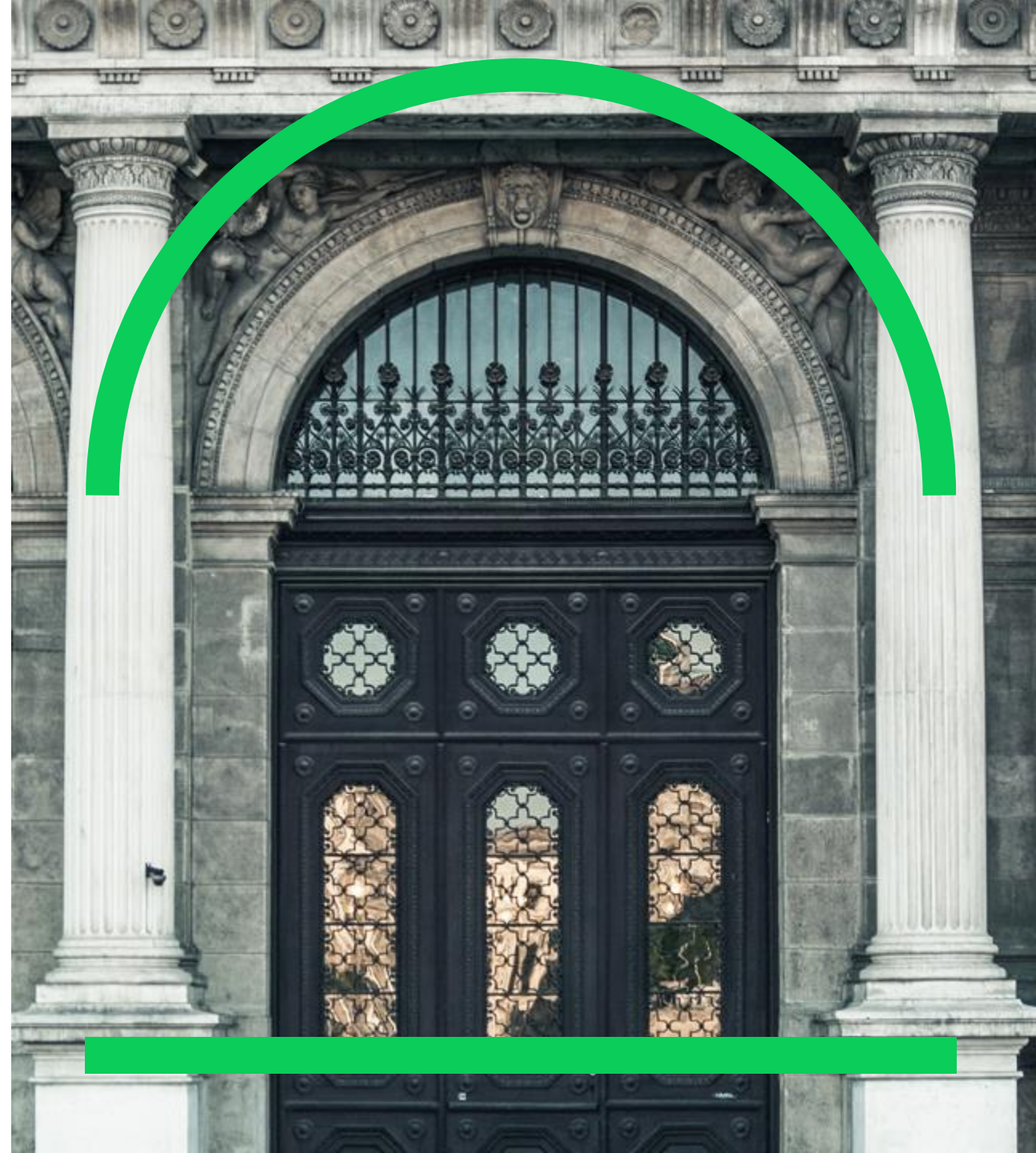


CERL for CSR

Empowering Future Leaders:
Integrating Corporate Social Responsibility
and Sustainability in Higher Education
through Community Engaged Research and
Learning

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Key topics

Integration of CSR and sustainability into HE through **community-engaged research and learning (CERL)**.

MA-level course where students co-create **implementable CSR projects** with and for **community partners**.

Focus on **real societal challenges**, aligned with the **UN Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs**.



Collaborative model involving students, academic staff, community organizations, and a corporate partner.

Emphasis on **skills development** (e.g. critical thinking, collaboration) and **reflection** to support attitude change.



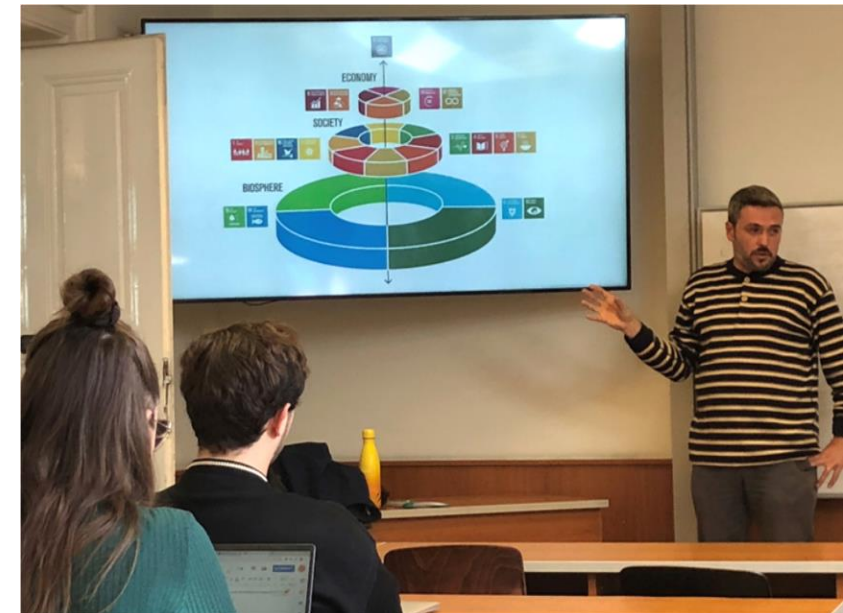
Challenge / Problem

- Higher education often lacks **practical, impact-oriented approaches** to teaching CSR and sustainability.
- Students have **limited opportunities** to work on **real-world, socially relevant projects**.
- There is a **gap between academia, civil society, and the business sector**, with few structured collaborations.
- CSR education often remains **theoretical**, without focusing on **implementable, partner-driven solutions**.



Objective

- To **integrate CSR and sustainability** into higher education through **Community-Engaged Research and Learning (CERL)**.
- To engage students in **co-creating CSR projects** that address **real community needs**, supported by corporate partners.
- To develop **critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills**, and to foster **attitude shifts** towards social responsibility.
- To **bridge academia, society, and business** for mutual benefit and learning.
- To contribute to the **achievement of the SDGs** through educational innovation and societal engagement.



Implementation methodology

Foundation

**Collaborative
Framework**

**Partner Selection
& Alignment**

**Curriculum
Integration**



Implementation methodology

**Student
Engagement:**

**Corporate
Support:**

**Continuous
Feedback Loops:**

**Reflection and
Evaluation:**



Tools and technologies used

Learning Management Systems (LMS) - Moodle and Neptun

- Distributing assignments
- Managing communication
- Submitting student work
- Monitoring course progress

Note: These platforms support the internal university environment but offer limited access to external partners.

Virtual Collaboration Tools - Microsoft Teams and Zoom

- Online meetings, workshops, and presentations
- Real-time interaction between students and community partners
- Inclusive access for partners outside the university (Teams especially supports external collaboration)

Reflective Tools - Online surveys and feedback forms

- Tracking student learning progress
- Gathering peer and community partner feedback
- Supporting reflective and meta-cognitive learning processes

Outputs, outcomes, and impact



Outputs: Tangible Deliverables

14+ CSR projects developed by students - in collaboration with **11 BA-level** and **3 MA-level** community partners

Deliverables include:

- CSR audits, Stakeholder maps
- Sustainability action plans
- Strategic CSR proposals

Community partners **adopted several student-created CSR strategies** for:

- Securing corporate partnerships
- Improving fundraising
- Implementing CSR initiatives



Outcomes: Skills and Attitudes Developed

Student skill development in:

- CSR and sustainability concepts
- Stakeholder engagement
- Strategic planning and real-world problem solving

Attitude shifts:

- Increased student commitment to sustainable and responsible practices (pre- and post-course surveys)
- Enhanced awareness of societal and environmental responsibilities



Wider Impacts:

Community partners benefited from:

- Implementable CSR solutions
- Strengthened links to corporate actors
- Long-term, sustainable partnerships

Students influenced to pursue:

- Careers in CSR, sustainability, and social innovation
- Continued personal and professional engagement with social responsibility

Lessons learned

1. Clarity and Alignment are Crucial

- Setting **clear expectations and goals** at the start of the project is essential.
- All stakeholders—**students, educators, and community partners**—must share a common understanding of objectives and desired outcomes.
- Misalignment at the planning phase can lead to misunderstandings and reduced project effectiveness.

2. Feedback Should Be Continuous and Bidirectional

- **Regular feedback loops** from community partners ensure that student outputs remain relevant, realistic, and useful.
- Feedback should not be a one-time activity but an **ongoing dialogue** throughout the project.
- This supports both academic quality and practical impact.

3. Scalability Must Be Considered Early

- Some projects, while of high quality, faced **implementation challenges** due to limited resources or capacity of community partners.
- It's essential to assess **feasibility and scalability** during the planning stage and to provide support to enable real-world application.

4. Sustaining Student Engagement Is Key

- **Motivation and commitment** are critical for project success.
- Engagement is enhanced by:
 - **Hands-on experiences**, including **field trips** to community partner sites
 - Working on **real-world problems**
 - Opportunities for students to witness the **real-life impact** of their contributions

Adaptability and transferability to other disciplines

✓ High Adaptability across Contexts

- The *CERL* model is **flexible** and can be replicated by other **higher education institutions globally**, including those seeking to **embed CSR and sustainability** into their curricula.
- The approach is **context-sensitive**: it can be **tailored to local community needs**, whether focusing on environmental challenges, social innovation, and regional development.

↻ Transferability across Disciplines

- Although rooted in CSR, this practice can be adapted to disciplines such as:
 - **Environmental science**
 - **Public health**
 - **Social work**
 - **Urban planning**
 - **Entrepreneurship**
- Key transferable elements:
 - Stakeholder mapping
 - Project-based learning
 - Real-world partnerships
 - Reflective learning practices
- Inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary potential

Sustainable and Lasting Impact

For students: It fosters a **sustainability mindset** and equips them with **practical skills** for careers in responsible business and sustainability.

For alumni: Many have reported that their CERL experience influenced their **career choices** and helped them secure CSR-related roles.

For community partners: Student-generated CSR proposals are often **implemented**, contributing to long-term impact and organizational development.

Strengthening Institutional Ecosystems

- The **collaborative partnerships** formed with community and corporate stakeholders enhance the **university's role in society**, encouraging **mutual learning** and **social innovation**.
- These collaborations can evolve into **long-term engagements** that continue beyond the academic year.

Thank you
for your kind attention!

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