2. SERVICE-LEARNING INSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the concept of institutionalization of solidarity service-learning (SSL) in Higher Education (HE), the reasons that make it necessary, and the risks and tensions it implies. Based on over a decade of experience in CLAYSS's accompaniment to these processes, this work also presents some tools and knowledge developed in Latin America and other parts of the world.

1.1- Institutionalization of Solidarity Service-Learning in Higher Education. Concept

The decision to promote a solidarity-based institutional model can be relatively simple to put in writing. In fact, most of the institutional missions of Higher Education—Catholic or otherwise —include references to their social mission, the development of professional profiles committed to social and environmental realities, citizen participation and many other good intentions.

However, when the specialized literature refers to the "institutionalization" of solidarity service-learning[1] (SSL) in Higher Education, it points to the effective incorporation of this pedagogy as one way of managing, teaching, learning, researching and relating to the community adopted by the institution as part of its identity and mission (Jacoby, 1996; 2015; Furco, 2004; MacIlarth, 2013 and others).

We could define the authentic institutionalization of SSL as the incorporation of the pedagogy and practices of solidarity service-learning into the institutional policies and culture. It is not so much a question of how long the institution has been carrying out service-learning experiences, but rather to what extent the pedagogical proposal is part of the institutional identity and culture (Furco, 2020).

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[1]   We use this term, which emphasizes the dimension of solidarity in "service-learning" (Tapia et al., 2015), in English, service-learning or "community service-learning", "academic service-learning", "community based learning" and other similar ones.

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(Tapia, 2006 pp. 33-34). Each institution develops service-learning policies that are appropriate and integrated to their own institutional identity and culture, which means that various institutions may have very different SSL policies, even if they preserve the main characteristics of the pedagogy (Rubin, 1996 pp. 297-302).

SSL institutionalization is much more than a mere sum of projects. It requires not only the implementation of quality practices, but also the establishment of institutional policies that integrate the pedagogical proposal in the mission, practices and budgets.

Institutional policies contribute to the generation of institutional cultures (rituals, symbols, routines, values, expectations) and, in turn, institutional cultures drive or "shape" institutional policies. This is what forges the *identity* that the Higher Education Institution (HEI) builds inwardly and projects outwardly, since it is itself part of the community, the

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interweaving of actors that make up the social fabric. Just as there are HEIs known for their academic achievements in a given field of knowledge, or for their unique history, we can find HEIs that are renowned and valued for their identity of solidarity and the contribution that the SSL projects make to the students' comprehensive educa-

tion, establishing a virtuous circle between academic learning of excellence and solidarity service for the common good.

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For some authors, "institutionalization" means moving service-learning from the margins to the mainstream of the institution, becoming part of the academic structure of the institution, legitimized by faculty teams and managed by the university administration (Pickeral and Peters, 1996:2; MacIlrath and Puig, 2013 p. 274).

Furco and Holland point out that:
> "*Like most educational initiatives, service-learning attains institutionalization when it becomes a permanent, expected, valued and legitimate part of the intellectual and organizational core of the institution's culture. However, compared to other initiatives, service-learning institutionalization presents certain distinct features that challenge traditional conceptions of 'institutionalization'. More specifically, its multifaceted and multidisciplinary structure and the profound institutional impact it exerts require management teams to think innovatively about how to institutionalize this educational initiative*". (Furco & Holland, 2004 p. 24)

Furco presents a comparative table that illustrates the institutionalization processes, and explains how to characterize the experiences or projects within the framework of institutional cultures and policies.

Table 1. What does it mean to "institutionalize"?
(Furco, 2020, based on Kramer, 1998)

A MARGINAL SERVICE-LEARNING PRACTICE IS:	AN INSTITUTIONALIZED SERVICE-LEARNING PRACTICE IS:
Occasional	Routine (not occasional)
Isolated	Widespread
Restricted	Legitimized
Uncertain	Expected
Weak	Supported
Temporary	Permanent
At risk	Resilient

Furco (2003) identifies three crucial stages in the institutionalization processes of service-learning:

1. Critical Mass Building: when the work team that will promote service-learning at an institutional level is consolidating and the concept and practices in the HEI have not yet been sufficiently disseminated.

2. Quality Building: when part of the students and faculty have embraced the proposal and, even with inconsistencies, share the concept of service-learning and develop projects in partnership with the community as well as institutional knowledge in terms of student participation, and curricular articulations and strategies for the continuity and support of projects.

3. Sustained Institutionalization: when service-learning has become an integral part of the Institutional Educational Project (or similar).

Numerous cases show that these three stages can be verified in a consecutive and gradual way, "bottom-up", starting from the initiative of a few engaged faculty members, trained in the pedagogy, until it reaches a greater number of students and faculty, with the support of the authorities.

It is also true that, in certain documented cases, the initiative for promoting SSL emerged from a decision taken by the university authorities, who encouraged "top-down" teachers' training and the building of a critical mass.

In any case, whether the initiative arises "bottom-up" or "top-down", the evidence shows that the most successful and lasting SSL institutionalization processes take place when the "top-down" and "bottom-up" processes are brought together, when the creativity and commitment of the critical mass achieve recognition and support from the authorities and institutional policies, and when both the grassroots and the management of the institution coherently promote service-learning.

FIGURE 1: Institutionalization processes (Tapia, 2013 p.4; 2021)

INSTITUTIONAL POLICY DECISIONS:
Support, sustainability, assessment, visibility

SOLIDARITY SERVICE-LEARNING INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

BUILDING OF CRITICAL MASS:
Engaged faculty and students, partnerships, good practices

In these contexts, institutional policy decisions and the projects undertaken at grassroots level generate the adequate synergy to establish service-learning as part of the institutional identity.

▸ The authorities' support can provide sustainability and visibility to service-learning practices; it can create spaces for coordination that encompass all or most of the academic units; it fosters curricular articulation of solidarity practices; it offers training instances for faculty, students and community partners; it facilitates partnerships with community partners or state agencies; and it establishes quality standards and systems for monitoring and assessing practices.

▸ The existence of a critical mass of engaged faculty and students, already convinced of the proposal and implementing good service-learning practices with community partners, makes it possible to generate a "contagion effect" among colleagues and students, to show that the proposal is possible and effective and not just a new fashionable theory or something imposed by the authorities in office. It can enthuse and inspire other faculty members and students, and demonstrate—with facts—that it is possible to articulate work in the classroom with community practice.

The experience of multiple institutions reveals that, if service-learning is promoted exclusively by the authorities, without the participation of at least a small critical mass of students and faculty, it can become a mere intention with no impact on teaching practices or institutional life.

SSL institutionalization in HEIs takes time, management and resources, and it requires sustained, carefully planned processes, which—according to evidence—are developed over a minimum period of five to seven years (Furco & Holland, 2004 p. 34). In some institutions, it can take much longer. For example, in the massive and complex University of Buenos Aires, it took almost 30 years from the time SSL practices began to be institutionalized in some schools (the first, in the School of Dentistry, in 1998) until experiences were generalized in most academic units and the University, as a whole, institutionalized SSL as a policy through the creation of *Solidarity Educational Practices* (2010) and its implementation as of 2013 (See page 325 of this book).

In view of the fact that even the shortest processes normally last longer than the duration of the terms in office of university authorities, the alignment between political decisions and support from the critical mass is essential to enable the institutionalization processes to continue beyond the inevitable change of authorities.

In this regard, it can be stated that the critical mass of engaged faculty and students is crucial to ensure the continuity of the processes, particularly because these may face crises or interruptions in their development, due to the changes in the institution's administration or political management.

1.2- Rationale and characteristics of SSL institutionalization

Why is it necessary to develop service-learning institutionalization processes? Why is it not enough to have good service-learning practices in some courses or programs?

For the faculty and students who have sustained SSL for years without institutional support, there are many obvious answers to this question: institutionalization makes it possible to stop feeling marginal actors who address issues single-handedly; to count on paid time for planning, reflection and assessment of projects; to obtain academic recognition of the knowledge acquired within the community; to stop paying out of their own pockets for all the materials, travel expenses and other costs inherent to the project; to receive legal support from the institution; among many other reasons. Especially for the faculty involved, the lack of SSL institutionalization often entails an enormous overload of work, since the efforts invested in the projects are not usually acknowledged, neither academically nor financially.

Rubin highlights that also from the point of view of authorities and administrators, institutionalization offers major advantages. He points out that in the 1960s and the 1970s, in the United States, numerous state-funded university volunteering and service-learning programs emerged, of which—ten years later—little or almost nothing remained, as a result of political changes and their own overconfidence. Consequently,

> *"...administrators have learned to be wary of investing in programs that are administratively weak, tangential to the educational mission or of dubious service to the community. They seek to ensure that service-learning programs survive, even if the excellent volunteering coordinator changes jobs, the engaged faculty member assumes another position, the community organization is reorganized or the enthusiast student leader graduates"* (Rubin, 1996 p.297).

A number of community leaders also state that it is easier and more effective to create partnerships with the university when there is a centralized communication that facilitates access to multiple possible projects. In this respect, it is not unusual to see the case of a coordinator of a small community center on the outskirts of a large Latin American city, who had been approached, at different times, by faculty from four different courses of

a large university to propose four different projects for the children assisted at the center. The community had welcomed medical, dentist, educational and sports support offered by the students, but the community leader had been negotiating, for several years, different schedules and work arrangements with four groups of different faculty members and students separately, for fear of losing some of the support. Eventually, during the process of institutionalization of service-learning at the university, the four chairs found they were working in the same neighborhood and with the same center, so they decided to start interacting in a more coordinated way, thus facilitating the life of the center.

For several years now, a broad spectrum of service-learning specialists and leaders have agreed that:

> *"service-learning must be fully integrated into the mission, policies, practices and budgets of higher education in order to be viable and sustainable. (...) most service-learning champions believe that institutionalization is critical for service-learning to keep thriving over time. (...) if it is marginal and its promoters are busy struggling for survival, it is difficult to develop and sustain high quality courses (...) From a community perspective, it is irresponsible for the institution to encourage, or even allow, its staff to establish community partnerships for service-learning without institutionalizing the infrastructures necessary to sustain these partnerships responsibly and over time (Jacoby, 2015 p. 260).*

In his well-known self-assessment rubric, Furco establishes five major dimensions to assess the degree of institutionalization of service-learning in HEIs (2003):

1. Philosophy and mission of service-learning.
2. Faculty involvement and support in service-learning.
3. Student involvement and support in service-learning.
4. Community participation and partnerships with social and public organizations.
5. Institutional support for service-learning (Furco, 2003).

Each of these features, in turn, is broken down into 22 indicators (see chapter 3).

Summarizing these and other indicators, it can be claimed that high levels of service-learning institutionalization were achieved in a HEI when the following ten characteristics are verified (CLAYSS, 2013 pp. 33-34; Furco, 2003; Jacoby, 1996; 2015):

1. *The CLAYSS pedagogical proposal is a formal part of the educational project, and it is rooted in the institutional culture and identity:* SSL experiences are sustained by the institution at large and are part of what is normally done in that HEI. Regardless of the changes in faculty or management teams, SSL has be-

come a habitual way of teaching and learning, linked to research and recognized and valued as part of the institutional history, identity and culture.

2. *A substantial number of authorities and faculty know what service-learning is*, they can differentiate it from other pedagogical innovations and other forms of learning based on projects and experience; and they promote its inclusion in the institution's overall mission and in the professional work of the faculty involved

3. *The faculty involved in service-learning receive some kind of recognition for it:* this may include certifications or specific recognition, their inclusion in professional assessment processes, among others. The institution can offer specific incentives for project development, such as funds awarded in open competition, travel expenses, grants to receive specific training or to attend service-learning conferences, annual awards for best practices, and others.

4. *A significant number of courses and/or subjects offer opportunities to carry out service-learning projects.* Students can opt, throughout their studies, to participate in SSL projects linked specifically to their professional profile and articulated with the mandatory or elective curriculum. They receive academic credits for taking courses that include SSL projects and/or receive specific recognition for their participation in the projects (certificates of participation, recognition recorded in their file or transcript, etc.).

5. *Students embrace and lead the projects*: when a significant number of students are proud that their University teaches through engagement with reality; when it is common for the students themselves to lead the activities; when the Student Centers and other spheres of student representation explicitly accompany institutional policies that promote SSL; and when graduates continue to participate in or support the projects.

6. *Partner organizations share goals:* most of the civil society organizations or public agencies with which the HEI works are familiar with the concept of service-learning; they are aware of the goals that the institution pursues with regard to SSL projects; they have agreed on clear objectives for the supportive participation of students and assume the formative role that the activities are expected to play in the community. Both the HEIs and the representatives of the civil society organizations or public agencies are aware of and sensitized to the needs of the others, of the schedules, objectives, resources and capacities to develop and implement service-learning activities. There is broad general agreement between the goals of both parties and ample space is given to community partners to express their specific needs and to propose service-learning activities.

7. *There is an institutionally recognized coordination:* within the HEI, it is clear who are the faculty members or administrators who coordinate the institutional service-learning Program, the office in charge or the agency designated in the insti-

tution to promote SSL institutional development and ensure its continuity and sustainability. Faculty and students refer to this coordination, and the management staff collaborate with them fluently.

8. *Institutional support is offered for SSL promotion*: both from the institutional coordination and through various areas, faculty, students and partners are offered support and services to encourage the development of good practices for SSL, for example:

   ‣ Institutional instances of training and exchange are conducted for faculty, students and partners, for the development of quality projects.

   ‣ There are coordinated information mechanisms that allow the entire educational community (faculty and administrators, non-teaching staff, families, graduates, community partners) to sensitize and become familiar with the different SSL activities.

   ‣ There are institutional instruments that allow for monitoring, systematization and assessment of the service-learning practices that are being applied in the HEI.

   ‣ Collaboration between courses and academic units is facilitated to undertake multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary projects.

   ‣ Diagnosis and management of partnerships is facilitated to identify a significant number of projects around a problem or locality relevant to the community and the institutional project, in order to converge efforts and achieve more substantial impacts.

9. *The graduate's profile includes the dimension of social and citizen engagement:* not only in generic terms, but the competencies for applying knowledge and skills to community service are included in the specific personal profiles, and service-learning is valued as a strategy to acquire those competencies.

10. *An effective intra-institutional articulation is verified:* the institutional service-learning practices and programs contribute to articulating teaching, research and commitment to the environment, and to the active linkage and coordinated work among university vice-presidents' offices, secretary's offices or areas that manage teaching, research and extension/social engagement/USR/linkage with the environment.

1.3- Risks and tensions in SSL institutionalization

We deem the institutionalization processes not only necessary but indispensable, and in fact, the focus of Uniservitate is centered on the promotion of these processes.

At the same time, a realistic look requires taking into account the fact that, as with any other innovation process, SSL institutionalization processes do not develop in a lineal manner, and that almost inevitably they entail risks and tensions which need to be faced.

In the first place, resistance to change on the part of administrators and faculty often presents difficulties for any innovation that modifies the status quo, particularly in the more traditional universities. As long as SSL projects are isolated experiences carried out by "the usual idealists", they will be tolerated or even treated favorably. However, when they are presented as cross-cutting policies, they are often met with resistance. The most frequent instances of criticism and resistance can be grouped into three major issues:

▸ *Academic quality:* for those who still cling to the institutional paradigm of the "ivory tower" and the encyclopedic or more traditional teaching methods, all the time that students do not spend in the classroom, in front of books or screens, or in the laboratory, is a waste of time. They fear that service-learning institutionalization and community outreach will "lower the academic level" and distract faculty and students from study and research. Their conception of "excellence" is usually still based on the acquisition of contents and does not tend to value the development of competencies, which means that they do not value the specific contribution of SSL to the formation of professionals with the profiles required for the 21st century.

Faced with this challenge, the first step would be to honestly assume what can be true about this criticism. Not every solidarity or volunteering activity carried out in universities contributes to academic knowledge, nor does it constitute service-learning per se. Not every practice that is considered SSL is so, nor has it necessarily attained the required quality to have a positive impact on learning or academic quality.

Together with this acknowledgment, it is also necessary to show that current international research is sufficient evidence of the positive impact of quality service-learning practices on the students' academic development, and that it offers reliable assessment practices to assess the knowledge and competencies gained by students through SSL projects, as well as rigorous research associated with field activities.

Institutionalization processes make it possible to assess the diverse solidarity practices developed at the HEIs and accompany those that actually articulate learning and solidarity action, so that they reach the desired quality level and contribute, at the same time, to the resolution of community problems, to academic quality and to a comprehensive education.

▸ *The teaching role:* another frequent resistance is related to the perception that SSL projects imply an extra workload for the faculty, which clashes with their need to research and publish in order to advance in their careers. It is true that—especially in their early days—SSL practices can entail extra time commitment. At the same time, it is also true that implementing any innovation that enhances our teaching practices and the quality of higher education normally requires a significant investment of time, until what is new becomes habitual. Furthermore, in many cases the teaching workload could be considerably less if educators were capable of delegating protagonism to their students, who could normally take on many tasks related to the management and logistics of the projects which do not necessarily have to be undertaken by faculty members.

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▸ *The link between SSL and research* is, certainly, another critical issue for the projects' sustainability. Many critics of service-learning contrast the time devoted to addressing social issues with the time needed for rigorous research, and it is true that some service-learning practices do not link research and action. Quality SSL practices in Higher Education, on the contrary, can and should create opportunities for research, in particular, situated research and participatory action-research, as well as more traditional forms of research, while also providing spaces for the development of undergraduate and postgraduate theses on the issues addressed by the projects or the matters that need to be studied in order to offer a solution to those problems.

As numerous examples around the world demonstrate, not only is it not contradictory to conceive service-learning projects and publish academic papers, but cleverly designed projects do offer extraordinary opportunities to carry out pertinent and rigorous situated research, and to generate numerous publications and opportunities for students to complete their undergraduate thesis, dissertations or postdoctoral research. This is a major difference between service-learning and other kinds of social projects undertaken in HEIs as occasional or institutional volunteering, and it is a key factor to promote in institutionalization processes.

▸ *The link with the community:* Among the most recurrent criticisms to service-learning projects, we can include those that maintain that, while beneficial for students' learning and the development of competencies, it does not truly offer the community any significant contributions.

Unfortunately, we must recognize the existence of projects that, though appreciated as very positive for students, in fact contributed little or nothing to the quality of life of the communities, to the empowerment of their stakeholders or to local progress.

However, it is a shortcoming in the design of the project which surely did not sufficiently consider the objectives to achieve with the community, or did not enter into an authentic dialogue with the local referents that could have contributed to a better design and execution of the actions in the field. Quality service-learning projects place as much emphasis on the achievement of the goals agreed on with the community as they do on the achievement of academic goals. As is often stated, the hyphen that connects service and learning also functions as a beam scale in which both elements must strike a balance.

Here too, SSL institutionalization allows for the creation of mechanisms for selecting and strengthening partnerships, for assessing outcomes in the field and inter-institutional dialogues that make it possible to minimize the risks of organizing projects that fail in their community impact.

These and other criticisms, along with the general resistance to any change that implies modifying already established and known practices, are not uncommon. Nonetheless, the experience of numerous universities around the world shows that it is possible to overcome most of this resistance by bringing to light the positive impact of the evolution of good service-learning practices on students, on academic outcomes and on the links between the university and the territory

Something more complex and profound than resistance to curricular changes or new teaching and learning proposals is what some authors call the *immunity* to change, which can nestle even in the institutions that claim to be more progressive. J. E. Belderrain explains:

> *"As we very well know, in every organization or institution, when there is a desire to innovate, resistance to change always emerges as a recognizable and active force against those same changes.*
>
> *Immunity to change is something else, it is deeper, more powerful, it is a series of elements that form a constituent part of an organization, its rules, its institutionalized dynamics, its standardized languages, its instituted symbols. This set of things can pose very serious obstacles that hinder change.*

KEYS ▸ 4

Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education | *Service-Learning Institutionalization processes in higher education*

> *Richard Sennett wrote a great work called "Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation". The major thesis that underlies all of Sennett's work is that all modern institutionalism and the political and economic systems that derive from it (...) are more focused on competition among individuals and the need to control them than on the generation and promotion of the capacity, also natural, of individuals to be able to cooperate.*
>
> *Human beings are capable of collaborating, we need institutions to seek, encourage and strengthen those capabilities. To this end, we need to identify the elements of the institutional matrices, the molds of our institutions, which make us immune to change, which make us immune to adopting a culture of collaboration" (Belderrain, 2021).*

There is no denying that there is inevitable tension between service-learning as a pedagogy that aims to change education in order to change the world, a pedagogical philosophy founded on the ideas of fraternity and cooperation, with practices deeply rooted in contemporary Higher Education based on competition and individualistic materialism, or with forms of collectivism that repress personal and social initiatives, which persist in some parts of the world.

In fact, some of those who initiated the service-learning movement in the 60s as part of a countercultural and revolutionary movement tend to complain about what they call "pedagogification" of service-learning (Pollack, 2019 p. 35), and they view the processes of institutionalization with distrust because they see them as risks for the "domestication" of a revolutionary pedagogy, and its blending with what is "normal"; something that can turn service-learning into one more element of a conservative university bureaucracy.

However, even those who adhere to the most critical aspects of service-learning, like Butin and others, consider SSL institutionalization indispensable, precisely in order to have an impact as an agent of change (Jacoby, 2015:242-245):

> *"...the potential for service-learning... lies in embracing more than rejecting that same academy which the service-learning movement is striving to transform" (Butin, 2006 p. 493).*
>
> *"...the disciplining of a movement is a necessary prerequisite for having the ability to work within and through the specific mechanisms of higher education" (Butin, 2010 p. 23-24).*

Along the same lines, Butin cites the processes developed in American higher education in the fields of gender studies and African American studies. In both cases, social change movements became intellectual movements that were organized within university structures, and managed to achieve institutionalization as academic departments capable of acting and affecting both the structures of higher education and those beyond them.

Furco synthesizes this issue thus:

> *"...the way in which we have approached service-learning institutionalization has involved using it as a strategy to contribute to the academic achievements and other objectives within the present educational system—a system that, many of us agree, needs serious repair—. Still, this may not be the best role for service-learning. Can service-learning, perhaps, become the force that transforms the ways educational institutions function, challenging the epistemological and pedagogical regulations that guide current educational practices?" (Furco, 2011)*

In a Catholic institution, SSL should be a valued tool to overcome these contradictions, to reinforce our own identity and mission, to favor the integration between faith and life, theory and practice, a spirituality of service lived individually and one lived collectively as an institution and capable of being part of the personal and professional development of all students, offering a space for encounters and work in solidarity between those who profess the Catholic faith and those who do not.

In the specific case of Catholic universities, solidarity service-learning makes it possible, on the one hand, to articulate the values expressed in the identity and mission with the academic courses, research and social engagement activities (McCrabb, 2021).[2] At the same time, we cannot ignore that in many of our universities the formal curriculum—which teaches Theology, Ethics and Social Doctrine of the Church—can often collide with a secularized curriculum, which is not too veiled and subscribes to the search for individual "success", understood as the accumulation of material wealth, even in detriment of the others, the planet and the values of the Gospel.

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2   We offer the interested reader material focused on service-learning institutionalization processes in Catholic Institutions of Higher Education: a) RIDAS (2021). Monograph on Service-Learning Institutionalization in Education: https://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/RIDAS/article/view/38017/36555, b) II Uniservitate Global Symposium: Service-learning, comprehensive education and transformative spirituality, abstracts related to "Service-learning: experiences and processes of institutionalization":
https://www.uniservitate.org/category/symposium/experiences-and-institutionalization/

of all students, offering a space for encounters and work in solidarity between those who profess the Catholic faith and those who do not (Pushpalata, 2021; Tapia, 2021).

1.4- Lessons learned from accompanying and assisting institutionalization processes

Up to this point, we have mentioned general concepts about SSL institutionalization processes. We would now like to briefly highlight some lessons learned from the concrete accompaniment of specific institutionalization processes in certain universities.

CLAYSS, the Latin American Center for Solidarity Service-Learning, has been developing, since 2010, accompaniment and technical assistance programs for the institutionalization of SSL in universities in Latin American and other parts of the world (Ochoa, 2014; 2016; 2017)[3].

Within this framework, a tool was designed to analyze the degree of SSL institutionalization, conceived to facilitate the accompaniment and technical assistance processes for authorities and faculty, and which, we believe, can be useful in various cultural contexts, and in public and private, confessional or non-confessional HEIs. It can also be complimentary to other tools already mentioned, such as Furco's self-assessment rubric.

This tool (Ierullo, 2016 pp. 15-16) considers three fundamental dimensions to analyze the degree of institutionalization of SSL in HEIs:

1. **Institutional engagement with the SSL proposal:** This dimension analyzes decisions made by the university institution, regarding the implementation and development of SSL experiences.
2. **Consensus/support of the different institutional stakeholders for the implementation and sustainability of the solidarity educational experiences:** Through this dimension it is possible to account for the consensus and support built in relation to the different institutional stakeholders (faculty, students, authorities and community partners), with the aim of sustaining SSL experiences.
3. **Incorporation of service-learning in the academic proposal/culture of the institution:** This dimension expresses the degree in which the SSL pedagogical proposal becomes a daily practice inside the institution, through its incorporation as part of the academic proposal and professional profile. This dimension tends to account for the degree in which the SSL proposal is embodied in a par-

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3   https://clayss.org/publicaciones-experiencias

ticular way of approaching the teaching, extension, research and management processes, as pillars of university work.

The Solidarity Universities Program (CLAYSS) experience made it possible to establish a system of indicators through which to create an index to evaluate the situation of the HEIs that participate in the program and in the design of institutional support actions.

As regards the "institutionalization of SSL experiences", the index was built on the basis of the consideration of the three dimensions cited above (institutional engagement, consensus/support of different stakeholders and introduction in the academic proposal/ culture of the institution) and of indicators selected for each of them. On the basis of the application of an assessment grid, each variable was assigned a value that, in all the cases, ranged from 0 to 100, representing, in an increasing and direct manner, a higher degree or level of each of the studied variables. Based on the average, an index was obtained, which represents the level of SSL institutionalization in general. The indicators used for each dimension are the following:

Table 2: Dimensions and indicators of SSL institutionalization in Higher Education (Ierullo, 2016 p. 23)

VARIABLE	DIMENSIONS		INDICATORS
SSL Institutionalization level in Higher Education	Institutional engagement to the SSL proposal		Existence of resolutions or other legislation in the university which regulate/establish service-learning.
			Degree to which solidarity educational experiences are mandatory for the university students.
			Allocation of economic resources for solidarity educational experiences on the part of the university (resources and frequency).
			Designation of management positions for the coordination/monitoring of experiences.
	Consensus/ support of the different institutional actors for the implementation and sustainability of the solidarity educational experiences	Faculty	Number of participating faculty.
			Diversity of participating faculty (according to departments/colleges/ schools).
			Degree of familiarity with university experiences of faculty participating in CLAYSS training.
		Authorities	Involvement of authorities in project development.
			Participation of the university authorities in CLAYSS training sessions.

		Students	Number of participating students.
			Diversity of participating students (according to departments, colleges, schools).
			Student participation in CLAYSS training activities and field visits.
		Community partners	Number of linkages.
			Types of linkages/partnerships.
			Formalization of agreements with organizations/agencies.
			Participation of community leaders in CLAYSS training sessions at the university.
	Incorporation of SSL in the institution's academic proposal/culture.		History of the service-learning experience in the institution.
			Institutional incorporation of service-learning practices.
			Relationship between the experiences carried out in the field by students and the professional profile.
			Designation of teaching positions for the coordination/monitoring of experiences.

The accompaniment and analysis of SSL institutionalization processes from the Solidarity Universities Program, and the CLAYSS experience in general, allow us to identify five critical issues (Ochoa, 2020):

1) The role of government agencies in HEIs

It refers to the role played by authorities and government agencies in the design, implementation and evaluation of institutional SSL policies, pointing to at least three possible scenarios:

▸ Policy vacuum: SSL activities dependent, basically, on isolated academic units, faculty or student initiatives.
▸ Poorly articulated policies: SSL activities dependent on peripheral organizations with little decision-making power. Fragmented or divergent policies: activities and organizations dependent on diverse authorities.
▸ Clearly articulated institutional policies: an area directly dependent on the University President's Office, the Vice-President's Office, the Secretary's Of-

fice or a specific Directorate to coordinate and articulate SSL activities and projects. Coordinating organizations for the missions of the university and SSL: teaching, research, management (Extension/USR/Engagement); pastoral (in the case of CHEIs).

In order to formulate articulated policies, coordinated to ensure a comprehensive action, it is essential to map the SSL initiatives already underway in HEIs (e.g., geographical location, thematic grouping, and identification of community partners/natural leaders, capable of collaborating, articulating, helping to improve and contributing to the generation of new initiatives). Within this framework, the role of authorities in the hierarchy of the university's social mission is a key factor, highlighting priorities, getting involved in the selection of the leaders of the process and incorporating them in decision-making environments, creating spaces for direct dialogue with the president of the university and other relevant authorities.

2) Critical mass building

This refers to the need to invest human, material and economic resources in teacher training programs and SSL practices/projects/experiences; as well as in systems of teacher recognition, incentives for student protagonism and training and accompaniment programs for local partners.

3) Focus on initiatives vs. free initiatives

This refers to the need to prioritize and rank SSL initiatives within the framework of a strategic institutional plan, or another management tool available to the HEI. What is central here is the diagnosis "outside" the institution (recognizing community stakeholders and their demands) and "inside" (recognizing which demands can/should be addressed as part of the students' education). Within this framework, a "central/crosscutting project" can coexist with free initiative projects.

4) Assessment, validation and visibility of good practices

This refers to the revision of curricular contents, faculty assessment and promotion criteria, and students' assessment. It alludes to mechanisms of validation and visibility of SSL good practices as constituent aspects of this process.

5) Support in local and international networks

This refers to the need to rely on dialogue and mutual trust, on the recognition of others, their context and history. Sharing SSL experiences and institutionalization models among colleagues, relying on local networks, regional hubs and global experiences.

Some final reflections on institutionalization processes

Authentic SSL institutionalization not only modifies institutional culture, but it also contributes to generating a culture of solidarity both inwards and outwards, in the link between the HEIs and other social actors or organizations.

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Experiences conducted in different latitudes evidence a series of useful insights (Ierullo, 2016 p. 22) that are expressed below:

‣ Institutionalization entails a transition **from isolated actions to institutional decisions**, with leaderships legitimized by an engaged critical mass that contributes to the multiplication of service-learning projects.

‣ **Institutionalization is not achieved in the short term,** but rather implies a series of measures sustained over time and embodied in intentional decisions on the part of the different institutional stakeholders.

‣ **Institutionalization is accomplished through intentional actions on the part of administrators, faculty, students and community partners.** It is not a product of chance, but derives from sustained and planned actions. Those actions are expressed in institutional regulations and procedures, in the allocation of economic and human resources. Consequently, the institutionalization process calls for political, conceptual and management agreements. It involves the students' motivation and support for the proposal, and the establishment of formal partnerships with civil society organizations, public or private entities that adhere to the pedagogical proposal and are partners not only for the purpose of receiving help from the university but also to intentionally become training spaces for students.

▸ **Institutionalization implies actions inside the institution** (recognition, financing, establishment of internal bodies for its monitoring, assessment and everyday support of practices, curricular and study program reforms, etc.) and outside the institution (creation of partnerships, actions to render the project visible and others).

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[1] Usamos este término, que enfatiza la dimensión solidaria del "aprendizaje-servicio" (Tapia y otros, 2015), en inglés service-learning o también "community service-learning", "academic service-learning", "community based learning" y otras similares.

 [3] Ofrecemos al lector interesado materiales ampliatorios focalizados en los procesos de institucionalización del aprendizaje-servicio en las Instituciones Católicas de Educación Superior: a) RIDAS (2021). Monográfico sobre Institucionalización del aprendizaje-servicio en la Educación Superior:

https://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/RIDAS/article/view/38017/36555, b) II Simposio Global Uniservitate: Aprendizaje-servicio, educación integral y espiritualidad transformadora, resúmenes referidos al eje "Aprendizaje-servicio: experiencias y procesos de institucionalización": https://www.uniservitate.org/category/symposium/experiences-and-institutionalization/

[4] https://clayss.org/publicaciones-experiencias