



**STUDENT
CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT**



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Civic Engagement in future European Universities Campuses



White Paper

This Withe Paper constitutes an intellectual outcome of the Project 2020-1-FR01-KA203-080652 Programme Erasmus+ key action 2 “Strategic Partnership”, led by La Rochelle University. These pages arise from the meetings in which we have shared experiences and initiatives of civic engagement, organizing and carrying out debathons, visiting associations, institutions, community projects, as well as from the participation in and development of civic engagement projects by students and university staff. Civic engagement practices in the participating universities have been shared (Agricultural University Athens (GR), Catholic University of Valencia (ESP), Klaipedos Universitas (LIT), La Rochelle University (FR), Sveuciliste U Zadru (CRO (FR), Université Bordeaux Montaigne (FR) and Universitatea Tehnică de Construcții București (RU). All the academics and staff involved in the project have participated in its development of the paper, directed and coordinated by Alberto Arrufat (Universitat Jaume I de Castellón) and David García-Ramos Universidad Católica de Valencia). The participant student’s opinion has been specially considered in order to achieve true examples of civic engagement.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
PART I: DEFINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	5
I.1 Concept of Civic Engagement	6
I.2 Legal framework of Civic Engagement	12
I.3 Promoting Civic Engagement for Human Development.	22
I.4 Connecting Civic Engagement and European Citizenship.	26
PART II: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN EU EDUCATION STRATEGY.	32
II.1 Civic Engagement for University Students objectives	33
II.1.1 Promote Critical capacity.	34
II.1.2 Improving citizenship resilience against miss and disinformation.	37
II.1.3 Prevention of radicalization and polarization	38
II.2 Civic Engagement University Environment.	42
II.2.1 Regarding students' learning and development.	43
II.2.2 Regarding Staff (professors and services), context and activities.	46
II.2.3 Regarding Institutions' budget and priorities.	48
II.3 Study of the current situation of Civic Engagement in the Universities of the European Union States.	50
II.3.1 Formal obligations of the universities of the member states of the European Union in the field of civic engagement	52
II.3.2 Current actions of the Universities of the Member States of the European Union in the field of Civic Engagement.	57
PART III. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION AT EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES	61
III.1 SWOT analysis framework.	62
III.2 University needs for an effective implementation of Civic Engagement.	69
EXECUTIVE CONCLUSSIONS.	74
REFERENCES	80

INTRODUCTION

The white paper on Civic Engagement in future European Universities Campuses aims to explore the concept of civic engagement and its significance within the European education system. The paper consists of several sections, which are summarized as follows:

Part I: Defining Civic Engagement explores the concept of civic engagement, discusses the legal framework surrounding it, and highlights its role in promoting human development and European citizenship.

Part II: Civic Engagement in EU Education Strategy focuses on the objectives of civic engagement for university students, such as promoting critical capacity, countering misinformation, and preventing radicalization and polarization. It also examines the university environment from the perspective of students, staff, and institutional budget and priorities. Additionally, it investigates the current state of civic engagement in European Union universities.

Part III: Civic Engagement Implementation at European University Campuses conducts a SWOT analysis to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to implementing civic engagement. It explores the needs of universities for effective implementation, introduces different initiatives that can be considered as «Engagement for European Civic Engagement (E4ECE)», discusses some available programs, and emphasizes the importance of education in civic engagement.

Finally, in the Executive Conclusions, provides key takeaways and summarizes the main findings of the white paper. Overall, the white paper delves into the various aspects of civic engagement and its implications for future European university campuses, aiming to provide insights and recommendations for fostering active citizenship and democratic participation within the education system.

PART I: DEFINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

I.1 Concept of Civic Engagement

Civic Engagement in the EHEA

A common problem with this type of concept when trying to define civic engagement is that we all know what we are referring to, but if we are asked, it is difficult to say exactly what it consists of. It is a wide enough concept to include many different initiatives.

As far as the active role of students is concerned, when we talk about civic engagement we could be talking about political participation with local authorities, starting with the university itself, volunteering, NGOs, mentoring and tutoring of various kinds, contribution to the empowerment of the local community.

Regarding the topics that would be included under the label civic engagement we also find a great variety, from social justice to commitment to sustainability, educational inclusion, commitment to gender equality, cooperation and sustainable development, civic values and solidarity with disadvantaged citizens.

Finally, regarding the way in which the commitment takes shape in each university, we also find significant differences ranging from the recognition of credits in the student's curriculum, to the granting of scholarships and aid for the development of different types of initiatives, to the application of methodologies such as service learning or programs that promote inclusion and equal opportunities and the commitment of students to them.

Within the European Higher Education Area, civic engagement has always been present as one of the objectives of the development of a «Europe of knowledge», represented by the EHEA:

capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. ... The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development

and strengthening of stable, peaceful, and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount... (Bologna Process and Declaration, 1999)

It is precisely in the last decade of the last millennium when a reflection on civic engagement began to develop throughout the world, precisely when the decline or at least the substantial transformation of the traditional forms of civic association and the social capital associated with them began to be perceived in the main democracies of the world (Carpenter 2021: 39). The perception of the crisis of democracy is not, unfortunately, something new in Europe. It could even be said that the very formation of the European Union from its beginnings after World War II arose from the need to avoid excessive limitation of democracy through totalitarian drifts. To this end, it was necessary to achieve a framework of common citizen awareness.

In the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the birth of the new democracies of the East, but also in the context of armed conflicts such as that in the Balkans, there was a growing awareness of the precarious balance of power needed to maintain the rule of law as conceived in Europe and, by extension, in the West. The successive crises of terrorist violence, economic, social change and health emergency (2001, 2008, 2011, 2020), in addition to the severe threat posed by climate change, are all factors that today make necessary a new proposal that places civic engagement as one of the central teaching and learning objectives in the EHEA. This is reflected in the 2018 Paris Communication of the European Ministerial Conference for Higher Education:

We therefore commit to developing policies that encourage and support higher education institutions to fulfil their social responsibility and contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive society through enhancing intercultural understanding, civic engagement and ethical awareness, as well as ensuring equitable access to higher education (Paris Communication, 2018: 1).

The social and cultural diversity of the EU means that the recognition and inclusion of all citizens in the European citizenship project is one of the objectives that has recurrently appeared in the declarations of EU commissions and working groups in recent decades, as one of the educational measures aimed at preventing violent radicalization.

Philosophical approach

Concern for the city and its government, for politics, in short, and for civic commitment is as old as philosophy. Since Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, there has been reflection on the need for the free man to commit himself to the government and political organization of the city-state. Is it the duty of the free citizen to commit himself to the care of his fellow citizens? Is it a right that may or may not be exercised? Or is it not, finally, a condition for democracy, as proposed by the American philosopher and educator John Dewey? Dewey advocated the idea that education should be engaged with the real world and with the social, political and economic problems facing society. Dewey believed that education could not be limited to the mere transmission of abstract and theoretical knowledge but had to be rooted in the experience and daily lives of students. However, for Dewey the purpose of this education was not only to improve students' personal lives, but to turn them into democratic citizens.

Dewey emphasizes the role of universities in personal and social responsibility through the promotion of civic engagement that prepares individuals to communicate effectively across demographic, ideological, and political differences. In terms of the functions of Higher Education, the recognized need to focus this sector towards a broader "social responsibility" that engages the community and services for the public good can be readily recognized in statements that position universities to provide the desired impact and influence on societies. Such is the case of UNESCO:

Faced with the complexity of current and future global challenges, higher education has the social responsibility to advance our understanding of multifaceted issues, which involve social, economic, scientific and cultural dimensions and our ability to respond to them. It should lead society in generating global knowledge to address global challenges (...) (UNESCO, 2010, p. 2).

According to Dewey, engaged education must also be practical, dynamic and participatory. It should emphasize critical reflection -as we will see below, critical capacities-, collaboration, dialogue and action -through debate that contributes to consensus decision-making-, and it should help students develop skills to address complex problems and to make informed and ethical decisions.

Finally, Dewey also noted the central importance of education for democracy. He believed that the function of education was to prepare students to participate actively in the political and social life of their community and to work collaboratively to solve problems and promote the common good.

As we see, in this sense the definition of civic engagement has to do with democratic and political values of the first order. But across diverse cultural and religious traditions there also appears another aspect of civic engagement that is worth highlighting: service and care for the other, reflected in practices of volunteering, community service, service learning, all of which derive from different understandings and ethical approaches to charity. Living in a democracy that coexists with inequalities and injustices of different kinds is a situation that demands to be solved in some way, that demands a certain commitment to the disadvantaged, to the victims.¹

¹ In the world of jurisprudence, as in so many others, the years following World War II saw the birth of a new concept of victim, as well as that of crimes against humanity and genocide, which has given rise to other "-cides", such as ecocide or feminicide. Concern for victims is a feature of our society that deserves attention here (Foucault, Girard, Agamben). The victim mobilizes the concern of citizens in a very unified and natural way, which provokes instantaneous displays of adhesion and solidarity that

One of the main criticisms that civic engagement has received is that it is an «umbrella term (...) used to encompass [political participation, social connectedness, associational membership, voluntarism, community spirit, or cooperative and tolerant moral norms], while clarifying none [of them] (Berger 2009: 335). It is true that this is a term of difficult consensus, since both 'civic' and 'engagement' can refer to a very wide number of different traditions, currents or meanings.

On the one hand, the civic has been related to the city in its political sense, and hence all political actions that are considered civic engagement; but also to that of community, a concept that receives different interpretations in the various traditions of political and anthropological thought, to name but a few; the state and the nation, two concepts that have again been revealed as potentially conflicting, because of the polarization, problems of recognition, and of national and nationalist-type identities that seem to have become a trend worldwide. What is the civic, then? It seems, as we shall see, that approaches focused on the local with a global perspective are consolidating (the neologism "glocal" has been coined to refer to this type of practices) and it is because they try to synthesize the two extremes of the problem in the answers offered from this perspective to problems that are global, such as climate change, from local actions (given the impossibility of implementing solutions on a global scale).

On the other hand, engagement can appear as a simple civic concern, so that reading the specialized and/or critical press, participating in informative talks and in protests and demonstrations on issues affecting the local community or the planet, are also considered forms of civic engagement; it has also been resolved in different forms of service, especially service learning, or community service, in addition to volunteering in all its variants. Finally, a step beyond civic action as a

can, however, be produced uncritically and without reflection. It is not just a matter of citizens caring for the disadvantaged, but of doing so as a form of reflexive and critical commitment to the construction of a more just society.

result of engagement allows us to recognize other types of citizen actions as civic engagement: from different forms of associationism and participation in social and community institutions to more specific political participation. These types of activities could be included under the umbrella of civic engagement.

Whether or not it is an umbrella term, it has had a certain fortune since the 1990s, following the publication of Putnam's now classic work (1993)², the fact is that it manages to collect and group together a series of practices that have deserved the attention of higher education institutions and other international bodies such as UNESCO or the EU so that it will eventually constitute a central place in the curricula and in the catalogue of competencies and learning outcomes of European universities. This reality responds to an attempt to resolve two different issues: on the one hand, that we live in a world full of injustices and inequalities that should deserve our attention; on the other, that in the face of this lacerating situation the response can be of two types: individualistic, in the sense that if one fights to do better for him/herself, without directly helping others, that is, one will be helping to solve the world's problems by helping him/herself; or communitarian, where only community and democracy, working for the good of the whole society will succeed in putting an end to injustices and inequalities. This is the classic libertarian/liberal vs. communitarian confrontation whose resolution seems no closer today than it was in Greece 25 centuries ago.

This terminological difficulty encourages us to add to this first preparatory reflection a framework of international legal practices and jurisprudence that will allow us to frame, in the third part of this document, a proposal that has validity and recognition in a European University composed of universities that belong to different nation-states with different cultural, religious, social and political traditions.

² Cf. Figures 1 and 2 in Berger 2009: 339 which indicate an increase from 0 to 400 appearances per year in peer-reviewed journals in just 15 years, 1991-2006, and from 0 to almost 1200 in U.S.A. newspapers.

Conceptual notation

Volunteering and civic engagement are close concepts, but some differences remain: Volunteering is regulated at EU level by the European Charter on the Rights of Volunteers, adopted in 2011. The charter establishes a common frame of reference for volunteering in Europe and recognises the vital role it plays in building fairer and more caring societies. It also sets out principles such as free choice of volunteering, recognition and respect for the rights of the volunteer, equal treatment and non-discrimination, and valuing volunteering as an important contribution to society. In addition, the EU has funded volunteering programmes such as the European Solidarity Corps and the European Voluntary Service.

I.2 Legal framework of Civic Engagement

There is no universally accepted legal definition of student civic engagement that applies in all countries. There are references to student civic engagement in some education laws and policies. In many countries, civic education is considered an important component of education, and education laws and policies often set expectations and requirements around student civic engagement.

The Original Law of the European Union do not refer to students' civic engagement or young people's civic participation. However, the treaties contain general provisions supporting active participation and active citizenship of EU citizens. Some relevant provisions are: Article 10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), which states that "every citizen has the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union"; also, article 11 TFEU, which states that "the institutions of the Union shall be open to public participation", and that "appropriate measures shall be taken to give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action"; we have to consider also, article 165 TFEU, which states

that "the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States", and that "Union action shall be aimed at promoting the mobility of students and teaching staff"; finally, article 166 TFEU, which states that "the Union shall contribute to the development of a European policy in the field of sport, taking account of the specific characteristics of sporting activities, their structures based on voluntary activity and their social and educational function".

EU secondary legislation contains references to the civic engagement of students or the civic participation of young people in democratic life. For example: Erasmus+ Programme, which funds mobility and cooperation projects in the field of education and training, includes actions aimed at fostering active citizenship and civic participation of young people; The European Charter on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent, which sets out the rights and duties of children and young people in the EU, recognises the right of young people to participate in democratic life and to express their views on matters that affect them.

In the last years, different initiatives have developed inside European Parliament that are -mostly- connected with students' civic engagement:

- The European Youth Strategy Report, presented in 2019 by the French MEP Victor Negrescu, which was adopted by the European Parliament, and which highlights the importance of involving young people in civic and political life, as well as in decision-making at local, national and European level.
- The "Mobilise Youth for Europe" campaign, launched by the European Parliament in 2019, with the aim of encouraging young people to participate in the 2019 European Parliament elections. The campaign included a series of events and activities to raise young people's awareness of the importance of exercising their right to vote and actively participating in European democracy. The "Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange" project, launched in 2018 by the European Commission in partnership with the European Parliament

and other organisations, which aims to foster intercultural dialogue and civic participation of young people using virtual tools.

- The debate on the European Charter on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent, held in the European Parliament in 2020, which discussed the importance of guaranteeing the rights of children and young people in the EU, including their right to participate in civic and political life. Source.
- The DiscoverEU initiative, launched in 2018 by the European Commission, which offers 18-year-olds the opportunity to travel around Europe and discover its cultural and heritage diversity, with the aim of encouraging their active participation in European life.
- The European Youth Report, presented in 2020 by Italian MEP Silvia Costa, which highlights the need to encourage the active participation of young people in the political and civic life of the EU and proposes a series of concrete measures to achieve this.
- The European Youth Goals initiative, launched in 2018 by the Youth Council of Europe, which seeks to involve young people in the definition of European policies in areas such as education, employment, social inclusion and participatory democracy.
- The "European Solidarity Corps" programme, launched in 2018 by the European Commission, which offers young people the opportunity to participate in solidarity and volunteering projects across the EU, with the aim of fostering their civic engagement and sense of European citizenship.
- The "Youth for Peace" project, launched in 2016 by the European Parliament, which aims to encourage the participation of young people in conflict prevention and resolution, as well as in the promotion of peace and international cooperation.
- The "Discovering Parliament" programme, launched by the European Parliament in partnership with youth organizations, which offers young

people the opportunity to visit the European Parliament and participate in workshops and debates on democracy, citizenship and human rights. The Future of Europe Debate and the Future of Europe Conference, which are taking place in the European Parliament and other EU institutions, and which aim to involve citizens and young people in defining EU policies and objectives for the coming years.

- The Future of Europe Debate and the Future of Europe Conference, which are taking place in the European Parliament and other EU institutions, and which aim to involve citizens and young people in defining EU policies and objectives for the coming years.

In general, student civic engagement is not a legal obligation in most countries. However, in some states, there may be specific laws or regulations that require certain civic activities by students, such as community service or participation in student government. In most cases, students' participation in civic activities is voluntary and based on their own civic interest and engagement. An example of a legal obligation in the area of student civic engagement might be a law that requires students of certain ages or educational levels to perform a certain number of hours of community service in order to graduate. Another example might be a law requiring all schools in each country to implement a civic engagement programme for students, such as the «We the People» programme in the United States, which promotes civic education and active citizen participation.

For example, in the United States, the Secondary School Education and Enhancement Act (ESEA) establishes a Secondary School Improvement Grant program that includes the development of civic engagement programs for students. In addition, the College and University Student Voting Rights Act (HEOA) protects the right of students to register and vote in elections. In other countries, education laws and policies may also establish requirements for student civic participation, such as the obligation to perform community service hours or

participate in civic activities during school time. It is important to note that education laws and policies vary by country and region and may change over time, so it is always advisable to consult the current education laws and policies in the specific jurisdiction.

There may also be laws that require students to participate in certain political or social activities, such as participating in student elections or organizing public discussion forums at school.

Some states regulations have a fine line between volunteering and student civic engagement. As explained above, these are two different figures:

- In Peru, the law establishes that university students must complete 240 hours of social service in order to graduate.
- In Mexico, the law establishes that students in upper secondary education must complete a social service of 480 hours in order to obtain their certificate of studies.
- In Brazil, the law establishes that university students must perform a social service of at least 120 hours in order to graduate.
- In Spain, volunteering is not compulsory, but there is the figure of "academic credit recognition" for volunteering activities or participation in solidarity projects.
- In the United States, community service is not mandatory at the federal level, but some universities and higher education programmes require students to perform a certain number of hours of community service in order to graduate. In addition, there are federal programmes, such as AmeriCorps, that offer community service opportunities in exchange for financial aid for education.

Some EU countries have regulated student civic engagement in different forms and to different degrees. It is important to note that the regulation of student civic engagement varies widely among EU countries. While France is the most persistent country in this area, other member states do not have a specific legal obligation:

- In France, voluntary civic service is compulsory for all 16–25-year-olds and can be fulfilled through activities in various areas, such as education, environment or culture. Civic service is compulsory for young people between 16 and 25 years old. The duration of civic service is from 6 to 12 months and can be performed in a variety of organisations, including non-profit organisations, public services, cultural and sports associations, among others. Civic service was established in France in 2010 as part of the Law on Guidance and Programming for Youth and is considered a right and a civic duty of French youth. Moreover, civic service is under the supervision of the Ministry of the City, Youth and Sports. Civic service in France is based on the values of solidarity, citizenship, and participatory democracy, and aims to foster the social integration and civic participation of young people. Young people who perform civic service receive financial compensation and can obtain educational credits for their higher education. It is important to note that civic service in France is not considered military service, but rather voluntary service for the community, although young people are required to fulfil the same duties and responsibilities as soldiers. Not necessarily. Voluntary civic service in France is unpaid, but young volunteers receive a monthly allowance to cover their expenses. The amount of this allowance varies according to the length of service and the organisation in which the service is performed, but generally ranges between 580 and 700 euros per month.
- In Germany, voluntary service is also a popular option for young people, although it is not compulsory. There are several volunteering programmes

available, such as the "Social Voluntary Service" and the "Federal Voluntary Service".

- In Spain, although there is no specific legal obligation for student civic engagement, the government has launched several youth volunteering initiatives, such as the "Programa de Voluntariado Juvenil" (Youth Volunteering Programme) and the "Servicio de Voluntariado Europeo" (European Voluntary Service).
- In Italy, national civic service is an option for young people aged 18-28 and can be carried out in different areas, such as environmental protection, culture and care for the elderly.

Establishing a European regulation that allows for the recognition of student civic engagement must start from a rough conception and an ethical and moral foundation that serves as a basis for an obligation of student civic engagement. The following are some of the most common rationales:

- Social responsibility: the idea that individuals have a responsibility to society and should contribute to the common good. This implies that young people should participate in activities that contribute to the development of their community and the well-being of others.
- Solidarity: the value of solidarity implies that individuals should act for the benefit of others and that they should be willing to help those in need. In this sense, students' civic engagement can be seen as a form of solidarity with the community and with those in need of help.
- Active citizenship: the idea that citizens should be active and participate in the political and social life of their community. This implies that young people should be aware of their rights and duties as citizens and should participate in making decisions that affect their community.

- Integral education: the idea that the integral development of individuals is not limited to the academic sphere, but also includes the development of social, emotional and leadership skills. In this sense, student civic engagement can be seen as a form of holistic youth development.

Not all EU Member States' education laws contain explicit references to student civic engagement, but some countries have incorporated the concept into their education laws and policies. Examples include:

- In Spain, the Organic Law on Education (LOE) includes education in civic and ethical values as one of the objectives of compulsory education, and states that students should acquire skills for democratic participation and civic engagement.
- In France, the 2013 law on guidance and programming for school reform states that civic and moral education is an integral part of education, and that schools should encourage civic engagement and active participation of students in the life of the community.
- In Germany, the School Cooperation Act states that the school should foster the personal and social development of students, and that education should promote civic engagement and social responsibility.
- In Portugal, the National Education Plan for the period 2021-2030 sets as one of its objectives the promotion of active citizenship and civic engagement of students.

It is important to note that, although not all education laws contain explicit references to student civic engagement, the promotion of civic participation and civic engagement are core values in education in many EU countries.

A second aspect to consider when establishing a regulation that allows the insertion of student civic engagement in European universities would be the limits to its formulation that would prevent its qualification as such:

- any activity that violates human rights or human dignity, or that goes against democratic values and the principles of equality and non-discrimination, should not be considered appropriate in the context of student civic engagement. Some examples of activities that could be considered inappropriate are:
- Activities that promote racism, xenophobia, homophobia or any other form of discrimination.
- Activities that promote violence or the use of force as a means of conflict resolution.
- Activities that go against human rights and human dignity, such as human trafficking, labour or sexual exploitation, violation of privacy.
- Activities that promote religious intolerance or disrespect for the beliefs of others.
- Activities that go against democratic values, such as manipulation of information, corruption, clientelism.
- It is important that any activity considered as student civic engagement is ethical, legal and respectful of human rights and democratic values.

These broad limitations are easy to establish but become complicated when we try to go to specific activities. For example:

- Military service could be seen as student civic engagement. However, it is important to note that military service is a highly controversial issue and varies considerably from country to country. In some countries, military service is considered a civic duty, while in others it is seen as a burden or an

imposition. Therefore, considering military service as part of student civic engagement may be seen as controversial or even inappropriate in some contexts and cultures. However, it is important to keep in mind that military service is a highly controversial issue and varies considerably from country to country. In some countries, military service is considered a civic duty, while in others it is seen as a burden or an imposition. Therefore, considering military service as part of student civic engagement may be seen as controversial or even inappropriate in some contexts and cultures.

- Active political participation could be considered as a form of student civic engagement, as it implies the involvement of young people in society and in the democratic process through the exercise of their political rights and participation in political activities. But what if civic engagement was provided in a political organisation with anti-Semitic positions, would it cease to be considered civic engagement? Certainly, an operational description of civic engagement is not enough; it must be defined by substantive value aspects.

This raises another operational problem in the incorporation of student civic engagement into the university:

- The inclusion —or exclusion— of an activity as student civic engagement. Who would be responsible for making this decision? Would it be an academic? In this case, the answer seems simple in operational terms: the decision would be made by the universities, but it would be subject to administrative and judicial review. It would be possible to establish supporting guidelines for the European Union on the criteria to be considered.
- A second important issue in relation to the obligation to European recognition credit system: If a student had developed his or her civic engagement in an organization that offers help to obtain financial or psychological support in a clinic that performs terminations of pregnancies

in the cases legally established by the internal laws of that state, it would be student civic engagement. The question is whether we could oblige—in a system of European credit recognition— another university in the same state, ideologically opposed to voluntary termination of pregnancy, to recognise these credits. The question also extends to an application for recognition to a university in a state where the legal practice of voluntary termination of pregnancy is prohibited. Would the public order of the forum take precedence over cooperation in the European Higher Education Area?

I.3 Promoting Civic Engagement for Human Development.

Thirty-three years have passed since the first Human Development Report published by the United Nations (UN, 1990), and it is now widely accepted as an important goal for all societies. In the European Union, human development has become a priority for public policies and has been included in the Europe 2020 Strategy. However, the UN Human Development Index has declined globally for the second year in a row, showing that much remains to be done.

Already in the last decade of the last century, Human Development was postulated as a different alternative to measure the development of a country or region, putting the emphasis on something more than the growth of GDP or GNP to measure the development of a country, something more than income and wealth, and something more than the production of goods, provision of services and accumulation of capital. Human development was and is understood by the United Nations as a process of expanding people's choices, including living a long and healthy life, being educated and having access to the resources necessary to achieve a decent standard of living, a life of political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-esteem.

Therefore, as the first United Nations Report stated, the real wealth of a nation lies in its own people. According to the definition of the Report itself:

- Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. In principle, this choice can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these essential choices are not available, many other opportunities remain inaccessible.
- But human development does not end there. Additional choices, highly valued by many people, range from political, economic and social freedom to opportunities for being creative and productive, and enjoying personal self-respect and guaranteed human rights.
- Human development has two sides: the formation of human capabilities - such as improved health, knowledge and skills- and the use people make of their acquired capabilities - for leisure, productive purposes or being active in cultural, social and political affairs. If the scales of human development do not finely balance the two sides, considerable human frustration may result.
- According to this concept of human development, income is clearly only one option that people would like to have, albeit an important one. But it is not the sum of their lives. Development must, therefore, be more than just the expansion of income and wealth. Its focus must be people.

The latest UN Human Development Report entitled *Human Development Report 2021-22: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*, seeks to understand and respond to the new reality in which people find themselves, destabilised in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the climate crisis in which the planet finds itself. These events have caused the

Human Development Index value to fall globally for the second year in a row for the first time ever. As Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, states in the Foreword to the Report: “Each new crisis reminds us that when people’s capabilities, choices and hopes for the future feel dashed, the wellbeing of their nations and the planet are the accompanying casualties”. It can also be observed that these crises in most cases affect developing or low-income countries much more than developed or high-income countries and affect vulnerable people more than non-vulnerable people. In order to try to mitigate these effects, it is crucial to encourage the active participation of citizens in public life, not only by exercising the right to vote, but also by promoting collaboration and dialogue with other citizens, institutions, and organisations to improve the quality of life in the community and contribute to the strengthening of civil society and democracy.

For several decades, the concept of civic engagement has been the subject of study and debate in political science and sociology. Civic engagement refers to the active participation of citizens in public life, through collaboration and dialogue with other citizens, institutions, and organisations, in order to improve the well-being and quality of life in the community (Putnam, 2000).

The term civic engagement has evolved and adapted to social and political changes. In recent decades, interest in civic engagement has increased because of the crisis of representativeness of political systems and the need to strengthen citizen participation in decision-making (Boulianne, 2016). In this context, civic engagement has become a key issue in the academic and political sphere and has given rise to numerous studies and the rise of public policies aimed at fostering citizen participation.

Civic engagement can become a fundamental tool for improving the level of human development in a community. When citizens are actively involved in public life, it creates an enabling environment for the development of a more equal, equitable and sustainable society. In this sense, civic engagement can contribute to the

achievement of one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

Studies have shown that civic engagement has positive effects on individual and collective well-being. For instance, participation in civic activities can improve citizens' mental and physical health, as well as increase their sense of belonging and trust in others (Putnam, 2000). Likewise, civic participation can promote transparency and accountability of institutions, strengthen democracy and reduce corruption (Gaventa, 2006).

However, for civic engagement to have a positive impact on human development, it needs to be promoted in an inclusive and equitable manner. In this regard, it is important to pay attention to structural barriers that may limit the participation of certain groups of citizens, such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, migrants, women and youth (Boulianne, 2016).

The University cannot be left behind and must encourage civic engagement activities, among the university community itself and the rest of the population, prioritising those in the most vulnerable situations, in order to try to increase the level of human development of that society. University students are a valuable source of ideas and energy. By involving them in civic, social and cultural activities, they are given the opportunity to develop skills and values that can be applied in their future work and relationships with their community and environment. Moreover, by actively participating in public life, university students are improving the quality of life in their community and contributing to the strengthening of civil society and democracy.

Therefore, civic engagement at the university level can also enhance social inclusion and equal opportunities, and ultimately seek to improve the level of human development. University students can engage with organisations and communities to address social challenges such as poverty, climate change and discrimination. In doing so, they contribute to a more just and equitable society for all.

I.4 Connecting Civic Engagement and European Citizenship.

We live in a time of profound youth disaffection about national and international governmental institutions and regarding the European Union (hereinafter EU). An incongruous reality between the way in which young people enjoy the advantages offered by the European integration process while they are profoundly indifferent—even sceptical—about the values that underpin it. Of course, this is an assertion that rests on a general review that becomes more cunning if we look at particular groups or individuals with specific motivational factors.

Membership of a political process is constituted based on shared references and sentiments. The idea of citizenship - and European citizenship is no exception - requires three foundations: firstly, a rational connection with the proposed values offered - the person makes the decision to join on the basis of a logical analysis of the proposal, of an evaluation of justice, benefit, sustainability or durability; secondly, through sentimental connection under the idea of belonging to a collective which, although it partly blurs his individuality, offers him satisfaction under an ideal which justifies not only this disfigurement but also the expressive reasons for his intellectual and factual support; lastly, the delimiting legal basis which establishes the legal conditions which must be met by an individual in order to become a citizen. A monopolistic and self-regulating foundation for the group that establishes the requirements for membership, but also—with the permission of human rights treaties—the set of rights and freedoms that protect citizen-members, not forgetting the conditions of access to mechanisms for guaranteeing their fulfilment.

In the case of European citizenship, the legal basis is the result of a normative evolution which, starting from an ideal in its origins—the Schuman Declaration—

has ended up becoming the core of the action of the European Union as a whole. Established in the original law of the EU through the Maastricht Treaty (1992), it was surrounded by rights and freedoms for the citizens of the EU Member States, constituting an additional citizenship to the national citizenship of each Member State. The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam introduced important advances in the field of European citizenship, including the possibility of participating in municipal and European elections in the Member State of residence, as well as the right to diplomatic and consular protection in third countries. Years later, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) enshrined the fundamental rights of EU citizens, including equality before the law, freedom of movement and residence, protection of personal data, the right to an effective remedy and to a fair trial, among others. Finally, the Lisbon Treaty (2009) consolidated and extended the rights of EU citizens; it established the right of citizens to lodge citizens' initiatives with the European Commission, to obtain consular assistance from any EU Member State in third countries and strengthened the protection of fundamental rights. On the other hand, secondary European Union law has deepened the rights of European citizenship, addressing aspects such as the free movement of persons, the right of residence, equal treatment and the protection of citizens' rights in different areas, such as employment, social security, education and health.

European citizenship contemplates a double condition of rights: on the one hand, those that we can consider material - and which imply the obligation of the European Union to guarantee certain rights including free movement, free expression, among others - and on the other, those that constitute a guarantee of their fulfilment by the EU institutions, but also by the Member States.

The "connection" to the idea of citizenship can be fostered at school by showing that it is not an artifice, demonstrating how European citizens have a common history, culture and values. The European Commission has for years supported the idea of citizenship building in schools in a commendable way and has devoted

enormous efforts and resources to this end. However, there are some caveats to this method: firstly, it makes it easier —for those opposed to the idea of European integration— to criticise the manipulation of the European Union in schools. Secondly, it is an action to promote citizenship that places the student in a passive position who "receives" the information in the absence of any prior motivation — something similar happens in the Erasmus youth exchange programmes—. Thirdly, as a result of the economic resources it offers, it has been very well received in schools, but its implementation is often carried out by teachers whose only motivation is to obtain remuneration (economic or merit-based) but who are highly disaffected —or even opposed— to European postulates; this leads to a merely formal implementation of the actions which undermines their true objective. All of this, not to mention the fact that states remain reluctant to make commitments in the field of education that involve the inclusion of compulsory subjects about the European Union. Without prejudice to the above statements, the promotion of the European Union at school continues to be a fundamental element in the construction and assimilation of European citizenship by our young people.

Civic Engagement is another way of fostering European citizenship among university students that also addresses some of the above obstacles:

- It places students in a specific environment of engagement based on their personal choice and affinity with the action developed by the structure (army, prosecution), organisation (political party, NGO, among others) or job.
- It facilitates the engagement of students with needs associated with the life of Europeans and less likely to be transmuted under other motivations. It provides a participatory and pro-active vision of young university students.
- It fosters the questioning of reality, critical thinking and a mature approach to needs and their claims.

- It allows access to and knowledge of realities that are under-represented in the political system and as far as possible, understanding and channelling the needs of specific sectors (either because of their limited economic resources, less media attention).
- In a certain sense, the introduction of Civic Engagement in the European university system is a broadening of the vision of the European reality, and, at the same time, it can lead to a greater channelling of European realities. Political spaces such as the agricultural environment or peripheral geographies offer great potential for Civic Engagement.
- It promotes a better understanding of the values that drive engaged actions. This avoids destructive polarisation of the established framework because it brings academics closer to reality and to the people who live and work there, which in turn strengthens their resilience to disinformation.

As we have seen above, some Member States already include Civic Engagement in their university setting - either fully integrated in the curricula or surrounding it - but in other Member States it has hardly been explored or is unknown. Determining what qualities civic engagement needs to have in order to contribute to the idea of European Citizenship is not a simple task in its current germinal state and will have to wait a few years before a scientific assessment can be made. Nevertheless, some characteristics are logical:

- European Civic Engagement must involve a transnational performance of civic engagement that involves entities from at least two EU states; obviously, the greater the European impact, the more likely it is to affect the construction of European citizenship. However, such a requirement may preclude access to certain national realities and thus be exclusionary to the objective. For this reason, different modalities should be considered. These initiatives are often associated with various

themes, usually focused on human rights, the environment, gender equality, refugee protection, but not only, also development, entrepreneurship, among others.

- It should involve the active involvement of citizens in society at the European level. Both concepts play an important role in democracy and the building of a stronger and more cohesive community in Europe and must therefore be rooted in the set of European values and rights.
- It must represent the plurality of European societies and therefore embrace their human, ideological and vital diversity. Political participation and participation in the public affairs of their community in the European area not only through local and national elections in their country of residence or to the European Parliament.
- Fostering a sense of identity and belonging based on solidarity and cooperation that enables citizens to work and question reality together on issues involving common challenges, social and economic welfare issues, and to collaborate in building a more united and prosperous Europe.

Civic Engagement should be instrumentalized through the freedom of citizens to establish their participation by joining non-governmental organizations, interest groups or transnational networks to address Europe-wide issues. Similarly, it can include exercising the right to submit European Citizens' Initiatives to ask the European Commission to propose legislation in a particular area, allowing citizens to directly influence the political agenda and propose policy changes; not least, participation in European programmes and projects.

In short, European civic engagement and European citizenship constitute two symbiotic elements directly related and on which it is hoped to build a society that is more committed to the local environment in which it lives, under the values of

the European Union and closely linked to the mechanisms for evaluation, reconsidering or reviewing political strategies.

PART II: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN EU EDUCATION STRATEGY.

II.1 Civic Engagement for University Students objectives

In an era characterized by rapid information dissemination, diverse perspectives, and interconnected global challenges, the role of universities transcends the conventional boundaries of education. Beyond imparting knowledge, universities are now entrusted with the task of nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped to engage critically with their societies. Civic engagement has emerged as a powerful tool in this endeavour, offering university students a unique platform to develop essential skills, combat misinformation, and actively contribute to societal well-being.

This section, titled «Civic Engagement for University Students», delves into a set of overarching objectives that underscore the transformative potential of civic engagement in the university context. The objectives not only underscore the importance of promoting critical thinking skills among students but also highlight the role of civic engagement in enhancing citizenship resilience against misinformation and countering the forces of radicalization and polarization. These objectives collectively underscore the imperative for higher education institutions to nurture informed, socially responsible, and actively engaged citizens.

Critical thinking is the bedrock of an informed and democratic society. In a world flooded with information, the ability to discern, analyse, and evaluate information critically is essential. This objective within civic engagement seeks to empower university students with the tools to question assumptions, challenge biases, and seek evidence-based conclusions. By engaging in community-based projects, students are exposed to diverse perspectives, encouraging them to think critically about complex issues and contributing to their growth as informed citizens.

The digital age has brought forth unprecedented challenges, including the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. To safeguard the integrity of democratic discourse, universities must equip their students with the skills to

navigate the vast sea of information with discernment. Civic engagement serves as a laboratory for this skill development, enabling students to fact-check, verify sources, and critically assess the credibility of information. By participating in projects that require them to engage with real-world issues, students learn to distinguish fact from fiction, fortifying their capacity to make well-informed decisions.

Universities are bastions of diverse perspectives, fostering an environment where respectful dialogue and constructive debate are paramount. However, the rise of radicalization and polarization poses a threat to these ideals. Civic engagement acts as a counterforce, enabling students to engage with individuals from different backgrounds, collaborate on community initiatives, and bridge ideological divides. Through such engagement, students cultivate empathy, understanding, and open-mindedness, which are crucial in preventing the entrenchment of extreme viewpoints.

In essence, the objectives outlined in this section reflect a holistic vision of education that extends beyond academic achievements. Civic engagement for university students serves as a conduit for personal growth, social responsibility, and the development of skills that are essential for navigating the complexities of contemporary society. As we delve into the nuances of each objective, it becomes evident that civic engagement is not merely an extracurricular activity but an integral component of a comprehensive education that equips students to become active contributors to a more informed, resilient, and harmonious world.

II.1.1 Promote Critical capacity.

Critical thinking skills can be fostered in the EHEA from a variety of perspectives. The importance of critical thinking in the university has been highlighted in recent years, given the need to teach students to discriminate between information that

can be received and disseminated uncritically. Phenomena such as contagion and viralization, typical of digital media, mean that opinions and judgments of university students are based not so much on the development of critical abilities or skills -argumentation, dialogue or discussion- as on the repetition of slogans and hashtags, trends and fashions (Mitchell & Münch, 2019). American philosopher Michael Sandels has defended since the nineties of the twentieth century the need to renew public debate to protect democracy. In the line of Dewey, who proposed engaged education as the main way to build democracy in the USA in different works published during the first third of the 20th century. Years of crisis for the first democracies in Europe and in the world, due to two world wars, with completely polarized societies that ended up causing the rise of totalitarianism in Europe, and authoritarian drifts in some countries in the rest of the world (Judt & Snyder). A path that it is very similar to our current situation. We must highlight here the UE effort to create citizens awareness and commitment in young EU citizens, to avoid radicalization and polarization, to frame it within a higher education approach.

Some more frequent learning objectives that promote critical capacities are proposed here:

- Teach critical thinking skills: Educators can teach students to question and critically analyse ideas, arguments and evidence presented in class.
- Encourage debate and dialogue: Students can discuss and debate different points of view and perspectives in class. Respectful and constructive dialogue can help students develop the ability to see things from different angles.
- Promote research and inquiry: Students can be encouraged to investigate topics independently and to dig deeper into existing knowledge.
- Provide authentic learning experiences: Students can be exposed to real-world situations in which they need to think critically and make informed

decisions. This could be through hands-on projects, case studies or internships.

- Use technology and online tools to foster collaboration and critical thinking: Technology can be used to facilitate collaboration among students and to promote critical thinking, for example, through online discussions or interactive games.
- Encourage diversity and inclusion: Students can be exposed to different perspectives and cultures and encouraged to consider how these differences can affect the way we think about and evaluate ideas.
- Assess students' critical thinking: Educators can assess students' ability to think critically through tasks and activities that require analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.

In ancient Greece, the term «*kriticós*» referred to the ability to judge and discern things in order to make the best decisions for the benefit of oneself and others. When we talk about critical thinking today we refer to at least three disciplines: philosophy, which approaches critical thinking from a logical and argumentative perspective; cognitive psychology, which ventures to analyse how we think, that is, what is the structure of our thinking, the behaviour and procedures used by people who think critically; and, finally, from an educational perspective originated, again, in Dewey, which will be further developed by Bloom (1956) in his famous taxonomies, and for whom critical thinking would consist of analysing, synthesizing and evaluating. This last perspective, the educational one, has focused on methodologies and tools for teaching/learning critical thinking (Thonney & Montgomery, 2019: 170). Following Liu, Frankel, and Crotts (2014) there would be five main dimensions of critical thinking:

1. Evaluating evidence.
2. Analysing and evaluating arguments.

3. Understanding implications and consequences.
4. Producing original arguments.
5. Understanding causation.

One of the powerful tools to improve our critical thinking is conversation in all its varieties, from the Socratic dialogue to public debate, passing through academic discussion, journal review and critic, reports. To face the other and assess not only other's thought and words, but ours, are the fundamentals of any critical thinking. To provide it within the frame of Higher Education ought to be the aim of every academic, intellectual and education institution. To educate and help students to perform critical thinking is to drive them into civic engaged practices and choices.

II.1.2 Improving citizenship resilience against miss and disinformation.

Improving citizenship resilience against misinformation and disinformation is crucial in today's information age. Misinformation refers to false or misleading information spread without harmful intent, while disinformation is intentionally false information spread to deceive or manipulate. In any case, to resist, and be resilient, to this false information implies to be aware of its existence, and to act to control its diffusion. Civic engagement-oriented actions help individuals to improve their acknowledgement of the existence of this phenomenon and to develop tools reveal deceitful information. This tool can be label as information literacy skill, and according to Heard *et al.* (2020: 4):

While information literacy entails procedural skills not usually associated with critical thinking, such as the retrieval, management, storage, referencing and communication of information (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP], 2018), Paul and Elder

suggest information literacy is dependent on critical thinking to ‘provide the tools for assessing information’, and they account for information literacy as ‘an aspect or dimension of critical thinking’ (2007, p. 9). From a psychological standpoint, information literacy can be seen at least in part as the exercise of some of the knowledge-acquisition components of critical thinking, such as selective encoding (‘screening relevant from irrelevant information’), selective combination (‘putting together the relevant information in a coherent and organized way’) and selective comparison, (‘relating old, previously known information to new, about to be learned information’) (Sternberg, 1986, p. 10, italics ours).

Information or media literacy are key tools to improve citizens resilience, and to develop a civic engaged individual status that benefits both the individual and the social. It is because individuals are socially engaged with their local community, but also in with the global, that we are willing and able to learn how to read media critically. Contrasting our perspective, locally rooted, with others’ perspectives, also locally rooted, makes us resilient against any tentative of destroying.

II.1.3 Prevention of radicalization and polarization

To prevent radicalization and polarization among students, critical thinking capacity and information, and particularly media literacy are involved. In recent decades, radicalization used to occur primarily within individuals’ familiar environments. However, in today’s globalized world, the internet has opened doors to new forms of radicalism. The internet facilitates the dissemination of a wide range of information, including violent content. People now express opinions online, effectively turning everyone with internet access into «journalists», using social networks for dissemination.

While the internet can facilitate violent behaviour, it's not the root cause of radicalization. The decision to embrace violence rests with the individual. We are interested here into the reasons behind this choice but focuses on the communicative context and discourse that define new radicalities and their impact on users.

The study of how online content influences individuals' radicalization processes remains inadequately explored. Nevertheless, technology's rapid growth, coupled with its ability to evade security controls, has allowed violent groups to recruit allies. Platforms like Twitter, with their concise messages and hashtag strategies, create bubbles that isolate individuals and reinforce their beliefs.

It is important to emphasize the emergence of new forms of radicalization, making it crucial to adapt to these evolving phenomena. The 21st century has witnessed unpredictable and uncontrollable radicalization due to increased connectivity, internet biases, algorithms, and the rapid adoption of digital environments, particularly exacerbated by events like Covid-19. This environment allows almost anyone to become radicalized and fosters social polarization, where consensus becomes nearly impossible.

As a result, the concept of «cognitive radicalization» emerges, involving the adoption of extreme beliefs. In an information-rich society, people struggle to process vast amounts of information, leading to confusion and the need to rationalize beliefs. Radical beliefs offer a simplified, logical solution to this informational overload (Bronner, 2022).

These new forms of radicalization also bring forth new victims, blurring the lines between victim and perpetrator. The victims of yesterday may become perpetrators today, still victims in some sense. The narrative plays a pivotal role in victimhood, and in some cases, victims of issues like climate change may resort to extreme symbolic violence to express their grievances.

In order to prevent the development of such forms and new ways of violent engagement, and to promote unity and the defence of democratic values, civic-engaged institutions can use media literacy as a tool to empower individuals to participate in civic activities effectively. Educated citizens are more likely to engage in informed debates and discussions, rather than resorting to polarized or extremist viewpoints.

Media literacy education at the higher education level in the European Union (EU) can play a significant role in combatting polarization, radicalization, and promoting civic and social engagement (McDougall, 2019: 42-43). It can contribute to these goals through the following tools, that could be incorporated as contents, methodologies and goals within international micro-credentials and minors in the context of European universities:

1. **Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills**, as presented in section II.1.1., can contribute to critically analyse media content, identify biases, misinformation, and propaganda. This critical thinking capacity enables students to approach information with a discerning eye, reducing their susceptibility to extremist narratives and polarized viewpoints.
2. **Understanding Media Ecosystem**: Media literacy education provides students with an in-depth understanding of the media ecosystem, including the economic, political, and social factors influencing media production and distribution. This knowledge helps students recognize how media outlets may be influenced by various interests, fostering a more nuanced perspective. Since media literacy is connected to civic engagement and democracy, understanding media ecosystem should provide and encourage to a more engaged student profile.
3. **Media Production**: Teaching students about media production, including creating their own content, helps them appreciate the challenges and ethical considerations involved in media creation. This can make them more responsible and ethical media producers and consumers.

4. **Media Literacy Across the Curriculum:** Integrate media literacy principles into various courses and disciplines. For instance, history courses can include lessons on media's role in shaping historical events, while political science courses can examine media's impact on political discourse. However, we should open the scope and try to infiltrate other areas with civic engaged perspectives (Farnell, 2020: 50-51). A civic engaged university should offer the possibility of developing courses in the areas, between others: urban studies, architecture, economics, laws, or health sciences, among others, with a civic engaged approach and including media literacy education, giving students the possibility of reflecting on their role as different fields professionals committed with their communities.
5. **Community Engagement.** Finally, encourage students to engage with their local communities and contribute to media literacy initiatives, especially in areas vulnerable to radicalization. In the context of «glocal» initiatives (i.e., internationalization at home, short-term exchanges, online networks), cross-cultural and international perspectives can encourage students to critically engage with diverse media sources from different countries and cultures. This helps foster a global perspective and reduces the potential for xenophobia and radicalization, without lose sight of local communities. In recent years we witnessed the development of platforms as the European Platform for Community Engagement in Higher Education (<https://community-engagement.eu>). This kind of initiatives present insights and proposals close to ours, even from different perspectives (community and civic, sustainability, service learning). They are also proof that there is a real interest in this sort of initiative. They have proven their usefulness in the fight against radicalization, in the search for inclusion and the development of intercultural competencies that enable dialogue and critical and constructive reflection on radicalization and polarization trends, as well as promoting the engagement and interest of the younger generations in the European Union democratic values.

By incorporating these strategies, media literacy education in higher education institutions in the EU can empower students to become informed, critical, and responsible media consumers and contributors. This, in turn, can contribute to the reduction of polarization and radicalization while promoting civic and social engagement in a diverse and interconnected world.

II.2 Civic Engagement University Environment.

Civic engagement within the university environment has gained significant attention due to its potential to foster active citizenship, social responsibility, and community involvement among students and staff. This paper delves into the various dimensions of civic engagement in higher education, focusing on its impact on student learning and development, the role of staff (professors and services), and its implications for institutional budgets and priorities. By exploring these aspects, we aim to provide insights into the multifaceted nature of civic engagement within the university setting and its significance for creating well-rounded, socially conscious graduates.

Civic engagement involves actively participating in the community, advocating for social change, and assuming responsibility for addressing societal challenges. In recent years, universities have recognized the importance of fostering civic engagement among their students and staff to contribute to the betterment of society. The following will address three key aspects of civic engagement in the university environment: its impact on students' learning and development, the role of staff in promoting civic engagement, and the influence of institutional budgets and priorities on civic engagement initiatives.

II.2.1 Regarding students' learning and development.

As stated by Millican and Bournier (2011, p. 89),

Student-community engagement (SCE) refers to student involvement in local projects within a community setting. It normally involves the inclusion within the higher education (HE) curriculum of a period during which students work for a community-based organisation in ways that enable them to benefit the community and to learn from the experience.

Student-Community Engagement (SCE) is a dynamic concept that encapsulates the active involvement of students in projects that directly impact local communities. It allows us to encompass different activities and approaches not only locally, but also globally. Taking advantage of the EU mobility programs, on one hand, and the different programs of critical thinking, social and cultural inclusiveness, prevention of radicalization and engagement programs, activities and associations, on the other, it is possible to promote the creation and development of SCE networks not only locally, nor global, but «GloCal»³. Such

³ The term «glocal» is a *portmanteau* of the words "global" and "local," used to describe a concept or phenomenon that simultaneously incorporates both global and local perspectives, influences, or characteristics. It signifies the interconnectedness and interdependence between global trends and local contexts, emphasizing how global forces impact local environments and vice versa:

Merging global and local means bringing together local learning, engagement, and impact with global communication, collaboration, and knowledge production. This process takes place across social, cultural, and geographical boundaries and involves the way students learn about the world as well as how they learn to act responsibly in it. (John et al., 2017, p. 20).

Glocal education and mobility are innovative approaches that merge global perspectives with local contexts, aiming to provide students with a comprehensive and culturally sensitive educational experience. This concept recognizes the need for individuals to navigate both global interconnectedness and local distinctiveness. Glocal education and mobility emphasize the value of cross-cultural understanding, adaptability, and the ability to critically engage with diverse perspectives. In a nutshell, glocal education and mobility exemplify the fusion of global and local dimensions in the

networks would undoubtedly benefit students' learning and development in new ways adapted to the new geopolitical and educational stage. Some of the benefits of the so called «glocal education and mobility» are the following:

1. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Glocal education and mobility promote cultural awareness and sensitivity by exposing individuals to diverse worldviews, practices, and values. This helps to break down stereotypes and fosters open-mindedness.
2. **Global Citizenship:** Engaging with both global and local dimensions encourages the development of global citizenship. Individuals become aware of their responsibilities as members of a global community and recognize their potential to contribute positively to it.
3. **Holistic Skill Development:** Glocal education and mobility enhance a range of skills, including communication, adaptability, collaboration, and problem-solving. These skills are essential for navigating an increasingly interconnected and complex world.
4. **Local Relevance:** By contextualizing global issues within local frameworks, glocal education ensures that learning remains relevant and applicable to students' immediate surroundings.
5. **Network Building:** Glocal mobility fosters the creation of international networks that can facilitate future collaborations, trade, and cultural exchange.
6. **Personal Growth:** Immersion in different environments challenges individuals to step out of their comfort zones, fostering personal growth and self-discovery.

pursuit of well-rounded, culturally aware individuals. These approaches empower individuals to be adaptable, empathetic, and effective participants in both their local communities and the broader global context.

Moreover, going beyond the confines of traditional classroom learning, SCE seamlessly integrates practical experiences within the higher education (HE) curriculum. This integration extends beyond theoretical knowledge, enabling students to immerse themselves in real-world scenarios where they contribute meaningfully to community-based organizations by participating, creating, and developing projects and actions with the community and society, at any level, as target.

Central to SCE is the notion of reciprocity—a symbiotic relationship where both students and communities' benefit. Students dedicate a portion of their academic journey to actively participate in activities that address genuine community needs. This hands-on experience serves as an invaluable platform for students to apply their academic insights, fostering a deeper understanding of how classroom concepts manifest in the actual world. Furthermore, SCE enhances critical skills such as problem-solving, communication, and collaboration, which are essential for personal and professional growth.

The incorporation of SCE within the HE curriculum marks a deliberate departure from traditional pedagogical methods. It recognizes the profound impact of experiential learning, allowing students to bridge the gap between theory and practice. During their engagement with community-based organizations, students not only contribute their skills but also develop a heightened awareness of social challenges. This heightened awareness nurtures a sense of responsibility and empathy, qualities that are indispensable for cultivating socially conscious citizens.

At its core, SCE seeks to break down the boundaries between academia and the community. By encouraging students to actively participate in the betterment of their surroundings, it fosters a sense of shared responsibility. This approach transforms education into a collaborative endeavour, where institutions of higher learning become integral components of the communities they serve.

Consequently, SCE extends the reach of education beyond the confines of campus walls, making a tangible difference in the lives of individuals and neighbourhoods.

In conclusion, Student-Community Engagement redefines the traditional academic paradigm by intertwining classroom learning with real-world experiences. It serves as a bridge that connects students' intellectual growth with the well-being of local communities. By instilling a sense of reciprocity, nurturing practical skills, and promoting active citizenship, SCE stands as a testament to the transformative power of education when harnessed for the betterment of society.

To create a system which properly assesses, and recognizes such learning and development, if the acquisition of competences that could be part of the Program curricula, should be a strategic point of departure to make civic engagement a part of the real learning and training of HE students within the European Universities campuses.

II.2.2 Regarding Staff (professors and services), context and activities.

The active engagement of university staff members, including professors and support services, plays a pivotal role in creating a robust culture of civic engagement within the institution. This engagement not only amplifies the impact of civic initiatives but also nurtures students' personal and professional development through immersive experiences that extend beyond the classroom.

Professors are uniquely positioned to drive civic engagement by integrating community-based projects into their courses, since they should be encouraged as Catalysts for such Community-based projects. This approach transforms traditional classroom settings into dynamic learning environments where theoretical knowledge is applied to real-world issues. By involving students in projects that directly benefit local communities, professors empower students to

understand the practical implications of their academic pursuits. This methodology cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and empathy, as students grapple with the complexities of community challenges.

Furthermore, professors serve as inspirational role models for civic engagement. When educators actively participate in research, advocacy, and community service, they exemplify the values of social responsibility and active citizenship. Students are more likely to be motivated and inspired by faculty members who demonstrate a commitment to making a positive impact beyond the academic realm.

Support services within universities, including career centres, volunteering, student's campus life, and counselling services, have a unique opportunity to infuse civic mindedness into their offerings. Career centres can guide students towards pathways that align with their values and community-oriented goals. By encouraging students to explore careers in non-profit organizations, public service, or socially responsible businesses, these centres contribute to the cultivation of a generation of professionals who prioritize making a difference in society.

Counselling services also play a role in fostering civic engagement by emphasizing the importance of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and interpersonal skills. These qualities are not only essential for effective civic involvement but also contribute to building healthier, more interconnected communities.

The collaboration between professors, support services, and other staff members creates a synergistic effect that reinforces the values of civic engagement across the institution. When faculty members and support services collaborate on projects, students are exposed to a holistic approach that demonstrates how different disciplines contribute to community well-being. This multidimensional exposure not only enriches students' learning experiences but also enhances their understanding of the interconnectedness of societal challenges.

While the involvement of staff in promoting civic engagement is valuable, challenges may arise, including time constraints and resistance to change. Universities can address these challenges by recognizing and rewarding staff engagement in civic initiatives, integrating civic engagement training into professional development programs, and showcasing successful staff-led projects as best practices.

II.2.3 Regarding Institutions' budget and priorities.

The allocation of budgets and priorities for civic engagement initiatives at institutions, including universities, can vary widely depending on several factors, including the institution's mission, location, size, and available resources. To these structural elements we should add the cultural ones, those bound to culturally biased perspectives, prejudices and assumptions. Here are some key and general considerations related to institutions' budgets and priorities for civic engagement initiatives that should be considered and promoted within higher education institutions. We could classify them in four different axes or targets: institution, students, professors and researchers, and local communities and associations.

1. **Institutional Mission:** An institution's mission statement often guides its priorities. If civic engagement aligns with the institution's core values and mission, it is more likely to receive budgetary support and attention.
2. **Strategic Planning:** Many institutions develop strategic plans that outline their goals and priorities for a specific period, typically spanning several years. Civic engagement may be included as a strategic priority in such plans, signalling a commitment to allocate resources to related initiatives.
3. **Dedicated Budgets:** Some institutions establish dedicated budgets or funding streams specifically for civic engagement activities. These funds

may support community partnerships, service-learning programs, research projects, and outreach efforts.

4. **Grant Funding:** Institutions often seek external grant funding from governmental agencies, foundations, and other organizations to support civic engagement initiatives. These grants can supplement the institution's budget and expand its capacity for such activities. Some universities offer also grants to fund students engaged projects, to encourage and sustain engaged local communities' initiatives.
5. **Community Partnerships:** Collaborative efforts with community organizations, local government agencies, and non-profits associations can leverage external resources and support for civic engagement initiatives. These partnerships may include shared funding or in-kind contributions.
6. **Student Involvement:** Institutions may prioritize student involvement in civic engagement and allocate resources to support student-led initiatives, clubs, and organizations focused on community service and social impact. They can also recognize this engagement through academic recognition and certification.
7. **Research Initiatives:** For research-focused institutions, civic engagement may be integrated into research initiatives, with budgets allocated for projects that address societal challenges or community needs.
8. **Faculty Development:** Providing resources and incentives for faculty members to engage in civic-related research, teaching, and community service can be a priority. Faculty development programs may include funding for course development, sabbaticals, or research grants.
9. **Program Evaluation:** Institutions may allocate funds to assess the impact and effectiveness of civic engagement initiatives. Evaluation helps determine whether resources are being used efficiently and whether goals are being met.

10. **Student Support Services:** Services such as community service offices, career centres, and counselling services may receive budgetary support to assist students in engaging with the community and developing civic skills.
11. **Public Relations and Outreach:** Budgets may be allocated for marketing and communication efforts related to civic engagement initiatives. Outreach campaigns can raise awareness and promote involvement.
12. **Infrastructure and Facilities:** In some cases, institutions may invest in infrastructure or facilities that support civic engagement activities, such as community centres or research hubs.
13. **Training and Professional Development:** Providing training and professional development opportunities for staff and administrators involved in civic engagement efforts can be a priority.

It's important to note that the allocation of budgets and priorities for civic engagement initiatives should be aligned with the institution's overall goals and objectives in an organic way, throughout the entire university structure. Additionally, institutions may engage in ongoing assessment and strategic planning to ensure that resources are directed toward initiatives that have the most significant impact on their communities and align with their mission and values. Today, all these initiatives must go hand in hand with an inevitable international projection. As we have pointed out in section II.2.1. and in the discussion on the definition of civic engagement, we cannot propose civic engagement activities that do not incorporate international and intercultural perspectives.

II.3 Study of the current situation of Civic Engagement in the Universities of the European Union States.

We are going to approach to the complex landscape of higher education regulations within the European Union (EU), particularly concerning the role of universities in promoting civic engagement. It highlights the intricate web of regulations that universities in EU member states operate within, emphasizing the interplay between national and EU-level frameworks.

The concentric circles presented in this section offer a visual representation of how various layers of regulation impact higher education institutions. At the core lies fundamental rights and constitutional provisions that influence universities' interactions with citizens, both national and from other member states. Beyond this core, intergovernmental agreements like the Bologna Process aim to harmonize higher education systems, ensuring mobility and degree comparability. Additionally, programs such as Erasmus facilitate academic exchanges and innovative developments within the European university framework.

In the outermost circle, universities in EU member states engage in numerous international initiatives and programs, working in partnership with organizations like the OECD, the United Nations, and UNESCO. These collaborations often rely on state financing and contribute to the universities' international mission.

Despite the absence of a binding international or EU instrument mandating the integration of civic engagement into university curricula, the text highlights some national exceptions, like France's recognition of student engagement as a part of its legal framework. Soft law documents, open legal frameworks, and internal initiatives within universities also pave the way for civic engagement.

In conclusion, while there isn't a legal obligation for EU universities to incorporate European civic engagement, various pathways and opportunities exist at both national and international levels for universities and their faculty to actively promote civic engagement as part of their mission. The complex interplay of regulations and initiatives highlights the importance of understanding the multi-level landscape within which higher education institutions operate in the EU.

II.3.1 Formal obligations of the universities of the member states of the European Union in the field of civic engagement

Universities in EU member states are regulated by a variety of multi-level regulations. These vary from state to state but, at the same time, they are all involved in - and form part of - frameworks for joint action designed at EU level.

Therefore - and despite the existence of some initiatives to promote the transfer of educational competences to the European Union - a first aspect to clarify is that higher education is a national competence, which has not prevented it from being the object of actions, regulations and initiatives that complement, coordinate or promote the objectives of the European Union, insofar as it affects the objectives of the European Union; furthermore, some European Union Law rules require certain principles of behaviour from the States, which also affects the national rules that regulate Universities.

Schematically, the regulation of universities in the Member States can be illustrated by means of a concentric circle design:

1. The constitutive central circle.

- A) The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which, together with the rest of the human rights treaties ratified by the European Union, regarding the rights and freedoms of European citizens, affects universities in their relations with nationals, with nationals of other member states and in those rights recognized universally in their relationship with all persons residing in the member state regardless of their nationality.
- B) The constitutional provisions which, within the framework of the international human rights treaties ratified by each State, regulate the right to education, and establish State competence - regardless of internal

distribution - over university education, the obligation to establish a system of grants and study aids for students with insufficient economic resources, guaranteeing equal opportunities, and the duty of the public authorities to promote science and scientific and technical research for the benefit of the general interest. Also, the role of the Universities in the study of environmental protection, the promotion of sustainable development and the promotion of the right of citizens to participate in cultural life -including people with disabilities- and in the use of cultural heritage, as well as in the training of professionals in these fields.

- C) National legislation: Each Member State has its own higher education legislation regulating the establishment and operation of higher education, including the conditions of access to higher education, university fees, including exemptions and grants, the recruitment of teaching staff and the format of teaching, research and the protection of students' rights. Also, their territorial distribution, as well as the terms on which public and private actors provide the right to education. Also, the accreditation and quality standards that evaluate and accredit the quality of universities and their study programmes to ensure high educational standards and comparability of degrees. Without prejudice to international cooperation, this function is performed by public - or public-private - entities established at the national level by governments.

2. The intermediate circle of treaties and agreements.

- A) In the original law of the European Union: *The Treaty on the Functioning of the Union* regulates the functioning of the European Union and defines its competences and policies. Although it does not deal directly with higher education, it establishes the principles of free movement of persons, allowing EU citizens to study in any member country under equal conditions.

- B) *The Bologna Process*, an intergovernmental agreement within the EU framework, which harmonizes higher education systems to facilitate student mobility and comparability of academic degrees. This has led to the adoption of common structures, such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). This is an evolutionary process which establishes proposals for credit loads and which, despite initial reluctance, has ended up being confirmed in all the countries of the European Union and - with a few exceptions - for all university studies.
- C) Programmes and actions such as Erasmus which promote cooperation in the field of education, training, youth and sport. It enables students, teaching staff and researchers from participating universities to undertake academic exchanges and mobility in other member countries. The Erasmus programme has today become a framework for innovation in the European university framework because of its ability to fund novel methodologies and to support innovative developments such as the newly known European Universities.

3. The external circle initiatives.

A multitude of initiatives and programmes subscribed to at national level with international organizations such as the OECD, the United Nations or UNESCO find their place in its external circle. These programmes - normally financed by the State - are part of the commitments assumed internationally in various initiatives and which are operated by the University Institutions according to their availability and vocation. The universities located in the Member States operate as necessary partners in the achievement of the objectives set at national and European level and in their international projection. This takes place mainly as a channel for funding.

As can be seen, it is a regulation that organizes, harmonises and guarantees a basic homogeneity necessary for their adequate interaction and provision of their service to society. Therefore, Universities enjoy a very wide autonomy to establish self-regulations that complement, extend or promote methodologies that improve the

achievement of these objectives. The integration of Civic Engagement into university education is an issue within the margin of self-regulation available.

However, some aspects of university education that condition the incorporation of civic engagement in higher education in the Member States must be taken into account: among others, its curricular nature -included in the curricula dictated by legislation- or extracurricular -benefiting from a wide margin of university autonomy-; whether it is compulsory or optional; also, the degree of commitment that universities can assume with regard to this issue considering the limited resources available to them.

In the section I.1.2. we have already referred to the general regulation of Civic Engagement, so it is now appropriate to ask to what extent universities in the Member States have assumed formal obligations - either via international or EU agreements, via national regulations (constitutional or implementing regulations) or, finally, via self-regulation - that oblige them to implement measures aimed at fostering Civic Engagement?

In order to answer this question, the regulations affecting the universities that make up the consortium implementing the European Civic Engagement project were analysed. The review of these regulations and the consultations carried out led to the following conclusions:

- There are no binding international instruments (neither universal nor regional -European-) that require the introduction of civic engagement in the curricula of the universities of the Member States.
- There is no binding provision in the national legislation of the Member States consulted that requires the introduction of civic engagement content in the curricula of the official university degrees of the Member States consulted. However, there are some specific exceptions such as the French regulation which indicates that the recognition of student engagement is a provision of the law on Equality and Citizenship adopted on January 27,

2017 (decree no. 2017-962). It requires that any commitment in a voluntary, voluntary or professional activity can be valued a posteriori in a training course (in the form of ETCS credits for example).

- However, Member States have adopted various soft law documents - such as national strategies, processes, protocols or plans. For example, obliged to implement the National Progress Plan which emphasize the development of the creativity and creative human —the latter is one of the cornerstone targets in the Lithuania's Progress Strategy (Lithuania 2030)—. Klaipeda university development strategy 2021-2030 is developed regarding these national strategic development plans. The planned creation of the Volunteering platform is one of the examples how formal (national) development directions are implemented at the University level.
- In the same sense, the States have an open legal framework which does not legally prevent the integration of Civic engagement in the curricula of university studies. According to the law, there are no operating conditions other than those related to strict compliance with legal and ethical operating principles; activities are carried out at the University to ensure strict ethical principles for all groups - activities are guided by organizing training for faculty and non-teaching staff, a code to ensure equal rights and opportunities for socially sensitive groups at the University has been adopted. In the same vein, as we have established in the first part of this paper, Civic Engagement can be developed in various ways and with a commitment to a variety of purposes. Some of these purposes are easily accommodated in the mandate of internal Member States' rules related to education - for example, some laws (opportunities equality 2005 and higher education 2013) enhances higher education to propose specific measures to support students with disabilities - in the same sense, the French law for citizenship and equality enhances higher educations to implement measures to allow engaged students to better conciliate engagement and studies.

- None of the founding norms, nor the operating statutes of the universities analysed expressly mention civic engagement among their objectives, nor do they include it among the actions or missions that universities must develop. However, this does not mean that their members do not carry out activities that could be qualified under the label civic engagement. In fact, the concept of civic engagement as defined in section I.1.1. provides an example of civic engagement with a faster potential extent.

The conclusion is that there is no objective legal obligation for the universities of the Member States to incorporate European civic engagement; however, it can be stated that: firstly, some states have already taken steps to establish mechanisms that allow civic engagement to be incorporated into university studies; secondly, that some universities - or rather, some teaching staff - already consider civic engagement as part of the university's mission and, therefore, have sought formulas that allow for developments in this area in their subjects -For example, some offers extra points for university entrance for doing social works during high school-; finally, that the incorporation of European civic engagement can be implemented in the universities of the member states of the European Union through actions or programmes promoted by the European Union. The initiative to create European campuses is an opportunity to integrate civic engagement into the European university network, in a transversal manner, in the countries that make up the EU and its partners.

II.3.2 Current actions of the Universities of the Member States of the European Union in the field of Civic Engagement.

As mentioned above, civic engagement actions are as wide and diverse to make impossible to summarize, map, describe, or picture a complete landscape of the

ongoing and past initiatives that fall under this label. It is offered here a general outline of actions taken by universities in the EU.

The importance of Service-Learning Programs has growth in last few decades, encompassing different trends in Social Justice, volunteering, and community service realities. The presence of SL in many United States and EU universities, as a core teaching and learning methodology, makes possible the implementing of service-learning programs that combine academic coursework with community service. These programs enable students to apply their knowledge to real-world problems while addressing community needs. The European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education (<https://www.eoslhe.eu>) has mapped the Service-Learning Experiences in Higher Education across Europe, collecting more than 150 experiences from across 20 different countries. The aim of the project was to draw on existing practice, share knowledge and develop best practice related to service-learning in Europe. The project ended in 2017, but they continue to collect, share, and spread the SL experience. As they state:

The aim of the European Observatory is to enhance and disseminate the knowledge of service-learning in higher education in Europe, as an educational approach that enhances students' civic engagement, brings them closer to different social realities while allowing them to work in a real environment.

The general interest in higher education for civic engagement and SL programs has led to the creation of many Community Engagement Centres. Some universities have established dedicated centres or offices for community engagement. These centres serve as hubs for coordinating civic engagement activities, forging partnerships with local organizations, and providing resources and support to faculty, students, and staff involved in community projects. Farnell (2020: 33-47) proposes different levels of higher education recognition of staff and students' civic engagement, going from research and more open uses of institutional spaces for community activities, up to the institutionalization of such initiatives (44-46). The

creation of such centres must be particularly encouraged to ensure the presence of a real civic engagement-oriented training and education, learning and teaching.

Regarding research projects assessing the social impact of civic and community engagement, service-learning and other initiatives, there are a growing number of universities in the EU engaging more often in research projects that address pressing societal challenges, such as sustainability, public health, social justice, and economic development. Research outcomes contribute to informed policymaking and community well-being. It is worth highlighting, especially, the initiatives proposed by different European University Alliances for the study of civic engagement in an interdisciplinary way. In addition to this project (<https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/projects/students-civic-engagement-european-project-scee/>), we can offer, as an example, the program proposed by CIVIS (<https://civis.eu/es/civis-micro-programmes/micro-programme-civic-engagement>), among many others. Even if this trend can be read as a fashion, the actual impact on social behaviour, the influence in the social perception of local communities' engagement, the tendency to perceive «glocalism» as a new and more socially engaged version of the old «globalism», and, finally, the urgent need of developing tools against misinformation, radicalization and polarization.

Students' current actions, student-led initiatives, student organizations and clubs play an active role in promoting civic engagement. These groups organize community service projects, awareness campaigns, and events that address various social and environmental issues. Often, these initiatives promoted by students, lead to partnerships with local communities. Universities also collaborate with local government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community groups to tackle shared challenges. These partnerships can result in joint projects, research initiatives, and resource-sharing.

Many universities actively engage in policy advocacy, providing research-based recommendations to policymakers at local, national, and EU levels. Their expertise contributes to evidence-based decision-making. Beyond local and national efforts,

EU universities often participate in international initiatives and partnerships aimed at addressing global challenges and promoting cross-border cooperation, completing the local perspective with a global prospective and projection.

Civic engagement initiatives frequently involve interdisciplinary collaboration, allowing experts from various fields to work together on complex issues that require multifaceted solutions. To combine interdisciplinary research, service-learning actions, and civic engagement education in general needs an ethical leadership in the heart of it. Some universities emphasize the development of ethical leadership skills as part of civic engagement. This includes promoting values such as social responsibility, inclusivity, and ethical decision-making.

Universities host public lectures, forums, and conferences on topics related to civic engagement, encouraging dialogue and knowledge sharing among academics, policymakers, and the broader community. Educational outreach programs extend the university's resources and expertise to local schools and community organizations. These programs may involve mentoring, tutoring, and educational workshops. Universities often seek external funding from EU programs, foundations, and grants to support civic engagement initiatives. These funds can help expand and sustain community-focused projects, but also to create networks of different.

Finally, many institutions invest in monitoring and evaluating the impact of their civic engagement activities. Assessments help universities measure the effectiveness of their initiatives and make improvements as needed. It's important to note that while these actions are common among universities in the EU, the specific priorities and strategies can vary from one institution to another based on their unique mission, geographic location, available resources, and community needs. Case studies of individual universities or initiatives would provide more detailed and current insights into specific civic engagement efforts.

Part III. Civic Engagement implementation at European University campuses

III.1 SWOT analysis framework.

A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) of civic engagement initiatives in European Union (EU) universities can provide a useful framework for assessing their effectiveness and potential for improvement. Civic engagement initiatives in universities aim to encourage students and faculty to actively participate in their communities and address societal issues. In our case, this analysis must face the particularity of a supra national university. Such kind of institution should move from a local interest and framework to a more global and open ones, nonetheless, keeping the «localism» of each partner as the foundation and knot to tie and unite the whole.

As an idea considered as old as the idea of European integration itself, a supra national university had been envisioned many times before it took shape in the European University Initiative. French president Macron's speech, given for an event celebrating the 800th anniversary of the Parisian university in 2017, set goals for student mobility and exchange, such as all students speaking at least two European languages by 2024 or a certain proportion of the population having spent at least six months abroad, and he acknowledged the important role of intellectuals, researchers, and universities in building a stronger Europe. This made the framework where (and when) the concept of a European University was retaken in modern times.

Later in 2017, the idea of a European university could be found in official texts such as the report "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture" by the European Commission. The conclusions of a mapping exercise of existing partnerships conducted by the Council's Education Committee (May 2018) offered more ideas for the shaping of the European Universities Initiative.

After months of negotiations, the European Universities Initiative was launched by the European Commission at the end of 2018 in the Erasmus + Programme Guide for 2019 and a first call for proposals was launched. The final concept of European Universities envisaged the following goals:

- Promote European values and strengthen European identity.
- Improve quality, performance, attractiveness and international competitiveness.
- Institutionalised cooperation with systemic, structural and sustainable impact
- Whole-institution approach
- Mobilise all missions of higher education institutions.
- Deliver on EEA, ERA, EHEA
- Help implementing the European strategy for universities in synergy with new European Innovation Agenda, e.g., in cooperation with other alliances.
- Act as role models

From the first goal in 2017 to create at least 20 consortiums in 2023 the ambition increased to 60 European Universities involving more than 500 higher education institutions by mid-2024, supported by the European Union financial instruments. After the 2023 Erasmus+ call for proposals, 50 European Universities are created and financed by Erasmus+ programme, involving more than 430 higher education institutions in both capital cities and remote regions of 35 countries, including all EU Member States, and Iceland, the Republic of North-Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and Turkey, as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (<https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative>).

Within this context, a possible SWOT analysis could be offered here trying to compile and apply the different approaches and concepts we have presented in the previous sections.

Strengths

1. Civic engagement initiatives provide students with real-world learning experiences, allowing them to apply classroom knowledge to practical situations. The European universities framework allows students to find and develop these educational opportunities within an international context, giving them the occasion to encounter, to debate, to discuss, and to discover realities beyond local perspectives, to enlighten and enlarge their previous perspectives and experiences.
2. These initiatives foster a sense of community within the university and strengthen ties between the institution and its surrounding communities. In the case of European universities as described above, this community is not only local and focused on each city or country, but openness its aim towards the creation of a more global community, stronger not only because bigger, but also, and particularly, due to the decentralized perspective. This allows such «glocal» communities to face polarization and radicalization with dialogue and inclusiveness. Moreover, civic engagement initiatives facilitate networking opportunities for students and faculty, helping them build meaningful connections with community leaders and experts.
3. As for research opportunities, civic engagement projects often lead to valuable research opportunities for faculty members and students, contributing to academic excellence. Civic engagement, as it has been stated above in the first section of this white paper, should be the aim and the consequence of higher education, understood as the research and seek of true elements and common ground for dialogue, cooperation, solidarity,

democracy, and sustainable development for the human family and the environment preservation. Civic engaged-oriented research can (and should) be found at the very heart of each European university. Finally, universities can contribute to evidence-based policymaking and community development through research and data analysis.

4. Students and faculty can develop a wide range of skills, including leadership, communication, and problem-solving, through civic engagement activities. Such skills are core to the civic engaged student status and are part of the general competences expected to achieve at the end of the learning process.
5. Promoting civic engagement aligns with the values of social responsibility and ethical citizenship, which are essential in a democratic society. It also supports the resistance against different forms of violence, radicalization, polarization, and European disengagement in youths, while provide them reasons and motivations to endorse European identity without renouncing to local and minority identities.

Weaknesses

1. A general and very limited participation in these activities, since not all students and faculty may participate in civic engagement initiatives, leading to unequal opportunities for personal and academic growth. This limitation responds to different reasons (i.e., the actual possibility of participation in mobility programs due to economical or personal circumstances) and are common to many other initiatives.
2. Universities may lack the necessary resources, funding, and infrastructure to support comprehensive civic engagement programs. This lack aligns also with limited participation of students, staff, and faculty members, for

different reasons as seen above. Lack of engagement leads to reinforce that very same lack of engagement, ending in a loop of disengagement.

3. For these same reasons, it can be challenging to integrate civic engagement initiatives seamlessly into the academic curriculum, potentially leading to a disconnect between classroom learning and community engagement.
4. Measuring the impact and effectiveness of civic engagement initiatives can be complex, making it challenging to demonstrate their value, which constitutes the main assessment difficulty. Civic engagement umbrella concept does not help to overcome this difficulty at all.
5. As a final consequence of all the above, resistance to change makes some faculty and administrators resistant to the idea of diverting time and resources away from traditional academic pursuits.

Opportunities

1. Access to EU funding and grants for civic engagement projects can help universities expand their initiatives and address resource constraints. Since EU funds and grants are looking for university alliances and networks, it is easier for a European university to get such funds and grants.
2. Universities can collaborate with local governments, NGOs, and businesses to create meaningful partnerships and enhance the impact of their initiatives. This «localism»
3. Leveraging technology and online platforms can help universities reach a wider audience and facilitate remote civic engagement opportunities. Specially in European universities, since they must share a common framework for the transference, design, and development of courses and programs. The design of micro-programs, micro-credentials, minors, and joint masters, gives the perfect context to do it.

4. EU universities can learn from each other's best practices and experiences, fostering international collaboration and cross-cultural understanding, and encouraging internationalization at home initiatives to make non mobility students in civic engagement global activities.
5. Universities can involve alumni in civic engagement initiatives, taking advantage of their expertise, resources, and networks.

Threats

If universities do not prioritize civic engagement, these initiatives may lack the necessary support and commitment from top leadership. To prioritize them means to destinate budget, human resources, and structures, to the development of more civic-engaged actions.

Changes in government policies or political interference can affect the funding and autonomy of civic engagement initiatives. Paradoxically, apathy or disinterest among students and community members may hinder the success of civic engagement programs. This apathy, this lack of interest, are, at the same time, a consequence of the political «changes to nothing changes», the politics of polarization and radicalization. We must be sure whether civic engagement initiatives may compete for resources with other academic or administrative priorities within European universities. Universities may face ethical and legal challenges when engaging in certain civic activities, requiring careful navigation of potential conflicts. Where and which are the limits for civic engagement when individuals can understand as engagement to cast away migrant people or not to accept refugees within the country borders. The very same education tool for democracy and citizenship could be used as a weapon against the values and institutions were supposed to defend.

In conclusion, civic engagement initiatives in European universities have the potential to create positive impacts on both the educational experience of students

and the surrounding communities, but also in the reinforcement of democracies and the resistance against misinformation, polarization, and radicalism. However, they also face challenges related to resource constraints, participation rates, and integration into the academic curriculum, three angles of the same problem. Benefit from opportunities for collaboration, and funding, can help universities overcome these challenges and strengthen their civic engagement efforts.

III.2 University needs for an effective implementation of Civic Engagement.

This last section aims to present, in response to the SWOT analysis and the needs perceived during the development of the project, a series of proposals and measures that, within the context of a European University, will respond to these needs.

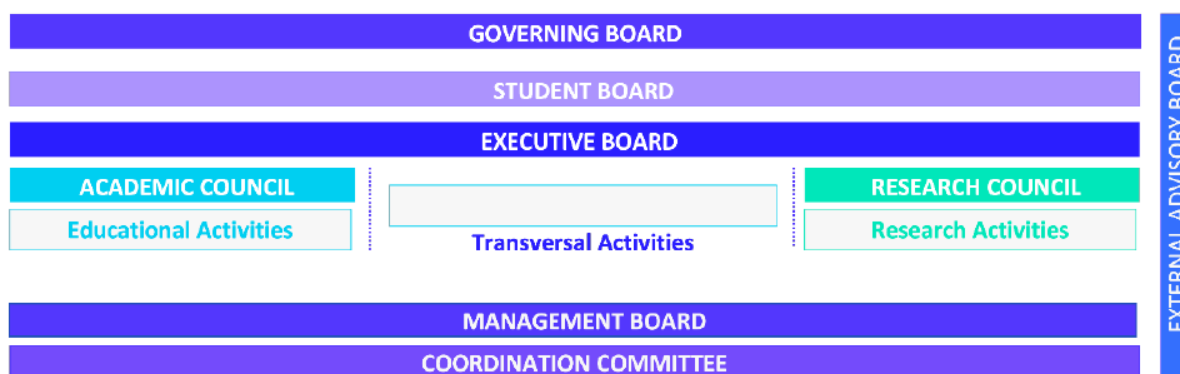
European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability (EU-CONEXUS) was created in 2019 and was one of the first 17 selected alliances. Today it is a fully functioning inter-campus alliance, formed by 9 universities in 9 countries and seeking to act as a fully-fledged European university to address societal, economic, environmental challenges in urban coastal areas in Europe (www.eu-conexus.eu).

EU-CONEXUS mission statement (March 2022) states that the alliance “promotes common European values and a strengthened European identity by bringing together a new generation of Europeans, who can cooperate and work within different European cultures, in different languages and across borders, sectors and academic disciplines. EU-CONEXUS is committed to creating a new institutional framework for higher education in Europe that allows for a truly European way of studying and carrying out research through institutional alignment and seamless mobility for all”.

EU-CONEXUS partners commit to a common set of values and ethical principles that are guiding their missions, including “We adhere to a concept and quality of education which has the objective to create RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS in professional and individual terms”.

EU-CONEXUS governance system replicates university's typical org. structures having joint or coordinated services for mobility, communication, academic offers, students' empowerment.

Governance and management structure



Despite not having any dedicated service related to (promotion of) civic engagement at EU-CONEXUS, the alliance has worked and working on several initiatives to contribute to the awareness of civic engagement at the alliance through education and students' empowerment.

First, the alliance includes the students in all governance structures and working groups. Student Board, consisting of the students from all member universities, is one of the main governance bodies with the vote in the Governing Board of the alliance. Being members of councils of working groups students can discuss and approve the academic and other offers related with them or propose theirs. This allows the alliance to be more student-centred and to train the students to be active in (self)governance, to be participatory, to be responsible for the actions the alliance is developing.

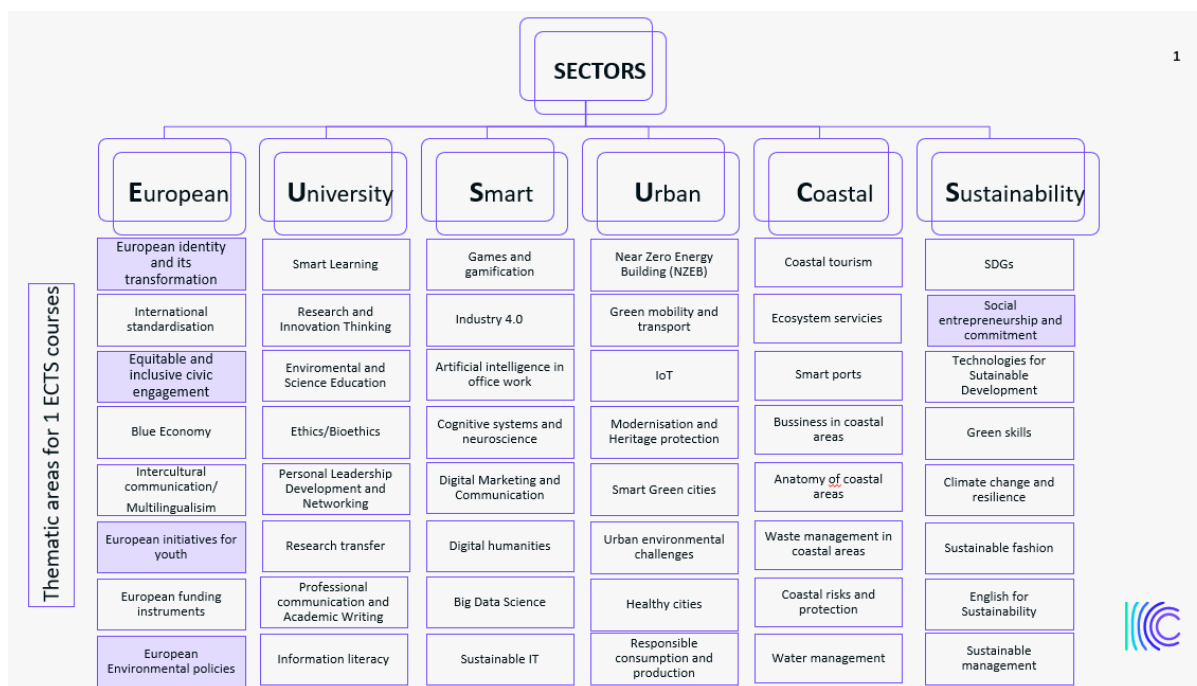
Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project "Student Civic Engagement European project" was submitted and funded Erasmus KA2 03 (2020-2023). This project aims to raise awareness, teach, and support youth who are interested in civic engagement. It aims to specify, in direct connection with students' needs, the most relevant solutions to better promote civic engagement (organisation of debates on,

engagement courses, workshops, experimentation of the “Engaged Student Status”).

Civic engagement directly and indirectly is addressed in joint academic offers (i.e., jointly developed and delivered, and accessible to all students of the alliance).

The Social Entrepreneurship programme (SEP) is an innovative and student-centred competition where students submitted innovative business ideas and gained mentorship support from an international organising team including experts from industry for their entrepreneurial ambitions. SEP was piloted in 2021-2022 academic year, and for most of the partner institutions, it was the first time that such a programme was offered to their students, especially in a multicultural setting. The programme has been so successful that a regular Minor course schedule will be established in the full roll-out phase. As an important part of the programme, social responsibility was part of the curricula of the programme and contributed to promotion values of civic engagement and developing of skills.

Responding to the goal to raise responsible citizens, new micro-programme on Smart urban Coastal Sustainability (to be developed in 2024) will include several micro credentials related with civic engagement such as Equitable and inclusive civic engagement, social entrepreneurship and commitment, or enabling the students to use European initiatives and instruments to proceed with their initiatives.



Summing up, EU-CONEXUS aims to include civic engagement training activities in the study programmes and other academic offers.

Extracurricular activities. As for practical actions, EU-CONEXUS invites the students and staff join some activities that may be referred to civic engagement: the university community is invited to be responsible and to take the action to maintain clean beaches of our seas (Call to Earth initiative: in 2022 the students were cleaning the beaches of 9 cities).

Students' active participation is also encouraged through Calls for students projects (<https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/1st-call-for-student-projects-supporting-student-engagement/>) where they are invited to present and get the funding for their activities. One of the projects type focusses on strengthening EU-CONEXUS students' community such as collaboration between student organisations, volunteering, projects in peer support, projects that promote equal opportunities, inclusiveness and gender equality among students and all other types of projects that promote collaboration between students of partner institutions.

Another example of raising awareness of civic engagement and training the youth to be active and responsible citizens of the society is international school contest (from 2020-2021) “Think Smart, Create Green” where pupils of secondary schools from EU-CONEXUS cities are invited to identify the challenges of the society and environment of their regions and to propose the actions to solve them.

EXECUTIVE CONCLUSSIONS.

- Civic engagement is a broad concept that encompasses various initiatives such as political participation, volunteering, mentoring, and community empowerment. It is considered a key objective in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to develop citizens with necessary competences and shared values. The concept has roots in philosophy, emphasizing the role of education in preparing individuals to be active democratic citizens. It also includes aspects of service and care for others, reflected in practices like volunteering and community service. Civic engagement has gained attention since the 1990s and is now an important aspect of higher education and focuses an important debate in about it places in curricula and learning outcomes. The European Charter on the Rights and responsibilities of Volunteers regulates volunteering at the EU level and recognizes its role in building fairer societies.
- The study discusses the legal framework for student civic engagement in the European Union and highlights the varying regulations among EU countries. While some countries have specific laws or regulations requiring civic activities by students, most student civic engagement is voluntary. The paper suggests that a European regulation for student civic engagement should be based on social responsibility, solidarity, active citizenship, and integral education. It also emphasizes that any activity violating human rights, human dignity, or democratic values should not be considered appropriate for student civic engagement. The paper raises questions about the application of student civic engagement in scenarios involving controversial topics or organizations. It also expresses concerns about the decision-making process and the recognition of credits in different universities within the European Higher Education Area.
- This paper emphasizes the importance of promoting civic engagement for human development and European citizenship. It discusses the concept of human development as a process of expanding people's choices and

highlights the need for more than just economic growth to measure development. Also explores the decline in the UN Human Development Index and the impact of crises on human development. It argues that civic engagement can contribute to improving human development by actively involving citizens in public life and addressing social challenges. The study also discusses the connection between civic engagement and European citizenship, emphasizing the need for a rational and sentimental connection to shared values. It suggests that civic engagement in universities can enhance social inclusion and equal opportunities, as well as contribute to a more just and equitable society. It is also important to consider the relevant role of schools in promoting European citizenship and the potential benefits of civic engagement in fostering a sense of identity and belonging. It concludes by outlining the qualities that civic engagement should have to contribute to European citizenship, including transnational performance, active involvement of citizens, and fostering a sense of solidarity and cooperation.

- The paper emphasizes the objectives of civic engagement for university students. It highlights the importance of promoting critical thinking skills, improving citizenship resilience against misinformation and disinformation, and preventing radicalization and polarization. These objectives underscore the need for higher education institutions to cultivate informed, socially responsible, and actively engaged citizens. These skills are essential in today's media landscape, where misinformation and disinformation are prevalent. Critical thinking allows students to discern between reliable and unreliable information, enabling them to make informed decisions and contribute to their communities in a meaningful way.
- Civic engagement in the university environment is crucial for fostering active citizenship and community involvement among students and staff. It

not only has a positive impact on student learning and development but also contributes to the overall well-being of the community. The role of staff in promoting civic engagement is essential, as they can serve as role models and mentors for students. Institutional budgets and priorities also play a significant role in supporting civic engagement initiatives. Adequate funding and resources are necessary to implement and sustain these initiatives effectively. Strategic planning and alignment of budgets with the institution's mission and goals are crucial for the success of civic engagement efforts.

- There is no legal obligation for universities in the Member States of the European Union to incorporate European civic engagement into their curricula. However, some states have taken steps to establish mechanisms for incorporating civic engagement into university studies, and some universities and teaching staff already consider civic engagement as part of the university's mission. There are no binding international instruments or national legislation that require the introduction of civic engagement content in the curricula of universities in the Member States. However, some specific exceptions exist, such as the French regulation that recognizes student engagement and allows it to be valued in a training course. Member States have adopted various soft law documents, such as national strategies and plans, that emphasize the development of creativity and civic engagement. While there is an open legal framework that does not prevent the integration of civic engagement in university curricula, activities must comply with legal and ethical operating principles. The influence of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Treaty on the Functioning of the Union is relevant to impulse the introduction of civic engagement in university curricula. Overall, without a legal obligation there are opportunities at both the national and European levels to promote and incorporate civic engagement in university studies: European campuses initiative is one of them.

- This paper demonstrates that Universities in European Union Member States are already actively engaged in promoting civic engagement through a variety of actions and strategies. However, this involvement varies in intensity. Among the experiences studied in the Universities involved in this project, civic engagement is implemented through service-learning programs, the creation of community engagement centres, participation in research projects addressing social challenges, and the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration. Students also play a role in promoting civic engagement through student-led initiatives and partnerships with local communities. Universities collaborate with government agencies, NGOs and community groups, engage in policy advocacy and seek external funding to support their initiatives. They also emphasize ethical leadership and the development of ethical decision-making skills, organize public lectures and educational outreach programs, and conduct monitoring and evaluation to measure effectiveness.
- This paper presents a SWOT analysis of civic engagement initiatives in EU universities, focusing on their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It acknowledges the challenges and opportunities of implementing civic engagement in a supra national university context and discusses the requirements for effective implementation. Additionally, it provides examples of initiatives undertaken by the EU-CONEXUS alliance to promote civic engagement.
- The incorporation of Civic Engagement curricula in European Universities is still a long process that will require progress in several directions. Some of them may be:
 - Establishing a legal definition of European Civic Engagement as a starting point at the European level.
 - The creation of a label or an initiative -which we could call Engagement for European Civic Engagement (E4ECE)- that socially

highlights the initiatives developed from the Universities and supports their continuity through financial aid.

- To promote the dissemination and implementation of methodologies that allow the incorporation of European Civic Engagement in university institutions and the establishment of an Education in Civic Engagement.
- Adapt the Credit Mutual Recognition System to allow the incorporation of European Civic Engagement.

REFERENCES

- Berger, B. (2009). Political Theory, Political Science, and the End of Civic Engagement. *Perspectives on Politics*, 7(2), 335-350.
- Bloom, B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. Longmans, Green.
- Boulianne, S. (2016). Online news, civic awareness, and engagement in civic and political life. *New Media & Society*, 18(9), 1840-1856. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815616222>
- Bronner, G. (2021). *Apocalypse cognitive*. PUF.
- Carpenter, S. (2021). *The ideology of civic engagement: Americorps, politics, and pedagogy*. SUNY Press.
- Farnell, T. (2020). *Community engagement in higher education: Trends, practices and policies: analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/071482>
- Gaventa, J. (2006). Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis. *IDS Bulletin*, 37(6), 23-33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00320.x>
- Heard, J., Scoular, C., Duckworth, D., Ramalingam, D., & Teo, I. (2020). *Critical thinking: Skill development framework*. Australian Council for Educational Research.
- John, B., Caniglia, G., Bellina, L., Lang, D. J., & Laubichler, M. (2017). *The glocal curriculum: A practical guide to teaching and learning in an Interconnected world*. [sic!] Verlag für kritische Ästhetik. [http://fox.leuphana.de/portal/en/publications/the-glocal-curriculum\(39dd54b8-3817-41a0-87c1-faa741eaa5ef\)/export.html](http://fox.leuphana.de/portal/en/publications/the-glocal-curriculum(39dd54b8-3817-41a0-87c1-faa741eaa5ef)/export.html)
- McDougall, J. (2019). Media Literacy versus Fake News: Critical Thinking, Resilience and Civic Engagement. *Medijske studije*, 10(19), 29-45. <https://doi.org/10.20901/ms.10.19.2>
- Millican, J., & Bourner, T. (2011). Student-community engagement and the changing role and context of higher education. *Education + Training*, 53(2/3), 89-99. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400911111115645>
- Mitchell, P., & Münch, F. V. (2019). #Contagion. En C. Borch (Ed.), *Imitation, Contagion, Suggestion: On Mimesis and Society* (pp. 107-125). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351034944>
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). What makes democracy work? *National Civic Review*, 82(2), 101-107. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ncr.4100820204>
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.