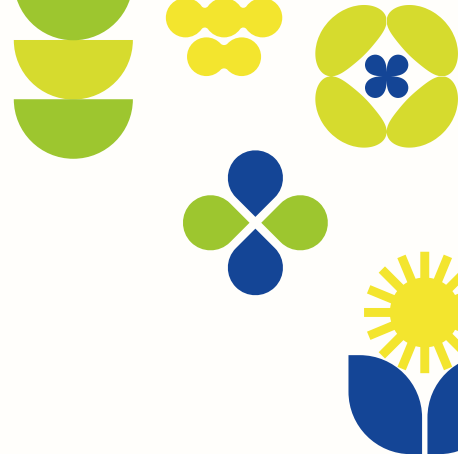


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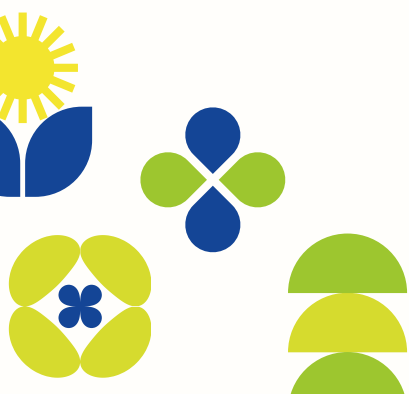
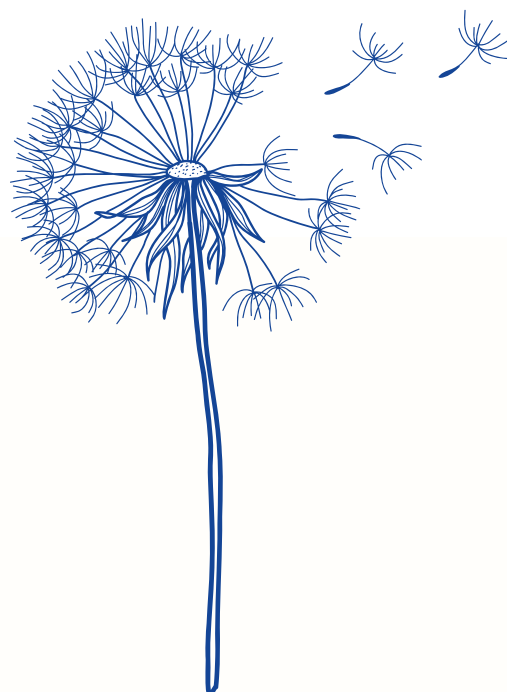


SERVICE-LEARNING FOR EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A HANDBOOK FOR EDUCATORS

BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH
PRACTITIONERS

AUTHORS: SEED CONSORTIUM





2026

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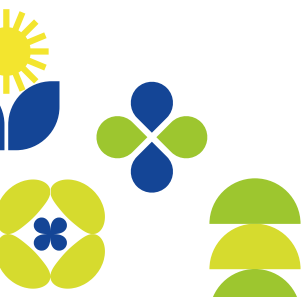
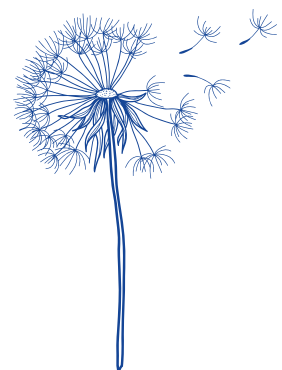
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1. ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook has been created to **support pedagogues** who wish to integrate Service-Learning (S-L) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into their practice. It is designed as both a **conceptual introduction** and a **practical tool**, so you can navigate it in the way that best fits your needs, interests, and teaching context.

1.1 OUR COMMUNITY

Teachers:

Whether you are new to S-L or already experienced, this handbook will provide you with step-by-step guidance, tools, and examples for connecting classroom learning with sustainability challenges.

School leaders:

You will find insights into how S-L and ESD can be supported at the whole-school level, including ways to foster partnerships with civil society organizations and to encourage a culture of civic engagement.

Multipliers, teacher trainers and lecturers:

The handbook offers conceptual foundations and best practice cases that can be integrated into educational programs, helping pedagogues develop the competences they need to apply S-L for ESD.

Teacher trainees and students:

For those preparing to become educators, the handbook provides accessible entry points into S-L and demonstrates how ESD can be put into practice through concrete projects.

HOW TO APPROACH THIS HANDBOOK

As a step-by-step guide:

If you are planning to run a S-L project from scratch, you may choose to read the handbook in order, moving from understanding the concepts to planning, implementing, and reflecting on your project.

As a resource toolbox:

If you already have experience with S-L or sustainability education, you can dip into the methods, tools, and case studies whenever you need inspiration or specific activities.

As a training resource:

For teacher trainers and institutions, the handbook can serve as a curriculum component in seminars and workshops. Exercises, examples, and conceptual sections can be adapted for group work and reflection with teacher trainees.

As a source of inspiration for school leaders:

Use the handbook to identify ways to embed S-L and ESD in your school's strategy, to build sustainable partnerships, and to encourage a culture of engagement among staff and students.

1.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE HANDBOOK

This handbook is unique in that the recommendations it contains are both **research-led and based on the experience of practitioners**. This means that the theoretical principles are always aligned with the real-life experiences of experienced educators. For better readability of this manual, references are not included in the running text. You will find corresponding references in the bibliography.

We have taken the key concepts, their mutual enrichment, and their significance for today's teaching from the **latest research** and base our work on current findings. The chapters on planning and implementing projects, with their step-by-step instructions for designing and carrying out S-L projects on sustainability topics, are based on both reference works and **interviews with experts**.

The examples and case studies also **show real projects** from schools in Germany, Romania, and other countries to illustrate how the approach can be implemented in different contexts and under different conditions. The principles are always designed to be adaptable.

The SEED consortium conducted ten guided individual interviews with educators from different contexts. These were transcribed and evaluated using coding in accordance with qualitative content analysis.

In addition, an international group discussion (focus group) was moderated to gain insights into transnational Service-Learning projects in the context of ESD. Four teachers from Germany and Romania participated in the focus group.

1.3 OUR INVITATION

This handbook is intended as a living resource that you can turn to at different points in your teaching journey. Whether you are beginning with small classroom activities or planning a whole-school initiative, the materials here are designed to support you. Above all, we invite you **to approach S-L and ESD with openness and creativity**.

Every project, every partnership, and every reflection contributes to a common goal: to give all participants both a **critical understanding** and a sense of **self-efficacy** in shaping a sustainable future.

2. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the world of Service-Learning! In recent years, educators around the world have faced increasing pressure to make learning more meaningful, relevant, and responsive to the challenges of our time. Topics like sustainability, climate change, civic engagement, and global citizenship have moved to the forefront of education agendas. Teachers, school leaders, and policymakers alike are asking an important question: **How can we empower students** to become active, responsible citizens who understand the world and know how to change it for the better?

One promising answer is to **combine ESD and S-L**. ESD, on the one hand, is an educational concept whose overarching goal is to develop creative skills. S-L, on the other hand, is a form of learning that works in many ways to develop these skills. The combination of both in particular can greatly enrich teaching and learning processes.

This handbook aims to **introduce teachers to the concept of S-L**, especially in the context of sustainability education. It is designed for multipliers and educators who are looking for **inspiration and guidelines**.

2.1 OVERVIEW SERVICE-LEARNING (S-L)

Service-Learning is an educational approach that combines **community engagement** with **academic learning**.

Participation

In projects—often in collaboration with civil society organizations—learners address the real needs of the community. These projects are not extracurricular activities or volunteer work, but are embedded in the curriculum and linked to clear learning objectives. Participation in S-L means that students are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and reflection of projects. They are co-creators who take responsibility and thus combine technical learning with real-world engagement. This ranges from generating ideas to autonomous project management and strengthens their sense of responsibility and social skills.

Action and reflection

Crucially, S-L is not just about action. Reflection is an integral part of the process. Students are encouraged to think deeply about their experiences, analyze the social, economic or environmental issues involved, and connect their learning to their own values and identities. This combination of action and reflection supports both personal development and academic achievement.

Skill development

Research has shown that S-L helps students develop key competences such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and civic responsibility. It also promotes motivation and engagement, as students feel that their learning has purpose and impact.

2.2 OVERVIEW EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD)

ESD is a holistic approach to teaching that **equips learners** with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values **needed to create a more sustainable future**.

It emphasizes the interdependence of environmental, social, and economic systems and **empowers and encourages learners** to take informed action on global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and inequality.

Teachers across Europe and beyond have expressed a growing need for guidance on how to effectively implement ESD in their classrooms. While many schools are committed to addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), educators wish for concrete ideas for how to translate these abstract goals into concrete, experience-based learning. **That is where Service-Learning comes in.**

2.3 DEMAND AND SUPPLY

Several factors led to the development of this handbook and the broader project it supports:

Teacher Demand

Teachers in Germany, Romania, and other countries are repeatedly expressing their interest in implementing ESD but often lack practical tools and training. This project will directly respond to that need by offering teachers concrete strategies and examples.

Network Momentum

Within the German Service-Learning Network, many educators and institutions are beginning to explore how to use Service-Learning to support sustainability goals. However, structured guidance on how to integrate ESD into Service-Learning was missing—until now.

(International) Collaboration

The transnational projects “Understanding Service-Learning” and “Service-Learning for Democracy in Europe” are revealing a growing interest in cross-border educational partnerships. Teachers increasingly want to connect with peers across Europe to share ideas and develop international Service-Learning projects.

Curriculum Development

At Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich, new study programs in ESD and Sustainability are being launched. This handbook will support those efforts by offering foundational knowledge and best practices for using Service-Learning in academic and teacher-training contexts.

This handbook does not deal with the development of a new educational methodology. Rather, it focuses on facilitating S-L as a suitable method for implementing ESD in an innovative and practical way.

In this handbook, you will find:

An overview of the theoretical foundations of Service-Learning and its connection to ESD

Practical tools for planning and implementing Service-Learning projects in various subject areas

Case studies and best practice examples from schools across Europe

Tips on how to support students' personal growth

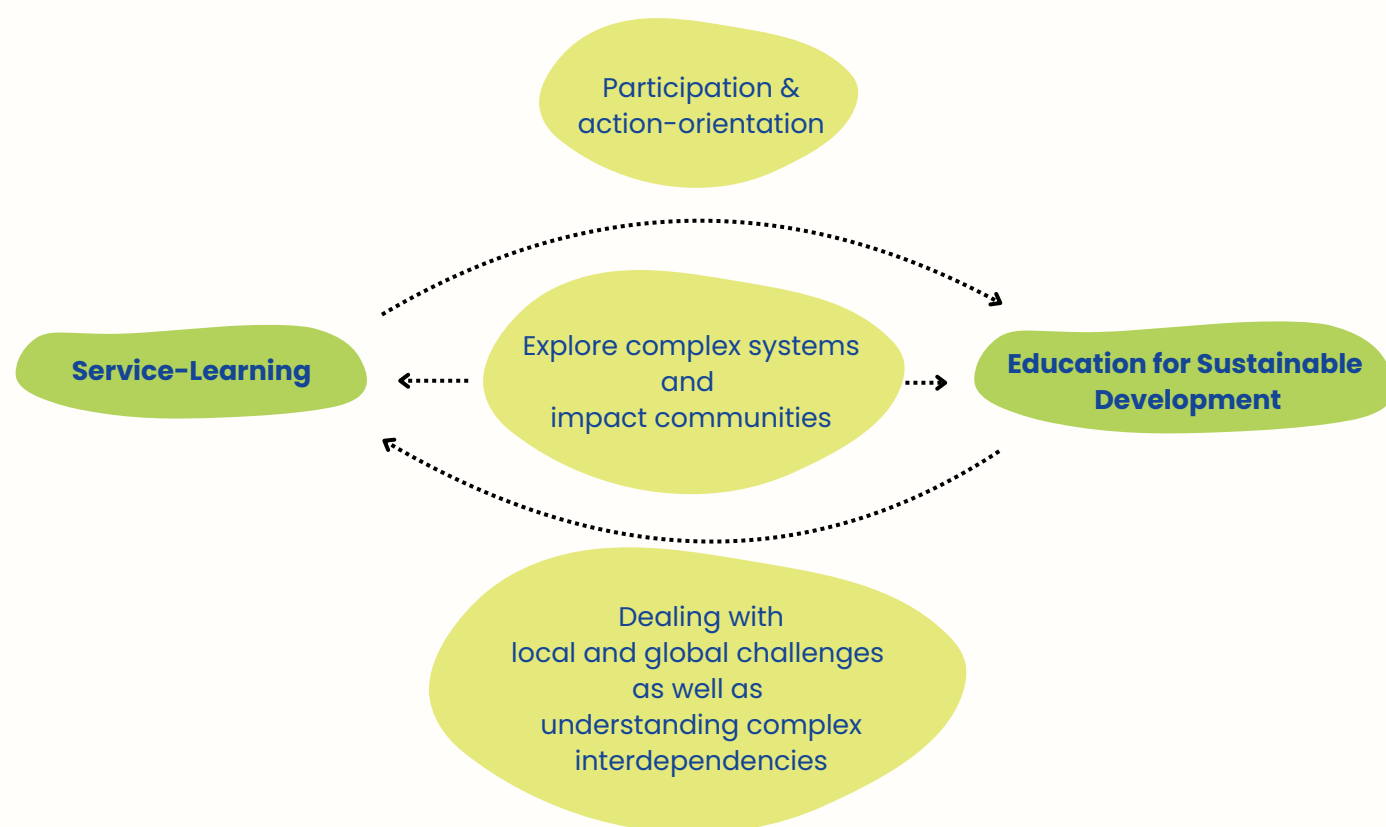
Throughout the handbook, we emphasize the **importance of student participation, democratic values, and real-world engagement**. We also **provide ideas** for assessment, reflection activities, and integrating S-L into existing curricula.

2.4 THE POWER OF INTEGRATING S-L IN ESD

This project is based on the insight that S-L and ESD can mutually enrich one another. By integrating S-L projects in ESD teaching practices, students can **engage directly** with global challenges while developing a deeper understanding of sustainability. At the same time, S-L makes ESD more experiential, participatory, and action-oriented.

The combined approach allows students **to explore** their own role in socio-ecological systems and **to experience** their potential to have an impact on the world around them. As research indicates, such awareness is a basic prerequisite for democratic and responsible action.

By linking curriculum with real-world challenges, teachers can address the SDGs—especially the high-priority goals such as climate protection (SDG 13)—in ways that are both **pedagogically sound** and **personally meaningful** for students. In fact, studies have shown a particularly high interest among young people in climate-related issues, making this a timely and highly motivating focus for S-L projects.



*"To make [students] responsible for something,
you have to involve them in the process."*

- Elena Mora 2025

This handbook is an **invitation**—to rethink how we teach, how students learn, and how schools can engage with the wider world. By implementing S-L with a focus on sustainability, **teachers can help students** become not just better learners, but better citizens—aware of the world's challenges and empowered to address them.

Whether you are a classroom teacher, a multiplier, a principal, or a teacher educator, we hope **this resource provides the support and inspiration** you need to facilitate your S-L project. Together, we can make education an impetus for both personal transformation and societal change.

AT A GLANCE:**Service-Learning:**

A method that combines social engagement with academic learning. Learners plan and carry out projects, often in collaboration with civil society organizations. In doing so, they address the actual needs of the community.

Education for Sustainable Development:

ESD is a holistic approach to teaching that equips learners with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to create a more sustainable future.

Service-Learning and ESD:

The implementation of S-L within the framework of ESD aims to address ecological, economic, and social challenges in the immediate environment of learners and to have a positive impact.

*"[The students] reflect on how they can contribute.
And I believe that's because we guide them through Service-Learning."
– Gudrun Reinders 2025*

3. SERVICE-LEARNING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational concepts and competence models such as ESD, the OECD Learning Compass 2030, Deeper Learning or frameworks of 21st Century and Future Skills seek to respond to an increasingly globalized world and its challenges. While there is no single blueprint for schooling in the 21st century, there is broad consensus: children and young people must **be enabled to learn and act in connected ways**. Only then can they develop the confidence, responsibility, and resilience to face complex challenges.

This is precisely where S-L comes in. It is a participatory approach that combines subject-based learning with students' civic engagement. **S-L fosters a learning culture** in which children and young people actively **learn through participation, co-creation, and conscious reflection**. At the same time, they bring their knowledge and competences to bear on social, ecological, or economical contexts as well as cultural, or political settings – making abstract learning content tangible and meaningful.

In S-L, students plan and shape their engagement, reflect on their experiences, address challenges, and develop solutions. In doing so, they gain not only subject-specific competences but also social and democratic skills that are essential for life in the 21st century.

Example:

Be cool, Adopt a Grandpa was a Service-Learning project in Romania that brought students closer to elderly people in the community in order to improve their well-being and reduce social isolation. The project was carried out in partnership with the Day Center "Clement", the Social Services Complex in Câmpia Turzii, the Cluj County School Inspectorate, media partners, and Aly Dance.

Through this initiative, students organized various intergenerational activities such as caroling, offering handmade mărtisor gifts, planting trees, storytelling sessions, dance activities, and basic digital skills workshops, spending meaningful time with seniors. The project aimed to address issues like loneliness, social exclusion, and the risk of poverty among elderly people.

At the same time, students developed important skills and values, including empathy, communication, teamwork, organizational abilities, intergenerational dialogue, and active civic involvement.

The unique strength of Service-Learning lies in this dual focus:

- **Transforming school and learning culture** by connecting academic content with socially relevant experiences, opening schools to their communities, and fostering meaningful, student-centered learning.
- **Reinforcing democracy and civil society** by equipping students with the experiences and skills necessary for civic engagement and democratic participation.

3.2 HISTORY

Although the roots of S-L can be traced back to John Dewey's philosophy of experiential learning, it was not until the 1980s that it was recognized as a distinct pedagogical approach in the United States, championed by scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. Since the beginning of the 2000s, S-L has also spread widely throughout Europe and is now embedded in thousands of schools, colleges, and universities around the world.

Network:

In 2022, the **Service-Learning in European Schools and Organizations Network (SLESON)** was founded, bringing together institutions and organizations committed to advancing S-L in schools across different European countries. This marks an important step toward strengthening collaboration, exchange, and the international visibility of S-L as a transformative educational approach.

3.3 METHODOLOGY

S-L can be implemented as a teaching and learning method in all subjects, school types, and age groups. S-L is not an extracurricular activity reserved for a small group of highly motivated learners. It can therefore be an effective tool for **reshaping both teaching and learning practices as well as educational culture**.

Insights from practice show the wide variety of ways in which S-L can be designed. What all examples have in common is that **young people participate in democracy** in two ways: within the classroom and in society. In line with a democratic school culture, students plan and shape their engagement themselves, **reflect** on its progress in class, discuss challenges, and develop solutions. They directly apply their knowledge and competences in practice by collaborating with community partners and addressing social, ecological, cultural, or political issues that matter to them (=service). At the same time, their engagement is intentionally **connected to research-led teaching, curricular content and learning goals** (=learning).

However, these goals can only be achieved, if S-L is carefully implemented. Research findings as well as feedback from practice show clearly: S-L does not automatically strengthen competences. The impact depends on how the approach is designed and facilitated by teachers.

For this reason, the Stiftung Lernen durch Engagement (Foundation Learning through Civic Engagement) has derived **six quality standards for S-L** from scientific findings on effectiveness and prerequisites of learning processes. These standards provide educators with guidance for effective practice and ensure that students' experiences strengthen both their academic and civic competences.

The six quality standards of Service-Learning:

Real demand:

Students' civic engagement responds to an actual need in their community or society, taking on tasks perceived as meaningful by all stakeholders.

Connection to the curriculum:

Engagement is embedded within lessons and linked directly to curricular objectives.

Reflection:

Students regularly reflect on their experiences, connecting practice with learning.

Student participation:

Students actively contribute to planning, preparing, and organizing their Service-Learning projects.

Engagement outside the school:

Projects extend beyond the classroom and involve collaboration with external partners.

Recognition and conclusion:

Students' contributions are acknowledged continuously through feedback and celebrated at the end of the project.

3.4 PARTICIPATION OF LEARNERS

In high-quality Service-Learning projects, it is essential that learners experience a high degree of **participation at every stage of the project** (appropriately tailored to their age and institutional framework) from planning and implementation through to completion. Tackling a challenge that they themselves perceive as meaningful, rather than simply completing assigned tasks, can enhance motivation and identification with the project. Pupils should have the opportunity **to take an active role** in decision-making, contribute with their own ideas, and put them into practice. In this way, children and young people are entrusted with genuine responsibility not only regarding commitment, but also in the classroom and in their own learning processes. For teachers, this requires reflecting on their own understanding of their role and their attitudes, developing into learning guides who recognize and support **students as the main protagonists** in their actions and learning.

The more students are involved in S-L, the greater the opportunities they have to develop self-confidence, self-efficacy, social and communication skills, critical thinking, and to become actively involved in society in the future. However, it must be borne in mind that learners may first need to be introduced to participation and taking responsibility. These **skills must be developed gradually**, which in turn requires **adaptive teaching skills** on the part of teachers.

"We have a voice and can decide what we want to devote ourselves to."

- Student 2025

3.5 INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

S-L combines school learning with civic engagement, thereby promoting learners' academic and social skills. When learner groups from different countries are involved, S-L takes on an additional dimension: **transnational projects promote intercultural understanding and global responsibility**. In such a project setting, learners work together with peer learning groups from other countries to identify authentic social, cultural, environmental, or political needs. The learners then actively contribute to the development of solutions. When carefully designed, international S-L enables all participants to explore global issues in different regional contexts, exchange perspectives, and understand sustainability challenges through collaboration with peers in other countries. Teachers also benefit from such formats, as they can exchange methods, compare curricular practices, and strengthen their professional networks.

The teachers interviewed for this handbook were convinced that international S-L not only allows learners to engage with content in different cultural contexts, but also enables them to cooperate successfully in practical implementation. **Linguistic and cultural barriers are reduced**, their understanding across national borders is deepened, and their horizons are broadened through real interactions. In the process, learners strengthen their democratic skills, experience participation, and develop values, attitudes, and critical thinking—all of which are essential skills for active citizenship in Europe and beyond.

OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS

International S-L projects allow students to:

Work together on shared sustainability topics such as climate action, biodiversity, or social inclusion.

Develop key competences including critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and dealing with misinformation and prejudice.

Gain motivation and confidence by seeing how peers in other countries address similar issues.

*“Service Learning makes the children suddenly wake up.”
– Elena Mora 2025*

CHALLENGES TO CONSIDER

While the potential is high, international cooperation can face several practical obstacles:

Limited time within the school year and differing national calendars, particularly during exam periods and holidays.

Financial and administrative barriers, such as travel costs or complex approval procedures.

Difficulties finding suitable partners or schools in other countries willing to collaborate.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To make international S–L feasible in everyday school contexts, consider the following strategies:

Start small and virtual. Online or hybrid projects reduce costs and allow flexible participation.

Use existing networks. Platforms like eTwinning or school partnerships can serve as starting points, but additional contact spaces or matchmaking tools can be helpful.

Choose the right timing. The period from May to July often works well for many European schools.

Focus on shared topics. Select themes linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that resonate in all participating contexts.

Encourage student exchange. Have learners present their local findings or activities online to their peers abroad. This fosters mutual learning and motivation.

Integrate citizen science. Activities such as bird counting or environmental data collection are apt for collaborative inquiry and can easily be conducted across borders.

International Service–Learning can be a powerful way to connect global citizenship education with local action. Even small, low-threshold projects can spark meaningful cross-cultural learning and show students how everyday efforts contribute to shared sustainable futures.

*“For my students, Goal 17 [Partnership] is especially meaningful–
they always ask how can we do something with others?”
- Vera Schmelz 2025*

*“Transnational projects can be a way to promote your school,
connect to European values, and open your students to new
experiences. There are benefits at school, community, national, and
international level.”
- Raluca Petran 2025*

3.6 SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INTERNATIONAL S-L

Cross-cutting competences:

Students learn to address European and global challenges collaboratively, engaging with diverse perspectives and interests. In doing so, they come to appreciate diversity as a normal part of life and learn to value differences. Research shows that S-L fosters social, intercultural, and democratic competences in measurable ways.

Participation and self-efficacy:

As learners' interests, experiences, and ideas guide each phase of the project, they experience what it means to build knowledge acquisition and decision-making processes together. This strengthens their confidence in their own abilities and their belief that engagement can bring about change.

Connected learning in complex contexts:

S-L emphasizes networked thinking rather than isolated facts. By reflecting from multiple perspectives, students develop problem-solving, teamwork, and communication competences—essential skills for navigating complex European issues.

Language learning:

With growing multilingualism and easy global communication, international S-L offers authentic opportunities to apply and improve oral and written language skills. Working with peers from other linguistic and cultural contexts helps students understand nuances, deepen intercultural awareness, and experience the direct relevance of language learning.

In short, International S-L cannot only strengthen the students' academic performance, but also empowers them as democratic citizens capable of acting responsibly in a diverse and interconnected world.

Example:

One example of international S-L is the **EARN project**, a transnational initiative between Portugal and Germany funded by Erasmus+. 11th- and 12th-grade students explored real social needs in their own communities through research, interviews, and discussions with local stakeholders. They then met for joint research days, visiting institutions such as animal welfare organizations, homeless services, and support facilities for people with disabilities.

Working in mixed German–Portuguese groups, the students reflected on their experiences in English and compared perspectives. The findings were documented and used to develop initial ideas for concrete volunteering projects, which were later shared and discussed at a joint conference. This collaboration not only strengthened democratic participation and perspective-taking but also fostered intercultural understanding and appreciation of diversity.

Example:**European Service–Learning project for the production of detergents and cosmetics**

This international project involved 12th-grade students from the educational institutions “Regionales Berufsbildungszentrum Technik” (Kiel, Germany) and the “Istituto d'Istruzione Superiore Sandro Pertini” (Alatri, Italy). The school subjects involved were Chemistry and Microbiology. The project idea was to use locally produced oils (rapeseed and olive oil) to create cosmetic products like creams, lip balms, and deodorants. The students aimed to investigate whether different effects could be detected in the manufacturing process and the final products.

The collaboration was structured around two phases:

- Kick-Off in Alatri, Italy (March 11–15, 2025): Project activities included the production of lip balm and hand soap using olive and rapeseed oil in the local school's chemistry labs. Students also participated in cultural visits to Alatri and Naples.
- Student Mobility in Kiel, Germany (May 12–17, 2025): Students worked in the chemistry labs, manufacturing cosmetics with olive and rapeseed oil, utilizing custom-made perfume essences. A student also led a workshop on making perfume/essences for use in creams and hand soaps. Activities planned by the German students included a city rally through Kiel, cultural visits in Kiel/Hamburg, and a visit to the NPZ (Norddeutsche Pflanzenzucht).

The project concluded with a final presentation and closing event with all involved students, teachers, and the school principal.

This international collaboration allowed the students to engage with the intersection of Sustainable Development Education and Service–Learning. This experience not only fostered practical skills in Chemistry but also increased awareness of sustainable consumption and the value of local resources.

“The kids I teach are young and not allowed to travel alone, but I still want them to connect and understand that they are not alone in their problems – that other children in other countries are also doing something for the environment, for society. I believe that this can support the idea of a European spirit as well as the motivation to engage.”

– V. B. 2025

AT A GLANCE:

In Service-Learning, students...

- ... plan and shape their engagement
- ... address challenges
- ... develop solutions
- ... reflect on their experiences
- ... gain subject-specific competences
- ... gain social and democratic skills

The six quality standards for Service-Learning:

- Real demand
- Connection to the curriculum
- Reflection
- Student participation
- Engagement outside the school
- Recognition and conclusion

The goals of Service-Learning:

Transforming school and learning culture:

Connecting academic content with socially relevant experiences

Opening schools to their communities

Fostering meaningful, student-centered learning

Reinforcing democracy and civil society:

Equipping students with the experiences and skills necessary for civic engagement and democratic participation

The potential impact of international Service-Learning:

- Cross-cutting and cooperative competences
- Participation and self-efficacy
- Connected learning in complex contexts
- Language learning

4. EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.1 WHAT IS EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD)

The overarching goal of ESD is to **empower and encourage learners** to engage with complex issues relating to future-oriented challenges and to **actively shape society**. This requires a comprehensive review of key topics in order to examine and evaluate important issues from an ecological, economic, cultural, political, and social perspective. Skills in systemic thinking are an important prerequisite.

Addressing issues that are relevant for the future and developing skills are among the key prerequisites for working together towards a stable, sustainable society.

In Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), learning processes are implemented in a **practice-oriented manner**, taking the curriculum into account and tailored to the **needs of the learners**. Students assume a high degree of responsibility for their own learning process and negotiate about priorities. Joint reflection phases with teachers and other individuals involved in the learning process serve to build networks, promote interdisciplinary and critical thinking, and strengthen cohesion.

In this context, ESD is guided by the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, and the curriculum guidelines. ESD sharpens awareness of the skills needed to deal with local and global challenges. The **Inner Development Goals (IDGs)** framework was developed to work constructively on the SDGs, and is therefore helpful in this regard as well. It is a science-based model identifying essential skills, competences and qualities (like empathy, resilience, mindfulness) needed for individuals and organizations to effectively address complex global challenges.

“Education for sustainable development is a current societal issue that concerns us all.”

- Raluca Petran 2025

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a universally recognized framework that helps align S-L projects with pressing local and global challenges. They enable educators and students to connect local action with broader priorities, reinforcing the relevance and impact of their work. Integrating the SDGs into S-L ensures that activities address meaningful societal needs while fostering critical thinking about systemic change.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



United Nations (UN), 2026. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals. (Available online at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>)

If you would prefer to work with the seven areas of transformation — energy, mobility, consumption, etc. — rather than the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the following chapter of this handbook contains recommendations from teachers on the types of projects that are suitable. Some teachers mentioned in the interviews that the transformation areas can be easily integrated into the curriculum. However, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are now very well known and familiar to most students, both internationally and locally.

"The highlight was when my students pitched their topics to 6th-graders—they introduced their topic and their exhibition. Together, they created an artwork."

- Nora Lehnerer 2025

4.2 TRANSFORMATION FIELDS

Integrating ESD-related topics into the curriculum is meaningful, and relevant. The seven areas of transformation can be referred to as an alternative or addition to the SDGs. The fields **energy, mobility, prosperity and consumption, industry, resources, food, as well as cities and rural areas** are key areas in which learners are inspired to actively engage with the challenges of sustainability in the real world.

Relating to everyday activities encourages learners to acquire knowledge and apply it in projects that promote sustainable practices and strengthen responsible engagement.

The seven fields of transformation:



Transforming **energy** use encourages learners to explore renewable sources and efficient technologies that reduce environmental harm and promote climate resilience.



The field of **mobility** emphasizes sustainable transportation options, urging learners to rethink travel habits in favor of walking, cycling, and public transit to lower emissions.



Wealth and consumption transformation challenges students to critically assess consumption patterns and embrace responsible, equitable use of resources for a fairer society.



Within the **industry** field, fostering innovation in sustainable production methods, supporting cleaner technologies, circular economy principles and ethical labor practices are crucial.



Resource transformation focuses on reducing waste, promoting reuse and recycling, and ensuring the conservation of ecological systems vital for human and ecological well-being.



Nutrition and **food** systems transformation teaches about sustainable agriculture, reducing food waste, and adopting diets that support health and environmental sustainability.



Transforming **cities and land use** engages learners in urban planning that balances human needs with green spaces, biodiversity protection, and resilient infrastructure for sustainable living.

CONNECTING PROJECTS TO THE FIELDS OF TRANSFORMATION

In interviews with experienced teachers, the following projects were mentioned and can be linked to the transformation fields of sustainability:

Energy:

- Climate protection projects
- Fridays for Facts
- Raising awareness about energy saving

Nutrition:

- Sustainable food culture
- Food rescue and foodsharing
- School kitchen/meat reduction

Wealth & Consumption:

- Clothes swapping, upcycling
- Exhibitions on consumer behavior

Mobility:

- Projects on CO₂ reduction
- Cycling initiatives

Resources:

- Waste reduction, saving water and paper
- School gardens for biodiversity protection

Cities & Land:

- Urban gardening, green classrooms and communities
- Refugee integration
- Support for the homeless

Industry:

- Recycling (textiles, plastics)
- PR for local businesses

The S-L projects are **interdisciplinary** and combine school subjects (especially science, politics, ethics, languages, and art) with practical, everyday-life topics. The strongest connections to these fields of transformation in the examples compiled for this handbook can be found in connections to the areas of resources, prosperity and consumption, nutrition, and cities.

“These projects give me a feeling of well-being and make me feel forever young.”

- Raluca Petran 2025

4.3 LINKING PROJECTS TO SCHOOL SUBJECTS

In interviews, teachers state that the interdisciplinary projects are mainly anchored in one school subject. The following school subjects can be assigned to the following projects:

Biology / Natural Sciences

School gardens, bee projects, recycling, biodiversity protection, nutrition, climate change

Geography

Global learning, resource consumption, environmental pollution

Ethics / Religion / Politics

Solidarity, social justice, peace, democracy education, privilege workshops

Languages

Communication, international partnerships, project reports, social media

Arts / Music

Exhibitions, creative upcycling projects, artistic engagement with consumption or the environment

Mathematics / Computer Science

Surveys, data analysis, budgeting, programming for presentations

Nutrition & Social Studies / Home Economics

Foodsharing, clothes swapping, sustainable cooking

Sports / Health

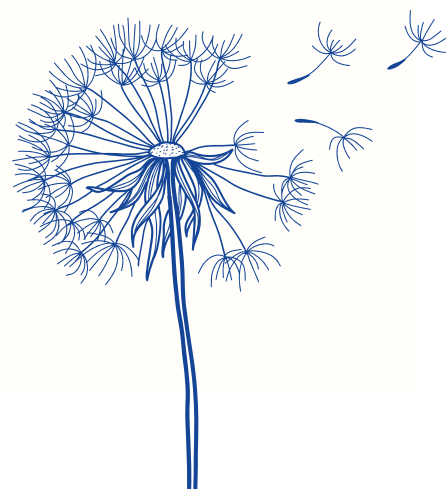
Prevention, wellbeing, healthy lifestyles

"In ethics class we did a privilege walk to reflect on the privileges one has based on birthplace. Then students explored their local neighborhood — what institutions are there, where might they intern or work one day?"

- Nora Lehnerer 2025

Overview: School subjects, projects and transformation fields

School Subject	Projects	Transformation Fields
Biology / Natural Sciences	School garden, bee projects, recycling activities, biodiversity protection, climate protection workshops	Resources Nutrition Energy
Geography	Global environment and climate projects, water and land use	Resources Cities & Land Energy
Ethics / Religion / Politics	Solidarity projects (e.g., support for homeless, refugee integration), peace topics, democracy workshops	Cities & Land Wealth & Consumption Social sustainability (across all fields)
Languages	International partnerships, project reports, presentations, social media	Cities & Land Wealth & Consumption (through public engagement, global networking)
Arts / Music	Upcycling art, exhibitions on consumption & environment, creative public engagement	Wealth & Consumption Resources
Mathematics / Computer Science	Surveys, data analysis, budget calculations, programming tools for projects	Industry Resources (data & efficiency)
Nutrition & Social Studies / Home Economics	Foodsharing, clothes swapping, sustainable cooking, nutrition awareness	Nutrition Wealth & Consumption Resources
Sports / Health	Activities on health, wellbeing, exercise, prevention (e.g., nutrition and fitness)	Nutrition Cities & Land (healthy lifestyles in communities)

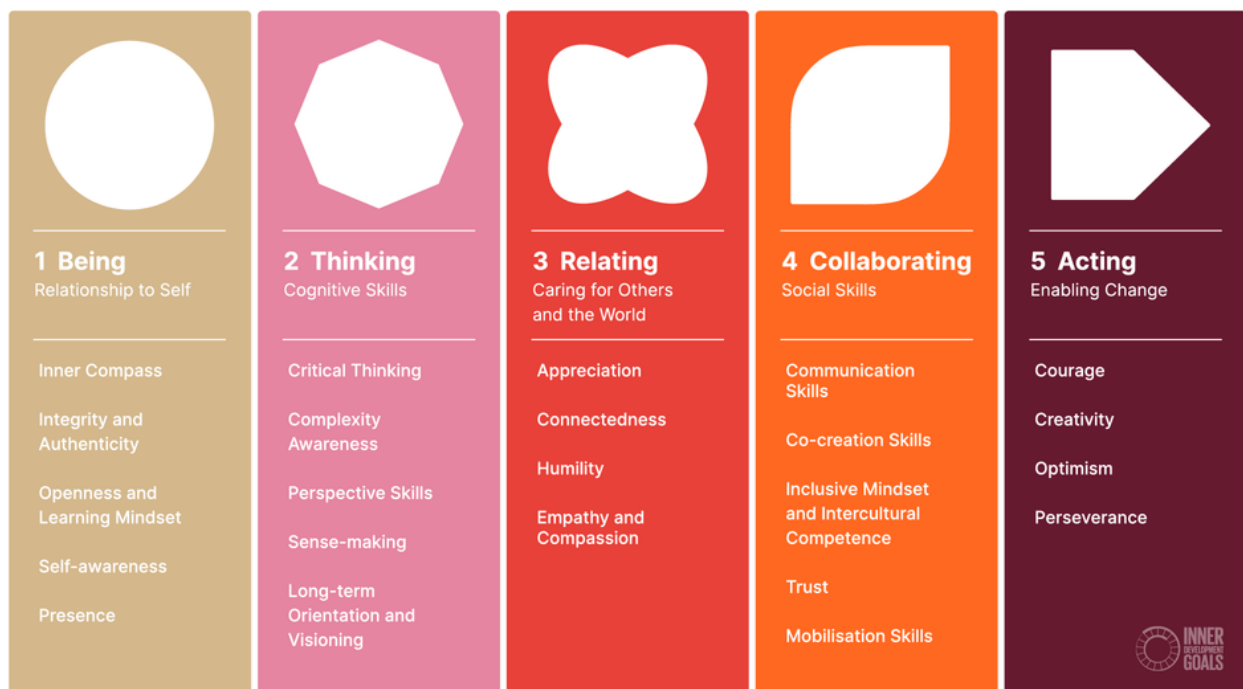


4.4 SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE INNER DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Many of the competencies and qualities of the IDG framework listed below can be fostered through teaching and learning formats such as Service-Learning. The Inner Development Goals (IDGs) complement the SDGs and the transformation fields by focusing on the **personal and interpersonal capacities** necessary for transformative action. Referring to the IDGs in Service Learning encourages the cultivation of empathy, resilience, and ethical responsibility among learners.

This combination of global objectives and inner competencies strengthens the transformative potential of S-L. Ultimately, relating to the SDGs as well as the IDGs empowers students to contribute effectively to sustainable development through **informed, reflective, and purposeful engagement**.

Further information: [Inner Development Goals \(IDGs\)](https://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org).



Inner Development Goals (IDG), 2026. The IDG Framework. (Available online at: <https://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org>)

*“The students’ work has a purpose
and that gives them satisfaction.”
- Elena Mora 2025*

4.5 TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

S-L is a transdisciplinary approach, as it brings together academic institutions or disciplines and non-academic stakeholders. Together, they try to solve complex real-world problems, moving beyond traditional subject boundaries to create a holistic understanding and practical solutions. It **bridges academic institutions and society**, aiming for mutual learning and transformative outcomes, especially for sustainability challenges. Think, for example, of co-creation between schools or universities and municipalities, companies, or other societal organizations.

Transdisciplinarity includes...

- Co-creative methods
- Creating spaces for cooperation
- Collaboration and reflection
- Exchange of all forms of knowledge
- Impact across society as a whole public
- Mutual learning processes
- Effectiveness of science-informed methods of political and social consulting

The synergy between Service Learning and Education for Sustainable Development fundamentally changes the learning environment. It requires venturing beyond the confines of the institution into the "real" world, and on top of that, to contribute to a sustainability measure. This transition necessitates close collaboration with non-school actors, including community organizations, local authorities, and industry.

A key challenge in the implementation of transdisciplinary projects is the **time management** required for all necessary measures. However, the advantages of this integrated approach outweigh the disadvantages: By addressing real-world problems, collaboration can improve the quality of results and innovative practices. Transdisciplinary work, as is always practiced in Service Learning, directly **contributes to solving real, complex problems** that cannot not be offered within the school setting alone.

This transdisciplinary engagement leads to the collaborative creation of knowledge and context-specific solutions. As a result, **the gap between theory and practice is bridged, and learners experience the relevance of their actions.**

AT A GLANCE:**Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in a nutshell:**

- ESD supports learners in gaining knowledge and in developing values and abilities needed to create a more sustainable world.
- ESD helps students understand how environment, economy, and society connect, preparing them for real-life challenges on a local and global scale.
- ESD uses active and collaborative learning so students acquire both by doing and by reflecting, which builds strong problem-solving skills.
- ESD supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals by promoting a holistic view and taking all dimensions of sustainability as well as all parts of nature and the world into account.

Linking SDGs/transformation fields and IDGs with ESD:

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide teachers with important topics and targets to guide ESD, making learning relevant to global issues.
- The Inner Development Goals (IDGs) help ESD focus on deeper skills like empathy, self-reflection, and building good relationships.
- Combining SDGs and IDGs ensures that students gain both practical knowledge and personal abilities to become positive changemakers.
- Including IDGs in ESD encourages personal growth and courage, so students can confidently address sustainability problems.
- Linking these frameworks in ESD inspires a sense of community, helping learners work together as responsible global citizens.

Transdisciplinarity means:

- Impact beyond institutional boundaries, across society as a whole
- Cooperation with institutions or partners outside schools
- Collaboration and reflection
- Exchange of all forms of knowledge and skills
- Co-creative methods

5. FROM S-L PRINCIPLES TO ESD-PRACTICE

There is an urgent need to implement S-L projects within the life-long learning approach of ESD. The challenges facing the world today—climate change, inequality, resource scarcity, health crises, and threats to peace—can best be solved by combining theoretical knowledge and reflective practical experience.

Responsible engagement and sustainable living require the promotion of learners' skills, values, and attitudes. S-L responds to this need by bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world community engagement, allowing learners to apply what they have learned in meaningful ways that are directly aligned with the SDGs. This dual approach promotes critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills while strengthening empathy, solidarity, and civic responsibility.

In short, S-L within ESD prepares students not just to understand sustainability challenges, but to actively contribute to building a more just, inclusive, and resilient society.

By engaging students in projects that respond to real needs—such as promoting clean water access (SDG 6), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), or fostering climate action (SDG 13)—S-L links the curriculum content to experiences that cultivate both academic competences and civic responsibility. In doing so, S-L becomes a practical pathway for schools to contribute directly to the achievement of the SDGs while preparing students to thrive as active, sustainable citizens in an interconnected world where ESD is both necessary and urgent.

This chapter focuses on the **planning and implementation processes** of S-L projects.

5.1 ANNUAL PLANNING

Integrating an ESD-oriented S-L project into annual planning requires teachers to follow a set of preliminary steps that align both with the curriculum and with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This ensures that **the project is meaningful for students' learning and relevant to the community's needs.**

The following stages can be rearranged or combined in any order.

STAGE 1 – DEFINE SDGS/IDGS IN CURRICULUM

Teachers identify competencies, topics, or subject areas in the curriculum that can be linked to one or more SDGs/IDGs.

Alternatively, teachers can identify an SDG-related need in the community and explain how it can be linked to the subjects taught this year.

EXAMPLE :

In science, a unit on ecosystems in biology can connect to SDG 15: *Life on Land*, while in civics, a discussion about equality can connect to SDG 10: *Reduced Inequalities*.

Both connect to the IDG Critical thinking.



STAGE 2 – FOSTER INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

When teachers from different subjects are involved in the S-L project, they work together to decide which competencies and skills the students should develop.

They formulate learning objectives and performance indicators, making explicit reference to the goals of skill promotion and contributing to sustainable development wherever possible.

EXAMPLE :

A math teacher can focus on data collection and analysis, while a geography teacher can focus on mapping and understanding local resources.

Both can contribute to SDG 6 by having learners analyze data on water consumption at school.



STAGE 3 – DEFINE TIMELINE AND DURATION

The teacher or team of teachers determines the time frame for implementing interim goals and the duration of the project.

EXAMPLE :

If the S-L project relates to SDG 13, tree planting and outdoor workshops could be planned for the spring, while preparatory lessons and data collection take place in the winter.



STAGE 4 – SECURE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT

Teachers ask the school administration for support in scheduling, allocating rooms, and coordinating activities. Support can also be requested for public relations work.

EXAMPLE :

In a S-L project on SDG 3, the school administration can help organize access to the gym for awareness-raising events or adjust timetables to enable collaboration between biology and physical education teachers.



STAGE 5 – INTEGRATE S-L PROJECT INTO CORE ACTIVITIES

Teachers include the S-L project into their annual teaching plans, ensuring it is recognized as part of regular subject work, not an extra activity.

EXAMPLE :

A language teacher can plan persuasive writing assignments that connect to students creating advocacy materials for SDG 5 S-L project.



STAGE 6 – DESIGN THE LEARNING UNIT

The teaching team develops the design of the learning unit and assigns each teacher clear tasks in the project. It establishes assessment criteria, reflection methods, and evaluation strategies for both the learning outcomes and the impact of the project on the community.

EXAMPLE :

For a project on SDG 7, science teachers facilitate experiments on renewable energy, while IT teachers guide learners in creating a digital campaign on energy consumption. Assessment covers both scientific understanding and communication skills.



STAGE 7 – IDENTIFY PARTNERS AND BUILD COLLABORATION

Teachers and students identify community partners—such as NGOs, local authorities, or businesses—and agree on collaboration details (resources, roles, support).

EXAMPLE :

For a project on SDG 2, teachers might partner with a local food bank or farmers' association to organize food collection drives and awareness campaigns.



STAGE 8 – INFORM AND ENGAGE STUDENTS

Learners are informed about the S-L methodology, the duration of the project, the objectives including the desired competencies, and the assessment criteria. Teachers and learners work together to determine how the project relates to sustainable development. This step is important for shared responsibility and learner motivation.

EXAMPLE:

When launching a project to improve local green spaces, teachers and learners work out how the project work will not only benefit their city, but also contributes to personal development on the one hand and the global goal of sustainable communities on the other.



By addressing these stages, teachers ensure that the S-L project is systematically integrated into the teaching practice, aligns with SDG priorities, and fosters both academic achievement and social responsibility among students.

"I think that most students take away positive experiences from Service-Learning and therefore speak positively about it. Because it's something they're interested in, where they can use their strengths, where it's about dealing with something relevant to life."

- Stephan Bickel 2025

"Children wrote the project, divided the roles, and made decisions. They know what they do and they do it very well."

- Raluca Petran 2025

5.2 FACILITATION: AREAS OF ACTIVITY

S-L is characterized by a high level of participation and responsibility on the part of learners. This chapter outlines five areas in which learners are actively involved. Teachers should see their role primarily in supporting and closely advising learners. Coordination and supervision are particularly helpful when communicating with external partners. Experienced teachers also recommend that reflection activities be guided by teachers.

The areas of activity include:

- 1. Issue and partner**
- 2. Planning**
- 3. Measures**
- 4. Reflection**
- 5. Presentation**

AREA OF ACTIVITY 1: ISSUE AND PARTNER

In this field of action, information about a partner's needs, problems, and resources is collected and structured. If there is no partner, the engagement takes the form of advocacy for a cause. In both cases, the issue and concerns are clearly presented and discussed by the learners.

What learners do in consultation with the teacher:

- They decide which issue to address and how it relates to the SDGs.
- They choose an external partner and visit them.
- The problem is identified together with the partner.
- They collect data through surveys, interviews, or analysis of the local press and social media to present the context of the topic or problem.
- They create a clear presentation highlighting the problem, needs, resources, and opportunities.
- The topics and partners are presented in class and discussed.

EXAMPLE (SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION):

Students at a vocational school visit a rural village where water is obtained from unsafe wells. They interview families who explain the health risks posed by waterborne diseases. They also find a local NGO that has previously installed small water filters in other regions. After analysis and discussion in class, the students decide to focus their project on improving access to clean drinking water.



AREA OF ACTIVITY 2: PLANNING

This stage turns the idea into a concrete project with clear goals, actions, and responsibilities.

What students and teachers determine together:

- What needs to be done (goals and activities)
- When it should be done (schedule)
- How it will be implemented (methods, roles, tools)
- Required resources (financial, material, personnel)
- Available or required budget?
- Division of labor: Who is responsible for which part of the project?
- Public relations, internal information exchange, information flow with partners

EXAMPLE (SDG 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION):

The students want to reduce food waste in their school cafeteria. In the planning phase, they decide to run an awareness campaign and set up a composting program over a three-month period. They divide up the tasks: some students collect data on food waste, others design posters, and still others contact local composting experts. They ask the local community and a supermarket chain for support in providing compost bins and information materials. They plan to publish up-to-date information on social media to involve the wider public.



AREA OF ACTIVITY 3: MEASURES

Learners implement the activities they have planned.

What happens:

- The activities are carried out with partners under the supervision of the teacher.
- Depending on the requirements and planned activities, learners work individually or in groups.
- The partners, e.g., the community, are actively involved in this phase.

EXAMPLE (SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION):

The learners organize a one-day tree planting event in the community. Preparing the event, they work with local forestry experts and NGOs. Some learners lead workshops for younger children on the importance of trees. Others cooperate with parents to provide materials and tools. On the day of the tree planting event, the younger children and their parents, as well as the S-L group and their teachers, work together to reforest a degraded area.



AREA OF ACTIVITY 4: REFLECTION

Regular periods of individual and group reflection activities help learners to contextualize their experiences and connect them to personal growth, civic responsibility, and academic learning in various subjects.

What reflection includes:

- Discussing challenges, successes, and feelings before, during, and after the project.
- Asking questions about the causes of the problem.
- Connecting the project experience to learning objectives in the classroom and the SDGs.
- Receiving and discussing feedback from teachers and community members.
- Awareness of developing Inner Development Goals such as empathy or courage.

EXAMPLE (SDG 3: GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING):

After organizing a mental health awareness campaign in schools, learners reflect in learning journals and group discussions. They talk about how stigma prevents people from seeking help and how their campaign has changed some attitudes. With guidance from the teacher, they realize that they have also improved their own communication and leadership skills. They can also experience relief from challenging situations by sharing difficulties. Together, they develop strategies for dealing with these situations. They also consider how stress can be reduced in future projects.



AREA OF ACTIVITY 5: PRESENTATION

Learners present their results publicly, showcasing both the process and the outcomes. This is crucial for recognition, collaborative learning, and personal development.

How students can present their results:

- Exhibitions with photos, videos, or posters
- Articles in the local press or on school websites
- Presentations at school assemblies, community meetings, parent-evenings
- Podcasts, short films, or social media campaigns
- Reports submitted to local authorities or partners

EXAMPLE (SDG 15: LIFE ON LAND):

After renovating a local park as part of their math and geography lessons, the students organize an exhibition with before-and-after photos, invite community members, and publish an article in the local newspaper. They receive praise and recognition.

They also create a short video for social media explaining how the project contributed to SDG 15. They formulate tips for other schools that want to replicate their initiative. This area of activity not only celebrates their achievements, but also inspires others to get involved.



“The biggest gain is that children become responsible adults.”

- Raluca Petran 2025

“Our role is to increase [the students’] sense of community that they belong to the same community, even if they come from different villages.”

- Rodica Ionescu 2025

“Our projects make the school and the students visible in the community.”

- Raluca Petran 2025

5.3 GOOD PRACTICES

In many European schools, ESD is recognized as an important goal, and some countries have included ESD in their curricula. However, teachers and principals find it sometimes challenging how to translate the concept into concrete classroom practice.

In this regard, S-L offers a powerful approach: it **connects subject learning with meaningful community engagement** and thus provides a competence- and experience-based way to work on the SDGs. While numerous S-L projects already touch on sustainability topics, they often do so implicitly by fostering relevant skills (IDGs) and deepening knowledge.

A few projects have made ESD an explicit focus – we highlight two of these examples in the following section. They demonstrate how abstract concepts of sustainability can become tangible, relevant, and motivating for young people when combined with S-L.

EXAMPLE: “Friday For Facts” (Kaiser Heinrich Gymnasium Bamberg)

Pupils in a 6th grade class work on the causes and consequences of climate change in biology lessons and explore ways to act in a climate-friendly way. Soon, computer science lessons also become part of the project: the pupils research online, write scripts, film and edit videos.

They can now share their knowledge with explanatory videos and PowerPoint presentations on climate and the environment. Through surveys in their environment, the pupils find out that children and young people from nearby schools are also dissatisfied with their level of knowledge about climate change. So, there is a real need for the class to get involved. With their films and presentations, the children educate their peers in neighboring schools about the topic. This example shows how motivated young people are to tackle even complex and challenging topics when they are able to act independently and take responsibility—and in doing so, work together to raise awareness.



EXAMPLE: “Water Days for Kindergarten Children” (Gustav-Walle-Schule Würzburg)

At the Gustav-Walle School in Würzburg, a 6th grade class explored the topic of “water” across physics, chemistry, and biology lessons and combined their learning with a social engagement project. Guided by their teacher, the students first deepened their own knowledge about the properties and significance of water, aquatic habitats, and the water cycle. They then transferred this knowledge into practice by preparing playful learning units for children at a local kindergarten. In small groups, the pupils designed simple experiments, explained everyday phenomena, and invited the kindergarten children to actively explore water with all their senses. As a highlight, they organized a joint excursion to a nearby stream, where the younger children could discover water as a living environment.

Through this project, the students not only strengthened their scientific skills, but also practiced communication, responsibility, and teamwork. At the same time, they experienced how their knowledge could have real value for others – making learning both meaningful and socially relevant.



*"You discover unsuspected qualities in children and
help them develop in directions
where they already have abilities."
- Rodica Ionescu 2025*

The annual plan and areas of action shown in the chapters above are based on recommendations from experienced teachers. They are important for understanding how comprehensively S-L projects can change school culture according to the principles of ESD. All phases reinforce each other and, in conjunction with the SDGs, not only help learners recognize the global significance of their local actions, but also underscore the great relevance of curricular lessons.

S-L projects can be effective on many levels. When S-L is used as a structured method, skills, including subject-specific skills, can be developed. As these are linked to the needs of the community in terms of the SDGs, learners can:

- ... apply what they have learned at school to change the community for the better while contributing to the achievement of one or more SDGs at the local, regional, national, or global level.
- ... make decisions that have real outcomes, not just hypothetical ones.
- ... develop as competent, capable individuals and also as citizens.
- ... build individual leadership, communication, and teamwork skills, etc.
- ... experience progress in their own development through reflective practice.
- ... gain a better understanding of themselves, the community, and society while working to create a better world in their immediate environment.

"Together with a primary school, our 9th-grade class built a large experiment kit with materials for physics and chemistry experiments. We then gifted the kit to the primary school and carried out the experiments with the children there."

- Stephan Bickel 2025

AT A GLANCE:

Why Service Learning and Education for Sustainable Development?

Service-Learning for ESD prepares students not just to understand sustainability challenges, but to actively contribute to building a more just, inclusive, and resilient society.

Stages for implementing an ESD-Service-Learning project:

- Issue and partner
- Planning
- Measures
- Reflection
- Presentation

When combining Service-Learning and ESD, the students can...

- apply what they have learned to improve the community and contribute to achieving the SDGs at various levels.
- make decisions that have real impacts.
- develop as capable and responsible citizens.
- strengthen leadership, communication, and teamwork skills.
- foster personal growth through reflective practice.
- gain a deeper understanding of themselves, the community, and society while actively contributing to the common good.

Annual planning of a Service-Learning project connected to the SDGs:

- align curriculum with SDGs and IDGs
- foster interdisciplinary collaboration
- define timeline and duration
- secure school leadership support
- integrate Service-Learning project into annual planning
- design the learning unit
- identify partners and build collaboration
- inform and engage students

6. FEEDBACK, GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

Service-learning is an integral part of classroom instruction and, as such, is also subject to feedback, assessment, and grading. At the same time, this format extends beyond traditional teaching and learning settings: learners build new connections, independently explore unfamiliar problem contexts, and collaborate with external partners to develop solutions to existing needs. These processes involve demands that are not always routinely practiced within school environments.

This results in **two clearly distinguishable tasks for teachers: providing appreciative feedback and conducting criteria-based assessment**. On the one hand, it is essential to acknowledge students' engagement and to support their learning processes constructively—even when individual project phases do not lead to the intended outcomes. On the other hand, teachers remain responsible for assessing and grading student performance in a transparent and accountable manner within the framework of the curriculum.

It is crucial to clearly distinguish between these two functions for learners. From the outset, students should know when and how ungraded feedback will be provided, which aspects of their work will be assessed, and the criteria on which evaluation will be based.

6.1 APPRECIATION AND FEEDBACK

At the core of ungraded feedback is a dialogical exchange about students' academic, social, and personal development. Learners are encouraged to articulate their needs: What does the individual or the team require to continue working productively? How can the teacher provide targeted support to help address challenges arising during the project?

To prepare for feedback conversations, the use of a structured **questionnaire** is recommended, addressing aspects such as:

- Reflection on personal development (e.g., time management, perseverance, autonomy) and social learning (e.g., teamwork, conflict resolution).
- Individual contributions to team communication and collaboration with external partners.
- Achievements and personal highlights.
- Challenges encountered and strategies used to address them.
- Helpful feedback received from peers, teachers, and project partners.
- Ongoing challenges and areas where further support is needed.

Feedback should be provided at least once in a direct conversation with the teacher and can be complemented by peer feedback formats as well as guided self-reflection.

6.2 GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

For grading purposes, particular emphasis should be placed on aspects that can be assessed transparently and as objectively as possible on the basis of predefined criteria:

- Subject-specific competence: appropriate use of terminology, clear explanation of concepts, and coherent structuring of content.
- Documentation of the project process: transparent and comprehensible presentation of the individual work steps.
- Information processing: accuracy in data collection and analysis, as well as well-founded interpretation of results.
- Critical reflection on one's own contribution: engagement with challenges and one's role throughout the project process, from idea development to evaluation.
- Justified decision-making: alignment of initial hypotheses with actual outcomes and reflective consideration of alternative courses of action.
- Outlook: assessment of the project's scope and the development of possible follow-up initiatives.

Transparent and fair assessment requires clearly communicated criteria. The use of a rubric is strongly recommended, ideally introduced at the beginning of the project. Such a rubric clarifies which performances are expected, to what extent they will be assessed, when they will contribute to grading, and which components are mandatory but not graded (e.g., preparatory reflection sheets).

Established assessment formats include oral contributions, portfolios, project or learning journals, presentations, and reflective reports. These formats make individual learning pathways visible, foster self-regulation, and allow for a differentiated demonstration of subject-specific competences. It is recommended by LMU Munich's "el mundo" initiative, to primarily assess individual achievements, even when the project work itself is collaborative.

Making Learning Goals Transparent

A transparent and participatory approach to learning objectives and assessment criteria is central to effective service-learning. In practice, this means jointly clarifying learning goals, openly communicating criteria, regularly giving and receiving feedback, and making learning progress visible. Both curriculum-based competences and additional forms of achievement—such as taking on particular responsibility—should be recognized.

In this way, a balance can be achieved between **performance assessment and genuine appreciation**. At the same time, key principles of Education for Sustainable Development—participation, recognition, encouragement, and the capacity to actively shape one's environment—are meaningfully embedded in classroom practice.

7. ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is the **result of a European collaboration** dedicated to facilitating S-L according to the principles of ESD. At its core, the project aims to enrich sustainability education with the experiential qualities of S-L, while offering teachers the competences and tools to guide students in meaningful, practice-oriented learning.

Many young people are showing a growing interest in issues such as climate change, social justice, and sustainability. Building on this engagement, the project aims to support teachers in providing learners with opportunities to **explore the systemic interrelationships** behind the challenges of sustainable development. Together, the participants (learners, teachers, partners) can **experience how their own actions can contribute to change**. This turns education into a space where critical understanding can grow hand in hand with the ability to take action.



7.1 OUR MOTIVATION

The idea for this project grew out of conversations and observations across different contexts in Germany and Romania. Many teachers and school leaders shared their commitment to ESD, but also expressed uncertainty about how to bring it to life in everyday teaching. At the same time, members of S-L networks pointed to the untapped potential of combining S-L with sustainability education.

Responding to teachers' needs:

Teachers regularly ask for practical ways to implement ESD. This project provides them with a tested methodology that connects content learning with civic engagement.

Building on student interest:

Studies show a rising interest among students in sustainability topics, especially climate protection. Service-Learning provides structured ways for students to channel this interest into meaningful, competence-building action.

Strengthening teacher education:

Universities and teacher-training institutions are developing new study tracks in Sustainability and ESD. This project offers concrete tools, examples, and concepts to embed Service-Learning in those programs.

International cooperation:

Earlier projects such as "Understanding Service-Learning" and "Service-Learning for Democracy in Europe" showed that cross-border Service-Learning projects are not only possible but inspiring. This project builds on that momentum and adds a specific focus on sustainability.

Looking ahead, we **envision S-L becoming a natural tool for implementing ESD across schools in Europe**. By linking science-based teaching to action and reflection, curriculum and community, local engagement and global challenges, this approach empowers students to develop critical understanding alongside **a lived sense of agency**. In the long term, the project aims to strengthen international cooperation in S-L, to support teachers in embedding sustainability, and to inspire young people to see themselves as active contributors to democratic and sustainable societies.

7.2 OUR CONSORTIUM

This project is carried out by a partnership of organizations that bring complementary expertise in S-L, ESD and multiplier training.

LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS-UNIVERSITY (LMU) MUNICH – EL MUNDO, GERMANY

Role:

Academic partner


Focus:

Teacher education, curricula development

Contribution:

Integrates Service-Learning into new study tracks on Education for Sustainable Development and Sustainability. Supports teacher trainees with practical tools and opportunities for applying S-L in their studies.

STIFTUNG LERNEN DURCH ENGAGEMENT (LDE), GERMANY

Role:

National network leader


Focus:

Service-Learning practice and dissemination

Contribution:

Shares expertise from a strong network of 240 schools, 24 competence centres, and 70 trained S-L coaches. Develops training programs and collects best practices to strengthen the use of S-L for ESD.

NEW HORIZONS FOUNDATION (NHF), ROMANIA

Role:

Experienced innovator


Focus:

Linking S-L and sustainability

Contribution:

Has worked on connecting Service-Learning and ESD since 2018. Coordinates the Romanian Service-Learning Network with over 150 schools and NGOs, and shares results regionally through the Central and East European S-L Network.

“PAVEL DAN” HIGH SCHOOL, ROMANIA

Role:

School partner


Focus:

Practical piloting and dissemination

Contribution:

Provides a real school context for testing and refining Service-Learning projects. Works closely with the Cluj County School Inspectorate to spread results to schools across the county and at national level.

In collaboration with the “**Stiftung Gute-Tat** München & Region”: Its programs—“Volunteer Agency,” “LdE Competence Center,” and “Corporate Engagement”—highlight the wide range of opportunities for engagement and collaboration.



Together, these partners combine academic research, school practice, and civil society engagement. This ensures that the project is grounded in everyday classroom realities, informed by research, and connected to wider networks that can spread its results nationally and internationally.

7.4 FUNDING AND SUPPORT

This project is co-funded by the **Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union** under the action KA210-SCH – Small-scale partnerships in school education. The program supports projects that strengthen schools by promoting innovation, civic engagement, and sustainable development.

The Erasmus+ funding enables the partners to:

- Develop practical resources such as this handbook, which provides teachers with a clear methodology for combining Service-Learning and ESD.
- Train teachers and teacher trainees in Germany and Romania, equipping them with the skills to guide students in projects that link curriculum with civic engagement.
- Pilot and replicate Service-Learning projects in schools, with a strong focus on sustainability challenges and climate protection (SDG 13).
- Strengthen networks such as the Romanian S-L Network (150+ schools and NGOs), the German S-L Network (240 schools, 24 competence centers, 70 coaches), and international forums for exchange.
- Support dissemination through universities and departments, for example via LMU's educational networks (BayZeN, the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Bavarian teacher network for ESD).

By providing this support, Erasmus+ ensures that the project's outcomes are not limited to single institutions but reach schools, teacher-training programs, and civil society partners across Europe.

7.5 FURTHER INFORMATION

Stiftung Lernen durch Engagement

The Stiftung Lernen durch Engagement (SLIDE) is a German foundation dedicated to establishing high-quality Service-Learning, or 'Lernen durch Engagement,' as a key educational methodology nationwide. This approach connects students' civic engagement projects with curriculum-based learning to foster democratic competence, self-efficacy, and a contemporary school culture.

New Horizons Foundation

The Fundația Noi Orizonturi (New Horizons Foundation) is a Romanian NGO focused on transformative and experiential education, primarily through Service-Learning and outdoor adventure methods. It empowers youth and their communities by helping children and young people develop life skills and become active agents of positive social change.

BayZeN

BayZeN is a think tank of Bavarian universities for sustainability, ESD, and climate protection. The network promotes discourse, improves conditions at universities, advises on implementation in research, teaching, operations, and more, and supports alliances.

17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a historic global plan of action, adopted in 2015, that establishes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets to be achieved by 2030. This universal and indivisible agenda seeks to eradicate poverty, foster peace, ensure prosperity for all, and protect the planet across its economic, social, and environmental dimensions, with a central pledge to "Leave No One Behind."

Inner Development Goals (IDGs)

The Inner Development Goals (IDGs) is an open-source framework defining 23 science-based skills and qualities across five dimensions of human growth (Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, Acting). The initiative aims to accelerate the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by providing the inner capacity necessary for individuals and organizations to drive large-scale sustainable and transformative change.

German Service-Learning (Lernen durch Engagement)

The LdE (Service-Learning) Quality Standards are six core pedagogical criteria designed to ensure the effective implementation of this educational method in schools. These standards mandate the integration of student participation, engagement responding to a real community need, and structured reflection, all while maintaining a strong connection to the official school curriculum.

Reference framework of competences for democratic culture (RFCDC)

This document is a guide for educators on how to apply the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Its core purpose is to equip students with the necessary values, attitudes, and skills to take responsible, democratic action regarding climate and sustainability challenges.

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The consortium wishes you and your students many insightful S-L-projects.
For further information, please visit the project website here:



<https://www.geo.lmu.de/el mundo/de/projekte/shaping-the-future/>