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Service-Learning in the Context of Karol Wojtyła's Theory of Participation

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Abstract

Objectives of the research: The aim of this article is to explore how Karol Wojtyła's theory of participation can enhance our understanding of 'Service Learning' (SL) and its potential benefits for education and personal development resulting from the implementation of SL in higher education.

Research methods: The research was based on an analysis of publications on Service-Learning, a hermeneutic examination of Karol Wojtyła's writings on participation, and a case study using SL.

A short description of the context of the issue: Service-Learning is defined as reflection and action to transform reality, as serving in solidarity with the application of learning content and as learning by serving the community. This article presents the principles of Service-Learning through community participation, exposing the benefits of this approach in education.

Research findings: Karol Wojtyła's theory of participation serves as a creative inspiration for the theoretical basis of Service-Learning. Its principles can introduce SL project participants to personalistic values. The concepts of service, community, common good, solidarity, dialogue and opposition play a key role in this confrontation. By combining service with the learning process, SL can contribute to the development of project participants in terms of both knowledge and social skills.

Conclusions and recommendations: In drawing conclusions regarding the potential benefits of implementing the Service-Learning method in education, the authors emphasise that values, in accordance with Wojtyła's philosophy, are a key element of personal and social development. In the context of SL, people can find fulfilment through relationships with others, which is the answer to contemporary educational challenges. The authors recommend further research into different forms of SL implementation in order to better understand and maximise its potential in fostering participation and social service.

Keywords: service-learning, service, theory of participation

Introduction

In the third decade of the 21st century, higher education in Poland has seen a growing interest in Service-Learning – an innovative didactic proposal in academic education (Gierszewski, 2023; Kamiński et al., 2023). Service-Learning is defined as reflection and action for the transformation of reality; serving in solidarity with the application of learning content; and learning by serving the community (Tapia, 2019, p. 489). This concept traces its roots back to educational transformations initiated in the second half of the 20th century, drawing inspiration from John Dewey's (1859–1952) concept of experiential learning and Paul Freire's (1921–1997) emancipatory pedagogy (Biela et al., 2021; Culcasi & Cinque, 2021; Deans, 1999, pp. 15–29; Tapia, 2019, p. 489). The term "Service-Learning" (SL) itself was first coined in 1967 by Robert Sigmon and William

Ramsey, teachers in the Manpower Development Internship Program in Atlanta (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999).¹ In order to capture the essence of the program, they introduced the concept of *service-learning*, which they described as embodying the relationship between authentic community service, conscious learning, and reflection. Service-Learning, as perceived by Sigmon and Ramsey, has an element of added value by occurring within an experiential context that facilitates constructive, positive contributions to the community (cf. Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Andrew Furco, a proponent of SL in the USA, emphasises that SL is distinct from volunteering as it directly connects to learning at school or university, and therefore within the educational curriculum. SL is also not merely an educational activity confined to formal settings, such as the classroom or auditorium; rather, it requires the application of knowledge and skills to address real-world challenges (Furco, 1996, pp. 71–76; Furco & Biling, 2002). At its core, SL integrates service (solidarity actions, community volunteering, active citizenship, commitment to the common good) with learning (development of skills related to curriculum-based learning), so that pupils/students can enhance their knowledge and skills through solidarity service to the community (Fiorin, n.d., p.2; cf. also: Biling & Furco, 2002; Cohen, 1976; Fiorin, 2016; Eyler & Giles, 1999; McNatt, 2019; Sigmon & Keyne, 2010; Tapia, 2006). This framing is key to explaining Service-Learning as a distinct learning model.

The objective of this article is to explore the understanding of the 'Service Learning' educational paradigm through the lens of Karol Wojtyła's theory of participation, within the context of the potential benefits of SL in higher education for both academic learning and personal development. The authors contend that it is worthwhile to reflect on the potential outcomes for all stakeholders involved in the implementation of SL projects. When using the term "happen" concerning the student,

¹ William Heard Kilpatrick, who coined the term "project method," argued that learning should take place outside of school and involve efforts to meet real community needs (W. H. Kilpatrick, 1929). *Foundations of Method: Informal Talks on Teaching*, MacMillan & Company). See: D. D. Chipman and C. B. McDonald (1980). *The Historical Contributions of William Heard Kilpatrick*, *Journal of Thought*, 1, 71–83.

one can mean what happens in the student, between the student and the beneficiary, and because of the student. Maria Nieves Tapia, the architect of the Latin American SL concept, illustrates this notion by stating that “studying architecture and designing plans is learning. Studying architecture, designing plans, and contributing to the construction of houses together with those in need is ‘learning by serving’” (Tapia, 2019, p. 509). In essence, the goal of SL is not solely students’ ability to apply knowledge in practice but also about their actions benefiting others, holding social significance, becoming valuable to someone, and instigating change in others. Tapia suggests that Service-Learning appears as a response to the four pillars of education envisioned for the 21st century by UNESCO, which situate the learning process in the perspectives of learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be (Delors, 1996, pp. 85–97; Tapia, 2006, pp. 141–156; 2019, p. 511). Thus, it pertains to a specific subject, a specific person, because changes in their knowledge, emotions, and actions, are ultimately changes in their being.

The ultimate educational objective, as eloquently articulated by John Paul II in his address to UNESCO is “being more” (1980, nos. 7 and 11), that is the person (subject) and their existential essence. In a personalistic framework, this notion of “being more” opens up the person to the realm of values. Values not only impose obligations but also stimulate various biopsychological energies, mobilise and unleash motivational forces. Within this context, values serve as mechanisms of action, as they foster personal development and the process of maturation. Through engagement with values, individuals develop in their being, find direction for growth, and achieve higher levels of maturity (Popielski, 1994, pp. 163–165). John Paul II encapsulated this idea by stating, “Values are the underpinnings of the choices that determine not only your own lives but also the policies and strategies that build life in society. (1985, no. 6). In other words, values open up a human being to the community, facilitating every human being’s self-fulfilment in relation to others. This line of reasoning naturally leads us to advocate for a pedagogy centred on learning through service (Service-Learning), where individuals find fulfilment through personal interactions with others.

Service-Learning as learning through service

In the context of higher education, Service-Learning (SL) emerges as an answer to the question of the significance of knowledge acquisition. Over and over again, lecturers encounter inquiries from students such as, “Why are we learning this?” or “What are we learning this for?” SL projects aim to steer students towards society, by providing them with opportunities to apply the knowledge they acquire in practical settings.

“Service-Learning is an innovative pedagogical approach that integrates meaningful community service or engagement into the curriculum and offers students' academic credit for the learning that derives from active participation within the community and work on a real-world problem. Reflection and experiential learning strategies underpin the learning process, and the service is linked to the academic discipline' (Albanesi et al., 2021, p.12; Culcasi et al., 2022).

From the point of view of academic didactics, this is an important element; however, limiting SL only to the realm of practical application (such as practical benefits for curriculum delivery and meeting social needs) reduces its significance. SL should be considered in a broader context, namely from the perspective of human education and personal development. When implemented correctly, SL has the potential to impact every aspect of education, benefiting both the learner and the beneficiary.

In our analysis of this phenomenon, we will somewhat detach ourselves from the conventional notion of learning, treating it as a byproduct of the previously defined academic learning objectives (although we will use the full wording of the term to describe the method under analysis). Our main focus lies on the latter part of the phenomenon: service, which shapes the implementation and direction of the learning process, i.e., the method itself. We are keen on dissecting this method both because of its essence and because of the conditions necessary for achieving optimal results across all possible perspectives – whether pertaining to individuals, relationships, or situations. While discussions regarding the benefits of university and lower-level education typically revolve around the perspective of pupils/students, the nature of the SL method compels us to broaden

our analysis to encompass other beneficiaries. These include individuals targeted by students and learners within the framework of the method.

In the Polish context, the term “service learning” is most commonly translated as “uczenie się przez zaangażowanie” [literally: learning through engagement] (Gierszewski, 2023; Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wolontariatu, n.d.; PODN, 2023). On the other hand, the literal translation of the term into Polish as “uczenie się przez służenie” means “learning through serving,” and this version of the term has independently been adopted by two research teams in Poland engaged in international projects: the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, which participated in the UNISERVITATE project in collaboration with CLAYSS, the Latin American Center for Service-Learning (Kaminski et al. 2023), and the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, which is implementing the eSL4EU project: e-Service Learning for more digital and inclusive EU Higher Education systems, in cooperation with four European universities.² It is likely that in Poland, the literal translation of the term “service” as “służba/służenie” has not been used previously due to the ambivalent connotations of these words. This interpretation, in relation to other countries where the word “service” as “służba/służenie” has not been used, is also adopted by Tapia, who argues that in very liberal societies, the concept of service in the context of specific assistance rendered to another person or community typically carries religious overtones (Tapia, 2006, p. 87).

The PWN *Dictionary of the Polish Language* (PWN, 1997) provides five different contexts for the term “service/służba,” including “an institution of public utility or the military; also: the employees of such an institution; the activities of such institutions; duties performed during certain working hours in some institutions; performing the work of a servant in someone’s home, household, etc., against remuneration; also: persons performing such work” (PWN, 1997). These four designations of the term “service” are either not particularly conducive to capturing the notion of

² Cf. European Observatory of Service learning in Higher Educational, Program Erasmus+ Key Action 2: Partnerships for Cooperation. 2021-1-PL01-KA220-HED-00003; <https://e-sl4eu.us.edu.pl/en/the-project/>

Service-Learning, or are only minimally useful (e.g., as a place of performing service, as doing specific servile work, as carrying out socially beneficial activities). The interpretation that aligns most closely with the sense and meaning of this service is the first, which reads: "service is work for the benefit of a community, performed with dedication" (PWN, 1997). This definition evokes the most widely accepted understanding of SL. However, one may question whether "uczenie się przez zaangażowanie" fully encapsulates the complexity of the process that service-learning embodies in English. "Zaangażowanie" (engagement) is defined (WSJP, 2018) as an attitude in which one pursues a goal in a determined manner, with a significant personal contribution of time and effort. Therefore, "uczenie się przez zaangażowanie" is not a precise descriptor of the process involved in SL. The omission in translation of the potential offered by the word "service" (*służba* in Polish) contributes to this impoverishment, which in turn undermines the concept itself. Emanuel Levinas explored the notion of service, viewing it as a fundamental aspect of ethical living that arises from our relationships with other people (Levinas, 2002; cf. Kaczmarczyk, 2016, pp. 7–34). Thus, as "uczenie się przez służenie," Service-Learning entails working for the benefit of a specific community (here, the community is understood as comprising two beneficiaries: the social institution and those for whom the institution works, united by a common good), concurrently engaging in the learning process

In the context outlined here, service appears to be perceived as an attitude, one that can be characterised as such. Therefore, we define an attitude by its three constitutive factors: knowledge, emotions, and concrete actions. It can therefore be assumed that when embarking on Service-Learning, each learner (be it a pupil or student) has some background knowledge, emotions and experiences accompanying the intended action, all of which contribute to the action itself. In the specific scenario of a modality such as learning by doing, pupils/students engage in a collaborative relationship within a community comprised of the beneficiaries indicated above.

Let us consider, for instance, students of pedagogy who, in the process of learning by doing, will collaborate with two beneficiaries:

the caregivers at a Mother and Baby Home (the people in charge of the Home) and the mothers (adolescents, immature, “with a baggage”) taking care of their children. The students’ task could entail imparting certain parenting techniques to these mothers. While students possess theoretical knowledge of these techniques (e.g., manipulative play, reading, singing, and playing with building blocks), it is through their interactions with the mothers and children that this knowledge system evolves, and acquires new meanings.

In the situation indicated here, it can be assumed that emotions will also change. They will be influenced by the dynamics of the student-mother and student-child relationships, which in turn will modify their knowledge. All of these processes, it is hypothesised, will unfold during concrete action, which, from the student’s perspective, can be described as learning by serving. Service is recognised as a pivotal value for human and social development (Heska-Kwaśniewicz, 1998; Olbrycht, 2017; Tapia, 2019). By integrating the attitude of service into Wojtyła’s theory of participation, we can observe the extent to which the inherent good, which becomes the goal of the attitude, can yield benefits for all the parties involved, provided that in the course of service it is internalised through genuine dialogue fostered by mutual solidarity and, when necessary, by rightful objection.

Service-Learning in the personalistic perspective of Karol Wojtyła’s theory of participation

Certainly, the experience of service learning (SL) is more intricate than portrayed in the aforementioned example. In essence, SL involves multiple stakeholders and beneficiaries (students do something for someone, with the help of someone and for the benefit of that someone) – each contributing to a social process of action, which is accompanied by certain emotions and entails a formation of relationships. Moreover, it facilitates a significant didactic and educational process that supports personal development, a concept well elucidated by Karol Wojtyła’s personalistic

philosophy. Wojtyła's theory of participation accurately describes and explains the requisite conditions for realizing SL objectives from various perspectives, and the potential educational and developmental impacts on each participant involved. The linkage between service in SL projects and the phenomenon of participation is not novel (cf. Cross, 1974); similar reflections have been articulated by a team of Polish researchers, including Adam Biela, Dorota Kornas-Biela, Mariola T. Kozubek, and Arkadiusz Wuwer (2021, pp. 38–42).

Central to our analysis of participation is a pivotal insight from Karol Wojtyła:

If a person exists and acts "together with others," it means that they have some share in an entirety greater than themselves, that they therefore participate in it. ... Participation is, in a way, a characteristic of the person acting and existing together with others. And it consists in the fact that, by existing and acting in this way, man fulfils himself in this." (Wojtyła, 1994, pp. 458–459)

Recalling and reflecting on this very inquiry into the phenomenon of participation, Marek Rembierz notes that:

by participating "in an entirety greater than himself, man not only preserves himself (his own dignity but also, thanks to this participation, which is 'a property of his person' – fulfils himself and at the same time transcends (transcends, "outgrows") himself, as he strengthens his personal subjectivity (power over himself), positively shapes his agency (enhances his abilities) and opens himself more fully to reality in his relationships with others. (Rembierz, 2012, p. 225).

However, Rembierz adds a note of realism, suggesting that it is possible to "radically diverge from Wojtyła's orientation in actions carried out together with others, leading to the objectification of the individual and complete dependence of their way of existence on the functioning of the group" (Rembierz, p. 226).

Let us explore Karol Wojtyła's ideas through some examples and examine moments when pupils/students discover themselves as agents of actions, which fosters self-development. When pupils/students see themselves as agents and can perceive their actions as successful, good, and useful, this enhances their perception of themselves as persons and fosters a personal and creative process simultaneously. This, in turn, likely boosts their self-esteem in both their knowledge (I know how to do something, I know what to do) and their emotional attitude towards themselves (I am worth something), as well as a favourable view of action for others' benefit and action as such (leading to joy from taking action, and satisfaction from social involvement).

From a personalist standpoint, this action – the act – serves as an opportunity to discover many social and moral values. That is to say, a broader dynamic emerges as the “we” comes into play, with multiple participants getting involved, and each student and beneficiary actively contributing to the relationship. Pupils/students begin to take part in the endeavour, in being together, representing what Karol Wojtyła termed the “second dimension of participation.”

What defines the essence of this second dimension of participation? Wojtyła explains this concept of “we” in terms of the common good, which appears to encapsulate the essence of the educational (and developmental) outcomes not only for the student but also for the other beneficiaries involved in the SL process. Let us try to analyse the entire process by referring to Wojtyła's insights. He suggests that each “we” signifies a plurality of subjects, indirectly referring solely to a particular plurality. Each “we” is tangibly (albeit indirectly) defined. Thus, the “we” not only denotes a multitude of human subjects but also signifies that these individuals are interconnected in some way. This interconnectedness can be the source of their experience of unity. Paradoxically, the notion of unity seems to contrast with experiencing multiplicity. Clarifying this apparent contradiction is crucial for understanding the implications of SL implementation. Let us try to analyse its nature.

What is unity? According to the PWN *Dictionary Of The Polish Language* (1997), unity can be defined as harmonious coexistence and unanimous

action. It represents a common thought that unites subjects (persons) sufficiently for them to undertake joint action. From a philosophical standpoint, unity can explain the essence of unanimity as being grounded in the same foundation, a common principle. Prudence Allen, in discussing the unity of thinking among multiple subjects, reduces it to the principle that “One plus one equal” (Allen, 2006, pp. 87–108; cf. Ecler-Nocoń, 2016, pp. 96–106). This suggests successive processes following the actions of multiple subjects, each being a unique and inimitable person, yet united by a common idea. However, this common idea, when internalised by each subject, transcends a mere sum of individual components. In the PWN Dictionary's explanation of the concept of unity (*jedność*), there is also a reference to the principles of classical drama composition: the unity of time, place, and action. This reference can also aid in understanding the essence of what can occur during the process of SL implementation. Essential to its implementation, after all, is the unity of these three principles – the process occurs simultaneously, in a specific place, and is connected by a particular action. However, with the virtual possibilities of transcending space, these three principles can manifest in another dimension, although still connected by a common thread.

In analysing the concept of unity (plurality), we might conclude that it is founded on a shared idea. Wojtyła believes that the essence of “we” derives from good, understood as values, which, by uniting many individuals, warrants the designation “common good.” This common good is also described as a summons to community, which can be formed by people defining themselves with as “other.” Thus, this pronoun inherently contains an invitation to community (Wojtyła, 1994, pp. 458).

From a personalist perspective, *participation*, as viewed by Wojtyła, cannot be achieved outside of human subjectivity. Participation must define the one who participates. If we refer to the SL projects participation which aligns well with this notion, it is the student who defines how they participate, mindful of the shared values (common good) among themselves and the other beneficiaries. In essence, by existing and acting together with others, one achieves self-fulfilment. Wojtyła emphasises that participation must recognise that within any given “we,” each “I” inherently

possesses self-determination and a drive for self-fulfilment. By this very fact, a human being is a person. This inherent characteristic of humanity cannot be suppressed or eradicated by any human “we.”

By virtue of this attribute, man is capable of realising the personalistic value of his act, while simultaneously acknowledging the outcomes of communal action and existence. He is also empowered to do so. We advocate for personalism against individualism and totalitarianism, as both concepts undermine the possibility and, in a sense, the very capacity for participation, depriving man of the right to participate. (Wojtyła, 1994, p. 459)

This conviction situates SL-related pedagogy within personalism for a number of reasons, which will be elaborated upon later in this article. Suffice it to say, however, that when individuals act alongside others, they retain all that this collective action entails while simultaneously realising the personal value of their act. It is the individual who determines the nature and influence of their acts.

In a SL project named SenSkype (2022), conducted at Bel University, psychological support was extended to senior citizens in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative, guided by participatory theory, serves as a valuable illustration of the benefits derived from SL projects for all involved parties. The SenSkype project addressed the imperative to alleviate mental health issues among the elderly population, exacerbated by the isolating effects of the pandemic. Typically, senior citizens residing in nursing care facilities experience isolation, a condition that was further compounded by the pandemic-induced feelings of loneliness and fear of illness.

The objective of the project was to provide seniors residing in the “Viničky” nursing care facility in Nitra with a space to discuss personal concerns, their situation, family matters, individual interests, and life experiences. Through regular online interactions with psychology students, senior citizens found a meaningful substitute for in-person contact particularly beneficial for those in crisis. Importantly, each participant in the student-senior relationship was subjectively engaged in their own act,

thereby contributing to the realisation of common good (values). However, owing to the individual subjectivity of each participant, the concept of common good assumed slightly different dimensions for each of them.

For psychology students, the project offered an opportunity to apply and enhance their psychological knowledge while developing qualities such as warmth, attentiveness, and listening skills. Seniors, on the other hand, were able to navigate their circumstances through the point of view of personal experience, finding solace amidst the pandemic situation. It is conceivable that the project also helped the nursing home staff to resolve the emotional tensions prevalent among senior citizens in relation to the pandemic. By catering to the needs of the elderly, the project simultaneously contributed to the realisation of common good while reflecting the subjective decisions made by those in charge. Consequently, it can be inferred that the well-being of nursing home staff, entrusted with the care of senior residents, was also positively impacted by the initiative.

The aforementioned line of reasoning unveils the essence of participation, as conceptualised by Wojtyła. Participation, in the context of SL projects, embodies a pedagogy rooted in personalism. It is a property of the person who, by existing “together with others,” engages in action as a person. In this process, the individual retains all elements inherent in collective action while simultaneously realising the personalistic value of their own acts. Whether it be a student, senior, or caregiver, it is the individual who determines the nature and form of the act. Indeed,

pupils and students who are able to apply the knowledge they have acquired, in the process of education, in solidarity-based action to solve real problems of the local community, not only contribute to the betterment of that community, but by maturing pro-socially are able to give a deeper meaning to the learning/study process. By decentralising themselves through discovering and caring for the common good, they strengthen their sense of self-worth and subjectivity (Biela et al., 2021, p. 41).

In essence, as Wojtyła asserts, “Man relinquishes the fulfilment of himself in action ‘together with others’” (Wojtyła, 2021, p. 407).

For a comprehensive grasp of participation within the discussed context, it is important to refer to the concept of community. What defines a community? A community can be defined as a collective of persons bound together by common interests, by a common life. However, a community transcends being merely the sum of its members. What is important for a community to come into existence is a new, redefined understanding of the relationships among its constituents, who are the true agents of action. If the community is not the simple sum of its members, it means that each member retains the autonomy to decide upon their own actions, and the decision to do so arises precisely from their participation in the community.

In the scenario under consideration, the community was made up of students, senior citizens, and nursing home staff. This leads us to the analysis of subjective action within the community. Subjective participation hinges on voluntary choice: a member of the community chooses what others choose, or even chooses it because others choose it, and at the same time, chooses it as their own good and as the goal of their own pursuit in the sense of self-fulfilment. Participation empowers individuals to make such choices and collaborate with others accordingly.

In the exemplified case, we observed the voluntary choices of all members of the community. While students voluntarily joined the Sen-Skype project, the needs of senior citizens were determined by themselves and their caregivers. Each party independently decided to act together, perceiving it as conducive to their own good, self-development, and self-fulfilment, while also benefiting their project partners. Each found self-fulfilment differently, demonstrating that the solution to the problem of community and participation lies not merely in acting “together with others,” but in the pursuit of the common good.

In Wojtyła’s view, the common good cannot be fully understood

without also taking into account the subjective moment, i.e. the subjective moment of the action in relation to the persons acting. If we take this moment into account, the common good is not only the objective of an action fulfilled in a community, understood in a purely subjective

sense, but it is also and even primarily that which conditions and, as it were, triggers participation in persons acting jointly with others and thus forms in them a subjective community of action. If we can understand the good as an end, it is in this double sense: the objective and the subjective at the same time. The subjective meaning of the common good is closely linked to participation as a property of the person and the act. In this sense, too, we can maintain that the common good corresponds to the social nature of man (Wojtyła, 2021, p. 398).

To sum up, the common good constitutes the guiding principle for appropriate participation within a community, enabling individuals to fulfil themselves through their authentic acts in concert with others. According to Wojtyła, “The common good is the good of the community precisely because it creates in an axiological sense the conditions of existing together, and action follows this”. (Wojtyła, 2021, p. 398). Within a community, individuals aspire to choose what others choose while recognising the choices as their own good. Furthermore, in communities where the common good is paramount, individuals expect their actions to benefit, sustain, and enrich the community, demonstrating a willingness to sacrifice individual goods for the community³ (...). “This sacrifice is not ‘against nature,’ for it corresponds in every man to the property of participation and, on the basis of this property, opens to him the path toward fulfilment.” (Wojtyła, 2021, p. 399).

Principles of service through participation in the community

However, in order for participation to be fully realised, in other words, in order for the values of service to be realised in the individual and within the “we” of the community, certain attitudes are necessary. Obviously, when considering SL projects, we cannot guarantee, prejudice or assume that a community composed of three beneficiaries (students, institution

³ Which fits in with the designations of the term “service.”

members, and individuals in need) will always develop effectively. However, if the attitudes indicated by Wojtyła are authentically embraced, such development may very likely take place. Wojtyła identifies both the attitudes by which the community can live up to its fullness and those that impoverish it.

Wojtyła highlights solidarity, opposition, and dialogue as key attitudes for development. In addition, he emphasises that the attitudes of solidarity and opposition must be considered together, as one is strictly necessary to understand the other. The attitude of solidarity arises from the fact that people live alongside others. It is an attitude of community in which the common good properly conditions and triggers participation; in turn, participation properly serves, supports, and realises the common good. Solidarity implies a constant readiness to accept and realise one's share as due to everyone by virtue of being a member of a particular community.

A student enrolled in an SL project is prepared to address the community's needs by virtue of their plenipotencies (education and abilities). They are ready to perform these tasks in solidarity with those who lack or are developing these abilities. They perceive the fulfilment of this task as a common good, uniquely defined for each community member, but recognised as their own by each member. Wojtyła states:

Consciousness of the common good commands us to surpass the part that falls to us as a share, though in this intentional relation it fundamentally realises its part. In a sense, solidarity even prevents from trespassing on some-one else's obligation and appropriating as one's own a part that belongs to another. [Authors' note: This means that the student, in solidarity with those they serve – teaches them to meet their own needs rather than doing it for them.] Such an attitude is in conformity with the principle of participation, for participation taken objectively and "materially" indicates certain parts in the communal structure of human action and existence. The attitude of solidarity takes into consideration the parts that fall to every member of the community. Appropriating the part of the obligation that does not belong to oneself is fundamentally contradictory to community and participation." (Wojtyła, 2021, p. 401).

Solidarity, however, does not exclude opposition; on the contrary, opposition can often manifest as an attitude of solidarity. It can be a means of achieving the common good. For it is usually not those who oppose that exit the community but rather those who seek inclusion, a way of participating in it. They are looking for such a form of participation that will allow them to engage more effectively and more fully within the community. By its very nature, opposition must be seen as constructive. It is imperative for the proper functioning and structure of communities themselves, a condition for their correct system. Wojtyła underscores that "the human community possesses its correct structure when rightful opposition has not only the right of citizenship in it, but also the effectiveness demanded by the common good together with the right to participation." (Wojtyła, 2021, p. 403).

These insights seem to fit well with the essence of Service-Learning projects. Their success hinges on genuine participation in solidarity from all parties involved. If such solidarity is lacking (due to the inauthenticity of any one beneficiary), the common good remains unrealised. In such cases, the appropriate response, stemming from genuine solidarity, would be opposition.

Gary K. Clabaugh (1999, pp. 163–199) accurately discusses such scenarios where legitimate opposition becomes necessary. Let us examine the situation in relation to the following SL project. Clabaugh titles his reflections, *Service Learning: The Right Thing for the Wrong Reasons?* He asserts a profound truth (also applicable to SL projects) that when we help others, we simultaneously help ourselves. In SL, this assistance translates into knowledge, but the pupils/students also learn a great deal about themselves and others, and about interpersonal dynamics. Through SL projects, we hope to create situations that facilitate the realisation of these very goals. However, there is a risk that if students engage in assignments for the wrong reasons, entirely different personal and social goals may be achieved than intended.⁴

⁴ For example, a student who pretends to work, learns to make a good impression with minimal effort. Thus, he / she rather masters the art of lying and manipulation. See A. Janowski (1998), *Uczeń w teatrze życia szkolnego*, WSiP.

Clabaugh recounts an example: he asked a high school student to provide an honest account of a completed service task. The student admitted to not actually performing any service and confessed to fabricating data and forging signatures. In this case, as Janowski writes, the student became proficient in the use of evasions, deception and, more concerning, may now firmly believe that these tactics are effective.

Another student, as Clabaugh reports, was tasked with assisting individuals with Alzheimer's disease twice a week. At first he tried to handle the responsibility, but when it became overwhelming, he resorted to spending his time in the park, engaging in recreational activities and drinking. Subsequently, he wrote a moving diary entry, which formed part of the assignment, and received a B plus grade. Whatever he gleaned from this experience did not enrich his knowledge as academics anticipated, nor did it foster the development of his social and personal competencies in terms of discovering essential humanistic values.

Just these two cases clearly show how conformity and avoidance hinder the spirit of participation. Avoidance is withdrawal and thus, non-participation, which is, in a sense, a form of egoism. Conversely, the conformist allows themselves to be swept along by the collective, giving up the opportunity for self-fulfilment in acting "together with others." These attitudes often stem from an individualistic or totalised view of humanity and are the source of alienation, which represents everything that limits and prevents individuals from realising their full potential. When discussing self-fulfilment, we reject the subjective interpretation in favour of the most genuine aspirations of the personal subject. Therefore, from an educational standpoint, it is imperative that SL projects afford all participants the opportunity for holistic self-actualisation and minimise tendencies toward conformity and avoidance.

Final reflection – service is participation

The objective of this article has been to explore the pedagogical concept of Service-Learning within the framework of Karol Wojtyła's theory of participation. Authentic implementation of SL projects, which occurs when

project participants refrain from adopting conformist attitudes and evasive tactics, can bring many personal and social benefits. Throughout the project implementation process, students' knowledge is undoubtedly poised to develop and improve in a meaningful way. When students take action for the right reasons, the developmental outcomes can be invaluable. Such outcomes may include an internalised attitude of social solidarity, an ability to enter into dialogue, and a social sensitivity that prompts individuals to oppose violations of the common good within the human community. If projects are founded on an honest recognition of the common good, there is the potential for shared development among all beneficiaries throughout the project's duration. Discerning the common good is only possible if the members of the community serve one another with an attitude of genuine service. The most appropriate means of realising service is through active participation in the life of society. Learning through service, by participating in communities of individuals, fosters the realisation of the common good, benefiting everyone within these communities.

This study has unveiled new avenues for research within the pedagogical and broader educational categories. Establishing a connection between Service Learning and Karol Wojtyła's theory of participation presents certain challenges for both researchers and practitioners. In order to overcome these challenges, it is crucial to thoroughly understand all facets of participation within Wojtyła's theory and to integrate these principles into SL practice. This analysis requires not only the application of hermeneutics but also phenomenology in order to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of this phenomenon-experience, while simultaneously revealing its practical significance.

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