be demonstrated. In conclusion, engaged

[18] The term 'urban' is used in this paper for referring to environments characterised by a dense and diverse population, the concentration of administrative bodies and infrastructures, a diverse set of livelihood and income generation activities, and high levels of land occupation, waste, and pollution (see Center of Expertise for Urban Programming, 2016).

urban pedagogies will be conceptualised as 'spaces of possibilities' holding a potential for both individual and collective transformation. Drawing on relevant literature and experiences gained at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, it will be argued that such environments can serve to retool academia and - by doing so - play an active role in preparing a more desirable (humane, democratic, and inclusive) post-COVID-future.

8.2 Rethinking the Urban University in Times of Systemic Dysfunction

Cities and universities share long and complicated histories. In recent decades, processes of massification have fuelled their expansion and drastically altered their socio-spatial dynamics. Given that knowledge capital tends to concentrate in urban places, policymakers started to frame universities and cities as 'co-dependent guardians of regional economic development' (Pugh et al., 2016). A landmark OECD report, for example, argued universities ought to play a greater role in regional development, stating that "institutions of higher education must do more than simply teach and research… they must engage with their regions, provide opportunities for lifelong learning and contribute to the development of knowledge-intensive jobs which will enable graduates to find local employment and remain in their communities" (OECD, 2007, p.11). By committing to this mission, universities have become place-based institutions that actively contribute to the 'neoliberal turn in urban policies' (see for example Drozdz, 2014); supporting cities' broader efforts to generate 'new economies', attract the 'creative class', and stimulate 'market-oriented redevelopments'.

As Ferman et al. (2021, p.12) pointed out, universities find themselves in a complex and contradictory position nowadays: "simultaneously contributing to and suffering from the crises of neoliberal

restructuring, both on campus and off." With these contradictions, the authors state, new potentialities for solidarity and political alliance between university and community members emerge, creating the context for what they coined as 'the interrelated struggles for the right to the city and the right to the university'. This relates to Bailey (2011, p.100) stating that "defending the university requires much more than academics representing truth through democratic criticism and moral indignation" and Freedman (2011, p.10) who suggested that we do not only have the responsibility "to defend the idea of university education as a public good that is reducible neither to market values nor to instrumental reasoning", but that "we will also need a clear vision of what the university should be". Earl (2016, p.22) goes on to say that progressive academics need to equip themselves "to ask critical questions, to engage in democratic debate and to make informed choices about social priorities." He points at the urban agora as a space allowing people "to (re)acquaint themselves with diverse cultures, de-colonising their minds from the monolithic notion of society" and calls to assert the right to the city to help rethink the university.

The notion of 'the right to the city' was first proposed by Lefebvre in his 1968 book 'Le Droit à la Ville'. It has been taken up by social movements, researchers, and progressive authorities as a call to reclaim the city as a co-created space, detached from the growing effects of commodification on social interactions, the rise of social inequalities, and the process of marginalisation and segregation that characterise contemporary cities (Harvey, 2008). Lefebvre does not propose an unequivocal definition of the right to the city. Nevertheless, he strongly expresses the need "for a re-appropriation of the urban space by citizens as a starting point for the democratic transformation of society" (Costes, 2010, p.181). As Marcuse describes: "the demand for the right to the city is a demand for a broad and sweeping right, a right not only in the legal sense of a right to

specific benefits, but a right in a political sense… it is not the right to the existing city that is demanded, but the right to a future city" (2012, p.34-35). According to Earl (2016) this conceptualisation of 'rights' points at the need for a 'new pedagogy' which allows us to enact an intellectual life that breathes the 'new urban'. From this ground, the author argues that pedagogy could, and possibly must, be brought to bear as "a major site of slippage in the space of the city, a space to be engaged, to create the productive disjuncture between our in-university selves and the learning that can potentially occur outside the institution walls and out on the streets" (Earl, 2016, p.5). The following paragraphs will seek to strengthen these claims, drawing on the Brussels-based context and experiences.

8.2.1 Brussels, a super-diverse city. Super, diversity!?

Brussels is known as one of the most diverse cities worldwide. In just a few decades, the composition of its population has changed profoundly; becoming bigger, denser, and more diverse (Hermia, 2021). Today, the Brussels Capital-Region has a population of 1,220 million people and an annual growth rate of approximately 0,14% (www.ibsa.brussels). With the publication of the World Migration Report in 2015, the city got famous for being a 'lovely melting-pot' holding one of the world's largest numbers of residents from foreign origins. Having reaped the benefits of the neo-liberal globalisation, Brussels attracts both creative class, high-income workers as well as socio-economic migrants and asylum seekers from all over the globe. The Local Integration Monitor states that in 2020, 73% of the inhabitants in the Brussels Capital-Region had a "recent immigration background" (LIIM 2020, p.3). More than 180 nationalities are represented in Belgium's capital region. Brussels in that sense can be coined a minority-majority city characterised by 'superdiversity', a concept that was introduced by sociologist Vertovec (2007) for

highlighting the diversification of diversity and the complex dynamics of inclusion and exclusion characterising our globalised and urbanised societies. Brussels could be coined a textbook example, combining a unique set of beauties and miseries.

According to data from the EU's statistics agency, Brussels is one of the richest regions in Europe with a GDP per capita rising 196% above the European average (Eurostat, 2019). Yet, despite the accumulation of wealth in the Brussels region, many of its residents live in precarious conditions. More than 45,000 families figure on the waiting list for social housing, while recent studies counted no less than 25,000 vacant dwellings spread across the Brussels territory (De Sloover, 2021). With more than 8,000 hectares of parks, gardens, and forests, Brussels is one of the greenest cities in Europe. Yet, more than 20% of the Brussels population does not have access to public green spaces (Stessens et al., 2017).

Europe's capital is known as a vibrant city, a magnet for creative centipedes and talents. At the same time, the Brussels region is facing high levels of job shortage and unemployment. The poverty indices tie together and reinforce one another. For example, one in four children grows up in a household without a fixed working income. Amongst adults between 18 and 24, one in six leaves school without a diploma; 29% of adults of all ages without secondary school diploma are unemployed (Poverty Report Brussels, 2020). Brussels, thus, is characterised by a combination of both wealth and poverty, and its highly fragmented and unequal educational landscape adds a layer of complexity and concern to this picture.

Just like its social and political (infra)structures, the educational cityscape of Brussels is quite unique, holding more than 1,000 educational institutions. The region concentrates the largest number

of students in the country. When it comes to higher education, more than 50 institutions found ground in its territories, representing a quarter of the student population in Belgium (Vaesen et al., 2014). This particularly large number of HEIs results from various processes, some of which can be traced back to socio-political frictions characterising the regions' histories. Vaesen and colleagues point at three important influencing factors in this regard: religion and language related contradictions; the governmental complexity characterising the region and the quest for autonomy by its local administrations; and last - but not least - the internationalisation of the higher educational landscape, intertwined with the increased European and international role of Brussels.

Not all Brussels inhabitants seem to be able to benefit from this extensive educational landscape though. Studies indicate that a large proportion of young people lack a higher educational degree, especially young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (see for example Sahiti, 2021). A first reason for this is that only 45% of young people (18-22 years old) from Brussels' disadvantaged neighbourhoods leave secondary education with a diploma needed to enter tertiary education. Secondly, the participation rate in higher education remains lower in socially disadvantaged environments, even for those with a diploma that provides access to higher education. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds also tend to opt for higher education of the short type, due to self-selection influenced by their social environment. Finally, even during higher studies, socio-economic backgrounds have a considerable influence on the success rates partly due to the costs and lack in socio-cultural capital, but also as an effect of existing stereotypes and unadopted pedagogies (Blommaert and Van Avermaet, 2008; Emmers and Plessers, 2018; Jacobs and de Jong, 2021). The quantitative democratisation of higher

education in Brussels, therefore, can be called unequal and highly segregated (Vermandele, 2010).

As Vaesen and colleagues rightly argue, HEIs are not directly responsible for all processes leading to this school segregation and inequality. Yet, they do have an obligation to increase the participation and success rates of students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods and social environments. According to the authors, this involves costs that cannot be met without additional financial arrangements. However, current policies are not moving in that direction, quite the contrary. As in many European countries, Belgian higher education has been on the receiving end of neoliberal restructurings, experiencing successive rounds of budget cuts (VLOR, 2018). In the next paragraph, it will be argued that the increase in precarity caused by the COVID crisis, could indeed turn the struggle of universities for their cities into an intertwined struggle for the right to the city and the University, a struggle that is highly needed, to retool the higher education landscape as leverage for shaping more equal, just, and democratic (urban) futures.

8.3 All in the Same Storm, Not in the Same Boat

"Being 21 in 2021 means being lonely and hungry", Belgian students chanted as they took to the streets of Brussels at the beginning of the *third corona wave*. By that time, three-quarters of students in Europe had had their school or university completely closed due to the pandemic. Studies indicated high levels of distress and an increase in precarity, both amongst students as well as the most vulnerable academic staff members (Bloch, 2020). According to data provided by the European Youth Forum (EYF, 2020), students feared that the quality of their education had been diminishing due to less face-to-face time with their teachers. An estimated two-thirds of European

students felt they had been learning less since the beginning of the pandemic. This rises to around three quarters for the most disadvantaged. In spring 2021, hundreds of Belgian students took the streets of Brussels to request a partial return to class. "We are here to resume face-to-face classes and for a little more money," they chanted. Nell, a 19-year-old Belgian first-year student, said that she was tired of taking online courses in a shared flat with an unreliable internet connection. Students from vulnerable and marginalised groups are at risk of "being completely left out of education," Sanaullah warned (Amiel and Vicent, 2021).

Young people are indeed the most connected and digitally literate generation, but this does not mean they are immune to mental health effects of social distancing, quite the contrary. An OECD report, citing evidence from a study conducted in the UK, reads that "young adults (aged 18 to 29) have experienced higher levels of distress compared to other age groups since the onset of the pandemic" (OECD, 2020). Studies also show that the COVID-19-crisis has affected their life goals, ambitions, and opportunities (Rens et al., 2021). Youth unemployment, for example, started rising again and it is expected that young people will be particularly affected by the economic fallout of the pandemic, as they are overrepresented in some of the heaviest affected industries and non-standard forms of employment, such as part-time and temporary gig work. "Most young people do jobs on the side, primarily in the food retail and entertainment sectors, which have been obviously quite substantially hit by the pandemic," Sanaullah noted. The crisis has thus affected young people's ability to pay for their basic costs of living. Moreover, the isolation, economic hardship, concerns, and uncertainties took a heavy toll on young people's mental health and wellbeing.

The COVID-19-crisis illustrates that diversity is not always super, and that diversity is still not considered a norm in our educational structures and offerings. Studies also warn of the long-term impact of the pandemic, expressing concerns about the rising inequalities that the European higher educational sector sees itself confronted with. Addressing this 'social crisis' will of course demand a multifaceted response, including adequate and sustainable funding, improved infrastructures, continuous support, and a more balanced workload for staff and students. Working toward more equal educational opportunities, moreover, will require efforts from the entire sector. The latest UNESCO report (2021) in that sense, calls for a 'new social contract', reinforcing education as a shared social commitment, one of the most important human rights, and one of the most important social responsibilities. To realise such ambitions, the authors stress pedagogy must be grounded in a truly inclusive education - one that accounts for all forms of discrimination and segregation - and that curricula should emphasise ecological, intercultural, and interdisciplinary learning, supporting students to access and produce knowledge while also allowing them "to go beyond the space we already inhabit and accompany us into the unknown" (UNESCO, 2021, p.12). Put differently, it could be argued that retooling higher education to respond adequately to the rising inequalities demands a form of 'radical imagination' that - as will be argued in the next paragraph - can be fostered through engaged urban pedagogies.

8.4 Engaged Pedagogies as Spaces of Possibilities and Hope

With UNIVER.CITY, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) explores practices, networks, and tools supporting the development of pedagogies that are better aligned with the specific needs and opportunities of its urban surroundings. To do so, a university-wide learning community was set up consisting of teachers, researchers, policy staff members,

people working in administration, students, and community partners. People with a shared interest in campus-community engagement. We decided to use the term Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) as an umbrella concept for 'knowledge creation and sharing activities in which real-life contexts and collaborative strategies are applied as building blocks for shaping powerful learning environments, responsible and responsive teaching and research programmes, where academic and extra-academic actors are brought together to work around societal challenges and contribute to positive change'.

The concept of 'community' highlights the situated and contextualised nature of learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The 'engaged' dimension stresses its dialogical nature (Marková, 2003), requiring the involvement of multiple parties, expressing 'multitudes of multi-voiced meanings' (Bakhtin, 1986). Linking the term 'community' to 'engagement' serves to broaden the scope from traditional expert-driven and mono-disciplinary forms of research and education to more participatory and transdisciplinary modes of inquiry, seeking to create holistic perspectives and frames of reference allowing participants to observe, analyse, understand, and tackle complex issues (Moriau et al., 2021).

Taking advantage of the unique learning opportunities that our urban environments provide, the VUB-CERL-offer is quite vast and heterogeneous. The initiatives relate to a variety of disciplinary and societal contexts, building on a variety of activities. Students in criminology, for example, go to a prison for studying penological topics together with prisoners and people working in detention centres, and by doing so not only gain a better understanding of theoretical concepts but also contribute to the reintegration of prisoners and the continued professionalisation of detention staff. Students in journalism apply their expertise in hyperlocal journalism to collect

testimonials and create neighbourhood portraits in collaboration with local media and cultural houses for fostering social cohesion and a sense of community in deprived neighbourhoods. Students in sociology investigate sociological dimensions of urban sustainability issues in close collaboration with local residents and policymakers, as to feed in and inspire the communication and action strategies of Brussels-based citizen's movements. CERL initiatives - we believe - are a means to develop more authentic and impactful study experiences, building on the diversity of real-life contexts and challenges that our urban context provides.

Engaged urban practices are considered a means to align our pedagogical offerings with the diverse backgrounds, needs, and expectations that our students bring to the classroom. They are conceptualised as 'hybrid learning environments' (Zitter and Hoeve, 2012), allowing to cross-link formal and informal learning environments and experiences, thereby challenging participants to look at a situation, an experience, or problem from a variety of perspectives: that of the detainee, the local shop tenant, a resident, policymaker, a care provider, youngster, or elderly people. It incites them to look for ways to connect those different perspectives, cross-pollinate the experiences they gain when they move between the University campus and the city centre, their home environment and the research field, the online learning environment and onsite learning place, thereby stimulating them to identify shortcomings in their way of understanding, identify biased or stereotyped ways of looking at things, and develop more diversity-rich and diversity-sensitive modes of reading them and interacting with other people. CERL strategies in that sense can be considered a means to learn *in* diversity and *for* diversity (Sierens and Van Avermaet, 2015).

The post-surveys and focus group interviews that we took with some of the students (n≅250), academics (n≅300), and societal partners (n≅150) taking part in our engaged offerings (covered in a forthcoming paper in more detail), reveal that lecturers value the positive impact of their CERL initiatives on student motivation, satisfaction, involvement, and performances. “Our students are tomorrow’s changemakers. This kind of learning encourages active citizenship and fosters student agency and responsibility”, one of the interviewed lectures stated. Students appreciate the societal relevance, the added value for their personal development, self-knowledge, and understanding of societal developments and needs. Both lecturers and students highlighted the diverse and international character of Brussels as an asset for putting CERL into practice. “Being immersed in this superdiverse context, really allows you to get to know yourself better, but it also stimulates you to look beyond your own frames of reference, your personal needs and merits. It helps you to grow from I to we,” a student commented. The societal partners valued the inspirational input of students, the academic expertise, and additional resources and capacities the activities had brought to their organisations. “This was a great collaboration,” one of the partners reacted, “keeping us sharp and making us reflect on things we might usually not focus on.”

Yet, our studies did also highlight some important hurdles and concerns. Students pointed at the dense structure of their study programmes and the heavy workload they had experienced. They stressed the importance of transparency about the purpose of the proposed activities and expressed a need for adequate support. Lecturers emphasised the importance of adequate infrastructure and resources. They are concerned about the lack of recognition that leadership of involvement in engaged practices receive and pointed out that central coordination is key to sustain partner relationships

and ensure adequate monitoring. The societal partners were concerned about their lack of time to provide adequate supervision and pointed at the need to be supported in translating their needs and expertise to the academic context.

Our interviews also pointed at the risk of one-sided benefits and 'over-partnering'. These findings confirm previous research, indicating that not all campus-community initiatives are truly beneficial (see for example Mitchel et al., 2012). Scholars point at the danger of not genuinely *walking the talk* of developing 'reciprocal partnerships' and 'being mindful of both needs and assets of all involved stakeholders'. Mitchell and colleagues in that sense stressed the importance of adopting critical approaches 'aiming to change the conditions that structure social dynamics' by creating 'new forms of engagement'.
Pointing at the danger of overly simplified and naïve discourses and approaches, Boström et al. (2018, p.11) emphasise the need of acknowledging the importance of 'transformative conflicts' when working in/toward engaged pedagogies. "Rather than placing hope on reaching consensus, difference, disagreement, and conflicts need to be handled, rather than suppressed" for they have the potential to transform individuals, communities, and institutions for the better, they argue, stressing the importance of taking social contexts and power relations into account when targeting genuine transformation. Engaged practices in that sense, should be organised as *agonistic spaces* (Mouffe, 2005), supporting participants to explore and understand areas of friction. They need to provide a sheltered space for dialogue on conflict-laden topics and processes involving diverging interests and desires. These dialogues need not, and in some instances possibly should not, be based on collectively shared values or consensus-seeking but should rather draw on the creative power of social discord for - as Kumashiro (2008) reminds us - consensus can

contribute to, rather than interrupt the status quo by creating a 'resonance of dominant ideas and ideals'.

Universities in that sense - as was argued by Magnusson (2011) - must learn to ‘see like a city’ by recognising and engaging a world characterised by multiplicity and diverse knowledge. Addie (2017) noted that a retooled urban university should internalise the mediatory role between abstraction and social practice of the urban, by forging strategies that ‘relate and interconnect the conceptual and the concrete, the structural and the experiential’ as they come together for different groups in urban space and across urban society. The author emphasised that alternative knowledge needs to be integrated through urban teaching, research, and engagement too, as Lipman (2011, p.164) contends, “[clarify] the interconnectedness of urban issues and the need for systemic solutions.” Practices of community engagement in that sense should be recognised as a form of ‘boundary work’ (McMillan, 2008) allowing people to gain a more critical perspective on the forms of domination inherent in their own histories, knowledge, and practices, and learn to value alternative forms of knowledge and modes of knowledge production. Giroux argues that borderlands “should be seen as sites both for critical analysis and as a potential source of experimentation, creativity and possibility” (Giroux, 1992, p.28). Therefore, if a willingness to deviate from the norm and explorative thinking that moves away from traditional paths are at the core of the adopted approaches, it is important to critically assess how they achieve inclusion and invite participants to work with the tensions and conflicts this diversity typically entails.

In their most advanced form, CERL initiatives can be considered ‘collective learning processes’ generating ‘collective impact’ (Kania and Kramer, 2011) building on assets both universities and their

immediate surroundings can provide. Lecturers, students, and societal partners are transformed through the 'pedagogical encounter' or 'productive tension' as they learn from one another in/through interaction. At the same time, critical interventions allow them to experiment with alternative settings and reshape the conditions at play. It could be argued that urban environments - due to the socio-ecological challenges they typically concentrate on - offer unique opportunities for designing engaged pedagogies. But it should also be acknowledged that navigating such environments is a rather risky endeavour, inevitably coming with moments of tension, friction, and discomfort. Thus, unleashing the progressive potential of engaged pedagogies entails much more than just the 'creation of a welcoming environment', allowing diverse people to take part in a 'collective learning journey'. It demands a critical position and therefore active exploration of power imbalances - with an aim not only to work against the injustices encountered, but also to actively shape more just, equitable, and empowering conditions (Seale, 2010). Critique is not enough. In order to foster transformation, critical inquiry must be paralleled with discourse and practice of hope, "holding the present open and thus unfinished" as Benjamin (1997) states.

8.5 Reclaiming the Right to the City and the University, a Timely Stance

> *We all live in our time and place, immersed in what is, and imagining a social scene different from what is immediately before us requires a combination of some things: seeds, surely; desire, yes; necessity and desperation at times; and at other times a willingness to dance out on a limb without a safety net – no guarantees*. (Ayers, 2014, p.12)

CHAPTER 8 RETOOLING HIGHER EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF RISING INEQUALITIES, A (POST)-COVID-19 REFLECTION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGED URBAN PEDAGOGIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and reinforced deep-seated inequalities. Poverty and discrimination have increased, leading to a decline in trust and increasing polarisation. This social crisis asks for a re-engagement of higher education. Universities need to actively shape spaces where traditional practices can be questioned, spaces where dominant discourses can be challenged and more just, inclusive, and democratic ecologies of learning, being, and becoming can be shaped. In this chapter, it is argued that at least part of the answer to this need might be found in the potential of the University classrooms to function as 'spaces of transformation'. Engaged pedagogies offer a means to supplant passive, supposedly neutral, and expert-oriented approaches to knowledge production and sharing with those that take the existence of a plurality of knowledge in a variety of institutions, people, and locations seriously. Approached as a form of praxis, engaged pedagogies challenge universities to ask what kind of education they are providing, what kind of knowledge they produce, and in what manner they can contribute to societal change. They help shape a space for ongoing self-reflection, by mobilising critical voices - engaged scholars, students, partners, and citizens - around a variety of societal emergencies.

Bringing together a plurality of perspectives and knowledge is key to finding new ways of understanding and addressing complex issues. Plurality is also important for creating more inclusive cities and universities. When carefully designed, engaged urban pedagogies can help shape the necessary conditions to address the interrelated struggles for the right to the city and the right to the University. They counteract fatalism and cynicism, by fostering a space for 'radical imagination'.

In order to actualise this potential, engaged pedagogies should be organised around the struggle over agency, voice, and value-driven

social relations. They must aim at producing students who can think critically, be considerate of others, take risks, and imagine a different future. Realising this vision of education is not an impossible task, but will need to be a collective effort, building on strategically developed coalitions - both within as well as outside academia - where progressive forces hold one another accountable for and support one another in reclaiming education as a space of possibility and hope, allowing us to work against social inequalities, rather than reproducing or reinforcing them.

Chapter 9 “Coaching and Diversity”: Curriculum-Based Engaged Learning at Ghent University

Ghent University

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9.1 Introduction

Adding to the collection of practices on Engaged Learning in higher education in Flanders, we describe ‘Coaching and Diversity’ as a Community Service Learning course (CSL), incorporating Engaged Learning in the curriculum. Our main idea is to connect students to the community of the University. Starting from the definition of CaST, we follow:

> *Engaged Learning as the process where students apply the theory learned at Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to a context outside of HEI by addressing societal concerns, challenges or needs while producing knowledge in an equitable, mutually beneficial partnership. (Chmelka et al., 2020, p.4)*

Older students take up the engagement to coach and provide support to freshmen students at the level of freshmen’s study guidance, how to find their way around in the city, and getting to know the wider Ghent community, especially in connection to the University to achieve competencies themselves and take up their responsibility as a peer. The training itself consists of an academic component elaborated on via an online learning platform in the form of self-directed learning, via small group supervision across faculties stimulating student-mentors to reflect, and exchange experiences on coaching mentees with other mentors, and via e-portfolio tasks eliciting their personal reflections adjusting their own learning process. Students get the opportunity to be educated on ‘Diversity’ and ‘Coaching’ and reflect before, while, and after they act.

Embedding the course in the curriculum, students have the option between an elective course in their regular programme (model curriculum) or on top of their regular curriculum (credit contract). The option to earn credits (3ECTS) compensating for their engagement, helps them to stay committed during the academic year and to consider the coaching of mentees as an academic learning trajectory.

CSL is put central in the structure and logic of the course. Students exchange with each other to the benefit of their personal and professional experiences with diversity. Benefits they mention are mastery and transferable skills in light of their future professional career, coaching and leadership skills, exchanging personal experiences as students with valuable knowledge, addressing societal concerns, and challenges or specific and diverse support needs. Students shared that it was the first time they meet other students in a transdisciplinary way. Others go further and initiate conversations within their faculty about the culture of diversity by reflecting on and exchanging their experiences. As in all communities, there is a turnover to the next generation when mentees, students who received coaching or applied for coaching, become mentors in a later year.

This chapter will start with a brief explanation of how this course is related to Engaged Learning at Ghent University (UGent), afterwards situating the course through a short history and overview, and then explaining how it is put into practice and matched within the University. We will discuss essential human and material building blocks to run this course within the context of higher education. We share experiences of all those involved, as this is an essential part of valuing the course. It also means we will discuss outputs, impact, and how our initial goals in ‘Diversity and Coaching’ are met in connection to the UGent community. Concluding, we commit ourselves to keep asking attention and to invest in sustainability, sharing some difficulties in finding the necessary support within a highly competitive HEI.

9.1.1 UGent and Engaged Learning

As this course was set up as a CSL project in 2013, you will find it on the University CSL website[19] among other initiatives. It is very

[19] https://www.ugent.be/nl/univgent/waarvoor-staat-ugent/onderwijsbeleid/doelstellingen/talentontwikkeling/community-service-learning

important to experience the flexible learning process through CSL as a combination of clear and academic learning goals with community service (Cress et al., 2005). As mentioned in the previous edited volume in this series (Marsh et al., 2021), CSL is the term bringing existing projects together which could be situated under the umbrella term of Engaged Learning. Relabelling sometimes means you have to defend all over again why a project should be included or could serve as piloting inspiration for new projects. Disregarding or undervaluing the engagement jeopardises sustainability, even when everybody agrees on the added value of keeping these courses running over the years. Continuing to situate these as 'projects' can prohibit valuing and supporting these sustainable initiatives of creating a structural difference in higher education. It is important to strengthen the connections between similar setup projects and methodologies and possibilities to exchange collaboratively on necessary steps, learning from each other's archived knowledge and experiences.

We confirm the core aspect for the course 'Coaching and Diversity' meets both descriptions, CSL and Engaged Learning, when we focus on learning by experience as students engage and apply what they have been taught in the course concerning diversity, coaching, and self-regulated learning to the real-world context of freshmen students in higher education. We hope to respond to the call to become more civically engaged community service wise. Our aim is to improve the access to education for those freshmen for whom studying in higher education could be seen as vulnerable and/or who express diverse (educational) needs.

Engaging students (*mentors*) to coach one or two students (*mentees*) first enrolling at university means sharing their own experiences as a student while also exchanging with mentees to value the knowledge and experiences that all students bring to university from their communities. It helps to co-produce knowledge within academia, across faculties, and in different disciplines. We create learning communities among those mentors, engaging another layer of students (*coaches*) as partners and co-designers of the curriculum,

which increases the personal and professional development of mentors to deal with the difference in a relational context, enriched by exchanging multiple perspectives with each other.

9.2 Overview of 'Coaching and Diversity'

> [Justice entails] the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly. The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting. How then shall we understand our role in *helping constitute who and what come to matter*? (Barad 2007, p.x)

9.2.1 Structure of the course

In February–March 2013, this course was approved by the educational board at UGent to run officially as a university-wide elective course. It was initially unrolled in four pilot faculties. Today nine out of 11 faculties take part in supporting this course in their curricula. During the past eight years, a stable format and approach were developed and established by discussing evolutions and adaptations with the core team, checking in with the various faculties. The core team of the course exists of two lecturers from the faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, one coordinator of the mentors and coaches from that faculty, and one coordinator of the mentees and the matching, coming from the UGent central Student Counselling Office.

The primary focus of the course is creating a caring and supportive environment to tackle the needs mentees are presented with when enrolling as a student. We use activated learning to stimulate Engaged Learning in the curriculum as what "enables students to derive learning from meaningful community engagement whilst working on real world problems" (Chmelka et al., 2020, p.4):

- Community engagement:
  The main societal need to tackle is facilitating access and the opportunity to study in higher education for a diverse student population, by engaging mentors to take up responsibility for freshmen peers. The mentees are students who are starting in a vulnerable position: they are the first in the family to take up higher education, are students with a disability, with a different native language, with a foreign degree, living in difficult socio-economic circumstances, with an atypical education trajectory, or facing mental health problems, etc.[20]

- Academic components:
  These consist of online practice-based learning paths with theoretical input (on the UGent e-learning platform 'Ufora') that mentors can follow at their own pace during the course. Three topics are elaborated on:

  1. Diversity,
  2. Coaching, and
  3. Self-regulated learning.

- Mentoring relationships between a mentor and two mentees: (preferably from the same faculty):
  - We provide for this coaching-relation learning by experience, reflections on handling differences, providing support and co-constructing knowledge, and skills on becoming a student at UGent.
  - There are five online exchanges between mentors in small, interdisciplinary groups supervised by coaches (students from the 2nd Master of Special Needs Education) where mentors can discuss their coaching process and relation with the mentees.

[20] https://www.ugent.be/nl/univgent/waarvoor-staat-ugent/diversiteit-en-inclusie/voor-studenten/mentoring/voorwie.htm

- Mentors write down personal reflections in their e-portfolio and upload specific assignments around coaching and diversity, which are evaluated and where the mentors receive feedback on.

The initiative is announced at different levels, mainly by support officers in the different faculties, at the start of the academic year to make the initiative visible. Student-mentors find ‘Coaching and Diversity’ in the list of possible courses and apply to register in their curriculum. It is a bit more difficult to make the offer known to mentees who are not yet registered at university. This involves a lot of communication connecting with different communities and promoting the initiative on social media, info sites, registration office, etc. Possible candidates are invited to take part in an online information session. This session is organised separately for mentors and mentees to appropriately share information about the objectives of the course, structure and planning, e-learning portal, expectations concerning engagement, and benefits. Candidate mentors and mentees are invited to fill in a survey, which is used to make a good match between mentor and mentees. The survey probes for general interests, specific needs, background, etc. The filled-in surveys are printed and categorised according to faculty and ranked based on needs.

Every year, it is exciting hoping the puzzle can be made finding a matching mentor for the mentees. In some faculties there is a waiting list with mentees, in other faculties, extra mentees must be recruited. Each year, mentors and mentees wait impatiently to start, sharing the opinion that the earlier they can start the better to guide mentees in the unknown structures of UGent. The matching is, as soon as available, transmitted to the contact persons (often support officers) in the different faculties. They organise an event to disclose the matching and initiate the first meeting.

Mentor students in the course want to provide support to lower the thresholds and barriers for the new freshmen mentees. Confronted

with theoretical inputs concerning diversity combined with reflective exercises endows them with consciousness about diversity in their own student environments. For example, the privilege walk challenges them to discuss the privileges they enjoy or did not obtain compared with other students and their mentees. Matching with two mentees and the invitation to get to know each other through working together one year creates closer connections and challenges them to take different positions and broaden their perspectives in the coaching process. Matching with students from different disciplines in the five online exchanges helps them to inspire and support each other, trying to find possible responses to needs in their micro society. As engaged students take part in more than one engagement in the community, they can also disseminate their experiences from this course to the local campus and outside.

Every time we start explaining the structure, we are aware of the complexity involving different layers in involving people from all corners of the community. We have tried to visualise the complex structure of the course, but the best way to get the bigger picture is getting involved and learning by experience as our intern witnesses.

Figure 1: Structure presented at Enlight UGent November 2021

9.2.2 Content of the course

When students enter the course and they think of diversity, they often immediately think of students with migrant backgrounds. We, however, try to approach diversity in a very broad and layered way. During the online learning trajectory, we focus on categorisation and the consequences it can have. We present the students David Mitchell's Big Five: gender, religion, ethnicity, social-economic status, and ability (Mitchell, 2016). Each category is given signifying power: it defines who the student is. We show, with very concrete examples, how these different categories can lead to exclusion in higher education today. While categories might be used effectively for political, medical, or economic purposes, in educational contexts, we suggest, their use as primary identity markers is ethically irresponsible, to the extent that it can foreclose possibilities for students and their learning.

The categorisation can mark the non-normative as being other to those who can be recognised as naturally belonging. From such an unmarked, autonomous position, it is easy enough to see one’s own being as normal and natural, and as being the way, it *should* be. Normativity is thus produced as a natural state of being without ever needing to pay attention to the way ableism, sexism, racism, and homophobia are being produced (Hehir, 2005). Through these logics, students who are categorised as different from the norm are perceived as having a problem that is located *in* them, preventing them from becoming what everyone can and should become. This process of categorisation can be described as abjecting the other, placing the difference *in* the other. The student who is categorised as different from the norm is then perceived as having a problem, a problem that is located *in* the student (De Schauwer et al., 2016a) rather than questioning the normalising discourses and practices themselves.

The educational traditions of segregation based on categories are not based on empirical evidence, but on normative assumptions which

make segregation feel natural in education, especially in higher education (Danforth, 2015). The effect of such practices is not just on those who are abjected, but also on those who are there as students. As Shildrick's (2002) analysis shows, the abjection serves both to construct and protect normalised identities as being 'not that'. Students in the course 'Coaching and Diversity' become aware of how normativity works and that we are all part of it. We do not only focus on students with diverse needs. It is a challenge for those who have been identified as normal individual entities to see the work they do to abject and thus exclude those who cannot present themselves as that generic, normalised entity (De Schauwer et al., 2016b).

A key strategy of categorisation in higher education is individualisation – a relentless hyper-individualism, through which individuals are made responsible for the success of dealing with diversity and for the problems they are confronted with. There are a lot of individuals we can hold responsible for handling diversity, and we want to problematise this individualisation of accountability and responsibility and the auditing mentality that comes along with it (Bansel, 2007). Individuals become, by default, the agents who are responsible for inclusive higher education. Sometimes it is the individual student who is blamed (they couldn't be included because they were not 'normal' enough or their presence was disruptive); sometimes it is the lecturers (who have failed because they have not adapted their teaching practices appropriately), or the policymakers at university (who did not create the necessary conditions for inclusion to work or provide adequate support).

We want to start from what the students at their level of influence can do. They can provide very concrete support through coaching new students, who enter university and who are disclosing their (educational) needs. We let them share this responsibility with their mentees, their supervision groups, the coaches, and the team of Coaching and Diversity. We begin, not with the neoliberal subject-as-entity, but with the "emergent intracorporeal multiplicities of life" (Fritsch, 2015, p.51). We are interested in the moment-by-moment

production of possibilities through peer-to-peer coaching and among all those involved - not just humans but also discourses, values, and the spatial-material elements of a university. In handling diversity, the process of searching is as important as finding adequate solutions.

9.2.3 Resources of the course

Like any other course, academic staff are responsible for the academic components (learning paths content at an institution based e-platform) and each year teaching assistants are appointed to evaluate and provide feedback on the mid-and end-term assignments. But this course requires more than just a regular course. Staff resources and time are essential:

- To take care of recruiting students, university-wide and at different educational levels and courses, partially before enrolling.
- Matching students in pairs according to interest and education in a short period at the beginning of the year.
- Student-mentors must be divided into groups under the supervision of coaches recruited from a different course in that same time lock.
- Planning and organisation must be prepared to communicate expectations and align collaboration with everyone involved.
- Overall coordination and follow up of study progress and activities.
- Connection with supporting staff within the faculties must be repeated several times a year.
- To keep up with changes in the educational landscape, like COVID-19.

We can fall back on a part-time coordinator (10%) for the mentees from the central Student Counselling Office who is recruiting the mentees, does the matching at the beginning of the academic year, and follows the mentees throughout the course. There is also a part-time coordinator for the mentors (40%), a PhD student from the

Department of Special Needs Education who is assigned to keep track of the smooth running of the mentors, the exchanges during the year, the training, and follow up of the coaches. There is no extra structural funding for the course which forces us to be as creative as possible and keep additional costs to a minimum.

With a positive look, shortness on staff forced us to and helped us value the peer-to-peer support with student coaches. On the other hand, this again needs extra coordination, training, and time to provide feedback and evaluate their process. Coaches are recruited at the beginning of the year from another course ‘Coaching and Consultation’ in the last Master of Special Needs Education. Coaches are prepared and informed about the mentoring at the time of the activity, what mentors are expected to have accomplished, combined with the kind of possible questions that could be raised, where to find ‘answers’, or how to refer to other existing support. Coaches keep track of their participation and are real partners in the educational process of the mentors. They report back using preformed scales to keep track of the evolution and participation from the first to fifth activity. They will use the scales to present an overall view of the progress their group of mentors made, together with their own critical views and evaluation of the sessions at the end of the year. After each activity we gather all coaches in online group sessions, letting them exchange on what went well and what was difficult, find inspiration in different intervision approaches, and stay away from the idea that one size fits all.

We fall back on the support officers of each faculty to see the students in between and to give input from the study programmes. We try to maintain a close line of communication with the mentees and the follow-up and support for the mentors. This is easier in some faculties than in others and needs to be rebuilt each time with new staff members.

9.2.4 Matching with the (U)Gent-community

The original intention had to do with what we call today decolonising the University. For some students access and study success appeared more challenging, and the idea was to pave the way with pioneers and peers creating a bigger influx. Being represented in higher proportions allowed students to find allies and get a voice from within to ask for more attention to the needs of students in vulnerable situations. It also gave rise to recognisable role models in contact with the communities for whom access was challenging or even not considered.

The unique combination of guidance about the structure and expectations in becoming a university student in the local context of Ghent in combination with academic components around diversity and coaching can be one answer to meet some needs expressed by the community. Participating and engaging can influence the focus and co-construct new shared ‘knowledge or canons’, respecting different world views and perspectives, valuing different lived experiences, and deconstructing the existing normative patterns. It helps the University evolve together with a changing society prioritising new societal challenges, for example concerning superdiversity, mental health, changing family composition, economic and environmental status, adapting curricula, and research in response. Being systematically mentioned as one of the initiatives on the University website ‘Diversity and Inclusion’ and meetings with the vice-chancellor and the policy coordinator on diversity are important to support the embeddedness in applying and representing the mission and policy statements of UGent concerning diversity and inclusion.

In other parts of our jobs, all members of our team are separately involved in other tasks and different communities, working groups, engagements, etc. around diversity and student support. We are always making connections with the course since it is a point of concern to keep the dialogue going back and forth, questioning how

to anticipate and respond to remaining or returning needs in the different communities. Examples: meetings around Diversity and Inclusion of the diversity coordinators from each faculty, Dare to Think Diverse (platform around diversity at UGent), a student in the warm city of Ghent, and a working group around student well-being.

9.3 Engagement with Participants

9.3.1 Students

Students are involved at three different levels: mentee, mentor, and coach. We meet all candidates at the beginning of the year in groups online, but we use surveys instead of individual intakes because of timing and the number of applicants.

We want students to become aware of their frame of reference through the online study programmes. We give input on concepts such as ‘diversity’, ‘intersectionality’, ‘privilege’, and ‘coaching’. The students learn how to position themselves with regard to diversity and how to recognise normalising practices and systems. They learn how to respond to the needs of peers and what can help them in communicating accessibly. Throughout the assignments, we exchange inspiring practices and critical incidents that can come up in the coaching process with the mentees.

Mentor and mentees are supposed to meet regularly, every two weeks, to set up a trustworthy and (hopefully) caring relationship that is different from just a classmate because of reciprocal expectations. They work with very concrete support questions of the mentees that can change over time and reflect together on the actions they can take. We see actions on three domains: at the academic level of the study, at the social support level, and at becoming familiar with UGent and the city of Ghent. Academic support may consist of learning to take notes during courses and overcoming language barriers, making study plans, going over and preparing for exams, emphasis from the lecturer, dealing with ICT and learning platforms, applying for exam

facilities, etc. Social support has to do with becoming a student, belonging at university, dealing with the uncertainty and fear of failure that students often experience, finding additional support such as the student psychologist, or the monitorate… We want peer-to-peer support and to give students the opportunity to help each other from an equal relationship and position.

Mentor groups and coaches meet during three supervisions in the first semester and two in the second but can ask questions by mail the whole year. In the supervision, a lot of attention is paid to language use and critical moments throughout the coaching process. The coaches confirm and reassure the mentors and motivate the group to think together about how students can actively support their mentees. Before and after every activity coaches have an online meeting with the coordinating team member, but also keep in touch through WhatsApp and email in between those scheduled meetings. They help design the teaching materials, although they value the script made available from the start. It is their own aspirations to be more involved in co-design and share as much need-to-know information about the intention and essence of the course because of making the shift from student position among other students into a position in charge or responsible for other students. They do not always have access to all available information from policy and back offices.

As the coordinating team, we usually are in less contact with individual students, but they can always reach us through our helpdesk moments. We rely mostly on the contacts with the coaches and the contact the mentors and mentees have in their own faculty. Mentor, mentees, and contact persons at the faculty get to know each other during the first meeting and during the prepared talk at the support office at the faculty each semester. Sometimes this is all it takes to close the gap between a student looking for support and the available support. We are contacted when trajectories are not going smoothly or when they have specific questions about the training and assignments. In some cases, mentors or coaches contact us to ask for accommodations or motivational talks. Therefore, it must be very

clear for the mentor, mentee, or contact person who can be reached to capture signals in an early stage.

9.3.2 Staff

The team initially consisted of project members from the group ‘Gender and Diversity’ completed by two academic staff members from the faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences to take care of the academic components. The group dissolved and the team has become a lot smaller over the years, redirecting the efforts to the responsible academic staff and respective departments.

Every semester a team meeting is organised to manage the coordination and discuss possible innovations, adjustments, or issues. To keep track of evolutions and learning climate in faculties and inform the involved contact persons, we organise meetings to listen to what goes well or is difficult and exchange possible innovations or shifts. We learned that it cannot be taken for granted that information about the course is known by all members as there are frequent turnovers in staff and students.

A lot of communication must be set up with good up to date documentation. It is difficult working with staff in different units which requires more communication. The added value of working with staff involved at different levels, units, and departments help to have ears and eyes at different levels. The challenge is then to bring together this shared knowledge and co-produce new insights about the variation in university student support for the benefit of the community.

We are very much convinced of the importance of reflection on topics such as diversity for the students, particularly for students who are not familiar with it. We want the mentees to be reassured that they are not the only ones. Every year, we see how many doubts and insecurities mentees have about studying in higher education and how many doubts and insecurities mentors have about dealing with diversity and really mattering as a coach. We are convinced of the

importance of the systematic interactions we bring about in students and the academic knowledge we provide them with. We do not stop at the reflection, we let the students act in a real situation with fellow students within the safe context of their education. In this way, we set not only thinking, but also doing in motion, and this is something that can spread further in the daily lives and later professional lives of many of these students.

9.4 Added Value for Impact

9.4.1 Outputs of the course

Each year approximately 100 student-mentors register for this course, guiding more or less than 150 mentees during one academic year. Mentors are divided into 10 interdisciplinary groups, supervised by duo coaches. This means we create a supportive peer-to-peer community with engaged students all over the University. It is creating a network with people caring for each other, accepting and valuing different ways to belong and contribute when sharing certain attitudes, common interests, and goals, which maybe is the best description of a community. This is making a difference for mentees, and that can be witnessed in mentees or students who applied but ended up on the waiting list, taking up the role of a mentor in a subsequent year. Some students who do not have room in their regular schedule to engage as a mentor, still decide to become a coach in their last year at the University.

The initiative is not simply about improving study success, you cannot rely on simple output statistics. That is something we introduce mentors to when panicking if mentees are not performing according to model students. The main learning outputs we hope to deliver each year for students registering for the course are:

- Academic achievement and skills: Students are trained on different levels and evaluated on their learning process in their view on diversity and mentoring two other students.

- Strengthening an affirmative and relational view on difference: Students are, during their mentoring process, confronted with diverse needs and support questions, but also with strengths and strong opinions of their mentees, fellow mentors, and coaches. Students are in charge of how they shape themselves in relation to the other and learn from each other on multiple levels in this course. Reciprocity is a major factor mentioned by mentors, where initially they expect to coach and share their knowledge as a wiser student. Coaching makes them aware it works in both directions and the mentors realise they are changing themselves, learning from their mentees, and in relation to the other students they exchange with.
- Coaching skills, leadership, and citizenship: By coaching another student and reflecting on that process, mentors sometimes are anticipating professional employment situations. Students experiment and learn skills on, for example, coaching and informed decision making, taking societal needs, and equity into account.
- ‘UGent brand’ and being a UGent student: Students take up the shared responsibility propagated by the University by implementing and integrating critical attitudes discussed in the course and at an institutional level. Experiencing being a student from within the community, they can spread the word about what being a student can mean in relation to the faculty, and UGent.

9.4.2 What worked well and what didn’t in the initiative

Evaluation and feedback are important aspects of running this course. First of all, it is important to keep ourselves motivated in relation to our aims and the expectations from UGent. Evaluating and continuous monitoring is also important to check if the initial intentions are met, to keep track of changing needs, and stay in touch with the UGent-community, students, and all partners involved. Using questionnaires takes place during mid and end-term. Coaches gather the questionnaires and send them to us. Some faculties invite mentees in

groups to share their experiences and evaluate how the programme is going. We can also evaluate the progress or added value for mentors when reading their written transcripts reflecting on the academic and practical components and activities or looking at their logbook of the meetings with the mentees. The last evaluation is done by the coaches when sharing their impressions after the activities and in the scales reporting on those activities. The online group sessions with the coaches and the evaluation meeting at the end of the course help us to stay alert and constantly improve what we are doing for the next course.

The overall feedback of the student-mentors is positive with a recommendation every student should get the opportunity to get involved. Participants share this course is crossing their own discipline in a different way (discipline driven) and they learn theory and skills (pedagogy driven) which otherwise would not be included in their education. However, they almost all reported they had underestimated the study load. As an engaged student, they often do more than estimated. The students think that 3ECTS is not much for the engagement and the work they are expected to do. Within the faculties, we also hear a need for more differentiation according to what is necessary for their programme for elective courses.

Each year we reach a new batch of students getting involved in the course or students taking up the next level. It means more and more students get engaged and can spread the word, contributing to constructing a supportive peer-to-peer community. We still can manage to run the course, even with turnovers or less staff in looking for creative solutions involving interns and making use of digital tools. Each year it is possible to position the course as a university-wide elective course in relation to various other new and existing initiatives while being valued as making a difference and other ways of doing academia.

At the end of the course, students can distinguish the different components as working in combination to create added value,

attribute to growth, and personal development for themselves, the mentees, and in relation to each other. They can transfer what they learned to their own studies, disciplines, and professionalisation in light of further employment. They became aware of belonging to a community with members taking up different responsibilities, helping them to work together and refer for more adequate support, when necessary. They become critical thinkers challenging traditional patterns and ways of doing at university, not only regarding diversity. Students report valuing the opportunity to connect with other people from all over the University, which would not have been possible in their regular curriculum. Some of them even are building long-lasting relationships.

Difficulties we are confronted with are timing and lack of resources. We need to find other ways to promote the initiative to start recruiting mentors earlier. As it is an elective course, there is not always a good fit with the space created in the students’ curriculum. Matching based on needs and common interests at the beginning of the academic year is puzzling. We experience a lot of willingness and commitment, students are informed and involved from the beginning. This asks for transparent communication and fast-paced responses in relation to the educational environments, which are not always possible in combination with other commitments. Students expect staff members within the faculty to respect and similarly implement in their way of doing what is expected from them as engaged students in this course.

9.5 Possible conclusion

In the course ‘Coaching and Diversity’, education AND diversity go hand in hand, they meet within the structures of higher education and are implemented in the curriculum over faculties. It leads to small-scale, concrete exchanges between students in the peer-to-peer coaching and the intervision groups with coaches. The subject brings in a structural way learning, action, AND reflection on the level of the students themselves. We focus fully on the process of the encounter

between the students and let them learn from each other, both in the coaching process of the mentees and that of the mentors. This is an

important statement to both the educational policy and the diversity policy of UGent. However, the course needs to be surrounded and accompanied by many additional actions to be sure that we are working on a diversity policy within the University that is tangible, supported, and sustainable. It is crucial that every student feels welcome and that we learn together how we can do this today and in future.

It becomes clear that a diversity policy in higher education is a matter of and...and...and... . The course has a very generic and broad scope across all faculties and this is considered a great added value by the students and the staff members. At the same time, the course is supported by the contact points within each faculty. This is necessary to respect the ways of working and expectations from each programme. The course is in favour of looking broadly at diversity and approaching the students as 'us' instead of ‘us and them’ AND at the same time, we need to be aware that these initiatives cannot be seen separately from specific actions toward each group in order to sufficiently recognise the specificity, vulnerabilities, and support needs of each category. This and-and approach invites a collective knowledge in higher education, which is necessary to address these complex problems.

Chapter 10 Conclusions from Engaged Learning Across Belgium

Courtney Marsh and Noel Klima

Conclusions

In the wider European context, we have found that Engaged Learning is quite diverse in nature and in how it is applied among different universities across the continent. Diversity was also a key component in the Belgian examples, as demonstrated in the previous chapters. Similarly, funding and overextension were also found in the Belgian context. The case studies provided exemplified very labour intensive workloads for the staff involved with little to no additional funding provided to support such work. Engaged Learning courses, both across Europe and within Belgium specifically, require more effort than a 'regular' course, the staff resources and time involved are an essential component to make such an initiative happen in the first place. As stated very plainly within the chapters, without additional support from many volunteers, Engaged Learning initiatives would have difficulties surviving.

Though staff difficulties have been examined, one aspect not discussed to any great extent in previously discussed publications (Chmelka et al., 2020; Marsh et al., 2021), is the difficulty in managing this type of course for the students. There was a notably heavy workload discussed concerning the students and what is already expected of them outside of a time-intensive Engaged Learning initiative. Students are already burdened with heavy expectations for their chosen courses, so more time cannot be committed to the Engaged Learning components of their studies. This could perhaps be remedied by a better embedding in the curricula or through a rise in credit points for Engaged Learning courses, but this point remains to be seen within the Belgian context. Though as discussed further below, students were still in large part very willing to participate in these initiatives and the benefits far outweighed the drawbacks.

Within the European context discussed at the beginning of this book, Engaged Learning initiatives were not often found to transcend across

the study years within the same programme. However, a notable difference within the Belgian context was the use of Engaged Learning programmes across multiple years within the same programmes. From this, it would seem that students are benefiting from a more robust, and interactive, learning experience throughout the entirety of their degree programme. Most especially for students in professions for which community interaction is an everyday requirement, this has the potential to better ready them for how to best interact with a diverse community.

Similar to the overall research in the field of Engaged Learning, the students who participated in the initiatives were more often than not overwhelmingly positive about their experiences with Engaged Learning initiatives, and this was no different in the Belgian context. Also as with the European examples, nearly all students chose to take Engaged Learning options when given the choice. The initiatives described in this book were positively received and left students with an "increased sense of efficacy", as well as a sense that they received real-world skills, a chance for personal growth, and helped to think about what kind of job they would want to do after studies.

Engaged Learning initiatives have also made a difference in how students view their contributions. The initiatives have given the view that reflection takes different forms depending on the contexts and the type of interventions. They are a means to develop more authentic and impactful study experiences, building on the diversity of real-life contexts and challenges. These types of experiences help the teachers to make the students step out of their comfort zones and focus on what matters in a real-world context and make a significant impact on those in their community.

From this viewpoint, students then view loyalty, rather than what one is academically obliged to do, as what drives the learning process to a great extent. This then connects the students more to their communities and what they do. To this end, what we are seeing is that

students are proposing organisations they are connected to, either because they are in their neighbourhood or are somehow related to them personally, via family members, friends, or acquaintances.

As a final point of discussion for the conclusions, the organisations and community partners involved were very happy with their participation in such initiatives. However, this considered, though the organisations were happy with the work, it was a recurring theme that they needed more time from the students and the rather short (in some cases only 10 weeks) placements were not long enough. An interesting point discussed in one of the case studies was that the rhythm of academia and the pressure to make weekly progress did not always align well with the rhythm of the real world. This could potentially be curtailed by more clear communication with the organisations and community partners on what exactly is to be expected, but this is mere speculation at this point. Another idea is to extend the reflection toward structuring some Engaged Learning courses to make them multi-annual courses (during all three Bachelor years plus the Master year(s)), as was seen in one of the examples provided. This gives the potential for additional benefits for the students to grow with the course, challenge, and engagement. An additional beneficial dimension could then be that students work together on joint challenges with other students from different years. However, perhaps also broader considerations to how a university education helps to prepare (or not) students for the real world should be explored further both within and outside of the Engaged Learning context.

Final Reflections

Each of the authors provided their own final reflections about their own Engaged Learning initiatives; however, the most poignant ones, which can, and possibly should, be applied to all disciplines are reflected on here.

From a community perspective, keep in mind that sometimes we can expect more from our target group. The idea of reciprocity is key in Engaged Learning, meaning we should be learning with, by, and for the communities in which we live. Removing the walls from around academic institutions is necessary, and in doing so it can be found that we constantly underestimate our target groups, keeping them unconsciously small when they have so much to contribute. Classrooms can be transformed into 'platforms for reflection-in-action', 'collective learning environments', and 'spaces of negotiation' when done effectively.

Last, but certainly not least, never separate Engaged Learning from the head topic of the study curriculum; give students new skills that make them more didactic and engaged in whatever field they choose to study. Moreover, and within the same vein, stay away from a one size fits all mindset. As has been stated throughout this book and previous publications, Engaged Learning thrives in its flexibility and diversity. This concept could be brought so far as to say that without these core components, Engaged Learning would not be what it is or have nearly the same (positive) impact it has shown thus far.

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Globally, there are growing calls for Higher Education Institutions to become more civically engaged and socially relevant while increasing public interest in the impact of universities on their localities and regions. Engaged Learning facilitates students to apply theory to real-world contexts outside of the University and to co-produce knowledge with and for the community. Engaged Learning provides students with the skills which increase their employability, and improve their personal and professional development, while communities gain access to skills to help develop, evaluate, or communicate their work about actual societal challenges.

To enhance the knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a successful and sustainable Engaged Learning initiative in the Belgian context, an in-depth view is provided into practices from eight case studies from five Higher Education Institutions across Belgium. Highlighted is the diversity and flexibility to be found within Engaged Learning initiatives. However, the one constant is each initiative's commitment to a concept where reciprocity between the students, universities, and communities, is prioritised. While the examples themselves differ in their structure and intended outcomes, this diversity is a benefit of Engaged Learning and further cements the varied nature across the disciplines and Belgium.

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