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THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL
OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
AN ANALYSIS OF SERVICE-LEARNING EFFECTS ON STUDENTS,
COMMUNITIES, AND INSTITUTIONS.

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The Transformative Potential of
Community Engagement in Higher Education:

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Communities, and Institutions.*

Abstract

Service-learning in higher education institutions (HEIs) is gaining worldwide attention as a reliable tool to sustain students' learning while fulfilling HEIs' third mission. Empirical research and conceptual reflections on the impact of service-learning on students are assembling and growing in scope. Nevertheless, the methodological rigour of certain empirical research has been questioned, and little attention has been devoted to the experience of faculty and community members. This dissertation aims to fill existing gaps reported in the literature, examining the effects and perspectives of service-learning in HEIs. Three studies were conducted to reach these objectives.

The first study investigated the effects on students participating in a voluntary semester-long service-learning course compared to traditional courses. A quantitative online survey was completed by 110 students at the beginning and upon completion of the lectures. Results from the analysis highlighted no statistically significant group differences over time in all variables under inspection. Factors potentially affecting the results include the students' perception of their competence, the duration of service-learning, and the use of self-reported measures.

The second study explored the community partners' perspective, which is an under-researched area, particularly in higher education and European settings. A qualitative approach was adopted, and twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with community partners from different organisations across Europe (Italy, Spain, and Slovakia). The results highlighted (1) positive effects on the community members and organisations; (2) relational, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivations, usually intertwined; (3) organisational empowerment; (4) different declinations of reciprocity; (5) co-educational role of community partners; and (6) a substantive role of sense of community and sense of belonging in service-learning experiences.

The third study aimed to fill the gap in research on faculty perspectives on service-learning in the European context. A qualitative approach was used, and twenty-two semi-structured interviews were collected in 14 European countries. The findings clarified the perceived service-learning transformative impact on the community, students, teachers, and HEIs, confirming and adding to previous literature. Moreover, motivational and institutionalisation processes were identified as crucial in sustaining the faculty's engaged scholarship. Finally, the community experience (i.e., sense of community and community responsibility) was found to be intertwined with the service-learning experience. Therefore, a fifth foundational pillar is posited (5 Rs): relatedness.

Overall, this dissertation provides new insights into the effects and perspectives of service-learning in higher education. The findings guided the integration of the 4Rs model, adding a fifth dimension of relatedness to reflexivity, respect, reciprocity, and relevance. Theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and areas for further research are proposed.

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Chapter 1 - Overview

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are independent entities that possess both autonomy and responsibility. They are specialised institutions with a set of established rules and practices that remain relatively consistent despite individual turnover and changes in external circumstances (Paleari, Donina & Meoli, 2015). At the same time, HEIs played a crucial role in the transition from pre-modern to modern European societies (Olsen, 2007) and continue to adapt to the evolving demands and needs of society and stakeholders. The current societal crises, including economic, environmental, civic and human rights, have significantly impacted the environment in which higher education institutions operate compared to just a few decades ago (Zomer & Benneworth, 2011). This has significantly influenced the need for redesigning, adapting, and broadening the missions of higher education institutions (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020).

The ways in which knowledge is produced and society's expectations and values are shifting, and academia is facing a turning point in terms of its three missions due to this dynamic change (Bortagaray, 2009). Indeed, HEIs have faced growing pressure to move beyond teaching and research and to engage in a "Third Mission" focused on contributing to society (Urdari et al., 2017). Universities that participate in Third Mission activities are seen as playing a significant role in promoting social, economic, and cultural development in the regions where they are located. This is achieved not only through the transfer of knowledge but also through developing research agendas and outreach efforts that target critical community issues (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997; Secundo et al., 2017).

As the demand for institutional change has increased, HEIs progressively re-evaluated the roles and rewards for academics to encourage them to engage in scholarship that addresses both professional and public needs, longing to be (and be seen) as "engaged HEIs". Engaged HEIs work in partnership with local communities to promote a wide range of community interactions that support community development and individual and social well-being (Bridger & Adler, 2006). To ensure development that is not detrimental to the community, people should have access to the resources to meet basic needs. The development of services, institutions, groups, and facilities that contribute to a well-functioning social organisation should be promoted, and equity and social justice should be fostered (Bridger & Adler, 2006).

Service-learning is one of the practices to sustain and foster the engaged scholarship of higher education institutions that has gained worldwide attention in the past decades (Hamner et al., 2002). Service-learning is an experiential learning strategy that integrates meaningful community engagement into the academic curriculum, offering students academic credits for the learning that derives from their active engagement with the community and the work with real-world problems. In addition to enhancing academic and real-world learning, the overall purpose of service-learning is to strengthen students' sense of responsibility and sense of agency while working with local communities to identify and answer the communities' needs. (cf. Aramburuzabala, McIlrath & Opazo, 2019; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Service-learning is a form of education that aims to simultaneously achieve the university's goals (i.e., students' education and third mission) and address the community's needs. This is fulfilled by involving students, academics, and community members in a collaborative process where all parties are considered teachers, problem solvers, and partners. In order to maintain this collaboration, strong and intentional partnerships between the university and community must be established (Suarez- Balcazar et al., 2005), which are based on four fundamental principles (the four Rs; Butin, 2003).

- 1 - Respect: Service-learning students and faculty should show respect for the community and its values and acknowledge that there are different types of knowledge beyond academics (d'Arlach et al., 2009);
- 2 - Relevance: Service-learning activities should be relevant for both students and the community, addressing the needs of the community while also expanding students' understanding of their surroundings (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991);
- 3 - Reflexivity: It refers to regular and ongoing guided activities where students are asked to critically analyse their experiences to gain a deeper understanding of social problems and the learning that derives from the experience. It is also a tool for the university-community partnership to evaluate the process (Jacoby, 2015);
- 4 - Reciprocity: Recognising, valuing and respecting each partner's knowledge, perspectives and resources is crucial for successful community engagement. Dostilio et al. (2012) divide reciprocity into three categories, (a) exchange: the exchange of benefits, resources, or actions; (b) influence: the relationship shapes personal, social, and environmental contexts; and (c) generativity: it may involve a change in unique ways of knowing and being or in the systems in which the relationship is embedded. The collaboration may evolve and extend beyond the initial focus as outcomes, ways of knowing, and systems of belonging are transformed.

1.1 Background

My interest in service-learning was born long before my PhD. It was June 2016, and the North American International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE) organised an international conference on service-learning. Prior to this conference, I had never heard about SL. However, I could easily trace some solid connections with the community psychology notions I collected during my master's degree in School and Community Psychology. I remember thinking that SL could be a concrete and consistent way to bring together the community and academia while sustaining, fostering, and promoting the community psychology principles of empowerment, community responsibility, and social justice.

After my graduation, I had the opportunity to cultivate my academic interest in

service-learning by winning a research grant as part of the Erasmus + project Europe Engage – the program that formally introduced the Italian academic landscape to service-learning and that started a systematic European reflection on this practice. As part of the research activities, I monitored the students' activities on the field, analysed the quantitative material and conducted interviews with community partners of the first service-learning course piloted at the University of Bologna. The results showed that service-learning supported students' active citizenship and allowed them to deploy personal and professional competencies while positively influencing community partners' work.

Indeed, SL has been suggested as a powerful tool to (a) address responsive knowledge, that is, an education attentive to the problem of society and the acquirement of experience and competencies to act on social problems, (b) increase community engagement activities by linking the curriculum to community needs, and (c) develop a "psychologically literate citizen", that is someone who sees responding to ethical commitment and social responsibility as a fundamental aspect of their ongoing education and personal growth (Altman, 1996; Bringle et al., 2016).

Moreover, several SL outcomes reported in the literature are part of the psychological skills, such as the capacity to understand and sympathise with individual and social problems, a willingness to listen to and collaborate with others, respect for diversity, and an overall ethical, moral, and human sensitivity (Maistry & Lortan, 2017).

Therefore, when writing a project for my PhD application in the field of community psychology, it was clear to me that service-learning had to be the underlying topic. Indeed, service-learning is a social-justice-oriented approach that relies on the partnership to happen (Compare, Pieri & Albanesi, 2022), as the European Association on Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE) highlighted in its definition of service-learning: "Service-learning in higher education is an experiential educational method in which students engage in community service, reflect critically on this experience, and learn from it personally, socially, and academically. The activities address human, social and environmental needs from the perspective of social justice and sustainable development, and aim at enriching learning in higher education, fostering civic responsibility and strengthening communities. Service-learning is always recognised with ECTS" (EASLHE, n.d.). Moreover, as presented before, reflection and active engagement are pivotal aspects (Jacoby, 2015). Through reflection, students, academics, and community partners can further their understanding of community issues and personal and professional competencies to address them. Active engagement is the *condictio sine qua non* service-learning can happen; all actors involved should be actively engaged and committed to the project (Mtawa, 2019).

Community psychology is a field of study – and practice – that profoundly focuses on understanding the processes that sustain change rather than change itself (Rappaport, 1987). As for service-learning, reflection and active community engagement are not only desirable outcomes but are intentionally embedded in the whole research or activity process (Arcidiacono, 2017), often carried out in

partnership with community-based organisations. Reflection and critical awareness are essential in understanding societal power dynamics and the root causes of issues and injustice (Zimmerman, 1995). They can be seen as the gears that move the active community engagement mechanism. Through active community engagement, individuals gain a sense of agency over the issues that affect them (a process of empowerment) and can make decisions about transforming their communities (Coy, Malekpour & Saeri, 2022; Frost et al., 2019). Finally, many of the fundamental principles of the community psychology field, such as empowerment and liberation, are based on social justice. These principles aim to provide access to resources, self-determination, and freedom from oppression. As a result, it can be argued that community psychology has always been focused on addressing and overcoming inequalities by recognising systemic injustices and giving a voice to minority groups (Compare & Albanesi, 2022a).

Besides social justice, many other service-learning outcomes align with values and assumptions in community psychology. These include respect for diversity, competence, empowerment, sense of community, social action and change, health and well-being, personal growth, caring and compassion, collaboration, citizen participation, ecological perspective, and integration of research with community action (Reeb, 2010). These outcomes reflect the core principles of community psychology and suggest that service-learning can be a valuable tool for promoting individual and community processes.

1.2 Service-Learning: What Do We Know So Far?

Through the years, hundreds of articles on service-learning and its impact on the involved actors have been conducted and published. A rapid search conducted on May 2023 on Scopus with a simple formula (i.e., service-learning AND (outcome* OR impact*)) generated more than 2,500 results. The main results reported in the literature on students, community partners, and faculty (i.e., the involved actors in the studies of this dissertation) are concisely reported in this section and will be extensively reprised in the following chapters.

Research with students shows positive effects of SL on various domains, here grouped in four dimensions as proposed by Conway et al. (2009): (a) personal outcomes, such as the improvement of self-efficacy, critical thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to create new innovative solutions and problem-solving skills; (b) social outcomes, such as the ability to work both in independent and collaborative environments, teamwork, and the attitudes towards the population one is serving; (c) citizenship outcomes, such as social awareness, sense of civic responsibility, civic engagement and social justice beliefs, attitudes, and critical understanding; and, (d) academic outcomes, such as positive attitudes towards schools, higher motivation to learn, and ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts (Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011; Compare & Albanesi, 2022a, 2022b; Cooper, Cripps & Reisman, 2013; Salam, Iskandar & Ibrahim, 2017; Salam et al., 2019; Yorio & Ye, 2012). However, the literature also highlighted that poorly structured SL experiences could reinforce stereotypes and fail to uncover the root causes of social inequality (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Gallini & Moely, 2003).

Literature on service-learning and community partners suggests twofold effects: effects on community partner organisation and effects on university-community partnership (Gelmon, Holland & Spring, 2018). While the first one includes economic and social benefits and the ability to accomplish the organisation's mission, the latter consists of effects on the relationship between community and university – i.e., quality of university-community interactions and satisfaction and sustainability of the partnership. Existing studies on the effects of SL on community partners seem to focus on the first area and report free consultations (e.g., career, nutrition, business, education), training, guidance, increased awareness of communities' needs, growth in social and economic capital (e.g., fundraising activities), satisfaction with students' participation, and additional human resources (Coleman & Danks, 2015; Jarrell et al., 2014; Jettner et al., 2017; Marshall et al., 2015; Simola, 2009; Weiler et al., 2013). Moreover, some studies report community partners' interest in being co-educators for students, having someone to confront or renew their practice with, and a way to strengthen shared values and impact the greater good (Budhai, 2013; Compare, Pieri & Albanesi 2022; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Schlegler & Koch, 2020). Some authors suggest carefully considering ethical issues when engaging with the community and monitoring the potential (unintended) harm and power differential that might create corrosive experiences (Rich, 2003).

Existing research on the benefits of SL for faculty members is threefold. On the one hand, the literature suggests an increased faculty engagement in teaching, creating a synergistic classroom environment that generates higher motivation to teach and transform the teaching activity (Pribbenow, 2005). Renewed teaching practices allow students and faculty to see each other in a different light and promote a sense of self-efficacy among instructors (Stewart, 2015). SL has also been proven to have an impact on linking theoretical knowledge to practice, representing a means for the practical application of the course content (McDonald & Dominguez, 2015) and improving academics' ability to think critically about existing theories and their applicability through logical connections with real-life problems (Carrington et al., 2015). Moreover, service-learning has been suggested to increase faculty opportunities for scholarship and research (Cooper, 2014). Besides the impact on teaching and research, SL has been recognised as a tool to increase faculty engagement with the community, create a community-university partnership, and improve relations with the community (see Sandberg, 2018). Finally, service-learning has been reported to foster deeper faculty connections with colleagues, sustaining a more profound sense of connection with other faculty and establishing closer interdepartmental relationships, that, in turn, reduce feelings of isolation (Pribbenow, 2005), and with students, promoting a deeper collaborative relationship with students (Bowen & Kiser, 2009).

Research also identified some barriers for faculty, such as increased workloads, intensive faculty time commitment, limited institutional support and training, difficulty meeting academic outcomes through service-learning and limited recognition of service-learning in promotion and tenure (Abes et al., 2002; Darby & Newman, 2014).

The literature examination I carried out during (and prior to) my PhD highlighted some gaps and limitations. On the one hand, a large body of research has

accumulated regarding the beneficial impacts of service-learning on student learning outcomes (e.g., Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011; Compare & Albanesi, 2022a; Salam et al., 2019; Yorio & Ye, 2012), and several measurement instruments for capturing these impacts have been developed (e.g., Bringle, Philips & Hudson, 2004). However, the literature examination also underlined that methodological rigour is not always applied in service-learning research. As different systematic reviews pointed out (Camilli Trujillo et al., 2021; Compare & Albanesi, 2022a), many articles are characterised by small samples, sometimes not adequately described, and carried out with unclear methodologies. Moreover, when studies propose ad-hoc measurements, instruments are scarcely reported as appendices, and quantitative scales are sometimes not psycho-metrically tested. In addition, the target community of service-learning experiences is not always defined, nor are the activities that students engage with. Finally, regarding the location of the studies, the majority are conducted in the North American and South Asian regions.

Although the community is an equally significant participant in this approach, its effects on the community have gotten considerably less attention. The community impact of service-learning was named one of the “top ten unanswered questions in service-learning research” more than 20 years ago by Giles & Eyler (1999), and the relative neglect of this question is still criticised (e.g., Farahmandpour & Shodjaee-Zrudlo, 2015; Lau et al., 2021).

Moreover, insufficient attention has been devoted to the impact and the processes of service-learning among faculty members; very few articles investigated the impact of SL on groups of scholars (within and between HEIs) trying to systematically understand common or diverging patterns of outcomes (e.g., Sandberg, 2018).

1.3 Purpose of the study & Methodology

This dissertation aimed to understand the processes and the psychosocial variables involved, underpinned, and fostered by engaged scholarship activities such as service-learning, addressing the gaps identified in the literature.

The doctoral thesis's main psychosocial variables under inspection are empowerment, psychological sense of community, and civic engagement. In addition to these dimensions, other psychological and community constructs have been investigated (e.g., motivation, reciprocity, and social justice). Three main research questions were posited to achieve these aims and guided the three studies enclosed in this dissertation.

RQ1: What are the effects of SL on students' citizenship development?

RQ2: How does SL impact local communities?

RQ3: Does SL sustain faculty members in their pursuit of engaged scholarship?

To answer these research questions, quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been adopted, and various actors were involved as participants in the studies. Where possible, the studies have been conducted with participants from different

European countries in the effort to identify a common EU service-learning framework, examining similarities and specificities with other international contexts (e.g., North American countries, Argentina, and South Asian countries).

For the first research question, a quantitative methodology was used to compare two groups of Italian students, one attending courses that adopted service-learning and one that did not, on the acquisition and strengthening of various psychosocial variables of citizenship¹ (i.e., sense of community responsibility, social justice attitude, civic engagement, and psychological cognitive empowerment). Students were asked to fill out a quantitative survey with a pre-post design. The survey included validated and reliable psychometric instruments.

For the second research question, a group of community partners was recruited from three European countries (Italy, Spain, and Slovakia). A qualitative methodology was adopted to explore in-depth participants' experiences. Thus, participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews through online platforms. The interview guide included questions regarding community partners' motivation to join SL, the perceived effects, the reciprocity of the university-community partnership, and the potential psychological sense of community involved in the process.

For the third research question, a group of scholars was recruited from fourteen European countries (northern, eastern, western, central, and southern). A qualitative methodology was chosen to gain deeper information regarding participants' perspectives. Participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews in presence and via online platforms. The interview guide included questions regarding faculty's motivation to join SL, the perceived effects on students, faculty, community, and the HEI system, and the potential psychological sense of community involved in the process.

1.4 Organisation of the study

This dissertation is organised into five chapters and three appendices. Each chapter will be presented with its own reference list. The first chapter introduced an overview of the role of higher education institutions in contemporary communities, how societal challenges pushed and offered an opportunity for HEI to adapt and broaden its missions and introduced the service-learning literature, highlighting

¹ The UNESCO model of citizenship was used in defining the term psychosocial variables of citizenship (UNESCO, 2015). This model proposes three conceptual dimensions: (a) cognitive dimension, which refers to knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking about global, regional, national, and local issues and the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations. Social justice attitudes and psychological cognitive empowerment belong to this dimension; (b) socio-emotional dimension, which refers to a sense of belonging to common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity, and respect for differences and diversity. Sense of community responsibility belongs to this dimension; and (c) behavioural dimension, which refers to the capacity to act effectively and responsibly at local, national, and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world. Civic engagement belongs to this dimension (cf. UNESCO, 2015).

potential and limits. Moreover, the purpose, the rationale and the organisation of the study have been presented.

As mentioned before, three general research questions were posited. To answer these questions, three studies have been conducted. In chapter two, the study conducted with students will be presented. This study examined the effects on students participating in voluntary semester-long SL labs and courses compared to traditional labs and courses. At the beginning and upon completion of the lectures, 110 students completed an online survey investigating four psychosocial variables of citizenship: sense of community responsibility, social justice attitude, civic engagement, and psychological cognitive empowerment. The perception of the quality of participation experiences was collected as part of the post-survey. Results from the analysis of covariance tests highlighted no statistically significant group differences over time in all variables under inspection. On the quality of participation experiences, an independent t-test showed that SL students had statistically significant higher scores compared to non-SL students. Factors potentially affecting the results include the students' perception of their competence, the duration of SL, and the use of self-reported measures. Future research may shed further light possible effects of SL on the identified psychosocial dimension.

In chapter three, the study conducted with community partners will be presented. This study aimed to explore community partners' perspectives on service-learning effects, motivations to join service-learning experiences, organisational empowerment, reciprocity, and civic responsibility. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with community partners from different local community organisations across Europe (Italy, Spain, and Slovakia). Results highlighted (1) positive material and social effects on the community members and organisations; (2) relational, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivations, usually intertwined; (3) underpinned organisational empowerment processes; (4) empirical declination of the reciprocity Dostilio's et al. (2012) model; (5) co-educational role of community partners; and (6) sense of community and sense of belonging as frameworks to understand and interpret the sense of responsibility and the engagement usually linked to service-learning experiences.

In chapter four, the study conducted with faculty members will be presented. This study aimed to investigate the motivations, understanding, and meaning of a group of EU scholars in adopting SL. A qualitative approach was used, and 22 semi-structured interviews were collected in 14 European countries. The findings clarified the perceived SL transformative impact on the community, students, teachers, and HEIs, confirming and adding to previous literature. Moreover, motivational and institutionalisation processes were crucial in sustaining the faculty's engaged scholarship. Finally, the community experience (i.e., sense of community and community responsibility) was intertwined with the SL experience. Therefore, the 4Rs model identified by Butin (2003), which included respect, reflexivity, relevance, and reciprocity, has been integrated with a fifth foundational pillar: relatedness. Future research directions are proposed.

It must be clarified that chapters two, three, and four are presented as research

articles and have been submitted to different journals – specified in the footnotes of the first page of each chapter.

In chapter five, overall conclusion will be drawn following the general research questions presented in this chapter. Theoretical and practical implications of the studies will be offered and methodological and structural limitation to the PhD research activity will be detailed. Finally, identified areas for further research will be delineated.

At the end of the dissertation, following a principle of sharing resources, appendices one, two, and three will report the integral measures and interview guides used to conduct the studies.

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Chapter 2 - The Students' Citizenship Development²

2.1 Introduction

In the last decades, in different corners of the globe, the political and social demand for improving higher education institutions' responsiveness to local communities' development has been growing (Preece, 2011). As a result, a renewed interest in social actions as policy-oriented exercises for higher education institutions (HEIs) and community development arose, falling under the umbrella term third mission – knowledge exchange and transfer, the generation of public value, and the pursuit of societal impact (Fini et al., 2018). Indeed, HEIs are currently recognised as active social actors in priming social innovation and sustaining community development (Knudsen et al., 2019). In this new scenario, HEIs become repositories for students' knowledge gaining and research about their future professions and careers. They also teach about responsibilities as active and responsible citizens through civically engaged activities (Giles & Eyler, 1994).

2.1.1 Civic Engagement and Sense of Community Responsibility

Civic engagement represents a process whereby people actively participate in institutional and community decision-making (Heller et al., 1984). A distinction between collective and individual forms of civic engagement can be made based on a continuum that moves from non-participation to civic and political participation (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Besides assisting students' learning about responsibility and social responsiveness, civic engagement among the youth population has been identified as related to (a) better social and emotional development (Albanesi, Cicognani & Zani, 2007), (b) a greater likelihood to be civically engaged in the future (Li & Frieze, 2016), (c) greater educational achievement (Ludden, 2011), and (d) an improved civic identity and a sense of social belonging and responsibility (Yates & Youniss, 1999).

The psychological sense of community construct encompasses the sense of belonging, identification with the group, interdependence, and mutual commitment (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). According to the community experience framework (Boyd & Nowell, 2017), members can perceive their experience in the community according to two independent yet related dimensions: resource and responsibility. The first implies community as a critical condition for meeting members' essential psychological needs, while the latter relies on a feeling of personal responsibility for protecting or enhancing the individual and collective well-being of a community of people that is not related to an expectation of personal gain. Studies on resource and responsibility dimensions of the community experience framework emphasised the relevance of community experiences positing the sense of community construct as

² Compare, C., & Albanesi, C. (under review). Exploring the Effects of Service-Learning on Psychosocial Dimensions Among a Population of University Students. *Journal of Experiential Education*.

a predictor of well-being (Boyd & Nowell, 2020), civic and political participation (Prati et al., 2020), prosocial behaviours (Compare et al., 2021), leadership behaviours, and greater congruence between one's belief system, identity, and behaviour within a social context (Boyd, 2015).

2.1.2 Reflection: Service-Learning and Empowerment

Service-learning (SL) represents one of the devices adopted by HEIs worldwide to integrate civic engagement experiences into the academic field while being responsive to the local community's development (Chenneville, Toler & Gaskin-Butler, 2012; Folgueiras et al., 2020). It has been recognised to instil responsive knowledge (i.e., education, experience, understanding, and action on social problems) and increase civic engagement by linking the curriculum to the needs identified with the community (Conway et al., 2009). Moreover, SL has contended as one of the most effective pedagogical tools for psychology educators seeking to develop psychologically literate citizens (i.e., students who, besides attaining fluency in their knowledge of the field, are compassionate, engaged, and efficacious citizens; Bringle et al., 2016).

Throughout the decades, many definitions of SL have been delineated. Nevertheless, the most accurate and acknowledged definition identifies SL as a course-based-credit-bearing experiential learning strategy that allows students to participate in organised, civically engaging activities that meet the identified community needs while reflecting on the experience in such a way as to gain further academic, civic, and democratic understanding and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

As underlined in its definition, SL is not just about doing; it is about reflecting on the experience. The development that SL fosters does not necessarily occur because of experience but because of the reflection process (Jacoby, 2003). The reflective process is referred to regular and ongoing guided activities where students are asked to scrutinise their experiences (Butin, 2010). Reflection is one of the five pillars of SL experience – together with relevance, respect, reciprocity, and relatedness (Butin, 2003; Compare et al., *under review*). It has been identified as one of the processes underpinning students' empowerment in being catalysts of change within the local communities (Compare & Albanesi, 2022a; Guarino et al., 2022).

Empowerment has been defined as an intentional and ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and relatedness through which individuals lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989). Empowerment has been conceptualised as an integrated multilevel construct – community, organisational, and psychological levels (Zimmerman, 1995), beneficial at the societal level for democratic functioning, at the organisational level for both the capacity to make meaningful social change and to support leadership development among participants, and at a psychological level for increased involvement, critical awareness, and an increased sense of agency in the civic arena (Speer et al., 2019). In its psychological interactional (or cognitive) dimension,

empowerment entails critical awareness of the forces that shape the community and societal systems and environments and the strategic understanding of what is required to change these structures (Christens, 2012).

Research on psychological empowerment posits an association with greater levels of civic engagement and a psychological sense of community (Speer & Peterson, 2000) to have protective effects on psychological well-being (Christens & Peterson, 2012) and positively associated with the social justice construct (Speer et al., 2019). Being an indicator of proactivity and critical awareness of how the agency can be harnessed for strategic change, psychological empowerment, especially in its cognitive form, is considered a relevant process for groups with less relative power, including youth (Kohfeldt et al., 2011).

2.1.3 Service-Learning Outcomes

Research findings on the impact of SL on students can be divided into (a) personal outcomes, such as the improvement of self-efficacy, critical thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to create new innovative solutions and problem-solving skills; (b) social outcomes, such as the ability to work both in independent and collaborative environments, teamwork, and the attitudes towards the population one is serving; (c) citizenship outcomes, such as social awareness, sense of civic responsibility, civic engagement and social justice beliefs, attitudes, and critical understanding; and, (d) academic outcomes, such as positive attitudes towards schools, higher motivation to learn, and ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Compare & Albanesi, 2022b; Cooper, Cripps, & Reisman, 2013; Salam, Iskandar, & Ibrahim, 2017; Salam, Iskandar, Ibrahim, & Farooq, 2019; Yorio & Ye, 2012). In particular, thanks to its reflective component, SL has been reported to contribute to a deeper understanding of structural social inequalities and sustain students' stance against injustice (Einfeld & Collins, 2008).

However, poorly structured experiences and reflections have been reported to be corrosive to students' learning and hinder their commitment to justice (Compare & Albanesi, 2022b). These dissonant findings sustain the claim that participation is not good in itself; only high-quality experiences can have positive effects. This is not limited to the SL experience. Indeed, while most of the existing research points out the benefits of participation (e.g., Flanagan, 2004; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006), other studies concluded that participation could also have negative results (e.g., Menezes, 2003; de Piccoli, Colombo, & Mosso, 2004). In the field of youth participation, Ferreira, Azevedo & Menezes (2012) have identified criteria that can inform the developmental quality of participation experiences (QPE) in different contexts, namely the action and reflection dimensions. While the first one is connected to the deployed community actions and their continuity and duration over time, the latter is connected to the frequency of active engagement and the presence (or absence) of elements that facilitates reflection on the actions. Within this framework, it is only when participation provides experiences of reflexivity and personal construction and reconstruction of meaningful positions and commitments that benefits arise (e.g., better civically engaged attitudes; Ferreira, Azevedo & Menezes, 2012).

2.1.4 Aim and Hypotheses

The current paper aims to understand the effects of civically engaged experiences such as SL on four different psychosocial variables of citizenship: sense of community responsibility (SOCR), social justice attitudes (SJA), civic engagement (CE), and psychological cognitive empowerment (PCE). While SJA and CE are constructs that have already been investigated, SOCR and PCE are new to SL literature. However, proxies of SOCR and PCE can be found in the existing literature (e.g., sense of civic responsibility and community belonging for SOCR, and self-efficacy, critical thinking and psychological empowerment for PCE).

To pursue this aim, two groups were recruited: one group of SL students and one group of non-SL students enrolled in traditional labs and courses. Relying on the presented literature, four hypotheses are posited:

- H1.** The mean of SOCR will be higher after the course experience so that SL students will have higher SOCR than non-SL students after the course experience but not before.
- H2.** The mean of SJA will be higher after the course experience so that SL students will have higher SJA than non-SL students after the course experience but not before.
- H3.** The mean of CE will be higher after the course experience so that SL students will have higher CE than non-SL students after the course experience but not before.
- H4.** The mean of PCE will be higher after the course experience so that SL students will have higher PCE than non-SL students after the course experience but not before.

2.1.5 The Context

The Community Psychology team of the Department of Psychology of the University of Bologna is in charge of two 4-credit community psychology labs and two 3-credit transferrable competencies courses that offer service-learning experiences. While the labs are open to psychology students only, the transferrable competencies courses are open to all students enrolled in the university. Students can voluntarily sign up for these activities. Activities are generally structured so that ten hours are spent in class and a minimum of twenty hours in the field. The class activities consist of introducing students to the SL methodology and foundational aspects, such as professional, democratic, and civic competencies, and the value of reciprocity in the university-community partnership. Moreover, references to the relevance of civic engagement and responsibility are made, stressing the agentic role that students can engage in during the SL experience to recognise and challenge systems of injustice and inequity that characterise the contexts they encounter. These dimensions of responsibility, engagement, and social justice are revisited during the group monitoring sessions that students attend to reflect on their

SL activities. The group sessions are guided by the faculty and follow the structure of describe, examine, and articulate learning of the DEAL model proposed by Ash and Clayton (2009). Moreover, in addition to group reflexive sessions, students are required to keep a field reflexive journal during the experience, with the aim of reflecting on the inner meaning of the actions they take in community settings and the competencies they train and develop through service-learning. Finally, a dedicated conclusive moment where students can give back to the community the deployed activities is foreseen. The field activities are related to the moments spent within the local community organisations designing activities and engaging with the beneficiaries of the SL projects (i.e., organisations' users and community members). While many local community organisations established long-term partnerships with the university, projects are implemented yearly according to the number of students and their choices. Students are asked to choose which organisation they would like to engage in regarding their interests and competencies. For the academic year 2021/2022, 21 projects were implemented involving various target communities (e.g., donor associations, older adults, children and teenagers inside and outside school contexts, underserved communities, and migrants) and regarding various activities (e.g., preparation and realisation of sensitisation campaigns, conduction of interviews and structured observations, creation and administration of surveys, conduction of primary and secondary school interventions, organisation of film club activities).

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Instruments and Procedures

The study was conducted between November 2021 and June 2022. Two data collection was performed at the beginning and the end of the lectures of each course of the academic semesters (November-January for the first semester and March-May for the second semester). An anonymous online survey was proposed to university students enrolled in SL labs or courses (i.e., transferrable competencies course) and to university students enrolled in non-SL courses but attending other labs offered within the same master's degree or transferrable competencies courses within the same university. An online quantitative survey was designed with the help of the Qualtrics platform and administrated at the beginning and the end of the labs or courses via email. Ethical clearance for the research was obtained by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bologna [Prot. n. 284761, 11/05/2021], and informed consent was collected from participants at the beginning of the survey. To ensure the participants' anonymity while allowing the match between time 1 and time 2, students were asked to generate an alphanumeric code at the beginning of each survey (the first letter of their name, plus the second letter of their surname, plus the day and the last two digits of the year of birth). Considering both data collection, 305 participants completed the time 1 survey, and 110 participants also completed the time 2 survey, resulting in a retention rate of 36%. Therefore, the other 195 participants were excluded from the study. The a-priori power analysis

performed on G*power 3.1 statistical software with a medium effect size of $f = 0.25$ (Cohen, 1988), indicated a sample size of 98 participants to achieve a statistical power of 80% to conduct repeated measures ANOVA. Therefore, the data collection satisfied the a-priori requirement.

2.2.2 Participants

The participants were 110 university students, of which 39.1% ($n = 43$) participated in SL activities. Respondents were mainly enrolled in master's degrees ($n = 84, 77.8\%$), with the rest enrolled in Baccalaureate degrees ($n = 24, 22.2\%$). Participants' main academic field was social science (e.g., clinical and community psychology, sociology; $n = 63, 57.3\%$), followed by applied science (e.g., business, education, engineering; $n = 33, 30\%$) and humanities (e.g., history, foreign languages, media; $n = 14, 12.7\%$). Most participants were cisgender women ($n = 87, 79.1\%$), and the rest were cisgender men ($n = 23, 20.9\%$). Age ranged between 20 and 59 years (Mage = 24.3; SD = 5). Participants' nationality was mainly Italian ($n = 105, 95.5\%$), with few exceptions (i.e., $n = 5, 4.5\%$; Chinese, Egyptian, Polish, Romanian, and Sammarinese). A minority of students ($n = 29, 26.4\%$) stated to belong to groups affected by one or more sources of systemic oppression within the Italian context (e.g., gender identity or sexual/romantic orientation discrimination, ableism, racism). The majority of respondents were full-time students ($n = 81, 73.6\%$), followed by part-time workers ($n = 22, 20\%$) and a minority of full-time workers ($n = 7, 6.4\%$). Only a minority of students lived with their partners ($n = 13, 11.8\%$) and had children ($n = 2, 1.8\%$).

2.2.3 Measures

Aside from a section on socio-demographic information, the survey included measures of sense of community responsibility, social justice attitudes, civic engagement, psychological cognitive empowerment, and quality of participation experiences.

Sense of Community Responsibility. To evaluate the sense of responsibility towards the community, we used the Italian version of the Sense of Community Responsibility scale (Prati et al., 2020). The scale consists of six items (e.g., "It is easy for me to put aside my own agenda in favour of the greater good of my community"). Answers were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree). ($\alpha_{t_1} = .78; \alpha_{t_2} = .77$).

Social Justice Attitudes. To evaluate the attitudes toward social justice and systemic oppression, we used the Social Justice Attitudes subscale of the CASQ questionnaire (Moely et al., 2002). The scale consists of eight items (e.g., "We need to change people's attitudes in order to solve social problems"). Answers were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree). ($\alpha_{t_1} = .70; \alpha_{t_2} = .83$).

Civic Engagement. To evaluate the behavioural component of civic engagement, we used the Behaviour subscale of the Civic Engagement Scale (Doolittle & Faul, 2013). The scale consists of six items (e.g., "I help members of

my community"). Answers were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree). ($\alpha_{t_1} = .76$; $\alpha_{t_2} = .75$).

Psychological Cognitive Empowerment. To evaluate the perception of how social power functions, we used the Source of Power subscale of the Youth Cognitive Empowerment Scale (Speer et al., 2019). The scale consists of four items (e.g., "The only way I can improve my community is by working with other students and community members"). Answers were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree). ($\alpha_{t_1} = .70$; $\alpha_{t_2} = .70$).

Control variable. Building on the proposed literature that posits that participation benefits only derive from experiences of reflexivity, we controlled the quality of participation experiences variable in our analyses to rule out its confounding effect on our results. To evaluate the students' perceived quality of participation upon completion of the activities, we used the Quality of Participation Experiences Questionnaire (Ferreira & Menezes, 2001). The scale consists of ten items (e.g., "During your experience, how frequently you felt that...divergent opinions generated new ways to look at issues"). Answers were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very frequently). ($\alpha = .84$).

2.3 Results

The descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables included in our study are displayed in Table 1. Low standard deviation values showed how the data are overall clustered around the mean. Mean values showed a general tendency of self-reported higher scores in the post-test in most of the considered variables –except for civic engagement in SL students. Independent t-test analyses performed on each variable showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups, except for the quality of participation experiences. The 43 SL students ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .67$) compared to the 67 non-SL students ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .79$) demonstrated significantly higher scores in the dimension related to the quality of their experience, $t(108) = 3.25$, $p < .01$. Moreover, no significant differences were identified in comparing t_1 with t_2 in both groups. Bivariate correlations showed a tendency of fan-spread correlation change, that is when a positive correlation is observed between initial status (i.e., precondition) and change (i.e., postcondition) (Petscher & Schatschneider, 2011). Moreover, the quality of participation experiences showed to be consistently correlated ($p < .01$) with sense of community responsibility and civic engagement at time 2 in both groups. This result might be ascribed to the fact that these three constructs all refer to dimensions of active participation and collaboration with others. Indeed, the reflection and action component of the quality of participation experiences recall attitudes toward collaboration, interdependence, and protagonism within the activities that resonate with the dimensions of civic engagement behaviour and sense of community responsibility agency. The significance of the correlation only at time 2 might be given by including the quality of participation experiences in the post-test only.

To test H1, we conducted a 2 (before versus after the courses) X 2 (SL students vs non-SL students) repeated measures ANCOVA on SPSS 27 on sense of community

responsibility, with the mean scores of the quality of participation experiences as a covariate. Results showed no significant interaction, $F(1,105) = 1.25$, $p = .26$, $\eta^2 = .012$. Therefore, H1 was not supported. We conducted a similar repeated measure ANCOVA on social justice attitudes to test H2. Results showed no significant interaction, $F(1,105) = .38$, $p = .54$, $\eta^2 = .004$. Therefore, H2 was not supported. We conducted a similar repeated measure ANCOVA on civic engagement to test H3. Results showed no significant interaction, $F(1,105) = 2.39$, $p = .12$, $\eta^2 = .022$. Therefore, H3 was not supported. Finally, we conducted a similar repeated measure ANCOVA on psychological cognitive empowerment to test H4. Results showed no significant interaction, $F(1,105) = .10$, $p = .75$, $\eta^2 = .001$. Therefore, H4 was not supported. Our results remain statistically non-significant even when we do not control for the quality of participation experiences.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations divided for group

	Group	Mean (SD) range 1-5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. SOCR t1	SL	3.35 (.70)	—							
	non-SL	3.24 (.65)	—							
2. SJA t1	SL	4.26 (.38)	0.10	—						
	non-SL	4.27 (.42)	0.13	—						
3. CE t1	SL	3.34 (.76)	0.64***	-0.04	—					
	non-SL	3.20 (.80)	0.57***	0.28**	—					
4. PCE t1	SL	3.92 (.70)	0.34*	0.22	0.27	—				
	non-SL	3.74 (.72)	0.43***	0.17	0.16	—				
5. SOCR t2	SL	3.41 (.67)	0.63***	-0.10	0.53***	0.23	—			
	non-SL	3.32 (.59)	0.63***	0.18	0.43***	0.40***	—			
6. SJA t2	SL	4.30 (.67)	0.19	0.41**	0.08	-0.03	0.18	—		
	non-SL	4.36 (.40)	0.10	0.71***	0.19	0.17	0.10	—		
7. CE t2	SL	3.29 (.74)	0.42**	-0.05	0.68***	0.44**	0.66***	0.09	—	
	non-SL	3.25 (.73)	0.48***	0.41***	0.69***	0.18	0.60***	0.22	—	
8. PCE t2	SL	3.99 (.64)	0.27	-0.13	0.23	0.45**	0.51***	0.09	0.45**	—
	non-SL	3.88 (.59)	0.21	0.26*	0.17	0.41***	0.24	0.45***	0.29**	—
9. QPE t2	SL	3.39 (.67)	0.23	-0.14	0.26	0.15	0.48**	0.11	0.54***	0.36*
	non-SL	2.91 (.79)	0.09	0.25*	0.19	0.14	0.38**	0.14	0.43***	-0.01

Notes. nSL = 43; nnon-SL = 67. SOCR = sense of community responsibility; SJA = social justice attitude; CE = civic engagement; PCE = psychological cognitive empowerment; QPE = quality of participation experiences. (t1 = pre-survey; t2 = post-survey). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

2.4 Discussion

Service-learning has been adopted by many higher education institutions worldwide as a means to promote students' civic and democratic competencies while reinforcing connections with local communities and addressing higher education institutions' third mission (Folgueiras et al., 2020; Jacoby, 2014). Research with community partners and faculty members involved in implementing the SL experience posits the students' pivotal role in changing contexts and addressing

communities' needs identified in the co-design phase of the experiences (Compare, Pieri & Albanesi, 2022). Building on this perspective, students are acknowledged as agents of change within the contexts they engage with. Moreover, the literature reports how SL influences students' democratic competencies and capabilities to think about themselves as active citizens (Geier & Hasager, 2020).

However, our study offers a tempered perspective. The findings suggest no statistically significant differences between students who experience SL and a comparison group of students not involved in structured civically engaged activities offered within academic curricula such as SL. Therefore, all hypotheses were rejected. The only finding that differentiates the two groups is the quality of participation experiences dimension, which suggests a generally higher quality of SL experiences, probably underpinned by its structured reflexivity foundational component (Jacoby, 2003). Nevertheless, more was needed to differentiate students' change throughout the time of the course when compared to non-SL groups. These findings dissonate with previous results on the SL positive impact on community belonging and sense of responsibility (McGuire & Gamble, 2006; Scales et al., 2000), social justice attitudes (Compare & Albanesi, 2022b), civic engagement (Nokes et al., 2005) and psychological empowerment (Chan, Ng, & Chan, 2016). The timing of the data collection might have influenced these results. Indeed, existing studies suggest that SL effects require time to settle down and be recognised, such as personal development and sense of civic responsibility (Hok-ka, Wing-fung & Cheung-ming, 2016).

The duration of the SL experience might also have played a role. Studies identified engaging in shorter SL experiences that required fewer hours on the field as contributing to similar unexpected results (Knapp et al., 2010; Zuccherro & Gibson, 2019). If we turn to the content, it might be possible that the constructs were not exhaustively made explicit throughout the monitoring activities or that not all constructs were equally addressed across all 21 SL projects. Therefore, students might not have been entirely aware of how SL impacted those dimensions. It might also be that other courses and labs have included elements that resonate with the same constructs, and therefore the difference between the two groups was downsized. On this, it should be noted that the current study opted for control labs and courses as a comparison group that was hardly a control as we might traditionally think of it (i.e., lacking treatment). The control labs and courses were described as traditionally taught; however, we cannot exclude that the course content did not partially overlap with those introduced in the SL labs and course, as hypothesised in previous studies (see Fleck et al., 2017).

On the contrary, SL might have sufficiently addressed the constructs under inspection and sustained students in developing a more realistic evaluation of their behaviour, beliefs, and attitudes at post-test, as hypothesised in other studies (see Osborne, Hammerich & Hensley, 1998). This might have fostered SL students to be more critical of their competencies and, therefore, moderated their t2 scores compared to inflated t1 scores (Kruger & Dunning, 2009). Finally, the high mean scores of t1 in the variables under inspection for both groups may have resulted in a ceiling effect that left little room for improvement, as this was investigated solely through the quantitative scores of the psychometric scales.

2.5 Conclusion

The current paper aimed at understanding the effects of civically engaged experiences such as service-learning in strengthening four psychosocial variables of citizenship dimensions: sense of community responsibility, social justice attitudes, civic engagement, and psychological cognitive empowerment. Therefore, two groups were recruited: one group of SL students and one group of non-SL students as a comparison group, with the expectation that SL could impact the identified dimensions, given the existing literature that posits social justice attitudes, civic engagement and proxies of sense of community responsibility and psychological cognitive empowerment as significant outcomes of SL. Nonetheless, the study showed no statistically significant differences between the two groups on the variables under inspection, except for the quality of participation experiences where SL students outperformed non-SL students. These findings diverge from the existing literature, suggesting that the experience does not change students. Still, studies have not explicitly quantitatively tested the effects of SL experiences between groups on complex psychological constructs such as sense of community responsibility and psychological cognitive empowerment.

Although the current methodology improved on the weaknesses of previous research, for methodological rigour and statistical power, several limitations should be noted. The quasi-experimental design and the small sample size of each group limit our ability to infer causation and generalise the results. Although students from multiple courses participated, only one university was represented. All instruments were self-report measures, which could have resulted in response bias and only reflected the students' perception of their experiences. Moreover, given the small numerosity, service-learning courses were considered as a homogeneous sample, while students engaged in different activities and 21 different projects, that might have helped them to reflect on the field about different issues and topics. Heterogeneity could have represented a source of noise in the data analysis, levelling the specific effects of specific experiences and resulting in tempered mean scores. No retrospective versions of the scales were included in the post-survey. This might have been problematic since the confounding factor of response shift bias was not considered. Response shift bias occurs when the student's internal frame of reference of the measured construct changes between the pre-survey and the post-survey due to the influence of the educational program or experience (Drennan & Hyde, 2008).

Future research should include larger samples and a time 3 data collection to control for long-term effects and measure multiple aspects of sense of community and psychological empowerment. Moreover, a mixed-method design with qualitative components might be more suitable for accurately reading data. Finally, future researchers should employ retrospective and non-self-report measures, including assessing student outcomes on the same constructs from other perspectives (e.g., faculty members and community partners).

2.6 References

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Chapter 3 - The Community Impact³

3.1 Introduction

Today's societies are asked to face multiple sustainability issues. This new landscape includes constantly changing demographics, always-new technology, migration waves, global marketplaces, and, recently, global health-related challenges. Consequently, greater attention is devoted to the work of community organisations and educational institutions worldwide in response to the new diversities and needs brought by communities and individuals.

In this scenario, higher education institutions can represent core actors in value creation serving societal needs (Knudsen et al., 2019). The perception of the university as an ivory tower has increasingly been challenged over the last few years (Cesaroni & Piccaluga, 2016). Following a generativity principle, scientific discoveries are perceived as capable of priming social innovation.

Following and adding to the first (pursue knowledge) and the second (educate students) missions of universities (Secundo et al., 2017), the social actions undertaken by higher education institutions formed its third mission (Geuna & Muscio, 2009). The third mission underpins a focus on knowledge exchange and transfer (Cesaroni & Piccaluga, 2016; Rosli & Rossi, 2016) and seek to generate public value (Bozeman, Rimes, & Youtie, 2015) and societal impact (Fini et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2016).

A relational path of third mission activities has emerged, shifting from a contractual view of partnerships to thickening academic engagement, with some degrees of reciprocity between the university and relevant actors, such as community organisations (Bjerregaard, 2010; Bruneel, D'Este, & Salter, 2010; Perkmann et al., 2013). University community engagement has also emerged as a priority in the European Commission's Renewed Agenda for Higher Education (European Commission, 2017). While actions that link a university with the broader society are not a novelty, community engagement in higher education is a new way of articulating and structuring how higher education interacts with the broader world. Bridger & Alter (2007) stated that the engaged university collaborates with local people to facilitate a broad range of community interaction that fosters individual and social well-being. The perspective of an engaged university emphasises that the university responds to changes in the higher education environment through mutual engagement with different organisations at different geographical scales (Goddard & Vallance, 2013). As a common denominator of an engaged university, several authors emphasise the need for reciprocity, respect, and responsibility between the university and the community (cf. Bridger & Alter, 2007; Holland, 2001; Nicotera et al., 2011).

While emphasised and advocated in many policy documents, community-engaged (teaching and learning) practices in European higher education are still at their

³ Compare, C., Brozmanova-Gregorova, A., Culcasi, I., Aramburuzabala, P., & Albanesi, C. (under review). "The Farmer, the Guide, and the Bridge": The Voice of Community Partners within European Service-Learning. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*.

early stage (cf. Aramburuzabala, 2019). Service-learning first arrived in Europe at the beginning of the 21st century. After the first decade of silent work conducted individually (mainly in Ireland, Germany, and Spain), scholars began to create networks to share experiences and research adopting SL. Thus, national networks emerged, such as Campus Engage in Ireland, the Network for Social Responsibility in Higher Education in Germany, the Association of University service-learning in Spain, and the Italian Network of Service Learning and Community Engagement in Italy. In 2014 twelve higher institutions from twelve European countries applied for Erasmus+ funding to develop the Europe Engage project to identify scholars and universities working with this methodology. Europe Engage aimed to promote SL as an experiential approach and institutionalisation through various actions to facilitate creating structures to support it in participating universities and other European higher institutions.

Furthermore, the project inspired the creation of a European university service-learning network that in 2019 was formalised as the European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EALSHE). EALSHE has the mission to institutionalise SL, offering support and unifying guidelines. Many scholars and higher institutions are embedding SL in European higher education in collaboration with social entities, stakeholders, and local services. However, studies on the community partners' perspective, especially in European higher education settings, are rare and not focused on the reciprocal dynamics of SL (Compare, Pieri & Albanesi, 2022; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Hilgendorf et al., 2009; McNatt, 2019).

Service-learning (SL) represents one of the actions for community engagement institutionalisation (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Martin, Smith, & Phillips, 2005; Thompson, 2000). Indeed, SL is designed to meet the university's teaching and learning objectives and the community's needs (and assets) identified by the organisation (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

Literature offers many definitions of SL, yet it can be defined as a "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience that allows students to (a) participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 112).

Whitley et al. (2017) claim that this is a commonly cited definition that has gained recognition over the last two decades for balancing and linking service and learning components in a meaningful way.

Mitchell (2008) offered a paramount distinction between critical SL (Rice & Pollack, 2000), which is explicitly oriented to a better understanding of social justice and to mobilise action against injustice and inequality and traditional or philanthropic SL, oriented to meet individuals or community needs without calling into question structural inequalities (see also Compare & Albanesi, 2022). Both traditional and critical SL need community-university partnerships. Respecting community values and assuring the relevance of the activities for universities and communities contribute to solid community-university partnerships. Valuing the reciprocity that derives from the partnership is also strategic to SL (Butin, 2003).

3.1.1 Reciprocity

Reciprocity encloses the potential to influence institutions, students' engagement and the community within which SL occurs through actions of respect, trust, genuine commitment, power balance, shared resources and clear communication (Jacoby, 2015).

Dostilio et al. (2012) consider reciprocity a "foundational concept" in SL that needs to be differentiated from mutuality. Saltmarsh, Hartley & Clayton (2009) proposed that mutuality happens when each party in the relationship benefits from its involvement, while reciprocity happens when authority and responsibility for knowledge creation are shared. In this sense, mutuality entails HEIs using their expertise for communities (technocratic approach), while reciprocity entails collaborating with communities (democratic approach).

Three orientations to this democratic approach have been posited (Dostilio et al., 2012). 1) Exchange: the focus is on the interchange of benefits, resources, or actions, and mutual benefit does not impact the way services are offered and does not question issues of equity, power unbalance and relationships. 2) Influence: the relationship is informed by members' positionalities and ways of making meaning of the contexts and the issues at stake. It iteratively impacts outcomes and processes, creating space for calling into questioning issues of justice, equity and power. 3) Generativity: it involves a transformation of individual ways of knowing and being or of the systems of which the relationship is a part. The relationship goes beyond questioning assumptions and issues of justice, equity and power. It develops a new understanding leading to new actions. Power, privilege, and oppression are actively and intentionally considered within this orientation, transforming how things are done and the individuals' positionality as part of the relationship.

Based on Dostilio et al. (2012) premises, understanding reciprocity orientation is essential to capture SL's philanthropic or critical orientation and its implication for the engaged university concept. Therefore, the first two research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How do community partners perceive reciprocity?

RQ2: Does this perception change over time?

3.1.2 Service-Learning Effects on Community Partners

Gelmon et al. (2018) suggest a twofold classification of the effects of SL on community partners: (1) effects on community partner organisation and (2) effects on university-community partnership. While the first one includes economic and social benefits and the ability to accomplish the organisation's mission, the latter consists of effects on the relationship between community and university – i.e., quality of university-community interactions and satisfaction and sustainability of the partnership. Existing studies on the effects of SL on community partners seem to focus on the first area and report free consultations (e.g., career, nutrition, business, education), training, guidance, increased awareness of communities' needs, growth

in social and economic capital (e.g., fundraising activities), satisfaction with students' participation, and additional human resources (Coleman & Danks, 2015; Jarrell et al., 2014; Jettner et al., 2017; Marshall et al., 2015; Simola, 2009; Weiler et al., 2013). Few published studies document the perspectives of community partners, and the field acknowledges that this area continues to be underrepresented in the overall SL literature (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Some of the studies with community partners report interest in being co-educators for students, having someone to confront or renew their practice with, and a way to strengthen shared values and impact the greater good (Budhai, 2013; Compare, Pieri & Albanesi 2022; Nigro & Wortham, 1998; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Schlegler & Koch, 2020). Despite a growing body of literature on service-learning, community partners' perspective is still scarcely considered. Therefore, the third research question is proposed:

RQ3: What are the perceived SL effects for community partners?

3.1.3 Motivation

According to Self Determination Theory, motivation is the “why of behaviour”. It can be made a distinction between intrinsic motivations (i.e., interest and satisfaction drive engagement in activities) and extrinsic motivation (i.e., instrumental reasons drive engagement) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The sustainability of interaction between community partners and Higher Education institutions – i.e., community-university partnership – necessitates attention to the motivations and perceptions of the effects of SL from the community partners' perspective. Despite the effects and benefits for the community have long been a hallmark of SL practice, as aforementioned (Coleman & Danks, 2015; Jarrell et al., 2014; Marshall et al., 2015; Simola, 2009; Weiler et al., 2013), there is scant evidence of community partners' motivations to join SL. Therefore, the fourth research question, scarcely addressed in the literature, is proposed:

RQ4: What are the community partners' motivations for joining SL?

3.1.4 Empowerment

Another aspect that we want to investigate further is the effect of SL on community partners' empowerment. Empowerment is a process by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them (Rappaport, 1987).

It has been defined as “an intentional, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources” (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989, p.2).

Empowerment encloses the individual, organisational, and community levels. Empowerment on the individual level refers to the belief in one's own strengths and power to influence the environment and gain mastery over one's own life

(Zimmerman, 1995). Organisational empowerment (OE) refers to “organisational efforts that generate individual empowerment among members and organisational effectiveness needed for goal achievement” (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 130). It can be distinguished between intra-, inter-, and extra-organisational empowerment. Intra-organisational empowerment refers to the cooperation between groups within an organisation (e.g., the organisation’s structure). Inter-organisational empowerment refers to cooperation between organisations (e.g., establishing alliances). Extra-organisational empowerment focuses on the organisation’s influence on the broader environment they belong to (e.g., public policies) (Peterson and Zimmerman, 2004). Some of the effects of SL experiences on community organisations are connected to the possibility of creating new collaborations and benefitting from the SL network that links different organisations and stakeholders in the community, incrementing relationships and new cooperation (Cohen & Kinsey, 2004; Driscoll et al., 1996; Sujová, 2021). These effects resemble organisational effects, but no study explicitly used the empowerment framework to inquire about these findings. Therefore, the fifth research question is proposed:

RQ5: What are the effects of SL on community partners’ OE?

3.1.5 Civic Responsibility

Civic responsibility can be defined as an “active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good” (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2006, p. 16). SL represents one of the ways to engage with communities and integrate civic engagement within experiential education into the academic framework (Strand et al., 2003).

Literature explored the role of civic engagement in increasing personal and social responsibility (Boyd & Brackmann, 2012), the role of schools, neighbourhoods, and communities in eliciting civic responsibility, and the impact of SL on personal and social development (Conway et al., 2009; Hayward & Li, 2017). By promoting civic awareness and responsibility, SL should leverage students’ cultural and civic identities within their academic curriculum, integrated with their civic competencies (Huda et al., 2017). Therefore, the sixth research question is proposed:

RQ6: To what extent do community partners perceive that SL can promote civic responsibility among university students?

3.1.6 Aims

This paper aims to contribute to the academic field by focusing on community partners' perspectives on higher education in three European countries – Italy, Spain, and Slovakia. Intending to contribute to the academic discussion and a better understanding of the specific aspects of community partner's service-learning experiences, in this paper, we explore the role of reciprocity, how it is oriented and how it relates to the perceived impact of SL on the community partners' organisations, their motivations to join SL, the organisational empowerment that SL can underpin. Finally, we consider the space allowed to promote a sense of civic responsibility within the experience.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Instruments and Procedure

To conduct this research, the paper's first author submitted a research proposal to the members of the European Associations of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE, www.eoslhe.eu). EASLHE members from three countries decided to join the research. The methodology, instruments, and themes were shared and agreed upon during the first meeting. A first draft of the interview guidelines and the inclusion criteria was provided and subsequently discussed with the research team. One question was revised, and another was added to the original guidelines.

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews aimed to investigate site supervisors' perceived impact of SL on their organisations; their motivations to join SL; the organisational empowerment that SL can underpin; the perceived value of reciprocity; and the possibility of promoting a sense of civic responsibility within the experience. Interviewers followed the interview guide in a flexible manner, allowing participants to introduce additional themes and considerations or dedicate more time to specific topics when perceived as relevant to the research questions. Thus, interviewers adapted the interview protocol to consider the responses' variability and try to embrace diverging perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of service-learning perception among community partners.

Ethical clearance for the research was obtained by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bologna [Prot. n. 0113558, 10/05/2021]. Interviews were conducted with the community partners in May 2021. A general call to community partners collaborating with the HEIs was made in the four contexts, inviting participants via e-mails and phone calls to be interviewed about their service-learning experiences. Inclusion criteria were (1) being part of SL experiences as site supervisors (i.e., community partners who work in community services or organisations) and (2) being part of the SL experience for at least one academic semester. Twelve participants answered the call and decided to join the study. Due to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted with the help of technological devices (i.e., phone, zoom call, google meet) and lasted approximately one hour.

3.2.2 National Contexts

We provide brief descriptions of the national contexts from which our study participants were recruited.

Italy

The first builds on the academic experience of SL at the University of Bologna, a big public university that started SL in 2015. In late 2016 a pilot experience was implemented, developing a SL lab for 30 Clinical Psychology master's students. Since that time, SL has continued to grow. To support the growth of SL experiences, the Department of Psychology established partnerships with several local social services in two different Campus branches. The scope of the partnerships grew from one local partner and six SL projects (for one academic module) to 23 local partners and 24 SL projects (for three academic modules) in six years, involving approximately 80 students every year.

The second builds on the commitment to service-learning of LUMSA University. This Catholic-oriented private university formally started SL in 2014 with the establishment of the Postgraduate School "Educare all'Incontro e alla Solidarietà" (EIS: Educating to Encounter and Solidarity). The School, whose academic board comprises Italian and international members (Europe, Africa, Asia, America, and Australia), includes four areas of activity: training, research, publications, and networks. The first important activity of training is spreading SL within University. Almost 100 students undertake SL projects every year. We collaborate with the Italian Ministry of Education and many foundations and associations of the Third Sector (Italian Red Cross, Scholas Occurrentes, and Caritas, among others).

Spain

Service-learning started at the School of Teacher Training of the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM) in 2008. On their initiative, a group of professors in various subjects decided to use SL in their teaching with the support of the Teaching Innovation Program. Since then, more than thirty SL projects have been carried out in teacher training. The service-learning projects focus on social justice, mutual trust, and tolerance without discrimination.

These professors promoted this methodology in other areas within the university and trained teachers from all Schools. Over thirteen years, 2,248 students participated in more than sixty projects, collaborating with 148 community entities. UAM is currently creating a SL Office with the support of an agreement with the SL Office of the Madrid city hall. UAM has actively promoted SL in higher education in Spain and Europe.

Slovakia

At Matej Bel University (MBU), service-learning has been applied since the 2005/2006 academic year, and qualitative and quantitative development has been achieved since 2013. More than 40 teachers from MBU were educated about SL, and currently, SL is implemented in different departments and several study programs in compulsory and optional courses. The university's rector officially confirmed SL as a way for the university to meet its third mission in several strategic documents in 2017 and again in 2021. The university has long-term partnerships with more than 30 collaborators – schools, municipalities, and regional non-profit organisations. MBU is also conducting research, implementing national and international projects focused on SL and grants, and publishing at home and abroad. MBU is also a partner of the Central and Eastern European Service-Learning Network.

3.2.3 Participants

The participants were 12 site supervisors involved as community partners from different local community organisations across Europe (i.e., Italy, n=5; Slovakia, n=4; Spain, n=3). The majority were cisgender women (n=9, 75%), and the rest were cisgender men (n=3, 25%). Age ranged between 37 and 60 years (Mage=48.6; SD=8.5). The focus of site supervisors' organisations was on education (33.3%); fragile adults (i.e., elders, people with disabilities, oncological patients; 25%); underserved communities (16.7%); community issues (e.g., rural development; 16.7%); and young children and families (8.3%). Participants' roles within the organisations were distributed as follows: 33% coordinators, 25% practitioners, 25% directors, and 17% school principals. Most site supervisors had at least three years of SL experience (n=7, 58.3%), and 41.7% had four or more years of SL experience.

3.2.4 Analysis

Interviews were recorded with participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim to allow for analysis. Following a deductive approach, qualitative data were encoded for thematic analysis using a template approach, as Crabtree and Miller (1999) outlined. This process required applying codes from a codebook to organise the corpus for subsequent in-depth analysis and interpretation. The codebook is sometimes based on a preliminary scanning of the text (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006); however, for this study, the template was generated a priori, following the research questions. Seven main themes were outlined for the coding manual: effects of SL on community partners; motivations; empowerment; reciprocity; effect of continuity of the partnership; co-educational role; and civic responsibility.

Two co-authors read the transcriptions of the interviews independently, testing the applicability of the predefined codes to the raw text. A comparison of the results showed no need for recoding. Upon completing the categorising of the transcribed interviews, the results were outlined. Given the numerosity of the sample, the themes were not quantified, privileging a representativity approach, meaning that when references to the themes emerged, each perspective was valued even when endorsed by a small number of participants.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Reciprocity

Participants reported many aspects linked to the reciprocity dimension and its exchange, influence, and generative orientations (see Dostilio et al., 2012). For some participants, SL represented an exchange of ideas and competencies rooted in the “give and take” framework of the experience, coherently with the Dostilio et al. (2012) idea of reciprocity as mutuality:

I think that it is about give and take. I try to structure situations in which students can deploy their competencies, and I receive their feedback and thoughts. (IT3_W)

Moreover, students’ involvement and engagement are also an exchange of experience in turn to human resources:

While students understand how learning works in practice, we expand our capacity at a minimal cost, having the opportunity to involve young people in civil society activities and recruit new volunteers. (SL4_W)

Participants also highlighted the value of the work that students accomplish during the service activities and how it influences and orients their further steps as local community organisations:

We also explained to the students that their service is not just something formal for us, a box that we just tick off at the end of the experience. It will be a living product that we continue to work with, so it is important that they do it well. (SL4_W)

Mutuality moves toward influence in the sense that there is recognition that SL does not end with students’ experience but affects ongoing and future practices. Interviewees pointed out different orientations of reciprocity that we could classify, according to Dostilio et al. (2012), as a mature form of influence, since its strong connection to the role of the experience in sustaining and adding new knowledge and interaction that can potentially prime change within the organisations:

I have received much knowledge and new ideas. University has brought creativity and youth. I feel very grateful and satisfied with the project. (SP2_W)

Other interviewees refer explicitly to the generative capacity of the partnership. Interestingly, the partnership is initially framed as mutually complementing each other, focusing on the level of practice. On the contrary, when framed in generative terms, it focuses on values that are superordinate to practice and guide people’s behaviour beyond the specific situation.

I think that partnership is the key. The different actors complement one another in many different ways. The interaction between these realities generates values. (IT4_W)

Furthermore, participants were asked to share their perspectives on what the university gains from the partnership.

The first aspect is linked to the idea that SL offers a way for Higher Institutions to link the practical community experience within the academic curriculum:

University gained an opportunity for students to combine the professional knowledge of their courses with practical experience. (SL3_W)

Another aspect is related to the didactic innovation derived from SL's experiential learning.

University gains a reciprocal exchange. It is a way to offer students both academic and personal knowledge and training. I think this represents an added value and a way to innovate the didactic. (IT4_W)

SL is also seen as a means to make the university more aware of -and connected with- the local territory where it is placed and the challenges that the territories have to deal with:

University and school are far from one another. SL brings us together. It contributes greatly to making students aware of different situations and realities. It brings the university to the community. (SP1_M)

Lastly, participants identified SL as a possible answer to the third mission of the university, being a way to bring together scholars and civil society:

The partnership provides an opportunity to support the university's third mission since it opens up the possibility of getting involved in the development of civil society. (SL1_M)

The reflection on the third mission calls into question the possibility of generativity, and the three examples seem to refer to the three declinations of reciprocity in the third mission: the university gains (spaces for professional experience); the university innovates practices and opens durable spaces for new contents and new relationships; the university enters the community through a new way of thinking about collaboration with the territory. Community partners showed to be sensitive to the HEI's different approach, far from one-way collaboration, co-creating new spaces for community partners' recognition, contribution, and transformational role within academia.

3.3.2 Effects of SL on Community Partners

Participants' perceptions of the effects of SL are twofold, effects on users and the organisation. Among the effects on users, community partners report a reduction of perceived discrimination, the possibility of having students as positive role models for users, empowering users, and more effective and diverse activities to offer. Students of the SL programs are usually trained to engage with diversity, and this helps them to adopt non-judgmental attitudes; this could be a positive outcome per se, but it becomes even more so when practitioners observe the effects on users, in the sense of a greater willingness to disclose themselves.

Students started an interaction with our homeless users without being judgmental. In turn, users, feeling not judged, disclosed themselves trusting students within a mutual and positive approach. (IT2_M)

When SL students and users share a similar (cultural) background, SL students can reasonably appear as those who have succeeded and have found a positive way of affirming their cultural identity, having an active role at the university, and being recognised as a resource.

Children are happy when someone is interested in them. The last SL student was Roma, and she was not ashamed of it. She knew how to build her own identity, so she represented an example for others, which was good for our users. (SL1_M)

The importance of having an active role, and having meaningful experiences, is a relevant part of SL not only for SL students (as most literature claims) but also for the users, as the two following quotes evidence.

Thanks to the students, the users of our social services had the opportunity to spend their free time meaningfully. It was all about mutual connection and cooperation. (SL2_W);

SL students helped school children, shifting from scholastic failure to success in the classroom. The children are empowered so much by having the opportunity to have an active role and participate. (SP1_M)

These quotes, particularly the last one, show that some form of generative reciprocity involves community members (e.g., the users), who gain agentic roles and spaces for participation, negotiating power differently through concrete actions.

Effects on the organisation include extremely pragmatic ones, like having the chance to count on additional human resources and having additional help in providing services.

SL saved us time and money. We reached more people. (SL4_W)

Other effects are less pragmatic and are related to innovation: integrating new tools to reach underserved users and learning new methodologies are recognised as helpful for dealing with unexpected challenges (e.g., the pandemic).

It has provided us with human capital and new methodologies for the work in our organisation. (SP3_W);

Thanks to one of the SL students during the pandemic, we created a social media account to reach users that we used to meet in the streets during our outreach activities. (IT2_M)

Institutional recognition of the accomplished work is anything but commonplace:

Users benefitted largely from the SL students' work. Many of the municipalities have remarked on it openly. (SP2_W)

3.3.3 Motivations

Participants reported very heterogeneous motivations to join SL. Nevertheless, they can be divided into three groups that are not mutually exclusive: relational, intrinsic, and extrinsic.

Relational motivations are connected to a “word of mouth” dimension, where community partners were suggested by colleagues and collaborators, described as trustworthy and well-informed about the organisation’s mission:

I trusted the person that suggested it to us. He knows our organisation and our mission very well. I did not know SL back then, but, trusting him, I decided to join. (IT1_W)

Extrinsic motivations were generally flashier and more quantifiable, mainly referring to the perception that SL can advance, facilitate, and implement the work of practitioners within organisations. Some participants reported how SL represents a way to have an external and fresh outlook from the students and the impact it has on their work:

It is a way to receive feedback from competent people (personal and professional competencies). Their observations help me to balance the activities. (IT4_W)

Another extrinsic motivation is linked to the possibility of having supplementary human resources to provide different and additional activities to the users:

We had insufficient human resources, and we wanted to do more. So, it is very convenient for us to turn to the university. (SL4_W)

Intrinsic motivations were less quantifiable and belonged to a more professional dimension of growth and “challenge” themselves as practitioners,

If something is innovative, it is a challenge for us. (SL2_W)

And also, in the professional learning dimension,

We wanted to learn new things. I believe that SL can be a very revolutionary way of generating new social innovation programs in a short time. It promotes fascinating ecosystems. (SP3_W)

Some participants reported other motivations to join the experience, such as curiosity for the SL approach and the opportunity of helping students to link theory to practice,

Curiosity was the very first motivation that pushed me to join SL initiatives. (IT2_M);

We wanted to help them to link practice to theory. (SL1_M)

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations fit exchange-oriented and influence-oriented reciprocity. On the other hand, relational motivation emphasises the importance of networks for expanding SL, and it shows that trust scaffolds the partnership.

3.3.4 Empowerment

References to intra- and inter-organisational empowerment have been reported throughout the interviews. On the intra-organisational empowerment, participants expressed how the presence of university students pushed the organisation to define its objectives more consistently by creating specific guidelines or presenting to students the project's mission.

Involvement in SL forced us to work on the clarity of what we do, to come out of the usual definitions and formulate the mission of the organisation and the meaning of our activities. (SL4_W)

The need to present themselves to students seems to push organisations to reflect on their practices and mission. This need seems to be linked to the fact that students in the SL project, although within a training process, are perceived as qualified interlocutors that "deserve" more preparedness, with positive spillover effects on users.

Because of SL, we decided to define some guidelines for the site supervisors. The good thing about these guidelines is that they were shared with all the personnel of the NGO, from the partitioners to the technical staff. After realising the guidelines, we noticed that everyone was more prepared and inclusive in welcoming users. (IT5_W)

For a participant, having SL students represented a way to have extra space to realise new projects for her organisation:

It feels like having an extra room in the house, an extra space where you can continue to live, flourish, and project new things. (IT1_W)

On the inter-organisational empowerment, participants reported the possibility of opening their organisation to new collaborations in different fields and with different organisational realities:

Service-learning has brought us a wide range of opportunities for new collaborations. We have identified new areas for project development and established new collaboration networks. (SP2_W);

SL gave us the possibility to know and connect with realities and organisations that I did not use to know before. (IT2_M)

Participants' voices presented SL as an empowering experience. They combined outer stimuli offered by the partnership and the students' collaboration and perspective with inner assets, seizing and valuing the opportunities to engage in self-reflective practices or do networking with other organisations, as reported in the last quote.

3.3.5 Effect of Continuity of the Partnership

Building on the idea that being involved in a long-term SL partnership affects how community partners perceive and think about the activities, a category on the effect of continuity of the partnership has been defined. References to this category refer to how SL has changed over the years without becoming “less attractive”, despite the efforts that it requires to be implemented and designed:

SL connected the university and the community realities without economic gain. On the contrary, it brought an additional workload to supervising students. Despite this, more and more organisations and local realities have decided to join the experience over the years. I think it depends on the fact that SL is interesting and the trustworthiness of the partnership that flourished over time. (IT2_M)

Another reported that the effect of continuity is related to motivation. Being part of the partnership influences and deepens the community partners' motivations to keep joining SL, such as having a role in the co-education of university students, valuing the students' outlook, and reinforcing the commitment to be part of projects that reinforce students' civic competencies. Interestingly, in the last quote, “flourishing” offers an implicit connection between generativity and continuity.

3.3.6 Co-educational Role

Participants were asked to reflect on their co-educational role as site supervisors. All participants perceived themselves as co-educator and facilitators of specific knowledge and experiences.

We had a co-educational role, especially for those more informal competencies and not strictly related to the professional or academic ones. (IT5_W)

As site supervisors, participants proposed to students some theoretical and professional knowledge as “seeds” to be grown, facilitating their knowledge of the organisational reality. Participants facilitated the acquirement and deployment of transversal competencies to connect with a reality that sometimes turns out to be not as far as imagined and sometimes different from the realities students are used to living in.

It felt like planting a small seed. Maybe not every seed will grow in the future. Anyway, I wanted them to remember the relevance of the suspended judgment, which is a fundamental requirement for both human and professional relationships. (IT2_M);

I accompanied the students throughout the SL project as a guide. The students were afraid of meeting our service users at the beginning. I do not know; maybe it was something that they heard, perhaps details of how awful it is in the facility or which clients are bad or dangerous, but when they were here and when they saw things with their own eyes, they saw that nothing would happen to them here. Well, then, these obstacles completely disappeared. (SL3_W);

I have been a bridge between different realities, an intermediary for them to learn another way of life and its implications. (SP2_W)

In their accounts, participants used a variety of metaphors that evoke at least three facets of their role: (a) the farmer, who plants the seeds, connected to the dimension of care; (b) the guide, the one who trains skills, and who does so by putting themselves at stake in the first person; and c) the bridge, which connects different realities and allows students to "cross the borders" between the university and community reality, configuring themselves first and foremost as experts/knowledgeable of the community and organisational context.

3.3.7 Civic Responsibility

Participants' reflections on civic responsibility converge on the idea that the experience with the community has the power to change students. According to their perspective, being in relation with the users can sustain a sense of belonging.

The service promotes and requires this responsibility towards the children since the SL students and children build a strong bond. We can see how university students develop a sense of belonging to the school and the community. (SP1_M)

Moreover, SL requires students to take decisions; this practical experience of "power" brings the concrete understanding that every decision entails consequence, thus raising a sense of responsibility towards the individuals and the community.

Along with the experience, they had to make choices that implied an act of responsibility toward someone else. Being aware of the choices they make can raise their sense of responsibility. (IT2_M);

The experience with the users certainly strengthened their sense of responsibility towards the community. (SL3_W)

Another essential element contributing to civic responsibility is the opportunity to be recognised as an active agent who contributes to the community.

Children and teachers reward the students' commitment with their words and action. I think this feedback from the users makes them feel that what they do is valuable. (IT3_W)

Another aspect is related to the feeling of being part of a community that promotes civic responsibility. For participants, sharing their SL experience with colleagues makes them feel they belong to a greater community. This may happen while having a SL meeting with other community partners or while describing the experience with a colleague who is not involved in SL:

Talking with colleagues about SL and making them understand what it is and why university students will be involved makes me feel like a member of a community that promotes change. (IT5_W);

I felt like to be part of a greater community during the last meeting — all community partners and university staff were in the same room. The municipality assessor was there too. I feel very grateful to be part of SL, and I try to witness the power of this experience with other potential community partners whenever I can. (IT1_W)

3.4 Discussion

The findings of this study offer insights into the service-learning experience from the community partners' standpoint, offering the opportunity to hear an underrepresented voice in literature. The study aimed at exploring community partners' perspectives on different aspects of the SL experience; we explored the role of reciprocity, how it is oriented and connected with the perceived impact of SL on community partners' organisations, their motivations to join SL, and the organisational empowerment that SL can underpin. Finally, we analysed the possibility of promoting a sense of civic responsibility within the experience. We conducted and analysed semi-structured interviews with site supervisors involved as community partners from different organisations across Europe (i.e., Italy, Slovakia, and Spain).

Regarding the perceived effects of SL on the community partners' organisations, results show how the experience can positively impact the working routines and consent to more efficient and diverse services for answering the users' needs. This is reinforced by the fact that the users can directly benefit from the students' service, establishing positive relationships in a non-judgmental climate. These results align with previous findings in the literature, where the economic, social, and material benefits (e.g., free consultations, human resources, new competencies) for the community partners are particularly stressed (Coleman & Danks, 2015; Jettner et al., 2017; Marshall et al., 2015). Additional effects of gaining new perspectives brought innovation, and general growth in the reputational capital are reported. On motivations, results highlighted how extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are usually intertwined, recurring within the same experience at different times. This, somehow, stresses the idea that there is no dichotomy. This distinction should not imply a polarisation of the two faces of the coin – where intrinsic motivations are good and extrinsic motivations are bad.

Nevertheless, differences can be found when considering the evolution of the reported motivations concerning the years spent within the SL partnership. We can see how motivations have become more complex and mature over the years – e.g., such as shifting from curiosity to desire to have a co-educator role. Findings confirm a part of the existing literature (Budhai, 2013; Compare, Pieri & Albanesi, 2022; Schlegler & Koch, 2020) and added new ones, such as the will to help students link theory to practice and the desire to learn new things from the interaction with university students.

Results also show how SL can underpin a process of organisational empowerment. Participants reported the possibility of making the organisation's objectives and mission more consistent while making employees more responsive in their interaction with the users – e.g., creating guidelines to have more inclusive and less judgmental ways of welcoming users. Moreover, the SL partnership enabled the reflection and design of new dedicated projects and the creation of new collaborations between different local actors that sometimes did not use to know each other. These processes were more likely to emerge in experiences where community partners demonstrated openness and commitment to reflect on the

inputs offered by the presence of students. Integrating different perspectives and questioning established procedures were shown to be essential conditions for the generative process.

These examples of intra- and inter-organisational empowerment experiences rely on the reciprocity orientation and the processes that sustain SL partnership and cannot be "credited" to the HEIs. We believe these processes can affect organisations' extra-organisational empowerment in the long run by influencing the local context with new projects and collaborations. These findings seem to provide a valuable lens for previous research reporting organisational effects of SL experiences, such as new collaborations and community cooperation (Cohen & Kinsey, 2004; Driscoll et al., 1996; Sujová, 2021), and consider them as potential organisational empowerment effects.

Reciprocity has been confirmed to be a foundational aspect of the experience. Results remark on the presence of the exchange, influence, and generative orientation as defined by Dostilio et al. (2012). Like extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, different orientations of reciprocity are usually reported by the same participant within the interviews. This suggests that there can be different ways of looking at reciprocity, and it does not necessarily represent how well community partners have understood and embraced the experience. The extent to which community partners understand service-learning is not directly connected to the focus on reciprocity. Thus, an exchange orientation is not necessarily associated with a poor understanding, while a generative orientation is not necessarily associated with a higher understanding of the experience.

Nevertheless, the generative orientation of reciprocity requires time to bloom and be perceived by community partners. Indeed, quotes reporting generative reciprocity are limited and do not account for some of the processes that, according to Dostilio et al. (2012), should occur to claim generative reciprocity (e.g., active and intentional consideration of power, privilege, and oppression and transformation of individuals' positionality). Mitchell (2008) would refer to this as critical SL, contrasting it with traditional SL. Based on our results, the distinction between critical and traditional SL could be more nuanced, particularly from the perspective of community partners. SL can be critical from its start (e.g., addressing structural inequalities as a learning outcome), but it may also evolve critically as an effect of reciprocal partnership dynamics that mature over time through recursive reflections involving different actors.

As suggested by Petri (2015), reciprocity and continuity are intertwined. And not only reciprocity seems to have a role in the effect of the continuity of the partnership. It can also happen the other way around. Knowing that the relationship is rooted in a reciprocal dynamic, community partners feel more motivated to join the experience again over the years. This continuity unlocks further understanding of SL, the reciprocity, and the effects of the presence of university students and matures and reinforces their role as site supervisors.

Strictly related to reciprocity and continuity, the co-educational role arose from the interviews. The three metaphors of co-education dialogue well with the three orientations of reciprocity: the exchange orientation require – at the minimum – the

caring attitude of the planter, preparing the terrain for "some future" influence. Then, the support of a guide is needed to navigate unknown contexts, acknowledging positionality to see different perspectives, which is part of what influence-oriented reciprocity is. Lastly, the bridge modifies landscapes and, stitching realities together, new spaces for generativity emerge.

Findings suggest that community partners are interested in facilitating students' knowledge (both professional and personal) and perceive this role as relevant in their relationships with students. Interestingly, shared insights on the co-educational role are not context-related (i.e., it is reported by participants from different countries and services), stressing the possibility of considering this perspective as part of the SL experience. This finding confirms and adds to previous research that pointed out how community partners perceived themselves as educators who cooperate with higher education institutions to help students and beneficiaries simultaneously (Petri, 2015).

Strand et al. (2003) suggest that service-learning is a way to integrate civic engagement within experiential education. Results confirm this, emphasising the role of the experience and the student's interaction with the community to strengthen their sense of civic responsibility (cf. Boyd & Brackmann, 2012; Hayward & Li, 2017; Huda et al., 2018). Moreover, community partners' quotations present being part of the SL partnership as a way to elicit a sense of belonging to a community that promotes civic responsibility among university students. Participants posit how SL experiences can reinforce their and students' sense of belonging. According to community psychology, Sense of Community means perceiving a similarity, acknowledging and pursuing positive interdependence with others, and, ultimately, belonging (Sarason, 1974). Building on the literature that proposes Sense of Community as a predictor of civic engagement (Albanesi et al., 2007; Cicognani et al., 2012; Talò et al., 2014), we suggest that SL experiences can sustain and promote higher levels of engagement by making participants feel they belong to a greater community.

3.5 Conclusion

Engaged and civic HEIs go beyond teaching, academic research, and knowledge. The Commission's Renewed Agenda (European Commission, 2017) emphasises that higher education must play its part in facing up to Europe's social and democratic challenges, integrating local, regional, and societal issues into curricula, involving the local community in teaching and research projects, providing adult learning and communicating, and building links with local communities.

This paper wanted to contribute to SL literature, adding a European perspective on this experiential education from the community partners' standpoint, scarcely reported by other studies (Sandy & Holland, 2006). The study involved twelve community partners in three European countries: Italy, Spain, and Slovakia. It showed no national patterns but resulted in a consistent picture of the processes that SL activates within community partner collaborations. Despite being suitable for sample saturation according to qualitative research guidelines (Braun & Clarke, 2013), we acknowledge that the sample size is restricted. Nevertheless, this study

offered an adequate space for community partners to share their voices and perspectives on the SL experience. Moreover, we are aware that those who decided to participate might potentially have been the more committed site supervisors of the SL projects and perhaps those who mostly perceived positive outcomes from the partnership experience. Case studies and qualitative tools seem to be strongly suited to SL research with students (Donahue, 1999) and with community partners. Based on the results from the interviews, we can suggest twofold effects of SL for community partners: (1) effects on community members and (2) effects on the organisation. Our findings highlight how the service activities stimulate and unlock effects and benefits for the community (e.g., community members) but also for the organisations. The findings particularly remark on the organisational empowerment outcomes of SL partnership for the community partners. Empowerment seems to be an effective lens to read the change produced by engaging with local stakeholders and other organisations within SL experiences. The possibility of helping students link theory to practice while learning new things and renewing working practices guides the community partners' motivations to join the experience. Being bridges, farmers, and guides are ways to scaffold students' experiences in encountering the community and represent the co-educational role that community partners recognise. All these aspects flourish within the reciprocal dynamic that occurs in SL experiences. Our results provide empirical support to Dostilio's model and its reciprocity declinations. According to Woods et al. (2013), achieving horizontal solidarity between the university and the community, whereby there is not a giver and a receiver of a service but a mutual benefit for all actors involved, is one of the challenges of service-learning. We believe conducting studies with community partners can sustain efforts to establish horizontal solidarity by providing a dedicated space for reflection.

Finally, Sense of Community and sense of belonging for both students and community partners seem to be potential frameworks to understand and interpret the sense of responsibility and the engagement usually linked to SL experiences.

3.5.1 Implications for practice

One last contribution of this study concerns implications for practice to guide practitioners and instructors in developing university-community partnerships built around the value of reciprocity. The first element is respect for the knowledge community partners bring into academia. Acknowledging that, as instructors, we do not hold all the knowledge is an essential first step to balancing the power dynamics and considering community partners as peers in the education of students. Of course, universities and communities usually bring different tenets and perspectives that should be integrated. Being respectful can foster the co-educational role of community partners and have a spillover effect on their motivation to join and continue the partnership. Remarking community competence with students is fundamental to legitimate the educational role of community partners and to instil in students the awareness that multiple sources of knowledge and competence are required to become responsive professionals and citizens.

Another element is reflection, which does not only occur with students but also with community partners. Dedicated spaces for understanding the status of the

partnership are required and need to include the active participation of community partners. Conducting interviews might represent a strategy to approach community partners' perspectives systematically and analytically; other quantitative strategies can also serve the scope. Monitoring activities with students and reflexive field diaries can contain references to the status of the partnership. Thus, instructors should pay attention to collecting these clues during these activities.

One last element is taking care of relations. Valuing the relational aspects of the partnership can consolidate the continuity of the collaboration, elevate the quality of the projects, and foster the generation of new networks and activities due to the possibility for the community to rely on a trustworthy ally, the university. Taking care sometimes means lending over some of the power and letting the community leverage university resources to grow and reach empowerment.

3.6 References

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Chapter 4 - The Faculty Engaged Scholarship⁴

4.1 Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) always brought about social and technological innovation with and for societies through teaching and learning dynamics and research impacts (Predazzi, 2012). Scholars acknowledge the relevance of surrounding concrete contexts and their responsibility beyond teaching and researching by addressing society's potential needs and challenges, promoting connections with reciprocal benefits (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). Universities, and HEIs in general, embraced the designated "third mission," assuming the role of stakeholders in the co-construction of integrated solutions to social challenges (Knudsen et al., 2021). HEI's contribution to society requires the scholars' active commitment to transferring knowledge and promoting entrepreneurial, civic, and democratic competencies while sustaining innovation, social welfare, and human capital formation (Compagnucci et al., 2020).

Aligned with societal awareness, societies are mobilising to attain sustainable development goals (SDGs), aiming to educate socially responsive and civically engaged graduates, professionals, and citizens (United Nations, 2015). HEIs became core stakeholders by promoting the engagement of researchers and scholars in integrating the SDGs into all levels of research and educational agendas (Brandt et al., 2018).

The third mission and the SDGs sustain HEIs in pursuing an engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1996), and engaged scholarship extends faculty roles beyond knowledge production, becoming actors of change involved in creative intellectual activities with various stakeholders (Checkoway, 2013). In a recent scoping review, Beaulieu et al. (2018) identified the engaged scholarship foundational five principles and values: (1) providing a high-quality scholarship; (2) establishing university-community partnerships based on reciprocity; (3) adopting a problem-focused rather than an exclusively theory-driven perspective to identify community needs; (4) being willing to expand cross-disciplinary boundaries; and (5) pursue the democratisation of knowledge by decentralising its production.

Two core values emerged from the review: active citizenship and social justice. The first refers to the faculty's acknowledgement of social accountability and civic responsibility to engage with the broader society on issues of public relevance, integrating roles as experts with their roles as citizens. The latter refers to the importance of defending equity and civic democracy for social change by integrating vulnerable and marginalised populations into research and action (Beaulieu et al., 2018).

⁴ Compare, C., Rivero, C., Vargas-Moniz, M. J., & Albanesi, C. (under review). "I am not alone." The Engaged Scholarship of European Faculty Through Service-Learning Experiences. *Higher Education Research & Development*.

4.1.1 Service-Learning

Among engaged scholarship strategies, service-learning (SL) represents a way to address engaged service activities while offering engaged teaching and researching opportunities. SL is one of the methods that has evolved in HEIs to promote students' civic engagement and democratic and pluralistic values through a productive balance of service and learning (Jacoby, 2014). SL invites students to engage in experiences with the community, deploying academic and personal competencies responding to aims identified by the community. The service is integrated into the curriculum, and the content of the experience has relevance for HEIs and communities. The students' learning derives from the experience and, foremost, the reflection on the meaning of the activities (Bringle et al., 1996). Nevertheless, SL implies more than students' social development, impacting faculty and community partners and members (Compare et al., 2022; Jacoby, 2014). Respect for the community's knowledge and the reciprocity of the established university-community partnership are, together with relevance and reflection, the pillars (four Rs) of SL (Butin, 2003).

Reported SL impacts on students are: (a) personal outcomes - improvement of communication skills and critical thinking; (b) social outcomes - the ability to work in collaborative environments; (c) citizenship outcomes - civic engagement and social justice belief, attitudes, and critical understanding; (d) academic outcomes - ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts (Celio et al., 2011; Compare & Albanesi, 2022a, 2022b; Guarino et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2009; Salam et al., 2019).

Effects on community partners can be divided into (a) effects on community partner organisations, e.g., the possibility of having a co-educational role in students' training, additional resources, and the activation of organisational empowerment processes; and (b) effects on the university-community partnership, generating quality and sustainable interactions (Compare et al., 2022, *under review*; Salam et al., 2019).

4.1.2 Faculty and Service-Learning

Scholars have been reflecting since the 60's on the potential of SL in transforming societies, sharing experiences, and providing frameworks of reference for action (Stanton et al., 1999). Despite this focus on self-reflection, included in many publications, a scarcity of empirical studies persists on SL projects as enablers of faculty and scholars (Darby et al., 2022). Existing research indicates that SL increases faculty engagement in teaching and responsible citizenship strengthens connections with colleagues and students, provides opportunities to connect knowledge to practice, increases faculty engagement in scholarship and leadership, and renews opportunities for research advancement and professional recognition (Jacoby, 2014; Sandberg, 2018). Awareness of student outcomes, improving student learning and development, and the possibility of cross-institutional networks are identified motivations to implement SL experiences (Cooper, 2014; Hou et al., 2015). Moreover, a sense of accomplishment, inspiration, personal growth, satisfaction, and an improved relationship with students and the community foster faculty commitment to SL (King et al., 2019).

SL is not without challenges; increased workload and time commitment due to the supervision and implementation of SL courses, limited institutional support and training, and limited formal recognition in promotion and tenure (Darby et al., 2022; Sandberg, 2018). HEIs' recognition of the added value of SL programs is vital for sustaining faculty commitment and motivation (Darby et al., 2022).

4.1.3 The Service-Learning Institutionalization

SL within HEIs require some form of institutionalisation to facilitate the legitimisation and the accreditation of SL practices as a valuable element for HEIs' civic engagement (Jacoby, 2014). Critical voices remark on how HEIs should remain sites of knowledge production rather than becoming sites of the definition of an ideal moral for civic betterment (Kezar et al., 2001). These critical voices are essential in reframing how SL is considered, helping to shift the question from if SL should be institutionalised to how and what it brings to SL. Indeed, the lack of institutional support can deter faculty convinced of SL's benefits from implementing it (Butin 2010). This debate reinforces the misalignment of faculty values and beliefs with the perceived institutional mission and principles, increasing the likelihood that the faculty's attempts towards innovations in support of the third mission, such as SL, will contract and fail in the long run (Borkosky & Prosse, 2019).

Conversely, thanks to institutionalisation, faculty can leverage roles, create peer networks, counteract marginalisation, reclaim agency, and reassert their professionalism and value to students, communities, and the institution through the pathway of SL expertise (Matthews et al., 2018).

4.1.4 The European Service-Learning Network: A Space for Community

Unlike other international contexts, such as the North American context, where SL has been promoted since the 60s, or in the Southern American context, where SL has been adopted for decades, SL in Europe emerged in the 21st century (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019). The European institutionalisation process has progressed in many countries, with the creation of the European SL observatory (EOSLHE) in 2017 and the association (EASLHE) in 2019. The European network stimulated the generation of National networks in many countries (Ribeiro et al., 2021) and fostered a sense of shared interconnectedness among European scholars (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019). Indeed, an international network of SL generates a sense of community, providing a space to share values and meaning-making. This is especially relevant for those who feel more isolated and with scarce recognition by their institutions and colleagues regarding gains through SL (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019). The sense of community encompasses a sense of belonging, identification with the group, interdependence, or mutual commitment, as happens within the SL programs with faculty and community partners (cf. Compare et al., 2022, *under review*).

According to the community experience framework (Boyd et al., 2017), members can perceive their experience in the community according to two independent yet related dimensions: resource and responsibility. The first implies community as a critical condition for meeting members' essential psychological needs (Sense of Community, SOC; McMillan et al., 1986). The latter relies on a feeling of personal

responsibility for protecting or enhancing the individual and collective well-being of a community of people not related to an expectation of personal gain (Sense of Community Responsibility, SOC-R; Nowell et al., 2010). Studies on SOC and SOC-R emphasised the role of community experiences in employees' engagement and well-being, civic and political participation, and prosocial behaviours (cf. Compare et al., 2021; Boyd et al., 2020).

4.1.5 Aims

Published studies are exclusively conducted in American and Asian contexts, with a lack of studies considering European contexts. This study aims to investigate the European faculty perspective on SL, exploring perceptions of the impact of the SL methodology, the extent to which SL can sustain faculty (and HEIs) in pursuing an engaged scholarship, and the role of the sense of community in sustaining faculty engagement. Three research questions are posited:

- RQ1.** What are the perceived impacts of SL according to faculty?
- RQ2.** Do faculty perceive SL as a means to pursue engaged scholarship?
- RQ3.** What is the role of the community experience (SOC and SOC-R) in SL?

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Instruments and Procedure

A draft of the interview guide was built and discussed with a SL expert (i.e., the director of an American SL department with more than 20 years of experience). Upon agreement, the first author shared it with the other collaborators.

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate scholars' perceived impact of SL on their HEIs, motivations for SL, and community experiences. Ethical clearance for the research was obtained by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bologna [Prot. N. 0284759 05/11/2021]. Interviews were conducted from May 2022 to July 2022. Participants were recruited through an open call disseminated through the EASLHE (www.easlhe.eu) associates' mailing list. Hence, fourteen participants were enrolled. Eight additional participants were recruited through participants' and authors' contacts to reach data saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Inclusion criteria were (1) being involved in SL experiences as instructors or academic supervisors (i.e., being faculty or a scholar), (2) having offered SL courses in the last academic year, or (3) being involved in SL activities for at least three academic years. Due to the physical distance, most interviews (i.e., 82%, n=18) were conducted through technological platforms, and four were conducted face-to-face. Interviews (approximately 45 minutes) were conducted in Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and English. Two co-authors conducted most of the interviews (n=16), while two collaborators conducted the rest. Collaborators received the first author's training on the interview guide.

4.2.2 Participants

The participants were 22 scholars employed in 18 different higher education institutions across Europe (i.e., Austria, n=1; Belgium, n=2; Croatia, n=1; Finland, n=1; Germany, n=2; Ireland, n=2; Italy, n=2; Lithuania, n=1; Portugal, n=2; Romania, n=1; Slovakia, n=1; Spain, n=4; The Netherlands, n=1; UK, n=1). The majority were cisgender women (n=15, 68.2%), and the rest were cisgender men (n=7, 31.8%). Age ranged between 37 and 68 years (Mean=50.5; SD=7). Participants' main academic field was applied science (e.g., business, physics, education, engineering, dentistry; n=9, 40.9%), social science (e.g., community psychology, social work; n=6, 27.3%), humanities (e.g., arts, history, theology; n=4, 18.2%), and natural science (i.e., zoology; n=1, 4.5%). Two participants (9.1%) did not belong to a specific academic field, having a multidisciplinary approach. HEIs were public (81.8%, n=18) or private catholic institutions (18.2%, n=4). Scholars' positions were distributed as follows: full/associate professor (n=13, 59.1%), assistant professor (n=3, 13.6%), researcher (n=5, 22.7%), and educational consultant (n=1, 4.5%). Participants' mean experience with SL was around eight years (SD=5.2). Half scholars had four to ten years of experience (50%, n=11), 27.3% had three years or less (n=6), and 22.7% had more than ten years (n=5).

4.2.3 Analysis

Consent for interviews' recording and transcription verbatim was collected. Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish interviews were translated into English to allow all authors to access the content of the data. The two co-authors that conducted the analysis were familiar with all languages and used the English translation to disambiguate the meaning of the excerpts when needed.

A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding was used to develop the themes of the thematic analysis (Fereday et al., 2006), incorporating the data-driven inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998) and the deductive a priori template of codes approach outlined by Crabtree & Miller (1999). This approach incorporated social phenomenology tenets into the deductive thematic analysis process, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data using inductive coding. The inductive coding process entailed recognising and encoding excerpts prior to interpretation and subsequently identifying and developing themes, following an iterative and reflexive process (Boyatzis, 1998). A codebook derived from the interview guide and the theoretical framework were redacted. The codebook contained the codes with which text was organised for in-depth interpretation (Crabtree et al., 1999).

The corpus of the interviews was entered into the QSR NVivo 10 data management software, and a comprehensive process of data coding and identifying themes was carried out. Five main themes were outlined, two inductive and three deductive. Inductive themes: (1) institutionalisation, which includes references to its presence or absence within participants' HEIs; (2) engaged scholarship, which refers to the commitment to change contexts and practices. Deductive themes: (3) sense of community, connected to the participants' community experience at the institutional and territorial levels; (4) motivations, scholars' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to join and promote SL experiences; and (5) transformative impact, related to the perceived SL impact on four actors: the community, students, teachers, and HEIs.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Institutionalisation

Participants identified different levels of SL institutionalisations in their HEIs as relevant actions for SL development and sustainability. In some HEIs, SL is a well-established experience proposed by specific faculties or ad hoc centres that offer SL as a multidisciplinary course.

This process of institutionalisation is made possible by the bottom-up efforts of individual movements and by the institutional sustainment of rectors and vice-rectors.

The vice-rector of education is a big fan of SL, and she wanted to create this space for SL in a specific centre because she thought it was important not to be connected to only one faculty. (BE_1)

Over time, SL experiences could be upscaled thanks to the SL inclusion in institutional strategic documents and recognition as a practice to fulfil the third mission. International recognition by the institutional system has been reported to be influential in fostering SL within HEIs.

Last week [May 2022], I was at the UNESCO World Conference of Higher Education in Barcelona. Some of the official UNESCO papers and some presentations were on SL. The traditional system is starting to recognise SL, which is powerful. (DE_1)

Some HEIs established SL departments in Germany, while for other countries, like Italy and Finland, the process of institutionalisation is at an early stage, even though many HEIs recognise SL as a valuable experience.

Participants also identified challenges related to the lack of formal and stable recognition ensuring the SL maintenance and funding over time. When institutional resources are scarce, SL is left for the efforts and commitment of single academics. Hence, some professors are reluctant to engage in SL for its complexity and additional responsibility toward the community. The lack of resources and institutionalisation policies have a cascade effect on administrative processes in adapting the traditional courses or defining new insurance agreements.

If I were to send the students on placement, that would be an issue for the university regarding insurance. It should be essential because when I send someone, they need to be protected, you know? This is my duty of care. (IRE_2)

4.3.2 Engaged Scholarship

Participants expressed how SL can change contexts, HEIs, and students' future and represent a commitment to an engaged scholarly profile aligned with the third mission. To participants' account, it is urgent to acknowledge that engagement is not *"out of the goodness of one's personality. It is a civic duty. Older generations believed that the State does stuff for us; these times are gone. We must undo this learning and remind people that it is up to you, as a community member"* (IRE_2).

To do this, the curricula content needs to change and embrace new learning, like the civic competencies, that can prepare and train students to take responsibility, become agents of change, and become "*compassionate leaders that can transform the world*" (ES_3). Students can transfer knowledge to the community through this practice and foster change. In the meantime, HEIs can better understand society and answer and reflect on its actual needs. Thus, society can be transformed by the university-community partnership in contexts that are open to change.

We sent this message to the community of being open and ready to collaborate, participate, and co-create with them. (HR_1)

Participants reported how SL could change communities over time, building a culture of ownership among students who decide to implement new services (e.g., a community oral health service) and staying connected to the HEIs after graduation as practitioners and site supervisors of the SL experiences.

4.3.3 Sense of Community

Participants reported an interconnection to SL's professional national, European, and international networks, presented as "*a family you can share your ideas and values with. You have your city, your Nation, then Europe, and the rest of the world*" (AU_1). This connection helps participants feel pride in being part of a movement within HEIs that promotes social change and feel recognised as a community that is rewarded and celebrated.

It makes me proud that my university is committed to SL and that I am participating and belonging to this movement. (ES_3)

Participants feel like members and leaders of this scholars' community, which make them feel "*not alone and empowered to share with other teachers around the world the will to do more than just teaching*" (RO_1). In some cases, no National SL networks existed. Thus, participants had to connect with the US, Latin American, and other EU realities. Understanding the community dimension's relevance pushed one participant to generate a new National SL network.

I was invited to the European Association for SL, and I suddenly felt like I was part of something in Europe...then, I met some people from the UK, and we created a little network here. From that point on, I have felt part of a community. (UK_1)

Besides the scholars' community, SL fostered participants' responsibility for their local communities and deepened their awareness of social dynamics.

SL made me feel more like a community member, engaged in wanting to do something more. I now see people with disabilities, the elderly, and homeless people with different eyes. [...] We must be more aware of our civic responsibility and many stereotypes and prejudices. (ES_1)

4.3.4 Motivation

Participants mainly reported intrinsic motivations, with some exceptions of extrinsic contextual motivations connected to having been approached by international projects or organisations (CLAYSS and the Europe Engage Erasmus+ project's consortium) or commissioned by their HEIs. Among intrinsic motivations, consistency with personal values and academic disciplines was reported. SL outreach activities have been connected to community oral health, while its attention to empowerment and critical thinking to the feminist approach. Moreover, empathy development and social justice orientation were linked to the educational and community psychology fields.

When you teach community psychology, you cannot ignore value, social justice, and the importance of working with the community. SL felt very coherent with this. (ITA_2)

Other motivations are related to the willingness to engage with the local communities in urban and rural settings. Participants reported how the partnerships with the community and the work and research on real-world needs are helpful *"to demonstrate to the wider society that the university can make a significant contribution"* (UK_1).

Another relevant motivation is translating academic competencies into civic competencies, training students to be good future professionals and active and aware citizens, embracing community partners' co-educational role.

SL is a way for students to learn valuable things. I cannot teach these things, but the community can. (LT_1)

4.3.5 Transformative impact

Participants defined different levels of impact on different actors. Therefore, this theme is composed of the (a) community level, (b) student level, (c) teacher level, and (d) HEI level.

(a) *Transformative Impact – Community Level*

Hosting students is a way for community organisations to have additional resources to implement activities, receive innovative ideas to design new services and get the chance to define community needs while students are deploying their professional and personal competencies. This exchange with the students motivates community partners to take an educational role in the students' training. The partnership with the university supports community organisations' reputational capital growth, becoming more active on social media and accessing research funds to address community needs. Moreover, SL is a way to *"empower community groups to take control of the research agenda"* (IRE_1), recognise community needs, and transfer academic knowledge through experience. This new knowledge can help partners to change their self-representation as organisations.

For a volunteer organisation, having a database of the members' list can change its representation as an organisation. More structured and organised using students' proposed tools and practices that are adopted and internalised. (ITA_1)

SL also directly impacts the users of the community organisation and NGOs. Through the activities, students can answer users' relational needs and *"improve their quality of life"* (PT_1).

We got 1000 names on the blood cancer register by doing this publicity campaign project. Somebody was found to be a stem cell match, so somebody survived leukaemia through the stem cells of a student. (UK_1)

Participants also remarked that to pursue positive and transformative impacts, community partners need to *"define their challenge in a very clear way and be committed to the SL project as well, having someone responsible for it. When we approach them, most community organisations are not used to doing this"* (DE_1).

(b) *Transformative Impact – Student Level*

SL impact on students was divided into four sections.

- 1 - *Personal competencies*, improved problem-solving, empathy, flexibility, critical thinking, and communication skills.
- 2 - *Social competencies*, teamwork, and positive attitudes towards the community.
- 3 - *Civic and democratic competencies*, significant increment of a sense of civic responsibility, reduced stereotypes about disadvantaged or underserved communities, active citizenship, understanding *"that technical problems are also social questions"* (BE_2), and *"learning about social justice, democracy, and social exclusion. SL is a new approach for them to become socially sensitive journalists, not just article writing machines"* (LT_1).
- 4 - *Academic competencies*, better ability to translate academic learning into practice, identify their professional passions, understand future roles as practitioners, change perspectives on learning and gain mastery over knowledge, and learn to self-evaluate their work.

Participants reported that through the engagement, students create new networks, learn to change contexts with their civic commitment, and *"feel empowered in helping solve real problems in the community"* (PT_1), realising that *"they do hold power within themselves to contribute"* (HR_1). In some experiences, students decide to remain in community contexts and develop their careers within community organisations or NGOs with long-term commitments.

Participants also highlighted that it could be challenging for students to process the experiences and *"want to move out of certain projects"*

because the topics were too hard for them to digest" (HR_1). Efforts should be constantly made to prevent experience pitfalls: e.g., students adopting stereotypical positioning.

We also see that SL may reinforce stereotypes and inequalities. I think that students also have stereotypes, and the experience does not introduce change. (BE_2)

(c) *Transformative Impact – Teacher Level*

Participants claimed that SL had an impact on their role as teachers and on how they teach. One of the impacts referred to the collaboration with colleagues.

Usually, you do your seminars and do not collaborate with your colleagues in teaching. In SL, you have bigger projects where different disciplines come together and collaborate. (DE_1)

SL also allows flexibility, freedom, or creativity in designing courses and activities. It helps to change perspective on the academic content, integrating civic learning, and on the students, *"paying more attention to diversity. Sometimes, as teachers, we only focus on learning objectives, leaving the human dimension of the teaching process behind"* (RO_1).

Through SL, teachers can improve their competence profile and a deeper understanding of society while providing a high-quality scholarship. SL also represented a space for faculty to feel competent, advance their careers, and gain visibility in HEI contexts.

SL made me visible in my HEI and promoted me a lot. I have become the department director, and now I am the director of my campus branch. This would not have been possible without SL since my HEI values community engagement and social responsibility activities like SL. (ES_1)

Finally, participants identified some challenges in introducing SL in their courses, like the lack of structural flexibility in adapting the traditional course to include SL and the fact that *"as a teacher, you cannot foresee what will happen. When you teach traditional courses, you know from the beginning what will happen. All parameters are controlled; students will feel emotionally and psychologically safe without uncertainty or anxiety. However, when you use SL, you have less control"* (LT_1).

(d) *Transformative Impact – HEI level*

According to participants' experience, SL impacts HEIs in four dimensions.

- 1 - *Utilitarian impact.* SL provides access to funds from established partnerships with the local communities and EU funds to hire researchers strengthening the HEIs' resources. Moreover, SL is a flagship, a showcase of the third mission, and generates networks with the students' potential employers.

- 2 - *Third mission fulfilment.* SL is recognised as a powerful experience to reflect better the engagement accomplished by the HEIs as a strategy to attain the university's third mission.
- 3 - *Institutional recognition.* Through SL, HEIs are recognised as international institutions, gaining higher visibility in their territory and growing their reputational capital as innovative institutions.

We received several awards for Teaching Innovation, one in sustainability and another for SL, because we have been included in one of the 100 best SL activities in the country. (ES_1)

- 4 - *Community recognition and engaged scholarship.* Participants believe that "HEIs cannot be detached from the community" (IRE_2). Through SL, HEIs establish positive connections with local stakeholders and become empowering institutions, activating and consolidating networks beyond SL projects.

My HEI is trying to build its identity and brand itself as an engaged university, and I think our community is getting the idea. People think writing an email asking us to join projects is customary. We want to be part of the community and do things with it, not for it. (HR_1)

4.4 Discussion

The paper aimed to understand the meaning of SL among European scholars and how SL contributes to shaping and sustaining engaged scholarship experiences. SL literature shows scarce attention to faculty experiences, especially in Europe, where no studies investigated scholars' perspectives. This gap was filled by bringing together the perspective of European academics who share a common interest in SL as a working methodology, heterogeneous in their backgrounds, years of SL experience, and country. Our results outline similarities and convergences between the European and worldwide perspectives regarding the meaning of SL, providing some specificities and proposing innovative contributions.

On the first research question (RQ1), findings reinforce the perception that SL impacts all involved actors: community, students, faculty, and HEIs. Impacts on the community resonate with findings of previous studies, such as receiving additional resources, renewed practices, and a co-educational role in the students' training (Compare et al., 2022; Salam et al., 2019). Our study added a transformative dimension to this impact, emphasising SL as an empowerment strategy for change in communities. Impacts on students also confirmed in the EU context results reported in the international literature on personal, social, civic, democratic, and academic competencies (Celio et al., 2011; Salam et al., 2019), adding specificities, such as identifying professional passions and gaining mastery over knowledge and learning processes through self-evaluation. Even for students, results add a transformative dimension to impact, identifying SL role in students' empowerment

and becoming agents of change for society (Sze-Yeung Lai & Chi-leung Hui, 2021). As for teachers, four types of transformative impact on academic life and capacity to deal with societal challenges were identified: (1) changing curricula (e.g., introducing civic competencies and emphasising metacognitive processes), (2) changing teaching methodologies, (3) changing roles in the educational process (e.g., introducing coeducation, agency for change, supporting empowerment), and (4) socially responsive and civically engaged education. Concerning the impact on HEIs, SL provides access to funds and connections with students' future employers, consolidating the HEIs' third mission and providing institutional and community recognitions as engaged scholarships.

For the RQ2, findings show that the engaged scholarship dimension also relates to faculty's motivation. Scholars are intrinsically motivated to join SL because of the changes it entails in the dynamics of knowledge construction and production (Knudsen et al., 2021). Alongside the motivations concerning teaching and learning practices, which resonate with previous studies in the North American context that present the desire to provide students with real-world and experiential learning opportunities as a salient intrinsic motivation (cf. Hou & Wilder, 2015), value motivations emerged. Brandt et al. (2018) claim that the third mission regards a renewed collaboration framework between different stakeholders (researchers, policymakers, and practitioners) that allows the integration of SDGs into the educational agenda. Participants overtly name this collaboration "coeducation" and recognise that students play a significant role in facilitating and making this change visible to community partners. The coeducational dimension of service-learning confirms other studies conducted with community partners in Europe (cf. Compare, Pieri & Albanesi, 2022; Compare et al., *under review*) and represent a rather new topic in the field (Darby, Cobb & Willingham, 2021). Our interviewees remark on the centrality of learnings in the renewal of educational projects oriented towards the third mission, acknowledging SL expanded HEIs course objectives incorporating civic and citizenship competencies, including cross-disciplinary critical reflection and substantive knowledge (Bringle et al., 1996).

Findings identify possibilities for pursuing high-quality scholarship focusing on the agentic role favouring students' ability to handle open-ended problems with innovation and metacognition. Metacognition and civic and democratic competencies represent a set of fundamental abilities in preparing students to engage with continuous and ever-changing societal challenges. Attention to metacognitive abilities and processes in SL will gain more space in future research on critical reflection, which is essential to social justice engagement (Rapa et al., 2020).

Results demonstrate the fit of SL, the attention to European HEI social responsibility, the connection with the SDGs for research and educational agendas, and the recognition of the third mission integrated into research and teaching activities. This alignment potentiates knowledge transfer, establishing local partnerships, and addressing real-world problems. Some interviewees corroborate these features, but others reinforce complexities such as the international ever-increasing academic pressure that makes scholars' engagement a challenge in a global scenario where

social justice endeavours are more needed.

Although European scholars agree with the claim that SL sustainability relies on its institutionalisation (Borkosky et al., 2019) and the third mission, findings reveal that SL institutionalisation is in early implementation efforts in Europe. The absence of institutionalisation contributes to reduced informal recognition, nurtured by traditional visions of HEIs as sites of knowledge production, where activities like SL are additional or misplaced. Institutionalisation may buffer marginalisation and denial of SL expertise and professionalism (Matthews & Wilder, 2018).

Despite not being acknowledged as a foundational pillar of SL, (RQ3) findings present the community experience (SOC and SOC-R; Boyd et al., 2017) of institutional and local contexts as intertwined with SL. Firstly, it results from a specific and community-oriented approach to knowledge construction based on a different relationship of academia with the local community. This relationship is underpinned by scholars' sense of responsibility toward the local communities, reducing asymmetries. Secondly, it develops across the national, European, and international SL networks of scholars who share connections, values, and experiences. When the SL institutionalisation process is absent, belonging to a national or a cross-national community of interest and practice acts as a buffer against the detrimental effects of the lack of formal recognition. This makes the community experience a resource, where multiple and nested belongingness does not compete but acts as resource multipliers. Lastly, from a theoretical perspective, SOC entails a power dimension (i.e., influence). Findings show how scholars' influence is unfolded as the feeling of making a difference, the capacity to identify transformational impacts, and sustaining the development of more competent and empowered communities. Therefore, the community experience is necessary to contribute meaningful and energised commitment to engaged scholarship. (Boyd et al., 2020; Compare et al., *under review*).

Given its relevance, we propose integrating the four Rs (respect, relevance, reflexivity, and reciprocity; Butin, 2003) with a fifth R: relatedness that sustains and fosters SL institutional, organisational, and community processes. Relatedness situates SL in a multilevel (ecological) perspective where complex and reciprocal relationships among individuals, HEIs, organisations, and communities are essential to maintain and nurture participants' engagement with SL. Sharing values, practices, and visions of SL within and across contexts and networks represents a ubiquitous process that assumes different meanings (e.g., a coping strategy to deal with the challenges or a transformational asset to bring about institutionalisation) based on the level of institutionalisation and stability of the university-community partnership.

4.5 Conclusion

Our research provided insights into the three research questions that guided the study. Faculty's community experience and the role of multiple psychological senses of the community as a booster of SL engagement and sense-making, mainly when European SL faculty struggle with SL institutionalisation, represented a relevant and unedited contribution. The findings also allowed positing a new SL pillar based on

the community experience (SOC and SOC-R): relatedness. Relatedness is intended to integrate and broaden the existing theoretical perspective on SL foundational dimensions, providing the space for practical implications for SL implementation and recognition, such as intensifying the EASLHE networking activity. Moreover, the integration of the community experience framework into the service-learning narrative offers a new space for theoretical exploration and advancement. Further research could examine the role of community experience among students and validate the newly proposed foundational pillar in other settings.

We are aware of the study limitation, like recruiting a relatively small number of participants to reach data saturation. Moreover, we relied on the EASLHE network; this helped us reach participants but automatically prevented the inclusion of potential participants from other HEIs or countries that are not connected to the European association. Future studies should adopt mixed-method approaches, including quantitative measures, and include a comparison group of scholars committed to activities related to the third mission besides SL could also clarify the uniqueness and specificity of the reported findings.

Overall, this study represents a step forward in understanding the SL's role as a space where scholars' intrinsic motivations, work and civic engagement, and social commitment can thrive. This is also relevant for HEIs, which can orient structural actions to implementing and institutionalising such engaged scholarship activities, potentially "receiving back" more committed and satisfied employees, socially responsive students, and empowered local communities. Further research could be conducted on detailing scholars' motivation, attitude, and behaviour regarding service-learning activities. Knowing scholars' motivation can be instrumental in designing strategies to encourage their engagement and continued participation. Moreover, exploring their attitudes can inform the development of targeted interventions to address potential barriers or challenges and foster a more favourable environment for scholars to engage in service-learning. Lastly, understanding scholars' behaviours can guide the development of strategies to promote active participation and ensure that their efforts align with their civic commitment. Assembling new knowledge would also provide additional data to help identify potential patterns specific to the European context or to the evolving role of service-learning as part of the changes that have transformed HEIs' role in society worldwide.

4.6 References

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Chapter 5 - General Conclusion

When I began my PhD in the autumn of 2019, I did not know what I would ultimately discover about service-learning. However, I intended to gather perspectives and insights from different actors to create a clearer picture of the service-learning experience as a community psychology scholar. As I reflect on my research, I believe I achieved my original intention.

Of course, in the spirit of self-reflexivity, I acknowledge my standpoint as a White European male researcher. I have not directly experienced service-learning since it was not yet offered in Italy at the time of my attendance to the master course, but I have observed and joined all the steps of the offered activities throughout the years since the very first pilot that the University of Bologna offered to students since 2016. Moreover, while I have interacted with many instructors, mainly from Europe and North America, but also from Latin America, South and Central Africa, and Asia, I have only directly witnessed service-learning offered by the University of Bologna in Italy and the Institute of Applied Psychology in Lisbon, Portugal. I recognise that my positionality influenced this project to some extent; being a community psychologist, in addition to being a community psychology scholar, proved essential in making meaning of the narratives participants brought into play. Therefore, I recognise that the findings presented in this dissertation reflect only one possible interpretation of the participants' experiences, influenced by my professional and personal experience.

As for my personal journey as a researcher, the unexpected results from the quantitative study were the ones that helped me grow the most. While I have conducted other studies where some of the hypotheses resulted in being rejected by the analysis, the rejection of all the posited hypotheses pushed me to deal with the "unexpected." Thus, I tried to look at data from a different perspective, offering different interpretations and explanations to start with in further studies. As a researcher who primarily uses qualitative methods, I am used to adopting different perspectives to understand data without limiting the comprehension to the surface. I perceive applying this competence to the quantitative methodology as an added value for my training as a researcher.

I found qualitative studies to be a space to draw my most exciting conclusions. Furthermore, conducting the interviews, meeting different practitioners and scholars, and collecting their narratives and stories full of passion and commitment to community work and development allowed me to see the bigger picture.

The community psychology perspective was a valuable lens to examine processes and elaborate concepts. It stimulated the focus on the relationship between the individual and the community level in the qualitative studies and the inclusion of the quality of participation dimension in the quantitative study. Additionally, most of the study variables under examination derive from the community psychology field, such as empowerment, sense of community, attention to social justice, and community responsibility.

5.1 The Research Questions

This doctoral thesis aimed at investigating the psychosocial variables that are involved in, underpinned by, and fostered within service-learning attempting to address gaps and limitations identified in the literature, such as improving the methodological rigour and not limiting the understanding of service-learning to the student's experience by including the community partners' and faculty members' perspectives. The thorough review of the relevant international literature allowed the formulation of three main research questions to accomplish these goals and guided the three studies enclosed in this dissertation.

RQ1: What are the effects of SL on students' citizenship development?

RQ2: How does SL impact local communities?

RQ3: Does SL sustain faculty members in their pursuit of engaged scholarship?

Regarding the first research question, the study in chapter two offered tempered results in highlighting the psychosocial effects of SL on students' citizenship development. On the one hand, results show that service-learning outperformed traditional courses in fostering students' quality of participation experience (Ferreira, Azevedo & Menezes, 2012). This effect is likely to be produced by the ongoing reflexivity that characterises service-learning and the student's involvement in working groups with practitioners, where great attention is devoted to students' insights and suggestions to meet communities' needs. On the other hand, no statistically significant change has been reported in comparing SL and non-SL students at two-time points.

These findings diverge from previous research that investigated the same constructs (i.e., civic engagement and social justice attitudes) or constructs that can be considered proxies of the dimensions under inspection in the study (e.g., sense of civic responsibility as a proxy of sense of community responsibility; self-efficacy as a proxy of psychological empowerment). It should be noted that these studies largely adopted qualitative designs. Moreover, when quantitative research was conducted, it rarely included longitudinal data or comparison groups, and validated psychometric measures were not always included in testing the constructs under inspection. Should we conclude that service-learning does not influence the students' citizenship outcomes?

Although this study represents a methodological improvement in investigating service-learning outcomes, many questions remain unanswered. For example, did students perceive any changes in the variables under inspection? Were the reflection activities focused enough on concepts like empowerment or social justice? How did the comparative groups address the citizenship outcomes under inspection? These are essential questions that need to be addressed to fully understand SL's impact on students.

One way to answer these questions would be to use a mixed-method design with qualitative supplemental components as ongoing and follow-up evaluations to

understand the students' experience of both groups. Ongoing field observations and follow-up focus groups would allow researchers to gather in-depth information about the students' experience. Therefore, it was not possible to provide a definitive answer to the first research question but rather consider areas for further research to disambiguate data.

Turning to the second research question, the study in chapter three highlighted multifarious impacts on local communities. The findings showed how service-learning could bring material benefits to the communities, such as free consultations, human resources, and new competencies. In addition, in the contexts under analysis, service-learning also impacted the organisational and community levels sparking intra- and inter-organisational empowerment processes. Empowerment did not limit the experience to ameliorate or "do good" to the community organisations but rather scaffolded a circle of reciprocal influence and the generation of new spaces of co-creation and implementation of different services for the local communities. Indeed, the reciprocal dynamic was confirmed to be a foundational aspect of service-learning, sustaining, and making the partnership feasible over time. Another relevant aspect that emerged from this study was the respect dimension; when academia respected community knowledge and expertise, community partners embraced – and claimed – a co-educational role in training university students' personal, citizenship, and academic development.

Lastly, on the third research question, the study in chapter four suggested that SL is a promising tool to sustain faculty members in pursuing engaged scholarship by offering clear guidance in designing community-engaged projects capable of letting the community into academia. This represents a way for faculty members to be citizens in their academic activities. The study deepened the understanding of the intrinsic (e.g., social responsibility, willingness to integrate civic learning into the academic curriculum) and extrinsic (e.g., institutional mandate) motivations that drive faculty members to connect their work as scholars with local communities in which higher education institutions are situated. The study added to the existing definition of the relevance dimension. Relevance is not restricted to the student's academic curriculum – meaning that activities need to have value for the student's learning – or to community needs. Still, it has to do with faculty work's meaning. For this, service-learning needs to be meaningful and relevant for academics as well.

This study also remarked on challenges; findings presented that service-learning, and engagement in general, is time-consuming and resource-intensive, especially for academics working in HEIs where engaged scholarship activities are not institutionalised or not perceived as valuable as teaching and research activities. However, the meaningfulness of the activities and the community experience has shown to be effective in sustaining the faculty's engaged scholarship even in challenging institutional contexts (e.g., when engaged scholarship activities are not institutionalised or recognised by the HEI). While the meaningfulness is closely connected to the scholars' system of values, the community experience is a resource that underpins and strengthens faculty's engaged scholarship by providing a sense of connection and belonging to local, international, and global

movements and communities that promote a shared vision; being active citizens while being teachers and researchers. The relevance of the faculty's community experience sustained the integration of the 4Rs model described by Butin (2003). A fifth R was posited, relatedness.

Taken as a whole, the studies confirmed the relevance of the foundational pillars of service-learning and offered new insights and perspectives. As a result, the Rs model proposed in chapter one was revised. The integrations made to the original model are highlighted in *italics*.

- 1 - Respect: Service-learning students and faculty should show respect for the community and its values and acknowledge that there are different types of knowledge beyond academics (d'Arlach et al., 2009). *Respect legitimates and stimulates community partners' co-educational role in training students. This training is essential for integrating academic knowledge with community know-how and reinvigorates the student's citizenship development while addressing personal and professional competencies.*
- 2 - Relevance: Service-learning activities should be relevant for both students and the community, addressing the needs of the community while also expanding students' understanding of their surroundings (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). *Moreover, service-learning activities should be meaningful and relevant for the faculty or scholars that implement them to sustain and foster academics' engaged scholarship.*
- 3 - Reflexivity: It refers to regular and ongoing guided activities where students are asked to critically analyse their experiences to gain a deeper understanding of social problems and the learning that derives from the experience. It is also a tool for the university-community partnership to evaluate the process (Jacoby, 2015). *Reflexivity accompanies students' understanding and potentially scaffolds the acquisition of complex personal and civic competencies. It is also a tool to improve the quality of the partnership.*
- 4 - Reciprocity: Recognising, valuing, and respecting each partner's knowledge, perspectives and resources is crucial for successful community engagement. Dostilio et al. (2012) divide reciprocity into three categories, (a) exchange: the exchange of benefits, resources, or actions; (b) influence: the relationship shapes personal, social, and environmental contexts; and (c) generativity: it may involve a change in unique ways of knowing and being or in the systems in which the relationship is embedded. The collaboration may evolve and extend beyond the initial focus as outcomes, ways of knowing, and systems of belonging are transformed. *The combination of various degrees of reciprocity fosters community's capability to progressively gain control over the processes that influence community life (community empowerment) and the dynamics that characterise the university-community partnership. This reciprocal dialogue allows deep and fruitful reflections on the service-learning practice and represents a way for the partnership to flourish.*
- 5 - Relatedness: *It sustains and fosters SL institutional, organisational, and community processes. Relatedness situates SL within a multilevel, ecological perspective, recognising the complex and reciprocal relationships among*

individuals, higher education institutions, organisations, and communities as essential for maintaining and nurturing participants' engagement with SL. The sharing of SL's values, practices, and visions within and across contexts and networks is a ubiquitous process that assumes different meanings, such as a coping strategy to address challenges or a transformative asset to facilitate institutionalisation, depending on the level of institutionalisation and stability of the university-community partnership.

5.2 Implication for research and practice

The present dissertation represents a significant contribution to the service-learning field, providing an updated and expanded framework for understanding and evaluating these experiences. The findings of each study have implications for both theory and practice in the research area, tracing similarities and differences with the existing literature. In chapters three and four, new themes emerged and connected the experience and perspective of different European contexts (e.g., co-educational role of community partners, engaged scholarship for faculty). This may be because these themes were not examined in other national and international contexts or because they relate to a European perspective, guided and underpinned by the principles of reciprocity and social-justice orientation endorsed by the European Association on Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE) and reported in its service-learning definition:

"Service-learning in higher education is an experiential educational method in which students engage in community service, reflect critically on this experience, and learn from it personally, socially, and academically. The activities address human, social and environmental needs from the perspective of social justice and sustainable development, and aim at enriching learning in higher education, fostering civic responsibility and strengthening communities. Service-learning is always recognised with ECTS."

(EASLHE, n.d.)

The results of the studies also have implications for applied research in the field. Results showed that adopting a common framework and shared tools to collect data allowed the identification of common elements across different contexts with different cultures, traditions, and levels of institutionalisation of service-learning. This emphasises the need and the efficacy of using shared tools to read the processes activated within service-learning. Following this logic, the survey and the interview guides adopted in the studies are included in this dissertation as part of the final appendices.

Overall, findings can be used to inform the development of interventions and programs that are more effective and responsive to the needs of the students, the community, the faculty members, and higher education institutions. The revisions and integrations made to the original 4Rs model contribute to the advancement of the field, unveiling new relevant theoretical dimensions to the general understanding of service-learning. The application of the reciprocity framework identified by Dostilio et al. (2012) was integrated with the empowerment construct,

the quality of participation (Ferreira, Azevedo & Menezes, 2012) was incorporated into the reflexivity dimension, the relevance was combined with the faculty work motivation, the respect for the community know-how opened a space for reflection on the co-educational role of community partners (Compare, Pieri & Albanesi, 2022), and, finally, the interconnection and the sense of community of different actors at the local, national, and European level sustained the creation of the relatedness dimension.

The centrality of specific dimensions and constructs entails some practical implications. One of the potential applications of the five-dimensions model is the development of an evaluation tool that can be used to assess service-learning experiences from this perspective. This tool could be co-constructed with partners and organisations and used as a screening tool to understand the experiences of faculty and community partners, as well as to guide academic and communitarian institutional decision-making regarding the continuation, improvement, or closure of specific service-learning initiatives. This tool would be helpful in optimising resource investment in service-learning.

Another practical implication of this dissertation relates to mutual understanding between faculty and community partners. The studies provide valuable insights into the perspectives of faculty and community partners on service-learning, which can be used to improve the university-community partnership. This can open a space for confrontation between actors and lead to a more equitable and mutually beneficial partnership. For example, faculty members may feel less isolated knowing that other colleagues have faced similar challenges in implementing service-learning, and look for external support (e.g., local community, national/international networks). On the other hand, community partners may feel more legitimised in asking for a fair negotiation space in their relationship with higher education institutions. This increased understanding and communication can ultimately lead to more effective and sustainable service-learning experiences while fostering the active engagement of the higher education institution and its third mission.

5.3 Limitations

This doctoral thesis has limitations that should be acknowledged. We can trace (a) methodological limitations, which are related to the studies presented in chapters two, three, and four, and (b) structural limitations, which are related to contextual and timing challenges encountered during the PhD.

A summary of the identified methodological limitations of each study is proposed here:

- Chapter two: The quasi-experimental design of this study and the small sample size of each group limited the ability to infer causation and generalise the results. Additionally, only one university was represented in the sample, and all instruments used were self-report measures, which could have resulted in response bias and only reflected the students' perceptions of their experiences.

- Chapter three: Despite the data saturation was reached, the recruited sample was small. Additionally, the participants in this study may have been more committed site supervisors of the SL projects. They may have mostly perceived positive outcomes from the partnership experience, which could have resulted in a bias in the findings.
- Chapter four: Despite the data saturation was reached, the recruited sample was relatively small. Additionally, the study relied on the EASLHE network, which helped to get participants but automatically prevented the inclusion of potential participants from other Higher Education Institutions or countries that are not connected to the European association.

In addition to the methodological limitations, this doctoral thesis also faced several structural hurdles related to the timing and contextual challenges encountered during the PhD. The most significant of these limitations was the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which had a ripple effect that influenced all aspects of the research.

Conducting research on community-engaged experiences in the midst of national quarantines was challenging. At the University of Bologna, and in other national and international higher education institutions, the pandemic had a detrimental effect on the activation of service-learning experiences, leading to a late data collection for the quantitative study, which resulted in a small sample size and precluded the possibility of conducting a qualitative follow-up adopting a mixed-method design. Furthermore, the pandemic also prevented the inclusion of a hypothesised Portuguese sample for a cross-national study, as the data collection in Portugal was delayed until late 2022, as opposed to the original plan of late 2021.

At the international level, the pandemic made recruiting community partners active in service-learning more challenging. Many local community organisations were preoccupied with addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic and had less time to devote to service-learning projects. Moreover, some of the faculty members recruited for the study in chapter four did not deliver service-learning courses during the time of data collection because of the pandemic. Lastly, some service-learning experiences had to be changed into e-service-learning experiences, including major or minor virtual components, to address the unprecedented needs caused by the pandemic (see Compare & Albanesi, 2022). As a result, Covid-19 created a different context for conducting the research, which had to adapt frequently to the evolving circumstances caused by the pandemic. It is important to note that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic presented significant structural limitations that affected the research and should be considered when interpreting this thesis's findings and methodological limitations.

5.4 Areas for further research

The findings of this dissertation offer areas for future research that can guide the development of a research agenda that advances the understanding of service-learning and its impact on students' learning, community development, university commitment, and social change.

A research agenda comprising six steps is here proposed and further detailed in the paragraphs below:

- 1 - Replication of the study's methodologies with larger trans-national samples, helping to identify cultural or contextual factors that may influence the effectiveness of service-learning in different regions.
- 2 - Integration of qualitative and quantitative supplemental components following a mixed-method design to gather data that can be used to assess the effectiveness of service-learning programs.
- 3 - Integration of other research strategies to overcome the limitations of self-reported measurements using structured formal and informal assessment strategies performed by teachers and site supervisors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the students' learning experience.
- 4 - Activation of participatory action research (PAR) processes to involve engaging communities to address specific concerns, pursuing positive social change, and combining research, education, and actions.
- 5 - Involvement of students in co-creating the hypothesized evaluation tool derived from the 5Rs model, exploring how the model can be integrated into the students' experience through a participatory process.
- 6 - Investigation of the cultural context in which service-learning takes place, investigating the cultural context's influence on the implementation and evaluation of the 5Rs model and understanding the potential uniqueness or transferability of the identified results.

To achieve the identified steps, larger transnational samples might be involved in replicating the same methodologies and integrating qualitative and quantitative supplemental components following a mixed-method design. The study's limitations in chapter two align with a recent synthesis of empirical studies conducted in the US (Chittum, Enke & Finley, 2022). The synthesis highlighted the need for further understanding of students' competence concerning community-based and civic engagement objectives since research on the effects of service-learning is still almost wholly focused on indirect or self-reported measurements. Therefore, future studies should consider integrating other research strategies to overcome this limitation.

Self-report measures could be integrated with structured formal and informal assessment strategies performed by teachers and site supervisors to gain a holistic perspective of the students' learning that is not limited to the student's perception. An example can be found in the work of Albanesi et al. (2021), where the authors integrated longitudinal self-report quantitative data with the teachers' perspectives to assess a citizenship education project carried out with high school students. This could strengthen the rigour with which service-learning experiences are assessed and evaluated while sustaining the triangulation of data for better understanding the impact of service-learning on the acquisition and strengthening of complex psychosocial variables of citizenship and metacognitive competencies.

This doctoral thesis's positive and innovative findings showed that more resources should be allocated to the research with the community and the faculty members. On this, participatory action research (PAR) processes could be activated and guided by the experience of community psychology researchers and practitioners. The cores of the PAR process are the attention to the power dynamics, the active engagement of communities to address specific concerns, the pursuit of positive social change, and the combination of research, education, and actions (Brydon-Miller, 1997).

The adoption of participatory processes can sustain a shift in the paradigm of power dynamics between universities and communities. By looking at service-learning from a perspective where experiences are co-created within the partnership between universities and communities, not just for the student's learning and the university's third mission but also for community development, communities should be recognized as active partners. Establishing horizontal dynamics means not only acknowledging the community's know-how but also including the community in setting the parameters and quality standards for these community-engaged experiences. Existing quality standards have been set by academics and may not fully reflect the perspectives, needs, and understanding of community partners. This dissertation shows that individuals are competent in setting goals and integrating and transforming the service-learning framework of reference with their perspectives when sustained.

The revisions and integrations made to the original 4Rs model, thanks to the involvement of different actors, contribute to the advancement of the field while providing a valuable framework for future research. To make the 5Rs model more inclusive, students could be involved in understanding how this new model can be integrated with and into the students' experience. Through a participatory process, students might also be interested in co-creating the hypothesised evaluation tool derived from the 5Rs model.

Finally, it is important to consider the cultural context in which service-learning takes place and how it may affect the implementation and evaluation of the 5Rs model. In this dissertation, I devoted particular attention to the European context, identifying similarities in how service-learning impacts individuals across different contexts. Future studies should further investigate these findings and dimensions, collecting more European data whilst also including reflections from other contexts to clarify similarities and differences and understand the potential uniqueness or generalisability of the identified results. Assembling new knowledge on service-learning by capitalising on the results of this dissertation could foster the definition of contextual patterns concerning service-learning impacts on the understanding, competencies, and motivations of the involved actors. Moreover, it could disentangle the influence of context at the local, national, and international levels. This could inform the development of more effective service-learning programmes by identifying foundational and transferable aspects and tailoring activities to meet contextual characteristics and peculiarities.

5.5 References

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Appendix 1 – Students' survey

Please indicate your level of agreement from 1 to 5 with each of the following statements
(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

PRE-POST: Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ; Moely et al., 2002).

Social Justice Attitudes subscale

- 1 - I don't understand why some people are poor when there are boundless opportunities available to them (R)
- 2 - People are poor because they choose to be poor (R)
- 3 - Individuals are responsible for their own misfortunes (R)
- 4 - We need to look no further than the individual in assessing their problems (R)
- 5 - In order for problems to be solved, we need to change public policy
- 6 - We need to institute reforms within the current system to change our communities
- 7 - We need to change people's attitudes in order to solve social problems
- 8 - It is important that equal opportunity be available to all people

PRE-POST: Sense of Community Responsibility Scale (SOCR; Prati et al., 2020).

- 1 - One of the best things I can do to improve my community is to be of service to community members
- 2 - I am always ready to help out people in my community even if it creates hardship for me
- 3 - It is easy for me to put aside my own agenda in favour of the greater good of my community
- 4 - When volunteers are needed by my community, I feel like I should be one of the first to step up
- 5 - I feel it is my duty to give to my community without needing to receive anything in return
- 6 - I often feel an obligation to do things that benefit my community even if my costs outweigh any personal benefit I may receive

PRE-POST: Cognitive Empowerment Scale (CES; Speer et al., 2019).*Source of Power subscale*

- 1 - Only by working together can we citizens make changes in the community
- 2 - The only way I can affect community issues is by working with other community members and students
- 3 - To improve my community, it is better to work with a group than alone
- 4 - The only way I can improve the community is by working with other community members and students

PRE-POST: Civic Engagement Scale (CES; Doolittle & Faul, 2013)*Behaviour subscale*

- 1 - I am involved in structured volunteer position(s) in the community
- 2 - When working with others, I make positive changes in the community
- 3 - I help members of my community
- 4 - I stay informed of events in my community
- 5 - I participate in discussions that raise issues of social responsibility
- 6 - I contribute to charitable organisations within the community

We ask you to think about the transferable competencies course that you have attended, and indicate from 1 to 5... (1 = never; 5 = always)

POST: Quality of Participation Experiences Questionnaire (Ferreira & Menezes, 2001).*Action subscale**...to what extent it motivated you to engage in the following activities*

- 1 - Look for info on books, media (TV, radio, newspapers), internet or experts
- 2 - Participate in community activities (e.g., petitions, protests, parties, meetings, assemblies, debates, public statements, etc.)
- 3 - Organise community activities (e.g., petitions, protests, parties, meetings, assemblies, debates, public statements, etc.)
- 4 - Lead or manage a team in charge of organising activities (e.g., petitions, protests, parties, meetings, assemblies, debates, public statements, etc.)
- 5 - Making decisions (as individuals or in groups)

Reflection subscale

...how often did you feel that...

- 1 - ...there were different points of view in the discussions
- 2 - ...there was reflection and different points of view were analysed
- 3 - ...conflicting opinions lead to new ways of seeing things
- 4 - ...you faced real problems and/or problems in your daily life
- 5 - ...participating was very important to you as a person

Appendix 2 – Community partners' interview guide

- 1 - What does service-learning represent to you and your organisation?
- 2 - Why did you decide to be part of service-learning at the beginning? Did your motivations change over time?
- 3 - What has the service-learning partnership brought to your organisation?
- 4 - In your opinion, what did you give to and receive from the relationship with students?
- 5 - Do you think that being part of service-learning impacted your organisation's working routines? Did this impact change over time?
- 6 - To what extent do you think the users of your organisation benefitted from service-learning?
- 7 - Had the commitment and service of students rewarded your efforts in guiding and supporting them?
- 8 - What do you think University as an Institution gained from the service-learning partnership?
- 9 - What do you think was the key for success? What went good and why?
- 10 - Do you think you had/can have a role in the training of service-learning university students? How?
- 11 - To what extent you believe service-learning can strengthen students' sense of responsibility towards the community?
- 12 - Does service-learning make you feel like a member of a community that promotes a sense of civic responsibility? Can you share an example of when you felt it?

Appendix 3 – Faculty members' interview guide

- 1 - What does service-learning represent to you and your department/institution?
- 2 - Why did you decide to be part of service-learning at the beginning? Did your motivations change over time?
- 3 - What has the service-learning partnership brought to your department/institution?
- 4 - Do you think that being part of service-learning impacted your teaching? Did this impact change over time?
- 5 - To what extent do you think the local community organisations benefited from service-learning?
- 6 - What do you think students learn from service-learning experiences?
- 7 - To what extent do you believe service-learning can strengthen students' civic competencies and sense of responsibility towards the community?
- 8 - Does service-learning make you feel like a member of a community that promotes a sense of civic responsibility? Can you share an example of when you felt it?

