



# Reconstructing rural memory in urban contexts: a service-learning experience from the Degree in Social Education

## *Reconstruir la memoria rural en contextos urbanos: una experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio desde el Grado de Educación Social*

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### Abstract

This study presents how a Service-Learning (SL) experience connects the community and the university for the common good, addressing topics such as rural oral memory, community identity, neighbourhood struggles, and children's imagination of the urban future through an audiovisual project. The aim was to understand the role of the community and the university in this project, and to identify aspects that reflect situated learning and the ecology of knowledge, going beyond the typical competencies of SL projects. It also explores the impacts of SL in the field of Social Education, which still lacks scientific literature. **METHOD.** A qualitative approach was adopted, with a single case study design and a deductive strategy based on community action and service-learning. Data collection included participant observation and document analysis. The analysis was structured around four theoretical categories: community action for the common good, the role of the university, the role of the community, and the learning generated. **RESULTS.** The results show that both the community and the university play a significant role in the co-construction of situated knowledge. Through dialogical processes, learning was generated that transcends conventional competencies, integrating memory, territory and the appreciation of intangible heritage. **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.** The experience shows that SL strengthens a pedagogy committed to social justice and activates processes of social transformation through co-responsible participation between the university and the community. The projects analysed strengthen territorial roots, promote a critical collective narrative, legitimise diverse voices, and make local memories visible.

**Keywords:** University Service-Learning (USL); community action; co-creation of knowledge; collective memory; university; social education

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## Resumen

Este estudio presenta cómo una experiencia de aprendizaje-servicio (ApS) articula la comunidad y la universidad para el bien común para abordar temáticas como la memoria oral rural, la identidad comunitaria, las luchas vecinales y el imaginario infantil del futuro urbano a través de un proyecto audiovisual. El objetivo fue conocer el papel de la comunidad y la universidad en dicho proyecto, e identificar aquellos aspectos que nos hablan de aprendizajes situados y de la ecología de saberes, que van más allá de las competencias propias de los proyectos ApS. Además, explora los impactos del ApS en el ámbito de la Educación Social, el cual carece aún de literatura científica. **MÉTODO.** Se empleó un enfoque cualitativo, con un diseño de estudio de caso único y una estrategia deductiva basada en torno la acción comunitaria y el aprendizaje-servicio. La recogida de datos incluyó la observación participante y el análisis documental. El análisis se estructuró alrededor de cuatro categorías teóricas: acción comunitaria para el bien común, rol de la universidad, papel de la comunidad y aprendizajes generados. **RESULTADOS.** Los resultados evidencian que la comunidad y la universidad tienen un papel relevante en la coconstrucción del conocimiento situado. A través de procesos dialógicos, se generaron aprendizajes que trascienden las competencias convencionales, integrando la memoria, el territorio y la valoración del patrimonio inmaterial. **DISCUSIÓN Y CONCLUSIONES.** La experiencia demuestra que el ApS consolida una pedagogía comprometida con la justicia global y activa procesos de transformación social mediante la participación corresponsable entre la universidad y la comunidad. Los proyectos analizados fortalecen el arraigo territorial, promueven una narrativa colectiva crítica, legitiman voces diversas y visibilizan memorias locales.

**Palabras clave:** aprendizaje-servicio universitario (ApSU); acción comunitaria; cocreación de saberes; memoria colectiva; universidad; educación social

## 1. Introduction

In a global scenario marked by political, social, ecological, democratic and educational crises, higher education institutions are being challenged to re-evaluate their role in contemporary society. This context opens the way to the concept of the university as a space for knowledge production, and also as a common good that can actively contribute to strengthening the social and territorial fabric (Collet-Sabé and Castillo Adrián, 2023).

From this perspective, university service-learning (USL) is presented as a pedagogical path that enables the integration of academic knowledge with transformative action in the environment. This methodology promotes comprehensive student training, while also serving as a strategic tool for moving towards a university committed to equity and democratic participation, and which fosters processes of social engagement that go beyond the classroom and are rooted in community realities (Puig *et al.*, 2007; Tapias, 2007; Santos Rego, 2025). As part of this approach, the community is not merely a passive context, but rather becomes a key element, with the university, in the co-creation of services for the common good.

The ways in which communities become involved in these processes and the scenarios that enable such participation remain relatively unexplored aspects in both theory and practice (Collet-Sabé and Castillo Adrián, 2023; Ruiz-Corbella and Bautista-Cerro, 2016). In this regard, this article is an example of how the university and the community can collaborate for community action for the common good. Through the recovery of life stories and rural memories, the project studied highlights non-formal knowledge, which is often overlooked by institutions, even though it is necessary for sustaining community processes and training critical and committed individuals. This article shows how the community can become an active player in knowledge production and recognises the value of situated learning, collective

memory and community participation. It also contributes to scientific production, especially in the still relatively unexplored field of USL in Social Education (Redondo-Corcobado and Fuentes, 2020).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is organised into three main areas that allow us to understand the pedagogical and community scope of the USL project. Firstly, community action is addressed as a transformative practice focused on the common good and based on the shared responsibility of social actors in the construction of collective projects. Secondly, USL is presented as an educational philosophy that connects the university and the community in situated knowledge co-creation processes. Finally, intangible heritage and collective memory are explored as content that recovers popular knowledge, strengthens community identity, and allows historically silenced voices to speak. These areas shape the conceptual framework from which the presented experience is interpreted.

### 2.1. Community action: setting the commons in motion

The term action, from the Latin *actio*, means «to carry out» or «to set in motion». This etymology reveals that action is not limited to the mere performance of tasks, but rather implies an intentionality focused on change, a will to intervene in the world. This understanding is relevant in the field of critical pedagogy, where action is conceived as praxis, that is, as a dialectical synthesis between reflection and action (Freire, 1970). In this context, acting is not simply doing, but rather doing so with critical awareness, with an understanding of the historical, social and political conditions that shape reality. This connection between thought and practice is not without tensions. When action is devoid of reflection, it can lead to unthinking activism, incapable of questioning the structures of domination that it seeks to transform. Likewise, reflection without action runs the risk of becoming a sterile intellectual exercise, disconnected from the specific struggles of individuals and communities. Therefore, praxis demands a constant and dynamic coordination between thinking and doing, focused on transforming reality and building a fairer society. From this perspective, action takes the form of a political and ethical act, insofar as it implies taking a stance on the world. It is about intervening in reality, and doing so from a critical stance committed to human dignity.

For its part, the concept of community, from the Latin *communitas*, consists of the prefix *com-*, denoting «with» or «in common» and the noun *munus*, which can be translated as «obligation» or «duty». This etymology indicates a dual dimension of the concept: on the one hand, the idea of what is shared, of that which is collectively constructed; and on the other, the notion of mutual responsibility, of a bond that implies both rights and duties among its members. This perspective is complemented by Bauman's (2000) view, who points out that community is perceived as a space of belonging, security and warmth, in contrast to the uncertainty and fragmentation of the modern world. The community is therefore represented as an emotional refuge and a social network that offers meaning and stability. From this perspective, the community becomes an active agent of transformation, capable of generating processes of change from its own internal dynamics. This vision implies recognising community members as social actors with the capacity for reflection, organisation and collective action. In this context, people inhabit the community and actively build it, negotiating identities, creating shared memories, and coordinating common projects that fulfil their collective needs and aspirations.

Thus, community action, understood as setting the commons in motion with reflection and responsibility, takes the form of a participatory, dialogical and transformative process that involves both individuals and groups. This approach is based on the co-responsible participation of diverse social actors within the community (citizens, organisations, public and private institutions, among others), who not only intervene but also co-construct the

processes of change. Far from conceiving of the community as a mere recipient of external aid, this perspective recognises it as an entity with the capacity of an agency, capable of organising, deliberating and acting according to its own interests and aspirations. In this regard, community action is part of an ethic of mutual care and solidarity, which challenges the individualistic and competitive logics prevalent in many contemporary contexts. By placing the commons at the centre, community action promotes more inclusive and equitable forms of coexistence, and is oriented towards the transformation of the structural conditions that lead to exclusion, inequality or vulnerability.

## 2.2. University SL as a proposed community action

In the context of multiple contemporary crises (political, social, ecological, democratic and educational), the university faces the challenge of redefining its role in society. From governance models focused on efficiency or competitiveness comes the notion of the university as a common good, understood as an academic institution co-responsible for the sustainable development of territories (Collet-Sabé and Castillo Adrián, 2023).

This approach is aligned with the concept of university social responsibility (USR), which transcends the logic of accountability or institutional projection, positioning itself in an ethic of care, interdependence and the co-construction of knowledge (Santos Rego *et al.*, 2025). From this perspective, the university is called to play an active role in social transformation, integrating ethical commitment into its substantive functions (Ruiz-Corbella and Bautista-Cerro, 2016). Along these lines and as proposed by Collet-Sabé and Ball (2024), it is about rethinking education as a commoning activity, that is, as a collective practice developed in open, diverse and sustainable social infrastructures, where we learn to live in common and take care of ourselves, others and the planet.

In this context, university service-learning (USL) is a pedagogical strategy that operationalises this responsibility by coordinating academic training with community action and by being focused on the common good (Martínez, 2008; Tapias, 2007; Tinkler and Tinkler, 2020). This proposal necessarily implies a disposition towards social transformation, shared responsibility between the university and the community, and the generation of educational spaces where theory and practice, emotion and cognition, are intertwined (Puig *et al.* 2007). Far from being conceived as a one-off intervention, USL is understood as an educational philosophy that integrates intellectual training, social commitment and community action in a dialogical, transformative and contextualised process (Escofet *et al.* 2016). In this regard, it promotes action built on dialogue with the community (Lau *et al.* 2021; Lumillo, 2025), becoming a political and ethical tool that allows us to build a university for the common good. This vision avoids reproducing logics of exclusion or hierarchy, and promotes participation, equity and sustainability as guiding principles of its educational action.

However, although community action, and in particular USL, seeks social transformation and the strengthening of the collective fabric, it is not without challenges. Power relations go through their internal and external dynamics, affecting aspects such as the distribution of resources, decision-making, the legitimisation of knowledge and the representation of interests.

Therefore, it is essential that community action is built on a dialogue of knowledge, recognising the validity of popular knowledge and avoiding the colonial logic of academic knowledge (Santos, 2009). This perspective rejects welfarism and promotes horizontal relationships, where all the actors involved participate on equal terms and with mutual respect. When guided by principles of social justice, community action can help transform systems that perpetuate exclusion and inequality.

## 2.3. Intangible heritage and collective memory as educational and community content

Community action is a privileged space for the production, circulation and validation of diverse knowledge. In this context, knowledge is not limited to academic or technical

knowledge, but also includes popular, experiential and situated knowledge that emerges from collective practice and dialogue between social actors (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

This concept is linked with the USL approach, which is framed within an «ecology of knowledge» that recognises the legitimacy of multiple forms of knowledge, especially those that emerge from subaltern and community contexts (Santos, 2009). Participating in community projects allows us to experience real ethical dilemmas, develop moral judgements and commit to social transformation. From this perspective, learning is understood as a situated process, where the community is not only a context of intervention, but also a space for generating knowledge (Santos Rego *et al.*, 2021).

In this context, intangible heritage, and in particular oral memory linked to local contexts, is a pedagogical resource of great value in university education, especially in disciplines focused on social and educational intervention. The use of local historical narratives allows students to develop critical historical consciousness and an in-depth understanding of social contexts (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Working with oral memory facilitates the connection between academic knowledge and the experiences of people and territories, generating socially committed learning (Freire, 1970). The incorporation of local history and community narratives encourages critical thinking, invites us to question hegemonic discourses and recognises the diversity of historical experiences (Seixas, 2006). Furthermore, this approach facilitates contact with traditionally invisible people and groups, which favours the understanding of social and cultural inequalities. At the same time, it allows us to visualise processes of urban and social transformation that directly affect communities, reinforcing the link between university and global justice.

Together, the lines of community action, USL and intangible heritage provide a perspective on the transformative potential of higher education in community contexts. Community action provides the ethical and political horizon of commitment to the commons; USL offers a methodology that coordinates academic and popular knowledge in dialogical and co-responsible processes; and intangible heritage constitutes educational content that roots learning in the living history of territories and their people.

### 3. Methodology

The case study presented is part of an USL project developed in the Degree in Social Education at the University of Vic-Central University of Catalonia (UVic-UCC). This project promoted community action processes led by students and territory actors, with the challenge of reconstructing the rural memory of a neighbourhood located in a city in the province of Barcelona (Spain).

The objective of the case study was to analyse the role played by the community and the university in building shared knowledge within the framework of the USL project. Likewise, it seeks to identify the diverse knowledge that emerges as situated learning, that transcends the academic competencies of USL projects, and that is based on the interaction between the different actors involved in the project.

#### 3.1. Context

The project is located in a neighbourhood of the city of Vic (Barcelona, Spain), marked by profound urban and social transformation over the past decades. Of rural and agricultural origin, with the historical presence of farmhouses and orchards, the rural spaces and green areas of the neighbourhood have been heavily developed. Furthermore, successive waves of migration, from the 1960s to the present day, have changed the social morphology of the neighbourhood. Currently, the neighbourhood concentrates approximately 18% of the city's population, which is equivalent to about 8,800 people out of a total of 49,333 inhabitants. Of these, around 45.9% are of immigrant origin, 29.8% earn less than 10,000 euros per year and 8.6% live in extreme poverty. These figures reveal a context of high population density, cultural diversity and economic vulnerability.

This scenario is where the USL proposal was raised by the Degree in Social Education at the UVic-UCC, where 33 students participated. In addition, the Social and Digital Innovation Laboratory (LISD) from the same university, the neighbourhood association (AVV), two local historians, five neighbourhood residents, and ten children from a social entity that cares for people at risk of exclusion and social vulnerability collaborated. The historians and local residents were proposed by the AVV based on their knowledge of the neighbourhood and their connection to local memory. The children were selected by experts from the participating entity based on criteria of availability, interest and diversity. This entire choice corresponds to a criterion of contextual convenience, based on direct knowledge of local actors. The purpose of the project was the recovery, reconstruction and preservation of the rural memory of the neighbourhood through the co-creation of audiovisual capsules and the use of digital tools. For this, four teams were formed, with each one assigned a specific objective that triggered different sub-projects, which developed their own audiovisual capsules and websites (table 1).

TABLE 1. Participants, objectives and products of the projects.

<b>P</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Product</b>
P1	Reconstruction of the rural past of the neighbourhood	Local historians	Locate the urban and anthropological history of the neighbourhood	3 videos (urban change, 1st migratory wave and 2nd migratory wave) + trailer + descriptive website of the project
P2	Rural oral memory	Local residents	Document the oral memory of people who have grown up in the neighbourhood	4 videos (4 local residents who have grown up in the neighbourhood) + trailer + descriptive website of the project
P3	Community identity and struggling spaces	Neighbourhood association	Draw attention to spaces of neighbourhood struggle and their symbolic significance	4 videos (4 members of the AVV who talk about 4 emblematic spaces in the neighbourhood) + trailer + descriptive website of the project
P4	Imagine the future of the neighbourhood	Social entity	Empower children to imagine the future of the neighbourhood	2 videos (2 groups of boys and girls imagining the future of the neighbourhood) + trailer + descriptive website of the project

Notes: P means project.

Source: authors' own compilation.

Each sub-project was organised according to the availability of the participants and had its own particularities. However, they all followed a shared organisational scheme (table 2). From the reference subject (Social Projects and ICT) the schedules were made more flexible to facilitate project development.

TABLE 2. Project development sessions and activities carried out.

<b>Session</b>	<b>Activities carried out</b>
First contact	Presentation of the community project to all participants: students and territory actors
Interviews and exploratory activities	Interviews and activities to explore knowledge about the territory and participation interests
Participatory meetings to select spaces	Dynamics with objects, stories and images to identify symbolic and significant spaces
Exploratory route through the neighbourhood	Identification of vestiges of the rural past and dialogue on the transformation of the territory
Recordings in historical locations	Interviews, open conversations about life stories, childhood and neighbourhood transformation, and audiovisual documentation in spaces with heritage value
Validation of stories	Joint review of content to ensure fidelity and respect
Presentation of audiovisual capsules	Visualisation of the audiovisual capsules at a public event in the city

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Beyond documenting the rural memory of the neighbourhood, the use of audiovisual tools for documentation and the use of information and communication technologies for web creation, this initiative also required: preserving the oral stories of the participants; generating links between different generations; and creating audiovisual products that will help strengthen the sense of belonging and identity of people in the place they live. In this regard, the audiovisual resource had to be transformed into a tool at the service of territorial learning and social cohesion.

### 3.2. Approach, methodological design and data collection techniques

This research falls within the interpretive paradigm, since its objective was to understand a specific socio-educational project in a contextualised manner (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The approach adopted is qualitative, since it makes it possible to explore and analyse the subjective, symbolic and relational dimensions of the project, as well as capture the complexity of its impact on the different actors involved. Regarding the methodological design, a single case study is chosen to analyse a specific project in depth, considering its characteristics, development, context and results, and allowing practices and relationships to be identified, and to generate transferable knowledge to other similar contexts (Yin, 2018). Defining the case in qualitative research involves delimiting a phenomenon that helps us understand relevant processes in a given context. In this study, it was defined as an experience of university community action focused on the recovery of rural memory in an urban neighbourhood in transformation. It was chosen for its pedagogical value, the diversity of actors involved and its ability to connect the university, the community and intangible heritage.

Participant observation and document analysis were used for data collection. On the one hand, participant observation was carried out during the seven development sessions of the project. This made it possible to collect qualitative information on group dynamics, interactions between participants and the atmosphere generated during project activities, capturing non-verbal aspects, attitudes, emotions and spontaneous behaviours. The collected information was documented through field notes, including descriptions of observed situations, direct quotes, reflections and possible interpretations. On the other hand, for the document analysis,

the four websites generated with the USL were reviewed, each corresponding to one of the four projects. From these websites, information on the objectives, activities, participants, results and pedagogical values of each project was analysed. In addition, the audiovisual capsules documenting rural history and participants' testimonies were viewed. The sufficiency of the information was assessed based on its capacity to offer a rich and contextual understanding of the case. This involved reviewing whether the data allowed us to explore the dimensions of the study, reflect the diversity of voices involved, identify tensions, and establish connections between the observed practices and the research objectives. This review was not based solely on the quantity of data, but also on its interpretive richness and its potential to generate knowledge in other contexts.

The data analysis was carried out manually, without using specific qualitative analysis software. For this, spreadsheets were used to compile the content obtained from participant observation and document analysis. These data were organised into categorization matrices constructed from key dimensions of the theoretical framework (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Analysis codes, subcategories, descriptors, indicators and references.

Code	Subcategories	Description	Indicators	References
Activating commons	Participation dynamics Shared responsibility practices Creating commons	Practices that promote the joint involvement of social actors	Shared decision-making Collective design of activities	Bauman (2000); Santos (2009); Puig <i>et al.</i> (2007); Tapias (2007)
Role of the university	Presence in the territory Social and ethical function Role in community processes	The university as an active force in the territory driving educational and social processes	Collaborations with social entities Accompaniment	Collet-Sabé and Castillo Adrián (2023); Ruiz-Corbella and Bautista-Cerro (2016); Martínez (2008); Santos Rego <i>et al.</i> (2025)
Role of the community	Citizen participation Co-creation of projects	Citizen participation in project creation	Initiatives proposed by local residents or entities Participation in project phases	Martínez (2008); Puig <i>et al.</i> (2007); Tapias (2007); Santos Rego <i>et al.</i> (2025)
Knowledge acquired	Non-formal learning Historical memory Understanding of the territory Appreciation of intangible heritage	Learning that transcends academic competencies, including knowledge of the territory and its history	Narratives about local history Recognition of rural knowledge Critical reflections on inequalities	Freire (1970); Seixas (2006); Santos Rego <i>et al.</i> (2021); Lave and Wenger (1991); Barton and Levstik (2004)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The analysis followed a deductive strategy, which allowed the data to be interpreted based on predefined categories, without overlooking the emergence of unforeseen elements. After initial coding, the categories were reorganised and refined to build a coherent analytical structure. Methodological triangulation facilitated the comparison of different types of data, enhancing the interpretation. Finally, the data were interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and research objectives, identifying patterns, tensions, and relevant contributions of the project.

The validity of the results was supported by three strategies: triangulation allowed for the comparison of different types of data; systematic coding provided interpretive coherence; and external validation with the LISD ensured well-founded and representative conclusions of the phenomenon studied.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Forms of community action: reflection, narrative, projection and collective imagination

The results show that the four projects developed set in motion diverse forms of community action, where knowledge and action are constructed in a dialogical, situated and co-responsible way.

In Project 1 (P1), which brought to light the social and rural history of the neighbourhood through interviews with two local historians, the approach initially focused on historical data was reformulated after collective reflection by the group. «We saw the need to seek a more meaningful pedagogical perspective on history, one that didn't focus solely on data or concrete facts, but rather valued human experiences, stories and social transformations» (P1 student). In Project 2 (P2), which focused on recovering the oral history of the neighbourhood through interviews with elderly local people who were born and raised there, community action was key from the start. The interviewees not only shared their stories but also participated in defining the narrative approach for the final product. «We wanted participants to be not only the protagonists of the video but also active in constructing its narrative» (P2 student). This intergenerational collaboration has resulted in an audiovisual resource which, in addition to documenting the rural past, strengthens the transmission of popular knowledge between generations. In Project 3 (P3), the collaboration with the neighbourhood association also exemplifies community action. Neighbourhood struggles to preserve spaces of local interest were documented. Furthermore, it was the association members themselves who proposed the spaces to be documented and selected the people to be interviewed. As noted in the document analysis, «we emphasised that their opinion was very important and that we weren't there to tell them what to do» (P3 student). In Project 4 (P4), the children were the protagonists in exploring and imagining the future of the neighbourhood. Through participatory activities, visits and interviews, the children expressed their ideas about the neighbourhood's green spaces. «This participation has been essential for them to become protagonists in the project» (P4 student). Although some of the children did not live in the neighbourhood, the project allowed them to develop a fresh outlook on the area and feel part of its transformation. The experience became an exercise in active citizenship and collective imagination.

The results show that all the projects presented included spaces for community action, where the community is not the object, but rather the subject of the educational process, whether to reflect on the action, narrate it, plan it or imagine it. In this type of community action, individuals not only receive knowledge, but also construct it through dialogue with their reality and with others (Freire, 1970). This logic of collective action strengthens the community fabric through practices of care, listening, and mutual recognition, and allows for the reconstruction of a sense of belonging and shared identity, given the fragility of social bonds in contemporary societies (Bauman, 2000).

## 4.2. The role of the university: facilitator, mediator, co-responsible and inclusive

Document analysis shows how the university positions itself as an actor committed to the territory and plays an active role in facilitating community processes, producing situated knowledge, and generating social impact. For example, in P1, the university promoted a collaborative social research process to reconstruct the neighbourhood's history. «When I began studying the rural history of the neighbourhood and the community gardens, I never imagined that my work could attract the interest of others and continue in the documentation proposed by this project» (P1 historian). In this regard, the university acted as a facilitator to integrate and enhance academic and popular knowledge by producing audiovisual capsules and websites that document processes of social transformation, migration and daily life in the territory. Through the document analysis of P2, it can be seen how the university acts as an intergenerational mediator, facilitating a process of recovering the neighbourhood's oral history. The project was built around a logic of shared responsibility. «This project has been an opportunity to reflect on the value of the neighbourhood's rural history and to cultivate a sense of belonging, which is very important in a neighbourhood like this» (P2 resident). In this regard, in community action, the university does not impose knowledge, but rather accompanies the community in building a collective archive, recognising the value of local knowledge and promoting intergenerational learning. Likewise, P3 has made it possible to document neighbourhood struggles and territorial defence processes. «This project is very interesting for the association and for the neighbourhood. It gives value to our collective memory and captures the voices of our local residents. And it helps us to advocate for a greener and more socially-conscious neighbourhood» (member of the P3 association). The university therefore becomes a space of empowerment, where students develop civic and ethical skills, and where the community finds a channel to make its demands and memories known. The P4 results show that the university becomes an agent of inclusion when it generates resources that amplify children's voices and strengthen the bond between children's and youth organisations, the community, the university and the territory. «This project is a significant experience that promotes participatory, inclusive and transformative education. It is motivational for the children» (P4 entity educator). In this regard, the results show that in this type of action the university can become a facilitator of community processes, presenting itself as an actor committed to the territory that provides technical, pedagogical and emotional support to local actors (Collet-Sabé and Castillo Adrián, 2023), and not imposing knowledge, but rather engaging in dialogue with the territory and recognising the legitimacy of local voices, promoting processes of co-construction of knowledge (Santos, 2009).

## 4.3. The role of the community: source of information and memory, restorer and co-creator and validator

Based on the results of participant observation and document analysis, it is observed that the community is not simply a recipient, but rather a co-creator of educational, narrative and territorial processes. For example, the historians (P1) helped build a story that links memory, urban changes and daily life. «When the road was built, everything changed. In the past, people would meet in the street, there were community gardens, life... now everything is faster and colder» (P1 historian). In the case of the elderly, «we wanted each person to feel valued, heard and respected. Not only as a source of oral memory, but as a local resident with a history and a life that has much to contribute to the neighbourhood» (P2 student). This approach enabled the recovery of stories about rural life, local festivals and urban changes from a lived perspective, strengthening intergenerational bonds and a sense of belonging. The four members of the association helped define the people and spaces to be documented. «I've already thought about who will participate in the interviews. I think they should be older local residents who know the neighbourhood well because they've always lived here and grown up here. We must capture their voices, or when they're gone, the rural memory of the neighbourhood will go with them» (P3 association member). The children's voices (P4) opened a space for collective imagination about the territory, reinforcing the idea that children also have the right to shape

and transform their environment. «We'd like this space to have more trees and a place to play because right now it looks abandoned» (P4 social entity child).

The results of participant observations show that these types of projects recognise the community as an active party in the process. Participants said they felt heard and appreciated, especially in a context where rural memory has historically been ignored. On various occasions, they expressed their feelings at seeing themselves reflected in the videos, highlighting the respect and care with which their stories were handled. For many of them, especially the older adults, the project represented a way to be heard, appreciated and recognised by younger generations, thus strengthening the community fabric and collective self-esteem, as well as recognising community knowledge as legitimate and valuable (Santos Rego *et al.*, 2025; Tapias, 2007). Compared to other USL experiences, this study looks at the role of the community as a knowledge validator, a relatively unexplored dimension in literature.

#### 4.4. Learning beyond social and civic competence: non-institutionalised knowledge

The results of the various data collection instruments indicate learning that goes beyond the social and civic competencies of USL. The work with intangible heritage, and in particular with oral memory linked to local contexts, is revealed as a pedagogical resource of great value in university education, especially in disciplines focused on social and educational intervention. For example, the work with historians provided access to a critical narrative about urban and migratory transformation processes at both a local and global level. «The changes that were experienced, and are being experienced locally, invite us to contemplate global changes. They are closely and broadly linked» (P1 historian). This type of reflection allows us to question hegemonic discourses on progress and to value social history as a tool for territorial analysis. Similarly, documenting the voices of older people (P2) allows us to understand the history of the territory from a lived perspective. «They remember how they played ball in the streets free from danger, because there were no cars. The neighbourhood had a different pace to it, and children grew up with different opportunities than today» (P2 student). This type of story not only provides historical information, but also sparks reflection on social changes, the loss of community spaces and the importance of preserving living memory. The process of documenting neighbourhood struggles (P3) helps us understand the political and symbolic value of public spaces. «I just wanted people to know that this space has a history. There has been and there is life, struggle and hope here» (P3 association member). This testimony generated learning about community agency and shared responsibility. The proposals arising from children's imagination (P4) invite us to rethink urban planning from an inclusive perspective and from the needs of the very youngest citizens. «I want the Horta de la Sínia to be a space with trees, flowers and animals, where we can play and create a garden» (P4 social entity child).

The results therefore show that this type of project makes it possible to: value non-institutionalised knowledge; foster critical thinking, since they incorporate local history and community narratives into the curriculum and encourage the questioning of hegemonic discourses and recognise the diversity of historical experiences; enhance empathy and an in-depth understanding of social and cultural inequalities by being in contact with traditionally invisible people and groups (Puig *et al.*, 2007; Escofet *et al.*, 2016; Santos Rego *et al.*, 2025); and strengthening civic awareness and the capacity for territorial analysis (Collet-Sabé and Castillo Adrián, 2023; Tapias, 2007).

## 5. Conclusions

This study aimed to analyse the role of the community and the university in a community action project for documenting rural historical memory, and to identify the resulting knowledge that goes beyond the established competencies of USL projects. The most relevant findings of this research indicate that USL is a community action that promotes the common good, as

it generates spaces for co-responsible participation and enables the dialogical construction of knowledge between the university and the community. The results obtained also confirm that, in this type of project, the community goes from being a passive recipient to an active participant in the pedagogical process. The co-creation of projects enables the construction of a collective narrative around the past, present and future of a territory. At the same time, the university assumes a role of facilitation and commitment, avoiding the imposition of academic knowledge in order to promote an ecology of knowledge where understanding is built on dialogue with the community and local memory.

In line with previous studies, our results show that the impact of these types of projects is not purely symbolic (Ruiz-Corbella and Bautista-Cerro, 2016). The public dissemination of the final products (audiovisual capsules and web materials) helps to strengthen identity and a sense of belonging. The websites created by each group offer audiovisual content, timelines, interviews, images, and explanatory materials that can be used by schools, organisations and the community as memory preservation, awareness-raising and training tools. In this regard, the study reveals that this type of USL acts as a catalyst for popular education processes, collective memory and social cohesion. But beyond the product itself, what it consolidates is a model of educational intervention and community action where the territory is not a setting, but rather a living agent of learning, reflection and action. Furthermore, this concept of community action aligns with the principles and challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). In particular, it meets local needs and is part of a global agenda for transformation, which recognises the interdependence between the local and the global, contributing across the board to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting citizen participation, equity and social justice.

Despite the observed potential, the project also highlights structural tensions inherent in community USL experiences. These most notably include the difficulty of reconciling academic schedules with community life, as well as the need to guarantee institutional continuity to help consolidate the ties forged. Likewise, the importance of carefully managing feedback and closure processes was identified to prevent the community from perceiving the project as a one-off intervention without any follow-up. These results encourage continued rethinking of the university's role in terms of ethical commitment and relational sustainability.

The findings presented have significant implications for the field of social education. As Redondo-Corcobado and Fuentes (2020) point out, there is a lack of systematic research on Service-Learning in the Degree in Social Education, making this experience a significant contribution to both pedagogical practice and scientific production in higher education. Furthermore, this study is part of the contemporary academic debate that highlights the urgent need to open the university to the territory and to recognise non-institutionalised knowledge as legitimate sources of learning. This openness broadens the educational horizon and allows us to move towards educational transformation, where knowledge is built on dialogue with communities and in response to their realities.

## Author contributions

**Mar Beneyto-Seoane.** Conceptualisation, data processing, formal analysis, research, writing-proofreading and editing.

**Yasmina Khatala Azzayakh.** Drafting, project management, resources, visualisation.

## Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

In accordance with the editorial policy of the *Revista de Educación y Pedagogía* (REP), it is stated that artificial intelligence tools were used during the preparation of this article. Specifically, Copilot was used to support specific writing and linguistic revision tasks, under strict human supervision and observing ethical principles and academic integrity.

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