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by Mohamad-Fadl Haraké, Lola Saliba,
Maryam Audeh Ibrahim, Nazleh Moussa

Service-Learning Initiatives & the Challenges of Unstable Environments[1]

Mohamad-Fadl Haraké, Lola Saliba, Maryam Audeh Ibrahim, Nazleh Moussa

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact & implication of higher education entities within the context of ''Service-Learning'' regarding the incubation of sustainable-non-profitable projects that have communal impact that are proposed and piloted by students. The study also highlights the many challenges that can be faced when trying to implement such extra-curricular initiatives in a post-war country, where public services are either poorly delivered or completely deteriorated and social capital is relatively inexistent. First a training seminar was provided by a World Bank youth advisor that introduced the concepts of ''Hybrid Transformational Change Management & Conscious Leadership'' and outlined the role of today's youth in emancipating the deprived communities. We then examined the structure and dynamics of AUL's School of Business course curriculum that had social-implications – and proposed several socially-responsible topics to the students' community and provided students with tools, processes, concepts, business modeling and ideation, etc. through the means of extensive trainings. Thirdly, we initiated an informal student's service club that aimed to assist students in developing entrepreneurial skills, learn to assess communal socio-economic needs, in order to deliver social impact within the campus's surrounding communities – within the banner of ''civic engagement''. Finally, students were invited to propose topics within a Project Management Process that went in line with the UNs Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Eventually such topics will go through a thorough evaluation process where one will be chosen by a designated committee– in order to receive the required funding (if any is required) to get implemented by the students' club and managed by a third party. The results indicate how students actually benefited from structured a ''learning by doing'' process that enabled them to gradually become ''Social-Public Entrepreneurs'' thus highlighting a new aspect of the ''Student Involvement Theory''.

Keywords: Post-War Countries, Service-Learning Initiatives, Public Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship, Responsible Management, Trans-disciplinary transformational change Projects, Civic-Engagement, Experiential Learning, Lebanon

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INTRODUCTION

Today, more than ever, we are witnessing a great interest in Social Responsibility of the business world (among both practitioners and academicians) as any entity is not solely expected to be responsible to its stakeholders but to society in general **(Nejati et al. 2011)**. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have been a fixture in today's world business environment and has become embedded in many higher education institutes in general as a tool to seek alternative ways to achieve sustainability **(Brown & Cloke, 2009)**. Higher Education Institutions in general (e.g. Research Centers, Laboratories, etc.) and Universities in particular play a focal role – through teaching, research and experimentation, in molding the youths' mind, initiating knowledge & sharing it, solving the world's problems, etc. **(Gray et al., 1999; Abdul Rahman & Castka, 2019)**. In this context, it would be appropriate to ask the following: *Are universities and academic institutes actually concerned and committed to their social responsibility? And if they do, to what extent?*

Higher education institutions are responsible towards their societies when it comes to educating young ''entrepreneurs'' who will be participating in the all-in-all communal build-up **(Fernández, 2010)**. This fact, is even more urgent in Lebanon given that: (1) the country is suffering Post-Conflict public services absence since approximately forty five years (since the outbreak of the civil war of 1975-1990); (2) the ongoing critical financial crisis that peaked in 2019-2020; and (3) the current COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. Hence, institutionalizing students' participation in social service is viewed by many experts as primordial within the context of social commitment linked to citizenship **(Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Hébert & Hauf, 2015)**. By ''community service'', we mean ''social-devotion'' where a student, and with the support of his / her peers and faculty as well, will be investing his / her time, knowledge and ressources to the service of the society **(Gray et al., 1999)**. Such work will show how the student actually benefited from his / her courses by putting his / her skills into action, foster leadership abilities, etc. **(Baxter, 1996; Sax & Astin, 1997; Eyler & Giles, 1997)**. This will also provide the student with social-work experience in general and Project Management expertise in Particular **(Butin, 2010)**. Hence, we find ourselves in front of a new research dilemma: *How can higher education entities (faculties and students included) actually get implicated in the all-in-all delivery of critical service-learning experiences and become transformational-change leaders for their communities*? In order to properly answer our research question, the study will have the following structure:

o First, we will start by conducting a review of the current existing literature in order to present the various approaches of our subject. We will check the basic foundation of social entrepreneurship and civic engagement, its conceptual framework, as well as its application. We will then be talking about the role of academic institutions that are becoming more and more socially-responsible as contributors to their communities' well-being by providing a

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climate for community-development initiatives and acting as catalysts for sustainability and professional development.

o   We will then be introducing our methodology part where we will explain our empirical observations and interpretation of our research results. This will lead us to analyze the relevance of our research framework in order to review our questions and objectives with regards to our exploratory work.

o   We will finally be discussing the results of our empirical findings and linking them to the concepts of ''Service Learning'' & ''Conscious Change Leadership'' by taking as examples the higher academic institutions who's' work do constitute an emancipation factor for the deprived communities in Post-War countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Higher Academic Institutions – As Social Change Makers**

For a great number of years, higher academic institutions were heavily criticized for their lack of response to social problems despite their many expertise and resources available on campus **(Jacoby, 1996)**. Many viewed that knowledge was being wasted as it did not address the social gaps – given that any academic entity – aims to mold future problem solvers / field champions **(Kozar & Hiller, 2010)**. However, since the 1990s, higher education institutes became more involved in the all-in-all communal emancipation process through civic actions that oversee the collaboration of faculty, students, and community in order to address social gaps – most notably, those of the most deprived **(Ostrander, 2004)**. This involvement has been exercised through the means of strengthening the civic mission of higher education, the promotion of social purpose and the incubation of several social initiatives that aimed to engage both faculty and students in order to improve the all-in-all status of the community **(Boyer, 1994, 1996; Harkavy &Puckett, 1994; Eggerton, 1994; Bringle et al. 1999; Rice, 1996; Ehrlich, 2000; Salt- marsh, 2002).**

Since then, more universities began focusing on the many possibilities of available transitions in higher education as well as the role that critical service-learning plays in social transformation **(Wieckowski, 1996)**. One of the main areas of focus is delivering critical service-learning experiences and becoming agents of positive change for their communities **(Dagostino, 2008)**. Many scholars and practitioners alike have agreed that ''soft'' persuasive measures can indeed change people's willingness to adopt new attitudes **(Jackson & Michaelis, 2003)**. Within this context, higher education institutes that usually deliver ''soft'' material have the potential to form a better socially-engaged society **(Barth et al., 2012)**. It should also be highlighted that international organizations (e.g. IFIs, INGOs, etc.) have emphasized on the role of education as one of the most important, powerful and effective tools for providing societies (specially deprived

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ones) with the appropriate and needed skills, competencies and qualifications in order to transform them into sustainable ones (**OECD, 2008, p.25**).

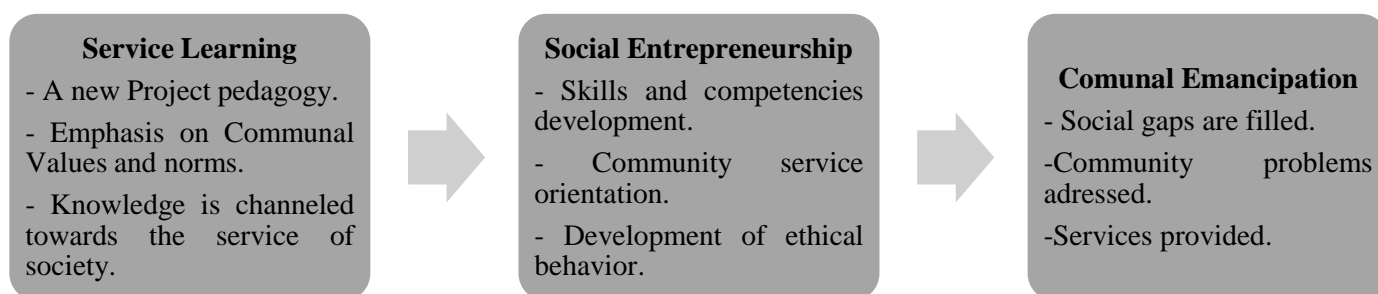- **Critical Service Learning – Utilizing Academic Teaching into Social Action**

Thus, we understand that there is a real need to maintain excellence in teaching and research on one hand, and to orient these two academic components to be responsive to the ever changing community on the other hand (**Kendrick, 1996; Dagostino, 2008**). This is done through the means of ''Service Learning'' which is considered as the most effective and efficient process of producing educated and responsible citizens whom are trained and educated to become active change-makers in their community (**Jacoby, 1996; Zlotkowski, 1999**). Also, ''Service-Learning'' will provide behavioral and cognitive skills as well as career opportunities to students where they can apply their academic knowledge in real-life situations (**Dagostino, 2008; Kozar & Hiller, 2010**). This concept (''Service-Learning'') attempts to engage students in communal emancipation by the means of engaging them in community service projects that are either launched, incubated, initiated, supported, etc. by their alma mater in order to foster civic engagement (**Bringle & Hatcher, 1995**). Such projects are pedagogically designed to crisscross collaborative ''Learning-by-doing'', enhance student development, accelerate civic-engagement, and elevate social conditions (**Markus et al., 1993; Sax & Astin, 1997; Baxter, 1999**). On another note, it seeks to bridge academic curriculum to communal gaps in order to establish a common ground for reflection with regards to the citizens' role in the community in general and how academia can meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth (**Stanton et al., 1999**).

- **Youth's Empowerment through Service Learning and Communal Engagement**

More and more studies, conference papers, research articles, etc. are viewing that millennials are usually investing their time, energy and money in entrepreneurial projects that benefit social causes (**Mcmillin et al., 2016**). Today's youth are looking for effective and efficient long-term solutions to numerous communal problems or deficits that the government was unable to solve (**Urmanaviciene & Raisiene, 2018**). In fact, these gaps are being filled by young leaders who are transposing the private sector's tools & concepts and transforming them into non-market behaviors (**Harding, 2006**). It should be noted that socially-responsible projects that are based on innovation, experimentation, and creativity – centered on the public interest are being led by young entrepreneurs (**Klein et al, 2010**). It should also be highlighted that Youth's social entrepreneurship is considered and perceived as a viable framework for young people to develop management capabilities and assume leadership roles while realizing concrete changes in their communities (**Baxte, 1996; Roper & Cheney, 2005; Van Ryzin et al., 2009**). Youth's Social Entrepreneurship is considered a dynamic process as it necessitates an all-in-all Business entrepreneurship – Project Management Process that has social anchoring (**Eyler & Giles, 1999; Belfort et al., 2016**). Indeed, social entrepreneurs will creatively contribute to the communal and

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economic needs of any concerned society given their ability to find development opportunities that others overlooked (**Dees, 1998**). Any project that can be perceived within the context of Social Entrepreneurship needs to be well established in order to guarantee its success. Thus, ''Service-Learning'' can be viewed as the most suitable and appropriate approach to teach Social Entrepreneurship (**Tracey & Phillips, 2007; Mueller et al., 2015**). Service-Learning pedagogy is widely recognized as a provider of a dynamic and holistic education (**Gray et al., 1999**); that being said, Social Entrepreneurship is expressed as a learning outcome that will improve the community's sustainable developpement as well its innovative and ethical values (**Clavert, 2011**).

Figure 01. From Service Learning to Communal Emancipation (based on Clavert, 2011)

By being aware of their ability to change bad social conditions that were overlooked, a ''Youth empowerment'' phenomena will occur – where the actions of engaged students will have a huge impact on both their own self (mindset, culture, behavior & procedural human dynamics) as they do for their community (**Anderson, 2010; Cahill et al, 2018; Boyaval et al, 2018**). This empowerment was the result of their work through the implication of higher education institutions (**Tomkovick et al., 2008**). In fact, this framework also highlights a new and interesting form of leadership as (**Guercine & Cova, 2018**): (1) there is the great role in which the individual's passion is employed and worked-on; (2) the focal role that passion plays; (3) the important role of the leader's professional network before, during and after the entrepreneurial creation process; and (4) the community's own crisis that initiated (raison d'être) the ''entrepreneurial quest''. Communal Projects have had a great impact on youth leadership in terms of takeaways (the effects of their leadership involvement on areas of community capital and vice versa) (**Eyler & Giles, 1996; 1997; Chazdon et al, 2009**):

o **Communal Projects** make significant contributions to the participants' personal development (in terms of leadership skills) and to community capital thereby strengthening the individual's personality on one hand, elevating the collective ''lives'' and promoting the vitality of community's collective interests in another.

o **Communal Engagement** will show a progression from development of knowledge, skills and attitudes following transformational change leadership perceptions, to individual behavioral

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outcomes and finally to tangible – results – improvements in communities and organizations alike.

We understand how Student's Social Engagement can be perceived as one of the main catalyzers of the youth's development & empowerment orbits **(Boyce, 2006)**. It is a leadership framework that guides communities in the way they organize services, opportunities, and further social supports so that young people can develop their full potential from one hand, attain leadership traits, and elevate their communities' overall status on another hand **(Hamilton et al, 2004).** We understand that ''Youth engagement'' is the result of involving the youth in responsible, challenging actions to create positive social change. By involving young students in planning socially-responsible initiatives, taking part of the overall decision-making phase of any project that affects themselves and others alike, conscious change leadership is hence being emphasized and implemented **(Pigg et al, 2007)**. Youth engagement is a central principle of youth development / empowerment as **(Scheffert, 2007)**: (1) It shapes their development by interacting with the people and opportunities made available within their environments; (2) it prepares young people to be active citizens in a democracy; and (3) it fills the gaps of communal deprivations and ensures a continuous process of collective interest insurance.

- **Post-Conflict Environment and Development**

Post-Conflict reconstruction and development present many challenges where local as well as international organizations and donors, service providers, the private sector as well as academic institutions work together or separately in order to address the many communal gaps given the quasi-inexistence of public administrations as well as the full (or semi) destruction of the public sector in its entirety – where public services can no longer be guaranteed for the concerned population **(OECD, 1998)**. The real challenge is addressing the many competing priorities when it comes to working on post-conflict development and service delivery. In this context, Service-Learning must address additional problems. The ensemble of the all-in-all complex challenges can be assembled into three categories **(UNHCR, 1997; Debié & Pieter, 2003)**: (1) economic and social assistance for the recovery of war-affected communities; (2) popularly reintegration support for specific target groups; and (3) strengthening institutions in the peace-building and recovery process.

- **Theoretical Framework: Student Involvement Theory**

Within the context of our work, the theory of ''Student Involvement'' seems the most appropriate conceptual framework as it is based on the following equation: the quality of the student's academic, professional and personal development is dependent on his / her degree of involvement in the all-in-all academic experience **(Astin, 1984)**. Such an involvement is defined in terms of what the student is dedicating in terms of time, physical presence, energy, etc. to the entirety of

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the learning experience (**Kahu, 2013**). Based on our topic, we can see how ''Service-Learning'' can be perceived within the cited above framework as the students' involvement can indeed enhance their development within the orbit of the following major dimensions (**Astin, 1975, 1977, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991**):
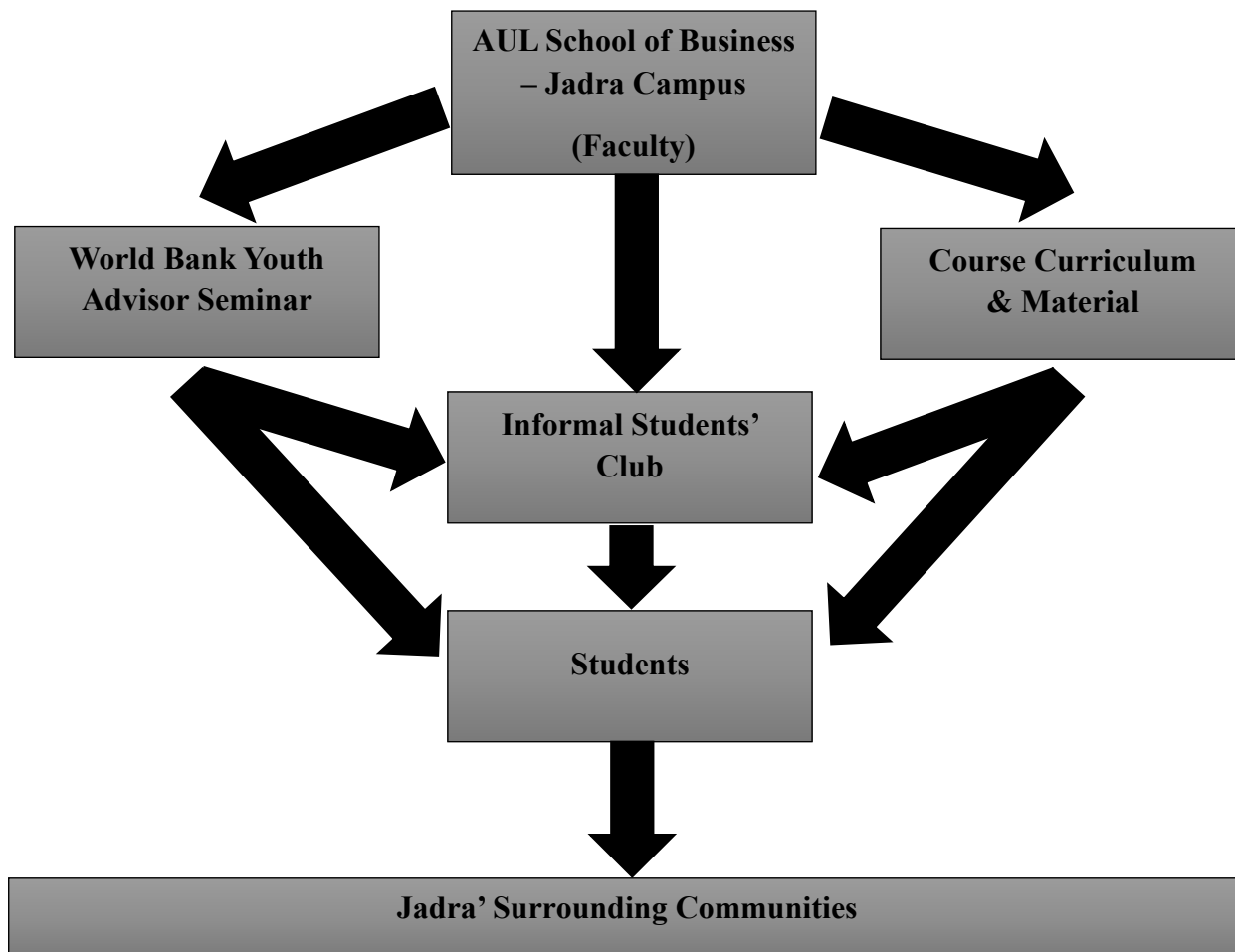
o   <u>Academic Involvement:</u> By attending and interacting with course material that is related to communal work, Social Entrepreneurship and responsible business. Such courses aim to raise awareness to today's social problems in order to encourage students to proliferate their participation in service-learning practice.

o   <u>Student-Faculty Interaction:</u> Through imitating, leading, and managing projects that are either proposed, incubated, etc. by any member of the university – thus falling under the banner of the Alma Matter. Such action will illuminate and enhance service-learning as an innovative transformative pedagogy for social change.

o   <u>Students'/Faculty-Civic Engagement:</u> Through their responses to social gaps and community needs by adopting a community-response policy, implementing developmental projects and increasing their role as responsible social-actors. On another note, this can be done through initiatives that aims to strengthen networking between different higher education entities and community partners on a local scale.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

- **Context**

The research began by drawing concepts from the literature. It carried out a series of exploratory studies to test the entrepreneurial Service-Learning concepts (**Shumer, 1998**). Our exploratory study was composed of several inter-related qualitative studies that all undertook purposive sampling by seeking out respondents who could provide '''information rich'' sources (**Hamilton, 2006**).

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Figure 02. The Exploratory Process

- **Targeted Terrain – The Case of Lebanese Academic Institutions**

Lebanon is an unstable environment that was always subjected to war – post-war periods. After the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) that practically annihilated state services and infrastructure coupled with high inflation rates, corruption, political instability, a polluted environment, etc. – the country never fully recovered – even with the many interventions of international organizations through their grants, aids-reliefs, programs, etc. Such harsh conditions cemented the country's status as a ''deprived-vulnerable'' nation **(Saad, 2001; Harfouche, 2008; Labaki, 2017)**.

Nowadays, more and more universities in Lebanon are integrating social responsibility into their mission statements, including their research and teaching missions, arguing that higher education

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is better off when it gives back to the society that is actually responsible for funding it (in order to play their parts of downgrading the all-in-all complex ''snowball''):

- Some universities are currently referring to themselves as *''Engaged''* institutions involved in civil and community service or ''outreach'';

- Civic engagement, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Community Service, Social Involvement, etc. students' clubs are being established in such universities and are getting sponsored by their institutions;

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as a topic is being integrated in academic as well as higher education's executive programs (e.g. core course, elective course, short XED program, etc.);

- Universities are adopting policies and procedures, sponsoring causes, etc. (e.g. the ''Green University'', ''Zero Tobacco'', Scholarships & Funds for Refugees and deprived populations, etc.);

- Social Actions are being initiated by students and adopted by universities (e.g. Mobile dental clinic for the deprived communities, Free Legal Consultation Unit, Blood donation drives, Full Free Medical Checkup, Offering higher education in Lebanese prisons, etc.);

- Many universities are organizing community-based ''Hackathons'' to deliver social reforms and public services to deprived communities;

- There are academic institutes that have established formal as well as informal think tanks aiming to search for the best solutions for social problems;

- Etc.

On another note, and with the escalation of the 2019-2020 financial crisis in Lebanon and the Spread of COVID-19 in the country – mainly:

- Many initiatives are managed by Higher-Education institutes aiming to launch micro-businesses in order to counter economic stagnation and unemployment.

- Many projects were launched by students and faculties alike in order to contain the virus, raise awareness about it and ensure volunteerism and manpower that can help limit its disastrous effects.

- **The Evolution of our Empirical Study**

The process of our empirical study took us approximately two years (2018-2020). It should be noted – that we faced many challenges that obliged us to keep our process an active one – specially the Lebanese financial crisis (2019-2020) and the national lockdown due to the COVID-19

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pandemic. That being said, our all-in-all work will be resumed and further outcomes will be published in future communications once the obstacles are overcome in a way that enables us to fully apply our project.

Within the context of our project, we are interested in knowing more about the significant role that service-learning plays in students' becoming more engaged and active citizens, faculty teaching in more critical and collaborative ways, and the higher education facilities growing into living knowledge incubators. Thus, on a two-year course (2018-2020) a number of actions were initiated by AUL School of Business and students in Jadra campus alike in order to test such paradigms.

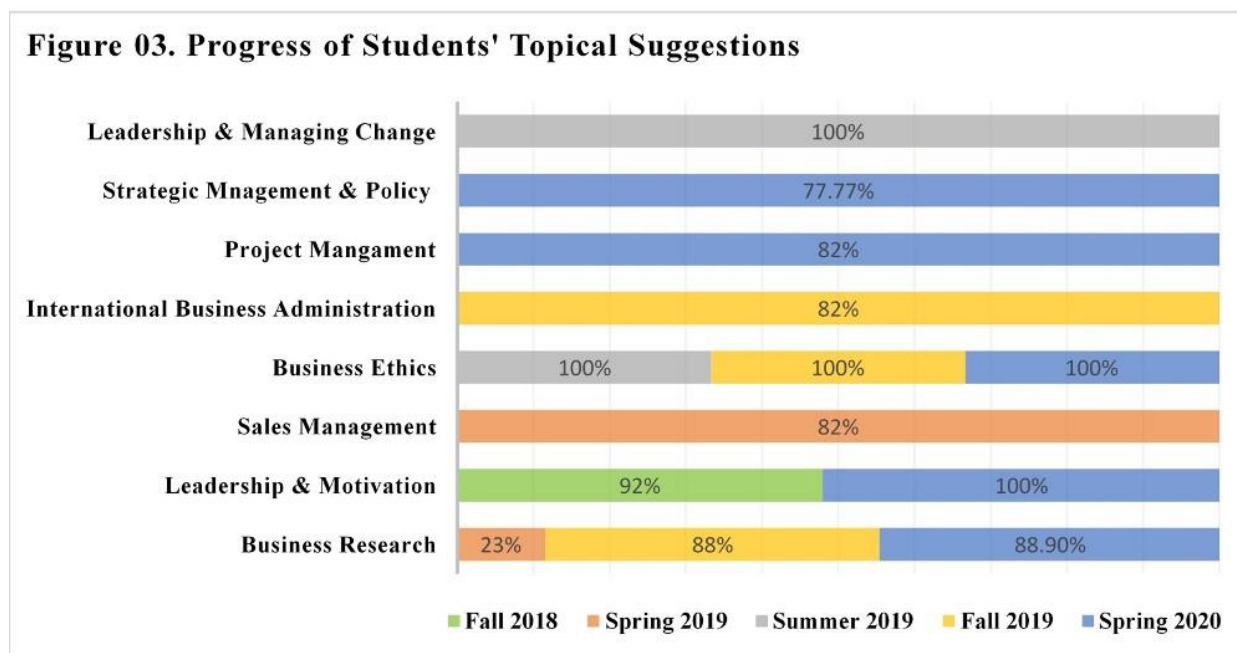### Phase I- Introducing Social Entrepreneurship & Youth Empowerment:

In December 2018, we invited a World Bank Youth advisor to present a lecture that outlines linking transformational change management to conscious change leadership. This lecture was given within the context of the BBA-level *''Leadership & Motivation''* course. The lecture explored the implication & impact of today's youth and the influence of International Organizations in producing sustainable-profitable projects that have communal impact, highlighting the concept of ''Hybrid Transformational Change Management''. To explore this concept, past experiences of implemented ''Hybrid'' projects that were co-led or funded by International Entities in Lebanon and piloted by the country's youth were introduced to the attendees. In the end, an exercise was proposed and co-directed by the invited speaker and course instructor, were students were invited to propose and develop project-ideas that fall under the UNs SDGs on one hand, and stress on technological and organizational innovations, sustainability and communal responsibility, continuity and progress – and that can be characterized as ''responsive'' to at least one of Lebanon's social needs on the other hand.

Phase II- Curriculum & Course Material

o **The Injection of Service-Learning in Business Courses**

Since the Fall Semester of 2018, a number of courses were chosen as ''test-pilots'' in order to inject ''Service-Learning'' material in their content. The basic mechanism of such a concept were outlined in the course mechanism, structure, etc. and assignments were requested from students that required them to formulate projects that were both compliant to the course itself and to the principles of ''Service-Learning''. Students went through a number of extensive training sessions, they were advised to review past socially-responsible business project, and were requested to present projects of their own (if they choose to do so). Gradually, and within a two year course, students got more and more implicated in the process to a point where 100% of the course attendees where fully integrated in our proposed framework (**Figure 03.**).

It should be noted, that the same course was not offered consistently around the year – due to administrative course offering procedures. On another note, the World Bank's Youth advisor's seminar (**Phase I**) actually prepared the participants in our work's initial stages which encouraged them to get interested in our work – from the start – which in turn, explains that the topical suggestions where from the start related topic's framework.

Figure 03. Progress of Students' Topical Suggestions

Topic	Value
Leadership & Managing Change	100%
Strategic Mnagement & Policy	77.77%
Project Mangament	82%
International Business Administration	82%
Business Ethics	100% / 100% / 100%
Sales Management	82%
Leadership & Motivation	92% / 100%
Business Research	23% / 88% / 88.90%

Legend: ■ Fall 2018 ■ Spring 2019 ■ Summer 2019 ■ Fall 2019 ■ Spring 2020

o **Project Proposals**

In the context of the cited above courses, students (working individually or in groups) were advised to choose one of the areas covered by the UNs SDGs (**Figure 04**.) and work on elaborating sustainable development projects / socially-responsible initiatives, that dealt with it either to AUL-Jadra Campus or a community of their choosing that surrounds the region of ''Jadra''. Their work was oriented to find innovative, creative, scalable and sustainable solutions (social entrepreneurship) for existing communal challenges – while utilizing course material (**Table 01.**). From the beginning students were advised that their proposed initiatives, and in order to guarantee long-term continuity should be designed to be run / managed by a third party once implemented.

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Figure 04. The UNs SDGs

It should be noted that Jadra region was not only chosen due to the university's campus location – but its strategic environments enables the students to launch a project that can affect directly or indirectly: (1) the regions of Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and Southern Lebanon; (2) Palestinian and Syrian Refugees (e.g. entrepreneurial emancipation efforts) due the approximate location of their camps; (3) the works and efforts of International Organizations, INGOS, International Development Programs (as well as the UN peace keeping force in Lebanon – UNIFIL's) as well as local entities and NGOs when it comes to offering services that should have been ''Public'' in those regions; the vital sectors of the Lebanese socio-economic fabric (e.g. energy sector, healthcare system, forestry, shipping sector, etc.); etc.

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Table 01. Project Criteria

Criteria	Explanation
Communal Problem	Explanation of problem and context: *Where is the Gap?*
Proposed Idea	Explanation of the solution (outline): what is the proposed idea?
Prospective Targets	The Objective(s) of your Policy / action Plan / Project / etc.: what are you aiming to achieve?
Relevance	Explanation of its significance: Why is it relevant?
The Choice	The Reason(s) behind the choice: why was this particular topic chosen?
Originality	Originality & Creativity: ■ What is new about it? ■ What makes it different from all the previous initiatives that were led by social change makers? ■ Are there similar examples? If so, where and how?
Feasibility & Challenges	Achievability: ■ By whom, what, how, and when would it be implemented? ■ What are challenges that one might face and how can such obstacles be addressed?
Prospective Benefits	Social Impact: How will the impacted community actually benefit from the proposed idea: ■ From a social – communal perspective? ■ From a public management perspective? ■ From a business perspective?
Project Stages	The proposed outline must contain the various stages, concepts, outlines, etc. of situation analysis, process, management, project management build-up, strategic action plan, etc.
Conceptual Framework(s)	The proposal must include the various concepts, notions, ideas, contemporary concerns, etc. of the related courses.

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Phase III- Students' Service-Learning Club's Build-Up

In October 2019, the idea of initiating a Students' Service-Learning club was born. The reason behind our choice to initiate a Student club goes within its value of offering extra-curricular learning outcomes with great impact **(Rubin et al., 2002)**. According to pedagogical experts – students' clubs are an important asset to higher academic institutions as they indeed contribute to developing interpersonal (e.g. self-confidence, motivation, etc.) **(McCorkle et al., 2003)** as well as management and entreprise skills **(Burggraaf, 1997; Kahl, 1998; Montes and Collazo, 2003)** – where its members actually go through as ''experiential learning'' **(Cox and Goff, 1996; Evans and Evans, 2001)**. On another note, a number of experts have found that clubs will heavily widen students' civic engagement **(Block and French, 1991)** and help them though practice (''Learning by Doing'') **(Grinder, Cooper and Britt, 1999)**.

The Students' Service-Learning Club aimed to incubate all the proposed projects by students and was initiated to help students manage for themselves the implementation of their initiatives. Due to the outbreak of the 2019-2020 Lebanese financial crisis, further attention to social and communal concerns had to be given – thus a structured stage-based project was initiated in order to guarantee the realization of the proposed initiatives. The authors of this article served as the piloting committee for the below stages:

o **Stage 01- The Club's Piloting Committee will develop a set of guidelines for the participating teams to follow (First Week of January):** what are the requirements that are needed for preliminary ideation and structuring of the project BM, BP, FA, etc. (steps to be included as starting point).

o **Stage 02- Initiation of the Service-Learning Club and Bylaws elaboration (First week of January):** Will be incubated by the campus's administration and advised by faculty members.

o **Stage 03- Communicating the Project to the Students (Mid-February):** As it is a Mega Professional Development (PD) project, a detailed outline of the all-in-all work will be communicated to all of Jadra Campus' students. An E-form will be sent for them so that they can:

- **Share the names and profile of each team members** (designated team members)

- **Share the project details (**e.g. Project title, concentrated SDG - the area of focus in which their project falls under, aim of the project, needed Resources / funding (if any) – on the condition that it does not exceed USD 3K, project description, etc.).

N.B. As this is Mega PD project, the participating teams will be given a one-month period in order for them to brainstorm and participate in such a project before filling the form.

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- **Stage 04 - Project Submission (Mid-February):** The participants will send their data (by filing the E-form) to the club's piloting committee for preview and preparation of the workshop.

- **Stage 05- Executive Training-day (Mid-March):** On this day all participants will undergo extensive training by an external expert in the field of social-entrepreneurship in order to refine their ideas. During this training, mentors will work closely with the teams to revamp the project plan. From the initial project concept phase to its operational implementation, the trainer will use a customized approach to guide the participating groups through each stage of the project development:

  ➢ **Session 01:** This session is all about clearing the Idea – Constructing / reconstructing the Idea itself; mentors and experts will help the participants highlight challenges faced by an industry & ideate solutions. The session will comprise of: clarifying the project's idea, measuring the seriousness and full potential of its development, creating a Business Model, elaborating a strategy, creating a Business Plan, etc.

  ➢ **Session 02:** Now that the idea is focused, the business model and plan are both established, we can now move on to the construction of the Most Viable Project (MVP). In other words, the session is intended to transform identified solutions into working prototypes (or potential ones).

  ➢ **Session 03:** This session will help participants get traction and build a foresight regarding the future operations of their project (e.g. Who will be running the project? How will the third party be actually running it? When can it be delivered? Any future / potential gaps? How will they be countered?

- **Stage 06 – Securing Funds (Mid-April):** Funding should be secured by a grant from an International Organization or an INGO.

- **Stage 07- Project Pitching (Late-April):** All participating teams will pitch the idea in front of a jury of experts. The jury will subsequently choose the most viable-feasible-impactful project. The winning project's team will be awarded a certain amount of money (approximately 1K-USD 3K) in order to implement its idea.

- **Stage 08 – Project Implementation (Early June – Late October):** The implementation process will commence. The wining team has to inform the campus administration and the club officials of the progress of his project implementation process on regular basis. This will be done by signing a *''Code of Ethics''* which includes the rights and duties of all implicated parties – including the managing third party – as well as **a *project implementation progress reporting standards*.**

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- o **Stage 09 – Project Evaluation (Early November – Late December):** The club's piloting committee is responsible for the elaboration of further control frameworks in order to properly evaluate the project implementation and impact (effectiveness / efficiency) and take corrective actions of needed.

Many Challenges and Obstacles were faced when trying to implement these stages:

a. Due to the aggravation of the financial crisis – which limited the possibility of obtained funds for the students' projects and due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's full-scale confinement and lockdown procedure – we are still stuck in Stage 03 (related to Phase III of our process). We will indeed resume our work once the lockdown is decreased – enabling us to continue our project.

b. On another note, further obstacles were faced that are related indirectly to the Lebanese financial crisis – where two of our contacted potential funding entities (local NGOs with Regional as well as International Affiliations) actually declined to provide us with the requested grant after their initial approval due to the fact that their sponsors cut them off as well.

DISCUSSION

We understand that community engagement academic programs, often called ''Service-Learning'' are structured pedagogies that link both learning objectives (academic and cognitive developpement) with community service initiatives in ways that can ameliorate both the students' growth (on both professional and personal levels) as well as the common social-good. In other words, ''Service-Learning'' is a teaching and learning pedagogy that integrates community service with the all-in-all academic experience as students seek to achieve scalable results for the community while gaining and / or applying further skills and competencies for themselves when spearheading community-service projects (''Learning by Doing''). It works by injecting experiential education (that actually enhances understanding of the situation which leads to a more effective and efficient action) through a process of civic responsibility frameworks, social action and further communal reflections - that can strengthen a community.

Usually, within the context of academia, and more specifically Business Sciences, community engagement is incorporated into an elective course (e.g. CSR Policy, Green Business, etc.) or a general core course (e.g. Business Ethics) even though social issues can be integrated in a course material (e.g. Social Entrepreneurship, Clients Rights and Duties, Unethical conduct in Sales Management, etc.). Such course designs aim directly or indirectly, within the context of community engagement to provide the student with a learning experience and reflections upon potential community action goals.

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This paper makes an interesting contribution as it was in a great sense co-authored by students based on a project that was co-led and initiated by them (within the orbit of the Student's Involvement Theory). It highlights the value of student-engagement through ''Service-Learning'' initiatives that aim to fill social gaps that resulted from the absence of public services in an unstable post-conflict environment. Our entire exploratory empirical process (the seminar / training session that was provided by the World Bank Youth Advisor (Phase I), the Curriculum & Course Material-related actions (Phase II), or the Students' Service-Learning Club build-up (Phase III)) provided actions that actually gave the students access to opportunities enabling them to engage in new forms of learning and knowledge build-up that they do not always gain in the ''traditional'' curriculum:

a. Raised awareness and several communal questions – hence, initiated an interest within the students (Phase I).

b. Made it possible for the faculty to provide further Service-Learning ground for its students as well expanded their knowledge with regards to such a discipline (Phase II).

c. Provided the opportunity for students to propose, elaborate and implement their own social-entrepreneurship initiatives while utilizing business tools and course concepts, material, etc. (Phase III).

Our study adopted the ''Student's Involvement Theory'' as a theoretical framework; however, it also presented further ideas that explicitly draws together concepts from the existing experiential learning literature (in other words – ''Learning-by-Doing'') with concepts in entrepreneurial learning knowledge as is. It would be appropriate to say, that even though our work centers around Service-Learning, Social Entrepreneurship and Project Management, several business-management related ideas were indeed raised that can be transferable to other contexts and could be used in future research that explores topics that were deduced from our work.

There are several implications from this research. This study was designed to explore how higher education institutions can draw out and implement service learning extra-curricular activities that can serve its faculty, students, and the community alike:

o **Community:** From the many proposed projects, the most suitable on all levels will be chosen and implemented in the community and managed by a third party. The project will aim to address the most urgent social needs where by its implementation – can serve as an emancipation factor for the targeted – deprived population.

o **Students:** They will benefit through the means of a ''Learning by doing'' pedagogical methodology which will enable them to properly put into action their conceptual and theoretical academically acquired knowledge. On another note, they will experience an all-in-

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all Project Management process (e.g. internal and external environment scanning, initiating an idea, reviewing a topic, proposal writing, planning the project, pitching and then implementing it, and evaluating the deriving outcomes). Students will indeed enhance their skills (most notably: Leadership, self-confidence, managerial skills, etc.) when involved in these activities and as a result should be considered as more attractive potential future employees and capable managers and / or entrepreneurs. Indeed, such activities are of crucial importance for career development, for employability and for entrepreneurship. Finally, they will be exercising good citizenship through civic-engagement – where they will be completely aware of the current needs of the community.

o **Faculty:** It will benefit through the means of establishing strategic relationships with both Public Sector entities, NGOs and International organizations – which provides many funding opportunities for future research. The entire process confirms why faculty must work on its ''Learning by Doing'' pedagogies as this enhances the forms of learning that are usually perceived to be difficult within the curriculum, and therefore, provide supplement semi-formal programs to study.

Finally, the entire paper is based on an unfinished work due to unexpected – uncontrollable factors (the general lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's financial crisis). Phase III will eventually be applied and the entire process of our work will be reviewed, criticized and worked-on in a future paper. Thus, we remain open for any new paradigm that may emerge once the work process is complete.

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