



Handbook 3
Profiguration,
Service Learning
and Intergenerational
Relationships

Service-Learning
Network of Catalan Universities

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Fidel Molina-Luque; Deli Miró-Miró; Paquita Sanvicén-Torné University of Lleida;
OApS-GESEC, INDEST

Work Team

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Contact

@apsucat
info@acup.cat

PROFIGURATION, SERVICE LEARNING AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

*Fidel Molina-Luque; Deli Miró-Miró; Paquita Sanvicén-Torné
University of Lleida*

1. Profiguration, active aging, intergenerational action and ageism.

Key concepts.

To know how to grow old is the masterwork of wisdom, and one of the most difficult chapters in the great art of living.

Henri-Frédéric Amiel

1.1. Profiguration

The term 'Profiguration' is a neologism created by Fidel Molina-Luque (2017, 2019, 2020, and 2021) that denotes and explains the promotion of intergenerational interdependence. It is the proposal of a new social contract between generations that is more supportive, with equity, respect, and mutual recognition as active and interdependent members of society. In this sense, 'Profigurative Socialisation,' understood as comprehensive socialisation involving all age groups, aims to formalise this new intergenerational social contract (see Molina-Luque, 2017, 2019, and 2020). In our experience, examples include Service Learning proposals that foster interdependence between young people (university students in this case) and the elderly (some of whom may also be students in university: 'Senior' programmes).

Margaret Mead (2019) established three types of knowledge transmission based on the culture of three types of societies, in a classification of continuity or discontinuity of norms and patterns:

- a) Postfigurative culture societies: there is a tendency to reproduce the existing culture, with continuity and tradition being the most important. The older ones, the adults, are the ones who teach the younger ones.
- b) Cofigurative culture societies: there is a more horizontal relationship. Traditional culture is not as important as technique. Teaching and learning occur between contemporary generations, between equals, and among individuals of the same age.
- c) Prefigurative culture societies: one does not learn from the adult generations but rather from the younger ones.

In this sense, we propose the new concept of 'Profiguration' in Social Sciences (mainly in Sociology and Education), which helps to understand and investigate education more completely and comprehensively. This concept involves understanding education as 'Profigurative Socialisation' (Molina-Luque, 2017), aiming to formulate a type of joint, collaborative socialisation that is dialogical and not necessarily hierarchical among various generations, and moves towards figuration. It seeks to highlight intergenerational responsibility: supportive relationships between generations, between the old and the young, in a transversal and holistic socialisation. This notion, Profiguration, reformulates and articulates the previous classification established

by Margaret Mead and goes beyond it, combining the educational intent towards ‘figuration,’ collectively, to teach and learn collaboratively in a dialogical manner. It is a new vision to mitigate and/or overcome the generational rupture that Mead defined as planetary and universal. In this sense, we also rely on various aspects of Norbert Elias’s Figural Sociology, of figuration and human interaction, of the interdependence between individuals, without separating the individual and society which form a continuum (Molina-Luque, 2021). The goal is to propose solid arguments that promote intergenerational relationships in a profigurative society and advance not only in active ageing but also in an intergenerational dialogue that overcomes ageism, both in relation to old age and youth.

1.2. Active Ageing

The concept aims to break the negative image of the ageing process. A process that is socially linked to the idea of dependence, unproductivity, senility, and the end of a life stage. A concept that addresses everyone in their social roles as individuals, citizens, and professionals, in the political sphere, and in public policies. It implies making this stage visible and approaching it not from a needs-based perspective but from a rights-based one (Giró, 2002:27). It involves observing, understanding, and treating the increase in years of life positively, not as a problem but as an opportunity and a challenge from all perspectives. “The ageing of the population is one of humanity’s greatest triumphs and also one of our greatest challenges” (WHO, 2002:75). The concept of active ageing is not new; the World Health Organization (WHO) began weaving it in the 1980s based on the *Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing* (Martínez, 2016). The most cited definition is the one coined by the WHO itself years later: “the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation, and security to enhance the quality of life of ageing individuals” (WHO, 2002:79). In the same vein, in 2012, on the occasion of the European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity, the Department of Social Rights of the Generalitat de Catalunya incorporated an explanation emphasising opportunities: “Active ageing means that the *baby boom* generation and other future older individuals have the following opportunities: staying in the job market and sharing their experience, continuing to play an active role in society, living as healthy and satisfying a life as possible”. Moreover, it adds an important reference to profiguration, “maintaining intergenerational solidarity is also fundamental, especially in societies where the number of older people is rapidly increasing”. Overall, it concludes: “the challenge for politicians and those working in this field will be to improve opportunities for ageing actively and living independently in any area: employment, health, social services, adult education, volunteering, housing, computer services, or transportation” (Generalitat de Catalunya, 13.03.2012).

1.3. Intergenerational Action

The White Paper on Active Aging¹ emphasises the relevance of maintaining activity in advanced ages to promote healthy lifestyle models. According to the data presented, 53% of older adults embark on new activities after the age of 65; 43% of them want to actively participate in activities that contribute to societal improve-

1 <https://imserso.es/espacio-mayores/envejecimiento-activo/libro-blanco-del-envejecimiento-activo>

ment, with 28% belonging to some organization, and specifically, 8% of older individuals participating in social and civil associations and entities. According to Eurostat data, in the European Union, by the year 2050, the percentage of people over 65 will be around 40%; in 2010, it was 17.4%. In our days, the capabilities of older individuals, their expectations, and their respective life trajectories expand the possibilities of participation in various social action-participation domains, showing a marked trend and lasting longer than in previous years. According to data from the White Paper, 45.5% of older individuals highlight that they enjoy good health and wish to make contributions and participate in community life. In this way, emphasis is placed on the need to develop, promote, and facilitate the active participation of older individuals in all areas and levels of society, and enhance intergenerational solidarity action (WHO, 2016)².

At the celebration of the II World Assembly on Ageing (Madrid, 2012), under the motto “a society for all ages” and within the framework of the proposed actions, the importance of the social participation of older people is highlighted in relation to two dimensions: their contribution to society and the improvement of their quality of life, with notable interrelation and feedback that entails, in a parallel manner, the social participation of older individuals, intergenerational relationships, and the enhancement of their quality of life. Active ageing, as a conciliatory model, implies continuous social, political, spiritual, cultural, and civic involvement (Pérez and De-Juanas, 2013). In the signed declaration concluding the World Assembly on Ageing, in the International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPPAA), Article 16 states: “We recognize the need to strengthen solidarity between generations and intergenerational associations, taking into account the specific needs of older and younger people, and to encourage solidary relationships between generations” (MIPAA, 2003). It is of significant relevance to establish intergenerational dialogue as a space for action, generating new understandings and potentials, based on trust and mutual commitment between generations.

Likewise, given the complexity of the current social landscape, natural and social coexistence among different generations constitutes a fundamental value, in which each sociodemographic group, each individual, contributes personal and social value to the entire society. The intergenerational perspective allows for the development of mechanisms and strategies, and the strengthening of associative networks and community participation, with the entire citizenry as the main protagonists. This perspective encompasses all sectors of society, enabling responses to needs, highlighting interrelations among individuals of different generations to seek solutions and propose improvements, with “*implica-acció*” [implica-action] to contribute benefits to the entire community. As the saying goes, combining forces always multiplies results.

In 2005, the European Commission presented the Green Paper «Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations» dedicated to delving into the theme of Service relationships and participation between generations based on mutual support and the transfer of skills and experiences between young people and the elderly, enabling intergenerational dialogue (Pérez y Orosa, 2014). In the words of Marjan Sedmak, President of AGE (European Platform for Older People), “we need to create an *Age-Friendly European Union* to foster solidarity between generations and enable active participation of people of all ages in society”.

² <http://envejecimiento.csic.es/comunicacion/boletin.html>
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241513500>

According to the United Nations (1995:9), “a society for all ages is one that adjusts its structures and operations, as well as its policies and plans, to the needs and capabilities of everyone, with which everybody’s potential is leveraged for the benefit of all”. As presented in the Plan for the Decade of Healthy Active Ageing 2020-2030³, in line with the adjustment of the timetable of the 2030 Agenda in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, it is necessary to «systematically contribute to articulating and amplifying various intergenerational voices on issues related to healthy ageing, and establish innovative forms of collaboration with older people» that propose intergenerational experiences to promote social cohesion and interactive exchange between generations in favour of intergenerational action. Therefore, the importance of identifying, supporting, and diversifying intergenerational projects becomes evident, as well as promoting the exchange of knowledge, skills, values, and complementary experiences between generations that combat age discrimination and enhance a tolerant, respectful, cohesive, and empowered citizenship consisting of individuals and groups of all ages.

1.4. Ageism

Ageism is discrimination based on age, and often, this notion is used to refer to discrimination against older people. However, we must not forget that age discrimination is unfortunately exercised both against older people and young people. In fact, negative labels are heard in one direction and the other, either because old age is associated with uselessness, poverty (aporphobia), or ugliness (when not the proximity of death); or because youth is associated with breaking rules, violence, disobedience, or selfishness (with the idea of *carpe diem*). In any case, the term “ageism” was coined by Butler in 1969 to identify prejudice and discrimination against members of a specific age group, mainly older people. This author asserted that, unlike other prejudices such as racism or sexism, ageism affects everyone, meaning that everyone ages, and it impacts us all. Ageism, ultimately, is the set of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that express prejudice and contempt towards characteristics of advanced age, and can end up justifying social inequality based on all this and violence and mistreatment of older people. In this sense, the UN advocates for the promotion of intergenerational solidarity through social programmes, regardless of the field in which they take place, as ageing is understood as a process for everyone that needs improvement. We must also consider that violence and discrimination against older people can occur through action, but also through omission by not being proactive and not helping individuals, contributing to neglect and inaction regarding physical, psychological, or emotional mistreatment of older individuals, as well as abandonment, unwanted solitude, and contempt. These attitudes and behaviours must be cut at the root, being vigilant to prevent them and oversee from public administration and the community (friends, family, neighbours). Attitudes and behaviours must be addressed within a framework of profigurative socialisation, which can and should be worked on in the educational system, as well as in situations of social education and even informal education through social networks, ICT, television, and recreational activities, raising awareness about the equality and respect that we deserve as individuals at any stage of our lives, at any age. This awareness also includes a new perspective of equity and solidarity that goes beyond the mercantilist view of the “economic” (productive and consumable) value of people (see Molina-Luque, 2021).

³ https://www.who.int/es/publications/m/item/decade-of-healthy-ageing-plan-of-action?sfvrsn=b4b75ebc_25

2. Profiguration, service learning and active ageing

Aging is not “lost youth”
but a new stage of opportunity and strength.

Betty Friedan, writer

As explained in the previous section, the new concept of profiguration and the consequent idea of seeking a society with a profigurative culture emphasise the importance of interdependence among individuals to overcome unwanted solitude and embrace a fulfilling life throughout various stages and ages, based on the necessary foundation of intergenerational relationships (Molina-Luque, 2021).

In this sense, and concerning this framework between education and socialisation, we develop formative alternatives around Service Learning (SL/ApS) and Community Engaged Learning (CEL), clearly combining educational and socialising elements. Along this same line, we connect profiguration and education through a distinctly intergenerational approach and intervention. We advocate for faculties (and universities) to become “Age Friendly Faculties” that incorporate the idea and practice of the importance of intergenerational relationships in a society that sometimes seems marked by a generational divide.

In terms of initial and ongoing training in different degrees and master’s programmes, the incorporation and development of generations and the interrelationships between them are important within the framework of a new social contract that allows overcoming ageism (discrimination based on age) and strengthening social cohesion. How do we relate to each other in society, the elderly, adults, and the young? How important are intergenerational creative actions through education, creation, culture, leisure, and interpersonal relationships, ultimately?

The University educates individuals, citizens, and professionals, with all degrees and master’s programmes to be a focus of action and drive for this intergenerational education.

Our university proposal for Service Learning (CEL) incorporates a diversity of elements, activities, practices, and profigurative action programmes, both in teaching and in research and transfer, as well as in its daily management and institutional documentation.

In general terms, Service Learning is an educational and sociological proposal that opens educational centres (Primary, Secondary, and University) to the real needs existing in the community and generates possible transformations in students’ ways of accessing and producing knowledge, linking formative theory and reflective practice. It requires the educational system to open up to life and be sensitive to the problems, difficulties, or deficiencies presented by its closest or farthest environment (Puig i Palos, 2006), being a magnificent opportunity to unfold the curriculum and foster participatory dynamics that enrich the educational process in collaboration with different community agents (Martínez-Odría, 2007). According to Chiva, Gil,

Corbatón-Martínez, and Capella (2016), the features of Service Learning can align based on three dimensions: the role of the involved agents, pedagogical characteristics, and the role of society. To this conceptualization, we add as an innovative element of Service Learning the broad transformational component that educational practices in Service Learning bring to the formal educational system, with the aim of training citizens capable of questioning the social context and the academic curricular environment, giving reality to their professionalising itinerary (Miró & Molina, 2016). Service Learning exists as a mutual formula that connects a commitment to transformation with social learning, and at the same time, it is an activity that integrates community service with the learning of content, competencies, skills, or values, based on reflective practice, to contribute to the social improvement of its environment.

Some examples from educational centres involve directly linking families to the development of tasks in schools and high schools, entering classrooms to share the knowledge and experiences of the elderly with children and youth, also contrasting different points of view and differing perspectives. In the field of health, organisation, law, education, or social work, at the university level, themes and approaches related to care issues need to be reconsidered; as well as actions related to nursing homes, unwanted loneliness, active ageing, and awareness about ageism.

Research and training must explore paths to contribute to innovation, to the improvement of quality of life, and to social transformation in order to foster the formation of a fairer, freer, and more sustainable society. It is in this scenario where the development of the practice of Service Learning (SL/ApS) with an intergenerational approach makes sense, in all those social, cultural, and economic manifestations that demand an integral and balanced society.

Recently, there is a commitment to a variant of Service Learning (SL/ApS). Some continue to see it as such, while others want to emphasise the Community, education, and profigurative socialisation. It is Community Engaged Learning (CEL). In essence, it remains SL/ApS, but it doesn't want to be confused solely with volunteering, but rather wants to emphasise its educational and socialising value. In the term "Aprentatge Servei" in Catalan or Spanish ("Aprendizaje Servicio"), there wouldn't be much of a problem with the concept, highlighting that the first word is precisely "Aprentatge" (*Learning* in English). However, in English, for example, the first word is "Service" (*Learning*); on the contrary, in the proposed variant, the emphasis is on "Community" (*Community Engaged Learning*, CEL). In some way, this aims to avoid or, at least, downplay the term "service" as it can imply inequality. Conversely, it is suggested to emphasise commitment together with the community (an idea and transformative practice) and to develop knowledge and skills for democracy (Jacoby, 2015 y Romero, 2018⁴). In our case, we continue to use the nomenclature of Service Learning (while also introducing that of Community Engaged Learning) because, at the international level, it has a well-established tradition, covering experiences from almost all countries worldwide, and is interconnected with educational networks predominantly known as Service Learning (SL/ApS).

4 Romero, D. (2018). *El Aprendizaje-Servicio: instrumento de formación cívica, liderazgo y compromiso con la Comunidad / Service-Learning: instrument of civic training, leadership and engagement in the Community*. Video conference (PPT-Powerpoint presentation), University of Lleida (February, 2018).

In any case, intergenerational Service Learning projects provide students and teachers (youth, adults, and elderly) with real experiences of social transformation and unique opportunities for equity, social justice, respect, and mutual recognition between generations. Empowerment is not only for the youth but also for the elderly, generating positive actions of responsibility and effective commitment. According to Mendia (2008) and reformulating his postulates intergenerationally, we can affirm that continued participation in transformative Service Learning projects helps students, both young and seniors, to:

- » Having a more widespread understanding of social challenges and difficulties, their causes and consequences, from different generational perspectives that engage in dialogue
- » Gaining a broader view of the world in which they live
- » Getting to know associations and individuals committed to social transformation
- » Developing skills related to project implementation: planning, managing, disseminating, and evaluating
- » Discovering individual skills and abilities and putting them at the service of the community
- » Developing values that favor personal autonomy: self-esteem, effort, perseverance, self-criticism, and tolerance for frustration
- » Internalising values and improving personal coherence: solidarity, responsibility, justice, and equality
- » Improving their abilities to work in teams: engaging in dialogue, negotiating, yielding, or demanding
- » Developing pro-social attitudes and coexistence habits: understanding, kindness, patience, and generosity with diverse styles inherent in the different experiences of various generations

Service Learning (SL/ApS) experiences develop, through a sociological and pedagogical framework, not only descriptive processes but also processes of reflection and introspection on real social situations, which encourage participants to engage with behaviours and actions involved in the social context to be addressed, emphasising the intergenerational aspect (see Miró-Miró and Molina-Luque, 2017).

Service Learning must facilitate the transfer of educational experience to social action and vice versa for students in the educational system (mainly primary, secondary, and university levels), as well as for teachers and professors. In the specific case of the university, in addition to its first two missions of teaching and research, it can benefit from the inclusion of Service Learning for its third mission, which involves social responsibility and commitment towards the transformation and improvement of the community, citizenship... society as a whole.

For this reason, we must reconsider education both inside and outside the classroom, within the framework of profiguration, that is, leveraging intergenerational interrelationships. As established in the white paper on active ageing (Causapié, Balbontín, Porras, and Mateo, 2011), specifically in chapter 15 on intergenerational relationships, the development of programmes and projects that highlight the support provided by young people and individuals of other ages to the elderly as well as the support that the elderly offers to others, both in their immediate surroundings and broader contexts, must be promoted. In this sense, a series of relevant guidelines are specified for all of this, among other things:

- a. To further explore, especially empirically, the understanding of intergenerational relationship processes at all levels (interindividual, group, organisational, and macro social)
- b. To raise public awareness about the values of intergenerational solidarity
- c. To support specific initiatives that promote intergenerationality where people live, increasing the sense of belonging to one or multiple generations and fostering opportunities to establish bonds between generations.
- d. To develop initiatives aimed at promoting a productive and mutual exchange between generations, focusing on elderly individuals as a resource for society.

Intergenerational programming refers to activities or programmes that enhance cooperation, interaction, and exchange among individuals of different generations. Through these programmes, people from various generations share their talents and resources, and provide mutual support through relationships that benefit both the individual and the community (Sánchez, 2007; Sánchez and Sáez, 2008). This can be demonstrated in the educational system with programmes and projects in schools that have become intergenerational centres or in the dynamics created, for example, in schools transformed into Learning Communities and in the experiences of Service Learning-Community Engaged Learning (SL/ApS-CEL), or in Open Classrooms of university programmes that connect senior students (with continuing education programmes) and young students (with initial formative programmes for bachelor's or master's degrees). There are also initiatives in non-formal education, in community socio-cultural animation, and even in the development of informal education activities (leisure, sports, and physical activity in general).

3. Service learning projects with an intergenerational key and sustainable development goals (SDGs)

The best life is not the longest,
but the richest in good deeds.

Marie Curie

In the words of Baños, Corbí, Luís & Rico (2014), population ageing is an «optimistic» reality that offers various possibilities for development, social engagement, and quality of life for older individuals and, in general, for society.

Similarly, according to the Green Paper on Ageing (2021), empowering older people can promote intergenerational learning and ensure the transfer of knowledge and skills. It is estimated that around thirty million adults in the EU often feel lonely⁵. Promoting autonomy, participation, and the rights of older people by seeking sustainable proposals that strengthen intergenerational solidarity and justice between young and older individuals presents itself as a significant challenge, but also poses opportunities and responses to the challenges currently posed by ageing.

As expressed by Cambero & Baigorri (2019: 64), active ageing offers an alternative vision to the old paradigms that associate the lives of older people with dependence, vulnerability, and lack of capacity, and places it at the basis of recognition of the elderly's human rights. Along this line, the pro-figurative practices of Service Learning and Community Engagement Learning are suitable resources and methodological constructs (Cano et al., 2020) of great utility to develop inclusive experiences aligned with the SDGs (Sanvicén, 2021; Molina, Sanvicén, Miró, Kovačević, Soldevila, 2021) of intergenerational exchange based on the concept of intergenerational solidarity, which is grounded in the reciprocal exchange between people of different generations, and in the idea of close collaboration, unity, and mutual assistance built on the strengths of respective generations (Flores, Ortega & Vallejo, 2019).

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the knowledge society needs to facilitate a space for reflection and innovation, through teaching and research, in order to encourage enquiries and conversations about social responsibility at university. Similarly, the statement of the World Conference on Higher Education⁶ (2009) and the report on development education in higher education (EpD)⁷ (UAB & ACUP, 2017:22) highlight the role of the university student to contribute in the process of social transformation and sustainable human development. In accordance with the SDGs, this process involves respect for the dignity and human rights of future generations, intergenerational responsibility, respect for life and the global ecosystem, tolerance for

5 JRC, Policy Brief: «Loneliness – an unequally shared burden in Europe» 2019.

6 UNESCO (2009). World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for societal Change and Development. Paris. ED.2009/CONF.402/2.

7 <https://www.uab.cat/doc/EpD-educacioSuperior>

local and global culture, non-violence, and peace. The innovative methodology of SL/ApS and CEL comprises several complementary dimensions in their definition (Lucas, García & Vega, 2015): the socio-educational and psychosocial approach that fosters the interaction of academic learning and social transformation, and which also contributes to the quality of education as well as the promotion of social responsibility; therefore meeting the needs and challenges that stand out in society by its articulation of a project that is committed to society and the development of the SDGs. This project also combines the planning, reflection, and evaluation of the competencies acquired by the student in dialogue with the community for its improvement. To use Ruiz, Chiva & Rivera's (2016) and Ramis' (2014) words, the impact of Service Learning on older people lies in its mental benefits at the level of self-esteem in addition to the meaningful and continued learning of the undergraduate. The fulfilment of the SDGs entails commitment, at a senior level, to the development of active and healthy ageing, the reduction of inequalities, the achievement of gender equality, and the transformation of territories to turn them into healthy, inclusive, and sustainable spaces through the adoption of policies that strengthen the capacities of older people.

According to Mendía (2017), there is a collective of people that he calls “persones grans actives solidàries” [active and caring older people] (*P.M.A.S, P+*)” that present some identifying features:

- They are actively committed to taking care of themselves and do not neglect their personal growth or healthy habits
- They are actively committed to their immediate and distant environment
- They are people with critical and creative thinking
- They learn from their mistakes and are not discouraged
- They know how to work as a team, with and for others
- They develop prosocial behaviour that is favourable to other people and social groups

Indeed, Service Learning and engaged learning are a proposal that enables the practical articulation of four key concepts in a single project: active ageing, lifelong learning, intergenerational action and a transformative option (Mendia, 2017). In line with the delegation of the 17 SDGs and the decade 2020-2030 of Healthy Ageing, Service Learning can help set up two strategies or areas of action:

SL/ApS Action 1: Changing the way we think, feel, and act about ageing

How: Developing projects that have an impact on stereotypes (how we think), prejudices (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act)

Areas of action ApS:

- a. Encouraging independence and autonomy of older people
- b. Equal recognition before the law
- c. Fundamental human rights
- d. Rights of older women and gender equality

SL/ApS Action 2: Ensuring that rural and urban communities encourage the capacities and virtues of older people

How: Creating physical, social and economic environments that value the capacities of older people

Areas of SL/ApS action:

- a. Creating age-friendly environments and guaranteeing the safety and services for the most vulnerable
- b. Connecting cities and communities
- c. Exchanging knowledge and experiences of older people with different participants
- d. Creating collaborative networks with older people to identify priorities and opportunities

Font: Authors' own creation

4. Creativity and narrative, two innovative ingredients in Service Learning projects

Creativity and change are
fundamental traits of human existence

Rogers, 1996:54 as cited by
Valero et alter, 2016:217

If creativity is imagination put to work,
Service learning is a project that puts creativity to work
for the betterment of society

Roser Batlle, 2012

4.1 We are not born creative, but rather become it

Effectively, the study of creativity from a sociological point of view demonstrates that it is a social product as well as one of the characteristics of human beings constructed throughout the process of socialization in which they are immersed in complex, interrelated, spatial and temporal dimensions. This finding is highly relevant for the actions of ApS because it implies the capacity of all individuals, without distinctions, to produce new answers and innovate on existing actions.

We draw on the theoretical contributions that combine the sociological model of creativity with the creative process throughout life to devise an interesting typology of creativity that is useful for SL/ApS: one of socialisation; educational; elaborative and projective (Valero-Matas et alter, 2016: 211). Since SL/ApS is a pedagogy that reflects, analyses and directly acts from and for life, it has a close relationship with Projective Creativity, as it is the culmination, so to speak, of the formative process of creativity and it has the objectives -like SL/ApS- of “satisfying, improving, helping society (...) its purpose is to achieve a better world” (Valero-Matas et alter, 2016: 211).

Understood this way, creativity is no longer a characteristic of divinity, nor the result of the muses -although inspiration continues to be important-, and it is not limited to the arts or the enjoyment of the senses. Rather, it can cover all the areas of life, well-being, and good living (Molina-Luque, 2021).

As has been demonstrated, creative activity improves the life quality of people of all ages. Of all the social manifestations of creativity, we highlight the one that is expressed through writing: personal and experiential narrative, and letters.

4.2 Do we narrate? Do we read it? Do we think about it? Therefore we exist

The theory of biographicity takes us back to the understanding of biographical actions and the construction of meaning through the narrative about the course of one's life (Vilaseñor, 2005; Dausin, 2015; Hernández & Villar, 2015). The account written by the protagonist of the lived events has very valuable elements that distinguish it from the report of a researcher or scientist. Albeit research work is essential, it should be acknowledged that a first-person account has some specific values that make it unique: the freedom of speech and to choose what to narrate, how to explain it and narrate it, and how not to explain it and narrate it.

A written account -like the oral report- puts things in black and white (either on paper or on a screen), thinking about two recipients: oneself and the others. Depending on the recipient, it will have different purposes at the same time: to serve oneself (paper/screen are like close friends that listen in silence and keep your secrets until you decide to share them) and to serve others who, while reading it, might see themselves reflected in the story, or not. In any case, they will feel as if they are being addressed and affected in some way.

Having reached this point, the reader might think: alright, but in the end, what advantages does this bring to ApS projects? How do you introduce the narrative? The following two examples do not explore all the possibilities, but they provide an interesting illustration.

4.2.1 Literature of Everyday Life Observation

We live in the age of hyperconnectivity, hypertext, and the free circulation of the private brought to the public sphere. The act of narrating, explaining, transmitting, and sharing experiences is now part of the daily life of infants, young people and not so young, who have been socialized in the all-powerful world of ICT. This activity has objectives and, undoubtedly, a utility. As partners of ApS projects, we advocate for the account that is neither brief nor fleeting: the literature of everyday life observation (la literatura de l'observació de la vida quotidiana), to use the expression coined by the writer Teresa Pàmies (Pàmies, 2003: 107-114).

Narrating helps us to meet other people, to let them know us, to live and to coexist. In the social imagination, writing (narrating) is tied to publishing. It is believed that writing stories or poetry is a task reserved for writers, and young people primarily. That it is only good if it wins awards and is edited. "I don't know how to write" or "I don't like it" are typical phrases that mask the fear of "not writing well". The built social imagery is that one only writes a personal diary when they are teenagers or young, etc. etc.

Writing, getting someone to read it, and commenting on it are relevant activities that also help break stereotypes. One literary example: Emilia -one of the protagonists of the mystery *Francina i la Providència*, written by Rosa Fabregat- starts to read "some notebooks secretly given to her by the old lady she visited (...) she opened one of them -the one that the sick woman told her to skim first- a bit reluctantly" (Fabregat, 1995: 56). But once she starts to read she cannot stop... "Today I do have some things to tell you, notebook... (...) I am a talkative woman (...) a quirky lady named María who sometimes, surely, might be said to talk to herself; but they don't know that I am talking to you. You always listen to me and are patient, and you don't ever leave me

without paper... (...) Emilia would have never guessed that the white-haired lady could write like that. She was taken aback” (Fabregat, 1995: 56-57).

Life is a continuous trajectory of narrative events. The pandemic situation of isolation and confinement has been an experience that merits being featured and explained in the first person. As an example: the organization ACCEM, which aims to improve the life conditions of people in a situation of vulnerability, organised a story contest in 2018 and 2019 #MayoresCuentan on the themes of loneliness and active ageing. In 2020, the people who participated in this contest were invited to explain their worries and experiences during the pandemic. The organisation has been collecting and publishing those stories on its webpage’s section *Mayores que cuentan y que nos cuentan (Older people who tell and who tell us)*.⁸ These are vivid and direct accounts that simultaneously show the fears and multiple active and lively attitudes. Out of the collection that can be read on the official website, we underline a fragment of *Y mañana más (And tomorrow more)*, from the 26th of March of 2020, signed by Paquita Márquez⁹:

“After two rather rainy days, today the sun shines at times. I have been on the terrace for a few minutes and I haven’t seen a soul in the streets. Back in the kitchen, I make some vegetable puree, I salt the fish that I will fry later and I dress a salad of escarole and tomato. In the thick of it, my son calls me through Sky. Darn! And me with this mop of hair! Given that I have little hair (with the mane that I had in my days!) and that going to a hair salon has now become a utopia, no matter how much I try to fix it, my hair is a mess. And my son goes and says:

“Look at your hair, Mom! How it shows that there are no hair salons...”

He then tries to fix it, my gesture probably alarmed him.

“But you are still the most beautiful mother in the world...”

What a fake...! I forgive him. He wants me to make a list of all the things I will need so that he can buy it and bring it.

After a little chitchat and promising him to make the list, we say goodbye until the night when he will call again to see how his father and I have been doing.

After lunch, I will wash and put curlers in my hair. The other day, while cleaning out one of the closets full of junk that hadn’t seen the light of day (and if you ask me, not even electric light) in decades, there appeared a box with the curlers and hair clips that I used before, when my mane required it, in order to avoid going to the dens of torture that are hair salons because I hated it. Now, with the lack of hair and grey hairs, the regular visits to said dens have become imperative, but back then, I managed with the curlers. We will see how I deal now with the forgotten task...

And tomorrow more.”

When read by others, a lived experience narrative, based on everyday life, allows one to share experiences that have not been lived. Reading other lives allows us to know them and make them ours. The not lived experiences are a part of us. They serve to learn and understand ourselves and others. As an illustration, here is an excerpt of one of the written reflections by a student (code S062021) about the reading of the book *Casa Ye-yé (Ye-ye House)*, by the University of Lleida (UdL) professor Anna Soldevila, in the context of one of the tasks of the Sociology course.

⁸ ACCEM. *Mayores que cuentan y que nos cuentan (Older people who tell and who tell us)*: <https://mayores.accem.es/mayores-cuentan/>

⁹ ACCEM. *Mayores que cuentan y que nos cuentan. Y mañana más (Older people who tell and who tell us. And tomorrow more)*: <https://mayores.accem.es/mayores-cuentan/>

“Old age and the idea of becoming an old person is a subject that tends to be avoided. That is to say, people make the mistake of thinking and associating happiness, the busy and enjoyable life, with younger people; whereas older people are given a second or third place, considering this stage of life as a complicated and hard-to-live phase. And I include myself in this group of people that think this badly. I have always linked old age to aspects of dependence, illness and loneliness. I know older people who are very happy, but still, I cannot imagine myself being happy at that stage. I even remember a day in class last year, when we were asked whether someone was scared or not very excited about getting older and I raised my hand to say that it was my case. This book has served to give me another point of view or another perspective about what it means to grow older. I have only had a close relationship with my paternal great-grandmother, and *Mary* has reminded me of her, so primed and with such a young spirit despite her age. But in my case, I think I made the mistake of only remembering the last moments of her life; dependence, illness, and, although she wasn't alone, loneliness. This made me hold a lot of fondness for older people, but a lot of fear that the time would arrive when I got older (...) This book offers a young perspective on old age. (...) this book has helped me eliminate part of the fear of getting older and it has motivated me to have an old age full of emotions and experiences like the ones narrated in the book. I am not scared of getting older, I am scared of losing myself, of looking in the mirror and not recognizing myself. And this book has been like a beacon of light that will light the way when the moment of gazing in the mirror in old age arrives, and it will help me to find myself (...).”

4.2.2 Letters: fragments of lives and experiences, before, now and forever

How much of the history of civilization and how many lives of people and communities have been known and reconstructed thanks to the study of letters kept by their protagonists throughout the years? Lived moments, experiences, fears, wishes, loves and heartbreak, welcomings a farewells, all of this explained in personal letters addressed to someone who had to receive it, read it and reply. Or not. Moments stored in boxes, snapshots of time just like instant photography. Moments that deny the saying and prove that, on many occasions, a picture is not worth a thousand words.

Writing letters might seem like an activity of the analogue era, of the last century. In the digital era, the communication between sender-receivers is immediate, with a few characters and emoticons that substitute subordinates and metaphors. Notwithstanding this, or maybe because of this, letters –correspondence- are coming back as an innovative activity in the interrelational formative field for all ages. Out of the diverse typology of projects that currently exist and use letters, we will show three experiences. The first two have been organized by us, and we have participated in the third one as observers:

1. Letters to coronavirus. During the academic year 2020-2021, the students of two courses of the degree in Social Work (UdL) have addressed COVID-19 knowing that it would not respond; hence they have told it everything they had inside. Written with complete freedom, the letters do not only contain what can be expected, –suffering, pain, and outrage- but also some constructive reflections on what they had learnt without being entirely aware of it, and some proposals for personal and collective improvement. Writing calmly and with time has enabled an exercise of reflection as well as individual and collective learning. There is not enough space to show the hundred collected letters. Only one fragment (code S0162021) will be provided:

“It's true that I'm angry, but about the way you have turned our lives upside down. I don't like online classes, I like to attend in-person classes. I don't like to hang out less with my colleagues and see their whole faces. You've ruined life in many ways. You've caught me at a very complicated moment in my life. I was almost done with high school, on the verge of taking my university entrance exams, graduation... Oh! the graduation ceremony. I had to finish high school

from home, to study for the exams on my own, and the graduation ceremony, well, nothing, we've not been able to celebrate it.

I also notice that you've affected people's minds. Now, when you're in a supermarket aisle, people are scared of passing others by their side because they think: "This one surely has COVID-19 and can infect me."

You know what? I had many plans for this summer once I finished high school, graduated and passed my exams. I wanted to travel, to get my driver's license, to work..., and I will leave it at that because I might get depressed.

But look, in spite of this, we've spent more family time at home thanks to you. In fact, we've disconnected from our social life in the street and have connected more with our parents and siblings at home. You have helped us to appreciate things like that, things that are honestly priceless.

In mid-April, it was very hurtful to watch the news and see how the number of infections only went up and up. Personally, I'm not the kind of person who goes out a lot; that is to say, I go to study and in the afternoon I sometimes go out with my friends or I go shopping. I don't party a lot nor spend too much time outside. I can say that, though, I've beaten the record for not stepping outside of my house for almost three months. It's true that it has been a bit hard, but as my parents say "it's for your own good."

Well, I'll leave you here, I think I've told you enough things; I know that many of these things were negative, but I trust in humanity, in our abilities and the fact that we've overcome other pandemics and I want to tell you that we'll also get over you and you'll be forgotten. You'll be a part of our history because we can't get rid of you now, and we'll all be remembered as the "pandemics", or the "locked down" (...) but, hey, you'll be remembered with happiness and fear and then we'll cure you like the flu. Because yes, the flu, Ebola, and the plague were all pandemics like you and we've overcome them because together we're strong and we'll get over you with optimism and effort. Leaving behind a lot of warriors, because that's what they were. Corona, COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, I tell you, good riddance because I don't want to see you again or to hear talk about you.

Hugs (oops, no, you will infect me!)"

2. Letters to the author of a book they had read. This is a reflective task organised during the academic year 2019-2020 in the Sociology course of first-year students of the degree in Social Work (UdL).¹⁰ The author receives the letters of the students. Later, a dialogue meeting with the author is organised to share the experience and to comment on the questions that have been raised in the letters. We offer an example (code S0552021) of the letters addressed to the author of the book *Casa Ye-yé*, which was read and discussed during the year 2020-2021.

"The reason for this letter is to thank you for writing this book, as it has been a personal learning for me, and to send you the questions that arose after reading it.

I am pleased to be able to send you and share with you my feelings. When I started reading the book, I never thought that your book would please me as much, that it would talk to me about matters that I highly enjoy and that it would be an easy read thanks to your narrative. I hope that the story you describe becomes, as soon as possible, a daily reality in our society. As you do, I also hope that in the future, if it has not already been achieved, I will advocate for older people not to be frowned upon and to be given the importance that they should have in our society. Thank you, it is a brilliant book. Every word you have written is, it seems to me, more than accurate, and I think that reading your book can encourage a lot of people to reflect, as it has occurred to me.

¹⁰ Writing letters to the author of a book they had to reflect upon was a course assignment that began in the academic year 2012-2013 with the author Zygmunt Bauman. He knew that they would write him letters that would be later compiled in a book. His death prevented him from being able to see the final edited project. Paquita Sanvicén (ed) (2015). *Hi ha llocs on agafar-se en aquest món líquid? Reflexions, preguntes i 19 cartes per a Zygmunt Bauman, de part de joves estudiants*. Lleida: Universitat de Lleida.

I would like to add that I was very pleasantly surprised with the fact that your book breaks the stereotypes about older people created by our society. Any person, at any age, I believe should be able to freely express their feelings and to be accepted without labels or prejudices.

Lastly, I would like to send you a set of questions that I have yet to solve:

-What would you put in the book if it had been written in 2020?

-Is it a real story? The characters? The facts? The events? To what extent? Would you be willing to disclose that information?

-If they were real, what is their current situation?

-Was one of the objectives of this book to echo the project of cooperative housing in Lleida?

-To what extent was the writing style intentional? The use of colloquial language to reach a certain audience?

-Are older people's minds less mouldable? Is that a personal or a general trait? This is a question on a general scale that would stretch across all areas.

-Is the percentage of inequalities, towards men and women, present in this social collective? In which areas? Could you specify it?

-Do you think that we are on the right track?

Thank you a lot for giving me the opportunity to read your book and I thank you in advance for your interest."

3. Children's letters for grandparents in a nursing home. In the project ECAVINAR¹¹, carried out during 2017-2020, we had the chance to attend, as observers, an exercise of correspondence between pupils and the grandparents of a nursing home organised by a school of one of the capitals of the region of Les Terres de Lleida. Since they were private, we were not granted access to the letters, but we were present in some of the moments when the participants met to give the letters, receive them, read them, and comment on them. Our register of these moments, which followed the data protection rules, depicts the expressions full of excitement of both participants. The letters worked as motivation and an excuse to meet, get to know each other, talk, and share moments and experiences while they read them. These intergenerational epistolary meetings are a widespread didactic and educational practice. As Xavier Tedó al 2017 quite rightfully said in the title of a news article he published in the newspaper *Ara* on 25.02.2017 about a similar experience in La Bisbal, friendship has no age¹².

11 Proyecto de investigación Envejecimiento, calidad de vida y creatividad a través de la narrativa (Research project Aging, quality of life and creativity through narrative; FFI2016-79666-TR) Ministerio de Competitividad (Ministry of Competitiveness), led by GESEC and Dedal-Lit. <http://www.envejecimientoycreatividad.udl.cat/es/>

12 Xavier Tedó (25.02.2017) Una amistat que no té edat. ARA. https://criatures.ara.cat/escola/alumnes-labisbal-es-cartegen-amb-avis-residencia_1_1398072.html

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