



# Implementation of Public Engagement Pedagogies in a Dutch university: From Individual Lecturers Towards an Institutional Approach

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## **Implementation of Public Engagement Pedagogies in a Dutch university: From Individual Lecturers Towards an Institutional Approach**

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There is an increasing demand for universities to respond to the needs and demands of a broad range of societal actors. Accordingly, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) aims to implement community service-learning (CSL) throughout its undergraduate and master's programs. Taking a broad conceptualization of CSL as an approach to public engagement that seeks an integration between classroom-based learning activities and community-based activities, we interviewed lecturers (n=23) who are at the forefront of adopting CSL at VU Amsterdam about their experiences. Through the analysis of those experiences, we report in our findings valuable lessons on how a university may make the transition from individual and isolated public engagement initiatives towards an institutional approach. To further institutionalize public engagement pedagogies, there is a need to create a shared vision on CSL, to widely implement adequate reward and recognition structures for lecturers, and to implement different forms of institutional support for coordination and management of partnerships with community partners. A centralized office can assist with capacity building and knowledge sharing about how to design and assess CSL activities that promote students' competences (including soft skills) and benefits to the community, while considering students' readiness levels and incorporating adequate ethical standards.

## **Implementación de pedagogías de participación pública en una universidad holandesa: del trabajo del profesor a un enfoque institucional**

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En la actualidad existe una demanda creciente, por parte de las universidades, de dar respuesta a las necesidades sociales con un amplio rango de actores sociales. Para abordar dichas necesidades, la Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) aspira a implementar el Servicio-Aprendizaje Comunitario (CSL en inglés) en todos los niveles de su programa subgraduado y en su programa de máster. Desde una conceptualización amplia de CSL como una forma de acercamiento a la participación pública que busca la integración de las actividades de aprendizaje en el aula y las actividades comunitarias, entrevistamos a profesores (n=23) líderes en la adopción del servicio de Aprendizaje-Servicio Comunitario (CSL) en VU Amsterdam y les preguntamos sobre sus experiencias pedagógicas. El análisis de dichas experiencias arrojó conclusiones muy útiles en torno a la progresiva integración de iniciativas públicas aisladas dentro de un marco institucional. Para institucionalizar pedagogías de colaboración pública, es necesario crear una visión compartida y arraigada en las prácticas del Aprendizaje-Servicio Comunitario con el objetivo de implementar una estructura de incentivación y reconocimiento para los profesores, además de crear diferentes modelos de apoyo institucional que coordinen y gestionen las colaboraciones con los socios comunitarios. Una oficina centralizada puede asistir con la capacitación y el intercambio de conocimientos que se enfoquen en el diseño y evaluación de determinadas actividades CSL que fomenten las competencias de los estudiantes (incluyendo las transversales) y que destaquen los

beneficios que reportan a la comunidad. Deben considerar, además, los niveles de preparación de los estudiantes y la incorporación de estándares éticos adecuados.

**Keywords:** *public engagement, institutionalization, community service-learning, lecturers, higher education, key lessons*

**Palabras clave:** *servicio comunitario-aprendizaje, lecciones clave, las educación superior, profesora/es, institucionalización, compromiso público*

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Higher education institutions (HEIs) are changing due to increasingly complex social demands, rising numbers of students and funding shortages (Berghaeuser & Hoelscher, 2019). Teaching and research, often regarded as universities' first and second missions, are still considered to be HEI's core functions. In response to such pressures, there is an increasing demand for universities to institutionalize a third mission that captures "all activities concerned with the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments" (Molas-Gallart & Castro-Martínez, 2007, p. 321).

The third mission can also be legitimized by activities such as lifelong learning and public engagement with a wide range of social actors (Berghaeuser & Hoelscher, 2019; Schuetze 2012; Kagan & Diamond 2019). Public engagement is a contemporary term for a range of activities that focus on interactions between universities and the broader public (Hamlyn et al., 2015). These activities include, among others, involving the public in the development of research and in research itself; working with societal stakeholders and communities in credit bearing courses, internships or volunteering, having students and/or researchers presenting to and writing for the public; working at festivals, science centres and other cultural venues (Hamlyn et al., 2015).

In many universities, the implementation of public engagement approaches is led by key individuals, often lecturers, who include them in their educational and/or research practices with little or no institutional support (Bennett et al., 2016; Hartley et al., 2005; Holland, 1997). Related to this, several authors claim that adopting an incremental approach is often conducive to a wider adoption of public engagement pedagogies (Blanchard et al., 2012; Cook et al., 2013; Murawski et al., 1999; Young et al., 2007).

Therefore, a central step in achieving an extensive and sustainable implementation of public engagement initiatives should be transferred from the initial collection of key individuals and often isolated actions to the universities' core by institutionalizing them (Holland, 2009). For this, it is essential that lecturers currently engaged in isolated initiatives are able to garner support from other faculty members, students, and office administrators (Holland, 2009).

In this article, we use the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (henceforth VU Amsterdam) in the Netherlands as a case study to explore how a university can make a transition from individual and isolated public engagement initiatives towards an institutionalized approach. The VU Amsterdam acknowledges the importance of public engagement actions to increase the social impact of its educational and research activities. This has been formalised in its Strategic Plan 2020–2025 which explicitly includes, among other goals, the intention to implement Community Service-Learning (CSL) throughout the university (VU Amsterdam, 2020).

Existing literature shows that drawing on the experiences and perspectives of early adopters can contribute to scaling-up and institutionalizing these pedagogies (Eckardt & Eisman, 2006; Cuthill, 2011). Thus, we identified and interviewed lecturers at VU Amsterdam (n=23) who are at the forefront of adopting educational approaches that seek an integration between classroom-based learning activities and a wide range of activities aimed at benefiting society. We then explored their views and experiences regarding the implementation of the current pedagogies, and their perceptions of what is required for scaling these up throughout the university. From that, we derived key lessons to support the institutionalization process at VU Amsterdam. These lessons might be relevant for other HEIs as well as for individual researchers and lecturers hoping to stimulate public engagement initiatives.

## Context of Community Service Learning

There are many definitions of community service-learning (CSL) in the literature. In this article, we focus on the pedagogical implications for students and use the concept of “the purple sphere” proposed by Furco and Norvell (2019), as it captures the complex nature and true essence of CSL and its underlying connection with public engagement. The purple sphere emerges from the realization that CSL consists of a real integration between classroom-based learning activities (the blue sphere) and community-based activities (the red sphere) (Furco & Norvell, 2019). According to the authors, such an integration implies that activities that occur within the blue and the red spheres reinforce each other as follows:

- classroom-based activities are designed to generate learning experiences that better prepare students to perform the community-based service activities; and
- community-based and public engagement activities are intentionally organized to influence and enhance students’ learning in classroom-based activities.

In addition, we use the term ‘public engagement’ in this article because it encompasses a wider range of activities that aim at promoting interactions between universities and society through research and/or teaching. As this research is situated in a context where there was no consensus about the definition of CSL at the VU Amsterdam, we adopt this approach because it allows us to take a broader view of how different lecturers were engaging with the public in their educational activities. Then, we apply the concept of purple sphere (Furco & Norvell, 2019) to capture the essence of community service learning and the connection with public engagement.

## Community service learning at VU Amsterdam

The concept of CSL originates from the United States and is becoming increasingly popular at universities in other countries (Bringle, 2017; Brundiers & Wiek 2013; Roman, 2015). In the Netherlands, public engagement, civic mindedness and the initiation of CSL courses have been promoted by the Dutch Department of Education since 2006 (Beckers & Van der Voordt, 2013). Since 2015, the relevance of CSL is underlined in VU Amsterdam’s institutional plan, as one of the educational aims is to provide opportunities for students to engage in activities with and for society through CSL (VU Amsterdam 2015). In 2020, the Strategic Plan 2020–2025 of the VU Amsterdam formalized the intention to implement Community Service Learning (CSL) throughout the undergraduate and master’s programs of the university (VU Amsterdam 2020). This research supplemented the Strategy Plan with the aim of building a better understanding of the scope of existing individual and isolated public engagement initiatives and positioning them within a broader institutional context.

## Methods

### Data collection

At the time we conducted this research, CSL was a relatively new concept at VU Amsterdam. However, there were already various courses and other educational activities that included public engagement activities and interactions with the public and social actors integrated in classroom-based learning activities.

Therefore, with the intention to implement CSL within the university, we identified these initiatives – even if they did not meet the typical definition of CSL as a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience that meets identified community needs and students develop competencies through reflection (Bringle and Hatcher 1995, 112) – and invited the lecturers responsible for them to participate in this research. This approach is in line with existing research on implementation of CSL that acknowledges the importance of identifying and exploring connections with existing activities for the purpose of creating bottom-up support and increased acceptance of the pedagogy (Bennett et al., 2016; Letven, Ostheimer & Statham, 2001; Ostrander, 2004).

Using a snowball sampling technique, we identified a total of 23 subjects. The selection criteria limited participants to teachers whose educational approach included some activity involving community partners and/or community members. In the public engagement courses included in this study, the activities varied from direct service-learning to indirect service-learning to research-based service learning. We defined direct service-learning as those involving face-to-face interaction between students and individuals and organizations to meet the requirements of the community. With indirect service learning, students are linked to the community in the role of an "advisor" working for a "client." In research-based service-learning courses, students collect, analyse, or implement data to focus on a community issue.

Semi-structured interviews gathered opinions and experiences from lecturers who integrate public engagement activities with classroom-based learning activities in their courses. In the interviews, we took CSL as a starting point because VU Amsterdam uses this terminology in its Strategic Plan as an umbrella term for public engagement pedagogies. The interview guide also included open-ended questions about the course activities related to community-based and public engagement activities, the facilitators of and barriers to these activities and their expected (learning) outcomes. (See Appendix for the interview schedule.) The questions were followed up with additional probing questions to encourage lecturers to recount their experiences in more detail. Some background information was also collected, including the respondents' sex, department, function, and years of experience. On average, the interviews lasted approximately an hour.

## Data analysis

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Two researchers (el Safti and Hilverda) were involved in the initial data-coding process using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data-analysis software. The first three interviews were independently coded and compared to develop an initial coding scheme. This coding scheme was further developed inductively. Multiple researchers reviewed the data to identify any misinterpretations or bias. When the researchers disagreed on the interpretation of a fragment, they reached consensus through discussion. The remaining interviews were coded by a single researcher, using the shared coding scheme. When a researcher was not sure how to code a specific fragment, the other researcher was consulted and a joint decision was made. The data analysis was reviewed and refined by two other researchers (Snijder and Scheffelaar) and organised into a final overview by looking for emergent patterns and themes specifically focused on facilitators and barriers. This researcher triangulation was intended to increase the validity, scope, depth, and consistency of our findings.

## Ethical considerations

Our research is considered 'standard' at VU Amsterdam for complying with the following conditions for human subjects:

- a) complete and correct information about the research prior to participation;
- b) conscious consent to the potential burden or harm by adults and voluntary participation in research before the participant engages in the research;
- c) the researcher guarantees the confidentiality of information obtained by adequate security and encryption;
- d) the researcher verifies data on risk of disclosure before they be made available to others.

In addition, our research complied with the following guidelines:

- No harm was envisaged for the participants or the population from which participants were drawn.
- Participants received complete and accurate information about the goals of the research before they participated.
- Participants gave active consent for participation in the research.
- Participants were healthy adults who are not in a vulnerable position.
- Personal and sensitive data are kept confidential and are stored in a secure environment.

The Code of Ethics for the Social and Behavioural Sciences of VU Amsterdam (2016) was followed. As 'standard' research that conformed to the guidelines, further review was not required by the Research Ethics Review Committee.

## **Results**

The results are presented in two sub-sections. First, we provide information on the respondents, courses and public engagement approaches we identified. Second, we report the perspectives and experiences of the lecturers we interviewed on different forms of public engagement to identify core strategies for scaling up such approaches for a deeper institutionalization within VU Amsterdam.

### **Description of the respondents, courses, and public engagement approaches**

We interviewed a total of 23 respondents who were involved in teaching 21 courses; 14 were women and nine were men. Two of the interviews were conducted with two lecturers at the same time. Respondents varied in age, years of teaching experience, and position (four junior lecturer and 19 senior lecturer). The respondents were from seven different programs of VU Amsterdam and varied from first year undergraduate courses ( $N = 15$ ) to master's courses ( $N = 6$ ) and extracurricular projects ( $N = 4$ ). See Table 1 for further information.

Although VU Amsterdam has been trying to implement and scale up CSL throughout its educational programs for some years, there has been a lack of awareness of the types of CSL practices occurring on campus. In this study, we identified several models of public engagement activities: a) the course-specific form enriching the theoretical content of a course and aimed at application of the acquired knowledge to practice, b) semester-long collaborative learning, and c) non-credit bearing, community-located initiatives.

There was considerable variation in the subjects' descriptions of the courses with regard to the degree and types of public engagement approaches and community-based activities carried out. Some courses included activities, such as a visit to a care organization to supplement the existing curriculum with first-hand insights into a topic. For example, one credit-bearing course in the Faculty of Science included four hours of volunteer work with senior citizens.

In most courses, public engagement activities were an additional component to enrich the theoretical content and apply the acquired knowledge to practice, for example, by conducting a research project, formulating recommendations, or designing a practical product, such as a business plan. Students learned to apply theory in practice, but for societal benefits. The students in these projects were not stationed at a workplace in an organization but were doing projects on behalf of social partners. The contact moments between students and communities and community partners differed across courses. For example, community partners were sometimes involved throughout the course, while in other courses community-based activities were a voluntary option. There were also cases where the community partner was involved in formulating the project (e.g., in the beginning or before the course began), but contact with students took place only at the end of the course by attending the presentation of the final product. For a sense of the range of CSL offered at VU, see sample course descriptions in Table 2.

**Table 1***Demographics of lecturers (N = 23) and courses (N = 21)*

Lecturer Demographic	N (Percent)	Course Data	N (Percent)
Gender		Grade	
Male	9 (39.1)	Bachelor	15 (71.4)
Female	14 (60.9)	Master	6 (28.6)
Teaching Experience		Extracurricular	
Junior	4 (17.4)	Yes	4 (19.0)
Senior	19 (82.6)	No	17 (81.0)
Faculty			
Health and Life science	6 (26.1)		
Health science	6 (26.1)		
Law	3 (13.2)	Length of Project	
Medical science	2 (8.7)	4-weeks	3 (14.3)
Environmental science	2 (8.7)	8 weeks	10 (47.6)
Medicine	2 (8.7)	5-6 months	5 (23.8)
Behaviour & movement science	1 (4.3)	1 year	3 (14.3)
Business and economics	1 (4.3)		
Logistics	1 (4.3)		
Psychology	1 (4.3)		
Sociology	1 (4.3)		
N/A	1 (4.3)		

*Note.* Teaching experience: Junior lecturer has less than 5 years of teaching experience, senior lecturer has 5 years or more of teaching experience.

## Strategies for Scaling Up and Institutionalization

Several key themes emerged from the interviews about how to expand and institutionalize public engagement activities in higher education. These are described below.

### *Create a Shared Vision*

Despite VU Amsterdam taking steps to formalize CSL as an important public engagement approach to strengthen its third mission, lecturers often reported that a lack of clarity and support for CSL at an institutional level posed challenges. Some lecturers had taught for years on projects integrating public engagement and community-based activities into their courses, but had never labelled these courses as CSL. A coherent, uniform vision – if broad and inclusive- of CSL throughout a university's management and departments is essential for scaling-up and further institutionalization. One teacher specifically named this issue:

...I think that as a management team or as a department you have to make clear that this is our vision. So, you must have your vision and your mission very well [defined], and adapted to your discipline. It took us years before everyone really accepted this.” (Lecturer of a bachelor course)

**Table 2***Three examples of public engagement in education at the VU Amsterdam*

Course name	Course description
Health in the City	In an elective course worth 6 credits in the BSc in Health Sciences, first- and second-year students of the “beta (i.e., natural) sciences” faculty work together in small groups in combination with activities with citizens of the municipality. The course consists of field work, lectures, sessions for reflection, and a presentation of the findings. It includes intensive projects that are developed in close collaboration with a commissioner.
Inside-Out Prison Exchange	The optional 6-credit course, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, developed for criminology and law students, takes place in a prison along with prisoners. The course idea originated from the United States. In 2019, law students and detainees collaborated by designing an ideal reintegration program in which the theoretical knowledge and prisoners’ experience was combined. Both students and detainees are selected based on their motivation.
The Learner-Centred Student-Run Clinic	The Learner-Centred Student-Run Clinic (LC-SRC also called De Studentenpoli) was designed to teach and train prescribing skills for medical students that are grounded in a real-life context and provide them with early clinical experience and responsibility (Recipe, 2020) The LC-SRC was founded in 2012 and is now a large student organization with more than 100 active students of different cohorts collaborating with specialists, general practitioners and other medical students to contribute to professional health care (Dekker et al. 2015). Students do not earn a salary or credits for their work. The clinic consists of various sub-projects (Schutte et al. 2017; Schutte et al., 2018).

***Widely Implement Adequate Reward and Recognition Structures***

The shared vision should go beyond the definition and mission of CSL. Several lecturers reported the absence of adequate reward and recognition structures at the university level to support and promote the implementation of CSL. Lack of time and budget were frequently mentioned barriers to the integration of public engagement activities into course-based learning activities. In relation to budget constraints, courses we identified were frequently smaller than usual, to provide more small-scale and intensive support to students. Instructors thus sometimes found that this small-scale and intensive support was inefficient in terms of allocation of resources. The lack of financial resources resulted in lecturers being less eager to commit themselves to public engagement. One teacher mentioned that it is difficult to remain committed to public engagement activities in a course without extra help.

“But scaling up, I have no idea right now of how [to do this], because I can’t do it on my own. I need extra teaching staff to do that, there is simply no money for it [because] the reimbursement per student is too low.” (Lecturer of a master course)

The need for changes in senior management priorities seems to be necessary in order to achieve improvements in the budget and time available for public engagement activities. One lecturer also mentioned that it is difficult to start these activities if there is little support from the management.



“But I note that in [a particular discipline] it is somewhat less multidisciplinary, which makes it more difficult to garner support. Because there’s no sense of urgency here. At least not with my boss. Nobody says go, go, go and carries everyone.” (Lecturer of a bachelor course)

Some lecturers received a grant or a prize to integrate public engagement into their courses, and education grants for students created some space for integrating public engagement into internships or master’s theses. To reduce their investment of time, lecturers sometimes deployed student assistants for extra support. Other lecturers recruited senior and master’s students to supervise first-year students as a means to reduce their own time investment. Only after student assistants and master’s students were involved for a longer period of time was this strategy deemed successful as a means to reduce lecturers’ workload, since supervision was more intense in the preliminary stages of a collaboration.

### ***Creation of a Centralized Office for Institutional Support***

Some lecturers proposed establishing a central office to provide different forms of institutional support that are needed to initiate and sustain the integration of public engagement activities into coursework. In our findings, two main forms of institutional support were identified:

- Coordination and management of partnerships with community partners;
- Promotion of students’ learning, community benefit and knowledge sharing across lecturers

These two forms of institutional support are detailed in the following sub-section.

### ***Provision of Institutional Support to Build, Sustain and Coordinate Partnerships for Public Engagement***

The kind of support a central office could provide seems to be even more relevant given that some lecturers reported that they had to embrace new roles in engaging with external stakeholders in their courses. In addition to the traditional teaching roles, in general, lecturers were often responsible for the facilitation, communication and coordination of public engagement activities among students and community partners. Lecturers had to learn to inform and maintain contact with all involved parties. Without institutional support, some lecturers found that this coordinating role was not always clear when they started out with public engagement, and that at first it can be difficult to do. They often juggle many things at once, such as supervising the students, liaising with the community partner and setting up (new) learning objectives. There is no particular manual to give them instructions.

“You are really a spider in the web. And, apparently, we had that role, or task, of having to inform everyone about everything all the time. [...] I found that really complicated.” (Lecturer of a bachelor course)

Lecturers sought ways to integrate public engagement as a permanent element of the courses they taught, and discussed some issues and strategies in this respect related to community partners, students, and topics. Lecturers looked for a way to extend the collaboration with community partners over several years, as the start of a sustainable collaboration, and setting out each other’s aims, needs and wishes required substantial time. The public engagement activities were adjusted and tailored to the topics of concern each year, based on the needs of community partners, but the *process* remained mostly the same over the years.

“So, it is based on the concept of working with a question that arises from practice and will be presented to the clients. So, that process should remain the same but the topic might change. Otherwise, it will become an ordinary assignment [without CSL] and then it won’t work.” (Lecturer of a bachelor course))

Furthermore, lecturers reported on the strong need for information on ongoing public engagement approaches linked to education, on more practical support and coordination in relation to community partners and other courses. A central office could maintain an overview of public engagement activities linked to courses and create an inventory of problems and questions community partners face, which could be stored in a database for possible matches with course content.

### ***Provision of Institutional Support to Promote Students' Learning, Community Benefit and Knowledge Sharing***

In line with the need to create a shared vision on CSL, lecturers said they would benefit from a centralized institutional support offering guidance about how to scale up the service activities to reflect the increasing knowledge and competence of students to provide beneficial service. Three specific areas of support were mentioned by several lecturers:

1. How to design in-class learning activities and community-based activities that consider student's level of readiness whereas promoting benefits to the community.
2. How to incorporate the required ethical standards and how to work with vulnerable populations.
3. How to assess and evaluate soft-skills and attitudes acquired by students in CSL (e.g., reflexivity, responsibility, effective communication, among others).

Without a centralized source of information about best practices, lecturers often struggled to effectively address these issues. Many noted that the implementation of CSL on a wider scale within the university could benefit from different forms of institutional support, including training for lecturers on those topics and knowledge sharing activities, mechanisms and platforms to stimulate co-learning. Although the courses were developed from the bottom up and organized demand-driven and problem-focused approaches, lecturers emphasized their need to share good examples to increase the sharing of knowledge among their colleagues. The importance of exchange was pointed out by a teacher of business and economics:

“It is really crazy that we are all reinventing the wheel here and don't know what we are doing and so on. I think that's important [knowing examples of CSL courses], and that courses will be more aligned by increased exchange.” (Lecturer of a bachelor course)

## **Discussion**

In this article we analyzed how VU Amsterdam has been trying to institutionalize public engagement pedagogies – often labelled as CSL – into its third mission. This process started with the identification of key individuals who integrated public engagement activities in their courses with little or no institutional support. In fact, starting from the bottom and using the experiences as a guide for scaling up CSL activities is a strategy often mentioned in the literature on institutionalization of CSL in higher education institutions (Bennett et al. 2016; de Chastonay et al., 2012; Holland, 1997; Reams & Twale, 2007). To our knowledge, this is the first Dutch study that presents relevant lessons for the wider implementation of public engagement approaches into educational practices at VU Amsterdam and other universities in Europe and around the world with the same goal.

As no study was conducted on CSL among lecturers in the Netherlands, this study provides unique insight into the implementation of it in a Dutch context where it is not yet broadly institutionalized. In line with previous studies in the United States and other parts of the world (Moore & Ward, 2010; Holland, 2019), Dutch lecturers who integrate public engagement activities into their coursework often report a positive impact on their research and other educational activities.

Some key challenges come to the fore. Similar to previous studies (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Banerjee and Hausafus, 2007; Halberstadt et al., 2019; Vogel, Seifer, & Gelmon, 2010), time and budgetary constraints and lack of institutional support were identified as key challenges. Likewise, logistical problems in coordinating community-based service activities and lack of time to develop a CSL course were key hurdles identified elsewhere (Abes et al., 2002; Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007). The establishment of a central office and the provision of institutional support at the administrative level can reduce the lack of time and budget (Werder et al., 2005).

Based on the study findings, some practical implications can be drawn out specifically for institutions in which public engagement is not fully developed and institutionalized into their third mission. The key lessons and recommendations offer guidance on where to focus when scaling up public engagement in the university. Literature also underlines the importance of recognizing public engagement activities as faculty

work, and therefore allocating the necessary time for them (Abes et al., 2002; Darby & Newman, 2014; Hou, 2010). When that is the case, there is a need for the corresponding conceptual and evaluative guidelines and a clear link to the university's mission, and sustainable institutionalization (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Buchanan et al., 2002). Furthermore, a central office for public engagement may help to get an overview of all existing activities across the university and serve as a knowledge repository of, for instance, practical guidelines and documentation of best practices (Opazo & Aramburuzabala, 2019). In this way, the different roles and tasks of the various parties can be made transparent, allowing for more extensive cooperation and sharing of lessons learned.

## Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths. Most notably, it is the first study to investigate public engagement approaches to be integrated across university departments from the perspective of lecturers in the Netherlands. This research includes lecturers from a variety of backgrounds, levels of experience and disciplines. The study provides insight into the issues arising when public engagement is not yet institutionalized and there is no broad consensus on the conceptualization of public engagement pedagogies, such as CSL, in the institution. Furthermore, the chance of bias was reduced by having several researchers involved in data analysis. In addition, in this article the steps of the data analysis were described in as much detail as possible, to decrease the dependability on one researcher and to achieve inter-researcher reliability.

Some limitations are also worth noting. A drawback of the exploratory and open nature of the interview structure is that not all background information was collected in a structured way with regard to the specific content of the courses, the background of lecturers, and the student populations. This limited the possibility of distinguishing between courses in relation to topics, different course designs or to the level of lecturers' experience. This information may have implications for different forms of institutional support (e.g., which forms apply to the wider institutional context, and which are related to specific contexts (e.g., disciplines, societal issues, students and/or teachers' experience level, among others)).

Although we believe our findings provide helpful insights for other universities willing to implement and scale up public engagement pedagogies, it is important to keep in mind there is no 'one-size-fits-all' strategy. Every institution has its own unique history and organizational culture and, even within one university, there may be substantial differences across different faculties (Meijs et al., 2019). Therefore, the situational elements and context-specific factors must be carefully considered by both lecturers and senior administrators (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the broad inclusion criteria used also may have implications for the institutionalization process. We interviewed lecturers involved in courses including both in-class learning activities and public engagement activities, although the integration of those activities was not entirely clear in some instances. Thus, it can be debated whether certain courses fulfilled the definitions and criteria set for the purple circle, as defined by Furco and Norvell (2019) as the integration of classroom- and community-based learning activities. This limitation is related to the finding that there was no consensus or shared definition on CSL among respondents at VU Amsterdam. Such a shared view on what CSL entailed had important implications to *what exactly is being institutionalized*. There are different views on the socio-political nature and role of service-learning. For instance, Morton (1995) differentiated between thick service-learning (sustaining and potentially revolutionary) and thin service-learning (disempowering and hollow), whereas Mitchell (2008) differentiated between critical (i.e., an educational practice that encourage students to see themselves as agents of social change, and use the experience of service to address and respond to injustice in communities) and traditional service-learning (a depoliticized practice that does not pay attention to those issues and concerns). Thus, if service-learning is institutionalized as an add-on, focused within an administrative unit, and faculty rewards and support are minimized, then it most likely will lead to a disappointingly thin and non-critical and unsustainable service-learning practice (Butin, 2006).

## Future directions

Some directions for future research are identified. One is related to the specific type of teachers involved in public engagement as relatively new form of learning. Because this pedagogical approach is not widespread in the Netherlands, in many Dutch universities it will be seen as an educational innovation. Thus, the respondents in this study could be regarded as innovators or early adopters, as categorized in Roger's diffusion of innovation model (Rogers, 1983). Innovators and early adopters embrace innovative practices, are able to handle a high degree of uncertainty, and learn through trial and error. These forerunners are not afraid and are therefore not like the so-called laggards, who favour maintaining their traditional methods. This might have influenced the results of the current study, as 'laggards' might struggle more with the flexibility and coaching role needed to support student learning in this pedagogy. Future research could find out more about the perspective of non-adopters, who might have different motivations and reasons for implementing public engagement activities in their courses. Those perspectives and motivation can provide the institutionalization effort with valuable input.

A second direction for future research concerns the type of respondents. As the current study is primarily focused on the perspectives of lecturers, future studies might include the perspectives of other parties, such as community partners, community members, and students, in order to examine the facilitators and barriers from different perspectives. Finally, this article was specifically focused on the lecturer's experiences and perspectives on public engagement and student learning. Future studies can address the relationships of students and teachers with community partners and members, to explore the community value and community impact in detail.

## Conclusion

In this article, we analysed how individual lecturers have implemented public engagement pedagogies in their courses to inform VU Amsterdam's efforts to institutionalize CSL across the university. We found that this set of key individuals were sufficiently motivated to carry out these activities with little or no institutional support. However, to further institutionalize public engagement pedagogies, there is a need to create a shared vision, support the establishment and sustainability of external partnerships, and offer (financial) incentives to lecturers. Those formal steps are essential within a university to make the transition from individual and isolated public engagement initiatives towards an institutionalized approach.

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## Appendix

### Topic guide

#### Community service learning or CSL

- What is your interpretation or definition of CSL?
- Tell us about your involvement in the CSL course? What does CSL look like within your course?
- What organizational issues do you encounter related to CSL?
- What have you changed in your CSL course over time and why?
- What skills, knowledge, and attitudes are covered in CSL education (see attached table)?

#### Best practices

- What do you think are success factors for implementing CSL?
- What is important regarding ethics in CSL?
- What barriers for the implementation of CSL do you distinguish?

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