

A LIFE LEARNING, NOW IS DIGITAL - FOMENTO
DE LA ALFABETIZACIÓN DIGITAL
ENTRE LAS PERSONAS MAYORES Y CONSERVACIÓN
DE HISTORIAS Y RECUERDOS

*A Life Learning, now is Digital - Promoting Digital Literacy
among Older People and Preserving Stories and Memories*

ARTUR SANTOS

*Transdisciplinary Research Center in Education and Development, Polytechnical
University of Bragança (Portugal)*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8425-6836>

ALICIA MURCIANO-HUESO

Universidad de Salamanca (España)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4351-9307>

RESUMEN

Las historias y recuerdos atesoran conocimiento cultural, pero su transmisión se ve amenazada con el paso del tiempo y las limitaciones de registro. El proyecto «A Life Learning, Now is Digital» busca preservar este legado mediante la formación digital de personas mayores institucionalizadas. A través de talleres, exposiciones y un libro, se capturan sus historias sobre educación, familia y deporte, enriqueciendo la investigación educativa y el patrimonio cultural. Este proyecto beneficia a los mayores, empoderándolos digitalmente y fomentando su interacción social.

Palabras clave: Competencias digitales; Personas mayores; Educación; Historia; Socialización.

ABSTRACT

Stories and memories hold cultural knowledge. As people age, this knowledge is lost, especially from times with limited recording methods. Sentimental value can breathe life

into something, but that meaning can vanish with the one who held it dear. We developed an international project (Portugal, Spain, Italy) to train institutionalized seniors in digital skills, boosting social interaction. They'll capture the seniors' stories (education, family, sports) for preservation. This project teaches digital skills to seniors, capturing their memories for educational exhibits and a book. This preserves cultural heritage and enriches educational research, while also benefiting the elderly.

Keywords: Digital Competencies; Elderly; Education; History; Socialisation.

INTRODUCTION

CULTURAL HERITAGE is a vibrant tapestry woven from traditions, customs, knowledge, and experiences passed down through generations. Personal stories and memories serve as essential threads in this tapestry, offering unique perspectives and insights into the social, economic, and daily lives of the past. Preserving these narratives is crucial for understanding our collective history and identity. However, cultural knowledge faces a constant threat of loss as individuals age and disappear. Pre-digital eras pose a particular challenge for cultural preservation due to limited or non-existent recording methods. The period between the 1950s and 1970s exemplifies this. In contrast, the vast recording capabilities available today offer far greater potential for capturing cultural and educational activities. Folklore, traditional skills, games, everyday practices and formal and non-formal education processes relied heavily on oral transmission, making them vulnerable to fading with time.

Imagine the vast repository of knowledge lost with the passing of a generation that witnessed historical events firsthand, possessed unique crafting techniques, or held detailed accounts of local customs. Without capturing these stories, we lose a window into the past, hindering our understanding of societal evolution and the cultural context that shaped our present. Those stories and memories can help us to retain and understand the social changes that occurred in that period, such as the political and social structures and family dynamics, combined with the increasing emphasis on formal education, at the expense of traditional methods.

Also, there is a sentimental value attached to personal narratives further underscores the importance of preservation. These stories are not merely factual accounts; they are imbued with emotions, experiences, and personal connections that weave significance into the fabric of cultural heritage. Losing a story is not just losing information; it's losing a piece of the emotional legacy that binds communities together. Allowing to elderly people to actively participate on projects, sharing their knowledge and retain it, can contribute for giving life, sense of belonging and reinforce their socialisation process (Löfgren *et al.*, 2022).

The deterioration of physical materials and records, coupled with a lack of readily available historical data, presents a significant obstacle to understanding past cultural practices and knowledge systems (Byard, 2021). Beyond factual knowledge, personal narratives are imbued with sentimental value (Bjursell, 2019). They are repositories of family history, personal triumphs and struggles, and unique perspectives on historical events. The emotions, relationships, and experiences woven into these stories create a powerful connection to the past, fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging within communities (Bennet, 2018).

Oral history is thus a research methodology rich in learning and knowledge of the memories of the past that makes it possible to rescue the testimony of life stories that would otherwise disappear, to save the history of the margins, to listen to people without a voice, and in some way, even to give them the right to their history (Santamarinas & Marinas, 1998). In this sense, over the years it has become increasingly important as a complement to historiography based on written sources. Part of its success is based mainly on the use of educational and digital media that have allowed for a higher quality of the interviews to be carried out, but which also have a significant influence on the process of collection, analysis, conservation and even dissemination. Although this technique began to become popular in the mid-20th century thanks to voice recorders, resources have advanced so quickly that today it is not only possible to accurately reproduce the words of the interviewees, but it is also possible to capture all kinds of details through video cameras. Currently, this methodology makes it possible to collect the voice accompanied by an image, where gestures, looks and emotions considerably enrich the discourse and allow for a greater and better interpretation of the discourse (Fabero & Robertini, 2021). But in addition, digital media also allow for a more exhaustive analysis through specific programmes that enable literal transcription in a matter of seconds, or certain software that facilitate their analysis. Not to mention the potential offered by these resources for preserving them in digital media or even disseminating them. In the last decade, websites and social networks have been a key element in the recovery and dissemination of historical memory. A clear example of this are the digital communities in which the exchange of memories has facilitated the reconstruction of past experiences that on many occasions would remain on the margins of analysis.

The digital competencies allow a greater socialization process, and the valorisation of individuals to their work, registers and memories. There are several types of technologies available (e.g., smartphone, computer, camera) that allow writing, reading, images or socializing. Fostering the capability to communicate through digital means between older people and others is very relevant. The COVID19 pandemic led to the shutdown of older people's institutions, and the limitations of family visits, namely to the risk group for COVID19 – the older people. While

the measures may be necessary to minimize the spread of the virus, the negative physical, psychological, and social effects are evident (Van Jaarsveld, 2020). The author pointed out that in «the short-term, there is a need to ensure that digital solutions to lockdown problems are also accessible to older populations». and at long term «Care homes and community centers should also take the opportunity to implement digital literacy programs for older individuals». (Murciano-Hueso et al., 2022).

According to the European Digital Competences Framework for Citizens there is «Around 40% of the European Union (EU) population have an insufficient level of digital skills – of which 22% have none at all. These are often older citizens, less educated young people, lower-income families and migrants». Considering that «In 2015, there were 64 million people, more than a quarter of the Union population aged 25-64, who had left initial education and training with at most a lower secondary education qualification. While there is no means to measure the basic skill levels of those people, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Survey of Adult Skills ('PIAAC'), which tested levels of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments, indicates that similar proportions of adults aged 16 to 65 performed at the lowest level of proficiency in 20 Member States»(COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION, 19 December 2016, Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (2016/C 484/01).

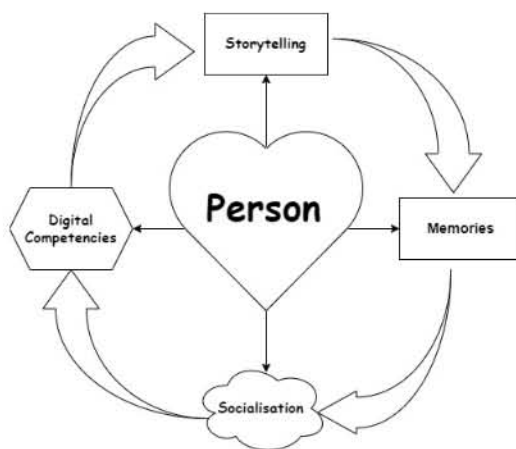
Moreover, the Council Recommendation point that «Participation in lifelong learning by low qualified adults remains four times lower than that by those with tertiary qualifications. Access to lifelong learning opportunities remains uneven across socioeconomic groups, and some groups of the working-age population, in particular third-country nationals, have less access. Encouraging wide and inclusive participation is therefore key to the success of upskilling measures. Efforts to reach out to individuals who need special motivation, support and lifelong guidance, especially those furthest away from the labour market or education and training, are essential».

Sharing stories and memories is a fundamental social act that fosters connection and strengthens relationships. In today's world, digital communication tools like social media platforms and video conferencing have emerged as powerful extensions of this social act. These platforms offer new avenues for sharing stories and memories with geographically dispersed communities, potentially enriching socialisation processes and providing avenues for social support by fostering a sense of connection and community even across vast distances. Research indicates a strong correlation between loneliness, social isolation, and depression among residents of aged care facilities (Gonyea et al., 2016). This association is particu-

larly pronounced when residents experience feelings of isolation from family and friends (Taylor et al., 2016).

Through the present project we pretend to settle an intervention methodology that aims to: a) Foster the digital competencies among seniors, b) Preserve and share local, regional and European memories and history of education and c) Contribute to social inclusion through the senior's participation in international projects.

FIGURE 1. *Key factors of the Project Intervention*



ERASMUS+ PROYECT «A LIFE LEARNING, NOW IT IS DIGITAL»: PRESERVING THE LEGACY THROUGH DIGITAL TRAINING FOR INSTITUTIONALISED ELDERLY PEOPLE

This intervention project is co-financed by the ERASMUS+ programme under the reference 2023-1-PT01-KA210-ADU-000160504. It involves three institutions from three European Union countries: Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Bragança (SCMB) (Portugal), the University of Salamanca (USAL) (Spain) and EduVita (Italy). The project has a duration of 24 months, with the activities beginning in March of 2024.

The project's methodology envisages multiple interventions:

- Repetition of the type of activities, one for each year of the project, but with different groups of participants;
- Application by each organisation in each country to its groups of participants, based on the same digital contents and stories and memories to be collected;
- Implementation of complementary activities (described below).

During the project lifetime we implement the following activities:

DIGITAL CLASSES 1ST GROUP

This type of activity is the core of the project since it aims to foster the participants' digital competencies at the same time contributing to active ageing, social-

isation and cultural heritage preservation. We promote digital skills, through narration and story collection of participants' childhood and education process. The project participants get to know and access new technologies to allow inclusion and socialisation in the digital world. The people who accompany the participants play an important role in the process, drawing on their knowledge and making the most of it to achieve the objectives of the activity. Previous to the first session with the participants, was defined the program according to the target group, previous life experiences and contextualisation, the schedule availability, the lesson's contents structure and stories and memories to be collected.

In the first and last session, the participants fulfil the digital competencies self-assessment from the EU digital skills platform (<https://europa.eu/europass/digitalskills/screen/home>).

The participants also respond to the Provision Scale Questionnaire (Cutrona & Russel, 1987) in the short version in their languages. For the Portuguese we used the instrument translated and validated by Moreira and Canaipa (2007), and for Italian by Iapichino et al. (2016), and for Spanish by Martínez-López et al. (2014). To ensure adequate validation the questionnaire was translated by 5 persons, Spanish native speakers with a good domain of English, the final proposal was obtained by comparison of the proposal and the differences to be resolved by a committee of two people (one of those being the second author).

The program will happen 2 hours' x 2 times per week for 6 months, reflecting 80 hours of training.

The activity has a participatory methodology, with many of the works to be carried out being used in the process of communicating and publicising the project, namely on social networks and the project's website (<https://scm-braganca.pt/life-learnig-now-is-digital/>), preparing material for the exhibitions and the book. At the end of each training cycle, participants contribute to reflecting on implementation and outcomes (responding to satisfaction questionnaire and focus group interview).

EXHIBITION

This activity is a type of wrap-up of the previous activity of the Non-formal digital competencies program of each partner organisation group. The exhibition put some selected works of the participants on physical/digital means to the local community and to the general public. In Portugal, it is implemented in the Ethnographic Museum Dr. Belarmino Afonso, the propriety of SCMB, in Spain, on the Zamora Education Museum from USAL, in Italy, on EduVita facilities.

This activity focuses on communicating the work carried out and the outcomes, as well as enhancing the participants' sense of life and socialisation processes. On the first day of exhibition setup, project participants with greater physical capacity will actively contribute to the assembly process, following the completion of material production (posters, canvases, video/photo editing for digital display).

The second day features the arrival and warm welcome of fellow project participants from the exhibition space (only for Spanish and Portuguese events and participants due to budget limitations to have a wider participation with Italian participants). This will be followed by a reception for invited local organisations (e.g., SCMB, USAL, EduVitae) partners and local entities (social, educational, cultural, and governmental representatives). The day will culminate with the public opening of the exhibition, attracting media coverage.

The third and fourth days are open days for tourists, other institutions (e.g., social sector), and the SCMB elderly users who do not participate in the project.

The fifth day will be dedicated to school visits from local institutions. , the SCMB users from the Special Education Centre and to dismount it. Additionally, the exhibition will be dismantled on this day.

Throughout the exhibition period, participants from the digital literacy program will be present to share their life stories and provide explanations to visitors, reinforcing their socialisation and living memories.

GROUP VISIT

This activity promises a vibrant exchange between Portuguese and Spanish participants. It fosters socialization, not just through friendly interaction, but by sharing the project's progress so far. Participants will have the unique opportunity to discuss and compare their memories, creating a tapestry of shared experiences.

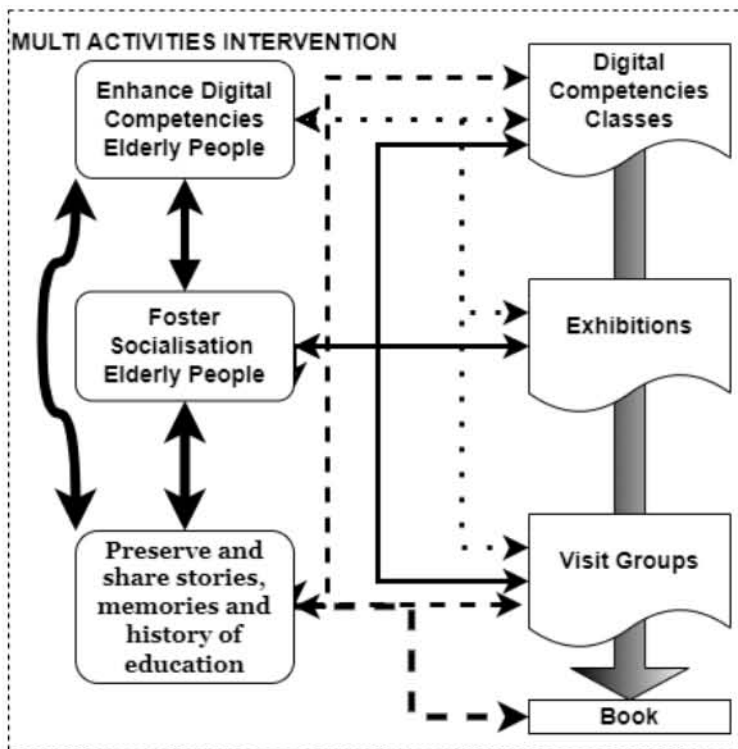
The program kicks off with a warm welcome reception for all participants. Ice-breaking activities will set the stage for a relaxed and social atmosphere. To enrich the experience, participants will embark on a guided tour of the local heritage sites, gaining a deeper understanding of the region's cultural tapestry. They will also have the opportunity to visit the institution itself, fostering a sense of connection and community.

Adding to the significance of this exchange, social, educational, cultural, and government/political entities will be invited to attend. The presence of local/regional media will further amplify the event, providing individual participants with a well-deserved sense of social recognition and appreciation for their contributions.

BOOK

This is an outcome of the project, including the memories and narratives of the participants from Italy, Spain and Portugal, divided according to the themes worked on during the digital classes and that are more relevant, e.g. a) vocational training in the old times, b) good practices of teachers, c) home education/education at home. The book will be published in print and online, making it more accessible to the general public and contributing to the dissemination of cultural heritage, including texts, photos and QR codes for audio-visual material.

FIGURE 2. *Relation between project objectives and activities*



PARTICIPANTS

The participants were chosen by convenience and had the following characteristics, according to the institution developing the intervention:

SCMB

SCMB users, namely from the Residential Structures for the Elderly, Special Education Centre and Integrated Continuing Care Unit with physical and cognitive capacity to be involved in the program tasks and activities. SCMB has more than 180 elderly users, 134 users of the Centre of Special Education and 60 users of the medium and long-duration care unit.

A total of 20 participants for each edition, with 14 elderly (over 70 years old) from residential structures, 3 disabled persons from the Special Education Centre, and 3 from the Long-term Continuing Care Unit (Integrated Continuing Care Unit). The elderly are mostly from rural areas and with no or lower educational qualifications. The selection criteria include their mental capability to follow the classes and motor coordination to use digital means.

USAL

The project will focus on 2 groups of 20 persons each (1 group/year), the participants being elderly people from residential homes, aged 70+. They are mentally and physically active, and motivated to learn and use digital content/materials, but with low skills and access to digital means.

EduVita

The project will focus on 2 groups of 16 persons each (1 group/year), the participants being elderly people from the community, with age 50+. They are mentally and physically active, and motivated to learn and use digital content/materials.

ETHICAL PROCEDURES

However, collecting personal stories and memories requires a strong foundation in ethical principles to ensure the well-being and autonomy of participants.

Prior to participation, each elder will receive clear and accessible information about the project's goals, data collection methods, and potential risks and benefits. Only those who freely and fully understand these details will be invited to provide informed consent. In the case of dependent persons (e.g. disabled persons from SCMB), their legal guardians were informed and asked for authorisation.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants have the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. They will retain control over their stories and have the power to decide what is shared, how, and with whom. All collected data,

including audio recordings, photographs, and written narratives, will be stored securely. Only authorized personnel will have access to this information, which will be used solely for project purposes. The use of materials that jeopardise confidentiality and privacy will be carried out after written or verbal authorisation by the participant concerned. The project acknowledges the emotional weight of personal narratives. Trained personnel conduct interviews with respect and sensitivity, ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for elders to share their stories.

Digital literacy training is not merely about technological skills; it's about empowering elders to engage with technology on their terms. The project will prioritize their comfort level and learning pace, fostering a sense of accomplishment and digital independence. Regular communication will be maintained with participants and their families throughout the project. They will be informed about the project's progress and have the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns. By adhering to these ethical procedures, our intervention aims to achieve its goals of cultural preservation and social interaction while prioritizing the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of the participating elders.

CONCLUSION

This manuscript has outlined a methodological framework for cultural preservation of education processes that prioritizes the collection and dissemination of personal narratives and stories, and contributes for active ageing. While the project is in its initial stages and empirical results are yet to be obtained, the proposed methodology offers a promising approach to tackling the challenges of cultural loss in the digital age. By integrating educational strategies that foster cultural awareness and transmission, socialisation processes, with the recording and dissemination capabilities of digital technologies, this project has the potential to:

- a) Capture and preserve valuable pre-digital era knowledge embedded within personal narratives from the same period (1950-1970).
- b) Enhance public understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage through engaging storytelling formats and comparison between 3 European countries.
- c) Empower local communities to actively participate in the preservation and transmission of their cultural heritage related to education.
- d) Bridge the digital divide by providing inclusive access to cultural and education heritage resources.

ACKNOWLEDGES

The present work is funded by the ERASMUS+ programme under the reference 2023-1-PT01-KA210-ADU-000160504 and it has been supported by FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia within the Research Center in Basic Education with reference UIDB/05777/2020 (<https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/05777/2020>). The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Union or the European Commission. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in this publication and is not responsible for any use that may be made of it.

REFERENCES

- BENNETT, J. (2018). Narrating family histories: Negotiating identity and belonging through tropes of nostalgia and authenticity. *Current Sociology*, 66(3), 449–465. Doi: 10.1177/0011392115578984
- BJURSELL C. (2019). Growth Through Education: The Narratives of Older Adults. *Frontiers Sociology*. 4:11. doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2019.00011.
- BYARD, R.W. The ongoing loss of historical material from institutions. *Forensic Sci Med Pathol* 17, 183–184 (2021). Doi. 0.1007/s12024-020-00332-2
- COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (2016), Council. Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling. Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (2016/C 484/01). Retrieved from [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=CS](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=CS). March 2023.
- CUTRONA, C.E. & RUSSELL, D. (1987). *The provisions of social relationships and adaptation to stress*. In: Jones, H., Pearlman, D., editors. Vol. 1. Advances in personal relationships. Greenwich (CT): JaiPress Inc., 37-67.
- FAVERO, B. & ROBERTINI, C. (2021). Historia oral y redes sociales, ¿una alianza posible? Recorridos y experiencias en el ámbito de la historia reciente. *Sociologie*, 2(1), 69-82. doi: 10.53119/se.2021.1.05
- GONYEA, J. G., CURLEY, A., MELEKIS, K., LEVINE, N. y LEE, Y. (2018). Loneliness and Depression Among Older Adults in Urban Subsidized Housing. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 30(3), 458-474. doi: 10.1177/0898264316682908
- IAPICHINO, E., RUCCI, P., CORBANI, I.E., APTER, G., BOLLANI, M., CAULI, G., GALA, C. y BASSI, M. (2016). Development and validation of an abridged version of the Social Provisions Scale (SPS-10) in Italian. 22. 157-163.
- LÖFGREN, M., LARSSON, E., ISAKSSON, G. & NYMAN, A. (2022). Older adults' experiences of maintaining social participation: Creating opportunities and striving to adapt to changing situations. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 29(7), 587–597. Doi: 10.1080/11038128.2021.1974550

- MARTÍNEZ-LÓPEZ, Zeltia, FERNÁNDEZ, María, GUISANDE, M., TINAJERO VACAS, Carolina, ALMEIDA, Leandro & RODRIGUEZ, M. Soledad (2014). Apoyo social en universitarios españoles de primer año: Propiedades psicométricas del Social Support Questionnaire-Short Form (SSQ6) y el Social Provisions Scale (SPS). *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología*. 46. 102-110.
- MOREIRA, J. y CANAIPA, R. (2007). A Escala de Provisões Sociais: Desenvolvimento e validação da versão portuguesa da «Social Provisions Scale» Social Provision Scale, Portuguese version: development and validation study. *Revista Iberoamericana De Diagnóstico Y Evaluación Psicológica*. 24 (2), 23-58.
- MURCIANO-HUESO, A., MARTÍN-GARCÍA, A. V. & CARDOSO, A. P. (2022). Technology and quality of life of older people in times of COVID: A qualitative study on their changed digital profile. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(16), 10459. doi: 10.3390/ijerph191610459
- SANTAMARINAS, C. & MARINAS, J.M. (1998). Historias de vida e historia oral. En J.M Delgado y J.M Gutiérrez, *Métodos y técnicas cualitativas de investigación en Ciencias Sociales* (pp. 259-283). Síntesis
- TAYLOR, H. O., TAYLOR, R. J., NGUYEN, A. W. y CHATTERS, L. (2018). Social Isolation, Depression, and Psychological Distress Among Older Adults. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 30(2), 229-246. doi: 10.1177/0898264316673511
- VAN JAARSVELD, G. (2020). The Effects of COVID-19 Among the Elderly Population: A Case for Closing the Digital Divide. *Front Psychiatry*. 12;11:577427. doi: 10.3389/fpsyt.2020.577427.