

VOLUNTEERING IN ALENTEJO CENTRAL: PLAN

SKILLS VALIDATION AND SERVICE-LEARNING FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

VERSÃO 0 | V&E STRAND - OUTPUT B



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ACRONYMS

SL – Service-Learning

1. Introduction: A Strategic Opportunity for Central Alentejo

This plan represents a strategic and concerted response to strengthen the human and social capital of Central Alentejo. More than an educational initiative, it is a development tool designed to promote territorial cohesion, combat depopulation, and strengthen young people's connection to their region. Through the structured implementation of Service-Learning methodologies, a roadmap is proposed to empower young people, deepen the connection between school and community, and promote a culture of active and inclusive citizenship.

The Service-Learning (SL) methodology is an educational approach that intentionally balances academic learning with the provision of effective community service. Its purpose is to generate mutual benefit: students consolidate curricular knowledge and develop transversal skills by responding to real needs identified in conjunction with the community, which, in turn, becomes an active partner in the educational process.

The potential of SL for Central Alentejo is immense. This approach is intrinsically aligned with the guidelines of the 'Profile of Students Leaving Compulsory Education', fostering critical thinking, autonomy and social responsibility. Furthermore, by focusing on local challenges, it contributes directly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), transforming the school into a true agent of cohesion and territorial development.

This document presents the path that guides us from the analysis of the current situation to the definition of concrete and sustainable actions, detailing the diagnosis, strategic vision and action plan designed to transform this potential into a reality with impact.

The Diagnosis: A Prepared Ecosystem, Untapped Potential

Building an effective strategy requires an in-depth diagnosis of the reality. The following analysis is based on extensive consultation with the main actors in the territory, based on concrete data such as a survey of 49 teachers from 11 school groups in 7 municipalities and a consultation with a sample of 37 secondary and higher education students. This multifaceted approach allows us to identify not only the challenges, but also the enormous latent potential that can be catalysed with the right framework.

The central conclusion of the diagnosis reveals a paradox: Central Alentejo has the necessary 'software' for Service-Learning — a strong culture of service, rich community practices and aligned values — but lacks the institutional 'hardware' to scale it up. There is a lack of coordination structures, methodological training, and formal recognition mechanisms that would enable the transition from isolated, voluntary initiatives to a cohesive and sustainable regional movement.

The following table summarises the main barriers to the implementation of SL identified by the different stakeholders.

Tabela 1 Barriers to the implementaton of SL

| Teachers' perspective | Students' perspective | Organisations' perspective |
|---|---|---|
| Structural barriers: Lack of time and curriculum integration. Lack of institutional and career recognition. | Practical and Equity Barriers: Lack of time (70%). Lack of transport (38%). Lack of information about opportunities (30%). | Systemic barriers: Fragmentation of coordination. Lack of resources (human and financial). Low formal knowledge of SL methodology (70%). |

Source: Own elaboration, meta-analysis of data from the questionnaire to teachers with SL theory

The following strategy was designed precisely to build the infrastructure needed to overcome these barriers and unlock the potential that exists in the territory.

Vision and Strategy: The Roadmap for Transformation

This section presents the strategic response to the diagnosis, defining the vision and lines of action that constitute the roadmap for capitalising on the latent opportunities in the territory and transforming Service-Learning into a transformative educational practice for Central Alentejo.

The vision that guides this plan is ambitious and inclusive:

To make Central Alentejo a national benchmark ecosystem in citizenship education, where Service-Learning is the bridge that connects the school curriculum to community life, empowering each student to be an agent of transformation in their own territory.

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To realise this vision, the intervention will be organised around three interconnected strategic axes, designed to respond directly to the needs identified in the diagnosis:

1. Institutionalisation and Curriculum Integration: To move SL from the extracurricular sphere to the centre of pedagogical practice, ensuring its recognition and sustainability.

2. Training and Professional Development: To equip teachers, technicians, and volunteers with the skills necessary to implement high-quality SL projects.

3. Governance, Partnerships, and Regional Ecosystem: To build a cohesive and functional regional network that ensures logistical, methodological, and financial support.

The integrated implementation of these three axes is fundamental to creating a virtuous cycle of growth and impact, whose concrete actions are detailed in the plan below.

2. Action Plan: From Strategy to Impact

The following actions represent the implementation of the strategic axes, designed based on recommendations made by teachers, students, and community partners to produce tangible, measurable, and sustainable results.

Axis 1: Institutionalisation and Curricular Integration

* Formalise Teacher Recognition: Integrate SL hours into the non-teaching component and value them in performance evaluations. Objective: Combat teacher overload and institutionally recognise their commitment, directly addressing the lack of recognition identified as a central barrier.

* Create the ‘Regional Skills Passport’: Develop a certification system to formally validate and recognise the civic and social skills acquired by students. Objective: Respond to the lack of formal recognition by transforming students' efforts into a tangible and valued curricular asset.

Axis 2: Training and Professional Development

* Launch an Accredited Training Programme: Develop continuous training in SL methodology for teachers, accredited by CCPFC. Objective: To fill the critical gap identified in the diagnosis, where more than 70% of teachers and organisations are formally unaware of the SL methodology.

* Train Community Partners: Organise joint training actions for organisation technicians and volunteers. Objective: Align languages, practices and expectations between schools and the community, strengthening the quality and effectiveness of partnerships.

Axis 3: Governance, Partnerships and Regional Ecosystem

* Develop a Regional Digital Platform: Create an online tool to map partners, centralise opportunities and share resources. Objective: Directly address the barrier of ‘lack of information’ identified by 30% of students and combat fragmentation of the ecosystem.

* Structure the Partnership Network: Formalise cooperation protocols between schools, municipalities (via Local Volunteer Banks) and social organisations. Objective: Overcome fragmentation in coordination by clarifying roles and responsibilities to create a robust and functional support network.

The effective implementation of this action plan depends on a clear, collaborative and results-oriented governance model.

3. Governance Model: An Alliance for Sustainability

Robust and collaborative governance is key to ensuring the coordinated implementation and long-term impact of this plan. The proposed model is based on shared responsibility and clear roles, ensuring that the strategy translates into measurable impact on the ground.

The recommendations of all stakeholders are unanimous in assigning a central role to the Eugénio de Almeida Foundation (FEA). The FEA should take on key functions as the coordinating entity of the ecosystem; as a resource centre, providing technical support and training; as a promoter, leading awareness-raising; and as a funding agent, providing financial support to stimulate innovative projects.

To ensure a shared approach, a regional governance structure is proposed that coordinates the operational, strategic and field components:

- Executive Committee: An operational body, composed of the FEA and representatives from schools and municipalities, responsible for implementing the plan.
- Regional Advisory Council: A strategic advisory body that will include social organisations, parents' associations and youth associations, ensuring alignment with the needs of the community.
- SL Coordinators in Schools: This figure, to be created in each group, will be the main point of contact, ensuring the vital link between regional strategy and implementation on the ground.

Commitment to results will be ensured through the monitoring of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each axis, allowing for continuous assessment of progress and accountability of all partners involved.

This model is designed to be agile and results-oriented, transforming the vision of this plan into a reality with lasting impact.

4. Conclusion and Call for Commitment

This strategic plan represents the transition from latent potential to structured reality. Its goal is to transform countless isolated initiatives, rich in merit but limited in scope, into a cohesive, sustainable, high-impact regional movement that places citizenship education at the heart of Central Alentejo's development.

We therefore call on all stakeholders to take action: policy makers, school principals, leaders of social organisations and municipal technicians. Your participation is more than just support; it is a collective investment in the future. The implementation of this plan is not merely an educational option; it is a strategic and urgent investment in the human and social capital of Central Alentejo.

The time to turn potential into reality, will into action, and students into full citizens is now. Acting together means empowering a new generation to build a more prosperous and cohesive future for our region.

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