



Chapter 46

Engaging Students and Communities Through Service Learning and Community–Academia Partnerships: Lessons From Social Marketing Education

Marco Bardus

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0707-7196>
American University of Beirut, Lebanon


Christine T. Domegan

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7975-9041>
National University of Ireland, Ireland

L. Suzanne Suggs

Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland

Bent Egberg Mikkelsen

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8700-6899>
Aalborg University, Denmark

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors present cases from four teaching marketing education experiences, based on community engagement and service learning principles. The cases address environmental and social issues (i.e., waste minimization [Lebanon], food consumption [Denmark], intellectual disability [Ireland], water consumption, and plastic waste reduction [Switzerland]). This chapter stems from discussions generated during a thematic workshop the authors organized at the 3rd European Social Marketing Conference, held in Espoo, Finland, on September 22, 2016. Through these cases, the authors aim to stimulate critical reflection on the role of service learning in the broader marketing education and on the intersection between education and profession.

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional model of education sees a linear interaction between university and the wider community, whereby knowledge is generated in the ‘ivory tower’ and spills out into the society. Over the past decade, however, this view has changed, with universities increasingly engaging with the society in the knowledge-generation process, through education and evidence-based practices. The concept of a ‘civic university’ embodies the dynamic interplay between academia and society, underlining the need for universities to cater for the needs of individuals and organizations. Following these trends, evidence-based disciplines such as business and marketing have gradually shifted from one-way, traditional, deductive pedagogic approaches to more inductive, interactive, experiential learning such as community engagement, also known as service learning (Heffernan, 2001; McKay-Nesbitt, DeMoranville, & McNally, 2012). This view is particularly fitting social marketing education, which reflects in the discipline’s goal of “benefiting individuals and communities for the greater social good” (iSMA, ESMA, & AASM, 2013). Social marketing, unlike commercial marketing, aims at influencing behaviour that will affect both the individual and the society. With service learning, social marketing students become ‘vectors of change’ for themselves and the communities in which they are involved (Domegan & Bringle, 2010).

The objective of this chapter is to stimulate critical reflection on the role and value of community engagement as a pedagogy to provide a meaningful learning experience for the community itself, the learners, and the instructors as well. This reflection applies to the broader marketing education and it contributes to the dearth of literature on social marketing education pedagogies. The authors, who are instructors of social marketing courses in their respective countries, reflect on four different teaching experiences and projects, based on community engagement and service learning principles. The cases address pro-environmental and pro-social issues, such as waste minimisation (AUB, Lebanon), sustainable food consumption (Aalborg University, Denmark), social inclusion in higher education for people with intellectual disability (NUI Galway, Ireland), and sustainable water consumption and waste reduction (USI, Switzerland). This chapter stems from fruitful discussions generated during a thematic workshop organised at the 3rd European Social Marketing Conference, held in Espoo, Finland, on September 22, 2016, in which the authors shared their experiences with an engaged and interested audience of social marketing practitioners and academics.

This chapter provides an overview of social marketing education, experiential learning, and the contexts of the cases, which will be described in the second paragraph (“Community Engagement”, the main focus of the chapter). Following case reporting guidelines (Yin, 2013), the authors provide a narrative summary of their experiences, focusing on issues and lessons learned. The “Solutions, Recommendations, and Future Research Directions” paragraph includes a discussion organised around two overarching research questions: How does experiential learning provide a meaningful learning experience for students and the community partners? What are the implications for the marketing discipline? The authors conclude the chapter with suggestions for future research, reflecting on cross-cutting themes that can apply to marketing education more broadly.

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