

# INTEREURISLAND: FROM FIELD RESEARCH TO A POSSIBLE MODEL FOR INTERNATIONALIZING UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EXPERIENCES

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**ABSTRACT:** The research aims to analyse and justifiably develop an innovative model for the internationalization of University social responsibility experiences through the international mobility of undergraduate students, with a combination of study and internships.

**KEYWORDS:** university internationalization, university social responsibility (third mission), internship abroad, service learning.

## 1. Introduction

The research presented in this article originates from the desire to share a series of speculations relating to the experience of study and internship abroad of 12 Undergraduate students of the University of Padua<sup>1</sup> (UNIPD), Italy. Between 2012 and 2015, these students participated in the *BEA Project*<sup>2</sup> in the city of Petrolina, in the State of Pernambuco, Brazil.

One of the peculiarities of the *BEA Project* is the combination of studying abroad with an internship that Italian university students do when participating in *Extensão* projects developed by local universities and communities.

The FORPROEX – Pro-Rectors National Forum of Extension in Brazilian Public Universities (2010), defines *Extensão* as an educational, cultural, scientific, and political interdisciplinary process which promotes transformative interaction between universities and other sectors of society.

According to Prof. Pedro Nuno Teixeira (2015), Vice Rector of Academic Affairs at the University of Porto in Portugal, *Extensão Universitaria* is becoming increasingly important both in Latin America, where the main objective is to influence social actions and interventions promot-

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<sup>2</sup> A social and cultural exchange project promoted by the Social Promotion Association En.A.R.S. – Padua, Italia. <<http://www.enars.it>> (03/2018).

ing citizenship and local leadership, and in developed economies where services and technology transfer receive greater attention. In Continental Europe, the most common term for *Extensão* is ‘Third Mission’, which is sub-divided into three areas: Further Education, Technology Transfer and Innovation, and Social Engagement.

Between 2012 and 2014, in Petrolina the combination of the international mobility of students for internships, their participation in social responsibility projects of local universities, and the learning through solidarity services in the community, created a highly challenging context from different standpoints.

Figure 1 – The *BEA Project Cycle*. [<http://www.enars.it>>]



The positive evaluations of all the people involved in the experiences<sup>3</sup> and the protagonism experienced, perceived, and reported by the university students involved prompted further analyses on the meaning and value of the BEA approach, both regarding the innovative educative practices, and to the University’s pathways and processes of Internationalization and Social Responsibility.

Numerous studies, from the 1980s onwards, have analysed the impact (in terms of value, significance, benefits, etc.) of the experiences of undergraduate students abroad. For instance, the Study Abroad Evaluation Project (SAEP), carried out in 1982 under the overall coordination of the European Institute of Education and Social Policy, analysed 116 different study programmes abroad (Oxford Studies in Comparative Education, vol. 5, 1995, *Aspects of Education and the European Union*, David Phillips). Currently there are several results that have documented the contributions of mobility programmes on students and their educational growth.

<sup>3</sup> University students, academic tutors, supervisors of the internships, and *BEA Project* coordinator. Data sources: Internship evaluations and Final Reports on Internship Abroad experiences.

Regarding the specific BEA experience, the level of students' reports on their practice and perception of their learning through the experience constantly prompted further analysis, with community referents, academics, and tutors.

It was additionally confirmed, as suggested by Milan (2007, 2009), that from the point of view of intercultural dialogue, the project approach stimulated students, through the participatory-solidary travel in other cultural contexts, «a true and profitable 360-degree identity opening, that expands the mind and the existential experience, promoting the authentic recovery of the community dimension and the building of a world-mind, of earthly identity». «Before focusing on interculturality as a “social” – “political” – “cultural” construction, the objective of the educational perspective is the ‘intercultural person’, capable of dialogue and reciprocity».

DECENTRALIZATION: The fact of finding myself in the situation of a foreigner, made me think a lot about the ability to get out of my world, of my way of thinking, the ability to ‘move away from me’. As a team, we worked a lot on the importance of expressing ourselves while omitting any judgment; we paid more attention to identifying our own interpretations and opinions, linked to our culture and experiences, trying to keep them separate from the descriptions of what we saw or heard<sup>4</sup>.

In 2015, the development of BEA's architecture led to a collaboration with the Department of Human Sciences (DCH), Campus III of the University of the State of Bahia in the nearby city of Juazeiro, Brazil. The existence of a bilateral agreement between UNIPD and UNEB and the signing of a Joint PhD Supervision agreement between the Pedagogical and Educational Sciences Course, FISPPA, UNIPD, and the Education and Contemporaneity Course, UNEB, created the conditions to implement research that would be able to systematize these activities and promote further investigation.

### 1. INTEREURISLAND<sup>5</sup> – *The Research*

Under the supervision of Professors Giuseppe Milan and Luca Agostinetti, FISPPA, UNIPD<sup>6</sup> and Augusto César Leiro, PPGEduc

<sup>4</sup> Equipe BEA 2015: Final report on an internship abroad by a graduate student in Educational Sciences, FISPPA, UNIPD, Padua, Italy.

<sup>5</sup> *INTEREURISLAND: INTERsectoral, Extensão Universitária, Research, Interculture, and Service-Learning. Approaching a New Development.*

<sup>6</sup> Social and Intercultural Pedagogy Research Group-GRIPSI-FISPPA, UNIPD.

Program, UNEB, the research focused on analysing the development of an innovative model to internationalize university social responsibility experiences (Public/Social Engagement, Third Mission), through the mobility of undergraduate students, combining study and internships.

The interest in summarizing the experience of the *BEA Project* and the possibility of replicating this experience within the Bilateral Agreement between the Department FISPPA, UNIPD and the DCH, UNEB, led to considering Multiple Case Studies as the most appropriate research methodology, since this was an empirical inquiry into contemporary phenomenon (i.e. a ‘case’), set within a real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin 2009).

The research design included a Pilot Case Study and a Multiple Case Study, as follows:

- Pilot Case Study: Petrolina, Brazil (March to June 2016).
- Case Study 1: Rovigo, Padua, Italy (October to December 2016).
- Case Study 2: Juazeiro, Brazil (March to July 2017).

As suggested by Yin (2005), the research involved the use of multiple data sources, which made it possible to refer to a wider range of issues, and a data triangulation to develop converging lines of inquiry. Tools and data collection sources were the following: documents (diaries, internal and/or administrative documents, E-mail correspondence, etc.), interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, direct and participant observations.

Due to the restrictions of the current paper, an overview of the different Case Studies is provided first. Secondly, the Process Model created from the Pilot Case study data analysis is illustrated, as implemented at FISPPA, UNIPD and DCH, Campus III, UNEB and analysed through Multiple Study Cases 1 (Rovigo, Italy) and 2 (Juazeiro, Brazil).

### *1.1 Pilot Case Study*

*Context:* City of Petrolina, State of Pernambuco, Brazil.

*Period:* from March 1 to June 30, 2016

*Research Object:* The *BEA Project*

*Hypothesis:*

- The *BEA Project* proposal is significant from the point of view of the University’s Internationalization and Social Responsibility and from the educational point of view for the undergraduate students involved.

- This proposal is replicable, with proper adjustments, in the contexts of Rovigo, Italy and Juazeiro, Brazil, as poles of a bilateral agreement between the FISPPA Department, UNIPD and DCH, UNEB.

*Partners:*

- Social Promotion Association En.A.R.S. Padua, Italy: *BEA Project* promoter and internship institution, through an Agreement with UNIPD;
- UNIPD, University of Padua, Italy: promoter of international mobility of undergraduate students for internships abroad;
- UPE, University of Pernambuco, Campus of Petrolina, Brazil: promoter of the *Extensão* project *Communication and educational relationships in extracurricular educational contexts*;
- FUNASE<sup>7</sup>, Petrolina-PE: *Progetto BEA* Partner hosting degree students for internship.
- UNIVASF, Federal University, Petrolina: En.A.R.S. Partner and promoter of intercultural and peer education activities with local and foreign students.
- APAE; Association dealing with people with disabilities.

*University students involved:* 2 students from the Educational Sciences Course FISPPA, UNIPD in Rovigo, Italy; 45 students from the 8th grade of the Degree Course in Pedagogy, UPE, Petrolina-PE Campus; 30 students from different UNIVASF graduate courses.

*Analysis Sub-unit:*

- 1) The sequence of activities envisaged by the *BEA Project*
- 2) University Social Engagement project established under the coordination of the *BEA Project* and through the collaboration of the UPE with FUNASE CASEM Petrolina
- 3) Undergraduate students' perception of their learning through the experience;

Analysis of the data collected from the various inquiries confirmed the initial hypothesis that the BEA proposal is significant from the point of view of University Internationalization and Social Responsibility and from the educational point of view for the students involved.

I am convinced that the BEA Project proposal is extremely significant from this point of view. I could see how important every moment I lived

<sup>7</sup> Social Educational Assistance Foundation for adolescents in conflict with the law – State of Pernambuco, Brazil.

was. Daily sharing, team meetings, reflection on certain issues and on practice, the university course, the stimulus to keep me questioning. All this was essential for a continuous growth and an educational process lasting four months<sup>8</sup>.

Definition of a cyclical sequence of *BEA Project* activities and reflections on the possibility of replicating the experience analysed at the other poles of the agreement between FISPPA, UNIPD and DCH, UNEB, led to development of a possible process model which was implemented and analysed in Case Studies 1 and 2.

### 1.2 Multiple Case Study

Case Study 1: October to December 2016.

Context: City of Rovigo, Italy.

Partners: DCH, Campus III, UNEB; FISPPA, UNIPD; Social Cooperatives Porto Alegre (Immigration) and Peter Pan (Children with Specific Learning Disorders), Department of Culture and University, Rovigo.

Case Study 2: March to July 2017.

Context: City of Juazeiro, State of Bahia, Brazil.

Partners: FISPPA, UNIPD; DCH, Campus III, UNEB; NAENDA, FUNDAC (adolescents in conflict with the law), *Pastoral da Mulher* (Women in prostitution) and *Lar São Vicente de Paulo* (Senior citizens).

For both Cases:

*Unit of Analyses:* The INTEREURISLAND Process Model

*Theoretical postulate:*

The INTEREURISLAND Process Model can be implemented in the two poles of the bilateral agreement between the FISPPA Department, UNIPD (Italy) and the DCH Department, Campus III, UNEB (Brazil) and the study of the two different cases will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

*Sub - unit of analysis:*

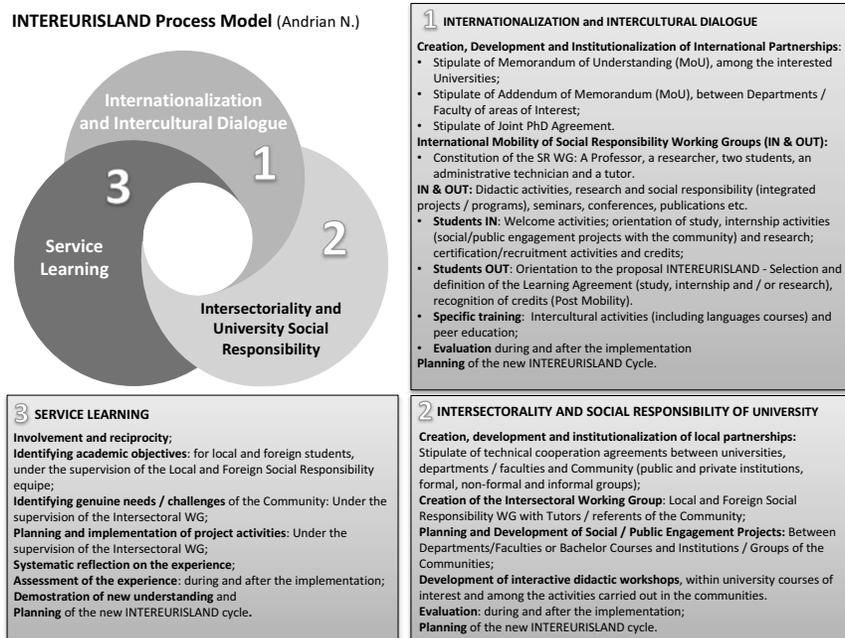
- 1) The sequence of practices implemented through the INTEREURISLAND Process Model;
- 2) The Social Responsibility project of the University;
- 3) The degree students' perception of their learning through the experience;

<sup>8</sup> Data source: final semi – structured questionnaire to Italian undergraduate students on mobility programmes in Petrolina (March-June 2016).

2. INTEREURISLAND – The Possible Process Model

Following analysis of the data collected during Study Cases 1 and 2 and an in-depth investigation of the studies on the University’s Internationalization and Social Responsibility, Figures 2, 3, and 4 summarize the ‘current situation’ as regards the justified development of the possible model for the Internationalization of University Social Responsibility experiences, INTEREURISLAND.

Figure 2 – INTEREURISLAND Process Model.



The Model presents the practices divided into three major areas that have been separated, both in the scheme presented and in the management of the proposed practices and processes. Areas which develop in close reciprocity and permeability, following a concentric sequence, each starting and developing through the other.

2.1 Starting from ‘Internationalization and Intercultural Dialogue’

Nowadays, universities face significant challenges due to major changes in international scenarios, (Knight 2009):

- innovations in information and communication technologies are providing alternative and virtual ways to provide higher education;
- new types of providers are emerging, such as international companies, for-profit institutions, corporate universities, and IT and media companies;
- providers – public and private, modern and traditional – have begun delivering education across national borders to meet the demand in other countries.
- alternative types of cross-border programme delivery, such as branch campuses and franchising and twinning arrangements, are being developed.

In 2014, Knight remarked that ‘isolated’ student mobility is considered the first generation of Cross Border Education. The latest frontiers identify, among the key features of the third generation, the Education Hub, the birth and development of International Branch Campuses and Excellence Research Centres and the development of specific mobility programmes, which are primarily addressed to: students, HE providers, research centres, and the knowledge industries.

Within this complex framework, the INTEREURISLAND model proposes a synergy between university/community local relations and international relations between different contexts and social responsibility projects/programmes.

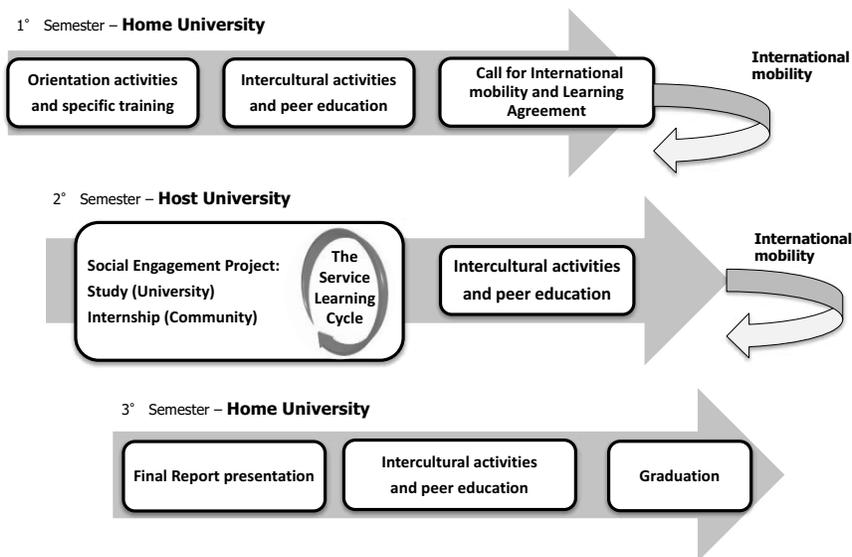
As indicated also by the Committee on International Relations of FORPROEX (2013), the proposal foresees the international mobility of a Social Responsibility Working Group (WG) composed, at the academic level, by a reference professor, a researcher (also a PhD student as joint supervision), two students, an administrative assistant, and a tutor.

In university/community interactions, exchanges of social responsibility WG should be based on community approval and support for potential projects and programmes to be implemented, through the creation of an inter-sectoral team. In addition, this condition opens up the possibility for communities in different countries to develop their forms of exchange through international technical cooperation agreements and/or programmes.

Figure 3 illustrates the complete cycle of activities that students are required to follow in synergy with the academic Social Responsibility WG and the Intersectoral WG. The plan considers the activities of the semester prior to the mobility period, carried out at the home university, the activities of the mobility semester at the host university, and those of the semester after the mobility.

Figure 3 – INTEREURISLAND international student mobility process.

INTEREURISLAND International students mobility Process (Andrian N.)



2.2 Developing ‘Intersectorality and the Social Responsibility of the University’

The most significant ideas contributing to the creation of a reference framework for the University’s Social Responsibility projects (Fig. 4), originated from evaluation of the data collected from analysis subunits on social responsibility projects, developed in each of the 3 different Study Cases.

An example is provided below, based on information about the *Extensão* project *Communication and educational relationships in extra-schooling educational contexts* of the Pilot Case Study. A project to teach *Interpersonal Relationships and Group Dynamics* of the 8<sup>th</sup> Degree Course in Pedagogy, UPE, Campus of Petrolina, according to the following *Extensão – PROEC, UPE*<sup>9</sup> actions:

- Knowledge Area: No. 7 – Human Sciences;
- Main thematic area: No. VI – Education;
- Secondary subject area: No. II – Education and Citizenship;
- Extension Line: No. 26 – Vulnerable Social Groups.

<sup>9</sup> UPE Pro-Rectorate of Extension and Culture, <<http://www.upe.br/modalidades-de-acoas>> (01/2018).

For the implementation of the project, an intersectional WG was created, consisting of the General Coordinator and the socio-psycho-pedagogical WG of FUNASE, local students (Pedagogy Degree Course, UPE) and foreign students (Educational Sciences Degree Course, Rovigo FISPPA, UNIPD) and a deputy professor of the related issues, as researcher. A WG that planned and developed the entire intervention, which turned out to be the focus of the given case study and of the entire INTEREURISLAND proposal.

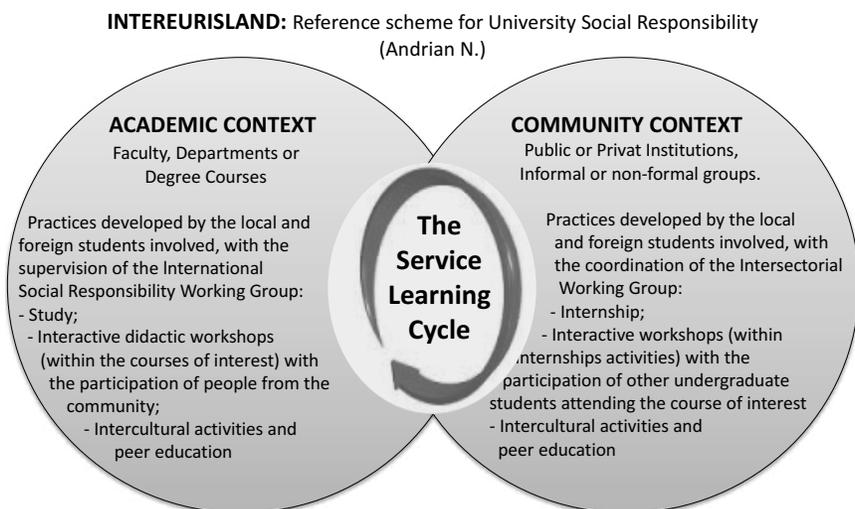
*Academic/Educational Goals* (shared and chosen by the professor and students involved: UPE and UNIPD): Acquiring/developing knowledge and skills regarding group dynamics, assertive communication, and educational relationships.

*Community needs* (expressed and shared by the FUNASE WG): creating moments of integration and developing positive relationships among adolescents in conflict with the law welcomed by the institution, among teenagers and the staff of the institution itself and among teenagers and other reference people (adult) from the community.

*Implemented activities:*

- interactive didactic laboratory on group dynamics and educational relationship, planned and managed by 45 students of the 8<sup>th</sup> Pedagogical Period, UPE, at the UPE Headquarters and during the curricular lessons with the active participation of the same students and 10 teenagers, welcomed by FUNASE. The workshop also provid-

Figure 4 – INTEREURISLAND reference scheme for University Social Responsibility.



ed opportunities for sharing and dialogue between the students, the coordination of the department of Pedagogy and the socio-psycho-pedagogical WG of FUNASE, regarding the professional profile of the pedagogical coordinator in institutions dealing with minors in conflict with the law.

- Encounters on assertive communication and active listening, held weekly at the FUNASE institution and in the city park. Nine internship mornings planned and conducted by local and foreign students, with the active participation of teenagers and the socio-psycho-pedagogical WG of the Institution.

### 2.3 'Service Learning'

*Service Learning* (S.L.) is a pedagogical proposal that originated in the United States and has spread rapidly to different regions of the world. Many trials have been carried out in several countries over the last twenty years, accompanied by many definitions, recognized benefits, and scientific reference literature on it.

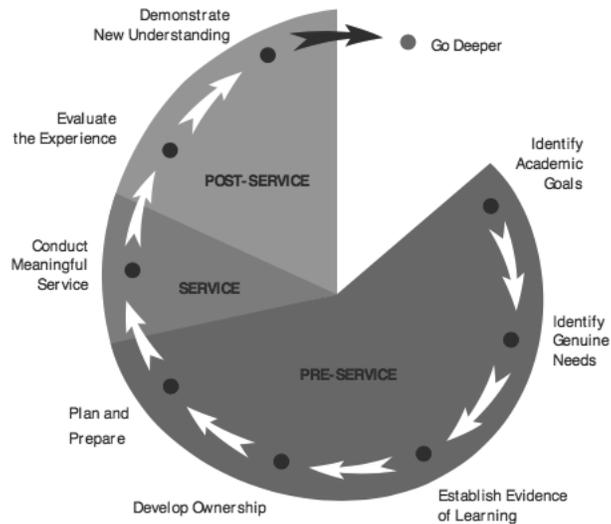
As indicated by Maria Nieves Tapia (2006), and from a 'Didactic Identity Card' (Fiorin 2016), S.L. lets students (schools and/or institutions of every level) be actors in the planning and implementation of activities combining school learning (with precise curricular goals) and solidary service (identifying real needs together with subjects from the community).

Service Learning seeks to engage students in activities that both combine community service and academic learning. Because service learning programs are typically rooted in formal courses (core academic, elective, or vocational), the service activities are usually based on particular curricular concepts that are being taught (FURCO 1996).

The Practical Guide, *The Nature of Learning, Using Research to Inspire Practice* from the OECD, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (2010), includes S.L. among the eight different proposals for building innovative learning environments. In Italy, the Ministry of University and Research (MIUR) has been promoting specific S.L. training for students and teachers with the Ministerial Decree No.663 of September 1, 2016, and the project 'Introduction of methodologies of participation in the Italian school system'.

The INTEREURISLAND model envisages that the planning and implementing of project activities follow the S.L. Cycle proposed by the National Youth Leadership Council (2009) as shown below (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – The Service Learning Cycle (National Youth Leadership Council 2009).



### 3. Final remarks

International mobility and intercultural dialogue between players from different countries, intersectorality between Universities and communities, Alternance between study, internships, and service learning proved fertile ground for exchange and enrichment, the basis of the INTEREURISLAND model.

The research highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of this possible model that promotes the development of relationships at two levels.

At the international level, by creating a network of partnerships as a privileged line of exchange, mobility, intercultural dialogue, innovative didactics, specific training, internships, and research.

At the local level, by creating intersectoral social responsibility WGs that facilitate peer-to-peer interaction between academia and their communities, building shared knowledge through innovative teaching and research activities, pro-social activities, sustainable development, and the practice of active citizenship.

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