



# The Five-Pillar Methodology: A Crucial Approach for a Successful Community Service Project

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## Abstract

The five-pillar methodology has been applied in the community service project Gonçalves in Brazil. This paper provides an extension and guidelines on how to apply our methodology as a foundation for a successful general community service project. Further advice regarding step-by-step approach will be provided. Behind the five-pillar methodology, a central point related to education as a foundation and lessons learned for life will be pointed out. Important aspects regarding challenges, strategies and future trends will be addressed. Finally, additional examples based on a real community service project will be highlighted.

*Keywords:* Five-pillar methodology, Gonçalves project, community service, and education.

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## 1. Introduction

Overall speaking, community service is generally understood as a practice of sharing in life to achieve personal growth and the common good. Volunteering work can achieve goals that are not always clearly visible in the short term. In a recent research review ([Nowakowska, 2023](#)), another crucial point discussed is that volunteering attracts people from different social value orientations. Special concern has been addressed to the concept of individualism and altruism. In this paper, the authors are focused to share a potential applicability of the five-pillar methodology to a general community service project. The five-pillar methodology has been first applied in the Gonçalves project ([Dobashi Nunes et al, 2023](#)). This special community service work has been established for more than twenty years, and the cooperation between Germany and Brazil has been proved to be a successful international co-creation work. Behind all common challenges of a typical community service work, the five-pillar methodology has presented clear foundations to help all people involved in the project, and towards directions to motivate all to overcome obstacles ([Project Gonçalves](#)).

The international exchange, promoted by UNEMAT (State University of Mato Grosso) in collaboration with Seciba and the Dietrich-Bonhoeffer-Gymnasium in Metzingen, Germany, has established a clear target to provide coexistence with communities, encouraging social participation in all means and, specifically, in social organization in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

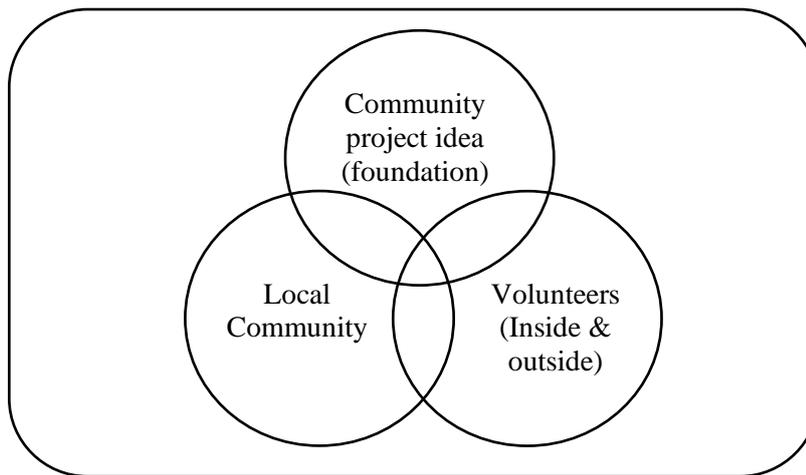
Such an initiative provides an opportunity for students to expand their cultural, ethical, political, and linguistic knowledge through voluntary actions. The first and most successful experience was conducted in 2018. The selection process was based on participants involved in voluntary service in 2018 at the Gonçalves project. The exchange takes place in alternate years. Biennially, a group of young Brazilians, aged between 16 and 25 years old, travels to Germany, and, in the intervening year, a group of young Germans comes to Brazil. The agreement also foresees the coming of two students to Brazil for one year, intending to study at UNEMAT and, in their free time, do internships at the Gonçalves project. All travel expenses are the responsibility of the “Sociedade Educadora e Cultural de Integração Brasil – Germany”. Such exchange work is fundamental to the success of this kind of project. The latest exchange occurred in 2022 (after Corona), which was very successful. This time seven students from a German high school have joined the project with local activities and challenges. A brilliant opportunity for both parties, with a valuable lesson for life.

## 2. Initial community project idea: guidelines

In this chapter, we would like to go one step back and provide some initial discussion about a general community service project. Let's take into consideration an overall community project that we are having in the beginning just an idea for this realization.

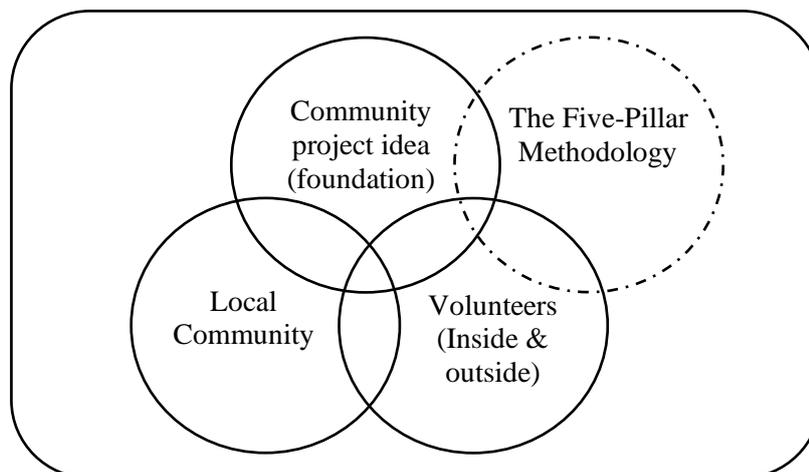
After establishing the first foundation of project goals, the next step will be to start supporting, organizing, and involving volunteers in the whole project. Figure 1 schematic represents a possible interaction between initial idea for a project, volunteers inside and outside the project and the local community itself. Nowadays, volunteer work is not just related to local people that are involved in such a project, but also with people outside the area from project, i.e., outside the local area of such a project. In the Gonçalves project we have an excellent example that such a cooperation between students from Germany and Brazil works properly, see the work [Dobashi Nunes et al, 2023](#).

Particularly in the first phase of a new community project, the initial idea is crucial to invest more time to establish a clear picture based on short, medium, and long-terms goals. Basically, a long-term goal represents something related to the project that we are focused to achieve in the future. In some specific cases, project strategy or even project vision is defined. A vision of a project makes the success of a community service project. On the one side, these types of goals typically take more time than short-term goals. Regarding short-term goal, typically takes less than a year to achieve, while a long-term goal represents an achievement that could take a year or even more. Important in those phases is to get the maximum involvement of project members to establish a precise and consistent project foundation.



**Figure 1:** Initial schematic community project work.

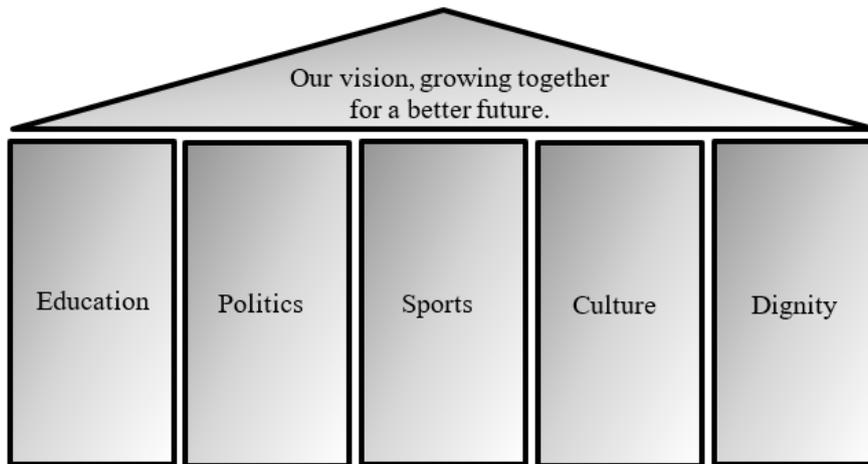
The authors suggested that next steps for further success of a community project are based on the five-pillar methodology. Figure 2 shows a schematic possible integration of our methodology into a community service work. All together can provide a very strong basis for a project starting point. Furthermore, a clear vision, growing together for a better future might be essential for an overall project success. In the next chapter a short review about this concept will be addressed. Take it into account, we might have the following combination.



**Figure 2:** Initial schematic community project work.

### 3. Project methodology and perspective

The five-pillar methodology has been presented in [Dobashi Nunes et al, 2023](#). In this context, the main idea behind that is to share in this work how to introduce the concept of five pillars in a methodology way to bring the success of a project in a practical real-life community service approach. See Figure 3.



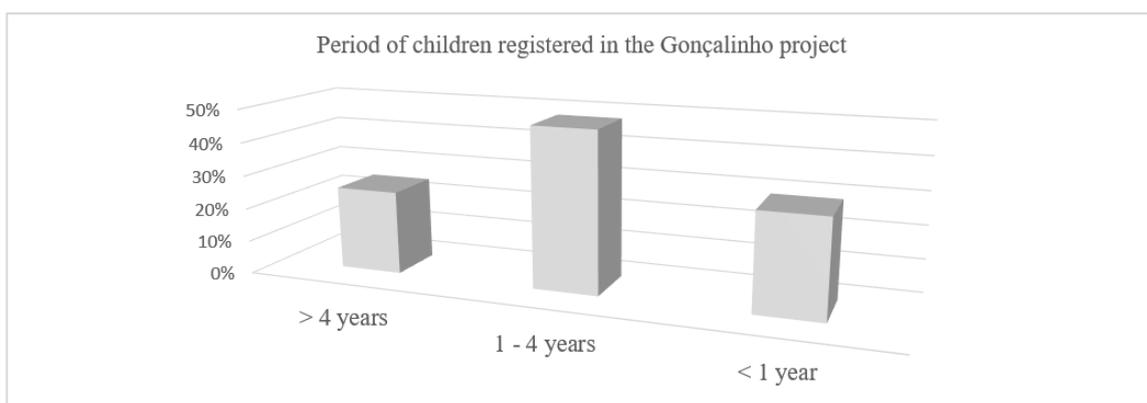
**Figure 3:** Project Gonçalves – The five-pillar methodology ([Dobashi Nunes et al, 2023](#)).

There are different aspects to consider during the definition of a community project service. For instance, in [Rosling et al, 2019](#) a very detail explanation based on statistics data and facts about poverty has been intensively discussed. Important points added in this excellent book are related to a basis and foundation with a clear vision.

The five-pillar methodology proposed in this paper, however, has been established with following focus: education, politics, sport, culture, and finally, dignity.

Apart from our five-pillar methodology proposal, social media has been proved to be a strong tool to involve more people to support such a community service project. Essentially, we might say that such use of social media tools has been consolidated not just in terms of creating more presence in the local area, but to attract more families and community members to join the overall idea of a such project. This, of course, has both sides, supporting work as a volunteer and as a participant as a benefit of such a project. A crucial point to be addressed in a community service work.

In addition, the well-known communication way through family and friend members that already are incorporated in the project (for instance, in the Gonçalves project 1 – 4 years of engagement) continues to be a powerful tool to attract more people to join such a project. See for instance in Figure 4 an overview about the period that kids are registered in the Gonçalves project. Very interesting to note that after Corona-Crises, the number of kids engaged in the project are increasing substantially. This can be explained duo to more involvement of project activities and local community. We might also observe that the number of kids involved in the project with more than four years is significantly high, which showed a clear commitment with the whole project itself.



**Figure 4:** Period of children registered in the Gonçalves project.

Before going inside of our five-pillar methodology is also important to stress that the essential application of education as a foundation and lessons learned for life might be considered and applied. See for instance the work from [Lancor & Schiebel, 2018](#). In this work, an excellent description on how students can participate in a community engagement experience. Important foundations, such as communication of scientific knowledge to a public in a common local community is addressed. An excellent approach to get more students inside of a community work and provide a better chance for specific groups that are not familiar with science. This is another example of sharing in life to achieve personal growth and the common good.

In the next chapter, a detailed description and explanation of our five-pillar methodology will be pointed out. Practical examples based on our cooperation with Gonçálinho project will be used to illustrate, and better understand our approach. Of course, the idea in our work is to create guidelines for a future common community service work.

## 4. The Five-Pillar Methodology

### 4.1. Education

We have already mentioned the importance about education as a crucial point for the success of a community service project. There is no discussion that the benefits regarding learning processes and positive impact on learning are huge. In the literature, we have found very interesting work with a detailed description of the sense of student benefits of community engagement. For instance, in [Garrison et al, 2014](#), a clear foundation based on learning focused on growth and the creation of value within the context of real-life education practices is addressed. Such a method is based on the foundation of a clear dialogue and exchanges of involved members in a project. In the Gonçálinho project, such a kind of methodology with strong dialogue, respect, and focus on the potential values of all kids is essential and has been applied for the whole project with success. Besides those learning processes and future perspectives for both parts, i.e., for children from the project and people involved in the project, special attention can be addressed to achievements for their own life with a better understanding of real-life challenges. Such a process with a clear methodology is very well addressed in [Bandy, 2011](#). In this essential work, the concept of community engagement combines learning goals and community service in ways that can enhance both student growth and the common good. A crucial foundation to a community service project. In the Gonçálinho project, also in the context of the learning process, another method well-known as *Service-learning Activity* presented in [Currie-Mueller et al, 2018](#) has been extended in the best sense that German students are establishing a long relationship with the project in Brazil in order to learn more about other culture and combined it with learning goals for their future life and gain experience.

The local project supervisors are not just providing them with an academic background; they are providing crucial lessons for their lives. Education combined with strong community engagement has proven to be a crucial power for the Gonçálinho project.

### 4.2. Politics

Another aspect is the early involvement of local politics to get better support for the project. Probably this is one of the most challenging tasks that sometimes can take a very long time to establish a good work together.

In this sense, starting dialogues with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or governmental agencies can be addressed. Promoting cultural events to share within the community will all benefit to support the project. In this regard, social media tools are crucial and essential to support such a project. In the Gonçálinho project, for instance, diverse activities have been organized to show to all children involved in the project the importance of participate in the local community discussion. Figure 5 shows one example of involvement of the project in the day of Paraguay river. This local celebration has also a political impact to show the importance of such a community service.



**Figure 5:** Gonçálinho project - Local celebration of Paraguay river.

Another strategy is to set up events in the project to create a bridge between the community and the local area. Overall, this part of work, although crucial, is usually challenging to motivate project members to continue to move on with those strategies. In a few words, patience, collaboration, and continued hard work are essential to move forward. Figure 6 shows another example of involvement in the local political context during the campaign “Say no to hunger”. This is essential to get more impact in the local political discussion about social-economic aspects.



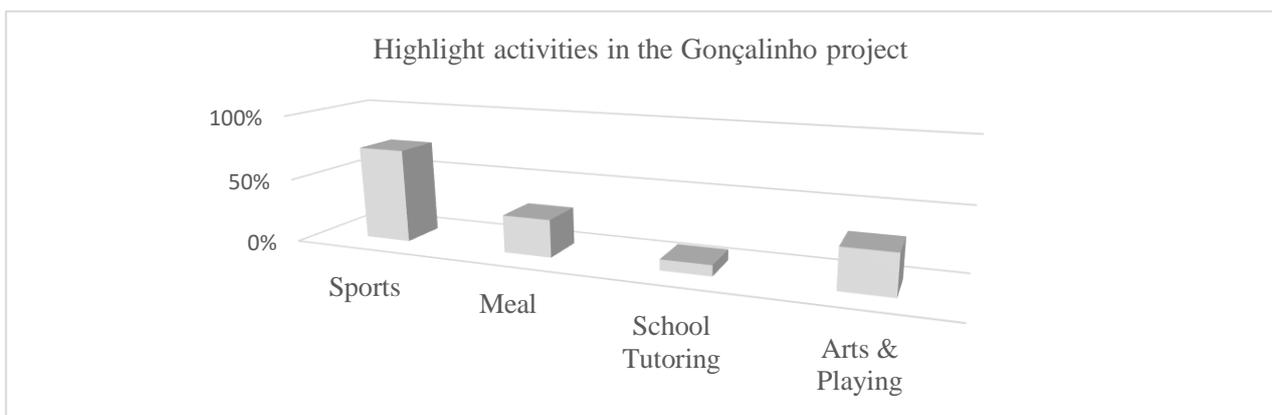
**Figure 6:** Local campaign: “Say no to hunger”.

### 4.3. Sports and other activities

Overall speaking, it depends on specific goals of a specific community service project, we might create a list of important bases for a local community service. In Figure 7, we have collected a summary with the most important activities for the kids in our project.

In our specific case, one of the most impactful ways to promote the project is through sports activities for children. Thanks to the volunteer work of local judo coaches, this sport has become one of the most popular and famous activities in the area. For most children involved in the Gonçalves project, this is the only alternative to doing another activity after schooling. Judo practice is offered twice a week, with small children up to 12 years old taking part in the morning and the older ones in the afternoon. The judo group is now so successful that some children even made it to national competitions despite the difficult conditions. This is another practical example of how hard work and dedication from volunteers lead to a successful project.

Additional activities outside judo have been established, such as the opportunity to play volleyball, and soccer, make handicrafts, and learn new things based on art activities, such as drawing. In the community garden, there are chickens, vegetables, and fruits. Those activities are also important because the project can make donations of eggs and salads to families. See Figure 8 for example the vegetable garden created in the Gonçalves project. Assuredly a crucial contribution from the project as a learning process activity for the children. In that sense, they might learn how to manage additional activities in their lives. Furthermore, this can be interpreted as a motivation for the children and a learning process for their future. Also, interesting to note that the meal during the time in the project plays an important role.



**Figure 7:** Overview of highlight activities in the Gonçalves project.



**Figure 8:** Vegetable Garden created in the Gonçalves project.

#### 4.4. Culture

A crucial point and fundamental basis for community service is culture and its intrinsic value, i.e., social, and economic benefits. Based on this, overall learning processes for all students, those who are involved in the project and those who are providing volunteer work, are getting advantages, for instance, for a better life by increasing the sense of tolerance with a better understanding of diversity and by generating more opportunities to come together with other people. Culture, of course, has an impact on a community service project, along with local arts and crafts, schools, universities, and NGOs. In this context, a chance to enhance benefits for all individuals involved has been observed. The Gonçalves project, with its involvement with indigenous communities has shown another bridge with immense possibility for creativity. Apart from that, working with more communities can provide more power to achieve local political participation and establish new bridges with local communities. We might say that since the foundation of the Gonçalves project in 2001, culture has been proven to be a crucial pillar for this whole development.

#### 4.5. Dignity

According to the authors, dignity with future perspectives is one of the central pillars of the overall project. Creating new opportunities and new foundations for the children is essential as a basis for their future. This kind of work has a crucial impact on the local community. It is not only a matter of time doing something outside of school, but the children are also contributing to a better future for those receiving the services and those providing them with a clearer participation in society (Banerjee & Duflo, 2019).

Exactly speaking in the Gonçalves project, the practical way to lead to the topic of dignity has been proved on the matter that diverse community events involve the local area and kids from the project have been established. In this context, all members involved in the project and kids are connecting to the local community to show the benefits of being a part of such a project. In simple words, such a project has become very prominent in the local area, and all the children, who are involved in the project are proud to be part of such a project. This leads to getting a chance and feeling to be part of the local community. Furthermore, this is also an excellent opportunity to create a strong character to better address challenges in life.

### 5. Achievements and Discussion

In this paper, a five-pillar methodology has been discussed and extended to an overall common community service project. According to the authors, for the success of a community service project is crucial to have a clear foundation based on vision and five-pillar methodology. Essentially speaking, the education foundation is another relevant point for the success of a community service project. Different benefits regarding learning processes and positive impact on learning can be achieved. In this regard, the main impact is not just to apply it as an extracurricular activity inside or outside's school. Certainly, both parts of such a community service project can gain advantages in the whole story. In fact, the authors agree that the main benefits are much more related to a better base in life, and to be extended to a future generation as well. In addition, we have addressed the importance and power of use of social media tools. Nowadays, a strong way to involve a local community, and even attract more supporters for such a project. In this case, we have the potential to get much more contact inside and outside of a local community. Basically, the idea is to share success stories from a project, trying to encourage people around to be part of it. By doing so, another important aspect can be highlighted, a possible close interaction in terms of local political support. Of course, we might create additional benefits in terms of open new opportunities for new cooperation and even donation support. Particularly in the Gonçalves project, such a kind of approach has been proved to be very successful. Further development on a five-pillar methodology has been investigated, and the main benefits of the current process are described.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper describes practical examples of a prosperous community service project. Details about how to create a solid foundation based on a five-pillar methodology for a project have been pointed out. In our research project, education has been proven to be a foundation and a crucial point for the success of community service. In the Gonçalves project, Education based on exchange with supervisors, students, and a combination of extracurricular activities brings an important potential to help kids in the project. Furthermore, sports and culture remain an important basis for the whole project's success. Additional points identified in our research show that involvement with local politics has been proved to be another important pillar in the project. This has been added with clear communication between project members with German support to create a better impact. Such an impact has been consolidated in 2023 with additional financial support to the project. In this paper, we also identified other important aspects, such as the chance for the students and volunteers to give an idea about the discrepancy between the rich and the poor in a broad sense. In this case, the cooperation with Brazil and Germany has been demonstrated to be a successful cooperation with a strong lessons-learned process for both parties. The Gonçalves project has consolidated the importance of such support for kids and helped those to a better foundation in life. A serious challenge that human beings have been facing for many years (Rosling et al, 2019). This project is a real example of how practical it is to create small movements that can lead to powerful impacts. Finally, we have showed that the five-pillar methodology can be extended to any other community service project based on his foundation.

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