

The Voices of Community Partners in Germany: Expectations and Assessment Standards

Objectives

- (1) In times of media reports about isolation, xenophobia, and egoism, social commitment is an important and indispensable driver for a just, respectful and good coexistence of all people. Service-learning is a solution for promoting voluntary work among students and empowering students to assume social responsibility. In contrast to a variety of existing studies about the universities' and students' perspectives, studies about the community partners' perspective are missing, especially in the European and German context.
- (2) In service-learning classes, students combine learning experiences from university and community (Furco, 2009). Multiple studies about students' perspectives and the influence of service-learning on students' personality exist (Feldman et al., 2006). In contrast, studies on the community partners' perspective, especially in Higher Education, are rare (Ferrari & Worrall 2000, Hilgendorf et al. 2009). Existing studies show that community partners were impacted by the additional workforce students provide. However, the partners had to invest time in the supervision of the students (Jettner et al. 2017). Martin et al. (2009) show that short-term service-learning projects strongly challenge community partners. In contrast, Bushouse (2005) shows that community partners are more interested in short-term than in long-term partnerships. The aim of our study is therefore to analyze the community partners' perspectives in service-learning projects in higher education in Germany.

RQ1: What motivates the community partners to participate in Service-learning projects?

RQ2: What do community partners expect from Service-learning projects?

RQ3: How do community partners assess the results of Service-learning projects?

RQ4: How do community partners evaluate the results?

Methodology

N=6 semi-structured interviews with community partners (all serve the refugee community or people with special needs) in pre- and post-design (one before the start and one after the end of the project). In the first interview, community partners are asked about their former experience with voluntary commitment in their organization, their motivation for participating in the project and what results they expect at the end of the project. In the second interview community partners are asked how they experienced the collaboration with the students, how satisfied they are with the results, whether their expectations have been met and whether there were any reactions from the project's environment. As this is an ongoing project, more interviews will take place in 2019 and 2020 to extend the data.

Results and Conclusion

RQ1: The community partners state that students bring in **additional manpower** and rather do background work that volunteers shy away from. The students shall also set **new and external impulses** in the work of the partners. Another reason is the **positive public relations work** that results from participating in the project. In addition, the partners also want to **support the students in their learning**.

RQ2: Three community partners initially claim that they have **no special expectations**. On request, however, they state that the project could have a **social benefit by immersing the students in foreign worlds** and thus reviewing or correcting existing values. In addition, the partners hope for a **new perspective on their situation**.

RQ3: The result is regarded as a success later when it is as **concrete and realistic as possible**. In addition, the community partners would evaluate the result as successful if **individual work processes were optimized**, when **students have experienced a broadening of their horizons** and a **respectful interaction between students and clients** took place.

RQ4: After completion of the project, the community partners assess the **results as scientifically sound as well as concrete and practical**. The community partners also positively evaluate the **new impulses from an external point of view** and the **insight the students gained into the organization**. The community partners consider as rather negative that **some results were already known before** and therefore do not set any new impulses. Also surprising for the partners were **how simple the solutions were**.

The results show that community partners have very different motivations to take part in service learning projects. **Firstly, the partners have their own interests**. It motivates them to get additional manpower and to solve problems in their own interest. This also means that the students develop concrete and realistic solutions for existing problems. They also see the students as part of their public relations work. **Secondly, the partners act in the interests of the students**. They want to give the students a special learning experience, offer them a broadened horizon and support them in their professional learning. They also evaluate the project results on the basis of these criteria.

Literature

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