Paper presentation: Student Perceptions of Living Lab Research Internships

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Student perceptions of Living Lab research internships in the COVID-19 pandemic – a Dutch case study

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Background

Today's challenges are complex and require collaboration across the quadruple helix

Shift towards transdisciplinary education where students are equipped with future-proof transversal skills

HE response: Living Labs as didactic method

What is a Living Lab?

Living Lab concept

Traditional internships: professional development and employability

Living Labs: co-creation between academic, students and society

*"open innovation ecosystem serving to provide opportunities for local
stakeholders to practice research and experiment with meaningful improvement
for cities and other organisations"*
(Hawk, N., Bartle, G. and Romine, M. (2012))

Hypothesis

Students develop additional skills in LLs vs traditional internships

Students improve their personal, professional and academic skills

Relevance?

Relevance: legitimise LLs as increasingly implemented didactic method

Methods

Evaluation research benchmarking: pre – and post-questionnaire on self-reported confidence levels

Areas: personal, professional and academic skills

Questions: open + 7-point Likert scales

Sample: 35 respondents (pre) and 18 respondents (post); 53 students provided qualitative answers

Personal skills: communication, team working, networking, partnership building, ability to engage with multiple stakeholders, presenting and giving and receiving feedback

Professional skills: communicating with non-academic stakeholders, collaborating with academic researchers, collaborating with fellow students, putting academic ideas into practice and presenting themselves to non-academic stakeholders

Academic skills: research skills, analytical skills, ability to think critically, ability to investigate complex problems, ability to write an academic report, ability to formulate ideas into research questions and hypotheses

Case study

2nd year BSc [Global Responsibility and Leadership](#) students

LL mandatory 10EC course with various stakeholders

During the research 76 students participated in the LL (23 in the first cohort, 53 in the second cohort)

Findings - Personal skills

Students were fairly confident about their personal skills before, yet did not mention them for improvement

Interestingly, they reported a small <u>decline</u> in the post-survey, potentially pushed to growth-zone

"I believe this project has shown me another side of teamwork I had never encountered before and therefore brought me out of my comfort zone in some settings" (S 53).

Findings – Professional skills

Students surprisingly rated skills higher <u>before</u> LL than after, and indicated most expectations for development

Potentially students became aware of skills and learning opportunities

LLs were different than expected due to COVID-19 pandemic

"It can be hard to work on a project where multiple stakeholders are involved, as they have different opinions on the project" (S 42)

Findings - Academic skills

Surprisingly students reported <u>lowest</u> before LL, yet highest afterward

Reasons?

LL is the first practical application which they had not done before

Students may have the most realistic idea of their academic skills

"The Living Lab has contributed to the advancement of my academic writing skills. Also, conducting the survey and working with real data was a very interesting and exciting thing to do!" (S 38).

Conclusions

Students conducting this LL report actively practice their personal, professional and academic skills = added value LLs vs traditional internships

LLs uniquely contribute to students' preparation for future careers, especially in the collaboration with the real-world and the application of research and theory in practice

It thus seems we can legitimise LLs increasingly common place in HE

Discussion questions

How can we create a LL environment where students can also make and learn from mistakes while also managing expectations of stakeholders?

How can we optimise the collaboration between stakeholders so it becomes an equal partnership where co-creation takes place?

What is the future of hybrid working and how do we adequately prepare our students for this in higher education and LLs?

Thank you!

To connect & further info:
- Email: i.s.e.van.der.zande@rug.nl
- Article: https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-06-2022-0236