



TexUnite

Project: 2024-1-DE01-KA220-HED-000253935 – TexUnite - Service Learning on Sustainability in Textile and Fashion Education

SL Project Title: Service Learning in Upcycling

Partner University: Albstadt-Sigmaringen University, Faculty of Engineering, Textile and Clothing Technology, Albstadt, Germany

Name of the Stakeholder:

Stiftung Lebenshilfe Zollernalb, Balingen, Germany;

Volksbank Hoenzollern-Balingen, Germany

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Language: German

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Executive Summary

As part of the Erasmus+ TexUnite project, eight third year (6th and 7th semester, bachelor's degree) Textile and Clothing Technology students, including one international student from Mexico, completed a service-learning initiative integrating sustainability education. The project run in cooperation with NGO Lebenshilfe Zollernalb and included the development of upcycling products with material sponsored by Volksbank Hohenzollern-Balingen and their handover with training to their inclusive production. With the production of upcycled products the NGO can help to finance their social work. Also, the students held virtual exchange with the students from Trakia University in Bulgaria, as both projects developed upcycling products. The upcycling instructions developed by the students will be shared as open educational resource (OER). Pre- and post-assessments indicated improved sustainability awareness.

Background and Context

The textile industry faces major environmental and social challenges, making sustainability literacy and awareness of EU regulations essential in textile education. This project familiarised students with the work of NGO Lebenshilfe and the inclusion of people with special needs in the labour market and their benefit for society. It linked academic learning with real-world experiences and promotes social and ecological sustainable practices within the community. It could show directly the positive impact each student can have on society.

Objectives

- ❖ Learn about advanced clothing technologies supporting social and ecological sustainable production.
- ❖ Explore an inclusive production.
- ❖ Use multiple already learned practices and combine them into a suitable package for the NGO in order to enable them to finance its work
- ❖ Support the partner company: students can directly feel their self-efficacy.

Methodology

In this service-learning project students learned about practices and challenges of an inclusive production. The students worked along the complete chain, starting with receiving and preparing the material, selection of suitable upcycled products, developing the products and creating concrete work instructions for the production from the NGO, then providing training to the people in the production to enable all people to produce the upcycled products. The project started with a visit at the material sponsor, and it ended with a final public presentation of all outputs. At the beginning and the end of the semester students evaluated the seminar, providing

insights into their attitudes towards sustainability, project implementation, and virtual exchange (VE).

Implementation Details

The project took part in the frame of industrial projects which are implemented in the bachelor's degree of Textile and Clothing Technology. This initiative (Lecturer: Prof. Sven Gerhards), involved 8 third-year Textile and Clothing Technology students. It ran during the winter semester 2025/2026 and included 120 hours of seminar and practical work.

- ❖ Theory: Students deepened their knowledge on EU sustainability regulations, ecological and social challenges in the textile industry, the circular economy, and learned about Service-Learning (SL) principles.
- ❖ Practical Part: Students developed upcycling products to enable the NGO to finance its social work. The students prepared the sponsored material, identified and developed upcycled products out of it. In this process they also created specific work instructions and its templates. They handed over the products to NGO Lebenshilfe, which included cutting and sewing training for the people with special needs. In addition all was documented and presented in a final public presentation.

Results and Impact

- ❖ Students strengthened their awareness of sustainability in the textile and clothing sector. Especially they learned about their own possibilities to create change and the impact they can create on society.
- ❖ NGO Lebenshilfe extended its product range and implemented further ideas. Also prejudices from the people working in the production were broken down, as these people tended to expect students to feel and behave as somebody better.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The small group of students were well organised and therefore only little challenges appeared. In future, the public presentation should be organized with online access further in advance.

Reflection and Feedback

Students and project partners were very happy with the result of the project. Especially the students felt their self-efficacy, which will lead to a positive impact for their future. Service-Learning projects are an important part in higher education.

Future Directions

The project at Lebenshilfe will be continued with the help of voluntary people. The OER materials of this project will be finalised and uploaded to the ZOERR and EPALE repositories for open access.