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CIVIS micro-credentials

Notes for a challenge-based approach

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Introduction

The staff week "Designing Micro-credentials with a civic approach" was held in Madrid between June 26 and June 30, 2023. The event brought together CIVIS members, experts from other European alliances, political and civil society representatives and private companies from the education sector, which made it possible to draw a political, technological and pedagogical map on the growing interest in the development of alternative credentials[1]. In particular, the aim was to explore the challenges and possibilities of developing micro-credentials with a civic approach at CIVIS, as part of the strategy of a modular educational offer. This initiative raised some questions that hovered over the whole week and that we would like to raise openly here: Should European universities, and CIVIS in particular, enter the field of lifelong learning? If the answer is yes, how? What could we bring to potential learners?

In this report, we want to explore to what extent it would be possible to propose a modular educational offer that would reconcile civic engagement with the acquisition of competencies that allow learners to adapt to a (personal, social, occupational) changing context. In order to do so, it is necessary to take into account both the pedagogical particularities of the micro-credentials and the very vision and structure of CIVIS.

The challenge-based approach is often referred to as a possible solution to bridge the gap between the Alliance civic vocation and a pragmatic side of education aiming at a visible impact on civil society. It could certainly be a useful tool in the context of lifelong learning. However, it is necessary to unravel the ambiguity of the term, as its lack of clarity often hinders the implementation of concrete activities in CIVIS. For this reason, the last section of the report focuses on three possible interpretations of the "challenge-based approach". in order to explore different ways of jointly building micro-credentials considering CIVIS reality.

This is an issue that will require the participation of many voices. The aim of this report is simply to offer some food for thought that will hopefully facilitate collective reflection on the development of micro-credentials with the CIVIS label.

Lifelong learning: one notion, two different traditions

A recent report on lifelong learning published by the Institute for the Future of Education of the Tecnológico de Monterrey (Mexico) provides some elements that can help answer the questions raised above[2] (Institute for the Future of Education). The report traces the historical development of the term, pointing out the evolution of its meaning according to the political and economic vicissitudes of recent decades. This allows us to observe two major trends. On the one hand, a tradition that follows UNESCO's humanistic vision, which emphasizes the intrinsic value of education and understands lifelong learning as a mechanism to "bring out the full potential of human beings and enable them to shape their societies towards greater democratization and social justice" (Elfert, 1). On the other hand, a more utilitarian vision of education, promoted at the time by the OECD and the World Bank, which conceives education as a factor of economic development. Our aim is not to go into the details of this distinction, but try to understand some of the tensions and challenges that the concept of lifelong learning still entails today, in order to identify a space where CIVIS could add value.

[1] See the report « CIVIS Staff week "Designing micro-credentials with a civic approach », to be published soon by Zoa Alonso and Nadia Fernández de Pinedo, the staff week organizers.

[2] So far, the report is only available in Spanish, but it is strongly inspired by Maren Elfert's work: *UNESCO's utopia of lifelong learning: an intellectual history* (Effert).

Lifelong learning as a response to a changing society

Although the idea of extracurricular and lifelong education is already some decades old, it seems clear that in recent years the concept of lifelong learning has gained a lot of weight. This renewed interest is often associated with the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution, a term that refers to the impact that digital transformation will have (or is already having) on all orders of our lives (Schwab). The argument goes as follows: the progressive blurring of physical, digital and biological boundaries is going to force people to equip themselves with tools that allow them to adapt to a constantly changing world. In the workplace, companies will demand skills and competencies that facilitate the adaptation of workers to the new needs of the market, which makes necessary the development of a lifelong learning system.

Beyond political considerations, there is something undeniable in this argument: in the last 10 years, the global education sector has been recomposed with the entry of new actors, who identified a space that was not being occupied by traditional educational institutions. Two examples may suffice to show the magnitude of this phenomenon.

1) The MOOC boom: although the first Massive Open Online Course was launched in 2008 and 2012 was declared by the New York Times as "the year of the MOOC"[3], the reality is that, since then, the popularity of platforms such as Coursera, EdX and Future Learn has only increased. By 2021, these platforms and others like them hosted more than 20,000 modular courses and programs leading to digital credentials. In total, more than 220 million learners worldwide are part of the international MOOC circuit (Shah).

2) The entry of big multinationals into the education sector: some of the world's largest companies are themselves becoming producers of alternative credentials. Google (Grow with Google), LinkedIn (LinkedIn Learning) and Microsoft (Microsoft Learn) alone offer more than 5,000 courses or modules closely linked to the needs of the labor market (Cortes, M. et al 2023).

This outlines a worldwide training circuit that responds to a need that traditional university pathways do not seem to be able to satisfy. The fact is that more and more learners are looking for short-term courses and programs. In some cases, it can be explained by a genuine interest in learning new things; in others, by the fact that companies are increasingly willing to recognize accreditations from any institution that guarantees the acquisition of specific skills. In any case, this situation points directly to a question: **What role should public universities play in a scenario of progressive privatization of the lifelong learning space?**

It is important to note that one of the main objectives of micro-credentials is to facilitate the employability of learners. However, the link between lifelong learning and the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (which provides useful elements for unraveling the changes that the education sector is undergoing worldwide) tends to put all the weight on the productive component of this transformation. However, according to the definition provided by the European Commission: "Courses leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labor market needs" (European Commission). This means that, beyond the working factor, there are many other challenges we are already facing as a society for which we need new competencies to understand and act accordingly. To name only a few: the aging of the world's population, citizenship rights in the digital age, tolerance towards the other in an intercultural context and impact of climate change.

[3] https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/education/edlife/massive-open-online-courses-are-multiplying-at-a-rapid-pace.html

We started this report by mentioning that lifelong learning draws from two traditions: a more humanistic one, which aims at a better coexistence among all, and a more utilitarian one oriented towards economic development. However, if universities aspire to have a real impact on the development of our societies, work cannot be understood as an element independent of the personal, cultural or social spheres. Otherwise, the labor sphere will be ceded to private interests. The question is whether we are capable of making these two visions converge. To take the examples mentioned above, the question is whether we are capable of developing competencies that promote better intergenerational coexistence, greater awareness of the use of our data, greater tolerance towards those who think differently and a sense of belonging to a natural environment, and by doing so creating working environments that benefit from this. When we wonder at CIVIS how to design micro-credentials with a civic approach, this is the question at hand. The objective is that the courses and modules we offer in a lifelong learning context have a civic sense with a positive impact on the lives of the learners and their communities.

CIVIS added value: the civic dimension of lifelong learning

The European Universities Alliances initiative is a new piece on the global education board. Collaboration between universities makes it possible to take advantage of their different expertise and resources, both in research and teaching, and thus multiply their impact on student learning. These alliances "are expected to lead the way towards the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and transforming the quality and competitiveness of European higher education" (Maassen et al). To this end, they are expected to advance in at least three directions: the creation of an inter-university campus, the development of a joint student-centered educational offer and the application of a challenge-based approach in which students, academics and external partners cooperate in cross-disciplinary teams to tackle the main issues facing the world today.

In this context, CIVIS is distinguished by its ambition to develop a civically engaged educational offer. In the development of micro-credentials, this goal (which serves as a guide for all the Alliance's efforts) must crystallize into concrete educational actions that bring real added value to our learners. We wonder, then, how CIVIS should position itself in a scenario with very particular characteristics. We have already mentioned the need to respond to the challenges that digital transformation will bring, as well as the impact of the new players on the global education landscape. But other specific to lifelong learning factors could be added, such as the participation of non-traditional learners, the voluntary basis of enrollment, the shorter duration of training courses and the acquisition of alternative credentials that recognize the acquisition of skills in non-formal environments.

How, concretely, could we respond to these challenges? As stated in the Handbook entitled *Building our civic identity. Towards a socially responsible university: walking together to achieve a positive and transformative impact on society*:

> The CIVIS Alliance came into being with the aim of having a significant impact on the development of societies, both locally and globally. This entails fully accepting its social responsibility towards both local and global communities. This anchoring and continual local dialogue enables the European University Alliance to meet the global challenges of this century and remain connected to the direct needs and concerns of communities (Arias et al).

Indeed, CIVIS has a structure designed to make the civic component a cross-cutting element of its educational offerings. Just to name a few of the bodies linked to this objective[4]:

- CIVIS Open Labs: They are responsible for ensuring the linkage of all CIVIS universities with their local territory. Conceived as open and collaborative spaces, CIVIS Open Labs create a forum where universities and local citizens can meet. Through innovative thinking and the co-creation of projects, participants can launch creative and inclusive initiatives which have a positive impact on the wider community

- CIVIS Hubs: Organized in 5 interdisciplinary axes, the hubs are "academic collaboration spaces" to develop multinational and multi-disciplinary educational offers. In other words, it is where academics from across the Alliance meet to develop collaborative educational opportunities, everything from standalone courses to full programs. In CIVIS, any educational activity must be coordinated by at least three member universities, which implies itself an exercise of interculturality and common search for solutions.

- Expert Group on Civic Engagement: Its goal is to build bridges between organizations, companies, governmental bodies and institutions external to academia in order to work together both to have a positive impact in the life citizens and communities and to transform basic conceptions about what universities can offer individuals and society. To this end, the group raises civic engagement awareness within the Alliance, promotes research in this area, identifies opportunities with external institutions linked to social and environmental engagement, and develops committed institutional policies and practices.

- Expert Group on Service Learning: Its main objective is to support and advise CIVIS bodies and CIVIS partners in the further development of Service Learning approaches. This is aimed at an increasing application of this experimental approach in which students engage in community service, develop certifiable practical skills and reflect critically on this experience in order to have personal, social and academic positive impact.

- Expert Group on Innovative Pedagogies: Its function is to advise and seek creative solutions to CIVIS teaching and learning challenges. To this end, this group works on the promotion of student-centered approaches for CIVIS academic projects, the experimentation with innovative teaching methodologies and the co-creation of educational activities in order to ensure intercultural and transdisciplinary approaches.

With regard to the development of micro-credentials, the challenge is to make the civic component not only part of our structure, but also visible to the learners. First, this would reinforce the Alliance's educational identity to the outside world. And second, and especially, it would have a concrete impact on our students' learning.

We must take advantage of the timing. We are now laying the groundwork for the development of micro-credentials in CIVIS and we need to make sure that civic engagement articulates each of the courses and modules we offer in the context of lifelong learning. To do so, it is necessary that these groups work in a coordinated way to take advantage of their experience and vision, as we will try to show below. But, before that, a parenthesis is necessary to clearly identify what a micro-credential is and what distinguishes it from a traditional course.

[4] This list is incomplete and should include the work other teams that, from different angles, work actively to achieve the CIVIS objectives linked to the civic component. Only some of the groups most directly linked to the content and pedagogical method of courses have been mentioned.

Micro-credentials: a concrete pedagogical framework

We have pointed out some differences between lifelong learning and a traditional curriculum system. Similarly, and from a strictly pedagogical point of view, designing a micro-credential is not the same as designing a traditional course. Neither the audience, nor the pace of work, nor the duration of the course, nor the objectives of the learners are the same. This necessarily affects the way of structuring the course, designing activities and evaluating them.

We do not intend to detail here the process of building a micro-credential, but it is important to point out the differences with respect to a traditional course, as this will help us to better identify how we can take advantage of the CIVIS structure to offer truly differential learning experiences.

Aspect	Micro-Credential	Traditional Course
Scope and Duration	Short and focused, typically covering specific skills, competencies or topics.	Comprehensive, covering a large range of subjects.
Learning Objectives	Specific and targeted towards developing particular skills or competencies.	Broad, encompassing a wide range of topics within a subject area.
Flexibility and Personalization	Flexible, learners choose their learning path depending on needs. Modularization possible.	Fixed curriculum with less flexibility in choosing topics.
Assessment Methods	Practical tasks, projects, or demonstrations of specific skills.	Variable.
Time Commitment	Short, allowing learners to complete them alongside other responsibilities.	Significant time commitment, often challenging to manage with other tasks.
Credentialing and Recognition	Digital badges or certificates showcasing specific skills.	Degrees or diplomas with broader recognition in formal education.
Target Audience	Any learner seeking quick acquisition or upskilling in specific areas.	Students seeking a deeper and comprehensive understanding of a subject within a curricular framework.
Learning Approach	Focused and hands-on, emphasizing real-world applications.	Mix of theoretical learning, lectures, discussions and practical applications.

As can be seen, one of the substantial differences of the micro-credentials is their orientation towards the development of specific skills. The CIVIS strategy is to focus on developing citizenship competencies, which the European Union defines as "the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability" (CEDEFOP). **But how can we ensure that the development of competencies to be valued by organizations, companies and governmental bodies contribute, at the same time, to the social, cultural and work environments of our learners?** In the last section of the report we want to explore the pedagogical scope of the challenge-based approach, in order to identify how it could be applied in CIVIS in a lifelong learning context.

CIVIS micro-credentials: towards a challenge-based approach

Let us admit that "challenge-based" is an ambiguous term. It has been proposed by the European Commission as one of the lines to guide the work of the European University Alliances, but there is no common view on its meaning or on how to apply it within each of them. It is not a new term, though. In the last 20 years it has been raised in different educational contexts which, beyond their differences, refer to an objective that seems desirable: that the classroom serves as a meeting place between academic approaches and concrete societal needs.

We would like to launch the discussion on the best way to integrate this issue in the development of CIVIS micro-credentials. To do so, we propose three possible ways of understanding the so-called "challenge-based approach" with the aim at finding the framework(s) that best fits the Alliance's educational objectives:

Case 1: the challenge as a theoretical framework

According to this perspective, the challenge-based approach refers to any course, module or program that revolves around one of the major challenges we face as a society. Climate change, economic inequality, political instability and technological disruptions, for example, require urgent global solutions. Putting the academic focus on these issues, regardless of the teaching method, would itself be a challenge-based approach.

In short: this perspective does not refer to the format, but to the content. In this sense, and in the absence of other guidelines, it is difficult to guarantee that learning outcomes are linked to the development of specific skills, as this will depend largely on the teacher's pedagogical will and the specific course objectives, which may be different from the acquisition of competencies by the student.

Needless to say, it is not a matter of ranking pedagogical methods in absolute terms. In a traditional course, a competency-based approach will often not be the most appropriate for the learning objectives. However, the particular context of micro-credentials requires articulating the courses in this way, in order to provide the learner with a framework conducive to the development of new skills that can be certified by digital badges. Therefore, if CIVIS finally decides to adopt this vision, it would be very convenient to offer our teachers training on competency-based learning and support for the design of courses or modules. Otherwise, there is a risk that a micro-credential will end up being indistinguishable from any other CIVIS course, which could create confusion among our community.

In any case, this does not resolve the question of how to leverage the CIVIS structure to ensure the civic component in the development of micro-credentials. Unfortunately, this approach, by taking such a broad perspective, does not facilitate this task. In other words, the difficulties in building bridges between Open Labs, Hubs and the various groups of experts concerned would not be different from those of the CIVIS educational offer as a whole. So, while insisting on the need to strengthen these bridges, we defer to the decisions that will be taken in general.

Case 2: the challenge as a frame for experimental learning

This perspective is based on the principle that the active participation of students in a real-world problem has benefits for their learning. To this end, students are confronted with a situation of a relevant problem, for which a solution resulting in a concrete action is demanded. The process involves the student understanding the nature of the challenge, engaging with actors or communities involved and, based on this, analyzing, designing and developing a solution. Learning is not measured in terms of the success of that solution in the real world, but in terms of the competencies that the student has acquired during the process, which should be measurable through evaluation.

Unlike the previous perspective, here "challenge-based" is understood as a pedagogical approach, as a strategy for the student to acquire certain knowledge or competencies. Depending on which competencies are to be developed, one challenge or another will be chosen and the course will be designed accordingly. That said, there are many possible options, both in the identification of the challenge itself and in the learning framework to be built. For example, although it is often the teacher who chooses the challenge and sets its limits, we can imagine a situation in which a problem is posed to students by a particular community. Similarly, despite not being a necessary condition for student learning, this challenge could be concrete enough in order to produce a visible positive impact on the real-life situation.

With respect to the development of micro-credentials, this approach has the advantage that the learner's "solution" to the challenge must show the acquisition of the acquired competencies. An example: if this solution consists of an awareness campaign, the impact of his/her learning will not be measured by the number of people reached by this campaign, but by all the competencies demonstrated by the student for its elaboration, such as critical thinking, mastery of audiovisual techniques and cross-cultural communication.

How could CIVIS use its experience in this framework? This is obviously a question that requires a multi-stakeholder discussion and a concrete coordination process. But here are some possible scenarios that might facilitate such a discussion.

- CIVIS Open Labs: Given their knowledge of the local reality, the Open Labs could contribute in different aspects and levels. For example: in the identification of a challenge linked to a local problem (or transnational, if shared by several open labs); in the co-creation of the micro-credential together with the academic teams; in the participation as evaluators; in the animation of design thinking sessions with the learners and so on.

- CIVIS Hubs: This is the academic component of the micro-credential, the core of the student's learning. Whether the challenge identified by the Open Labs or not, the Hubs would bring together academics from three different universities (and, ideally, from three different disciplines) interested in coordinating a micro-credential linked to that challenge. They would be responsible for identifying the knowledge and competencies needed and developing a course consistent with the learning objectives.

- Expert Group on Civic Engagement: This group could support at different levels, from the identification of strategic areas of civic engagement in CIVIS, to more practical issues, such as setting the boundaries of the challenge to ensure a positive exchange between learners and external stakeholders involved in the micro-credential.

- Expert Group on Service Learning: On some occasions, depending on the objectives of the challenge posed in the micro-credential, the most appropriate approach might be service learning. In such cases, this group could advise project coordinators to ensure that learners engage in activities that address real needs from the social justice perspective by integrating community service in the micro-credential.

- Expert Group on Innovative Pedagogies: Together with the Innovative Pedagogies Officer, this group could advise and support the pedagogical design of the micro-credential: course structure, reflection on methods, tools (digital or not), forms of evaluation adapted to the objectives of the course, etc.

These are just a few ideas. Perhaps not all of them are valid and they are certainly not the only ones. In any case, the coordination of these groups would be crucial to establish a challenge that is socially relevant and, at the same time, pedagogically meaningful and effective.

Case 3: Challenge Based Learning (CBL), a concrete pedagogical setting

While the first approach referred to course content and the second to a general framework based on experiential learning, **in this case we are presenting a specific and clearly defined methodology**. The Challenge Based Learning (CBL) emerged from the *Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow - Today* initiative, published by Apple in 2008. Since then, it has been used and adapted by different universities around the world, which have found in this methodology a framework that favors collaborative work between students and external stakeholders in solving real life problems[5].

While this approach has points in common with the previous one (in the sense that both start from a challenge whose solution is expected to have benefits for student learning), CBL proposes a concrete process divided into three phases:[6]

1) Engage: Students start from a very general and abstract idea, for example, environmental justice. Using design thinking methods, they outline a concrete challenge based on the learning objectives and the student's links (personal, social, cultural) with the general idea.
2) Investigate: They explore, learn about and analyze the nature of the challenge, its implications and possible solutions.
3) Act: They propose solutions that must be developed, implemented and presented to a real-world audience, which will contribute to the evaluation of the results.

Beyond the misgivings that may arise from the fact that this approach stems from the initiative of a multinational company, from the point of view that concerns us here (the development of CIVIS micro-credentials with a civic approach) **this methodology has a feature that can be both beneficial and detrimental: it is very concrete, which facilitates its application, but also more limiting, which reduces flexibility in the course design**.

That said, we may be able to adapt the general scheme proposed by the CBL to the structure and objectives of CIVIS. The following example illustrates a possible organization of a micro-credential from a pedagogical point of view. Obviously, each course has its own needs. The objective here is just to facilitate the imagination of a pedagogical scenario adaptable to different realities.

A CIVIS example based on the CBL model

Let us imagine a micro-credential on Circular Economy. The **topic would have been proposed within a Hub by at least three professors from different CIVIS universities**. Ideally, these professors would come from different academic fields. For example, Economics, Ecology and Anthropology.

The first step would be to define the competencies that the learners would be expected to develop. Let us say: Understanding of Circular Economy Principles, Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, Ethical Responsibility and Global Perspective. In order for the course to be coherent, both the structure and the activities developed should follow the direction set by these learning objectives.

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[5] Some of them are Tampere University, University of Twente and the University of Melbourne. Among the European University Alliances, ECIU, which establishes three different scenarios depending on the complexity (and duration) of the challenge.

[6] For more information on the CBL model: https://www.challengebasedlearning.org/

The course would be divided into the three phases proposed by the CBL model:

1) Engage

It starts from a general idea: The Circular Economy.

The objective of this phase is for the learner to understand the basic notions of the Circular Economy and to be able to make sense of it from his/her own personal context. To this end, both theoretical and practical sessions are organized to ensure academic rigor and the linking of the contents with the students' own reality.

By doing so, the students begin to narrow and personalize the focus: What does Circular Economy mean? Why is it important? Do I know any example around? How could I participate on it? How does my cultural context / my time determine food waste and resource flows? If group activities are proposed, the interdisciplinary and intercultural nature of the training will be enhanced.

At the end of this phase, learners sketch an actionable, close to home, meaningful and broad enough challenge to let them research about it. For example: “Reducing food waste in the university cafeteria”.

In this phase, the role of Open Labs can be crucial. In the best-case scenario, one of the CIVIS universities would already have an Open Lab linked to this topic, which would bring a concrete vision of civil society to the issue of the Circular Economy. But even if this is not the case, the experience of Open Labs in the design thinking methodology can be enormously enriching. A collaboration between Hubs (which provide academic knowledge and scientific rigor on the subject) and Open Labs (which provide a methodology and knowledge of the field) could be very positive in the process of reflection that should lead students to raise their challenges for the micro-credential. This collaboration can range from the organization of activities and workshops with students to joint reflection on the overall structure of the course.

2) Investigate

At this point, the learner should have some basic notions of the Circular Economy and the outline of a challenge.

The objective now is to deepen the knowledge of these notions and move towards the development of this challenge through research. Theoretical classes and practical activities will be at the service of this objective. In this process, questions will arise that will sometimes be theoretical, sometimes practical and sometimes related to the learner's own perspective. To name a few: how do global supply chains influence the cafeteria menu? Are there partnerships with local food banks or charities to facilitate the donation of surplus edible food? What is the degree of sensitivity of students and staff to circular economy? What responsibility do I have in my day for food waste?

The idea is to see the problem from as many angles as possible in order to understand the complexity of the challenge. The prioritization of these questions and the search for answers will gradually outline a more concrete challenge than the one posed in the first phase.

According to the CBL model, the teacher has a role that goes beyond the transmission of theoretical content. In the process of his or her research, the learner will consult sources (books, academic articles, blogs, audio-visual material, interviews with people in their interviews with people in his or her community) that will not always be reliable. For this reason, the teacher is responsible for channeling these questions to ensure academic rigor and to guide the learners towards the development of their challenge.

After having answered the main questions to their challenge idea in the research phase, they define a concrete challenge, ready to be implemented. For example: “Raise an awareness campaign in the cafeteria”. They could create posters, organize short lunchtime presentations, or host interactive games and activities to educate cafeteria users about the importance of reducing food waste.

3) Act

In the last phase of the course, the learners test and present the challenge idea to a real audience and the rest of the group. The implementation of the challenge within a real setting makes it possible to connect the theoretical component with a concrete reality close to the learner. The link with the environment facilitates greater involvement of the student in the learning process and opens the possibility of having a real positive impact on the community.

However, as has been said, from the learning point of view, what matters is not the real impact, but the evidence that shows the acquisition of competencies. This is why this phase concludes with the presentation of the project to an audience. To avoid pre-conceived assumptions, the projects must be defended based on their research.

The student's reflection on the lessons learned during the process makes it possible, on the one hand, to consolidate the knowledge acquired and, on the other, to provide evidence of the skills acquired. In our example, the posters or recordings of the lunchtime presentations should show that the competencies that had been determined in the course design, namely: Understanding of Circular Economy Principles, Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, Ethical Responsibility and Global Perspective, have been acquired.

At this stage, one possibility would be for members of an **Open Lab to participate as an audience for the projects presented.** Their feedback would have a great pedagogical value, as students would benefit from the experience of representatives of civil society who are familiar with similar problems in different cultural contexts. In addition, their knowledge of the logics of the field could facilitate the positive impact of the challenge in reality, should any of the learners wish to pursue it further.

Other links with CIVIS

In this example we have pointed out some possible meeting points between Hubs and Open Labs. There are certainly many other options and hopefully this example will serve to fuel the discussion. In any case, this would not the only possible linkage to the structure and functioning of CIVIS.

- **Expert Group on Civic Engagement**: the options presented in the previous case could probably be adapted to the structure of CBL. In addition to helping to define the broad lines that CIVIS should follow in terms of civic engagement, this group could advise teachers on the choice of a topic with a civic scope for their micro-credential. They could also advise students in defining their challenges, or even participate as evaluators in one of the courses.

- **Expert Group on Service Learning**: As long as the course integrated the community service component and articulated it coherently with reflection, participation and student learning, the insights and support of this group may be very useful. Although it is also possible that, given the more rigid nature of the CBL model, the integration of a Service Learning approach would be more complicated.

- **Expert Group on Innovative Pedagogies**: the options discussed in the previous case could probably be adapted to the structure of the CBL. Apart from that, CIVIS universities have excellent instructional designers who would be enormously valuable to support teachers in the

design of learning resources, the use of digital tools and the alignment between learning objectives, activities and assessment.

- BIPs: The CBL format may be well suited to a short mobility format such as BIPs, especially in the "Act" phase, which corresponds to the implementation of a previously designed challenge in a real setting. We could imagine a Micro-credential divided into three stages. The first two would be developed online with the help of digital tools that would facilitate both the exchange between students and the use design thinking methodologies. The third phase would take place in person, where students would have the opportunity to apply a solution to their challenge and present it to their peers and external stakeholders. It would also be an opportunity to link students and teachers with local Open Labs.

Conclusion

Four years after its birth, CIVIS has a well-established vision and structure. The alliance is now in an ideal situation to propose concrete educational solutions to the major objectives it is pursuing.

This year CIVIS has started working on the development of micro-credentials, which can be both a problem and an opportunity. A problem because everything has yet to be done. An opportunity because we have the occasion to define, from the outset, the educational offer we want to develop in a lifelong learning context. The staff week held in Madrid from June 26 to 30 laid the foundations for this process. By bringing together members of different European alliances, universities, institutions and companies, the first lines of what could be the development of micro-credentials with a civic approach were sketched out.

This document is an attempt to reflect on the place that CIVIS can occupy in the lifelong learning environment in order to make concrete proposals for the development of micro-credentials. This does not mean that these ideas can only be applicable to micro-credentials. If any of them serve as inspiration for the development of other courses, so much the better. However, the competency-based component of micro-credentials offers a good opportunity to explore the pedagogical potential of approaches that aim to reconcile the theoretical component with a real-world environment.

The challenge-based approach is often referred to as a tool to meet this objective. There are different ways of understanding the notion, though. Here we have tried to point out the differences between some of them with a twofold objective. On one side, to contribute to undo the ambiguity of the term “challenge-based”. On the other, to launch the discussion on whether this approach is relevant to the development of micro-credentials with a civic sense. It is not necessarily a matter of choosing one of the three. Adaptations or combinations that fit the objectives and structure of CIVIS could be done. And it is obviously something to be discussed with different working groups in CIVIS, especially those who are mentioned here and will be in a better position to provide ideas and recommendations on their role.

In any case, it is important to systematize the collaboration between the different work teams involved in the conception of courses, in their design and in the implementation of civic approaches. This will ensure that the courses we develop in CIVIS are both pedagogically meaningful and recognizable to external audiences.

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