

## Editorial: Civic Engagement in Higher Education Institutions in Europe

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*Published in:*  
Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung

*DOI:*  
[10.3217/zfhe-13-02/01](https://doi.org/10.3217/zfhe-13-02/01)

Published: 01/01/2018

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Gerholz, K.-H., Backhaus-Maul, H., & Rameder, P. (2018). Editorial: Civic Engagement in Higher Education Institutions in Europe. *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung*, 13(2), 9 - 19. <https://doi.org/10.3217/zfhe-13-02/01>

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## **Editorial: Civic Engagement in Higher Education Institutions in Europe**

### **1 Civic Engagement in Europe**

Over the last decade, the concept of Civic Engagement in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) has led to lively discussions. Nevertheless, a broad range of understanding of what Civic Engagement means for HEI can be observed. Several terms are used to describe the phenomenon, such as Civic or Third Mission on the institutional level or Service Learning, Community Service or Community Based Research on the teaching and research level (BERTOLD, MEYER-GUCKEL & ROHE, 2010). Civic Engagement is a “complex and polyonymous concept” (JACOBY, 2009). Based on these various approaches, two common frameworks of Civic Engagement can be portrayed: On the one hand, the fostering of HEI role in their community and civil society respectively. On the other hand, the aim to educate students to become active and responsible citizens (GERHOLZ & HEINEMANN, 2015).

The first approach addresses the HEI engagement, their activities and cross sectoral collaborations and interactions with civil society, public and non-profit organizations (WATSON, HOLLISTER, STROUD & BABCOCK, 2011). The aim is to transfer knowledge and insights between different scientific fields on the one side and society on the other side. In a concrete perspective HEI should make specific contributions to community development and academic research and teaching will

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be enriched by the knowledge and experiences of the civil society. However, this perspective raises the question what the legitimate role or mandate of HEI is in society.

The second approach focuses on preparing students to be civically engaged citizens in society and fostering an understanding for acting in a civil society. The most discussed concepts to reach this aim are Service Learning and Community Service. The idea is that students participate in concrete activities that fulfil societal and community needs. A structured reflection of such activities like Service Learning and Community Service fosters a deeper understanding of academic content and the students' understanding of civil society. These approaches are influenced by the educational philosophy of Dewey and his idea that a democratic society needs engaged citizens (DEWEY, 1966; PUTNAM, 2000).

Apart from these points, the debate of Civic Engagement in teaching and research is at the beginning. Experts are talking about different aspects and try to experiment with Civic Engagement more in teaching than in research. However, more normative discussions than concrete measures on the activity structure of HEI can be observed. But knowledge transfer as a core of Civic Engagement requires reflected activities and research. Both the outlined observations and the conceptual framing represent the starting point of this special issue and lead to the following priorities.

## 2 Priorities

Based on the Civic Engagement discourse in Europe, we consider four priorities to structure this emerging research field: (1) traditions, (2) institutionalization, (3) conceptualization and (4) meaning and effects.

### *Perspective 1: Traditions of Civic Engagement and the Third Mission of HEI*

The discourse about Civic Engagement can be seen as a source of orientation for shaping the HEI mandate in a given society. The origin of this discourse is primari-

ly set in the USA (BACKHAUS-MAUL & ROTH, 2013), where HEI traditionally have a stronger community orientation. In most European countries, independence and liberty of HEI in research and teaching are important legal principles. Due to the historical development of different welfare regimes types, the understanding of civil society and the characteristics of Civic Engagement vary within Europe (SALAMON & ANHEIER, 1998; ZIMMER & PRILLER, 2001). Thus, about a decade ago, the question arose how the concept of Civic Engagement can be interpreted by HEI in Europe – by adding a new Third Mission to HEI besides teaching and research or as an integrated part of teaching and research.

### *Perspective 2: Institutionalization of Civic Engagement in HEI*

On the institutional level, the discussion of Civic Engagement affects HEI in their organizational structure and activities. It can be observed that in mission statements of HEI, for instance, Civic Engagement and Third Mission are exclusively pronounced. Entities with the assignment to foster Civic Engagement activities inside and outside HEI are generated. Job profiles for representatives of Civic Engagement, Service Learning and Third Mission are created. Overall, political or stakeholder initiatives are established to foster Civic Engagement in the landscape of HEI (e.g. funding programs like ‘Campus and Community’ from the Association of Founders for Science in Germany, the National Coordinating Center for Public Engagement in the UK or the German Higher Education Network Education through Responsibility). Furthermore, Civic Engagement plays an important role in HEI regarding the organizational strategy as well as the accreditation processes. For instance, sustainability and social responsibility standards requested by international accreditation organizations can serve as drivers for the implementation of Community Service and Service Learning programs. Overall, an institutionalization process based on the Civic Engagement approach can be observed in HEI all over Europe.

*Perspective 3: Conceptualization and integration of Civic Engagement in study programs and curricula*

One aspect in the Civic Engagement discourse is to prepare students for their role in civil society. There are different ways to integrate Civic Engagement into the existing study programs and curricula. The most established concepts are Service Learning and Community Service. In Service Learning courses students participate in service projects, which correspond to community needs and have links to curricular contents (BACKHAUS-MAUL, EBERT, SATTLER & ROTH, 2015). A long research tradition of the effectiveness and the design of Service Learning and Community Service can be observed in the US. Nevertheless, the results of these studies are not directly transferable to different and heterogeneous European contexts (e.g. learning and teaching tradition, understanding of society and Civic Engagement). Furthermore, the existing studies mostly investigate in a general comparison between Service Learning courses and traditional courses. From an instructional point of view, it is also important to examine the effects of Service Learning arrangements on students' developments (GERHOLZ et al., 2017).

*Perspective 4: Meaning and effects of Civic Engagement for civil society*

Community Service programs encourage students to engage in civil society activities with an overarching purpose of improving the well-being of communities and addressing their social needs (GERHOLZ & HEINEMANN, 2015; MACKERLEBIXA, RAMEDER & PATZL, 2015). But is Civic Engagement in HEI meaningful and effective for civil society and Non-Profit-Organizations in general and communities and citizens in particular? This question highlights a key blind spot in the debate concerning Civic Engagement in HEI. To date, Civic Engagement in HEI is mostly discussed from an academic viewpoint (learning success, education policy). However, an opposite viewpoint was chosen in this perspective by instead focusing on the meaning and effects of Civic Engagement in HEI for civil society.

### 3 Overview of the contributions

The contributions of the issue reflect on the mentioned perspectives and can be structured as follows.

#### *Institutionalization of Civic Engagement*

*Brandt, Schober, Schultes, Somoza & Spiel* provide a unique perspective of a university and the different viewpoints concerning the chances and risks of a Third Mission-policy. They conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with all 19 deans and 23 actors in the field of Third Mission at the University of Vienna. Furthermore, they did a university-wide online survey to capture current Third Mission-activities.

*Meyer & Sporn* deal with the concept of Third Mission and the consequences for the legitimacy of universities. Based on trends and pressures for HEI towards the Third Mission, they present results of a case study in Austria. At the end, Meyer & Sporn classify their results in the theoretical light of the neo-institutionalized approach and describe isomorphic implications.

#### *Service Learning as learning approach for Civic Engagement*

*Gerholz, Holzner & Rausch* discuss the question where the civic responsibility lies in Service Learning. Based on a literature review, the authors portray that different understandings of civic responsibility exist as well as the diverse empirical results that have been published. Thus, they argue for an explorative empirical way and explore key situations in Service Learning which encourage the students to think about Civic Engagement in society. The results of their explorative, process-oriented study show that both the interaction with community partners and the scientific work on the service project influence the students' attitude concerning Civic Engagement.

The contribution of *Braßler* examines the potential of Service Learning to foster interdisciplinary skills. To do so, she presents empirical results of a pre-post study in an interdisciplinary Service Learning arrangement. The findings show that stu-

dents' development of interdisciplinary competence, self-awareness and civic activism was higher in the interdisciplinary Service Learning course than in traditional courses.

*Mordel, Burger, Heckmann & Horz* focus on the lecturers and the teaching skills necessary to implement Service Learning in HEI. They present an academic development approach to foster teaching skills for Service Learning courses. In detail, a workshop concept with learning outcomes, contents and methods is described. The evaluation of the workshop shows the relevance of planning and implementation in Service Learning courses.

Focusing on pre-service teacher education in Geography *Schulze, Kanwischer & Wolff* present in their workshop report findings from a university project creating a Service Learning setting for students with children and adolescents in an urban district of Frankfurt. The findings from the accompanying research show an increase in students' content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and social-spatial awareness. So far Service Learning seems to be a suitable strategy for academic learning in geography and civic participation.

*Resch* presents a qualitative study conducted in six European universities. The study evaluates students' experiences in Service Learning programs and the relevance of their experiences for their skill development and work life. Highlighting the relevance of emotions in experiential learning, the research design is based on students' narratives, combining memoirs and logbooks, as well as direct observations of counselling sessions. The findings indicate that students' roles as engaged citizens were strengthened and their worldviews changed. Future occupational paths became more concrete and emotional learning took place.

#### *Implementation of concepts of Civic Engagement*

Based on the World Citizen School model at the University of Tübingen, *Whilenda* describes how Civic Engagement of student initiatives can be implemented at HEI. Based on the overall aspiration of the World Citizen School, students' activities to create a social welfare are presented. In addition, the learning approach in a self-

organized and project-based setting is explained. During the reflection process, transfer potentials of the World Citizen School are identified.

With the concept of Active Citizenship, *Geier* describes a teaching approach to prepare students for their role in society, enhance their democratic skills and enable them to act as socially responsible citizens. In contrast to the term Service Learning, Active Citizenship learning focuses more on deepening the understanding of democracy in the sense of a democratic, citizenship-based society in accordance with human rights. Based on the competence model of a democratic culture described by the Council of Europe, *Geier* illustrates the purpose and process of the implementation of *active citizenship learning* in the new primary school curriculum of the Salzburg University of Education.

The interpretation of statistics in a civic perspective as “civic statistical thinking” is the object of the workshop report from *Biehler, Frischemeier & Podworny*. In order to enhance Civic Engagement, schools should educate children to be self-confident citizens in mathematics, especially in the field of statistics. With this goal in mind, they designed a university course in pre-service teacher education (“statistical literacy in mathematics classrooms”). In the report, they describe their experiences and how the course should be redesigned.

## 4 Outlook

First of all, the papers gathered for this special issue have an implicit statement in common: we need to talk concrete and analytical about Civic Engagement activities, approaches and programs on a European and national level without celebrating only normative beliefs and visions. Based on our observations, it is not surprising that most of the contributions to this special issue are workshop reports, which reflect the current discussion of Civic Engagement in Europe, particularly in German speaking countries. All the working papers illustrate in impressive ways that the knowledge transfer between HEI and society takes part in academic teaching and could be useful in research. But until now, only a few research projects on



single aspects of this subject have been done. The research field has been wide open for years but it is still nearly empty. In our opinion, one central aim of Civic Engagement is the research-based knowledge transfer between HEI and civil society. Civil society offers social challenges and experiential practical knowledge, which have a high potential to enrich teaching and research. The HEI or more precisely their personnel (lecturers, students, researchers, etc.) can be shaped into valuable contributors to solutions for relevant social problems. Nevertheless, when we are talking about knowledge transfer between HEI and society, we are still talking about experiments, irritations and changes in HEI as well as in the community.

This special issue about Civic Engagement in HEI in Europe presents workshop reports and scientific papers which describe the starting point of a new field of empirical and theory oriented research. When we are talking about Civic Engagement in HEI in the near future, we are not talking about social action but about knowledge transfer between HEI and civil society. And from a societal perspective it will be essential to talk about the sense and the impact of knowledge exchange between civil society and Non-Profit-Organizations in different European countries. This special issue could help that the debate about Civic Engagement of HEI in Europe is ongoing.

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