

Participatory Research Project

Participatory research projects can be a very suitable course format for strengthening transdisciplinary learning and for exploring community-based research. The idea derives from the need for more responsible research and innovation and addresses the dual challenge of doing “good” research and working with partners outside of academia to respond to research needs that are considered relevant by them.

At the same time, this format enables students to gain (sometimes first) research skills, e.g. to develop research questions, to choose an adequate research design and apply research methods like conducting interviews, participatory observation, writing research journals, etc., and train their personal communication skills.

The overall goal of the format is to promote responsible research in close contact with societal needs and to contribute to local and regional sustainable development.

Phase 1 – Preparation

As preparation for the later project work, students get theoretical input to responsible, participatory research and innovation as well as more generally regarding sustainable development and transdisciplinarity.

This series of theoretic course units is concluded with the presentation of current sustainability-related challenges by the local project partners.

Phase 2 – Research Project

First, the students have to choose a specific challenge to work on. Subsequently, they work in teams together with the local partner where they can apply their theoretical knowledge gained concerning research processes. Regular communication and collaboration with the project partner supports the participatory approach and makes it perceptible.

Phase 3 – Final Presentation

In a joint seminar at the end of the course, the student teams present their project results for the partners. This offers the opportunity for feedback from both perspectives, practice and theory.



“No one wanted to answer our questionnaire, but when a district manager asked to do so, it suddenly worked.” Student, University of Vechta, Germany

Benefits

- *Improvement of problem-solving competencies*
- *Provision of solutions to partner's problems*
- *Learning how to handle frustration*
- *Growing students' awareness about the company*
- *Establishing relationships for future collaboration, e.g. internships or thesis-writing*
- *Providing university insights for companies*
- *New concrete ideas for business*

Success factors

- *Students and partners get to know each other personally and early*
- *Communication support by teachers providing guides and experience*
- *Clear guidelines for cooperation partners*
- *Providing material concerning participative and responsible research methods*
- *Mutual trust between students and partner*

Challenges

- *To be taken seriously as a student by the partner*
- *Providing viable solutions to the problem of the partner*
- *Authoritative attitude by the partner*
- *Students' lack of experience in interacting with public for research*
- *Time as scarce resource for research process*
- *Students' lack of authority towards partners' employees*



With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.