

Defining Societal Mission for University

Good Practice Compendium



This Publication was developed in the framework of the Erasmus + Key Action 2 Cooperation Partnership project 'Enriching Communities through Engaged Mobilities' (ECEM) - 101090971

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**This publication is the outcome of in-depth consultations undertaken by the
ECCE consortium:**

Erasmus Student Network AISBL

CitizensLab

Academic Cooperation Association

Institute for the Development in Education

SGroup Universities in Europe

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

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Introduction

Universities' Societal Mission
and the Framework of the Project

Introduction: Universities' Societal Mission and the Framework of the Project

Universities have long been regarded as pillars of knowledge, engines of social progress, and custodians of culture. Their primary missions — teaching and research — have defined them for centuries, shaping their contributions to society and their role in fostering intellectual advancement. However, the contemporary landscape of higher education requires us to think beyond these traditional functions. As societies face complex challenges such as climate change, social inequality, forced migration, digital transformation, and geopolitical instability, the question of how universities can contribute more directly to societal well-being has become increasingly urgent.

This shift in expectations has led to growing recognition of what is often being called the “third mission” of higher education: community and societal engagement. Alongside the missions of educating students and producing research, universities are now asked to act as active agents of change in their local and regional environments. This does not mean abandoning their global role; on the contrary, it requires them to find innovative ways to connect global knowledge with local needs, ensuring that the benefits of higher education are felt not only in academic publications and international rankings but also in the daily lives of communities.

One of the most promising ways of achieving this integration is through service-learning. This approach embeds community projects directly into curricula, giving students the opportunity to apply their academic knowledge to real-world challenges while simultaneously developing their skills in teamwork, intercultural communication, and civic responsibility. For the community, such collaborations bring fresh perspectives, resources, and opportunities for dialogue with academic institutions. For universities, they provide a tangible way to demonstrate their relevance and their contribution to societal development.

At the same time, internationalisation has become a defining feature of modern higher education. It is no longer sufficient for institutions to operate in isolation within national boundaries. Global knowledge flows, student mobility, and international collaboration are now central to the functioning of universities. Yet, too often, internationalisation is reduced to statistics on mobility: how many students go abroad, how many international students are enrolled, or how many partnerships are established. This narrow view risks leaving out the majority of students and missing the deeper potential of internationalisation to transform teaching and learning.

A more comprehensive vision of internationalisation has emerged in recent years, often described as “internationalisation at home.” This concept emphasises the integration of global and intercultural perspectives into the curriculum, ensuring that all students – not only those who study abroad – gain exposure to international knowledge and develop intercultural competence. It aligns perfectly with community-engaged learning because both approaches insist on embedding experiences into teaching, linking abstract knowledge with lived realities, and fostering reflective practice.

The ECEM project has sought to bring these two strands together into a coherent framework: community-engaged internationalisation. This framework insists that global and local are not separate spheres but interconnected. By situating internationalisation in community contexts, universities make it more accessible, relevant, and impactful. Students learn not only from books and classrooms but also from interactions with local stakeholders, informed by global perspectives. Communities, in turn, benefit from innovations that are inspired by international knowledge and enriched by intercultural dialogue.

The need for this integration has never been greater. The crises of the twenty-first century, ecological, economic, social, and political, are global in scope but locally experienced. Universities are uniquely positioned to act as mediators between these levels, helping students and societies alike to understand and address complex challenges. But doing so requires a rethinking of curricula, pedagogies,

partnerships, and institutional strategies. It demands a vision of internationalisation not as an elite privilege but as a democratic right for all students. It requires viewing community engagement not as peripheral but as central to the university's mission.

The ECEM project has produced a series of outputs that support this rethinking. The [Handbook for Service-Learning in Erasmus+](#) "Service-Learning: Enriching Communities Beyond Borders" offers theoretical foundations and practical tools. Training events have built capacity among faculty and administrators. Institutional pilots have tested and demonstrated feasibility in diverse contexts. This Good Practice Compendium adds a further dimension by documenting real cases where universities have successfully combined internationalisation with community engagement. It provides concrete narratives of how these ideas have been translated into practice, what outcomes they have generated, and what lessons can be drawn.

The following chapters will present these case studies in detail. But before doing so, it is important to underline the broader significance of this work. By advancing community-engaged internationalisation, universities reaffirm their social mission, strengthen their identity, and prepare graduates who are not only globally competent but also ethically responsible. In an era when higher education is often criticised for being too focused on economic competitiveness, the approach showcased here demonstrates that universities can be both globally connected and socially grounded, both knowledge producers and community partners.

ECEM Enriching Communities
Through Engaged Mobilities

Purpose

of the Good Practice Compendium

Purpose of the Good Practice Compendium

The Good Practice Compendium has been designed with several interconnected purposes in mind, all of which align with the overarching goals of the ECCEM project. At its core, the compendium seeks to document and share examples of how universities have managed to bring internationalisation closer to their communities. This documentation is not limited to superficial descriptions of activities; rather, it examines in depth the context, objectives, processes, stakeholders, outcomes, and challenges of each initiative. In doing so, it creates a valuable repository of practices that can be adapted and applied in other institutional contexts.

A second purpose is to provide evidence that internationalisation can generate tangible social benefits. Rather than relying solely on metrics such as student mobility or partnership numbers, internationalisation should be understood through its qualitative impact: how it fosters intercultural understanding, supports equitable collaboration, and contributes to social and community development. By analysing good practices, this compendium demonstrates that internationalisation at home can strengthen sustainability, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and civic responsibility. It highlights that universities are capable of designing international activities with demonstrable impact beyond the campus.

The third purpose is to build capacity among higher education institutions and practitioners. The compendium does this by identifying success factors, challenges, and lessons learned across the case studies. These insights are intended to guide university leaders, faculty, and international officers in developing initiatives that are sustainable, effective, and responsive to community needs. The compendium is therefore both inspirational and practical. It shows what is possible and, at the same time, offers guidance on how to make it work in practice.

Finally, the compendium strengthens continuity within the ECEM project. It complements earlier outputs such as the Handbook for Service-Learning in Erasmus+ and links directly to the overall project aim of redefining internationalisation as a force for societal good. By situating these good practices within the broader framework, the compendium underscores the central argument that higher education should not treat internationalisation as an isolated strategy but as an integral component of its societal mission.

ECEM Enriching Communities
Through Engaged Mobilities

About the

Community of Practice

About the Community of Practice

ECEM's Community of Practice is not a passive network; it is an active ecosystem where members:

- Collaborate across borders to tackle common challenges in student mobility and engagement.
- Share practical tools, case studies, and pilot experiences that inform and inspire.
- Explore new ways of working that integrate mobility with meaningful community participation through service-learning.
- Develop policy recommendations and scalable practices that can be adopted by institutions across Europe.

What sets our Community of Practice apart is its interdisciplinary nature and its strong emphasis on practice-based learning. Meetings are designed not only for dialogue, but for mutual support and real-world application. Whether through thematic workshops or showcasing of successful initiatives, each gathering serves as an opportunity to translate shared insights into actionable strategies that strengthen the overall practice.

Participants and Aspirations

The ECEM Community of Practice (CoP) was formed as a dynamic and diverse space bringing together 29 individuals from 26 different higher education institutions and organisations, representing 16 countries. These included Portugal, Spain, Poland, Germany, Romania, Croatia, Moldova, Albania, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, India, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Algeria. Participants came from a wide range of academic and professional backgrounds. Among them were students, researchers, lecturers, university administrators, service-learning coordinators, mobility officers, and project

managers. This diversity of roles and perspectives contributed greatly to the richness and vitality of the CoP.

The Community of Practice was not only a platform for discussion but also a shared space for collaboration, innovation, and mutual learning. Participants joined with a strong desire to engage with their peers, enhance their institutional practices, and develop personally and professionally through collective exchange. Many members expressed a clear motivation to deepen their understanding of civic engagement, international mobility, and service learning. They viewed the CoP as an opportunity to enhance their own initiatives, explore new models of practice, and find fresh inspiration for their ongoing work.

One of the most frequently mentioned aspirations was the wish to grow professionally and personally. Participants hoped to expand their knowledge in service-learning and inclusive internationalisation, and to apply these insights in their institutions and communities. The CoP was also seen as a chance to build international networks and foster supportive relationships with like-minded colleagues from across Europe and beyond. The sense of belonging to a professional community, one that understands the challenges of this work and is committed to making change, was deeply valued.

For many, the CoP offered a space for practical learning. Participants were eager to explore real-life examples, concrete tools, and best practices that could inspire their teaching methods, their student engagement strategies, and their institutional policies. At the same time, several members hoped the group could go further than exchanging knowledge and become a forum for co-creating new approaches, frameworks, and collaborative projects. The idea of joint experimentation and shared innovation resonated strongly with the group.

A significant number of participants highlighted the importance of student involvement in their institutions. They expressed a commitment to empowering students as active agents of change, particularly within international mobility

schemes and civic engagement programmes. The CoP was viewed as a vehicle to support more participatory, student-centred approaches.

Inclusion was another major theme. Participants showed a strong desire to ensure that internationalisation becomes more equitable, accessible, and socially just. Many sought to bring more diverse voices into the process, especially those of underrepresented students or institutions. For these individuals, the CoP was not only a place to learn from others but also a means to advocate for change in the broader higher education system.

From the very beginning, the tone and energy of the CoP reflected curiosity, openness, and deep commitment. Members were not only interested in receiving information; they were ready to contribute actively, share generously, and engage in meaningful dialogue. Their willingness to reflect critically and build together made the group more than a learning community; it became a source of encouragement and collective momentum.

The geographic and professional diversity within the CoP was a vital strength. It allowed the community to act as a microcosm of European and global higher education, where different voices, traditions, and priorities could meet and grow together. In this way, the ECEM Community of Practice has become a central and living element of the overall ECEM initiative, a community where change is not only imagined, but practised, tested, and nurtured through shared experience. While every member of the Community of Practice brought unique experiences and valuable insights, the consistent participation and collaborative spirit of these institutions significantly enriched the experience for all. Their openness, leadership, and willingness to engage with complex topics helped create an environment of trust, creativity, and shared learning. Together, these collective efforts reaffirmed the importance of maintaining a joint, collaborative space where institutions can learn from one another and co-develop innovative approaches to community engagement. The experience demonstrated that such a Community of Practice can be vital not only for advancing community-engaged

programmes within individual institutions, but also for strengthening a shared culture of civic responsibility and partnership across higher education.

Active Participation and Key Contributors

Throughout the one-year course of the ECEM Community of Practice meetings, which were held within the framework of the project, a number of members demonstrated outstanding engagement through their consistent presence, thoughtful interventions, and generous sharing of knowledge and experience. These individuals played a key role in sustaining the momentum of the group, enriching discussions, and inspiring others to reflect more deeply on their own practices.

One of the most consistently active participants was from the **University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca** in Romania. Insights into the institutionalisation of service learning and the coordination of a Civic Engagement Centre provided valuable perspectives on structural approaches to community engagement.

A participant from the **Institute for the Development of Education** in Croatia enriched the Community of Practice with a dual focus on policy and implementation. Contributions helped bridge theoretical frameworks with institutional strategies.

Another engaged member came from the **University of Valladolid** in Spain. This participant began implementing service learning very early on in the ECEM process, showing a proactive and determined approach to embedding community-engaged practices in higher education. Contributions reflected a deep commitment to inclusive and community-driven education, often bringing forward practical examples of institutional transformation and helping others link vision with actionable strategies.

A participant from **IQS – Institut Químic de Sarrià at Universitat Ramon Llull** in Spain stood out for unwavering commitment to the Community of Practice. They were present at every ECEM meeting and event, consistently contributing with thoughtful reflections, real-world examples, and a strong dedication to advancing service-learning as a core component of institutional excellence and social responsibility.

While every member of the Community of Practice brought unique experiences and valuable insights, the consistent participation and collaborative spirit of these institutions significantly enriched the experience for all. Their openness, leadership, and willingness to engage with complex topics helped create an environment of trust, creativity, and shared learning.

The CoP Process

The Peer Community of Practice met regularly to share insights, support each other's work, and collectively develop a deeper understanding of community-engaged learning in an international context.

These meetings were designed to be collaborative and participatory, providing an open space for reflection, peer support, and knowledge exchange. Far from being formal presentations, the gatherings encouraged dialogue and mutual learning, with members contributing updates from their institutions, raising questions, and engaging in meaningful conversations about practice and implementation.

Between May 2024 and July 2025, five virtual CoP meetings were held:

- **Meeting 1 – Launch and Framework Definition (May 2024)**

The inaugural meeting aimed to present the purpose of the Community of Practice (CoP), align expectations among participants, and establish a common foundation for collaborative work. Attendees included representatives from higher education institutions, students, community organisations, and academic administrators. The group discussed the CoP's objectives, internal organisation structures, guiding principles, and

the activity timeline. Participants also shared their motivations, concerns, and hopes for the process.

Additionally, the IDE held an introductory workshop on Service-Learning, focused on various implementations during student mobilities, as presented in the Handbook for Service Learning in Erasmus: Collaborative challenge-based learning, Language and cultural exchange programmes, Training-based service learning, Virtual service learning and Orientation and integration programmes.

- **Meeting 2 – Implementation Strategies and Stakeholder Engagement (July 2024)**

This meeting focused on practical strategies for implementing community engagement initiatives within academic programmes. Participants explored how to ethically and effectively map and engage stakeholders, including civil society organisations, local governments, and marginalised groups. Methods for building equitable and sustainable partnerships were presented, along with models and tools such as partnership agreements and collaboration guidelines.

- **Meeting 3 – Communicating Opportunities to International Students (October 2024)**

The third meeting centred on communication strategies directed at newly arrived students. Best practices for onboarding were discussed, including orientation sessions, informational materials, and peer mentorship initiatives. Participants emphasised the importance of presenting civic engagement as an integral part of the academic experience rather than as a peripheral extracurricular activity. Institutions shared examples of successful outreach campaigns and communication tools.

- **Meeting 4 - Designing Service-Learning Projects**

This session was held within the two-day training held in Zagreb. The IDE prepared an interactive workshop which guided participants through the preparation stages of designing a Service-learning project through answering three key questions: the first referring to the pressing issue in the community, the second one referring to the selection of community partners and the third one focusing on the pragmatic aspects of making the project work.

This Community of Practice session fit perfectly within the concept of the training, which began with the overarching ideas of the social dimension and community engagement in higher education, and then gradually zoomed in on practical aspects, first through sharing Service-Learning experiences, and finally by focusing on the key question of Service-Learning project design

- **Meeting 5 – Designing a Diverse and Inclusive Curriculum (February 2025)**

In this session, the group reflected on their difficulty in designing curricula that respond to both student diversity and the realities of local communities. Pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning, participatory action research, and community storytelling were mentioned.

- **Meeting 6 – Co-Created Curricula in Higher Education: A Collaborative Approach to Engaged Mobility Schemes (April 2025)**

After this session, IDE prepared a workshop focused on co-creating a curriculum to enhance community engagement. The workshop was moderated by Linde Moriau from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, who emphasised collaborative learning between educators, students, and community partners. Through reflective exercises and interactive discussions, the participants examined how co-creation promotes student agency, civic engagement, and reciprocal learning. They gained practical

insights and tools to integrate co-creative service-learning practices into their own curricula.

- **Meeting 7- SGroup Café on Service Learning and last CoP Meeting (July 2025)** – On 18 July 2025, the ECEM Community of Practice held its final meeting, hosted in the format of an SGroup Café. Despite coinciding with the holiday period for some universities, the event gathered 32 participants from across Europe, representing a wide range of institutions and disciplines. The session featured Dr Nives Mikelić Preradović from the European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE), who shared her extensive expertise in the field of service learning. Her contribution offered participants a broad overview of current European practices, relevant projects and policy frameworks, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by institutions when embedding community engagement into their strategies and curricula. The meeting was more than just an exchange of knowledge: it was a moment of reflection for the ECEM Community of Practice. The session underscored the central role of the ECEM project (European Communities for Engaged Mobility) in fostering dialogue, collaboration, and capacity-building across European higher education. While this was the concluding activity of the CoP, the discussions and networks formed through ECEM will continue to inspire further initiatives, ensuring a lasting impact beyond the project's formal lifetime.

Throughout these sessions, members consistently demonstrated a willingness to share resources, offer guidance, and help troubleshoot each other's challenges. For example, some participants were just beginning to explore community engagement at their institutions, while others had already some experience to draw from. This diversity of perspectives allowed for rich conversations and the cross-pollination of ideas across regions, sectors, and levels of expertise.

The meetings also created an environment where practical issues could be addressed openly. Members brought questions related to designing service-learning curriculum, measuring student impact, fostering civic responsibility, and developing partnerships with local organisations. The group responded with creative ideas, examples of effective strategies, and offers of continued bilateral support.

Despite fluctuations in attendance, the spirit of the Community remained strong throughout, anchored by the commitment of its most engaged members and the trust that developed between participants. The CoP meetings not only supported the professional growth of individual members but also contributed to shaping a transnational culture of community engagement that will outlast the project's formal conclusion.

Future Plans

As the ECEM project moves toward its final phases, the Community of Practice (CoP) remains committed to continuing its collaborative momentum. The connections, trust, and shared knowledge built over the course of the meetings have laid a strong foundation for sustained cooperation beyond the life of the project.

Several members have expressed a clear interest in maintaining the network informally, intending to support one another as they continue to implement and develop community engagement strategies at their institutions. There is a shared desire to deepen cross-institutional collaboration through co-authored research, joint initiatives, student exchange efforts, and staff training opportunities focused on service learning and civic engagement.

Looking ahead, the CoP intends to:

- **Maintain regular communication** through a mailing list or digital platform where members can share updates, opportunities, and resources

- **Organise occasional online meet-ups**, even after the formal end of the ECEM project, to exchange progress and provide mutual support
- **Document and disseminate best practices**, building on the experience of the CoP to develop guidelines, toolkits, or case studies that can inspire and support other institutions
- **Support institutional change** by encouraging members to serve as ambassadors of engaged learning within their universities, fostering more inclusive, community-oriented educational practices

The Community of Practice has proven itself to be a dynamic, creative, and supportive environment. The future vision is not simply to maintain what has been created, but to build on it - strengthening ties, amplifying impact, and continuing to learn together as a truly international community committed to civic and community engagement in higher education.

The following testimonials share the experiences of members of the ECEM Community of Practice. They show how the project has inspired collaboration, innovation, and stronger links between universities, students, and local communities across Europe.

“As a university professor and coordinator of the Service-Learning Office, participating in this group has been an enriching experience. The initiative, which promotes the opportunity for university students to undertake international stays at institutions that implement Service-Learning as part of their educational model, not only helps create meaningful connections with host communities but also contributes to their mutual development and enrichment.

One of the key factors behind the success and cohesion of this group has been the excellent coordination throughout the process. In particular, I would like to highlight the essential role played by Beatriz Paranhos, who has taken great care of both organisational and management aspects. Her attention to detail has

facilitated the active participation of all group members and encouraged the involvement of new participants. In my case, this effort has yielded clear results: in our most recent meeting, five professionals – including faculty, researchers, and administrative staff – joined the session not only from Comillas Pontifical University but also from other universities within the EuPeace alliance to which Comillas belongs.

I am especially grateful for the opportunity to have participated in in-person gatherings, such as the one held in Porto in 2024, where a vibrant Peer Community of Practice was established to promote and expand Service-Learning across our respective institutions. I have also had the chance to attend online seminars led by internationally recognised experts in the field, which have offered valuable opportunities for training and reflection on this pedagogical approach.”

Elsa Santaolalla Pascual, Universidad Pontificia Comillas

“Being part of this group has stimulated and inspired us to replicate in our local environment similar spaces for meeting, exchange of good practices, search for collaborations and joint projects, etc., in relation to S-L.”

José Maria Marbán, University of Valladolid

“Through ECEM, we learned how to welcome exchange students into our local projects in a structured and meaningful way. Their energy and ideas have made a real impact in our community.”

Mar Fernandez, University of Valladolid

ECCEM Enriching Communities
Through Engaged Mobilities

Methodology

Methodology

To identify examples of Service-Learning developed within our Community of Practice, we carried out a structured qualitative survey among participating institutions. The survey was distributed through the ECEM Community of Practice and associated universities. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were encouraged to describe one or more initiatives that illustrated how their institution integrates internationalisation with community engagement.

The questionnaire is organised into **six sections**, corresponding to phases of reflection: contact and identity details; institutional mission; implementation of international actions; a detailed good practice description; supporting partnerships and evaluation; and consent and additional remarks. In total, the survey comprises **approximately ten key open-ended questions**, each prompting narrative responses rather than structured choices.

All responses were submitted electronically and reviewed collectively by the project partners. Each contribution was examined for clarity, completeness, and relevance to the project's focus on service-learning. From these responses, five cases were selected for detailed presentation in this compendium.

The selected cases were not chosen on the basis of performance or ranking, but rather to reflect the diversity of approaches within the Community of Practice. Together, they represent a wide range of institutional types and contexts, including large research universities, Jesuit and mission-driven institutions, and universities of applied sciences. This variety demonstrates how the same underlying principles can take different forms depending on institutional culture, priorities, and local community needs.

By focusing on qualitative data and reflective narratives, this methodology makes it possible to understand not only what universities are doing, but also why and how they are doing it. The aim was to capture authentic experiences that show

the dynamic interaction between internationalisation and community engagement. Through this process, the compendium highlights the creativity, commitment, and adaptability of the institutions that form our Community of Practice, while offering insights that can inform and inspire others.

The survey questions referred to in this compendium are presented in full in Annex I.

ECEM Enriching Communities
Through Engaged Mobilities

Case Study

IQS (Universitat Ramon Llull), Spain

Case Study – IQS (Universitat Ramon Llull), Spain

The following section presents five illustrative case studies that emerged from our collaborative process within the Community of Practice. Each case reflects a distinct institutional pathway toward connecting internationalisation with societal engagement. Together, they capture the diversity of contexts, scales, and approaches represented in our network, from large research universities to smaller applied and faith-based institutions. While the specific strategies differ, all share a commitment to bringing international learning closer to local communities and to embedding social responsibility in the international dimension of higher education. In the next pages, we present these five examples, each described through its context, objectives, activities, stakeholders, outcomes, success factors, challenges, evidence, and lessons learned.

Institutional Context

IQS, part of Universitat Ramon Llull in Barcelona, is a higher education institution with a long history of combining scientific and technical education with a strong commitment to ethics and social responsibility. Situated in a vibrant city known for its entrepreneurial dynamism, cultural diversity, and global connections, IQS has developed a distinctive profile that reflects both its Jesuit heritage and its contemporary engagement with the challenges of modern society. The institution has consistently sought to align its academic programmes with the real-world needs of students, businesses, and communities, while maintaining a clear orientation towards internationalisation.

Embedding entrepreneurship into the curriculum

The initiative documented in this compendium reflects IQS's effort to bring internationalisation closer to local communities through a focus on entrepreneurship and applied learning. The institution recognised that Barcelona, as a hub for innovation and business creation, offered an ideal context for linking international students with local entrepreneurial ecosystems. At the same time, it saw the potential to frame entrepreneurship not merely as an economic activity

but as a socially embedded process capable of addressing community needs and fostering sustainable development.

The objectives of IQS's initiative were twofold. On the one hand, the university wanted to provide its students, both local and international, with opportunities to engage in meaningful entrepreneurial projects that were informed by international perspectives and global trends. On the other hand, it sought to ensure that these projects were not isolated exercises but had tangible connections to the local community, whether through partnerships with small businesses, NGOs, or municipal initiatives. This dual focus on global orientation and local relevance was at the heart of IQS's approach.

To achieve these objectives, IQS embedded entrepreneurship into the curriculum as a practice-oriented component of international education. Students were required to work on real-life projects that often involved collaboration with local stakeholders, but these projects were situated within an international framework. For instance, students analysed global business models and adapted them to the needs of local companies or communities. They drew on international case studies, trends, and innovations, while at the same time responding to challenges identified in Barcelona and its surrounding region. In this way, internationalisation was not an abstract add-on but a lived experience, woven into the daily activities of students.

Stakeholders played a critical role in making the initiative successful. Faculty members designed and supervised projects that combined rigorous academic content with applied engagement. Local businesses and community organisations opened their doors to student teams, providing real-world problems and opportunities for experimentation. Students themselves, coming from a variety of cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, brought diversity of perspective to each project, creating an intercultural learning environment.

Impact

The outcomes of the initiative were multiple and significant. Students reported not only gaining technical skills related to entrepreneurship but also developing competencies in teamwork, intercultural communication, and problem-solving. They learned to navigate the complexities of working with real stakeholders and to reflect on the ethical dimensions of entrepreneurship. Local partners benefited from innovative ideas and fresh perspectives, often gaining insights that they would not have generated internally. For IQS, the initiative reinforced its identity as an institution that successfully integrates entrepreneurship, ethics, and internationalisation.

The success of the initiative was underpinned by several factors. The institutional commitment to entrepreneurship education provided a stable foundation. The presence of a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem in Barcelona offered a fertile context. The Jesuit heritage of IQS ensured that ethical reflection was integrated into activities, giving them depth beyond purely economic considerations.

Nevertheless, challenges were also encountered. Coordinating projects across international and local dimensions required careful planning. Ensuring that outputs were meaningful both academically and for community partners was not always straightforward. Faculty workload and resource constraints sometimes limited the scale of initiatives. Despite these challenges, IQS found ways to sustain and expand its activities, demonstrating adaptability and resilience.

The evidence of impact is visible in student testimonials, project reports, and feedback from partners. Some projects led to the development of business prototypes, while others informed the strategic decisions of NGOs or local companies. Beyond individual projects, the cumulative effect was to create a culture in which internationalisation and community engagement were seen as mutually reinforcing rather than competing priorities.

The key lesson learned from IQS's experience is that entrepreneurship can be

a powerful bridge between global learning and local engagement. By situating entrepreneurship within an ethical framework and embedding it in the curriculum, the institution showed how internationalisation can become a lived practice with tangible social and economic benefits.

Case Study

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität
(LMU) Munich, Germany

Case Study – Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) Munich, Germany

Institutional Context

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) Munich is one of Germany's most prestigious research universities, known for its academic excellence and its role in shaping intellectual and cultural life. Located in Munich, a city that combines global economic influence with pressing social and environmental challenges, LMU is uniquely positioned to address the interface between global knowledge production and local societal needs. The university has taken this responsibility seriously, embedding sustainability and civic responsibility into its teaching and internationalisation strategies.

The initiative highlighted in this compendium was conceived as part of LMU's broader sustainability agenda. Recognising that issues such as climate change, energy transition, and social integration are both global and local in nature, LMU sought to develop an interdisciplinary programme that would allow students to tackle these problems in collaboration with community partners.

Internationalisation was central to this vision, as the programme intentionally brought together students from different cultural backgrounds and disciplines, fostering an environment of intercultural dialogue and shared problem-solving.

Objectives

The objectives of the initiative were ambitious but clear. It aimed to prepare students to be globally competent and socially responsible citizens. It sought to connect academic learning with real-world problem-solving in the city of Munich. It also aimed to strengthen partnerships with local government, NGOs, and businesses, creating channels through which the university could contribute directly to community development.

Activities and Learning Design

Activities took the form of project-based learning seminars, co-taught by faculty from different departments. Students worked in interdisciplinary and intercultural teams on projects defined in collaboration with external stakeholders. For example, they might develop proposals for sustainable urban mobility, design interventions to support refugee integration, or analyse strategies for reducing carbon emissions. These projects were not simulations but addressed concrete issues faced by the city and its partners. Public presentations, exhibitions, and policy briefs were organised to share outcomes with wider audiences, thereby increasing visibility and impact.

The stakeholders involved were numerous and diverse. Students were the central actors, but faculty facilitated the process, ensuring academic rigor and reflection. The City of Munich provided real challenges and opportunities for collaboration, while NGOs and community organisations added perspectives rooted in social practice. Local businesses contributed practical insights and, in some cases, pathways for implementing student ideas.

Outcomes and Impact

The outcomes of the initiative were significant. Students acquired not only disciplinary knowledge but also practical skills in collaboration, intercultural communication, and sustainability problem-solving. They developed a deeper understanding of the social responsibility of professionals. Community stakeholders benefited from fresh perspectives and innovative proposals, some of which were incorporated into ongoing initiatives. Faculty enriched their teaching through the integration of experiential learning, and LMU enhanced its profile as a socially engaged, internationally oriented research university.

The success of the initiative was supported by LMU's institutional commitment to sustainability, which provided legitimacy and resources. The interdisciplinary approach enriched the learning experience, while partnerships with external

actors ensured authenticity. Embedding the activities into the curriculum guaranteed continuity and avoided the pitfalls of one-off projects.

Challenges and Evidence of Impact

Challenges were inevitable. Coordinating across faculties required substantial effort and flexibility. Balancing the expectations of external partners with academic standards was not always easy. Some stakeholders hoped for immediate solutions to complex problems, whereas the projects were necessarily limited in scope. Faculty workload was also a concern, given the demands of interdisciplinary and project-based teaching.

Evidence of impact was collected through student evaluations, stakeholder feedback, and tangible outputs such as policy briefs. Public exhibitions and presentations made the work visible to the wider community. The initiative also generated scholarly outputs, including conference papers and articles, contributing to LMU's academic mission.

Lessons Learned

The lessons learned are clear. Large, research-intensive universities can integrate internationalisation and community engagement successfully if they leverage their size, expertise, and partnerships. Sustainability, as a unifying theme, provides a powerful entry point because it resonates across disciplines and connects global and local dimensions. The LMU case illustrates how internationalisation can be more than mobility; it can be a process through which universities contribute directly to societal transformation.

ECEM Enriching Communities
Through Engaged Mobilities

Case Study

University of Split, Croatia

Case Study – University of Split, Croatia

Institutional Context

The University of Split is a dynamic and growing institution situated on the Adriatic coast, in a city renowned for its history, cultural heritage, and maritime economy. As a relatively young university compared to others in Europe, it has embraced innovation and openness as defining characteristics. Split itself offers a unique context: while being a hub for tourism and commerce, it also faces challenges of regional development, youth outmigration, and the need to diversify beyond traditional industries. In this environment, the University of Split has positioned itself as a key actor in fostering connections between global knowledge flows and local opportunities.

The initiative documented in this compendium illustrates the university's effort to internationalise teaching and learning while simultaneously contributing to the development of its surrounding communities. The central idea was to develop a model of community-engaged learning that could align international partnerships with local needs. The University of Split recognised that internationalisation should not remain confined to research collaborations or student mobility programmes but should be embedded in the fabric of academic life, connecting students and faculty directly with real challenges in their communities.

Objectives

The objectives were multifaceted. The university aimed to prepare its students to be active participants in a globalised world, equipped with both intercultural competence and practical problem-solving abilities. At the same time, it sought to strengthen the capacity of local communities to benefit from international knowledge and networks. Another objective was to provide evidence on how regional universities, often seen as secondary to major metropolitan centres, could become hubs of innovation and societal engagement precisely because of their strong ties to local contexts.

The activities developed under this initiative centred on collaborative projects between students, faculty, and community stakeholders. These projects were often interdisciplinary in nature, involving students from fields as diverse as engineering, social sciences, and humanities. By working on issues such as sustainable tourism, environmental protection, and cultural heritage preservation, students not only applied their disciplinary knowledge but also engaged in intercultural teamwork. International partners contributed by providing comparative perspectives and expertise, enriching the local focus with insights from other contexts.

Stakeholders included local municipalities, cultural institutions, NGOs, and businesses, all of whom provided challenges, data, and opportunities for collaboration. Faculty members facilitated the academic integration of these projects, ensuring that they met learning outcomes while remaining relevant to community needs. Students acted as co-creators of knowledge, not passive recipients, and their diverse backgrounds brought creativity and innovation to the process.

Outcomes and Impact

The outcomes of the initiative were visible at multiple levels. Students reported significant personal growth, particularly in developing intercultural competence, teamwork skills, and a sense of social responsibility. They also saw concrete applications of their academic learning, which enhanced their employability. Community partners benefited from research, proposals, and interventions that often had practical utility, such as sustainable tourism plans or educational initiatives for local youth. For the university, the initiative reinforced its role as an anchor institution in the region, demonstrating the value of higher education for both internationalisation and local development.

The success of the initiative was facilitated by the strong motivation of faculty and students, as well as by the openness of community stakeholders to engage in collaboration. The geographic and cultural distinctiveness of Split provided fertile

ground for projects that linked global themes, such as sustainability and intercultural dialogue, with local realities.

Challenges and Evidence of Impact

Challenges were also present. Coordinating international partnerships required significant logistical effort, particularly when aligning academic calendars and expectations. Resource limitations sometimes restricted the scale of projects. There was also the challenge of ensuring continuity across cohorts of students, so that projects could have lasting impact rather than being short-lived. Despite these obstacles, the initiative succeeded in establishing a model that could be sustained and expanded.

Evidence of impact came from community feedback, student evaluations, and the tangible outputs of projects. Some initiatives continued beyond their initial scope, becoming part of longer-term collaborations between the university and local institutions. The lessons learned point to the importance of embedding community engagement within curricula, ensuring institutional support, and viewing internationalisation as a process of mutual exchange rather than one-way transfer.

Conclusion

The University of Split's case shows that regional universities, far from being peripheral, can lead the way in developing innovative models of internationalisation that directly serve their communities. By connecting global perspectives with local action, the University of Split has created a powerful example of how higher education can foster sustainable development and intercultural understanding.

ECEM Enriching Communities
Through Engaged Mobilities

Case Study

Universidad Pontificia
Comillas, Spain

Case Study – Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Spain

Institutional Context

Universidad Pontificia Comillas, located in Madrid, is a private Catholic university with a strong Jesuit identity and a tradition of combining academic excellence with social commitment. As a university with an international reputation, Comillas has long engaged in mobility programs and global partnerships. However, its Jesuit mission also compels it to focus on social justice, community service, and ethical responsibility. The initiative presented in this compendium reflects this dual commitment, illustrating how internationalisation can be closely aligned with community engagement and social transformation.

The context for Comillas's initiative is Madrid itself, a city marked by diversity, inequality, and rapid social change. Migrant communities, socio-economic disparities, and environmental challenges coexist with global business hubs and cultural dynamism. The university recognised that its students could not be prepared for the complexities of today's world without engaging directly with these realities, and that internationalisation needed to be more than sending students abroad. It had to mean bringing global awareness and intercultural dialogue into the very heart of the city and its communities.

Objectives

The objectives of the initiative were ambitious and closely tied to Comillas's identity. The university aimed to educate “men and women for others,” capable of combining professional competence with ethical responsibility. It sought to design international experiences that were directly connected to the challenges faced by local communities in Madrid. Another objective was to provide students with opportunities for reflection, helping them to link academic knowledge with lived experiences of inequality, diversity, and solidarity.

Activities included service-learning projects, community-based research, and intercultural dialogue programs. Students worked with NGOs serving migrant populations, participated in sustainability projects with environmental groups,

and engaged in educational initiatives for disadvantaged youth. These activities were framed by academic modules that provided theoretical grounding and encouraged critical reflection. International partners contributed to the design and supervision of projects, ensuring that the local work was informed by global perspectives.

The stakeholders involved were numerous: students, faculty, NGOs, local authorities, and international partners. Students engaged in projects not only as learners but also as contributors to social transformation. NGOs and community organisations provided authentic contexts for engagement, while faculty integrated these experiences into teaching and research.

Outcomes and Impact

The outcomes were profound. Students developed intercultural competence, empathy, and ethical awareness. They reported transformative experiences that changed their perspectives on privilege, inequality, and responsibility. Community partners benefited from the energy, creativity, and commitment of students, as well as from the resources and visibility provided by collaboration with the university. Comillas strengthened its identity as an institution that integrates academic rigour, internationalisation, and social commitment.

The success of the initiative was supported by the tradition of social justice, which provided a strong ethical foundation. Institutional support ensured continuity and sustainability. The combination of academic modules with community engagement created a powerful pedagogical model, reinforcing the learning outcomes.

Challenges and Evidence of Impact

Challenges included balancing the academic workload of students with the demands of community engagement. Ensuring that projects were meaningful both for students and for community partners required careful planning. There was also the challenge of measuring impact, given the complex and sometimes intangible outcomes of social transformation.

Evidence of impact was gathered through student reflections, community feedback, and ongoing collaborations. Many students described their participation as life-changing, influencing their career choices and civic engagement. Community partners reported tangible benefits in terms of services provided, visibility, and innovation.

Lessons Learned

The lessons learned highlight the importance of integrating service learning into curricula, framing internationalisation as a process of ethical engagement, and building long-term partnerships with community stakeholders. Comillas's case illustrates that universities can be powerful agents of social transformation when they align their internationalisation strategies with their mission and values.

Case Study

Nürtingen-Geislingen
University (NGU), Armenia

Case Study – Nürtingen-Geislingen University (NGU), Armenia

Institutional Context

Nürtingen-Geislingen University (NGU) in Armenia is a private institution that has carved out a distinctive role in the country's higher education landscape. Operating in a context of political transition, economic uncertainty, and regional tensions, NGU has embraced an applied, practice-oriented mission that seeks to prepare students not only for careers but also for civic responsibility and social engagement. The university's initiative described in this compendium reflects its effort to combine internationalisation with local relevance, demonstrating that even in smaller higher education systems, universities can play a pivotal role in linking global knowledge with community needs.

The context of Armenia adds a particular urgency to this mission. As a country with a young democracy and ongoing socio-economic challenges, Armenia requires institutions that can foster resilience, innovation, and civic responsibility. NGU recognised that internationalisation could be a tool not just for academic prestige but for societal development, and that students could be prepared to act as bridges between global networks and local realities.

Objectives

The objectives of the initiative were to integrate international knowledge into curricula, build strong partnerships with community stakeholders, and prepare graduates for applied professional careers that were socially responsible. NGU wanted to show that internationalisation could be directly connected to the challenges of Armenian society, rather than being confined to mobility or research outputs.

The activities developed included practice-oriented courses co-taught with international partners, student projects based on real-life briefs from businesses and NGOs, and applied outputs such as sustainability strategies or business

development plans. These activities were fully embedded into the curriculum, ensuring continuity and institutionalisation. Faculty and students from partner institutions contributed to teaching and supervision, while local stakeholders provided challenges and opportunities for practical application.

Stakeholders included students, who were the primary actors; faculty, who collaborated across borders; local businesses and NGOs, who provided challenges and implemented outputs; and university leadership, which ensured institutional support. This broad involvement created a network of collaboration that linked global and local dimensions.

Outcomes and Impact

The outcomes were tangible and significant. Students developed practical skills, intercultural competence, and a sense of civic responsibility. Local partners benefited from innovative ideas and concrete deliverables. The faculty enriched their teaching and research. NGU enhanced its reputation as an institution that successfully combines internationalisation with applied societal engagement.

The success of the initiative rested on several factors. Embedding the projects in curricula ensured sustainability. Stakeholder buy-in guaranteed relevance and impact. International collaboration enriched the learning process, while NGU's applied mission provided a natural alignment with community engagement.

Challenges and Evidence of Impact

Challenges included ensuring continuity across student cohorts, aligning academic and business timelines, and managing limited resources. NGU addressed these challenges through careful project management, continuity strategies, and strong partnerships.

Evidence of impact included partner feedback, student reflections, and the uptake of project outputs. Many deliverables were implemented by businesses or NGOs, showing their practical value. Students reported growth in competence and responsibility, while partners valued the collaboration.

Lessons Learned

The lessons learned point to the possibility of combining internationalisation and societal engagement even in resource-limited contexts. NGU's case shows that smaller institutions can play a leading role in global knowledge exchange if they focus on relevance, practicality, and community orientation.

Conclusion

Towards a New Paradigm
of Higher Education

Conclusion – Towards a New Paradigm of Higher Education

The case studies collected in this compendium provide vivid illustrations of how internationalisation and service-learning can be successfully combined. They show that this is not a theoretical aspiration but a practical reality, unfolding in diverse contexts ranging from large research-intensive universities to smaller, practice-oriented institutions. By weaving international perspectives into community-engaged learning, these universities are creating transformative educational experiences for their students and tangible benefits for their societies.

One of the strongest themes across all cases is the power of embedding these initiatives into curricula. When community engagement and internationalisation are treated as optional extras or extracurricular activities, their impact is limited and their sustainability is uncertain. But when they are built into the structure of teaching and learning, they become part of the institutional fabric. This integration ensures that all students, not only the most motivated or privileged, have the opportunity to benefit from such experiences. It also provides continuity, making it possible to build long-term partnerships with communities and to deepen the impact of projects over time.

Another recurring lesson is the importance of partnerships. Universities cannot address societal challenges alone. They need to collaborate with NGOs, businesses, government agencies, and community groups. These partnerships bring authenticity to student projects, ensuring that they address real needs rather than hypothetical scenarios. They also extend the impact of universities beyond their campuses, creating networks of collaboration that amplify innovation and foster mutual learning.

The case studies also reveal the transformative impact on students. Engaging with communities, particularly in intercultural and international contexts, challenges students to think critically, reflect on their assumptions, and develop empathy.

They acquire practical skills in teamwork, problem-solving, and communication, but they also develop a deeper sense of responsibility as citizens. Many students report that these experiences shape their career choices, their civic engagement, and their worldview in lasting ways.

Challenges are part of the picture, and it is important not to underestimate them. Faculty often face increased workload when designing and supervising community-engaged projects. Aligning academic calendars with community needs requires flexibility and negotiation. Measuring impact can be complex, as outcomes are not always quantifiable. Yet, these challenges are not insurmountable. With institutional commitment, adequate support, and careful planning, they can be managed in ways that strengthen rather than weaken initiatives.

The broader significance of these practices lies in the paradigm shift they represent. They challenge narrow understandings of internationalisation as mobility for the few and community engagement as charity work at the margins. Instead, they point to a model of higher education that is inclusive, integrated, and socially responsible. This model resonates with global discussions about the role of universities in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in fostering social cohesion, and in preparing graduates for uncertain futures.

The ECCEM project has played a vital role in articulating and advancing this paradigm. Through its Handbook, it has provided concepts and methods. Through its training, it has built capacity. Through its pilots, it has demonstrated feasibility. Through this compendium, it has provided concrete evidence and inspiration. Taken together, these outputs offer a comprehensive resource for universities seeking to rethink their mission and practice.

Looking ahead, the challenge is one of scaling up and institutionalising these approaches. It is not enough to have isolated good practices; they need to be embedded in strategies, policies, and cultures. Universities need to create enabling environments for faculty and students, invest in partnerships, and

ensure that recognition and reward structures support engagement.

Policymakers and funding agencies also have a role to play by valuing and supporting universities' societal contributions alongside their research and teaching.

Ultimately, the vision of service learning is about reimagining the social contract of higher education. It is about reaffirming that universities exist not only to prepare individuals for careers but also to contribute to collective well-being. It is about recognising that in a world of global challenges, local engagement and international collaboration are not alternatives but complements. And it is about cultivating a generation of graduates who are both globally competent and socially responsible, capable of building more just, sustainable, and interconnected societies.

The compendium ends with optimism. The five case studies presented here demonstrate what is possible. They show that universities can rise to the challenge, that students can be transformed, and that communities can benefit from collaboration. They invite others to join the movement, to adapt and innovate, and to continue building the framework of community-engaged internationalisation. In doing so, universities can fulfil their highest mission: to serve humanity by linking knowledge with responsibility, global perspectives with local action, and learning with transformation.

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Annex I:

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ECEM Good Practice Compendium

ECEM Good Practice Compendium

Thank you for participating in this survey as part of the ECEM Project's Good Practice Compendium. This survey aims to gather case studies and insights on the societal missions of universities' international actions. Your input will contribute to a collective knowledge base that showcases impactful practices. We are particularly interested in hearing stories about successful implementation of service-learning and community engagement at your institution.

We kindly ask you to complete the questions below and upload relevant files where requested.

Thank you so much!

The ECEM Project Team

For more information about the ECEM project, please visit our website: <https://www.ecem-project.org/>

* Indicates required question

Contact Details

1. **University Name ***

2. **University Logo**

Files submitted:

3. **Name and Position within the University**

4. **Country**

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1J0D8Zv3TzMH7Mhck8AIP6RC0uY_3IjKrAbAjL_qwhGU/edit

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5. **Email Address**

*

Please provide us with your email address. We might contact you additionally in case we have any follow-up questions.

Societal Mission of your University

6. **What is your university's stated societal mission in its strategic documents or official statements?** *(Please provide a document or summary)*

7. **How does your university implement its societal mission through international actions?** *(e.g., international collaborations, community engagement, sustainable development initiatives)*

8. **Can you provide specific case studies or examples where your university's international activities have addressed societal challenges?**

Good Practice Case Study Submission

The ECCEM project consortium aims to collect best practices on how to bring internationalisation closer to communities through community-engaged learning. The case studies will feed into a Good Practice Compendium that will be largely disseminated across European higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

9. **Please describe a good practice from your university related to the societal mission of international engagement.** *(Provide details such as objectives, activities, stakeholders involved, and impact)* *

10. **What were the key success factors of this initiative?** *(e.g., partnerships, funding, institutional support)*

11. **What challenges did you face, and how did you address them?**

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12. **How does your university measure the impact of its societal mission in international engagement?** (e.g., indicators, evaluation methods, feedback mechanisms)

13. **Are there any partnerships (local, national, or international) that have been particularly valuable in advancing your university's societal mission?** (Please describe their role and impact)

14. **Please upload any supporting documents, reports, or case studies that illustrate this good practice.** (PDF, DOCX, PPT, etc.)

Files submitted:

Additional Information

15. **Have you participated in any of the following ECEM project activities: *** (please select all that apply)

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ ECEM Community of Practice
☐ Staff Training in Porto, 2024
☐ ECEM Conference in Brussels, 2024
☐ Staff Training in Zagreb, 2025
☐ I have not participated in any of the abovementioned activities
☐ Other: _____

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16. **If you have participated in any of the abovementioned activities, how would you describe the impact of the project on your work in your university?**

17. **Would you be willing to share more details in a follow-up discussion?**

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

18. **Do you have any other comments or suggestions?**

Consent and Submission

19. **Do you agree that your case study may be included in the Good Practice ^{*} Compendium developed within the ECCEM project, with appropriate attribution and in line with data protection guidelines?**

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes, I agree

☐ No, I do not agree

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