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ENHANCE - Training for CSL TUTORS

Module n.7

Service Learning and Third Mission
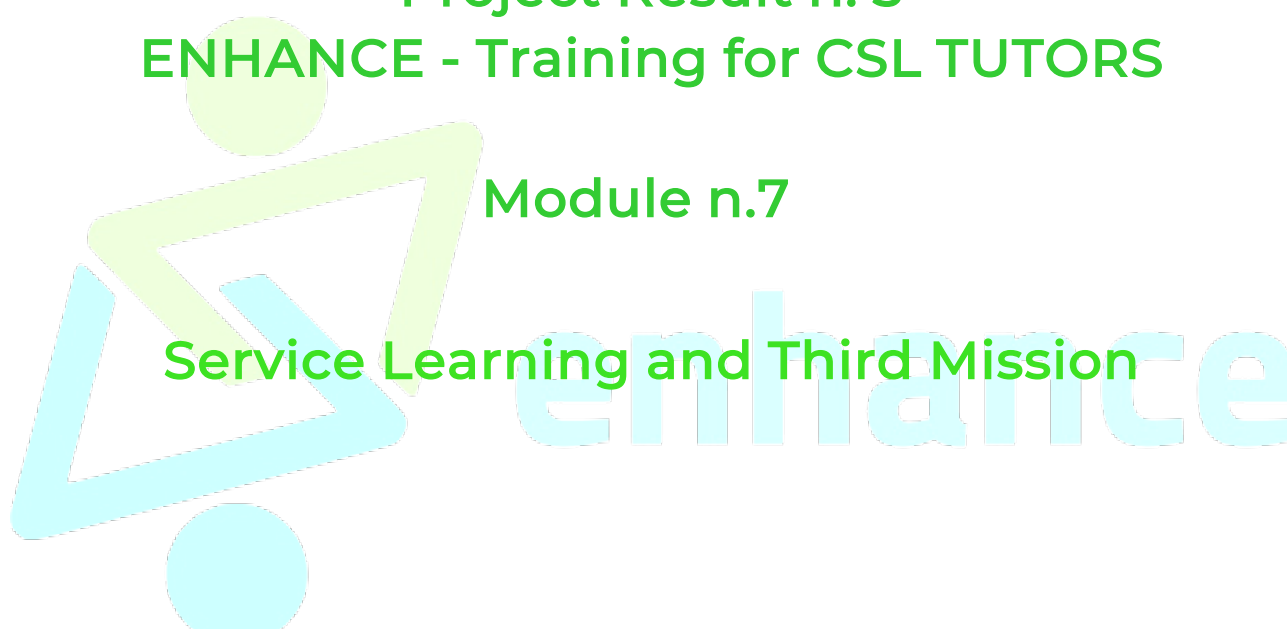
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Abstract

This document contains an analysis of the concept of the Third Mission (TM) and the link with service learning. TM is the third core of universities, the transfer of knowledge from academia to society, alongside the other two, the provision of education and the conduct of research (Section 1). The specific context and the main dimensions of the activities of the TM (societal, knowledge and technology transfer) are analysed in Section 2. Section 3 outlines TM as a broad range of activities undertaken by higher education institutions (HEIs) to transfer knowledge to society and to promote entrepreneurship, innovation, social welfare, and human capital formation. The link with service learning is highlighted as a participatory approach that promotes social co-creation and participation. The importance of student engagement in the embeddedness of service-learning in academic TM is analysed in Section 3.1, theorising that civic engagement is considered at the micro-level and contributes to the development of students' competences, while TM activities in HEIs are considered at the meso-level. In this context, Service Learning can be understood as an ideal didactic tool to merge community needs and academic goals, making TM more accessible and quantifiable. Finally (Section 4), the limitations of TM activities are underlined, and it is suggested that Service Learning is a methodology that makes the TM accessible and measurable.

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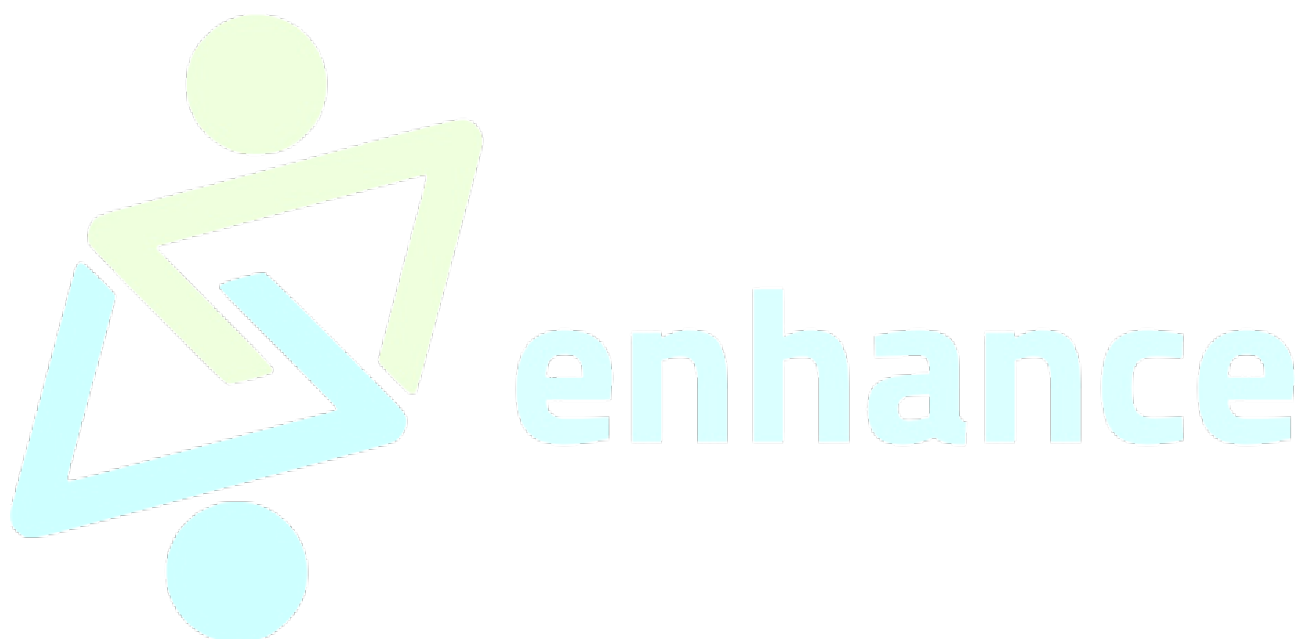
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1/ Introduction

To address the growing social and economic challenges, there is an increasing demand for higher education (HE) to promote sustainable human development and commitment to sustainability in the search for environmental quality, social justice and a viable and equitable economy. For this, it is necessary to generate a culture that contributes to an environmentally sustainable development and establish channels that facilitate the involvement of the entire academic community in the construction of a model of HE institutions that promote sustainability and social responsibility.

According to, Ribeiro, Aramburuzabala & Paz-Lourido, B. (2021: 2) "*The institutionalization of service-learning in higher education, is fundamental to the development of its third mission, fostering social engagement and providing students with an experiential exchange with community partners that enriches all and brings greater understanding, meaning and relevance to the other missions of higher education, teaching and research*".

The so-called 'Third Mission' is the third core of universities, the transfer of knowledge from academia to society, alongside the other two, providing education and conducting research. A key starting point for scientists is to find solutions to socio-economic problems by integrating everyday problems into scientific research (Hochstein, Walter, & Speck, 2022).

The term 'third mission' emerged from an analysis of the changing processes of innovation and the new roles and responsibilities of universities. Furthermore, the increasing demands of political institutions and social and economic entities for the public benefit of university research and activities, and the need for universities to be more responsive to the needs of society and the economy, led to emergence of the third mission activities. (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff's, 2000, *Guston & Keniston, 1994)*. Although definitions differ, the common concept is the same: public accountability and the importance of giving back to society through the dissemination of knowledge and scholarship beyond academia (Hochstein, Walter, & Speck, 2022).

2. Dimensions of the third mission activities

Based on relevant literature (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020; Ribeiro, Aramburuzabala & Paz-Lourido, 2021) third mission activities (Figure 1) could be assigned into the following three dimensions:

Social and Societal Transfer: refers to the targeted use of scientific knowledge to solve various societal challenges.

Knowledge Transfer: involves the adequate preparation and sharing of scientific knowledge with target groups outside of the university sector (e.g. practitioners, politicians, pupils), and the systematic integration of scientific knowledge into societal discourses.

Technology Transfer: involves the transfer of knowledge, ideas, technologies, innovations, and patents from the university to economic contexts.

Figure 1: Criteria of Third Mission activities
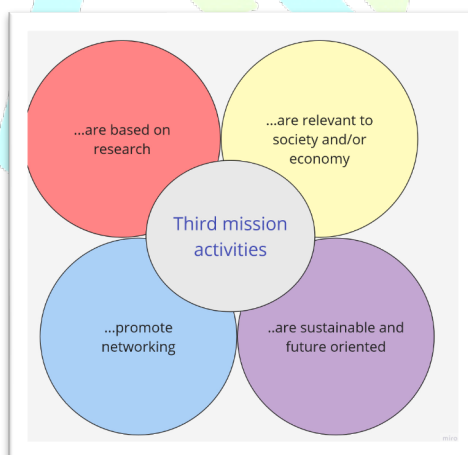
The criteria for the third Mission activities:

❖ are based on one's own research,

❖ are relevant to society and/or the economy,

❖ promote networking (primarily with societal and/or economic actors but also between activities and internationally),

❖ future-oriented and geared towards (or at least consider) sustainability

Source: complied by the authors; adopted from Compagnucci & Spigarelli (2020) and https://thirdmission.univie.ac.at/en/third-mission-activities/

At the Universities, multiple activities directly relevant to the Third Mission are ongoing. In most cases, however, most of them have not been formally identified as such and are not interconnected. How can we build up a project for the third mission through a series of organized phases in the University?

❖ It is important to collectively develop a specific content-related profile for the Third Mission of the University;

❖ conceptualize an explicit framework for a sustainable implementation of the Third Mission at the University;

❖ develop concrete measures for implementing the Third Mission, including identifying and valorizing relevant activities, making them visible and interconnected, and developing quality assurance measures.

❖ Finally, the project should be implemented in coordination with research and academic teaching, with the aim of further strengthening these essential pillars of the University.

This process of implementation will:

✓ build on the existing expertise at the University;

✓ explicitly take up the diversity of cultures within the University;

✓ capture, valorize, systematically interconnect and structure existing activities (Third Mission Network);

✓ may also serve to initiate and implement new activities in research and academic teaching, both in cooperation with external Partners as well as in the form of lived social responsibility.

In relation to active participation may include a variety of different aims and priorities, depending on the focus of the organizational units or individuals, such as:

❖ extended networking with societal actors and third-party funders;

❖ extended cooperation with public and private enterprises;

❖ establishment of new and transdisciplinary research projects in direct response to economic and social needs;

❖ integration of socially-relevant topics in research and teaching (service learning);

❖ better preparing students for taking over responsible tasks in politics, society and economy;

❖ extending the professional skill profile of the workforce;

❖ increasing the society's appreciation of science and research at the Universities

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3/The Third Mission and the connection to Service Learning

There are differences in the academic discussion of the Third Mission concept, particularly in relation to the roles and responsibilities of entrepreneurial universities and the move from simply commercializing research to investing in regional economic and social development. In contrast to economically dominated approaches to the third mission, which focus on cultural or social factors, on sustainability, on the integration of policy development strategies or on their economic efficiency, **participation-oriented concepts** emphasize the dialogical mission of universities to promote **social co-creation** rather than simply to transfer knowledge to society (Hochstein, Walter, & Speck, 2022). The **participatory approach** sees universities as leaders in both knowledge and innovation transfer (Agasisti, Barra, & Zotti, 2019).

Since there is no universal definition of the Third Mission, we follow the term of Compagnucci and Spigarelli (2020):

"[Third Mission] refers to an extensive array of activities performed by HEI which seek to transfer knowledge to society in general and to organizations, as well as to promote entrepreneurial skills, innovation, social welfare and the formation of human capital".

In this context and according to the literature, Service Learning (SL) as a teaching and learning technique integrates theory and practice. It enables students to participate in community service and then reflect on their experiences in class to gain a better knowledge of the course subject and a stronger sense of civic participation. (Bringle, Hatcher & McIntosh 2006). Students are actively involved in real-world problem solving, they strengthen their links with the community and help to develop skills for personal growth and civic engagement. They recognise and clarify skills and prepare their learning process (Leming 2001).

However, integrating SL into curricula is still seen as tough and sometimes higher education refuge to do so in favour of other objectives although it is considered as education strategy that integrates community service and academic experience and learning. There is an intensive connection between theory, measurement, design and practice in LS which positions everyone involved as co-generator of knowledge. Service learning researchers are frequently themselves practitioners-and vice versa-thus, the significance of the integrated identity of practitioner-scholar or scholar-practitioner (Clayton et al., 2013, pp. 345-349).

Service Learning provides both a practical learning experience and meets societal needs, distinguishing it from approaches like charity or volunteering. **SL** and **volunteering** are two concepts that are sometimes confused in everyday use because they have overlapping characteristics and we can use them interchangeably and as synonyms, although they are not. The pedagogical intention, the careful design of the service activities which are properly connected with academic material is key to **differentiate** between the two types of actions.

- ❖ In the case of SL, the division between community service and learning is overcome since pedagogical intentions are fused with solidarity. In other words, these are educational projects with social utility. In this sense, volunteer projects are proposals for social utility in which learning may take place, but this pedagogical component does not emerge as the main purpose of the action and, therefore, it is not usually planned or evaluated either. Consequently, and as an example, the scope of a Citizenship Competence approach will be more feasible in SL projects, given that the learning in practice is one of their main purposes (EASLHE, 2001, p.p.50-51).

- ❖ SL projects incorporate learning objectives which depend on the curricular time and place they occupy. The inherently pedagogical requirements of CSL imply incorporation into the educational curriculum with the resulting need for planning of various elements, including objectives, methodology, content and evaluation. As such, the curricular elements that are to be inserted in the project have to be renegotiated and carried out in a participatory manner by all the people involved (EASLHE, 2001, p.p.50-51).

In this sense, following the international consensus on the central features that define SL we could that this approach shares with volunteering the objectives of responding to real and felt needs of a community. If we want to develop a SL project we have to make sure that we also fulfil the other two central features (EASLHE, 2001, p.52-53):

- ❖ The process must be carried out by the **students** (including planning, development, and evaluation), and

- ❖ the project must be integrated into the academic curriculum, and Include the development of generic skills linked to ethical learning and **civic engagement**.

3.1/ The importance of student engagement in the embeddedness of Service-Learning in Academic Third mission

As mentioned above, the active involvement of students with the community and civic engagement provides spaces for reflection upon their experiences. Although, it is suggested when operating with a SL concept in a higher education system, a distinction has to be made between professional service in the community, volunteerism, field education, political participation and SL (EASLHE, 2001, Fiske, 2001, Furco & Holland, 2005).

The active involvement of students in solving a need identified in the community with a view to their personal development and **civic engagement** is an essential element of service-learning approach. However, civic engagement is considered on a **micro level** contributed the development of the students' competences (EASLHE, 2001, p.1-2), Third Mission (TM) activities in the higher education institutions are considered on the **meso-level**. While the Third Mission (TM) can be operationalized in different ways, Service Learning can be understood as an ideal didactic tool for merging community needs and academic goals. With this third mission comes the responsibility to evaluate the impact of service learning (Weber, Weber & Young (2010).

As a result, there are differences between institutions in relation to practices, indicators and inclusion criteria in relation to TM activities. However, SL must be tied in the strategic practices of TM of higher education, making TM more accessible and quantifiable. Moreover, SL must related to **pedagogical aims** and integrated into **academic programs**. According to Resch (2018) service learning is relevant for students on three levels: relevance of contents, relevance for working life, and relevance for skills development. Moreover, service learning is a methodology that makes Third Mission accessible and measurable. On a strategic level, Service Learning must be connected to these concepts, and on a pedagogical level, it must be meaningful, practice-oriented, and related to academic goals. As Resch (2018) shows, the integration of service learning into study programs is desirable, but not obligatory for them to function.

Higher Education (HE) is a key tool to promote sustainable human development and commitment to sustainability in the search for environmental quality, social justice and a viable and equitable economy. For this, it is necessary to generate a culture that contributes to an environmentally sustainable development and establish channels that facilitate the involvement of the entire

academic community in the construction of a model of HE institutions that promote sustainability and social responsibility. In this case, civic engagement, contribute to the development of a fairer society and improve academic and social learning that favours the development of the students" competences (EASLHE, 2001, p.1-2).

Service Learning distinguishes itself from other types of community-oriented activities by its curriculum content, focused on enrich the learning process with better understanding of course content. It is based on intentional curriculum design-grounded in well-articulated goals for both learning and service. According to Clayton, et al. (2013, pp. 339-340) service activities function analogously to the texts to be studied and analysed in the course; thus, they must be selected or designed carefully based on how they supplement, illustrate, and augment other academic material. It is suggested that, when *SL activities* designed and implemented appropriately, service learning encompasses multiple factors that are known to help students achieve in-depth understanding, such as, active learning, feedback, collaboration and cognitive apprenticeship.

Community maybe a campus, in the local area or a place in another country, and it may include grass roots initiatives; non-profit organizations; for-profit businesses or government agencies. Clarity and transparency regarding the specific form of the designed variables it is needed in order for research to inform theory, contribute to a knowledge base, and guide practice. In this context, community members are to be partners in the process of developing and implementing service learning, not merely recipients of service.

As a pedagogical practice of SL, an important element is the reflection of students on what they do, how they do it and what the result is. This reflection must be based on constant communication and dialogue with all the people involved in the project and on the idea that SL is a transformative process that is not separated from action.

4/ Conclusions

Third mission activities focus on the interactions between universities and the rest of society, which complement and to some extent overlap the traditional first (teaching) and second (research) missions of universities, rather than being seen as residual activities. Consequently, the activities of

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the Third Mission are related to research (technology transfer and innovation), teaching (lifelong learning/continuing education) and social engagement in line with regional/national development. As mentioned above, there are differences in the academic discussion of the third mission concept, especially in the responsibilities of higher education institutions. In contrast to the economically dominated approaches to the third mission as a simple transfer of knowledge to society, **participatory concepts** emphasize the dialogical mission of universities to promote **social co-creation** and to link both knowledge and innovation transfer to society (Agasisti, Barra, & Zotti, 2019).

As the transfer of knowledge and innovation is an essential role of universities, universities are already engaged in some form of third mission, but the understanding and activities vary as they are influenced by local, cultural, structural and legal considerations. Consequently, the dependence on contextual factors (national, regional, institutional, disciplinary and also at individual level) and the nature of the data needed to track third mission activities (in the same cases considered as invisible, unquantifiable, informal and not available in university units) are the main reasons for the limitations in identifying data on third mission activities.

In this context, the "one size fits all" approach raises concerns about how the Third Mission can best be implemented, managed, measured, and applied to countries or universities with homogeneous characteristics. As a result, universities may need to tailor their functions, strategies, and management to the unique aspects of each socio-economic context and different institutional and historical characteristics. In addition, human and financial resources should be allocated efficiently, avoiding overburdening university staff.

The Third Mission has recently been used as a performance indicator for higher education and is therefore becoming more and more necessary to be operationalized in a measurable way. Service learning is a very suitable method for this. In this context, service learning is a methodology that makes the Third Mission accessible and measurable. On a strategic level, service learning needs to be linked to these concepts, and on a pedagogical level, it needs to be meaningful, practical, and linked to academic goals (Resch, 2018).

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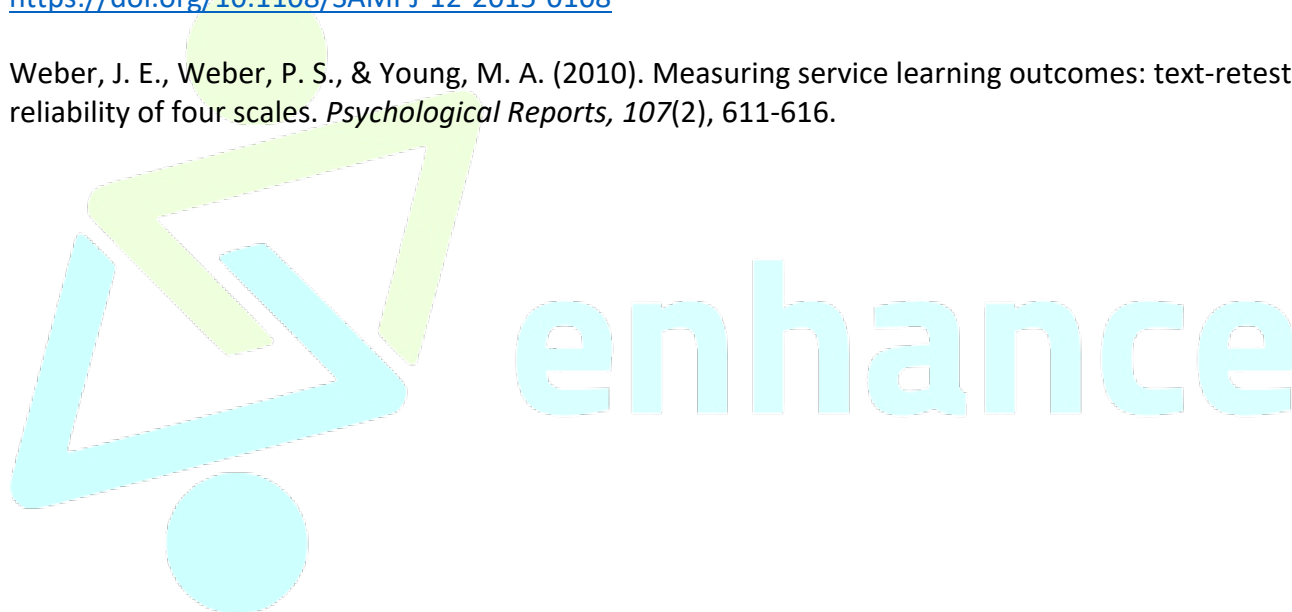
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