RURAL 3.0
: SERVICE LEARNING
FOR THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS: SERVICE-LEARNING FOR FUTURE JOURNALISTS AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION SPECIALISTS

'PENKTA KOJA' shelter in Lithuania

SUMMARY (approx. 100-200 words)

Service learning experience presented here is a part of the Erasmus+ Project "Rural 3.0: Learning through service for rural development" (Ref. 99382- EPP-1-2018-1-PT-EPPKA2-KA), within KA2 action (Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices - Knowledge alliances). During the project, Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas, Lithuania) delivered the service learning course "Management of Communication Project (6 ECTS) for 105 four-year students of the study program 'Public Communication' (72 students in 2019-2020 and 35 in 2020-2021). The studets were invited to choose a place and community for service. 25 students studying the course chose rural areas as a place of service. Other students 82 chose an opportunity to perform service learning in an urban area (city of Kaunas). While running the project RURASL students from Vytautas Magnus University and project partners from Kaunas LAG (the Project partner) together with 12 organizations in rural communities implemented the service learning activities. University students assisted organizations in rural areas (animal shelters, libraries, elderly care homes, civic organizations located in rural areas) to address the needs of rural communities.

LINKS

Link of the course of the academic module designed for RURASL project:
http://learn.rural.ffzg.hr:8080/login/index.php

Link of videos and testimonials:

PROJECT DATA

Country	
Lithuania	
Name of the course of the academic module designed for RURAL 3.0	
Management of Communication Projects (Komunikacijos projektų valdymas)	
ECTS credits assigned to the course	
6 ECTS	
Duration of the Course	
1 semester (4 months)	
Distribution of contact hours of the Course	
14 hours of lectures, 7 hours of seminars and workshops	
Name of Higher Education Institution	
Vytautas Magnus University	
Person responsible for the project at the Higher Education Institution and email address	
Natalija Mažeikienė Email: natalija.mazeikiene@vdu.lt	
Name of rural organization	

Coordinator of activities - Kaunas LAG

Other organizations in rural areas:

2 projects in animal shelters located in rural areas - the organization 'Penkta Koja' (5 students), 1 project in the organization Kaunas Pet Welfare Home 'Nojus' (3 students) in 1 project in the organization 'Lėsė' (3 students)
1 project at the public library of the Kaunas region - Kauno rajono viešoji biblioteka (3 students) which unites branches in more than 30 small cities and villages;
1 project in Elderly care home in Rokai - Kaunas region senelių namai 'Rokų gerovė'
4 projects in organizations operating on the national and regional level (including rural communities) – 'Nacionalnis Kraujo centras Kaunas' /National Blood Centre in Kaunas, 'Maisto bankas' / Food Bank, NVOs on political participation (Iniciatyva ,,Žinau, ką renku"/ Initiatives on empowering voters),

<u>Video created by students</u> *This project is part of the RURASL Knowledge Alliances project (https://rural.ffzg.unizg.hr/) funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.* THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION SUPPORT FOR THE PRODUCTION OF THIS DOCUMENT DOES NOT CONSTITUTE AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE CONTENTS WHICH REFLECTS THE VIEWS ONLY OF THE AUTHORS, AND THE COMMISSION CANNOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY USE WHICH MAY BE MADE OF THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN. Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union	Kauno apskrities moterų krizių centras/ Kaunas region women's crisis centre, etc.
	Person responsible for the project at the rural organization and email address
	Coordinator of activities at rural communities: Kristina Kazlauskaitė-Zumarienė, Kaunas LAG projektai.krvvg@gmail.com
	Number of participating Higher Education students
	During the autumn semester in 2019, 17 students participated in service learning in rural communities. The general number of students who participated in service learning is rural and urban areas was 72. During the autumn semester of 2020, 8 students participated in service learning in rural communities. The general number of students who participated in service learning is rural and urban areas was 35.
	Degrees of the participating Higher Education students and course (1st year, 2nd year,…)
	4th year students
	Number of beneficiaries of the service
	At least 20 beneficiaries who directly participated in activities - community members, employees of organizations, and volunteers At least 100 beneficiaries who indirectly received a benefit from the services (by using products and services created)
	Modality of the project (face-to-face, virtual, mixed and/or international)
	Blended learning. Face-to-face – 7 lectures (14 hours) and 7 seminars/ workshops (7 hours) (during Covid-19 this mode of studies is changed to online-learning). **Online learning in Moodle** environment (written assignments, course materials). **On-site service** and learning in communities (about 40 hours, including group work time to produce producst and services)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background of the project

Vytautas Magnus University has been implementing service-learning since the early 2000s. In 2004-2006 project "Dialogue between universities and communities" (CIVICUS) was coordinated by Vytautas Magnus University in the framework of the EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme in cooperation with European partners (universities, research centers, NGOs, and business institutions). In 2014-2017 Vytautas Magnus University participated as a partner in the

project 'EUROPE ENGAGE−Developing a Culture of Civic Engagement through Service-Learning within Higher Education in Europe' within Erasmus+ programme. Together with partners from 11 European countries, teachers and students from Vytautas Magnus university tested service learning teaching/ learning and assessment strategies. Participants of the Europe Engage project - teachers from the Department of Public Communication and Department of Social Work have been teaching service learning courses for future journalists, public communication specialists and social workers for 8 years. While running European Project 'Rural 3.0: Service Learning for the Rural Development' (RURASL) in the framework of Erasmus+ programme KA2 (Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices - Knowledge Alliances) Vytautas Magnus university and community partners from Kaunas LAG (the Local Action Group) and other communities implemented service learning in rural areas.

General social needs addressed by the project

(Service-learning addresses real community challenges. It is meaningful and relevant to community partners and students. Issues relevant to civic, cultural, economic, and political society are explored)

In Lithuania, 30 percent of the population lives in rural areas. In 2019, 67.1 per cent of the country's permanent population lived in cities and 32.9 per cent in rural areas. People living in rural areas are more likely to be exposed to poverty and exclusion risk. According to Ubarevičienė and Van Ham (2016)[1], people with higher socio-economic status in Lithuania are increasingly overrepresented in the largest city-regions, while the elderly and residents with lower socioeconomic status are overrepresented in declining rural regions. In 2017, the unemployment rate was 5.4 percent in urban areas and 11.0 percent in rural areas (Lietuvos statistikos..., 2018). Disparities of income inequality among rural and urban regions are significant. The average income of rural households accounts for only 67.9 per cent of the income of urban households. Income inequality causes social tension and increases emigration (Social Report 2016-2017)[2]. Additionally, depopulation processes have been increasing in rural areas. Internal migration leads to the redistribution of the population from rural to urban areas (Ubarevičienė 2016). Population segregation is taking place in rural areas when the concentration of older and lower social-economic status population is increasing in depopulated rural regions (Kriaučiūnas, 2018)[3]. So, in rural territories the unemployment rate is higher, ageing and depopulation processes are increasing faster than in urban areas. Educational, cultural, social, and health, public transportation services are less available for inhabitants living in rural areas.

According to another method of differentiating regions, in Lithuania, 8,6% of the population live in the rural area; 63,2 % in intermediate areas (small towns and district settlements); 28,3 % - in urban areas. Lithuania belongs to the group of Member States (Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania) with the highest percentages of intermediate territory (around 70%). Researchers (Kriaučiūnas, 2018) notice a new tendency in Lithuania – the very rapid growth of the number of large city residents living in suburban rural areas. At present, suburban residents of big cities (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda) are treated as rural residents. In the formal country statistics, these suburban residents are treated as rural populations. However, the living conditions and way of life in these districts differ significantly from conditions in remote and depopulated rural communities. According to Kriaučiūnas (2018), in suburban areas, the population is growing, and at the same time in peripheral rural areas, an intensive depopulation is going on.

While implementing the project 'Rural 3.0: Service Learning for the Rural Development' (RURASL) it has been important to take into consideration these new tendencies of development of big cities when surrounding rural districts become a living area for people working in Kaunas. Since many students from Vytautas Magnus University decided to perform service learning in rural areas near Kaunas it became crucial to recognize particular features of these communities and how their living conditions are influenced by the proximity of Kaunas city.

Students during their service in communities identified the needs of communities that are related to students' profile of study program (public communication and journalism). The students recognized communities' needs to **improve public communication and self-representation** to:

- become more visible, present better their identity, mission and activities, combat stereotypes on the group represented by the community;

- carry out public education and awareness-raising of broader public seeking to change citizens' attitudes and values,
- attract volunteers to the communities
- ensure fund raising and financial support

Analysis performed by students revealed that organizations and communities don't have appropriate communication strategies and plans, staff appointed to the task, relevant competencies, and resources (both human and financial).

For instance, at pet shelters, students identified the need to educate society and raise awareness on homeless animals, animal rights, to strengthen attitudes of moral behavior and responsibility towards animals, to mitigate animal abuse and strengthen the protection of animals.

Students identified **a lack of human resources at organizations to perform their regular actitivies and services**. At animal shelters, community members experience problems due to a lack of volunteers. During their service students helped organizations to take care about animals (dogs, cats) by engaging into 'emotional labour' (communication with animals and walking with dogs).

During service at **cultural and educational institutions** (libraries, museums, educational centres) in rural areas, students identified needs:
- to improve ICT ir information skills of community members, elderly people,
- to attract young users which don't find activities of traditional cultural organization attractive;
- to strengthen links and collaboration with external regional, national and international organizations and partners

Service objectives
- To assist rural communities and organizations in delivering social, cultural and educational services by creating communication products and contributing as future communication professionals;
- To help rural communities and organizations to build social cohesion by strengthening internal and external communication;
- To perform volunteering and provide missing human resources

Learning objectives
 Learning objectives
- Students will learn about the management of communication projects and acquire practical skills to implement small-scale communication projects in real organizations and communities;
- Students will learn to identify problems, make and negotiate proposals with communities, design and develop communication products.
- Students will learn how to apply social theories and concepts on communication to implementing projects in real organizations;
- Students will learn about communicative empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups and will practice it in small-scale projects in the communities and organizations;
- Students will learn to identify target audiences, carry out communication audit and set up a communication plan in a real organization;
- Students will improve skills and develop attitudes of civic engagement (involvement with and commitment to community)
- Students will improve reflexive and critical inquiry skills

Linkage with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its targets
 4. Quality education. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. **4.7.** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote

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[1] Retrieved from http://ftp.iza.org/dp10160.pdf, accessed on February, 23

[2] https://socmin.lrv.lt/uploads/socmin/documents/files/pdf/13545_social-report-2016-2017.pdf

[3] Kriaučiūnas E. (2018). Lietuvos kaimiškų teritorijų apgyvenimas: erdvinės transformacijos ir gyventojų gerovė, *Geografijos metraštis* 51, 2018, 3-24.

sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
3.8. Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential

11. Sustanaible cities and communities. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
11.a. Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.

Other organizations that participated in the project
Staff and volunteers of organization in rural areas:
- Public organizations working on cultural and social services: Kauno rajono viešoji biblioteka/ Kaunas district public library uniting branches in more than 30 small cities and villages; senelių namai 'Rokų gerovė'/ Elderly care home in Rokai, Kaunas region.
- Animal shelters - 'Penkta koja', 'Lėsė', 'Nojus';
- Organizations operating on the national and regional level (including rural communities) – 'Kraujo bankas'/ Blood Bank, 'Maisto bankas'/ Food Bank, NVOs on political participation (Iniciatyva ,,Žinau, ką renku"/ Initiatives on empowering voters), Kauno apskrities moterų krizių centras/ Kaunas region women's crisis centre, etc.

Reflection activities

Written reflections in the form Reflective logs (diaries), Oral reflections with the course teachers at university and the communities, Group and intervision reflections.

Evaluation
The general strategy of evaluation included a combination of summative and formative approaches. The final evaluation by giving a grade (100 %) was divided into three parts – 20 % + 30% +50%. Assignments included individual and group activities, analytical tasks, written and oral reflexive practices, project-based and collaboration on-site activities in rural communities.
- **20 %** - group work assignment on the **identification of problems in communities**; including the use of analytical tools – SWOT, PEST analysis, setting up problem-tree of social and communication problems;
- **30 %** - an individual written work assignment including **reflexive activities. Reflexive log** was submitted by students to teachers at the end of the semester. The reflexive log contains sections on analysis of personal, organizational and other problems faced and tackled in the communities, relation of service to university curriculum and study subject, reflection on connections between academic achievement, civic engagement, personal growth, and development, etc.). The reflexive log contains a summative presentation of **reflexive diary entries** which are written by students after every visit in the community.
- **50 %** - group work assignment on **the service learning project** in the community including a description of social and communication problems in an organization/ community and description of the products

created and services provided in the community. Products created and services provided during the service learning are assessed too.

Dissemination activities of the project
These service-learning projects have been presented and the experience was shared with colleagues from the Department of Public Communication and Social work at Vytautas Magnus University.

Human resources and materials needed
- Project Coordinator: Natalija Mažeikienė
- Kaunas LAG
- Students of the Vytautas Magnus University

- University teachers: Auksė Balčytienė, Natalija Mažeikienė, Rūta Vainauskaitė, Valerija Možeika
- Community members and volunteers from Kaunas region
  - Moodle course as the main resource

Solutions provided through the service to the identified rural needs

CASE STUDY. SOLUTIONS PROVIDED TO CULTURAL SERVICES ORGANIZATIONS (LIBRARIES, MUSEUMS, RURAL TORUSIM PROVIDERS, ETC.)
A group of students performed service at Kaunas region public library situated in Garliava (a settlement remoted 6 km from Kaunas). This organization has 30 branches in small towns and villages of the Kaunas region: Babtai, Batniava, Domeikava, Daugėliškės, Čekiškė, Eigirgala, Ežerėlis, Ilgakiemis, Lapės, Kačerginė, Karmelava, Kulautuva, Linksmadvaris, Liučiūnai, Neveronys, Padauguva, Pagynė, Panevėžiūkas, Piliuona, Ramučiai, Ringaudai, Rokai, Saulėtekis, Sitkūnai, Šlienava, Užliedžiai, Vandžiogala, Vilkija, Zapiškis). This organization undergoes a shift from a traditional role to a mission of the contemporary library. The new role includes new functions - to arrange cultural life in rural communities (library, internet access, and other services for inhabitants, international and national cultural events, art exhibitions, community events; education (information and media literacy). In that regard, **needs of the organization and rural communities:** to improve ICT and media literacy skills of community members (including elderly people), to attract young users who don't find library activities and mode of communication attractive, to strengthen ties and links with external regional, national and international organizations.
At the beginning of the service, students performed an analysis of the needs and issues faced by the library. The students carried out Assignment 1 (20 % of final evaluation; group work assignment on the identification of problems in communities; including the use of analytical tools – SWOT, PEST analysis, setting up problem-tree of social and communication problems). Students helped the library to enhance and promote external communication, improve communication through social media (FB, Instagram), improve communication on events. Students helped to prepare Communication Plan, produced FB and Instagram posts. During their service students carried out individual written assignment of writing a reflexive log (30 % of final evaluation). At the end of the semester, students presented a group project for evaluation (50 % of final evaluation).
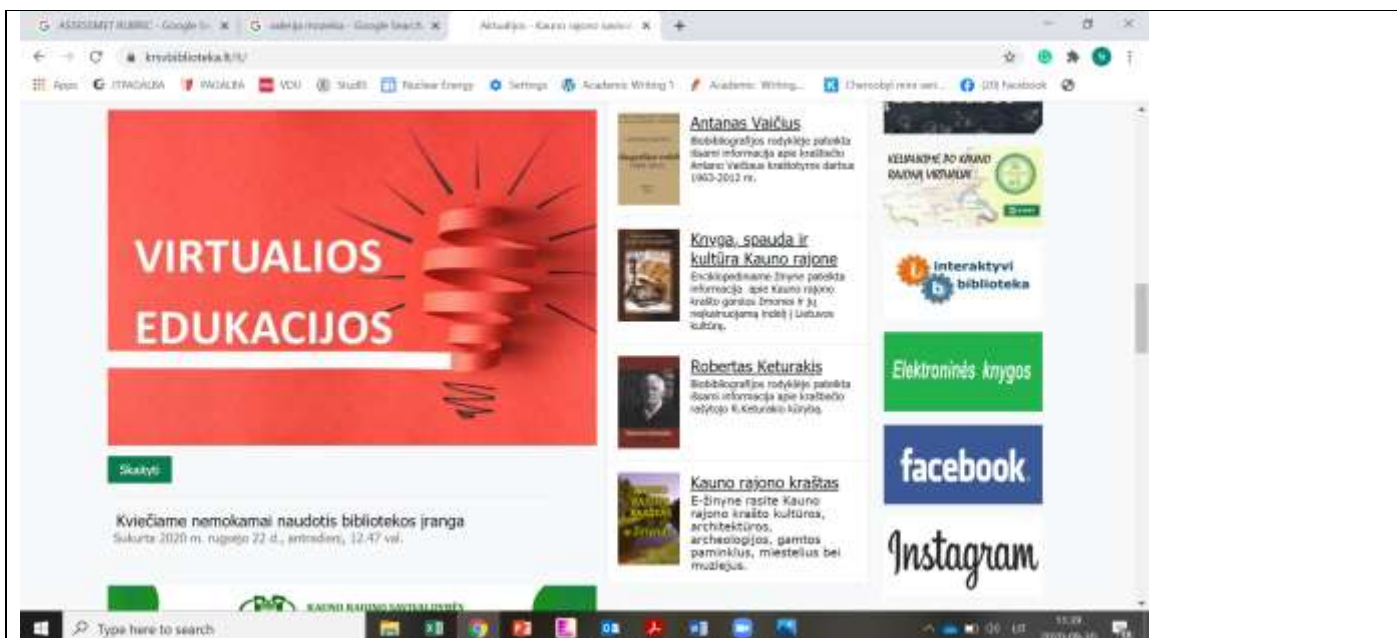
CASE STUDY. SOLUTIONS PROVIDED TO ANIMAL SHELTERS

Several teams of students in the autumn semester 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 performed service in animal shelters - the organization 'Penkta Koja' (5 students), 1 project in the organization Kaunas Pet Welfare Home 'Nojus' (3 students) in 1 project in the organization 'Lėsė' (3 students). These organizations are located in rural areas (for instance 'Penkta koja' is located about 20 km from Kaunas) since it is cheaper to rent shelter housing in the village and this territory is more suitable for shelters than urban places. At the same time, the proximity of Kaunas as a big town is important for the shelter – the majority of unowned dogs, future owners of animals, staff, and volunteers are inhabitants of the city.

At the beginning of the service, students performed an analysis of the needs and issues faced by the animal shelters. The students carried out Assignment 1 (20 % of final evaluation; group work assignment on the identification of problems in communities; including the use of analytical tools – SWOT, PEST analysis, setting up problem-tree of social and communication problems).

Students identified these **issues and needs of the organization and rural communities:**

- lack of human resources (staff and volunteers) and need to attract volunteers who would to walk and communicate with dogs, clean facilities, communicate with visitors;
- lack of financial resources and a need to raise funding (there are too many dogs in the shelters and too few financial resources to buy food, rent shelter facilities, provide medical treatment, sterilization, etc).
- need to perform efficient public communication and awareness-raising on animal welfare, animals' rights, responsible pet ownership, how to combat animal abuse and cruelty to animals.
- need to perform effective internal communication with volunteers who are not sufficiently informed about organization and work

Students assisted the animal shelters in taking care of dogs (walking and feeding dogs, cleaning facilities, etc.). Students helped the pet shelters to enhance and promote external communication on the website and social media (FB and Instagram) by creating stories about dogs and promoting their adoption, by presenting success stories of animal adoption. Students created promotional videos and materials inviting citizens to donate money and adopt dogs, to work as volunteers (see Video created by students) Students initiated communication campaigns on Facebook and Instagram (for instance, inviting to adopt senior (geriatric) dogs, announcing a 'Month of Adopted Dogs'). Students organized internal communication events for volunteers seeking to integrate them better into the organization). During their service students carried out individual written assignment of writing reflexive log (30 % of final evaluation). At the end of the semester, students presented a group project for evaluation (50 % of final evaluation).