



LOCUS Project Result 5

Sustaining a student programme beyond the LOCUS project

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About this project result

The LOCUS project was a three year long, Erasmus+ funded cooperation partnership in which higher education institutions and work field partners from the social work field joined forces to develop an approach to better educate future social workers (social work students) to conduct research and develop conversation skills. LOCUS stands for Labs of Contextualized Urban Social Work: an innovative educational program for social work students, a partnership between educators and professionals, an attempt to create dialogue with residents, and an international consortium. With LOCUS we send students out on the streets to engage in meaningful interactions with residents, work field partners and others. The LOCUS project developed an answer to the need for developing knowledge about neighbourhood needs by connecting social work students, social professionals, residents and lecturers. Working with the tradition of community research (van Ewijk, 2011) this project fostered both local and international partnerships and learning between higher education institutes and work field partners.

This EU-funded Erasmus + partnership has led to various insights, community meetings and project results. Nonetheless, training students, understanding neighbourhoods, maintaining local partnerships and fostering internationalisation of education are continuous challenges. We wish to sustain and expand our network and student activities beyond this project. Furthermore we want to invite and support our international colleagues to engage with the LOCUS approach and findings in their respective cities.

The main target groups of this project result are a) lecturers of HEI's who want to implement the LOCUS student activities and b) the social work organisations and local public institutions that could be involved as field partners.

This text builds on evaluation of the various LOCUS student activities. We present different scenarios for local Higher Education Institutes and local work field partners to implement (elements of) the LOCUS method, without needing substantial external funding.

The goal is to provide ready-to-use student programmes, for colleagues at universities and university colleges that believe in the added value of sending students onto the streets to talk to residents and feedback their findings to residents and professional social workers. We will present both local and international scenarios, hoping to spur the dissemination of our LOCUS approach and strengthen our international network.

The annex of this report provides a list of course materials, made and used by our partners during the LOCUS project. These **materials** can be found attached to this project results; they can also be downloaded from the LOCUS website www.locuseurope.eu, just as the other project results and relevant materials.

The different LOCUS project results complement each other. This document will help colleagues to decide which scenario is most suited for their needs and possibilities and will provide guidance in making crucial decisions for implementing such a student programme. Other project results, like the LOCUS manual (PR3) and training programme (PR2) will go into much more detail with regard to important actions such as preparing students, selecting neighbourhoods or organizing community meetings.

We hope that you, the reader, will engage with the student programmes described below. You are warmly invited to contact us to for discussion and collaboration on this matter!

Sincerely, The LOCUS team

Many ways of doing LOCUS: three scenarios

There are various ways in which *'sending students onto the streets'* to better understand the experiences and needs of neighbourhood residents can be developed into a valuable educational practice for future social workers. One interesting possibility is to embed the local student activities in a broader international collaboration, but this is not a necessary condition for a successful student programme, and not always an option as well.

The student programmes that operate within the current LOCUS project evolved over the years through much trial and error, discussion with colleagues and feedback from students, work field partners en residents. This learning process started years before the EU-funded Erasmus + partnership and will continue after the project ended.

The LOCUS project was inspired by the MyCityYourCity programme, initiated by the John Jay college for criminal justice in New York. Here, students were challenged to explore neighbourhoods through observations and short street conversations, resulting in students making a short movie to show this neighbourhood and their findings to lecturers and other students. Sjoukje Botman from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences recognised this as a good way to introduce students to doing research in a real life setting and invited the AP University of Applied Sciences and Arts Antwerp to collaborate. They added idea of working with a survey to compare the gathered data between the two cities.

Since 2018 social work students form Amsterdam and Antwerp exchanged experiences, movies and survey data under the title of MyCityYourCity. Each year students and lecturers from one city would travel to the other city to discuss this in person.

Over the years, colleagues became increasingly convinced that this valuable programme could be further refined and expanded. They wanted to involve other cities and social professionals. This has led to our current network of five European cities – Amsterdam, Antwerp, Madrid, Oslo and Tallinn – and the LOCUS project as an Erasmus + partnership (2022-2025). The core principles of MyCityYourCity remain intact, but this funding and international collaboration allowed us to add important elements, such as the collaboration with work field partners and the community meetings, that enrich the learning experience for students and increase that added value for local stakeholders.

Today a **LOCUS inspired students programme** should contain the following **four general key elements**:

- Send **social work students** to diverse and socio-economically challenged urban neighbourhoods to observe the neighbourhood dynamics and **talk with residents**.
- **Collaborate with local community social workers**, municipalities or other service providers to decide upon relevant questions and prepare students for the field.

- Encourage and support students to use **social science research methods**, conversation skills and their creativity to gather and process this information in a way that allows for discussion with social professionals, residents and students from different cities.
- Involve students and work field partners in the organizations of **community meetings** where residents and other local stakeholders provide feedback on student's findings and discuss neighbourhood needs and opportunities for a better future.

The Erasmus+ partnership allowed us to develop a 'maximalist' scenario because of its resources that facilitated international learning and travelling for lecturers, work field partners and a selection of students. Besides the semester activities in each city, we were able to organize two Intensive Programmes. During the second and third academic year of the program, five excellent students from each participating higher education institution came together in one of the partner cities carry out an research assignment with an international group. Furthermore the Erasmus + framework also allowed the different academic and work field partners to meet several times in person during the Transnational Project Meetings, facilitating exchange beyond the scope of the program.

As mentioned above, embedding the local student activities in an international collaboration does provide various opportunities and benefits, however it is not a precondition for a successful LOCUS inspired student programme. There are various ways to sustain these student activities without Erasmus + funding. In what follows we discuss three scenario's.

The first scenario is to organize a LOCUS student programme at the local level without international partners: a local approach involving one or more work field partners.

The second scenario is to organize international exchange between partners who do LOCUS at the local level, without the need for extensive recourses to travel. Logically, scenario two is not possible without also engaging in scenario one.

The third scenario entails what we have called an Intensive Programme, meaning an in person exchange between students and lecturers from different cities and countries that collaborate several days on a shared assignment. Such a LOCUS inspired intensive programme is theoretically possible without engaging in scenarios one and two, but we are convinced that the local activities provide a strong basis for students to participate in an international exchange programme around community research.

Scenario 1: Doing LOCUS at the local level

In our view, a LOCUS inspired student programme at the local level consists of **several core elements**:

- **A partnership between a higher education institutions and a work field partners** that support (social work) students to conduct community research and feed it back to neighbourhood residents and other stakeholders.
- Formally **embedding the LOCUS activities in a course** or seminar of the curriculum for which students can receive study credits.
- **Selecting a neighbourhood and determining the focus of the student research** in collaboration with the work field partner and possibly in collaboration with residents.
- Organizing courses and/or providing educational materials and guidelines that adequately **prepare students to conduct research in public space**.
- Developing **clear assignments and expected outputs for students** and student groups that are (a) directly related to the LOCUS activities, (b) fit within the goals and expectations of their broader (social work) education and (c) include outputs that are relevant for the work field partners and residents.
- **Two types of community meetings** in which work field partners help to facilitate exchange between students and residents and possible other neighbourhood stakeholders like social professionals. We distinguish between the two types of community meeting. The purpose of the first community meeting, before the student research is to prepare students by introducing them to the neighbourhoods. The second community meeting, after the student research provides an opportunity for students to give back their findings to residents and engage in discussions about these findings.
- After every LOCUS semester, lecturers and work field partner should **evaluate the collaboration**, the students activities, the results etc.

In what follows, we discuss these different elements more in depth and provide concrete suggestions on how to implement them as a LOCUS inspired student programme for social work students.

Key partners

If you want to organize a LOCUS student programme at the local level you absolutely need three types of actors to be formally involved: **students, lecturers, and work field partners**.

A fourth indispensable group of actors is of course the **residents** of the selected neighbourhood. Residents don't need to be formally involved in the project, if their roles are limited to being respondents to student interviews and discussants during community meetings. However it can be valuable to attribute a larger, more formal role to resident volunteers.

Besides these four indispensable partners, it could be worthwhile to also involve social scientists and representatives of the local municipality to enrich the student programme.

The choice for particular partners is likely to differ across national, urban and institutional context and can also depend on the specific focus of the program. We will now briefly discuss these different partners and how they can be involved.

Students

The LOCUS student programme is developed to work with **social work students**. Most cities worked with first or second year bachelor students. In Tallinn, we worked with master students. It is important to adapt the student assignment to their academic level.

We believe that working with first or second year students has some advantages. For one, LOCUS can be a challenging and exciting first introduction to doing research. If one seeks to prioritize the experience of doing research over understanding the methodological and theoretical standards of doing research, it is recommended to do LOCUS in the early stages of social work education.

Secondly, the group of Bachelor students tends to be significantly larger compared to the group of master students. When working with a survey as one of the main research methodologies, a larger group of students increases the possibilities to reach a representative sample of residents, without tasking students with a very large number of interviews.

On the other hand, working with master students has the advantage that one can expect more in terms of outputs, which could increase the added value for societal stakeholders.

Of course, both bachelor and master students need to be sufficiently prepared and supported for this assignment. This entails practical, methodological and ethical issues (see below). A first step is, of course, to introduce the LOCUS project to the students. [Attachment 1](#) provides an example of how Spanish colleagues introduced the project to convince students to engage with the student programme as an elective (see Annex for the full list of downloadable attachments).

Lecturers

Lecturers play an important role in preparing, guiding and evaluating the students. Depending on the number of students and how the LOCUS activities are embedded in the curriculum, more or less lecturers should be involved in the programme. **We do recommend to work with a team of lecturers** (at least two). It takes time to refine the programme and the assignment offers triggers of uncertainty amongst students who are not accustomed to interviewing and observing people in public space. Especially in the early years, it seems important for lecturers to support and complement each other in this process.

Furthermore, the LOCUS programme touches on various competencies such as scientific literacy, doing field research, conversation skills, communicating with work field partners and residents, writing reports and making creative outputs. Such expertise is likely to be distributed amongst colleagues, rather than being concentrated in one person.

Lecturers also have to make and keep contact with work field partners. When the project is new, the lecturer will have to use his network to identify, approach and convince work field partners. The

lecturer will have to manage expectations and enable work field partners to provide input and feedback to make the research and its output relevant and usable. When community meetings are organized to facilitate exchange between students and residents, work field partners will often invite their network, but lecturers remain responsible for what is presented and discussed.

Work field partners

In the context of LOCUS a suitable work field partner is a social work organisation / professional that is interested in better understanding the needs and preferences of the residents in the neighbourhood where they are working. Additionally they should have the capacity (time, expertise, network en motivation) to collaborate in this project. This entails:

- Providing input on the focus and methods of the student research
- Supporting students to explore the neighbourhood and approach residents.
- Co-organizing the community meetings and engage resident volunteers.

Typically these actors can be situated within the broader tradition of community oriented social work (Gutiérrez & Gant, 2018).

It is important to note that **the tradition of community oriented social work is distributed unequally and institutionalised differently across European countries and cities**. In Antwerp and Amsterdam for example, our work field partners were NGO's who are subsidized by the local and regional or national governments to foster citizen participation and local solidarity. Still, these organizations operate in different ways according to their local traditions and how they are funded. In Oslo, the activities of the work field partner are in many ways similar to the Dutch and Belgian work field partners, but here the organisation is part of the municipality. In Madrid, we did find partners who do adopt a community oriented scope, but it is not their core focus. Here the work field partners are larger public or non-governmental service providers that are also interested in neighbourhood dynamics and community building, amongst other things. In Tallinn the tradition of community oriented social work is hardly exists as such. You can find cultural organisations or informal citizen initiatives and public services who do contribute to community building, but it is not a commonplace as a focus of social work organisation. Here we chose to collaborate with the public welfare centre. It was only late in the project that we discovered that the coordinator of a neighbourhood repair workshop, funded by the waste department of the municipality, does actually qualify as a community oriented social worker, without holding this as a title, making him eligible as a possible work field partner in the future.

When starting a new student programme, lecturers will have to invest time and effort to clearly communicate to goals of the student research and what they expect from the work field partners. From their side, work field partners will have to express what they would like to get out of this research and the community meetings. They will also have to safeguard their precious time and evaluate on a yearly basis if their efforts are worth the return.

While this does take time and care, our experiences in this regard have been largely positive, as higher education institutions and work field partners really grew closer over the year, learning to better understand each other and expanding their collaboration beyond the LOCUS activities.

In this scenario of only doing LOCUS at the **local level**, the role of work field partners can be limited to very concrete actions that are relatively close to their daily activities such as expressing research interest, introducing students to their neighbourhood, organizing community meetings and providing feedback to students and lecturers.

In the context of an **international collaboration**, such as our Erasmus+ project, work field partners could be expected to contribute to other project outputs. In this case, open communication and flexibility from the side of the higher education institutions is needed to prevent that work field partners feel overburdened by tasks that diverge from their core competencies and interests. That being said, being part of an international consortium does also provide benefits to work field partners through international learning and networking.

Residents and resident volunteers

Neighbourhood residents that encounter students will be asked to participate in the LOCUS activities **as a respondent** for either street survey interviews or in depth interviews. After the interview, they should be invited to the closing community meeting where students present their findings and engage in discussions with neighbourhood stakeholders. We know from experience that only a small share of respondents will come to the community meeting. Nevertheless, **we insist on inviting all respondents for the community meetings**. Work field partners can often help to increase resident attendance.

It is also possible and desirable, to attribute a larger roles to resident volunteers. For example, they could be asked to introduce students to their neighbourhood or provide input on the survey questionnaire. In that case some residents are a more ‘formal’ part of the project. In most cases these resident volunteers will be recruited by the work field partners, for example if the work field partner hosts a community centre in the neighbourhood, they could ask visitors to contribute to the project.

During the LOCUS project, the Amsterdam fieldwork partner Eigenwijks took a leading role expanding the involvement of residents. They insist on what their coordinator describes as ‘reversing the roles’ to that residents can take the lead in research that is too often about them, but without them.

Testimony from Gina, team leader at Eigenwijks, Amsterdam: *Residents are the key experts to their own neighbourhood. They live there 24/7, see the things professionals don't see and can tell you all about every important aspect, theme and problem regarding their specific neighbourhood. The work field partner involved in this project, probably knows about these same issues by working alongside the residents. Maybe they have a specific area that needs some extra attention, or that they have questions about. But it might even be better to involve the residents in the topics and themes to discuss. This way, you take their view seriously and get a unique and essential view to what's important in that area.*

Researchers

We encourage you to involve lecturers with research experience in your team because LOCUS is to a large extent about learning how to do research. The profile of these lecturer-researchers can differ. A general understanding of both qualitative and quantitative social science methods is already a valuable

asset. Experience in urban sociology, ethnography and community research (van Ewijk, 2011) can be an important bonus.

Working with a survey experience with statistics can be a plus as well, especially when you are collaborating with international partners and aiming for international comparison. However, because we only worked with descriptive data and relatively small datasets that are gathered in the context of a student assignment, advanced knowledge of statistics is not essential.

It is possible to involve a researcher that is not involved in the student activities to strengthen and advise the team on research related matters. In that case can be important to manage expectations because the main goals of this project are not academic, but educational and practice oriented.

Representatives of the local government

We recommend to involve representatives of the local government (city or district level) in some capacity in order to strengthen the link between the students research and local policy. If work field partners are public service providers, this can help to facilitate the contact with policymakers, but it is not a requirement. Overall, we largely succeeded to connect with local policymakers or administrators via de fieldwork- or higher education partners.

Representatives of the local government can play a role in **suggesting interesting neighbourhoods** and research questions. They can also **contribute to the community meetings and the dissemination of the research findings**. In some cities, they helped to **introduce the students to the neighbourhood**.

Their attendance and involvement can contribute to the 'aura of importance' of the community meetings. Participants, especially students and residents, but also social professionals and lecturers, often interpret it as a sign of recognition and relevance when policymakers and higher up public officials participate.

At the same time we should avoid that politicians or local policy experts dominate the discussions between students and residents. We suggest to reflect on their role in the community meetings and discuss it with them in advance.

Embedding the student activities in the curriculum

During the Erasmus + LOCUS project, higher education partners had different local strategies to embed the student activities in their curriculum. At the local level, important variable include: the level of the students, the focus of the course, the number of credits and whether this course is part of the obligatory curriculum for all students or an elective.

The level of the social work students

LOCUS activities can be valuable for al social work students in the different years of their Bachelor or Master and student assignments can be adapted accordingly. That being said, we do recommend to work with first or second year bachelor students, mainly because we believe that this method is extra valuable as a first encounter with doing research ([see 'students' in 'Key Partners'](#)).

The focus of the course

Both courses on **research methodology** and courses on **professional competencies** could be suited to host these activities. If they exist at your institute, courses on community social work or urban social work could also be appropriate. The assignment, course materials and evaluation criteria need to be adapted to the focus of the course. [Attachment 2](#) provides an example of how LOCUS is embedded in a course on professional competence development in Antwerp. [Attachment 3](#) provides an example of doing LOCUS within a course on social science methods (see Annex for the full list of downloadable attachments).

Experience learns that the suitability of a research methodology course depends on the vision of how research methods should be taught to future social workers. The LOCUS approach to using research methods to better understand resident needs, experiences and preference can be considered more pragmatic and 'for educational purposes' than most academic approaches to teaching research methods. Discussing these expectations in advance might lead to misunderstandings.

Number of credits

During our European project, the number of credits for the courses with LOCUS student activities differed from 3 to 9 relating to the different educational contexts. Doing student community research takes time. **We recommend to embed these activities in a course for 6 credits or more**, if possible, because we believe that enough hours of fieldwork, lectures and group meetings contribute to better learning outcomes, but this is not a hard criterium. Lecturers and work field partners can decide together how much is expected from students in the assignment in relation to the course and its credits.

In the case of an international collaboration, we learned from experience that large differences between credits can be a disadvantage, especially when students have to work together in an intensive programme. Large differences in credits for the same or similar assignment will likely lead to differences in student engagement and quality of the research outputs.

Compulsory subject or elective

In our view, LOCUS inspired student activities should become part and parcel of the social work curriculum, but we understand that this takes time. Embedding these activities in compulsory subjects tends to be more sustainable in the long run and generally leads to involving larger groups of students. The latter is interesting when working with a survey and covering larger areas.

That being said, working with smaller groups of students is not necessarily a problem as the educational experience remains the same and we encourage to explore a variety of research methods, depending on the student assignment and local knowledge needs. Embedding these activities in electives or a programme to gain extra credits can be an interesting strategy to introduce this new programme in the curriculum.

Timing of the course

When your LOCUS student activities are part of an international collaboration, the timing of the courses are relevant as well. Different choices are possible, both in terms of when student do their fieldwork and how much time they get to complete it.

We decided to organize all student activities between the Christmas and summer holidays. This allowed the lecturers and work field partners to prepare the assignment and engage local volunteers in the first semester (between summer and Christmas), so everything is set for the students to start the fieldwork in the second semester, during spring season. Still, countries and universities structure their modules and semesters in different ways which complicated the organisation of COIL activities.

Selecting neighbourhoods, methods and questions

LOCUS focussed on urban neighbourhoods and particularly those neighbourhoods that are stigmatized or undergoing a rapid transformation. There are both pragmatic and content related reasons to select a certain neighbourhood.

Pragmatic reasons include the presence of the work field partner, the travel distance, the size of the area. In some cases safety concerns can be relevant as well.

In terms of **content** we encourage you to reflect about:

- (a) what makes this neighbourhood interesting and relevant for future social workers and
- (b) which urban residents are not heard as much as others in the public debate and which neighbourhoods could benefit from student research and alternative narratives?

Based on these questions neighbourhoods that suffer territorial stigma, host a diverse population, high levels of poverty and/or neighbourhoods that are in transition because of large infrastructural project or gentrification are particularly interesting for LOCUS inspired student activities.

Depending on the course in which these activities are embedded, the selected neighbourhood and the input from work field partners and residents the appropriate methods (such as surveys, observations, in depth interviews etc.) and more specific questions should be determined.

Higher education partners should decide on the neighbourhood, methods and questions for the student assignment together with the work field partners who have more knowledge about the neighbourhood dynamics. Furthermore it is important that the student findings and outputs will be relevant and usable for the work field partners, residents and other neighbourhood stakeholders.

As discussed earlier (chapter 'key actors', section 'residents and resident volunteers'), we encourage you to explore the possibilities to **involve residents** as early as possible. This includes discussions about where students should conduct research, but also how (methods) and to what end (outputs).

In some cities it was decided **to stay in the same neighbourhood consecutive years**. Others decided to **go to another neighbourhood every year**. The advantage of staying in the same neighbourhood is that you can deepen and broaden the scope of the student research over multiple years and can strengthen to contact with different neighbourhood stakeholders. The advantage of changing the research area

every year is that you can compare findings across areas from the same city and you get in contact with different local stakeholders each year.

The choice is yours, we do not recommend one over the other. Of course, a lot will depend on the work field partner, if they are active in different areas of the same city, it is easier and possibly more interesting for them to change each year. When the work field partner is active in only one area, changing the area will imply that you would have to look for a new work field partner. In any case, we do recommend to work with the same work field partner for consecutive years, if possible.

Preparing students for the field

Dealing with uncertainty and confronting 'the unknown' are important aspects of the LOCUS student assignment that part and parcel of the learning process. That being said, it is of course important to adequately prepare students for the fieldwork. While concrete instructions might differ depending on the neighbourhood, the course, the level of the students and the student assignment (see below) **several points of attention** will always be relevant.

Here we briefly address the most important ones. Our **LOCUS guide** 'When the neighbourhood becomes the classroom' **provides more detailed information** about how to prepare students.

Getting to know the neighbourhood

Students should learn about where they are going, before starting the research assignment. There are different ways to go about this. Lecturers, work field partners or even residents could give a presentation about the neighbourhood or students can get a **desk research** assignment to look for **statistics, earlier research or newspaper articles** about the neighbourhood.

Another good strategy is to go out and **walk around the neighbourhood** and observe what is going on. This observation can be unstructured, students just going out by themselves, or it could be more prepared as an observation assignment or a guided walk. [Attachment 4](#) provides the example of a **Jane's Walk** as a good way to discover the neighbourhood before starting the surveys and interviews (see Annex for the full list of downloadable attachments).

We recommend to integrate some of the 'getting to know the neighbourhood' activities in a **first community meeting** (see the LOCUS guide for more details) where students, lecturers, work field partners and residents come together to get to know each other and kick off the research. While this first community marks the formal start of the research, we do recommend to introduce the students to the assignment in advance. It could be valuable to give students a desk research assignment before the first community meeting, so that they are better prepared for the walk and contact with local stakeholders.

Lecturers can choose to regard these steps as only part of the preparation or to make it a formal part of the assignment. In most cities, students could use the findings from their desk research and observation in the final report, making the preparation an integral part of the research assignment.

Instructions on how to approach respondents and planning the fieldwork

For most students it will be their first time to conduct street interviews. Furthermore, for many students, the neighbourhood where they will conduct research differs considerably from the neighbourhoods where they grew up. We consider the following issues to be crucial:

- Students should **recognize residents as experts** of the neighbourhood and treat them as such.
- Students should **engage with a diverse range of residents** at different times and places.
- Students should **always be respectful and non-invasive**. They should reflect about moments and places that might be more convenient for residents to respond to questions.
- Students should **handle rejection professionally**.
- Students should **explain residents why** they are doing this research and **invite respondents to the closing community meeting**.
- Students should be **aware of 'informed consent' and 'privacy' guidelines** in relation to the methods they will use.
- Students should be **vigilant for possible dangerous situations**, we recommend that they go in pairs, so one could ask the questions and the other can take notes.

After carefully reading the assignment and being introduced to the neighbourhood, students should start planning the fieldwork. We recommend to give clear instructions on the area, the number of interviews, how to make notes etc. We recommend that students make decision about:

- **The division of labour within their team.** All students will have to do parts of the data collection (observation, taking surveys, conducting interviews), but there are different other tasks to distribute amongst the group members such as: going on the introductory walks, writing the report, presenting the work during the closing community meeting etc.
- **Pairing up for the fieldwork.** We strongly recommend that students take street surveys in pairs, switching between the role of 'interviewer' and 'taking notes'. All students should do a similar number of interviews as an interviewer. We recommend that all students conduct between 5 to 10 surveys, about 10 to 20 per pair.
- **Planning when and where to do fieldwork.** In order to fully grasp the neighbourhood dynamics and talk to a variety of residents, students should plan the fieldwork on different times and in different parts of their neighbourhood. While this sound logical to most work field partners and lecturers, we know from experience that it is important that lecturers stress this in their instructions and follow up on this matter throughout the research.

[Attachment 5](#) offers a template that students in Antwerp used to plan their fieldwork (see Annex for the full list of downloadable attachments).

Introducing students to social science traditions and methods

Even when the LOCUS activities are embedded in a course on developing professional competencies, this students programme is always, to a certain degree, also about learning how to do research. Therefore, some kind of introduction to social science fieldwork is an indispensable part of the course. [Attachment 6](#) provides an example of a general introduction to doing research and collecting data from our partners in Madrid.

When this assignment is part of a course on research methods or when you are working with more advanced students it is recommended to discuss the different methods more in depth. During our Erasmus + project, cities made different decisions on which methods students should use.

In all cities, students did observations and worked with a survey. In some cities the survey included more open questions, whereas others combined a shorter survey with closed questions with doing in-depth interviews.

[Attachment 7](#) gives an example of a course that introduces LOCUS students to ethnography, [attachment 8](#) introduces students to qualitative research methods and [attachment 9](#) provides an introduction to quantitative social science research for social work students (see Annex for the full list of downloadable attachments).

Student assignments and outputs

Key elements of the students assignments

The students assignments and evaluation criteria will depend on the focus of the course, the level of the students and the number of credits students can get. Despite these local differences, several elements were present in all local student assignments.

- Students reporting about their observations.
- Students reporting about what they found from the surveys and interviews.
- Students reflecting about their findings and personal experiences of doing research in relation to their preconceptions, the literature or the image of the neighbourhood that appears in the media.
- Students reflecting about the strengths and challenges of their neighbourhood and how community social work or policymakers could take steps to address these challenges while drawing on the strengths that are already there.
- Connecting individual anecdotes to the broader set of findings to get a better understanding of how various lifeworld perspectives are connected (or disconnected) in a more or less shared identity of people living in the same urban area.
- Create outputs that communicate the findings to different publics.

As you can see from this list, LOCUS is not only about gathering data. **Reflection about the findings and the experience of doing research is crucial** as well. [Attachment 10](#) explains in detail how lecturers can guide students to go from observation to reflection (see Annex for the full list of downloadable attachments).

Additional to these suggestions we also recommend to consciously **facilitate contact between students and work field partners and other neighbourhood stakeholders**. This tends to leave an impression on students that sparks further reflection about their role as future social professionals.

Different student outputs

We believe that it is important that future social workers learn how to communicate research findings and personal experiences to different 'publics', like residents, fellow students, social professionals and policy makers. In order to do that, students learn about the different media, forms of reporting and ways of speaking they can and should use to convey information in an engaging way to different groups of people. In the LOCUS project, **student outputs include:**

- Final reports on their research
- Reflection reports or diaries
- Recommendations to local policymakers
- Posters to present to residents during the closing community meetings
- Movies about the neighbourhood they studied
- Creative interventions in public space to engage in conversations with residents

The LOCUS manual provides more detailed information and examples about these different student outputs. In the context of international collaboration, we recommend that students make some of these outputs, particularly to movies and posters, **both in their local language and in English**. This makes it possible to exchange findings and experiences with student peers across national borders and adds to the 'international feel' of the project. We experience that contemporary students are very capable of adding subtitles to movies and producing outputs in English.

From the perspective of strengthening students' research competencies, we recommend to give clear instructions on how students can go from conducting surveys and interviews to writing a research report. [Attachment 11](#) provides concrete guidelines and tips for doing thematic coding and selecting quotes for a research report. [Attachment 12](#) shows how the assignment of writing a research report was communicated to the students in Oslo.

Feeding back finding to residents

After gathering their data and producing their outputs, students are not done yet. Feeding back their findings during a **closing community meeting** is part and parcel of the LOCUS student programme.

The main idea of the closing community meeting is that the students, lecturers and work field partners invite residents and perhaps also local social professionals and policy makers to present and discuss their research findings. We strongly encourage to aim for interaction and discussion between these different groups. As such, **one should avoid too much one-directional presentations from students or professionals with the possibility to pose questions at the end**. Instead you should look for forms like poster presentations or discussion tables that **prioritize dialogue**.

Closing community meetings may include presentations from students, such as posters, videos, oral presentations, open discussions, and informal conversations among participants. In Madrid, students also experimented with more artistic approaches like painting a community wall. Besides exchanging information and discussing challenges and desirable futures for the neighbourhood, these meetings aim to raise awareness about LOCUS as a broader project involving multiple sites and participants. As such it also promotes the values of citizen participation and community research.



These meetings provide a meaningful conclusion to the students' experience. Students highly value these meetings as they provide a chance to share knowledge and discuss their findings, which can be as rewarding than receiving a diploma or grade. The fact that they are presenting their findings for 'real' residents and possible future colleagues makes this assignment more relevant and exciting than other presentation exercises. The LOCUS manual, which can be obtained through the project website www.locuseurope.eu, provides more concrete suggestions and examples on how to organize a community meeting.

After the closing community, the LOCUS semester is done. **We recommend that higher education partners and work field partners plan a moment to evaluate the research process, findings and community meetings shortly after the closing community meeting.** Depending on the experiences, partners can choose to change to focus, methods, neighbourhoods or student outputs in the following year. Please do not skip this yearly evaluation and try to stay in contact regularly throughout the research period. We understand that this is sometimes difficult to organize because of busy agenda's but it is crucial, because the collaboration between teachers and work field partners is to motor for doing LOCUS at the local level.

Scenario 2: A network of local LOCUS activities

Adding an international dimension to the methods and outputs

To ensure the quality and coherence of the international research component, a series of online meetings will be scheduled to collaboratively design a standardized survey. These meetings will involve all participating higher education institutions (HEIs) and their associated work field partners. The goal is to **collectively determine the scope, focus, and structure of the survey**, while safeguarding its validity across different local contexts.

At least two meetings of approximately 90 minutes each are foreseen. After the initial meeting, a smaller working group—ideally composed of three representatives—will be tasked with drafting the survey questions based on the group’s discussion and conclusions. This draft version will be circulated at least one week prior to the second meeting, allowing all partners to review and provide feedback. The intention is to finalize the survey collaboratively during this second session.

Once completed, the survey will be administered by students in their respective cities during the research semester. Local teaching staff will then process the data in each city. The resulting datasets will be shared among all partners, and **one or two members of the consortium will take on the responsibility of conducting a cross-city comparative analysis.**

It is important to underline that the purpose of this collaborative effort is not to generate fully valid or generalizable comparative research findings. Rather, it is an educational tool designed to help students understand how local realities can differ significantly between contexts, and to offer them a broader view of the social landscape they are working within.

Facilitating exchange between students

Investing time in a COIL

To make international learning more feasible within your educational institute, we suggest to embed a COIL in your LOCUS program. A **Collaborative Online International Learning** project, a type of virtual exchange that makes use of digital technology to provide experiential learning without travelling abroad, lends itself well to the different elements of LOCUS. **Our suggestion is to have the online part of the program student-led**, which ensures international exchange and engagement from all participants (Haug et al., 2024). As Haug mentions in her COIL Handbook, **a COIL does not have to contain unique, newly created material**. In this COIL we have chosen to make use of our existing materials as well. We did slightly edit the materials to fit our needs.

The COIL will consist of **a minimum of five meetings in which students share their LOCUS experiences**, co-create findings from their data and present to their peers their reflections. The first three meetings will take place before gathering data, while the last two meetings will take place after data gathering.

The learning outcomes for this COIL are:

- Students will be able to effectively communicate and collaborate across cultures by participating in group discussions with international peers.
- Students will be able to analyse and compare local social issues across international contexts, using visual and statistical tools to synthesize data and present shared findings in a collaborative transnational poster
- Students will be able to identify and apply ethical considerations in international social research, demonstrating awareness of cultural sensitivity and research integrity in their fieldwork and presentations.

First meeting: Introduction and Cultural Exchange

Similar to the stand alone online meeting, the first meeting should be focused on introducing the online program and letting students get to know each other through some cultural exchange exercises. To facilitate this, students will be assigned to breakout groups with a lecturer and will prepare a short *Pecha Kucha* presentation consisting of several slides. Each slide will feature one image that represents a specific theme, including:

1. Your country
2. Your city
3. Your university
4. The neighbourhood you researched last year
5. Your hobbies

6. Your favourite thing about your country
7. Your career aspirations as a social worker

The purpose of this session is to establish rapport and build relationships within the international working groups. It is possible to use this moment to make groups of students consisting of different nationalities. These groups would then work together online throughout the COIL.

Second meeting: Local Contexts

In this meeting the exchange of local context is central. Students from each country will prepare a visual presentation in which they share some general information on the neighbourhood they will be working in during the LOCUS semester. In addition to that, they will dive into what kind of social issues are present in this neighbourhood, and how these relate to their education to become social workers.

Third meeting: Social research and ethical questions

To break with the pattern of student-led meetings, this meeting will be an online lecture about Ethical research practices. To shape this lecture, look at [Module 2](#) of our training program.

Fourth meeting: international data comparisons

The fourth meeting focusses on an exchange of results between the participating countries. Students have conducted their field research and have analysed the data. Now they will meet online in their international group and share their findings. To do this, students can make [factsheets](#) about their neighbourhood and present these to their international peers.

You can use this meeting to get the international groups working on their final assignment, which will be a presentation of their experiences and results based on transnational input. Students will work in groups to integrate the findings of each country and make one collaborative poster that they will present during next meeting to the whole group. We suggest the poster has at least two statistical comparative elements and two experiential comparative elements.

Fifth and final meeting: presentation and reflection

The fifth meeting is aimed at letting students present their collaborative, transnational findings that they have discovered during the LOCUS semester. Students present their posters to the whole group and with that reflect and finalize the LOCUS project and the COIL.

Stand-alone online meeting

If you do not have the resources to facilitate a COIL to get students engaged on an international level, then another accessible and effective method for promoting international exchange among students is through **a single online meeting**. This session, which comes **at the end of the LOCUS semester**, allows students from participating cities to reflect on and share their experiences with peers abroad.

A diverse group of approximately five students per city will be selected, ideally based on merit while also ensuring representation of different backgrounds and perspectives. These students will be asked

to prepare an individual poster ([see student experiential exchange](#)) using a shared template in English, which highlights the emotional, personal, and cognitive aspects of their LOCUS research experience. **The emphasis here is not on research outcomes but on the experiential journey of conducting community-based inquiry.**

To contextualize these personal stories, the session will begin with a brief presentation ([see international survey comparison](#)) of the overall sample size and comparative international data. This framing reinforces the shared purpose of the LOCUS initiative and situates individual contributions within a broader, transnational narrative.

Students will be placed in **breakout rooms in small, international groups** (ideally no more than five students per group, each from a different country), accompanied by a lecturer. Within these groups, students will present their posters and engage in reflective dialogue, fostering mutual exchange and peer learning.

Online Meeting Connected to an Intensive Program (IP)

When the online meeting precedes an in-person Intensive Program, its objective shifts from reflection to social connection. In this case, the assignment focuses on getting to know one another.

Students will once again be assigned to breakout groups with a lecturer and will prepare a short *Pecha Kucha* presentation consisting of several slides. This is the same assignment as the one during the first meeting of the COIL.

The purpose of this session is to establish rapport and build relationships within the international working groups, which will remain in place throughout the IP.

This online meeting is also an **ideal opportunity to introduce students to the comparative research results collected across the LOCUS network.** These findings should be presented in an engaging way, highlighting differences and similarities across variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and more. The facilitator can pose key discussion questions to prompt reflection and interpretation of these patterns.

Finally, the meeting may also be used to outline the goals and structure of the upcoming IP. A brief presentation ([see online kick-off for an example](#)) can be included to clarify expectations and provide space for student questions.

Scenario 3: Intensive, International student programmes

The third and final scenario that we present is another layer above the online collaboration we presented in scenario 2. **To dive fully into the international exchange and get most out of your international partnerships, we highly suggest you try to find a way to incorporate an intensive international student program (IP) connected to the LOCUS program.**

For this scenario we offer you our **lessons learned from our experiences in hosting the two IP's in the LOCUS project, and give you the full blueprint of our own IP.** In addition to that, we will suggest adding some online elements to be able to qualify for a **Blended Intensive Programme**, which can be funded through Erasmus+.

Lessons learned

It is our experience in conducting two IP's during our LOCUS project that certain elements are essential for student wellbeing and learning outcomes. We like to list several of our key lessons that we have learned over the last three years.

- Students come to learn, so you can **set the bar high**, academic texts to read, and skilled research assignments are welcomed by students coming to an IP. To get inspired we suggest some academic readings¹² and an assignment ([see attachment 13](#)).
- **Stick to five students per city**, preferably picked on merit but with an eye for diversity. A group of 25 students fits in a classroom, is small enough to really engage with during the lectures, but big enough so students feel part of something.
- **Incorporate a lot of breaks during the program.** English is at best a second language for most students, and it can be very overwhelming to have to listen and speak it all day. They will also meet a lot of new people, have to process a lot of information and need some space to walk it off every now and then. Spacious and light classrooms benefit learning, and being able to open a window can be a blessing.
- **Don't start too early and finish too late.** A program from 10 to 16 probably leads to better learning results than one from 9 to 17.
- **Incorporate a lot of active work assignments, groupwork, and international exchange.** Pick exercises that has them moving around and going outside. Students do not benefit from being sedentary all day.
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¹ Spradley, J. P. (2016). *Participant observation*. Waveland Press.

² Lofland, L. H. (1971). *A World of Strangers; Order and Action in Urban Public Space*. University of California, San Francisco.

- **Include a field trip with students, teachers and social workers to a social work institute in the host city.** This not only deepens the international exchange and cross-cultural learning, but also gives students the opportunity to socialize.

Key ingredients for a LOCUS intensive, international student programme

A blueprint of organizing and international IP

The best formula we have come up with during our own project is to have an intensive student program that lasts from Monday to Friday. Preferably, all students (25 maximum, equal amount per city) arrive on Sunday with a lecturer to bring them to their hotel. You can find a blueprint of our IP in [attachment 14](#). Students have already met online during an earlier meeting and will group up in that formation during the day.

After two intensive theoretical days (see [attachment 15](#), [16](#) and [17](#)), all project participants and students will go on a field trip organized by the host city. This will preferably be to the local partner's institutes to demonstrate how social work is being done in that area. The field trip can be combined with a big student assignment such as the observation assignment in [attachment 13](#).

On Thursday students are expected in the school library or in a reserved classroom to prepare their presentation assignment for the next day and to process their findings from the day before. Friday they will present their findings.

Turning an IP into a Blended Intensive Programme

To turn an IP into a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) and make the LOCUS experiences more accessible due to funding via the Erasmus+ Programme it needs a blended component. To do this, we suggest you follow the IP as it is, but add a few online elements before the beginning of the face-to-face program.

An online introduction session is an absolute must, to make sure the students get familiar with each other and with the involved lecturers and social work professionals. In addition, thematic online workshop diving deeper into the content of the program and/or the contexts of the participating cities/neighbourhoods are a necessity to prepare the students for the IP, while simultaneously putting to big of a workload on the five days they have together. That way, you use some online time to get to know everyone but also give time to engage students with the material. To follow up on this you can give them literature to read during the weeks leading up to the IP and build an assignment around those readings. **After the IP we suggest you return to your local context and have the students of your city work on a reflective assignment:**

- Students have been working in international groups during the IP. After the IP they regroup in national groups and share and exchange experiences, ideas and reflections. They make a poster based on these experiences, aimed at showing how they have experienced the IP and working in international groups.

- You plan another online meeting, roughly four weeks after the IP has ended, in which students can reconnect with each other. The main goal of this online meeting is to have students come together and recap their experiences of the IP.
- Students from each national group present their poster to the other students and discuss similarities, differences and things that stand out.

In **preparing for a BIP**, there are a few crucial elements that need to be taken into account.

- First of all, get in contact with the **international office** of your higher educational institution and/or faculty. Since funding for a BIP comes out of the 'regular' Erasmus+ mobility budget of the KA131 action, there is no guarantee funding will be available at any given time. Especially since the increased attention for the BIP action we have seen in the past years. A **budget** needs to be reserved for both hosting a BIP (the Organisational Support grant is € 6.000,- to € 8.000,-, depending on the amount of students) and sending your students abroad for a BIP, since there is a limited amount of grants available per call year.
- Set up an **multilateral agreement** with all Higher Education Institutions involved. This is a requirement for setting up a BIP, but also helps you to list the practical arrangements that come into play for these types of programs, such as the amount of credits, the involvement of the lecturers and the responsibilities for all practicalities like accommodation. If you are including several work field partners to join, it would be wise to involve them in the agreement as well.
- Since the BIP is part of the Erasmus+ funding programme, it requires some **administration**. Your international office has experience with this, and will be able to help you along the way. Most of the time, they will even be able to take the majority of the administrative work out of your hands, which will allow you to focus on the programme itself.
- The amount you will receive for hosting a BIP is not a lot, but it does give you some opportunities. Since the participating students will receive a travelling grant covering their travel, accommodation, and most of their meals, you will be able to use part of the Organisational Support grant for the programme itself, besides coffee/tea and one or two group dinners. **If you are involving work field partners, they will more than likely don't have funding available for travel. Since the Organisational Support grant is a lumpsum, you can spend part of the budget on their involvement in the program.**
- **Awarding ECTS to students is a requirement of the BIP.** Most BIPs offer 3 to 5 ECTS, depending on the length of the program and the amount of work in preparation and/or after the IP. Of course, the BIP can be integrated as an international component into a bigger semester program.

See the [basic toolkit](#) for Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes, developed by the Erasmus+ National Agencies of Austria and the Netherlands, for more practical tips on how to set up a BIP.

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Annex: List of course materials from the LOCUS website

1. Introducing LOCUS to students (Madrid)
2. Embedding LOCUS in a course on professional development (Antwerp)
3. Embedding LOCUS in a course on social science (Oslo)
4. Jane's Walk (Madrid)
5. Introducing fieldwork and data collection (Madrid)
6. Ethnographic methods (Oslo)
7. Qualitative research methods for LOCUS (Oslo)
8. Quantitative research methods for LOCUS (Oslo)
9. Planning the fieldwork (Antwerp)
10. From observation to reflection (Tallinn)
11. Thematic coding and using quotes (Amsterdam)
12. Instructions for a research report instructions (Oslo)
13. IP Assignment
14. IP Program
15. Observational research lecture
16. Theoretical lecture local context
17. Theoretical lecture urban social work