# International Service-Learning: Layers of Complexity

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- Theoretical premises:
  - What is ISL
  - Domestic vs International
  - Layers of complexity
  - Social justice

- Possible practical applications:
  - The UNIBO UNICORN experience

- Lessons learned at UNIBO:
  - Feedbacks from students
  - Insights from instructors and community

# Theoretical premises

# International service-learning

An immersive educational program **abroad**, characterized by:

a) Engaging in organized service activities targeting community needs,

b) Learning through direct **cross-cultural** interactions and dialogues,

c) Reflecting on experiences to deepen understanding of course content, **global issues**, **host country**, and personal civic responsibilities, locally and **globally**.

*(Cf. Bringle et al., 2011, p. 19)*

# Principal focus

Domestic service-learning $\longrightarrow$ Intrapersonal and interpersonal competences

International service-learning $\longrightarrow$ Intercultural competences

+

*(Power, oppression, privilege)*

# Domestic vs International

1. ISL is committed to student **intercultural competence development**;

2. ISL has a focus on structural analysis tied to consideration of **power, privilege, and hegemonic assumptions**;

3. ISL is typically **immersive.**

*(cf. Hartman & Kiely, 2014)*

# Layers of **complexity**

International service-learning experiences are required to **engaged with various challenges**, balancing the acquisition of **different competences** with a critical and deep reflection on **power**.

# Intrapersonal and Interpersonal

## Intrapersonal Competence:

Understanding and managing one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviours.

- Some components:
    - Flexibility and adaptability
    - Self-efficacy
    - Analytical and critical thinking

## Interpersonal Competence:

Building positive relationships and effective communication with others.
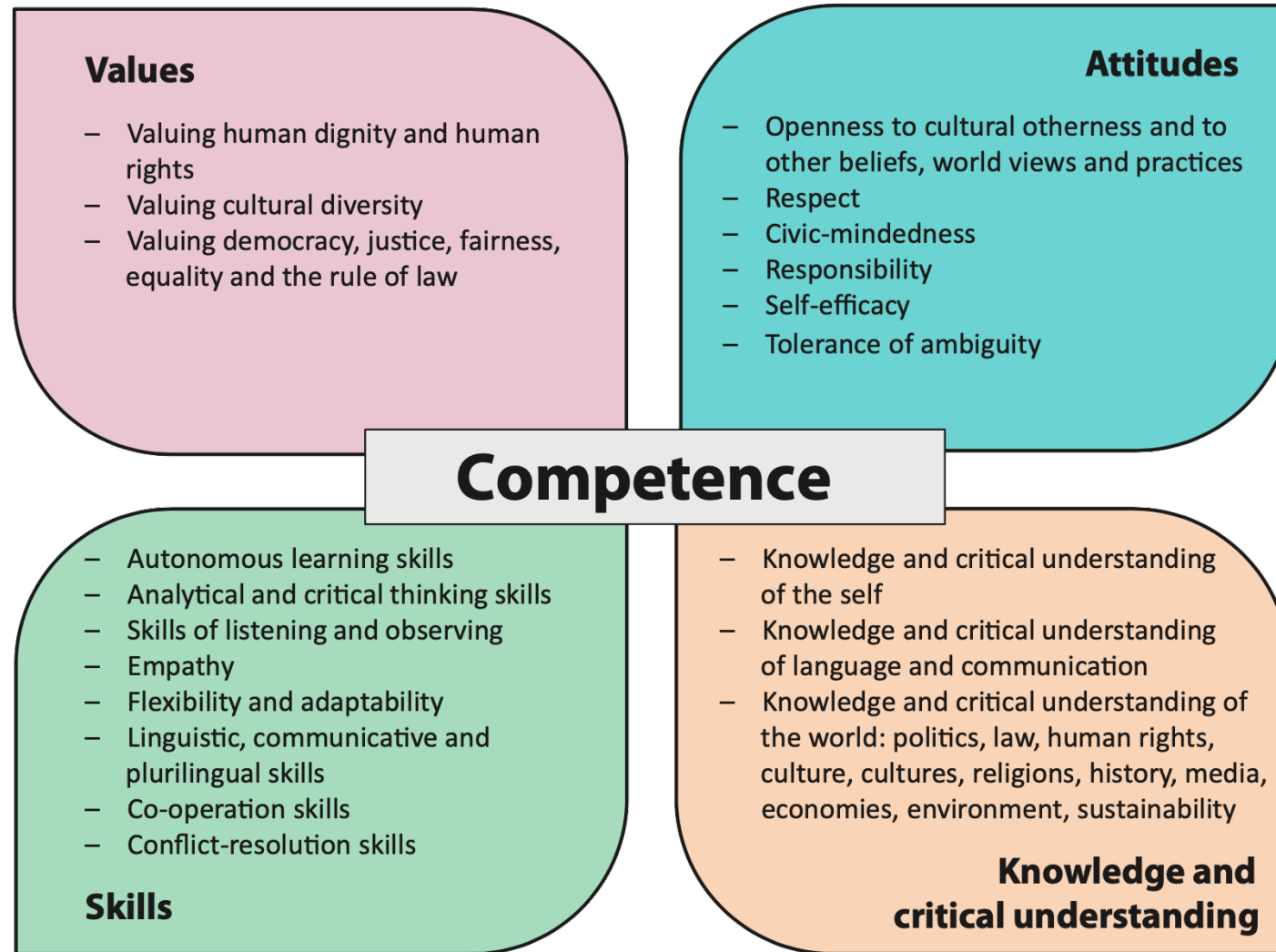
- Some components:
    - Empathy
    - Respect
    - Valuing human dignity and human rights

# Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence **hinges on our attitudes** during interactions with other cultures.

- Key Attitudes:
    - Willingness to suspend our own values, beliefs, and behaviours.
    - Avoidance of assumptions that our perspective is the sole correct one.
    - Ability to consider and value diverse perspectives.

- The Art of 'Decentring':
    - It's the skill to step outside our cultural framework.
    - Embracing cultural diversity and relativism.

- Some components:
    - Openness to cultural otherness
    - Valuing cultural diversity
    - Knowledge and critical understanding of the world

Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

**Values**
- Valuing human dignity and human rights
- Valuing cultural diversity
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

**Attitudes**
- Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- Respect
- Civic-mindedness
- Responsibility
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance of ambiguity

**Competence**

**Skills**
- Autonomous learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking skills
- Skills of listening and observing
- Empathy
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
- Co-operation skills
- Conflict-resolution skills

**Knowledge and critical understanding**
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
- Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability

# Traditional vs. Critical service-learning
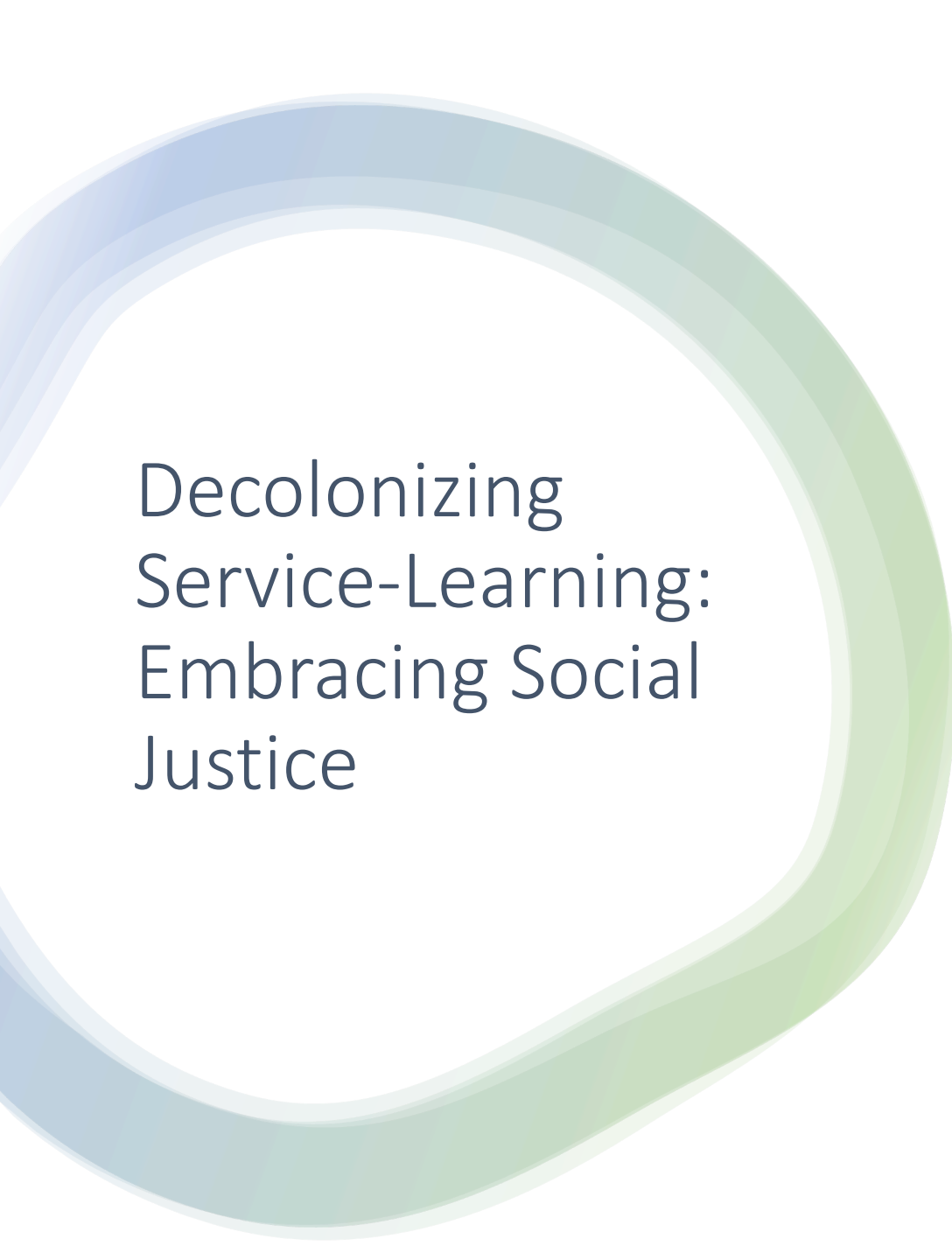
## Traditional Service-Learning Goals

- Student-focused and outcomes-based.
- Criticized for maintaining unequal power dynamics, offering superficial community engagement, and providing temporary solutions.
- Often perceived as addressing individual needs rather than transforming structural inequalities.

## Shift to Critical Service-Learning

- Takes a social justice perspective.
- Analyses root causes necessitating service.
- Questions power distribution, exposes political dimensions, and emphasizes community-university relationships.

## Social Justice Focus

- Essential to avoid perpetuating bias and colonialist mentalities.
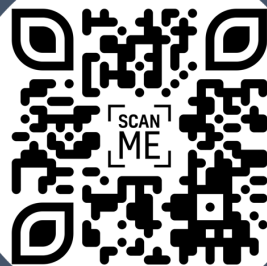- Aims to dismantle oppressive conditions and promote equitable change.

# Decolonizing Service-Learning: Embracing Social Justice

- Colonialist Nature of (traditional) Service-Learning
    - Universities often insert themselves in communities temporarily.
    - Building on the idea that academic knowledge is the only knowledge

- Role of Social Justice
    - Facilitates a decolonizing process.
    - Emphasises:
        - Respect for community knowledge.
        - Reciprocal interactions where all become learners, teachers, and problem solvers.
        - Reflecting on power asymmetries and working to counteract them.
        - Acknowledging interconnectedness among all actors.

- Breaking Down Hegemonic Positionalities
    - Fosters a sense of shared interconnection and belonging.
    - Counteracts prejudices and stereotypes.
    - Encourages the creation of new, inclusive narratives.

# Possible practical applications

# The UNICORN PROJECT

Service-learning with a mobility (virtual or physical) component to let Erasmus students engage with hosting local communities and strengthen civic and democratic competences.
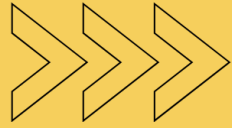
SCAN ME

**UNICORN**
UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY LEARNING

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
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# The UNICORN taxonomy

| 1 | Mobility and online exchange | → | Service-learning projects are **appropriate for international students** and have developed approaches to **maximise the benefits of mobility** and online exchange for deeper global civic and cultural learning and community engagement. |
| 2 | Meaningful reciprocal partnerships that meet actual community needs | → | **Reciprocal partnerships** and processes inform the design of the class and the community activities. |
| 3 | Academically relevant, real world student involvement in the community | → | Community involvement is relevant to and **integrated with the discipline-based academic content** and assignments |
| 4 | Explicit global civic and cultural competencies | → | Global civic and cultural competencies are **explicitly articulated** and develop students' capacities to reflect on social and economic inequities in local, regional and global contexts. |
| 5 | Critical reflection to facilitate learning | → | Critical reflection activities and assignments **integrate classroom and community learning**. |
| 6 | Integrated assessment of student learning | → | Student **learning assessment addresses** the discipline-based, global civic and cultural competencies, linguistic skills (where relevant), and includes feedback from the community. |
| 7 | Attention to community impact of service | → | Systems exist to **share learning** with the community and assess community impact of service projects. |

The UNIBO experience

Engaging with the local community, checking availabilities

Training week with project partners (both instructors and community organisations)

Realisation of a living catalogue of the activated experiences, including this experience in an existing service-learning course on transferable competences

Before hosting students:

the UNICORN MOOC

While hosting students:

- Welcome day and presentation of the practicalities
- Meeting with the local organisation and with the Italian students
- Active service component of 20 hours over 2 months with monitoring sessions

# REFLECTING DIVERSITY PROJECT

## AIM
To understand HOUSING NEEDS and find ways to deal with them
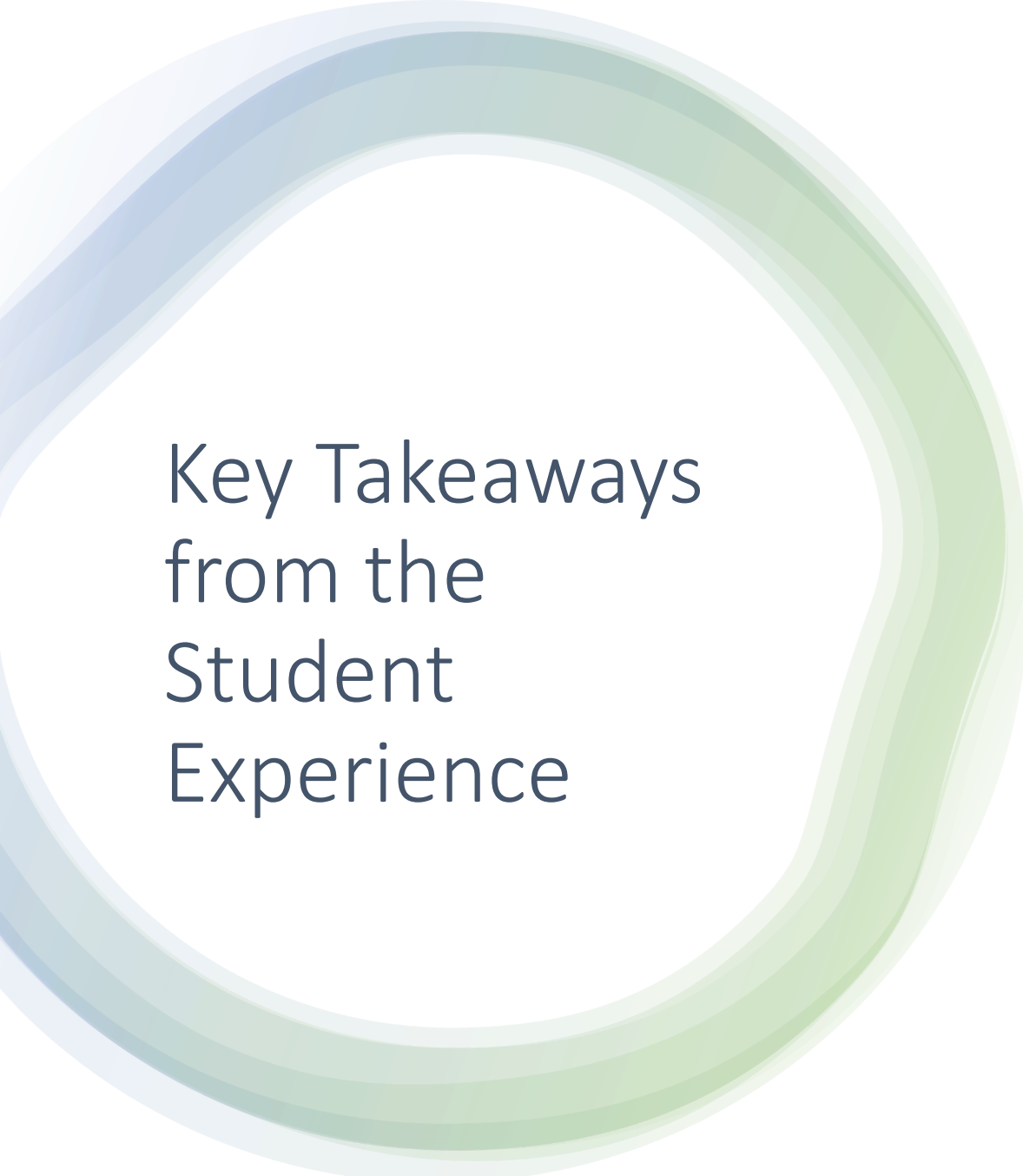
## METHOD
3 FOCUS GROUPS

# What we found out...

| Explicit needs | Implicit needs |
|---|---|
| Finding a house | Need to be heard |
| Health | Need to feel at home |
| Relationship and Activities | Need to rebuild their life |
| Autonomy - Work, Language, Transport | Being part of something |

# Lessons learned
# at UNIBO

# Key Takeaways from the Student Experience

## Stimulating Learning Journey

- Despite language barriers and living in a different city, students found the experience engaging and guided them in acquiring new competencies.

## Decentring Cultural Comfort Zones

- Encouraged reflection on shared issues and challenges in their home countries (e.g., housing shortages and migration centre systems).

## Strength in Diversity

- Local students played a pivotal role as facilitators between international students and community organizations' users (leveraging intercultural competence).

## Global Awareness Development

- Gained insights into the global nature of social challenges (e.g., migration and housing).
- Recognized variations in policies and approaches across different countries.

## But also, uncertainty about Impact

- Students were unsure about the extent of their impact on the community.
- Hopeful that their efforts were helpful but seeking clarity on their contributions.

**Personal Impact**

- Possibility of looking at different realities

- Opportunity to approach different cultures

- Opportunity to work as a team

- Opportunity to learn how to use new tools and research methods

- Valorization of skills

- Stepping out of the comfort zone

# Instructors and community feedback

**Maintaining Commitment Over Time**

- Community partners and instructors found it challenging to sustain students' commitment.

**Open Questions for Future Investigation**

**1. Impact of Non-Local Status**

- To what extent did students' non-local status hinder their ability to connect and commit to service engagement?
- Did they feel like outsiders, disconnected due to their "non-local status"?

**2. Semester Priorities**

- Was this semester primarily a social period for students, affecting their commitment to engagement?

Considerations for students leaving their home institution:

- The additional effort required (responsibility, attendance, extracurricular hours, etc.).
- The rewards offered (rich experience, networking, deep community and social challenge knowledge, global impact).

These reflections underscore the importance of **preparing students for the responsibilities and rewards** of service engagement to enhance their commitment and impact.

THANK YOU!

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# Divergences between partners in service learning: tensions and learnings

*Stéphanie MERLE, UCLouvain et Louvain Cooperation*

Summer school Service Learning – KULeuven – September 2023

# Stakeholders in Service-Learning

*Service-Learning combines, in one course, academic learning, concrete experience and service to the community. But also, a reflective practice to improve the student's civic learning.*

**The collaboration between stakeholders is in the DNA of SL**

But who cares about motivations, objectives, goals of communities and of other stakeholders?

What are the expectations and success criteria of each stakeholder?

# ISL course : IngénieuxSud (since 2013)

Students : 200 students each year from Science and Technology Sector. Groups of 8 (4 Belgian + 4 students from Global South)

Service : Technical project proposed by socioeconomics actors

Training process : One full academic year with lectures, workshops, seminars, debates, transdisciplinary panels… One-month internship.

Assessment : student's skills before/after, auto evaluation, portefolio for a continue assessment, individual reflective dissertation.

**Not AID : No money transfer, we don't ask stakeholders if they prepared the « after student ». It's not our problem.**

# Learning goals

1. Students are able to embrace the complexity of a technical problem by adopting a **systemic vision** and come up with a **sustainable and appropriable solution**

2. Students are able to establish a **balanced international partnership** while avoiding the pitfalls of domination often still anchored in their representations

## Students

- To be useful. Problem solvers.
- Recruitment and social status.
- Check social engagement.
-  Meet authenticity.

## Universities

- Solidarity label.
- Active pedagogies.
- Links with socio-economic actors.
- Canalize engagement of students.
- Social calm on campus.

# Socio-economic actors

- Solution to the mismanagement of resources.
- Responding to real problems.
- Symbol of prestige on social networks.
- Partnerships with organizations in the global North.

# Conclusion

Each stakeholder has his own motivation to participate

These different goals might generate misunderstandings.

**When students meet tensions that they 'learn the most.**

Open universities to civil society.

We say that we give a service… But our service is often wrong.

**The risk is to do worse… destroy local know-how.**

# Thank You

Summer School S-L @KU Leuven :

# FUCID Training Program

*An Academic and Citizen experience at the University of Namur*

Maxime Giegas

Project manager at FUCID
UNamur
15/09/2023

# FUCID = The University Forum for international development cooperation

- Created in 1976, an NGO within the University of Namur

- For students mainly but more generally to all members of the university and higher education community

- Forum = a meeting place offering :

  - Information and debate, through conferences, seminars, training weekends and an inter-faculty courses ;

  - Encounters and places for experimentation through solidarity projects in the global North and South or exchange programs between people from the Global North and South.

  - Analyses and studies based on multi-actor knowledge ;

  - Cooperation projects or projects to raise awareness of global citizenship, in partnership with associations in both the Global North and the Global South.

# What is the « FUCID training program » @UNamur ?

- An educational process <u>integrated into the curriculum</u>;

- <u>A phase of training and reflection</u> prior to the immersion;

- <u>Two weeks' work experience</u> in a law firm or association in Belgium or abroad;

- Remote support from FUCID during the experience;

- An <u>exchange meeting</u> between the trainees, members of civil society and the Faculty of Law to discuss the experience;

- Support for trainees in producing <u>a communication and awareness-raising tool</u>.

# 3 main goals for students :

1. As future members of our societies, is to become (or continuing to be) responsible and committed citizens for a fairer and more sustainable world ;
2. Learn how to put in practice the theory previously learnt in class and to reflect on it in a non-academic context ;
3. participate in the community through citizenship experience by working with solidary partners.

**Process : An annual training program**

## Before the immersion



- Interviews

- Conferences, group discussions, meeting with partners and/or professionals

- Pre-departure training

**Process : An annual training program**

## During the immersion

🧩 2 weeks of immersion

🧩 In 3 structures in Morocco

🧩 With homestay accomodation

**After the immersion**

Creation of a communication and awareness tool



An exchange meeting with all participants as well as membres of civil society and of the faculty of Law