

Policy recommendations for the enhancement of community engagement in higher education:

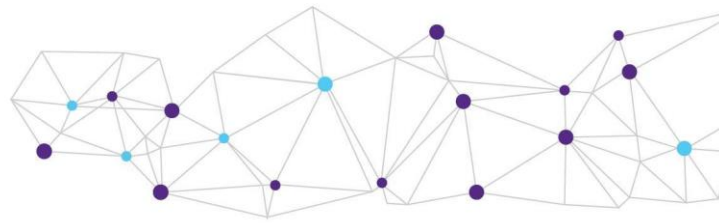
national and system-level policy recommendations for Flanders, Belgium

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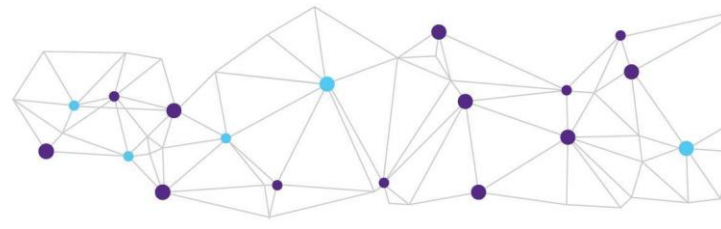
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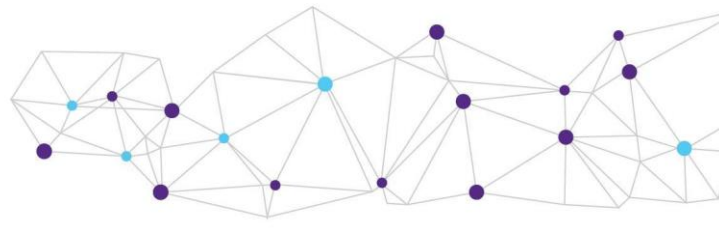
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Policy recommendations for the enhancement of community engagement in higher education: regional and system-level policy recommendations for Flanders, Belgium

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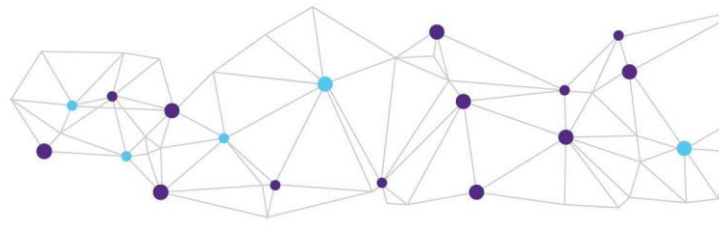
Summary

This document formulates policy recommendations for the enhancement of community engagement in higher education at the regional level. Firstly, it outlines the regional context of community engagement in higher education in Flanders. It highlights the lack of a shared definition of community engagement and the various concepts and definitions currently in use in Flanders. While a limiting top-down framework is not desirable within the Flemish context, a broad common definition might support dialogue and agenda setting.

Secondly, the document discusses the limited explicit inclusion of the social purpose of higher education and scientific research in existing policy frameworks. It highlights existing programmes that implicitly include social dimensions or overlap with a broad definition of community engagement activities, such as dual learning programmes, citizen science, mixed-source research funding programmes, quality assurance mechanisms, institutional networks for service-learning and science shops ('wetenschapswinkels').

Thirdly, it summarizes several key challenges and opportunities specific to community engagement in higher education in Flanders. This includes the need to transcend generalized rhetoric on the social role of higher education, the competitive nature of higher education, and the value of existing bottom-up community engagement initiatives, knowledge networks and existing locally embedded research at university colleges and universities.

Finally, it formulates several policy recommendations for the advancement of community engagement in higher education in Flanders. In addition to recommending the introduction of community engagement support policies, recommendations cover the expansion of existing funding programmes to further include social-profits and non-profits, the formal expansion of existing community engagement networks or the creation of a knowledge centre on community engagement, and the inclusion of societal stakeholders in quality assurance and accreditation processes.



1. Introduction

On the SHEFCE project

There are increasing demands for universities to open to society and to demonstrate their societal impact. Community engagement is a key precondition for societal impact and refers to how universities address societal needs in partnership with their external communities, encompassing public, business, and civil society.

Between 2018 and 2021, the project TEFCE – Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education (www.tefce.eu) developed and piloted an innovative institutional self-reflection framework for community engagement in higher education – the TEFCE Toolbox – and a recommendation on how to embed community engagement in higher education policy.

As a direct follow-up to the TEFCE project, the project Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement (SHEFCE) goes the next step to further build the capacities of universities, policymakers, and stakeholders in Europe for mainstreaming community engagement in higher education.

The SHEFCE project is funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Programme (Key Action 2, Strategic Partnerships in Higher Education)

These policy recommendations have been drafted by the Research Outreach and Communication Office (ROCO), Research Vice-Rectorate of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), within the context of the Erasmus+ research project SHEFCE: Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement.

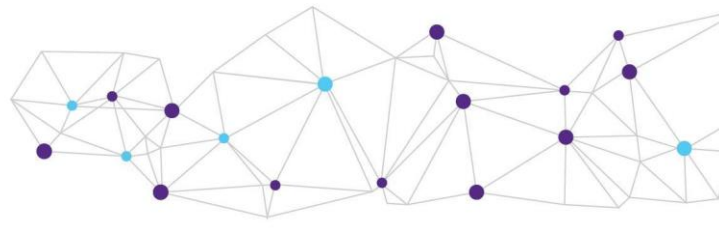
On defining community engagement in higher education

Concerning a working definition of community engagement, efforts in Flanders are challenged by definitional difficulties that are very similar to other regional contexts. There are many terms in use and little consensus regarding a common definition of what activities are community engagement and which are not.

Farnell (2020) argues that the solution to this issue might be to adopt a concise and intentionally broad definition of community engagement, allowing for various interpretations while still ensuring identification with a common goal.

It could also be argued that conceptual or definitional diversity is not a burden, but rather a reflection of the diversity of practices that developed during the past decennia in response to the need for community engagement in higher education. According to Marsh et al., the diversity in existing engaged learning policies in Europe illustrates as much (2021)¹.

¹ Marsh, Anderson & Klima (2021). Engaged Learning in Europe. IDC Impact Series.



This viewpoint is supported by several consulted stakeholders, judging that nor a vague, nor a top-down forced definition would find any support. The efforts for defining community engagement should be needs-driven and be applicable to a variety of contexts.

Regardless of these arguments, no common identification for community engaged activities is in use in Flanders. Multiple concepts are being used between or even within institutions, often covering some but not all aspects of community engagement.

Because of the autonomous nature of higher education systems in Flanders, the concepts used to refer to Engaged Teaching and Learning practices are quite diverse: community-based education, civic education, Service-Learning, and community service learning are sometimes used as equivalents. The lack of consistency in terminology could witness (i) a lack of familiarity with engaged practices as well as (ii) the lack of steady provisions.

However, the Department for Education indicates that its explicit policy is to allow institutions to define their own identity and develop their own accents in terms of community engagement, depending on their respective fields, study programmes and local context. Therefore, the Department avoids defining community engagement in higher education.

Among these definitions, service-learning (used at KUL) or community service learning (used at UGent and Antwerpen University) are the most frequent used terms and are perpetuated through the existing Flemish Network for Service Learning (cfr. infra).

The Flemish Service-Learning Network itself allows for an open interpretation of what service learning is, but defines societal engagement, theoretical integration, and personal reflection as key elements². KU Leuven and Ghent University have similar definitions of service learning^{3,4}. However, these definitions and terms do not cover the full spectrum of community engagement activities at institutions for higher education and research but are instead limited to community engagement within the student curriculum.

The Network itself intently refrains from providing a generic definition for service-learning, instead focussing on the values underpinning service-learning, such as reciprocity and mutual benefit. This allows for a contextual interpretation at the institutional level. However, it argues that a non-restrictive definition might aid with agenda setting and providing a common ground in discussions on the topic. Charting the landscape might therefore prove a very valuable initiative.

An alternative definition that covers a broader set of activities is community engaged research and learning (CERL), used at VUB and supported by the ENtRANCE Erasmus+ project⁵. The main value of this overarching term is the inclusion of a variety of activities that cover both the educational and

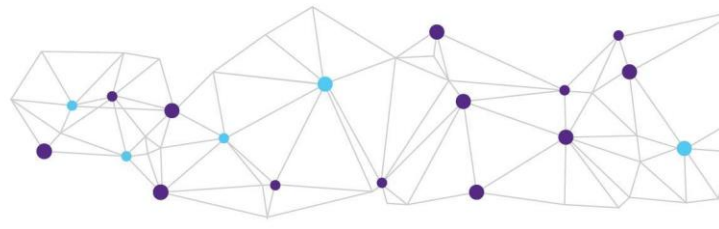
² Vlaams Netwerk voor Service-Learning in Hoger Onderwijs (2022).

[Over service-learning - Vlaams Netwerk voor Service-Learning in Hoger Onderwijs \(servicelearningvlaanderen.be\)](#)

³ KU Leuven (2022). [wat is service learning? - Service learning \(kuleuven.be\)](#)

⁴ Universiteit Gent (2022). [Community service learning en e-service-learning: de verbinding tussen student en samenleving | Onderwijstips \(ugent.be\)](#)

⁵ [ENtRANCE-Handbook.pdf \(univercity.be\)](#)



scientific missions of higher education institutions. However, it could be argued that this definition still foregoes community engagement initiated from an administrative level, as included in a more comprehensive approach to community engagement (Farnell, 2022)⁶.

The civic university concept – as used by Hasselt University⁷ – embraces a more holistic definition, valuing the engagement of the university within its region based on specific regional needs, challenges, and opportunities.

University colleges throughout Flanders apply a similar variety of community service learning and community engagement definitions.⁸

Concluding, no single definition of community engagement in higher education is available in the Flemish context. Although a range of interpretations and accents can be beneficial for the context-specific institutionalization of community engagement efforts (Farnell, 2020), it can also be argued that this makes it harder.

The lack of centralized definition might weaken community engagement when competing with clearly defined activities within to the third mission of higher education. This includes, among others, tech transfer, citizen science and science communication or outreach activities. These activities are included explicitly in policy documents and have their own dedicated offices or teams at a government, government agency or institutional level.

Within this document, we will employ the definition of community engagement in higher education that is utilized within the TEFCE toolbox and SHEFCE project, namely:

“Community engagement in higher education is a process whereby universities undertake joint activities with external communities to address societal needs in a way that is mutually beneficial, even if each side benefits in a different way.”⁹

Using this definition will allow for a broad approach and allows for the inclusion of many existing activities that overlap with this definition of community engagement in higher education.

On the organisation of higher education in Flanders

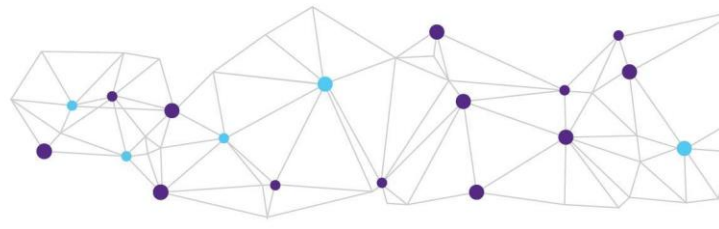
Higher Education Institutions and Research Centres need to be contextualized within the Belgian federalized government structure. Over the course of five state reforms between 1970 and 2001, Belgium became a federal state, composed of communities and regions. The distribution of power occurred along two lines.

⁶ Farnell, Th. (2020). Community engagement in higher education: Trends, practices and policies. NESET report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. doi:10.2766/071482.

⁷ Universiteit Hasselt (2022). [Civic universiteit - UHasselt](#)

⁸ Vlaams Netwerk voor Service-Learning in het Hoger Onderwijs (2021). [Service Learning in het Hoger Onderwijs in Vlaanderen. Een stand van zaken.](#)

⁹ Farnell et al. (2020). Building and Piloting the TEFCE Toolbox for Community Engagement in Higher Education. Zagreb: Institute for the Development of Education.



The first line relates to language and, in a broader sense, the ‘shared culture’ these languages define. The resulting communities are therefore the Dutch speaking Flemish Community, the French speaking French Community, and the German-speaking Community. These communities correspond with population groups. They have powers relating to culture, education, welfare, etc. The education system thus is typically divided by these language communities, with Brussels comprising both French and Flemish-speaking institutions. In accordance with the population distribution, the Flanders education system comprises the largest part of the population in Belgium. It is relevant to note that scientific research policy and funding relating to these areas of governance also mainly falls under the legislative power of the communities.

The second line relates to historic economic interests. The resulting regions, which aspired to more economic autonomy, are territorial in nature. The three regions are the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region, and the Brussels-Capital Region. They have powers relating to economy, employment, agriculture, public works, etc. It is relevant to note that scientific research policy and funding relating to these areas of governance also mainly falls under the legislative power of the regions.

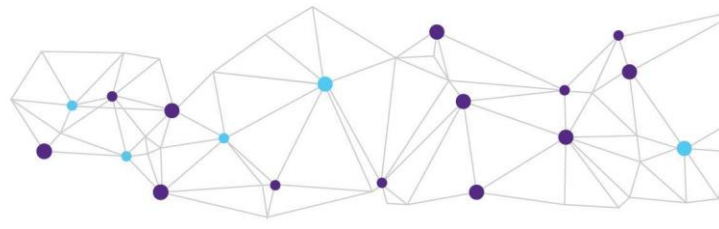
Thus, policy concerning community engagement in higher education in Flanders is mainly dependent on two main Flemish government ministries: the Ministry for Education and Training, and the Ministry for Economy, Science and Innovation. Additionally, the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization plays an important role in quality assurance and accreditation.

The current structure of higher education in Flanders is a direct effect of the Bologna process. The Decree on the structure of Higher Education in Flanders, drafted in the aftermath of the Bologna Process, goes beyond the introduction of the bachelor-master structure. Higher education associations – partnerships between universities and university colleges – were introduced to reduce the number of similar degrees, increase the efficiency of institutions, and provide smooth transitions from professional bachelor programs to academic masters via switching programs.

This has led to five higher education associations, grouped around the five biggest universities. Legislation on higher education, in following with the Bologna process, is often designed with these associations in mind rather than individual institutions. An example of this is the policy plan on science communication and related covenant (see below), which covers centres of expertise on science communication at the level of higher education associations.

These associations – and a list of other recognized education and/or research institutions – are governed by two main government departments and their related decrees. Education is governed by the Flemish Ministry for Education and Training, while research activities are governed by the Flemish Ministry for Economy, Science and Innovation.

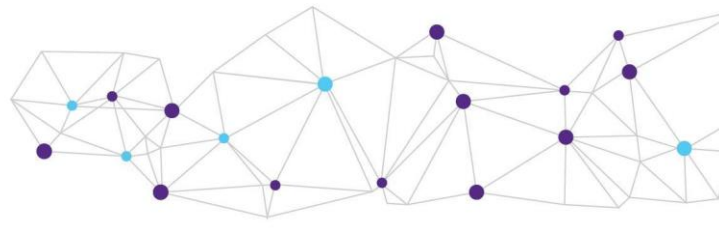
In addition, at the federal level, the department for science policy (BELSPO) has an important coordinating role at the national, European and international level. It serves as a centre of expertise for the federal government, manages the Royal science institutions and museums, manages the Belgian contribution to the European Space Organisation (ESA) and represents the Belgian IT infrastructure provider for universities, hospitals, and government. BELSPO also provides strategic project funding for scientific research.



Finally, the Brussels council for science policy (RWBBHG) and its funding agency Innoviris fund research and development projects in the Brussels capital region, with an explicit focus on regional engagement and urban transitional issues.¹⁰

¹⁰ Innoviris (2022). [Missie & visie | Innoviris](#)

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2. Overview of developments in Flanders, Belgium: higher education policies relevant to community engagement

On educational policy

The decree on higher education ('Codex Hoger Onderwijs')¹¹ is rather broad and limited in its inclusion of the societal role of higher education institutions, defining general 'social services' as one of the by-products of higher education and includes these as a valid element within (a part of) the tasks of lecturers. The current policy plan for education¹² makes no mention of community engagement in higher education, nor any of the alternative terms in circulation in the higher education landscape. This exclusion is partly deliberate, allowing for institutions to create their own interpretations of what community engagement is and how it is relevant to their context.

However, the policy plan for education includes dual learning. This practice of students learning both at school and within the workplace borders on aspects of community engagement and the existing service-learning paradigm. The policy plan includes the specific ambition to expand existing initiatives for dual learning to higher education, setting targets for 2022.

In coordination with the department for education, the department for work and social economy set up a learning network for dual learning initiatives and pilot programmes in higher education and adult education¹³. In addition to grouping the results of 13 pilot projects funded through the European Social Fund (ESF), a conceptual framework and model documents for dual learning projects were created. These model documents include modalities for non-profit organisations to participate in dual learning programmes, providing opportunities for community engaged learning.

However, educational concepts such as "dual learning" and "workplace learning," among others, do not focus on social service/engagement. Their focus is on student learning. While this concept might serve as a starting point for more social engagement, there is a risk that engagement with and added value for society will be pushed into the background.

Following the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (AHEA)¹⁴, the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) published an advisory note, highlighting the importance of inter- and trans- disciplinarity in higher education in facing grand societal challenges. It calls for higher education institutions to deploy their resources in education, research, and community engagement to analyse and tackle factors for social inequality.¹⁵

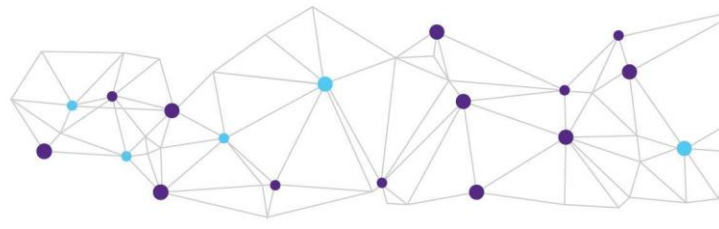
¹¹ Vlaamse Overheid (2013). Gecodificeerd Decreet betreffende het hoger onderwijs (citeeropschrift: "Codex Hoger Onderwijs"). <https://codex.vlaanderen.be/PrintDocument.aspx?id=1023887>

¹² Flemish Ministry for Education and Training (2019). *Beleidsnota 2019-2024*.

¹³ Vlaamse Overheid (2022). [Lerend netwerk - Duaal leren in het hoger en volwassenenonderwijs | Vlaanderen.be](#)

¹⁴ [Rome Ministerial Communiqué Annex II.pdf \(eha.info\)](#)

¹⁵ VLOR (2021). [Opvolging van het Bolognaproces: advies over het Romecommuniqué en aandachtspunten voor Vlaanderen](#)



In following with this importance of the social dimension of higher education in the Bologna process and European initiatives on community engagement, the Ministry of Education and Training Belgium/Flemish Community (MINEDU-FC) and the Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO) of the Flemish Community of Belgium lead an Erasmus+ KA3 project aimed at developing peer learning activities and resources underpinning principles and guidelines for social dimension.¹⁶

At the inter-institutional level, the university and university college councils (VLIR, VLHORA, VLUHR) serve as sounding boards and policy making platforms. They are given explicit competencies by the decree for education, within which are included responsibilities on quality assurance and societal partnerships. Current and common topics are typically discussed within ad hoc working groups, feeding into policy recommendations at a regional, national, and European level.

Higher education alliances at a European level, formed in 2019 and funded through the Erasmus+ program also play an important role in promoting community engagement in higher education. Multiple alliances involving Flemish universities include aspects of community engagement, responsibility, social dimension, cooperation, and openness in their values statements.^{17 18 19}

Societal relevance of curricula is included within the assessment basis of the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO)²⁰. The NVAO is a quality assurance organization that expertly and independently assures the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders and promotes a culture of quality within higher education institutions. It accredits existing and new programs and assesses the quality assurance of higher education institutions. While there is international cooperation, accreditation frameworks are determined independently.

Through its periodic institution reviews, the NVAO can influence policy and emphasize the importance of certain aspects of higher education, including community engagement. Especially through its institution review process, the efforts of an institution for community engagement can be evaluated. Recently, important steps have been made in increasing attention for institutional policies, including community engagement efforts. This ensures that community engagement is evaluated at the institutional level rather than at the level of specific courses or programmes.

In addition to institutional reviews, NVAO also performs a systemic review of the Flemish higher education system, which is defined in the 'Codex Hoger Onderwijs'. Community engagement could potentially be defined as one of the themes in such a review.

Specific curriculum and study program evaluation is performed by NVAO in cooperation with VLUHR, the sector council of Flemish universities and university colleges. Societal relevance of curricula is included within its assessment basis, although community engagement or service learning are not included explicitly. An overlap between professional and societal stakeholders is

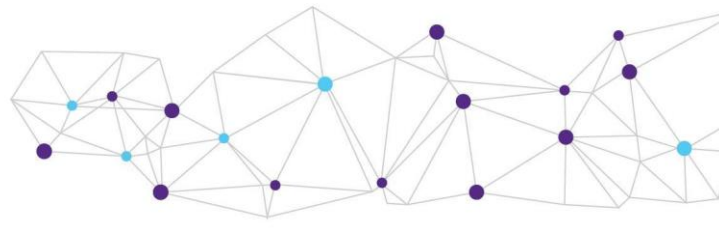
¹⁶ Inclusive Higher Education (2022). [About the project | Inclusive Higher Education](#)

¹⁷ Eutopia (2022). [Values Statement - Eutopia \(eutopia-university.eu\)](#)

¹⁸ YUFE (2022). [Who we are | YUFE | Young Universities for the Future of Europe](#)

¹⁹ Enlight (2022). [ENLIGHT \(enlight-eu.org\)](#)

²⁰ NVAO (2020). *Kwaliteitszorgstelsel Vlaanderen 2019-2025. Beoordelingskader Instellingsreview.*



possible, but this is not made explicit. Similarly, social relevance is included in the assessment grounds for course accreditation, but community stakeholders are not consulted in the review process, as opposed to professionals.

The most visible entity in promoting community engagement in higher education is the Flemish Network for Service-Learning in Higher Education. This network originated in dialogue between institutions and the government. Its aim is to promote service-learning in higher education in Flanders and promote scholarly activities related to it through dialogue and informal contact. In addition to its function as a peer-learning network and knowledge base, the network also organises seminars, congresses, workshops, and other events. Fourteen higher education institutions are represented within the network. Although the network is primarily aimed at teaching and learning activities, it also promotes research and development in service-learning, and aims to provide policy recommendations. The network was created in cooperation between the higher education institutions and the Department for Education, aiming to provide an informal platform for dialogue, communication, and knowledge exchange.

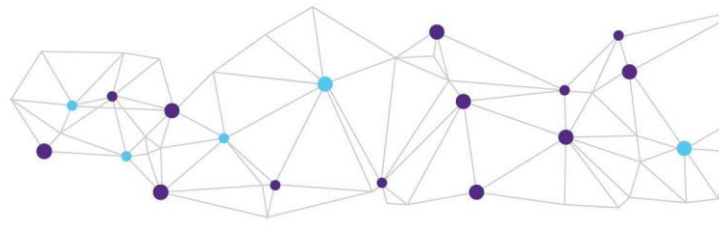
At the student level, the Flemish student federation VVS has the best overview of community engagement within the different student bodies. However, they provide mainly guiding support and a platform for dialogue for the different student councils and student organisations. It argues that community engagement is not very well established among students, being very dependent on the specific study programmes and scientific fields of study. In addition, there are very limited incentives in place for engaging in community engagement. VVS indicates that a framework for community engagement, or even workshops for student organisations, might at least help in putting community engagement on the agenda.

The potential impact of students on the inclusion of community engagement in curricula is also limited. While student representatives are represented in institutional councils (thanks to the Participation Decree) and are involved with curriculum and institution evaluations, they are limited in their power. In addition, VVS often is confronted with a fragmented landscape in which information exchange and coordination is difficult between institutions. The ability of each institution to contextualize community engagement makes it difficult to start up a dialogue.

On science and research policy

The current decree for science and innovation policy contains limited references to societal value or community engagement²¹. References to societal value are situated mostly within the end goals of the independent research institutions that are defined within the decree. Within their statutes, references to sustainable development, societal gains, open science, etc. are usually included. However, the nature of these goals is specified within the governing covenant with these institutions.

²¹ Vlaamse Overheid (2009). [Decreet betreffende de organisatie en financiering van het wetenschaps- en innovatiebeleid](#)



Building on this decree, the current policy plan for economy, science policy and innovation explicitly includes societal relevance of research and solving societal challenges through social profit organisations, education, or intermediary organisations²². Societal relevance of strategic fundamental research is put forward explicitly, aiming to strengthen the ties between societal groups and research institutions. While there is no mention of bottom-up research driven by society or communities, attention is given to “flipped technology transfer” within the context of innovative approaches to knowledge valorisation, valuing a flow of knowledge from societal and economic stakeholders to research institutions.

The department for economy, science and innovation (EWI) is currently in the process of reviewing their research assessment procedures and indicates that they aim to include science outreach in the assessment procedure. A guiding broad definition of what outreach – or community engagement – can be, would serve as a basis to work from, although too narrow a definition might be limiting in scope. The concept of the quadruple helix in research, in which citizens are involved in science and research, is also high on the agenda and prominent in partnerships with government partners such as RVO Society and Scivil. Both outreach and the quadruple helix concepts will be part of a system evaluation of fundamental research taking place in 2023.

The Fund for Scientific Research (FWO) can be regarded as the most important actor steering science and research in Flanders, given that it governs the public funding of research at higher education institutions and research institutions. Its policy plan builds directly on the government policy plan framework and does include funding programs for strategic research with social purpose for some fields. The social dimension of scientific research is also implicitly interwoven in its funding programmes, thematic calls, strategic research grants, etc. Contributing to this, FWO revised application forms to expand responsible and innovative research.²³

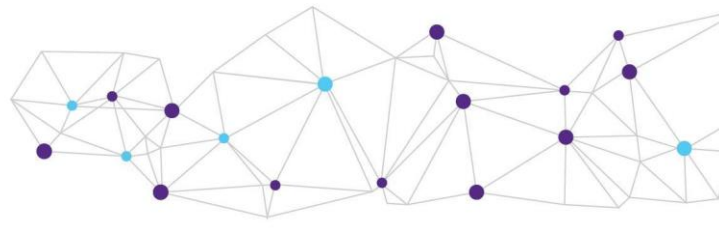
The FWO policy plan identifies social applications, collaborations and interdisciplinarity as opportunities for growth. It aims to balance fundamental research and applied research, identifying an excessive focus on societally directed research as a possible limiting factor to fundamental research. It states to aim for a ‘balanced research portfolio’, whereby the individuality of fundamental and strategic research is maintained and even improved. In this effort, it prioritizes scientific urgency as the catalyst for research projects, avoiding top-down thematic direction.

In the current FWO grant application documents for fundamental research, applicants are questioned on whether planned cooperation with societal actors is included in the proposed project. While this cooperation is not required, the inclusion of this thought process is aimed at steering for responsible research and innovation. FWO explicitly allows for a broad definition of what societal actors and cooperation might be, steering clear of too narrow a definition which might limit researchers.

Within this balanced approach, several FWO programs, application procedures and research assessment procedures do contain elements of societal value and community engagement.

²² Flemish Ministry for Economy, Science and Innovation (2019). *Beleidsnota 2019-2024*.

²³ FWO (2022). [Junior en Senior Onderzoeksproject](#).



Science outreach has been included in project calls, with FWO noting an increase in uptake of outreach activities in research projects. FWO also recently expanded these programs with social purpose to biomedical research²⁴.

In cooperation with FWO, the agency for innovation and entrepreneurship EWI promotes applied doctoral research funded partly by industry through the Baeckeland program, but no such programme currently exists for social profit or non-profit organisations.²⁵ The expansion of the current Baeckeland program is unlikely, mainly due to the focus on economic gains of EWI funding and policy. While the distinction between economic and social innovation is often difficult to make, departmental responsibilities remain limiting in crossing these lines.

Parallel to FWO, BELSPO also provides funding for scientific research programmes. In its current strategic plan, it highlights the importance of involving citizens and social organisations through, among others, citizen science programmes and cooperation with social organisations. It also identifies societal challenges in detail, listing societal expectations, changing values, scientific legitimacy, and social accountability of organisations as key factors.²⁶

Within the Brussels capital region, relevant to Flemish organisations and higher education institutions active within the region, Innoviris launched a social innovation project call in line with its urban transitional goals, as part of its start-up programme. In addition, it also ran co-creation and sustainability and social resilience project calls²⁷.

One area in which very clear goals have been set which border on community engagement, is science communication. Although defined in a rather limited way, the policy plan on science communication defines societal impact and societal participation within its policy goals, in terms of participation in 'public fora, media and citizen science projects'. It does not explicitly include service-learning, existing science shop programmes or community engagement embedded in the higher education institutions²⁸.

The governing covenant on science communication between the department of economy, science and innovation and the higher education associations sets explicit goals concerning outreach activities. It includes 'stimulating two-way communication between society and researchers, setting explicit KPI's for the number of outreach activities and cooperation with external actors.

Within science outreach policy, structural partners (independent non-profit organisations) provide support on KPI's regarding innovation in education and research methods. Brightlab - part of RVO Society – provides a STEM education lab facilitating the co-creation of new teaching methods, but little attention is given to service-learning or community engagement.²⁹ Their work is currently limited to secondary education, but including community engagement and civil service in their e-

²⁴ Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (2019). BELEIDSPLAN 2019-2023. [beleidsplan-20192023.pdf \(fwo.be\)](#)

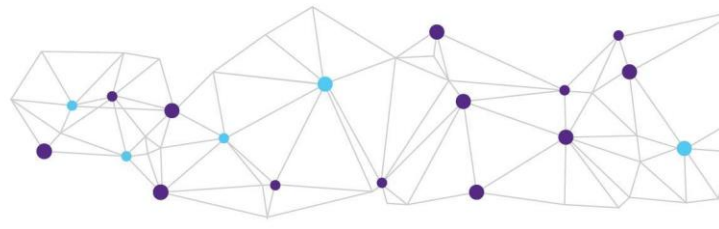
²⁵ VLAIO (2022). <https://www.vlaio.be/nl/subsidies-financiering/baekeland-mandaten>

²⁶ BELSPO (2022). [2022_2024_PlanStrat_nl.pdf \(belspo.be\)](#)

²⁷ Departement EWI (2022). [Beleidsplan Wetenschapscommunicatie 2022-2030.](#)

²⁸ Departement EWI (2022). [Beleidsplan Wetenschapscommunicatie 2022-2030.](#)

²⁹ Brightlab (2022). [Brightlab | Shaping future innovators](#)



learning offer might validate these aspects as education-innovation. Scivil, the Flemish knowledge centre for citizen science, provides a knowledge base, learning network and support for citizen science activities³⁰.

At the Flemish university colleges, through their council (VLHORA), the Flemish Agency For Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) financially support the Blikopener and TETRA initiatives. These projects incentivizes small businesses and social profit organizations to collaborate with university colleges in order to generate ideas, innovate and gather expert advice. Throughout the years, this initiative has evolved to an increased social focus.³¹³²

Finally, independent from government policy, a university science shop network has been active in Flanders since 2003, originating from a bottom-up cooperation between two university associations. Since 2021, this network has expanded to three associations and enables research projects with hundreds of non-profit organisations³³.

According to the FRIS research portal, listing publicly funded scientific research in Flanders, there are currently 15 research projects mentioning community engagement in their abstracts. Funding for these projects is diverse, ranging from regional (FWO) to European (Horizon 2020) programmes.

Table – Current key policy documents relevant to community engagement in higher education in Flanders and their duration (non-exhaustive)

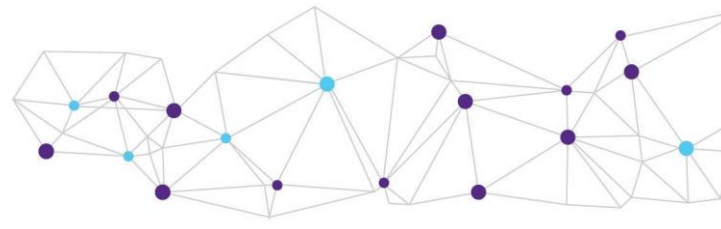
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Covenant on Science Communication												
Policy Plan on Education												
Policy Plan on Economy, Science and Innovation												
Fwo Policy Plan												
BELSPO Strategic Plan												
NVAO Evaluation Framework												
RWBBHG 6th Mandate Period												
Policy Plan on Science Communication												

³⁰ Scivil (2022). [Scivil | Citizen Science Vlaanderen](#)

³¹ VLHORA (2022). <https://www.vlaamsehogescholenraad.be/nl/blikopener>

³² VLAIO (2022). <https://www.vlaio.be/nl/vlaio-netwerk/tetra>

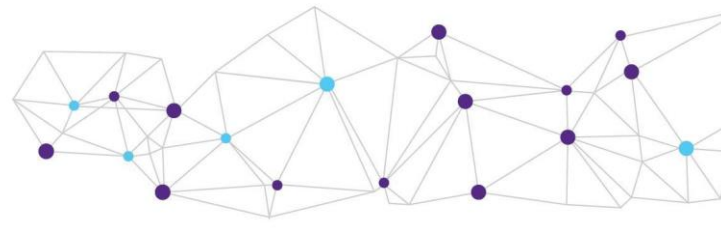
³³ Wetenschapswinkel (2022). [Studentenonderzoek met non-profitorganisaties | Wetenschapswinkel](#)



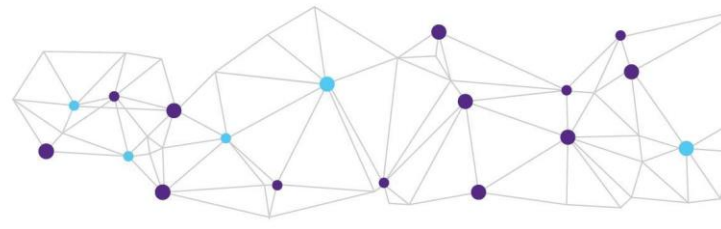
3. Assessment of the main challenges and opportunities for the community engagement improvements in Flanders, Belgium

Challenges

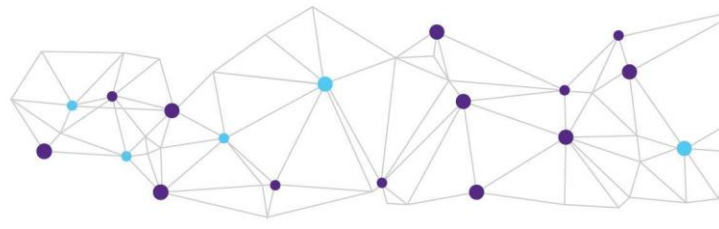
<p>C1. Lack of a shared, workable definition of community engagement</p>	<p>Within and between the current higher education associations, there are multiple definitions of community engagement, covering multiple subsets of community engagement activities. The most prevalent of these is (community) service-learning, a term which is also used by the existing network for service-learning. While very valuable in providing a platform for service-learning activities, this definition does not cover broader aspects of community engagement in higher education, such as community engaged research, science shops, student activities, citizen science, science outreach, etc.</p> <p>In comparison, related aspects of higher education and research do have a concrete, shared definition, e.g., citizen science, science outreach, tech transfer, etc. This clear conceptualization allows for the formulation of concrete policy plans and inclusion in governing covenants and working agreements.</p> <p>It can therefore be argued that to establish community engagement as a valuable concept within the discourse of higher education and scientific research, a shared, workable (operational) definition is necessary.</p> <p>While consulted stakeholders support this viewpoint, they caution against a restrictive or top-down approach. Both the Flemish Network for Service-Learning in Higher Education and government agencies explicitly refrain from defining community engagement too specifically and thus limiting its scope. They prefer to allow institutions and researchers to provide their own contextualized definition and identify stakeholders and collaborators themselves. Providing a broad framework for agenda-setting and charting existing community engagement activities would therefore be the preferred course of action.</p>
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<p>C2. Transcend social responsibility rhetoric in policy documents</p>	<p>Within current policy documents, limited attention is given to the social responsibility of higher education institutions beyond generalized rhetoric. Within the descriptions of the importance of the third mission of higher education institutions, the focus is usually on economic development and activities, e.g., tech transfer, or knowledge exchange with an explicit economic purpose. Societal impact is usually defined in vague terms, as are partnerships with non-profit or social-profit organizations. An exception can be found in the Brussels regional policy plan for science and innovation, with an explicit focus on regional engagement and urban transitional issues.</p> <p>While government stakeholders note that limiting top-down government direction is a conscious decision, not wishing to limit community engagement to a narrow interpretation or definition, the lack of a shared language might impair the ability of community engagement initiatives to compete with other aspects of the third mission of higher education.</p>
<p>C3. Disconnect between education and research policy domains</p>	<p>The structure of government in Flanders complicates efforts to set community engagement in higher education on the agenda. Powers are divided between the Department for Education and Training and the Department for Economy, Science and Innovation. This division is often mirrored at higher education institutions.</p> <p>While there is cooperation between the EWI and OV (education) departments, there remains a disconnect between both policy domains, each of which can be directed in a particular way, with policy plans being drafted by different administrations. This disconnect is perpetuated through different funding mechanisms, KPI's and evaluation parameters.</p> <p>Additionally, this disconnect is also propagated at the institutional level. Differing 'business logic' and regulatory frameworks between education and research departments encourage the same division at the level of administrations and management teams. This hampers collaboration across policy domains.</p>



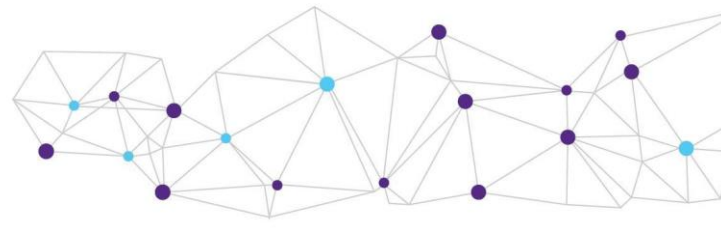
<p>C4. Transcend higher education associations logic and competition</p>	<p>Higher education in Flanders is structured along higher education associations, centred around the five universities. These associations exist along old ideological fault lines rather than geographical or educational areas. The geographical intertwinement of these associations adds to the existing competition between these associations, both on an educational level (competing for students) and a research level (competing for research grants, partnerships, etc.).</p> <p>While government programmes require regional embedding and collaboration (e.g., EWI programmes), this competitive context counteracts cooperation between associations regarding community engagement initiatives and existing related activities (e.g., science outreach, citizen science, ...).</p>
<p>C5. Competitive nature of higher education</p>	<p>The competitive nature of scientific research and education at an international level has an important impact on the ability for community engagement initiatives to find funding and traction. Higher education institutions find themselves needing to prioritize quantitative performance indicators on efficiency, productivity, and international rankings. This logic inhibits transversal cooperation within institutions and meaningful relationships with external stakeholders. Community engagement practices require significant time or resources investment to create sustainable relationships, co-creative partnerships and interdisciplinary or intersectoral projects. This often clashes with the prevalent competitive logic.</p>
<p>C6. Economic pressures on research policy</p>	<p>Economic pressures on research policy, funding agencies and research institutions create an environment in which economic aspects of the third mission of higher education take precedence over social aspects.</p>
<p>C7. Economic pressures on higher education</p>	<p>Economic pressures on higher education stimulate a continued focus on efficiency and further massification of higher education, which typically inhibits community engagement initiatives due to the difficulty of organizing these programmes at scale. The funding logic of higher education institutions exacerbates these issues.</p> <p>However, community engaged and embedded applied research projects do more frequently take place at university colleges, often situated in the humanities and social sciences fields.</p>



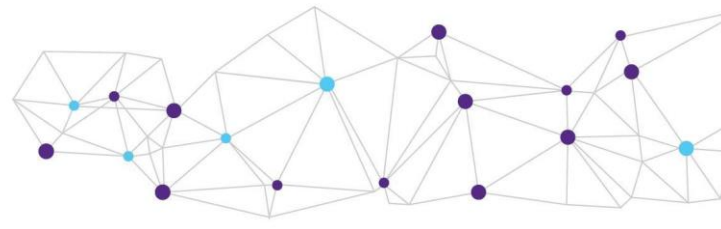
<p>C8. Complex and multi-layered governmental structure</p>	<p>The complex and multi-layered governance structures that define the local context in which Flemish higher education institutions operate, complicates efforts to coordinate sustainable policy changes pertaining to community engagement. This means that multiple overlapping mandate periods and strategic plans at different governmental levels and with different thematic or regional authority definitions need to be addressed to implement thorough policy changes that can be made actionable without contradiction.</p>
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Opportunities

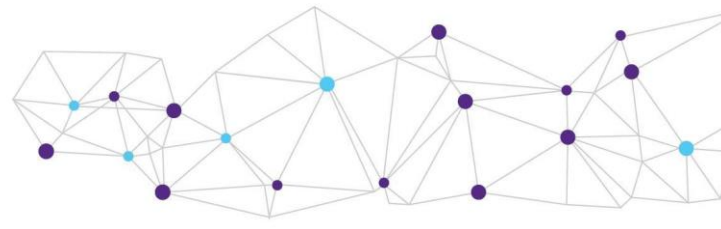
<p>O1. Existing connection with current European level community engagement projects</p>	<p>The current increased interest in community engagement at an international level (cfr. European University Networks, European research projects (CIRCLET, EntRANCE, TEFCE, SHEFCE)) has created a support community and knowledge base for defining community engagement in a local context and building community engagement activities. This momentum can be leveraged to advance community engagement policy and both the system level (through policy recommendations) and at an institutional level (through action planning for community engagement).</p> <p>This opportunity connects directly to the need for a shared, workable definition of community engagement in higher education (C1). Several higher education institutions have already participated in these projects (e.g., TEFCE, SHEFCE, CIRCLET, Blikopener, Wetenschapswinkel, EntRANCE), are active in the transnational community or have even applied existing toolkits and operationalized definitions of community engagement in higher education. This gives a head start in the shared use of an established, proved and internationally accepted definition.</p>
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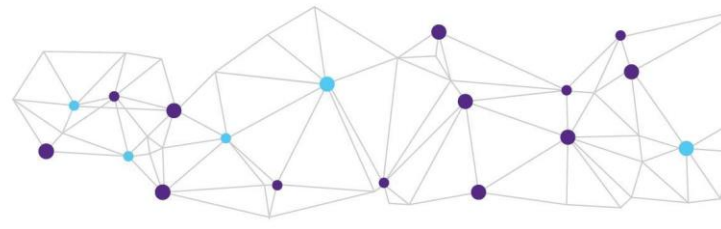
<p>02. Existing European level attention to the social dimension of higher education</p>	<p>Following the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (AHEA), the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) published an advisory note highlighting the importance of inter- and trans-disciplinarity in higher education in facing grand societal challenges. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Training Belgium/Flemish Community (MINEDU-FC) and the Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO) of the Flemish Community of Belgium lead an Erasmus+ KA3 project aimed at developing peer learning activities and resources underpinning principles and guidelines for social dimension.</p> <p>These developments related to community engagement can be leveraged to bring further attention to community engagement activities in higher education.</p>
<p>03. Existing European level university alliances with community engagement focus</p>	<p>University alliances at a European level (e.g., Eutopia, YUFE, ENLIGHT, EURECA-PRO, ...), formed in 2019 also provide opportunities for further development of community engagement at the institutional level. Most alliances, which are currently in the process of funding renewal application, place particular value on the social dimension of higher education institutions and the value of local community engagement.</p>
<p>04. Build on existing regional networks for community engagement</p>	<p>The current networks for community engagement in higher education or overlapping activities can serve as a seed for the expansion of system level support for community engagement in higher education.</p> <p>The existing coordinated network of science shops, the Flemish network for Service-Learning in Higher Education, or the knowledge centre for citizen science Scivil serve as excellent examples of what knowledge networks can achieve at the local level. They are also evidence of existing knowledge and a willingness to collaborate between institutions and associations.</p>



<p>05. Centralized control of scientific research funding</p>	<p>The funding agency FWO serves as a centralized agenda setter in Flanders, governed through a policy agreement with the government. Through its policy plans and funding distribution, it directs scientific research and research methods to a large extent, although it explicitly avoids directly influencing the research agenda.</p> <p>Within the current policy plan, amenities are in place for research with a societal focus, with specific funding schemes in place for applied research with and at businesses. There are clear opportunities to expand upon these existing policies and funding programmes to include community engagement.</p> <p>Applied research programmes for university colleges such as TETRA and Blikopener, funded by EWI explicitly include non-profit and social profit organisations.</p> <p>Additional funding programmes at the Federal or Brussels regional level can serve as a parallel, alternative track for the promotion of community engagement at higher education institutions. This is already illustrated by existing funding programmes (e.g., at Innoviris) championing community engagement and the social impact of scientific research.</p> <p>Additionally, systemic evaluation efforts are already ongoing at multiple levels, which do include community engagement as an increasingly important dimension of higher education and scientific research.</p>
<p>06. Leverage existing higher education networks</p>	<p>Although the higher education landscape is fragmented into associations, joint higher education networks that influence and to some extent enforce government policy are in place (VLIR, VLHORA, VLUHR). These networks can be used in order to draft policy recommendations that are endorsed by all Flemish higher education institutions. In addition, fixed working groups can be put in place in order to maintain a platform for community engagement in higher education.</p> <p>As already noted, system-wide evaluations are already ongoing which include community engagement as an increasingly important dimension of higher education.</p>



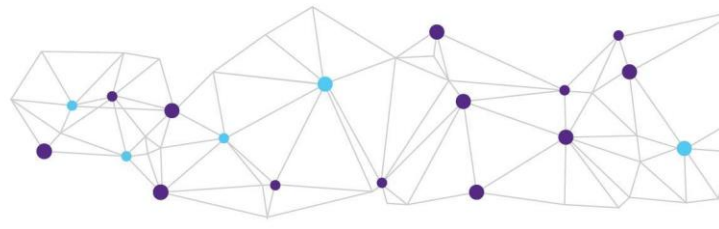
<p>07. Existing recognition of citizen science projects</p>	<p>The current recognition of the value of citizen science, both in policy documents and public opinion (following a few large, visible citizen science projects in Flanders) can serve as a basis for further increasing interest in community engagement through research. The existence of a knowledge centre for citizen science serves as an example of what cooperation on these topics can be.</p>
<p>08. Existing funding structures for collaborative research</p>	<p>Well-known funding mechanisms are in place for collaborative research, specifically Baeckeland funding, the Blikopener programme, and innovation research programs (e.g., at IMEC). These mechanisms could be expanded to include non-profit and social profit organizations or be made more accessible for organizations with limited budgets.</p>
<p>09. Science outreach as an established practice</p>	<p>The governing covenant on science communication and outreach, which includes all higher education associations and several other research centres and non-profit partners, provides an example of established practices which overlap with community engagement.</p> <p>This agreement can serve as an example for translating policy changes on community engagement in higher education into concrete KPI's, workable goals and funding mechanisms.</p>
<p>010. Existing dual learning practices</p>	<p>The inclusion of concrete goals concerning dual learning practices in higher education and the knowledge gained in implementing them, can serve as a springboard for the implementation of community engagement goals in education policy.</p>



4. Policy recommendations for the enhancement of community engagement in higher education

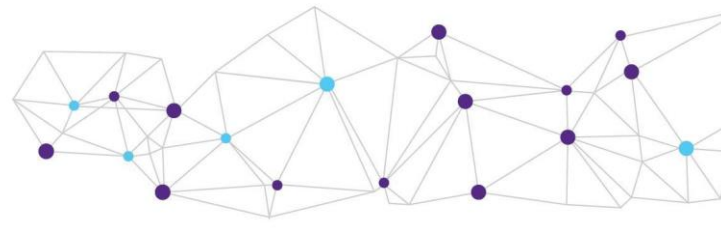
Long - term (8 -10 years)

Title	Introduce community engagement practice as an explicit dimension of the societal relevance of higher education
Challenge	<p>Current education policy includes the societal importance of higher education mainly in terms of civic education and the economic and social context for education and research. Only recently have some aspects bordering community engagement (e.g., dual learning, citizen science, etc.) been explicitly included in policy goals, with specific targets.</p> <p>At the same time, many community engagement activities have been undertaken at the institutional level of university colleges and universities. Within the field of teaching and learning, these efforts have found a platform in the Flemish Network for Service-Learning in Higher Education. This network has increased the profile of these activities, but additional support in the shape of explicit policy framing might be desirable.</p>
Approach	<p>Higher education sector councils (VLIR, VLHORA, VLUHR) are already working on including community engagement dimensions in quality assurance processes, accreditation processes and institutional review processes. System evaluations at the regional level involving multiple stakeholders (EWI, FWO, VLUHR) are also underway, with increased attention for community engagement in higher education.</p> <p>Through these existing processes, the higher education councils would be able to expand the inclusion of community engagement as a specific dimension of the third mission of higher education, which encompasses the existing activities that have already been well-defined (e.g., dual learning, citizen science, ...) and expands this to include less visible activities.</p> <p>Promote knowledge of international and European policy documents underpinning the importance of social engagement in higher education.</p>
Proposed actions	<p>Through a mapping of existing activities and the formulation of a broad but practical definition of community engagement, community engagement could be defined more clearly at the policy level. While top-down directives concerning community engagement are not desirable, it is the institutional level which has a pioneering role. Through a bottom-up process, contextualized approaches to community engagement could find common ground at the system level.</p>



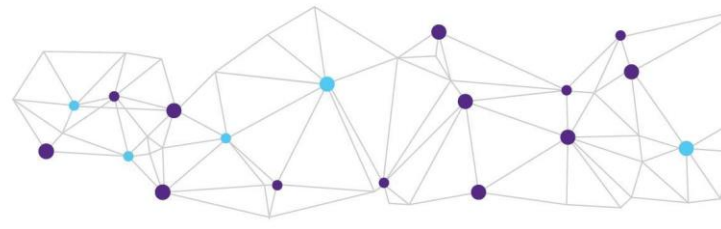
	Existing well-defined activities could be expanded upon. Frameworks such as dual learning initiatives, citizen science, social responsibility ... can serve as a benchmark on how community engagement can be included in policy documents.
Risks management	<p>A clear definition of community engagement in higher education, which is at least the result of a mapping exercise and would be a common denominator between contextualized practices, is a prerequisite for further explicit inclusion of CE practices.</p> <p>Government stakeholders are reluctant to anchor definitions and initiatives in formal law, preferring to engage in dialogue with institutions and try to reach a common understanding and plan. While allowing room for contextualization of community engagement, this could also lead to mere rhetoric inclusion of community engagement in policy documents. It might be desirable to also include concrete policy initiatives, like the current dual learning approach or science communication covenant, to ensure activation of new policy plans. However, building upon these existing frameworks that don't necessarily focus on social engagement might risk missing our goal.</p>

Title	Introduce community engagement practice as a dimension of societal relevance of scientific research
Challenge	Current science policy does include third mission aspects of research institutions but is often limited to generalized rhetoric. Community engagement as a collection of practices is absent, despite some (overlapping) elements being present, such as research projects with social finality, science outreach, citizen science, knowledge exchange, open science, etc.).
Approach	<p>Through higher education sector councils (VLIR, VLHORA, VLUHR), existing policy dimensions could be expanded to include a broader definition of community engagement which encompasses the existing policies. Work is already ongoing on a collaborative system review which includes the social mission of higher education research institutions, the quadruple helix, etc.</p> <p>In addition, engaging with existing research institutions and government partners for science outreach and societal impact could allow for the inclusion of community engagement in future covenants and funding agreements.</p>
Proposed actions	Explicit inclusion of community engagement practices as a method for societal impact of science, building on the existing recognition of overlapping methods.



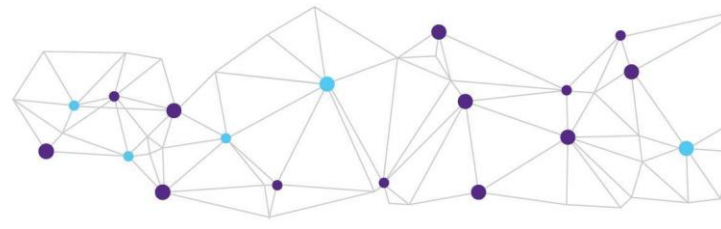
	<p>Expansion of the current covenant for science outreach, or creation of an additional covenant for community engagement.</p> <p>Existing well-defined programmes could be expanded upon. Frameworks such as social innovation programmes, co-creation project calls, citizen science programmes, ... can serve as a benchmark on how community engagement can be included in concrete policy initiatives.</p>
<p>Risks management</p>	<p>A clear definition of community engagement, which is at least the result of a mapping exercise and would be a common denominator between contextualized practices, is a prerequisite for further explicit inclusion of CE practices.</p> <p>Inclusion of community engagement in policy initiatives can remain limited to rhetoric only. Government stakeholders are reluctant to anchor definitions and initiatives in formal law, preferring to engage in dialogue with institutions and try to reach a common understanding and plan. While allowing room for contextualization of community engagement, this could also lead to mere rhetoric inclusion of community engagement in policy documents.</p> <p>Concrete policy initiatives, i.e. covenants and appointment of government partner organizations, can be a method of policy activation.</p>

<p>Title</p>	<p>Create system level support for existing community engagement initiatives</p>
<p>Challenge</p>	<p>Current community engagement initiatives originate and are funded at the level of individual institutions or in bottom-up partnerships between a small set of institutions (e.g. the Science Shop network, the Flemish Network for Service-Learning in Higher Education, informal citizen science networks). System level support, similar to existing covenants and funding agreements would ensure the sustainability of these initiatives.</p>
<p>Approach</p>	<p>Recognition of existing initiatives and a community engagement dimension within the current policy framework is a first necessary step.</p> <p>Examples for this integration can be found in existing policy agreements with outreach organizations and covenants with the higher education and research institutions.</p> <p>Leverage for this inclusion can be found within the existing networks of higher education institutions.</p>
<p>Proposed actions</p>	<p>Increased formal recognition of existing initiatives within policy documents.</p> <p>Establishment of both the Science Shop and the Flemish network for service-learning as independent non-profit organizations or recognition within policy documents.</p>



Risks management	<p>Specific funding needs to be provided to enable these initiatives, either through a system level covenant with higher education institutions or a direct partnership agreement.</p> <p>Government stakeholders are reluctant to anchor definitions and initiatives in formal law, preferring to engage in dialogue and promote collaborations in a more informal way.</p>
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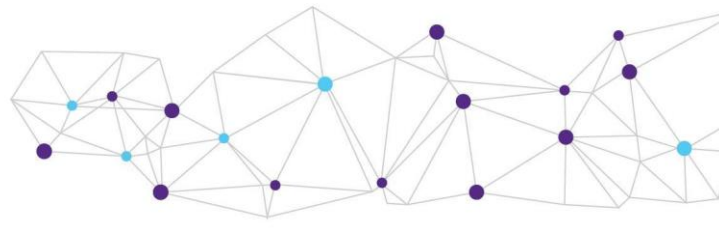
Title	Creation of a Flemish Knowledge Centre or Network for Community Engagement in Higher Education
Challenge	A coordinated approach is needed to expand community engagement in higher education. Definition, knowledge, training, professionalization, creation of a knowledge network and research to existing practices are needed to ensure a structural and sustainable approach. A knowledge centre or coordinated network would be desirable long term.
Approach	<p>Frameworks are in place to support knowledge and research centres, with several non-profit partner organizations providing these services to the government.</p> <p>The current knowledge centre for citizen science and its covenant agreement with the government serves as a great example on how to set up.</p>
Proposed actions	<p>Creation of a Flemish Knowledge Centre for Community Engagement in Higher Education or the expansion of currently existing knowledge centres to include a broad approach to community engagement.</p> <p>Inclusion of community engagement as a dimension of science outreach in the policy subplan for science outreach.</p> <p>However, in creating the Flemish Network for Service-Learning in Higher Education, the education department and higher education institutions explicitly opted for an informal network structure and dialogue, rather than founding a formal entity. It might therefore be preferable to create a network for community engagement in higher education or expanding the scope of the existing network to include community engaged research and institutional initiatives.</p>
Risks management	<p>Additional funding would be required to enable the creation of a knowledge centre. Synergies can be found within the current operation of the citizen science knowledge centre Scivil and the education innovation lab Brightlab. Cooperation with existing European initiatives can be sought out.</p> <p>When creating a new knowledge centre, it is paramount that it be created in collaboration and dialogue with the existing knowledge centres and networks, to avoid competition and the cannibalization of funding.</p>



	<p>Government stakeholders are reluctant to anchor definitions and initiatives in formal law or centralized bodies, preferring to engage in dialogue and promote collaborations in a more informal way.</p> <p>In addition, when creating a new knowledge centre, it is paramount that it be created in collaboration and dialogue with the existing knowledge centres and networks, to avoid competition and cannibalize funding.</p>
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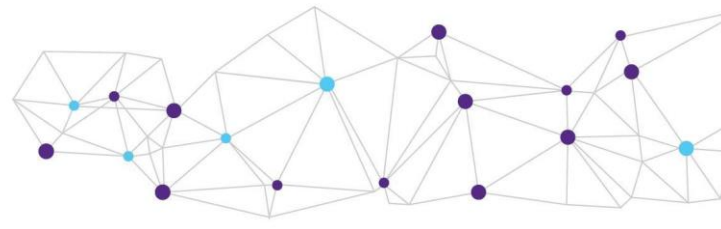
Medium - term (4 -7 years)

Title	Expansion of funding mechanisms for research with social finality
Challenge	<p>Currently, the social dimension of research is implicitly interwoven in several FWO funding programmes. In addition, it has specific thematic calls and allows for cooperation with community actors, a strategic program aimed at biotech research that would not be funded by industry actors but is of societal importance. FWO contributes to research with social impact, but aims to maintain a balance between fundamental, strategic, and applied research. However, this also means that community engaged research lacks visibility within the research funding programme portfolio.</p> <p>Parallel to these funding programmes, EWI funding programmes are mostly limited to economic and innovation goals, due to a strict separation of department domains. While programmes like Blikvangers do allow social organisations to participate, this is more difficult in other calls.</p>
Approach	<p>Existing funding programs are the central mechanism through which scientific research policy is enacted. These funding programs are controlled by the FWO policy agreement with the department of Economy, Science and Innovation. EWI and VLAIO funding calls are controlled by the department of Economy, Science and Innovation.</p>
Proposed actions	<p>Expansion of the existing FWO programmes that allow for social finality. More prominent inclusion of social impact parameters in research project evaluation procedures.</p> <p>Explicit expansion of EWI and VLAIO project calls to include social organisations and community actors.</p>
Risks management	<p>Expansion of existing programmes would require additional funding. FWO aims to maintain a balance between fundamental, strategic and applied research. This could prevent an expansion of funding for societally beneficial, non-economically viable or non-fundamental research.</p> <p>Project calls often require time and resource investment from participating organisations, which is not always possible for small social-profit organisations.</p>



Title	Expansion of the Baeckeland research grant format to social profit and non-profit organisations
Challenge	Within the current science research funding programmes, the EWI Baeckeland research programme, funded by the department for innovation and entrepreneurship, provides an important incentive for industry-lead research and agenda setting. No such funding programme currently exists for non-profit or social profit organisations.
Approach	Incorporation of community engagement project funding into the existing Baeckeland funding programme, allowing non-profit and social profit organisations to participate. Alternatively, a parallel social-profit programme could be set up, mirroring of the Baeckeland programme, potentially under a different government department.
Proposed actions	Expansion of the Baeckeland funding mechanism to include non-profit and social profit organisations. Formal recognition of the potential economic benefits of social-profit projects.
Risks management	Expansion of the Baeckeland programme would require recognizing the indirect economic benefits of community engaged research and cooperation with social-profit actors. Baeckeland programmes require an investment of 50-80% of the research project cost by the participating organization. This level of investment might be difficult for small non-profit or social profit organisations. Covering a larger share of the research costs through funding might be required.

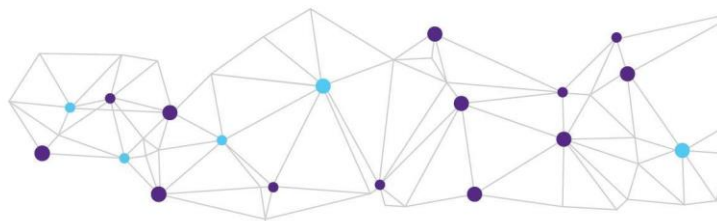
Title	Integrate a community engagement dimension into the institution and curriculum review process
Challenge	The NVAO review and accreditation process is a critical tool in the implementation of higher education policy and quality assurance. This provides potential synergies in promoting community engagement practices. In addition to institutional and curriculum reviews, a system review of the Flanders higher education landscape allows for a high-level analysis of community engagement efforts.
Approach	The NVAO review process for institutions and the course accreditation process are valuable agenda setting tools for higher education. Inclusion of community



	<p>engagement metrics or categories in the evaluation process would explicitly raise awareness of the community engagement aspect in higher education.</p> <p>The system review process further increases the value of the NVAO process for agenda setting and raising awareness for community engagement in higher education.</p>
Proposed actions	<p>Explicitly include community engagement activities as a review category within the societal value dimensions of the institution review process. These activities have already been included in institutional reviews but should be made explicit.</p> <p>Explicitly include community stakeholders in the institutional and curriculum review process, expanding the importance of community stakeholders beyond implicit inclusion.</p>
Risks management	<p>While system and institutional reviews might be a good platform for high-level discussion on community engagement, more specific incentives might be needed at the course level to have a real impact.</p>

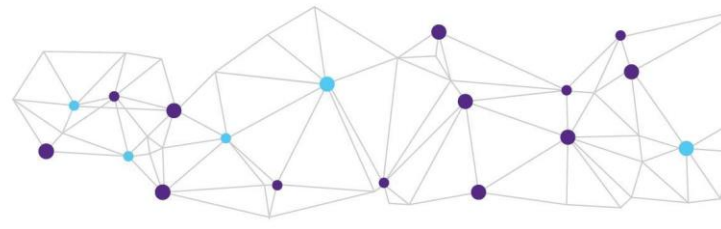
Short - term (1 - 3 years)

Title	Creation of a clear shared definition of community engagement in higher education.
Challenge	<p>Current policy, at all relevant departments, defines societal participation in an implicit or limited way, with no clear definitions or inclusion of current practices. In addition, no shared definition or delineation exists at an institutional level, with each institution or association using their own definition of service -earning, community service-learning, community engaged research, civic engagement, etc. A lack of shared vocabulary inhibits opportunities for cooperation.</p> <p>While a top-down definition framework is not desirable, an umbrella definition which allows for clear communication and a common reference frame, would allow for community engagement in higher education to compete at an equal level with currently more clearly defined third mission elements.</p> <p>A specific Dutch-language term might further add to this goal.</p>
Approach	<p>To a certain extent, higher education institutions are responsible for governance, quality assurance and policy steering through sectoral councils (VLIR, VLHORA, VLUHR) and advisory bodies.</p> <p>Creation of and support for a shared definition of community engagement should originate bottom-up from within these networks. Existing definitions and programmes can be aligned according to this shared agenda.</p>



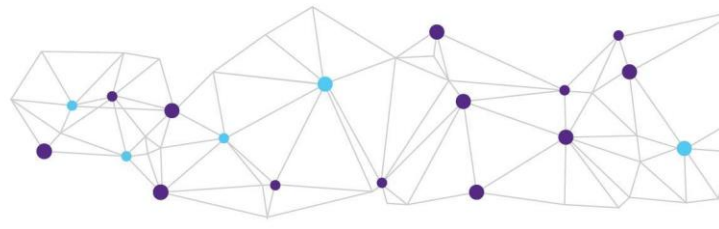
	<p>The existing Flemish Network for Service-Learning in Higher Education provides a fertile basis for discussions on community engagement, although the latter term goes beyond the narrower service-learning definition.</p> <p>Both the education and science departments, as well as the higher education councils, have expressed interest in including a discussion of community engagement in their ongoing system review processes.</p>
Proposed actions	<p>Creation of a working group on community engagement in higher education within the existing higher education councils (VLIR, VLHORA, VLUHR).</p> <p>Expansive mapping of existing definitions for community engagement at Flemish universities and university colleges. Expansive mapping of community engagement practices.</p> <p>Creation of a broad, shared umbrella definition of community engagement, which is communicated to and employed by the higher education associations, providing a common frame for discussion and collaboration.</p>
Risks management	<p>Requires willingness of all involved higher education institutions within the networks.</p> <p>Flexibility in defining a workable definition of CE will be needed to encompass varying activities and approaches. Existing work (toolkits, guides, e.g. TEFCE toolbox) can be applied to facilitate this process.</p> <p>Applying a broad umbrella definition risks remaining vague and generalist, lessening the potential impact of having a common concept.</p>

Title	Expansion of existing support for citizen science programs
Challenge	<p>Citizen science projects can be part of broader community engaged research and cross the divide between research institutions and society. Many existing projects include, by nature, societal actors and organizations. However, despite existing recognition and support from the citizen science knowledge centre Scivil, structural funding for citizen science projects is limited.</p>
Approach	<p>Project calls and funding programs have been launched from the government directly, bypassing established funding agencies, as recently as in 2019. Given available funding, similar calls could be repeated.</p> <p>In addition, attention to the community engaged aspect of citizen science could be increased within the call, to ensure an expanded role for citizen scientists, beyond mere data collection.</p>
Proposed actions	<p>Relaunching of the project call for citizen science, including specification of the role of citizen scientists and the importance of co-creation.</p>



Risks management	Requires the availability of funding.

Title	Inclusion of community engagement learning methods within the existing Brightlab programmes
Challenge	With Brightlab, Flanders has access to a best practice example of what education innovation can be. Brightlab is currently focused on technology and STEM education within secondary education. This means that there is little cross-pollination with innovative learning methods such as service-learning and community engagement. Brightlab could serve as the perfect platform to increase awareness of these methods.
Approach	Brightlab is oriented mainly towards technology and innovation partners. Through its policy agreement, cooperation with community partners, social innovation projects, service-learning networks could be enacted. Existing links between Brightlab and higher education institutions (e.g., education research departments, science outreach departments) could be used to create synergies and add new methods to the Brightlab inventory.
Proposed actions	Inclusion of community engaged teaching and learning methods within the Brightlab education innovation programme. Structural cooperation between Brightlab and higher education institutions, through relevant departments and research groups.
Risks management	Due to the strong focus on innovation and technology, resistance will probably be met when aiming to introduce social innovation or community engaged methods. A focus on the intersection between methods, (social) innovation and technology innovation could aid in overcoming this inertia. Barriers between higher education and secondary education must be overcome for collaborations to flourish.

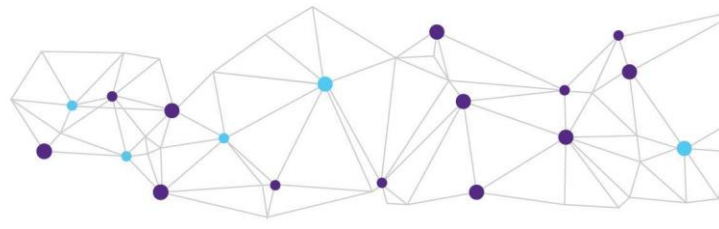


5. Policy alignment and implications for community engagement

As often indicated in this document, an efficient and sustainable integration of community engagement practices in higher education and research policy, will require significant policy alignment across federal and regional government levels and between government departments. In addition to the complexity of multiple government departments and governing covenants covering activities consisting of or overlapping with community engagement, inter-institutional networks, and accreditation bodies (NVAO), further necessitate coordination between these actors for an efficient approach. This efficiency is especially crucial given the current economic reality and the nature of community engagement as fairly time and resource intensive.

Similarly touched upon in this document, the “Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA” (PAGs) serve as a relevant cross-cutting framework for community engagement activities. The BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension is currently developing a system of indicators for monitoring the implementation of PAGs, which will include dimensions for community engagement in higher education.

Finally, Flanders has a very rich and well-developed ecosystem of innovation and technology transfer, start-up, and incubation management. Examples of social innovation, co-creation, living labs, citizen science, etc. can be found explicitly in funding programmes or implicitly integrated in research projects. It is important to argue that within these existing programmes, the value of community engagement activities could be highlighted as a valuable aspect of scientific research and development, as opposed to being isolated in specific project calls (e.g., Innoviris Co-Crete, EWI Citizen Science call, ...)



6. National consultations on the policy recommendations with stakeholders

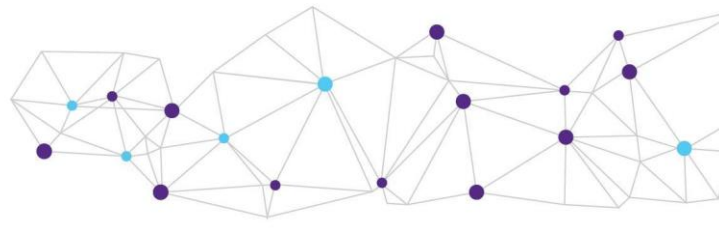
The drafting of this final document involved the consultation of a list of regional stakeholders involved in higher education and scientific research and relevant to the formulation of policy on community engagement, contacted through networking and desk research efforts. The involved stakeholders include representatives of:

- the Flemish higher education institutions
- the higher education councils (VLIR, VLHORA, VLUHR)
- the Flemish Education council (VLOR)
- the department for economy, science and innovation (EWI)
- the department for education and formation (OV)
- the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (FWO)
- the Flemish Association for Students (VVS)
- the Flemish Network for Service-Learning in Higher Education

Three online roundtable sessions were held to facilitate consultations between January 23rd and January 26th, 2023. Discussions involved the general contents of the draft document, as well as a guided discussion on short-, medium- and long-term policy recommendations.

There was a consensus among participants concerning the value of the document, indicating recognition of community engagement in higher education as a valuable pursuit. However, several important interpretation nuances and much additional information were also proposed to the draft document, such as additional inclusion of university colleges and student organisations.

Specifically, multiple stakeholders indicated the explicit policy direction of allowing higher education institutions and researchers agency in defining community engagement and community stakeholders, avoiding limiting what community engagement can be.



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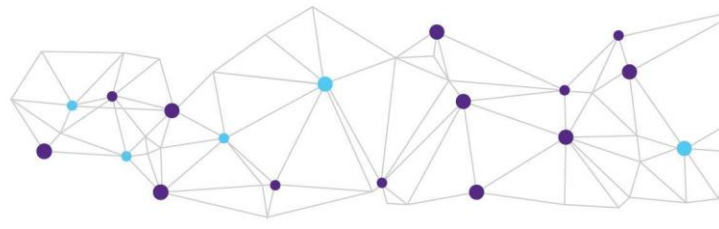
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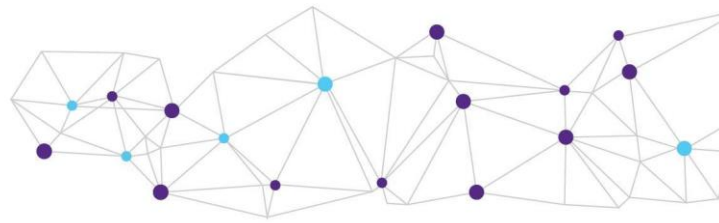
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Appendix

About the SHEFCE project

Project Title	Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement
Project Acronym	SHEFCE
Project Start Date	1.9.2020.
Project Total Duration	36 months
Project End Date	31.8.2023.
National Agency of the Applicant Organisation	HR01 Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, Croatia
Project Web Sites	https://community-engagement.eu/ ; https://www.shefce.eu/ ; https://en.iro.hr/2022/05/12/steering-higher-education-for-community-engagement/

Project partners

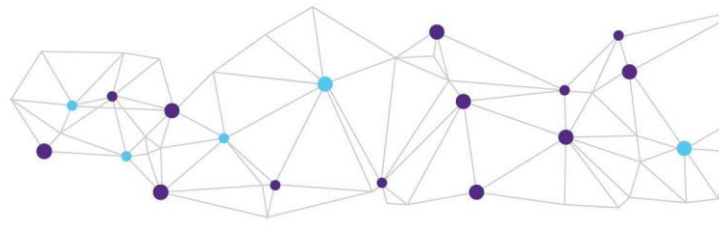
	Organisation	Abbrev.	Country
1	Institute for the Development of Education – project coordinator	IDE	HR
2	University for Continuing Education Krems	UCEK	AT
3	University of Rijeka	UNIRI	HR
4	Ghent University	UG	BE
5	Technological University Dublin	TUD	IE
6	University of Girona	UDG	ES
7	Free University of Brussels	VUB	BE
8	Association of Catalan Public Universities	ACUP	ES
9	Mary Immaculate College	MIC	IE
10	Brodoto	BDT	HR

Associate partners

Advisory team

1	European University Association	EUA
2	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education	EURASHE
3	European Students' Union	ESU
4	Council of Europe	CoE
5	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD

PROJECT FUNDING

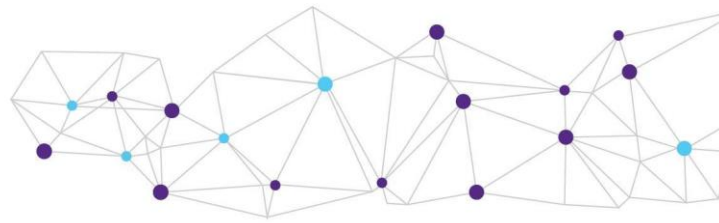


Dissemination partners

1	Campus Engage	CE
2	European Higher Education Society	EAIR
3	Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research	MESR

Local partners

1	CitySpark	CS
2	Dublin City Council	DCC
3	Girona City Council	GCC
4	Rijeka City Council	RCC



Abbreviations

BELSP0	Belgian Science Policy Office
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
CERL	Community Engaged Research & Learning
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EWI	Flemish Departement for Economy, Science and Innovation
FWO	Flemish Fund for Scientific Research
IDE	Instituut for the Development of Education
NVAO	Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RWBBHG	Council on Science Policy of the Brussels Capital Region
ROC	Research Outreach & Communication Office (VUB)
SHEFCE	Project “Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement”, funded by the Erasmus+ programme
TEFCE	Project “Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education”, funded by the Erasmus+ programme
TEFCE Toolbox	An institutional self-reflection framework for community engagement in higher education created through the project TEFCE
VLAIO	Flemish Agency for Innovation and Entrepreneurship
VLIR	Flemish Interuniversity Council
VLHORA	Flemish University College Council
VLOR	Flemish Education Council
VLUHR	Flemish Universities and University Colleges Council
VVS	Flemish Student Association