

# SERVICE LEARNING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

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## Service learning and social inclusion processes

## **INITIAL QUESTIONS 1:**

- What do we know about exclusion processes and the people experiencing them?
- How can we foster a critical analysis of unjust and unfair situations?
- Which aspects are key to promoting inclusion processes?
- How can we promote a social and institutional fabric that gives impetus to networks of inclusion?
- How can we facilitate recognition processes for people in situations of exclusion?

Promoting social inclusion processes is not an isolated responsibility to be assumed by specialised agents or social policies, but calls for the involvement of all citizens in the critical analysis of exclusion mechanisms and in the building of networks for inclusion and recognition.

Exclusion processes are related to injustice and lack of access to economic, social and cultural rights. It is a complex process which has a structural and economic dimension, which comprises difficulties gaining access to the labour market and other educational and social resources; a contextual and territorial dimension, related to community integration difficulties and the breakdown in family and social relations, and a personal and subjective dimension, which is related to a breakdown in communication, the difficulty in giving meaning to one's life and the deterioration of personal skills (Garcia Roca, 2006).

Exclusion is often related to circumstances that ascribe blame to people for their life stories or revictimise them, identifying them with risk population profiles. This interpretation overlooks the capabilities and strengths of the subjects, creates a stereotyped image of exclusion and does not facilitate the building of social capital.

Promoting inclusion processes therefore calls for structural, contextual and individual actions: proposals aimed at strengthening a fairer and more equitable social and economic system, facilitating linkages and participation in the territory and fostering processes that humanise and grant dignity to people in situations of exclusion.

## Which service-learning elements foster inclusion processes?

Service-learning proposals allow meaningful training and community service experiences to be enjoyed, which combined with spaces for reflection, support and networking can foster the building of social capital oriented towards inclusion.

- Service learning understands social needs as opportunities to safeguard civic challenges aimed at improving realities.
- Service learning places special emphasis on analysing and understanding social problems to address them creatively through collective actions.
- Service learning moves away from assistance-based positions and perspectives and is based on the understanding that everyone can take part in building a fairer and more solidarity-based society.
- Service learning promotes interaction and communication processes among groups and people with different realities, which can facilitate a comprehensive perspective of one another.

### An example...

A group of people in "third-grade imprisonment" take part in a technical training project in welding aimed at increasing their potential for integration into the labour market.

Following a needs analysis, the participants plan to engage in community service in the neighbourhood residents' association that needs a new platform for light and sound equipment for festive occasions.

Obviously, the technical training proved essential for creating the new platform, but the project also allowed different opportunities for face-to-face meetings between the participants and the residents to define and implement the project, to explain the importance of music on festive occasions and to share stories and dreams for the future in a climate of respect. They managed to change a number of labels by joining forces towards a common goal, which proved of benefit to all those involved.

The project fostered mutual understanding and the forging of new bonds between all the participants.

<sup>1. [</sup>Translator's Note: Open custody that allows a certain degree of freedom.]

## Training and employment: strategies for social inclusion

## **INITIAL QUESTIONS 2:**

- How can we facilitate and promote processes aimed at integration into society and the labour market?
- How can we recognise skills and capabilities to harness them in the search for employment?
- Which employment demands call for renewing the existing training oriented towards inclusion?
- How can we facilitate relations between the business and industrial fabric in the territory and social and training institutions?
- How can we promote good practices and experiences related to integration into society and the labour market in the territory?

One of the main ways to overcome the dynamics of exclusion is having a job that allows you to develop personal and economic independence. The demand for experience and specialisation renders access to the labour market difficult for people that have experienced exclusion processes. For this reason, training becomes an essential means of accessing employment opportunities in the labour market on equal terms.

It must be borne in mind that the labour market implies much more than gaining access to economic income. Having a job bears a major impact on the building of identity: it implies assuming and developing a responsibility, it poses challenges and questions to be answered, it allows knowledge to be applied and acquired, it connects individuals to a network of people with whom to work and to reach agreements, it organises everyday life with habits and routines, etc. If the job also implies esteem and appreciation for the tasks undertaken as well as recognition by both parties, it becomes an important element for personal self-fulfilment.

Improving employment and training resources to guarantee inclusion calls for efforts for innovation and optimisation in social and training policies in the territory. Attention must be paid to the demands of the labour market, to increasing the training available for new working environments and to facilitating capacity-building and professional retraining for people in situations of exclusion.

## Can service learning contribute to training and access to the labour market in situations of exclusion?

Designing realistic training and service learning aimed at integration into the labour market can increase the potential for inclusion in projects. Some of these steps can help us to initiate proposals:

- Gaining knowledge of the inclusion measures carried out in the territory by the various institutions and social organisation specialised in integration into society and the labour market.
- Generating linkages and establishing synergies between institutions and organisations, specialised in integration into society and the labour market, and the business world in the territory to step up the opportunities for integration.
- Pinpointing successful experiences in order to combat marginalisation and exclusion, which can become service-learning proposals.
- Encouraging service-learning projects aimed at integration into the labour market.

To instigate service-learning projects aimed at social inclusion, it is important not to lose sight of the underlying motives and goals of projects and to evaluate, throughout the process, whether our actions contribute to enhancing the quality of life of groups in situations of exclusion.

## **New challenges**

New challenges are faced to promote inclusion through service learning. On the one hand, strengthening institutional networks and partnerships among organisations, administrations and companies to offer more possibilities for high-quality integrated training and service experiences. On the other hand, initiating joint reflection on integration processes in situations of exclusion in our societies: analysing social dynamics, creating synergies, responsibilities and commitments of a political and territorial nature, and promoting actions in the milieu that facilitate recruitment. Project success calls for specific theoretical-practical training to develop working skills and to offer the possibility of gaining comprehensive experiences of recognition.

# Meeting challenges that help change roles

## **INITIAL QUESTIONS 3:**

- How can we overcome stereotypes regarding marginalisation and exclusion?
- How can we establish links of proximity between people experiencing different realities?
- What challenges are posed by service actions for participants?
- What community needs will be met by the challenge posed in the project?
- In which tasks and activities will the service actions take shape?

Service-learning projects imply challenges in the development of community actions that have a high educational component. Knowing the needs and realities of other groups and encouraging people to contribute with their input allows stereotypes to be changed and contributes to rebuilding social links.

One of the stumbling blocks that most hinders social integration are prejudices and labels that are associated with marginalisation, poverty and exclusion. Denigrating labels that society creates around people for being members of a social group, for their behaviour or biographies (Goffman, 2006). Stereotypes bear serious individual and social repercussions. On the one hand, the person runs the risk of integrating them and building their identity in a piecemeal manner, taking on these disparaging labels as their own. On the other hand, this social undervaluing undermines their legitimacy as spokespeople with other citizens, who do not listen to their input or silence them (Juliano, 2006).

The reasons behind these prejudices are distance and ignorance: fear to relate with the other and the difficulty to assign them another role in social dynamics. Efforts are needed to facilitate self-awareness and to strengthen the self-esteem of people in situations of marginalisation and exclusion. At the same time, collective actions are required that foster mutual understanding and knowledge. It is more interesting to confirm the things that bring us together and not the things that divide us, to foster social awareness and the building of inclusive social capital.

## And can service learning help us to change the perspective?

In service-learning projects, people in situations of exclusion are no longer beneficiaries of solidarity-based actions to become agents of change, and service actions are opportunities to incorporate their voices, input and contributions in the building of inclusive citizenship. The following must be borne in mind:

- Not convincing but inviting. The reasons that encourage us to use this
  methodology in situations of exclusion must be explained. It is not
  a question of distracting or convincing people to engage in meaningless activism but of elucidating the project's goals and the chances
  for autonomy it presents and undertaking a challenge.
- Starting out from real problems and needs. Getting involved in service means affording a role to participants in the critical analysis of the situation and in the design of solidarity-based actions. Detecting needs and problems based on processes of reflection and understanding that allow us to move closer to the testimonies and experiences of the key players involved.
- Thinking of actions that engender improvement. Reflection must be made on concrete and achievable actions that are motivating and rewarding to afford meaning to the service. Actions that allow the participants to corroborate personal development and to gain committed experiences in a collective undertaking.
- Challenges that help establish links of proximity. When service-learning projects pose challenges that involve spaces for meeting and exchange, links of proximity and trust can be established among the participants that help to change roles.

## Testimony given by the instructors

"The participants understood the scale of the project when they took part. The actions are important, but most importantly they felt useful, they were able to demonstrate they can do things and they felt engaged in it. You understand this as an instructor when you see them in action and you can hear their voices at the end of the project."

Professional participating in the *Reincorpora* (Reintegration) project

"In saying that the key players that would bring the projects to fruition were people that were in prison, I thought it might not work, but then I saw how they related to the young people, how they talked about their experience, how it made them aware that when you are young "you want to take on the world" but you have to think a little beyond that... They were incredible meetings."

Professional participating in the Reincorpora (Reintegration) project

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# Promoting autonomy-oriented learning

## **INITIAL QUESTIONS 4:**

- What knowledge and skills foster processes of integration into society and the labour market?
- How can we orientate learning to foster autonomy?
- In which spaces are the learning tasks to be undertaken?
- How can we systemise other learning which is not planned that benefits the subject?
- How can we facilitate spaces for reflection and awareness-raising as regards learning?

In service-learning proposals, combined training and service action improves learning oriented towards autonomy. Being self-aware, overcoming fears and prejudices, making decisions which are coherent as regards the rationale and emotions, and being responsible for one's actions becomes a key factor in the shaping of citizenship. To facilitate inclusion processes, knowledge must be conceived as a tool for self-development in society. Knowledge must have a personal utility that enables a better life in conditions of justice and equality and a social utility that inspires us to live alongside others.

Encouraging a process of autonomy calls for a comprehensive and participative methodology. It is not a matter of learning in a linear and regurgitative manner but learning by doing, active learning activated through experience. In service learning, autonomy is learned by resolving doubts, engaging in critical analysis, distributing responsibilities and applying knowledge in action. A dynamic process that must be accompanied by moments of reflection to give meaning to knowledge.

When the key players in the projects are people in situations of exclusion, it is important to make the knowledge they have acquired over their lifetime visible and to harness such knowledge. Highlighting abilities and skills that are transferable to the labour market and recognising what a person already knows enhances one's self-concept and lends them confidence in their job search.

In proposals aimed at integration into society and the labour market, learning is not limited to service, but rather other knowledge, skills and values are palpable throughout the process. On the one hand, specific working skills are developed as well as communication, interpersonal, planning and team-working skills, required for integration into the labour market. On the other hand, skills of an emotional and personal nature come into play such as the ability to understand one's own emotions and moods, as well as self-reflection and awareness, which also prove essential in integration processes.

## How can we stimulate a learning process oriented towards inclusion?

When deliberating over learning, the inclusion of one of the following elements may be of assistance to us:

- Thought must be given to what stage of the process will the learning actions and methodologies to be employed be implemented in order to consolidate them.
- Thought must be given to learning processes that imply an active role for the subject and that foster a search and investigative task.
- Knowledge and skills that foster the execution of a quality service and overall learning that can be transferred to different spheres of life must be introduced.
- A positive image of the process must be conveyed as well as an appraisal of how knowledge was brought into play during the project, describing the progress made towards achieving autonomy.

## Testimony of the instructors...

"The important thing in this project is retrieving people's knowledge and transferring it to other realities. The people that took part brought many skills into play, and this was a tool for empowerment. It is as if awareness of knowledge was a tool for transformation. We must be mindful of and encourage this awareness-raising."

Professional participating in the Reincorpora (Reintegration) project

# Generating conditions for humanising projects

## **INITIAL QUESTIONS 5:**

- How can we prevent the experience of objectification that provokes exclusion and marginalisation?
- What strategies must be used to promote opportunities for face-to-face interaction?
- How can we show we believe in the other person's potential?
- How can we promote spaces of trust and commitment in the projects?
- How can we help the other person to become aware of their importance and value?

Marginalisation and the lack of opportunities, coupled by prejudices and stereotypes, may give rise to dehumanising experiences that undermine the self-esteem of those in situations of exclusion. Generating humanising conditions implies guaranteeing access to economic, social and cultural rights. Work that calls for specific actions and policies as well as commitment on the part of all citizens. But this experience of recognition does not suffice at the political level only, it must also be experienced at an individual level.

Face-to-face relations are privileged spaces for offering humanising conditions, experiencing respectful treatment and avoiding isolation that may occur in situations of exclusion. Service-learning projects represent an opportunity to render knowledge and strengths visible which are placed at the service of others, elements which allow the dignity of the key players involved to be recognised.

The ability to overcome a challenge successfully, to share with other people and to take part in the community are opportunities for becoming aware of one's personal value. It does not only entail bringing skills and knowledge to light but recognising the person. Experiencing these humanising conditions in projects allows restorative relationships and bond of trust to be established with other participants. Planning must be undertaken in projects, actions and methodology aimed at raising self-awareness and facilitating self-knowledge and self-esteem processes. Individual tutoring spaces, value education dynamics, personal diaries and the sharing of testimonies are suitable tools for bringing value to light in situations of exclusion.

Inclusion calls for the abandonment of routine practices and actions that make the subject indistinct or make them feel like a service user, to offer personal experiences that build humanity. We have to ask ourselves if we favour experiences of trust, authenticity and humanity in our institutions (Rogers, 2002; Lévinas, 1993). If people feel listened to and welcome, if we approach their stories and the emotions they experience with respect. People's predominant experience in the projects must equate with being unique subjects, known and appreciated by those supporting them.

## How can we encourage humanising experiences and conditions?

To promote and generate humanising conditions in projects, attention must be paid to these indicators:

- Experiencing individual and respectful treatment in relations.
- · Feeling heard and welcomed.
- Nurturing spaces for face-to-face contact with the participants.
- · Having moments for reflection and awareness-raising.
- · Conveying a positive image of participants' progress.
- Moving away from perspectives and attitudes of victimisation.
- Believing and trusting the other person's skills and capabilities.
- Preventing experiences of loneliness or isolation in projects.
- · Creating spaces for dialogue and mutual understanding.
- Promoting trusting relationships among the participants.

## Testimony of the instructors...

"After undertaking the service tasks I believe an evaluation of the personal experience and benefits for the subject is very important. Everything they have taken from the experience must be gleaned in the tutorials or in the individual work. Some of the participants said to me: "I thought I would not be able", and once they have had the experience they realise that they have grown, they will never forget that challenge. It is a matter of developing a more personal tool about who you are and what you are capable of doing. With the project you open a door for self-development, which is one of the benefits of the entire process."

Professional participating in the Reincorpora (Reintegration) project

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## Promoting support-based pedagogy

## **INITIAL QUESTIONS 6:**

- How can we facilitate individual monitoring of the project participants?
- What can be done to have an overview of the experience?
- Which methodologies offer more possibilities for lending support?
- How can we foster pedagogical sensitivity across all the institutions participating in the project?
- How can we promote a support-based pedagogy in situations of exclusion?

Undertaking service-learning projects calls for support-sensitive pedagogy. It is necessary to promote spaces for individual monitoring, meeting spaces to jointly establish short- and long-term goals, to determine both needs and demands as well as the hopes and dreams of people and speak of progress and anxieties that the project may generate. Specifying the figure of an educational point of reference, with whom people can forge a bond and a relationship of trust, seems appropriate. A reference person that ensures confidentiality when projects are aimed at people in situations of exclusion: these people should not have to explain their story to all the professionals involved in the projects.

In service-learning projects many of the actions are undertaken in groups: designing proposals, reaching agreements, allotting responsibilities and evaluating actions. Instructors must also lend their support to the group: nurturing the environment and relationships established between the members, fostering spaces for dialogue and collective participation. Furthermore, ensuring the development of institutional networks and partnerships is necessary: overseeing contacts with institutions, evaluating the development of projects and reviewing the goals we seek to achieve by implementing the methodology. We foster spaces for meeting with professional and educational points of reference to review and improve coordination and to sustain the experience's elements of success.

A support-based pedagogy calls for professionals to update their technical skills aimed at promoting inclusion, such as individual work plans, case management, the design of training actions, etc. But it is also necessary to develop skills related to pedagogical sensitivity that allow bonds of trust to be generated, prejudices to be analysed, emotions to be supported, etc. In short, providing help, advice and support throughout the process.

## Keys that can facilitate the provision of support in projects

- Itinerary. In situations of exclusion, projects must be proposed that allow individual monitoring. Putting forward meeting places, nurturing the educational relationship and thinking of short- and longterm actions.
- Overview. It is imperative to have an overview of the project and its phases as well as the progress of the participants therein.
- Flexibility. Instructors must be able to maintain a balance between ensuring accountability and encouraging personal improvement. Defining specific actions that the group can carry out as well as being flexible in order to be able to introduce changes and improvements in the process.

### An example...

A group of male prisoners receive training aimed at integration into the labour market, in the domain of cooking and the hospitality industry in an organisation in the territory. They are involved in improving food kitchens in the area that play host to people and families with serious economic problems, planning and preparing healthy and affordable meals once a week. The service also considers preparing and serving meals once a week, something which has afforded an insight into other realities of exclusion, designing meaningful actions, as well as forging ties with the people availing of the food kitchen. Throughout the entire process, a social worker lent the men her support in designing the individual itinerary aimed at integration into the labour market and the development of service actions, creating opportunities to bring out their skills and personal vale and to support the participants.

# Generating inclusion and solidarity networks

## **INITIAL QUESTIONS 7:**

- How can we drive service-learning projects, involving various organisations, associations, administrations and companies?
- How can we foster the creation of synergies and links to generate an inclusive partnership in the territory?
- Which agents can promote a solid network of associations, administrations and companies aimed at social inclusion?
- What material and logistical resources must be planned to organise an inclusive partnership?
- How can we promote exchange among the different partners to evaluate and improve networks of inclusion?

Service learning cannot be undertaken alone; strategies for cooperation and concerted action among administrations, associations and companies to develop inclusive actions are necessary. Responding to the needs of people and increasing employment opportunities calls for partnerships that harness the strengths of institutions in terms of training, facilitating the management of job banks related to industry, commerce and companies in the vicinity and highlighting the range of resources available in the territory that can be tapped into.

Building a partnership calls for a principle of collaboration: working together and joining forces must benefit all the participants in the network. Often coordination between very different institutions requires a preliminary step, recognising that institutions, associations and companies have different rationales and interests, which does not imply changing them but rather understanding other ways of working, maintaining an open mind and being capable of setting achievable objectives and responsibilities that contribute towards generating inclusive social capital. Recognising the strengths of every member in the network heightens the projects' potential.

To establish a partnership network, it is important not to overlook that we are working together to combat marginalisation and exclusion with local actions that can promote recruitment and training for the job. Bridges and synergies must be built between people that work in institutions, administrations and companies when projects are aimed at social inclusion. And to move towards collaboration, spaces for dialogue must be generated and joint work plans must be established.

In service-learning projects aimed at inclusion, people are placed at the centre of partnerships, networks are not exclusively used for the coordination of actions but rather become service and support frameworks. An inclusive partnership grants access to a variety of resources, it expands people's points of reference and promotes a feeling of closeness and belonging to the community.

## How to promote a partnership structure aimed at inclusion?

The following ideas can help us promote the establishment of partnerships:

- Identify potential partners and invite participation. We need to know
  who our potential collaborators might be, and to do so it is interesting to analyse the opportunities for inclusion, training and work
  which are offered in the territory, to identify successful proposals
  and to invite institutions and associations to take part in the project.
- Establish a commitment to collaboration. Participants must listen to and trust one another, we must think about what we can do together to combat exclusion and to establish the main lines of action and specific agreements for which each member of the network is responsible in a collaborative and participative manner.
- Remove the protocol concerning relationships between organisations.
   Communication must be fostered and bureaucracy must be reduced in relations. Seeking out spaces for dialogue, evaluating the experience and acknowledging the effort and work of the various institutions affords meaning to the partnership.
- Local work and global vision. We need to think about improving actions that we can undertake within the network to increase the job opportunities and training of people in situations of exclusion, without losing sight of our overarching goal: to improve access to economic, social and cultural rights and to ensure fair conditions for citizens.

### Testimony of the instructors...

"It is very important to generate a framework so that actions are sustainable over time. It does not make sense to offer the best training if the person later returns to their context and nothing changes. The key is inclusion in the territory. It is common sense, having more contacts steps up the chances of finding work, knowing who to address if you have other problems such as rent, health, your life partner, etc. More networks other than family ones are necessary; thought must be given to support networks and points of reference beyond service-learning projects."

Professional participating in the Reincorpora (Reintegration) project

"Undertaking the project is an experience of recognition and autonomy, but more opportunities for us to build other means of inclusion and support together are needed in the region. Working together more, no longer thinking about "my users" to talk more about what we can do together so that people become agents of change in their lives."

Professional participating in the Reincorpora project

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# A good practice: The *Reincorpora*(Reintegration) programme

Based on two collaboration agreements with the Prison Service – Ministry of the Interior and Department of Justice of the Government of Catalonia – and "la Caixa" Social Projects, the *Reincorpora* (Reintegration) Programme has been running since 2011. The programme seeks to map out personalised plans for integration into society and the labour market for prisoners, based on a previously agreed individual plan, which contribute towards enhancing professional skills, enable development and the consolidation of values and facilitate the path towards integration into companies.

The programme is led by an institutional, organisational and logistical structure in which public institutions, private foundations, a broad territorial network of social organisations and training centres, which are experts in the execution of social and labour integration processes, take part.

The itinerary for integration into society and the labour market is developed through the following stages:

- Training-service. It combines training in trades and community service actions, fostering skills, abilities and values, as well as promoting social participation and civic commitment. The collaboration and involvement of penitentiary centres, training centres and social organisations in this first phase of the itinerary dispels false images, grants value to effort and communicates integration and active solidarity to society.
- 2. Support. The participation of social organisations is a key part of the programme. Their intervention materialises in the preparation of community service projects and support for the person throughout the itinerary, fostering the process of change from a global perspective, and helping to tackle emotional tensions and everyday problems. They are expert organisations in integration into society and the labour market that afford their professionalism, experience and quality in the care of people.
- 3. Integration into the labour market. The programme's ultimate goal is the person's integration into society and the labour market. This integration is brought about through the programme Incorpora (Integration) sponsored by "la Caixa", an employment mediation programme that combines the needs of the social and business fabric in order to ensure the success of integration into the labour market. It offers a free comprehensive service with labour integration experts that provide advice and support throughout the phases of the process, from recruitment to full integration into the workplace.



The projects and different training actions bring together four different agents: people imprisoned, people in the community benefiting from a service, experts in technical training and people that support personalised integration processes.

The incorporation of service-learning proposals in *Reincorpora* projects affords key elements for innovation that bolster individual chances of integration into society and the labour market and which contribute to establishing proximity links and connections in the territory. An experience which grants recognition and the strengthening of autonomy, which has allowed a network of integration, aimed at integration into society and the labour market, to be generated.

Service-learning proposals allow combined actions of technical training, placements in companies and community service. They have a high personalised component which takes material form in individual monitoring throughout the integration process. They improve skills training oriented towards the labour market. Service actions allow challenges with a high educational component to be met.

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